



---

Hegel and Haiti

Author(s): Susan Buck-Morss

Source: *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (Summer, 2000), pp. 821-865

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1344332>

Accessed: 16/10/2014 13:08

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



*The University of Chicago Press* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Critical Inquiry*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

# Hegel and Haiti

Susan Buck-Morss

## I

By the eighteenth century, slavery had become the root metaphor of Western political philosophy, connoting everything that was evil about power relations.<sup>1</sup> Freedom, its conceptual antithesis, was considered by Enlightenment thinkers as the highest and universal political value. Yet this political metaphor began to take root at precisely the time that the economic practice of slavery—the systematic, highly sophisticated capitalist enslavement of *non*-Europeans as a labor force in the colonies—was increasing quantitatively and intensifying qualitatively to the point that by the mid-eighteenth century it came to underwrite the entire economic system of the West, paradoxically facilitating the global spread of the very Enlightenment ideals that were in such fundamental contradiction to it.

This glaring discrepancy between thought and practice marked the period of the transformation of global capitalism from its mercantile to its protoindustrial form. One would think that, surely, no rational, “enlightened” thinker could have failed to notice. But such was not the case.

Thanks to Benedict Anderson, Étienne Balibar, Martin Bernal, Teresa Brennan, Zillah Eisenstein, Peter Gilgen, Miriam Hansen, Nancy Hirschmann, Michael Kammen, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, and the Society for Humanities and graduate students of Cornell University. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

1. “For eighteenth-century thinkers who contemplated the subject, slavery stood as the central metaphor for all the forces that debased the human spirit” (David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* [Ithaca, N.Y., 1975], p. 263; hereafter abbreviated *PSAR*).

*Critical Inquiry* 26 (Summer 2000)

© 2000 by The University of Chicago. 0093-1896/00/2604-0003\$02.00. All rights reserved.

The exploitation of millions of colonial slave laborers was accepted as part of the given world by the very thinkers who proclaimed freedom to be man's natural state and inalienable right. Even when theoretical claims of freedom were transformed into revolutionary action on the political stage, it was possible for the slave-driven colonial economy that functioned behind the scenes to be kept in darkness.

If this paradox did not seem to trouble the logical consciousness of contemporaries, it is perhaps more surprising that present-day writers, while fully cognizant of the facts, are still capable of constructing Western histories as coherent narratives of human freedom. The reasons do not need to be intentional. When national histories are conceived as self-contained, or when the separate aspects of history are treated in disciplinary isolation, counterevidence is pushed to the margins as irrelevant. The greater the specialization of knowledge, the more advanced the level of research, the longer and more venerable the scholarly tradition, the easier it is to ignore discordant facts. It should be noted that specialization and isolation are also a danger for those new disciplines such as African American studies, or new fields such as diaspora studies, that were established precisely to remedy the situation. Disciplinary boundaries allow counterevidence to belong to someone else's story. After all, a scholar cannot be an expert in everything. Reasonable enough. But such arguments are a way of avoiding the awkward truth that if certain constellations of facts are able to enter scholarly consciousness deeply enough, they threaten not only the venerable narratives, but also the entrenched academic disciplines that (re)produce them. For example, there is no place in the university in which the particular research constellation "Hegel and Haiti" would have a home. That is the topic which concerns me here, and I am going to take a circuitous route to reach it. My apologies, but this apparent detour is the argument itself.

## 2

The paradox between the discourse of freedom and the practice of slavery marked the ascendancy of a succession of Western nations within

---

**Susan Buck-Morss** is professor of political philosophy and social theory in the department of government, Cornell University, and Visiting Distinguished Professor in the Public Intellectuals Program, Florida Atlantic University. She is a curator for the art project *inSITE 2000* in Tijuana/San Diego. Her books include *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (2000) and *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (1989). Her email address is sbm5@cornell.edu

the Early Modern global economy. The earliest example to consider would be the Dutch. Their “Golden Age,” from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth century, was made possible by their dominance of global mercantile trade, including, as a fundamental component the trade in slaves. But if we follow its most excellent of modern historians, Simon Schama, whose thick description of the Golden Age of Dutch culture has become a model in the field of cultural history since its publication in 1987, we will be in for a surprise. Strikingly, the topics of slavery, the slave trade, and slave labor are never discussed in Schama’s *The Embarrassment of Riches*, a six-hundred-plus-page account of how the new Dutch Republic, in developing its own national culture, learned to be both rich and good.<sup>2</sup> One would have no idea that Dutch hegemony in the slave trade (replacing Spain and Portugal as major players)<sup>3</sup> contributed substantially to the enormous “overload” of wealth that he describes as becoming so socially and morally problematic during the century of Dutch “centrality” to the “commerce of the world” (*ER*, p. 228).<sup>4</sup> Yet Schama reports fully the fact that the metaphor of slavery, adapted to the modern context from the Old Testament story of the Israelites’ deliverance from Egyptian slavery was fundamental to Dutch self-understanding during their struggle for independence (1570–1609) against the Spanish “tyranny” that “enslaved” them—and hence for the origins of the modern Dutch nation.<sup>5</sup> Schama clearly acknowledges the most blatant contradiction, the fact that the Dutch discriminated at the time against

2. See Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (New York, 1987); hereafter abbreviated *ER*. The question for this newly enriched nation was “how to create a moral order *within* a terrestrial paradise” (p. 125).

3. The Spanish *asiento* granted to individuals the exclusive privilege of providing Spanish America with African slaves, but the Spanish themselves only loosely controlled the trade. Slave trading posts on the African coast flew flags of Portugal, Holland, France, England, Denmark, and Brandenburg as well. The Dutch merchant marines dominated shipping among the North Sea countries, carrying the goods of other nations, and they were participants in the *asiento* slave trade as well.

4. My reading revealed only two mentions of real slavery: in a discussion of the Dutch feasting habits, a distaste for “*mengelmoes* (mishmash),” which was a “soupy pabulum,” “the pap of slaves and babies” (*ER*, p. 177), and mention that the Dutch West India Company was “forced to spend well over a million guilders a year in defending the footholds at Recife and Pernambuco [in Brazil against the Portuguese], while only four hundred thousand guilders in profits had been made off the receipts from slaving and the sugar and dyewood plantations it supplied” (*ER*, p. 252).

5. The “Exodus epic became for the Dutch what it had been for the Biblical Jews: the legitimation of a great historical rupture, a cut with the past which had made possible the retrospective invention of a collective identity” (*ER*, p. 113). King Philip II of Spain was likened to Pharaoh during the Egyptian enslavement: “*The one bowed down Jacob’s house [Israelites] with slavery/The other, the Netherlands oppressed with tyranny*” (*ER*, p. 105). The Dutch reference to the Catholic missionary Bartolomé de Las Casas’s biting condemnation of the Spanish “misdeeds” of slavery in the colonies is mentioned by Schama, even as the Dutch practice of slavery is not (*ER*, p. 84).

Jews.<sup>6</sup> He includes a whole chapter discussing the scapegoating and persecution of a long list of “outsiders” who, due to the Dutch psychological obsession for purification, needed to be cleansed from the social body: homosexuals, Jews, gypsies, idlers, vagabonds, whores—but has nothing to say about African slaves in this context.<sup>7</sup>

Schama is clearly fatigued with the Marxist economic histories that treat the Dutch *only* as a mercantile capitalist power.<sup>8</sup> His project is, rather, the tracing of cultural causality. He examines how the anxieties of affluence due to the “‘overflow of goods’” awakened in the modern Dutch the fear of a different kind of slavery, the “enslavement to luxury” that threatened “free will,” the fear that avarice to consume would “turn free souls into fawning slaves” (*ER*, pp. 47, 203). He focuses on the family as the core of “Dutchness,” not world trade, allowing his readers entry into private, domestic life, home and hearth, full tables and personal affections, when “to *be* Dutch was to be local, parochial, traditional and customary” (*ER*, p. 62). We might be ready, therefore, to excuse him—were it not for the fact that slaves were not foreign to Dutch domesticity. Does Schama’s silence reflect the silence of his written sources? I cannot tell.<sup>9</sup> But Dutch visual culture provides clear evidence of a different reality. A painting by Franz Hals from 1648 depicts at the very center of the canvas a black youth, presumably a slave, as part of domestic life, visible in the bosom of a comfortable, affectionate Dutch family within a local, parochial, Dutch landscape (fig. 1). In Schama’s richly illustrated book, this painting by Hals does not appear (although another Hals painting,

6. “Paradoxically, the church’s predilection for describing its own flock as the reborn Hebrews did not dispose it to favor the real thing” (*ER*, p. 591).

7. See *ER*, pp. 565–608. Schama describes connections made by the Dutch between non-Europeans and excesses of tobacco, sexuality, and other debaucheries that threatened to contaminate the Dutch domestically: “The stock visual and textual anthologies of native barbarism in Brazil and Florida, for example, featured Indians smoking through rolled leaves, while acts of copulation, cannibalism, public urination and other sorts of miscellaneous beastliness proceeded routinely in the background” (*ER*, p. 204).

8. Schama is happy simply to record without critical comment the magical fantasy of Thomas Mun, that under capitalism money begets money, as influencing the Dutch he is studying:

Capital begot capital with astonishing ease, and so far from denying themselves its fruits, capitalists reveled in the material comforts it bought. At midcentury there seemed no limit, certainly no geographical limit, to the range of its fleets and the resourcefulness of its entrepreneurs. No sooner was one consumer demand glutted or exhausted than another promising raw material was discovered, the supply monopolized, demand stimulated, markets exploited at home and abroad. Would the tide of prosperity ever ebb? [*ER*, p. 323]

9. Certainly Grotius discussed real slavery. But Grotius (see note 13) is cited by Schama only in other contexts (just wars, free trade, Dutch destiny, marriage, whales). It is not unreasonable to have suspicions that the silence is Schama’s own. Such selective national histories have become a trend in European historiography, one that omits much or all of the colonizing story.



FIG. 1.—Franz Hals, *Portrait of a Dutch Family* (1648). Museo Thyssen Bornemisza, Madrid.

of a Dutch husband and wife alone in a landscape, is included). Nor are there any other images of blacks.<sup>10</sup> Of course, given the absence of slaves from Schama's written account, they would have been out of place in the illustrations. The consequence of this scholarship is partial blindness among seas of perspicacity, and it is characteristic of Western academic scholarship, as we shall see.

### 3

Beginning in 1651, Britain challenged the Dutch in a series of naval wars that led ultimately to British dominance not only of Europe but of the global economy, including the slave trade.<sup>11</sup> At the time, the Cromwellian revolution against absolute monarchy and feudal privilege fol-

10. Although see Allison Blakeley, *Blacks in the Dutch World: The Evolution of Racial Imagery in a Modern Society* (Bloomington, Ind., 1993), which gives visual evidence of blacks in Holland in this era.

11. Britain extorted the *asiento* from Spain at the time of the Treaty of Utrecht (1713). "Much of the wealth of Bristol and Liverpool in the following decades was to be built upon the slave trade" (R. R. Palmer and Joel Colton, *A History of the Modern World*, 3d ed. [New York, 1969], p. 171).

lowed Dutch precedent by making metaphorical use of the Old Testament story of the Israelites being freed from slavery. But within political theory a shedding of ancient scriptures was taking place. The pivotal figure here is Thomas Hobbes. Although *Leviathan* (1651) is a hybrid of modern and biblical imagery, slavery is discussed in clearly secular terms.<sup>12</sup> He sees it as a consequence of the war of all against all in the state of nature, hence belonging to the natural disposition of man.<sup>13</sup> Involved through his patron, Lord Cavendish, with the affairs of the Virginia Company that governed a colony in America, Hobbes accepted slavery as “an inevitable part of the logic of power” (*PSAR*, p. 263). Even the inhabitants of “‘civil and flourishing nations’” could revert again to this state.<sup>14</sup> Hobbes was honest and unconflicted about slavery—John Locke less so. The opening sentence of book 1, chapter 1, of his *Two Treatises of Government* (1690) states unequivocally:

Slavery is so vile and miserable an Estate of Man, and so directly opposite to the generous Temper and Courage of our Nation; that 'tis hardly to be conceived that an *Englishman*, much less a *Gentleman*, should plead for't.

But Locke's outrage against the “Chains for all Mankind” was not a protest against the enslavement of black Africans on New World plantations, least of all in colonies that were British.<sup>15</sup> Rather, slavery was a metaphor for legal tyranny, as it was used generally in British parliamentary debates on constitutional theory. A shareholder in the Royal African Company involved in American colonial policy in Carolina, Locke “clearly regarded Negro slavery a justifiable institution” (*PSWC*, p. 118).<sup>16</sup> The isolation of

12. If Hobbes's rhetorical examples draw on machinery as a metaphor for the artificially constructed state, the Old Testament provides the title for *Leviathan*, as it does for Hobbes's book on the Long Parliament, *Behemoth*, the biblical name for a tyrannical sovereign, already in use in the Dutch national story: “The kings of Spain in whose name these infamies [against Dutch civilian populations] . . . came to be seen as Behemoth, determined on destroying the bonds that held communities and even families together” (*ER*, p. 92).

13. Hobbes considered the “elemental struggle between two enemies” to be “the natural condition which made slavery necessary as a social institution” (David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* [New York, 1966], p. 120; hereafter abbreviated *PSWC*). Here Hobbes followed the earlier theorists, Samuel Pufendorf and Hugo Grotius; the latter's book *War and Peace* (1853) included proslavery views and the argument that slavery was legally acceptable.

14. Peter Hulme, “The Spontaneous Hand of Nature: Savagery, Colonialism, and the Enlightenment,” in *The Enlightenment and Its Shadows*, ed. Hulme and Ludmilla Jordanova (London, 1990), p. 24. Hulme is mainly concerned with Hobbes's depiction of “savages” indigenous to the colonies.

15. John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge, 1960), §1, p. 141.

16. Locke was involved in the development of colonial policies through his patron, the Earl of Shaftesbury, and was a strong defender of the enterprise. He authored the Fun-

the political discourse of social contract from the economy of household production (the *oikos*) made this double vision possible.<sup>17</sup> British liberty meant the protection of private property, and slaves were private property. So long as slaves fell under the jurisdiction of the household, their status was protected by law (figs. 2 and 3).<sup>18</sup>

## 4

A half-century later, the classical understanding of the economy—and hence slave owning—as a private, household concern was blatantly contradicted by new global realities. Sugar transformed the West Indian colonial plantations. Both capital and labor intensive, sugar production was protoindustrial, causing a precipitous rise in the importation of African slaves and a brutal intensification of their labor exploitation in order to meet a new and seemingly insatiable European demand for the addictive sweetness of sugar.<sup>19</sup> Leading the Caribbean-wide sugar boom was the French colony of Saint-Domingue that in 1767 produced 63,000 tons of sugar.<sup>20</sup> Sugar production led to a seemingly infinite demand for slaves as well, whose number in Saint-Domingue increased tenfold over the eighteenth century to over five hundred thousand human beings. Within France, more than 20 percent of the bourgeoisie was dependent upon

---

damental Constitutions of Carolina, sitting on its Council of Trade and Plantations as secretary from 1673–75. The Carolina constitutions stated: “every freeman of Carolina, shall have absolute power and authority over his negro slaves” (*PSWC*, p. 118).

17. “In Locke’s view, the origin of slavery, like the origin of liberty and property, was entirely outside the social contract” (*PSWC*, p. 119). Locke’s philosophical argument tempered the universality of equality in the state of nature with the necessity of consent before a social contract could be undertaken, thereby excluding, explicitly, children and idiots from the contract, and by inference others who were uneducated or uneducable. See Uday S. Mehta, “Liberal Strategies of Exclusion,” *Politics and Society* 18 (Dec. 1990): 427–53.

18. Davis notes “the unfortunate fact that slaves were defined by law as property, and property was supposedly the foundation of liberty” (*PSAR*, p. 267). It was only “after the Somerset decision of 1772” that “it was no longer possible to take for granted the universal legality of slave property” (*PSAR*, p. 470), although William Davy, the lawyer in this case, argued for an earlier precedent: “In the eleventh year of Elizabeth’s reign, Davy exclaimed, it had been resolved that *England was too pure an Air for Slaves to breathe in.*” Not so, writes Davis: “In point of fact, Negro slaves were bought and displayed in the courts of Elizabeth and her Stuart successors; they were publicly advertised for sale through most of the eighteenth century; and they were bequeathed in wills as late as the 1820s” (*PSAR*, p. 472). When, in 1765, William Blackstone made the claim that “a slave or negro, the moment he lands in England, falls under the protection of the laws, and with regard to all natural rights becomes *eo instanti* a freeman,” this did not apply to slaves in the colonies. “Even Somerset’s counsel conceded that English courts would have to give effect to a contract for the purchase of slaves abroad” (*PSAR*, pp. 473, 474).

19. See Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York, 1985).

20. See Ralph Davis, *The Rise of the Atlantic Economies* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1973), p. 257.





FIG. 2.—Peter Lely, *Elizabeth Countess of Dysart* (c. 1650). Ham House, Surrey.

Slaves were fashionable in late seventeenth-century England, accompanying aristocratic ladies like household pets.<sup>21</sup> Portraits by the Dutch-born Anthony van Dyck and Peter Lely were prototypes of a new genre of paintings, depicting black youths offering fruit and other symbols of wealth from the colonies to their owners.<sup>22</sup>

slave-connected commercial activity.<sup>23</sup> The French Enlightenment thinkers wrote in the midst of this transformation. While they idealized indigenous colonial populations with myths of the noble savage (the “Indians” of the “New World”), the economic lifeblood of slave labor was not their concern.<sup>24</sup> Although abolitionist movements did exist at this time, and in France the *Amis des Noirs* (Friends of the Blacks) decried the excesses of slavery, a defense of liberty on the grounds of racial equality was rare indeed.<sup>25</sup>

21. “The *London Advertiser* of 1756 carried a notice by Matthew Dyer informing the public that he made ‘silver padlocks for Blacks or Dogs; collars, etc.’ . . . English ladies posed for their portraits either with their pet lamb, their pet lapdog or their pet black” (David Dabydeen, *Hogarth’s Blacks: Images of Blacks in Eighteenth-Century English Art* [1985; Athens, Ga., 1987], pp. 21–23).

22. For the presence in Britain of slaves in the eighteenth century, see also F. O. Shyllon, *Black Slaves in Britain* (New York, 1974), and Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1992).

23. Louis Sala-Molins says one-third of the commercial activity in France depended on the institution of slavery; see Louis Sala-Molins, *Le Code Noir, ou le calvaire de Canaan* (Paris, 1987), p. 244; hereafter abbreviated *CN*. More conservative estimates put the figure at 20 percent.

24. It was Montesquieu who brought slavery into the Enlightenment discussion and set the tone. While condemning the institution philosophically, he justified “Negro” slavery on pragmatic, climatic, and blatantly racist grounds (“flat noses,” “black from head to foot,” and lacking in “common sense”). He concluded: “Weak minds exaggerate too much the injustice done to Africans” by colonial slavery (Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, in *Selected Political Writings*, trans. and ed. Melvin Richter [Indianapolis, 1990], p. 204).

25. Most frequently cited as an exception was the work of a priest, the Abbé Raynal, whose book (written with the collaboration of Diderot) *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (1770) predicted a black Spartacus who would arise in the New World to avenge the rights of nature. The book was widely



FIG. 3.—Anthony van Dyck, *Henrietta of Lorraine* (1634). Kenwood House.

“Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.” So writes Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the opening lines of *On the Social Contract*, first published in 1762.<sup>26</sup> No human condition appears more offensive to his heart or to his reason than slavery. And yet even Rousseau, patron saint of the French Revolution, represses from consciousness the millions of really existing, European-owned slaves, as he relentlessly condemns the institution. Rousseau’s egregious omission has been scrupulously exposed by scholarship, but only recently. The Catalan-born philosopher Louis Sala-Molins has written a history (1987) of Enlightenment thought through the lens of *Le Code Noir*, the French legal code that applied to black slaves in the colonies, drawn up in 1685 and signed by Louis XIV and not definitively eradicated until 1848. Sala-Molins proceeds point by point through the code, which legalized not only slavery, the treatment of human beings as moveable property, but the branding, torture, physical mutilation, and killing of slaves for attempting to defy their inhuman status. He juxtaposes this code, which applied to all slaves under French jurisdiction, to the Enlightenment philosophers’ texts, documenting their indignation regarding slavery in theory while “superbly” ignoring slavery in practice. Sala-Molins is outraged and rightly so. In the *Social Contract*, Rousseau argues: “The right of slavery is null, not simply because it is illegitimate, but because it is absurd and meaningless. These words, *slavery* and *right* [*droit*, that is, law], are contradictory. They are mutually exclusive.”<sup>27</sup> Sala-Molins makes us see the consequences of this statement: “The *Code Noir*, the most perfect example of this kind of convention in the time of Rousseau, is not a legal code. The right of which it speaks is not a right, as it claims to make legal that which cannot be legalized, slavery” (CN, p. 238). He thus finds it preposterous that Rousseau never in his writings mentions the *Code Noir*. “The one existing, flagrant case of what he is declaring categorically untenable gets none of his attention” (CN, p. 241).<sup>28</sup> Sala-Molins scrutinizes the texts for any evidence that might excuse this silence and finds, unequivocally, that Rousseau knew the facts. The Enlighten-

---

read, and not only in Europe; Toussaint-Louverture himself was inspired by it. See C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, 2d ed. (1938; New York, 1963), pp. 24–25. Michel-Rolph Trouillot has cautioned against too sanguine a reading of this passage, however, which was contextualized as a warning to Europeans, rather than an appeal to the slaves themselves: “It was not a clear prediction of a Louverture-type character, as some would want with hindsight. . . . The most radical stance is in the unmistakable reference to a single human species” (Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* [Boston, 1995], p. 85).

26. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, in *The Basic Political Writings*, trans. and ed. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis, 1988), bk. 1, chap. 1, p. 141.

27. *Ibid.*, bk. 1, chap. 4, p. 146.

28. Rather, Rousseau’s examples are from ancient times, for example, Braidias of Sparta against the satrap of Persepolis! See Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, in *The Basic Political Writings*, p. 72.

ment philosopher cited travel literature of the time—Kolben on the Hotentots, du Tertre on Indians in the Antilles—but avoided those pages of these same accounts that describe the horrors of European slavery explicitly. Rousseau referred to human beings everywhere—but omitted Africans; spoke of Greenland’s people transported to Denmark who die of sadness—but not of the sadness of Africans transported to the Indies that resulted in suicides, mutinies, and maroonings. He declared all men equal and saw private property as the source of inequality, but he never put two and two together to discuss French slavery for economic profit as central to arguments of both equality and property (see *CN*, pp. 243–46). As in the Dutch Republic and Britain, African slaves were present, used and abused domestically within France.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Rousseau could not *not* have known “that there are boudoirs in Paris where one amuses oneself indiscriminately with a monkey and a young black boy (*négrillon*)” (*CN*, p. 248).

Sala-Molins pronounces Rousseau’s silence in the face of this evidence “racist” and “revolting” (*CN*, p. 253).<sup>30</sup> Such outrage is unusual among scholars who, as professionals, are trained to avoid passionate judgements in their writing. This moral neutrality is built into the disciplinary methods that, while based on a variety of philosophical premises, result in the same exclusions. Today’s intellectual historian who treats Rousseau in context will follow good professional form by relativizing the situation, judging (and excusing) Rousseau’s racism by the mores of his time, in order to avoid thereby the fallacy of anachronism. Or, today’s philosopher, who is trained to analyze theory totally abstracted from historical context, will attribute a universality to Rousseau’s writings that transcends the author’s own intent or personal limitations in order to avoid thereby the fallacy of reduction *ad hominem*. In both cases, the embarrassing facts are quietly allowed to disappear. They are visible, however, in general histories of the era, where they cannot help but be mentioned because when Enlightenment theory was put into practice, the perpetrators of political revolutions stumbled over the economic fact of slavery in ways that made their own acknowledgement of the contradiction impossible to avoid.

29. See William B. Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans: White Response to Blacks, 1530–1880* (Bloomington, Ind., 1980). In 1764 the French government prohibited entry of blacks into the metropolis. In 1777 the law was modified to lift some of the restrictions, allowing colonial slaves to accompany their masters.

30. The author as well of *L’Afrique aux Amériques: Le Code Noir espagnol* (Paris, 1992), Sala-Molins considers the protests against slavery of the seventeenth-century priest Las Casas, who called for its immediate abolition, to have been more progressive than the *philosophes*.

The colonial revolutionaries of America fighting for their independence against Britain mobilized Locke's political discourse to their ends. The metaphor of slavery was central to that struggle but in a new sense: "Americans genuinely believed that men who were taxed without their consent were literally slaves, since they had lost the power to resist oppression, and since defenselessness inevitably led to tyranny" (*PSAR*, p. 273).<sup>31</sup> In evoking the liberties of natural rights theory, the American colonists as slave owners were led to "a monstrous inconsistency."<sup>32</sup> And, yet, although some, like Benjamin Rush, acknowledged their bad faith,<sup>33</sup> and some, like Thomas Jefferson, blamed black slavery on the British;<sup>34</sup> although the slaves themselves petitioned for their liberty,<sup>35</sup> and a few individual states passed antislavery legislation,<sup>36</sup> the new nation, conceived in liberty, tolerated the "monstrous inconsistency," writing slavery into the United States Constitution.

The French encyclopedist, Denis Diderot, spoke admiringly of the U.S. revolutionaries as having "burned their chains" and "refused slav-

31. Davis is citing Bernard Bailyn in this case. I am following Davis's presentation closely here.

32. Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1968), p. 289. Their enemies, the British Tories, seized upon this: "'How is it,' asked Samuel Johnson, 'that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of negroes?'" (*PSWC*, p. 3).

33. "The plant of liberty is of so tender a Nature, that it cannot thrive long in the neighborhood of slavery" (Benjamin Rush [1773], quoted in *PSAR*, p. 283).

34. In a suppressed clause of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson charged that the British King George III

"has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating the most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere . . . determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought and sold. . . . He is now exciting these very people to rise in arms among us, and to purchase that liberty of which *he* deprived them, by murdering the people upon whom *he* also intruded them, thus paying off former crimes committed against the *liberties* of one people, with crimes that *he* urges them to commit against the *lives* of another." [*PSAR*, p. 273]

35. "We have in common with all other men . . . a natural right to our freedoms without being depriv'd of them by our fellow men as we are a freeborn Peple and have never forfeited this Blessing by aney compact or agreement whatever" (quoted in *PSAR*, p. 276).

36.

If the American Revolution could not solve the problem of slavery, it at least led to a *perception* of the problem. Nor was the desire for consistency a matter of empty rhetoric. It appeared in the antislavery resolutions of New England town meetings, in the Vermont constitution of 1777, in individual wills that manumitted slaves, in Rhode Island's law of 1774 that prohibited future importation of slaves, and in Pennsylvania's gradual emancipation act of 1780, adopted, according to a preamble written by Thomas Paine, "in grateful commemoration of our own happy deliverance" from British occupation. [*PSAR*, pp. 285–86]

ery’” (*SP*, p. 85).<sup>37</sup> But if the colonial nature of the United States struggle for freedom made it somehow possible to sustain the distinction between the political discourse and social institutions, in the case of the French Revolution a decade later the various meanings of slavery became hopelessly entangled when they came up against fundamental contradictions between revolutionary developments within France and developments in the French colonies without. It took years of bloodshed before slavery—really-existing slavery, not merely its metaphorical analogy—was abolished in the French colonies, and even then the gains were only temporary. Although abolition of slavery was the only possible logical outcome of the ideal of universal freedom, it did not come about through the revolutionary ideas or even the revolutionary actions of the French; it came about through the actions of the slaves themselves. The epicenter of this struggle was the colony of Saint-Domingue. In 1791, while even the most ardent opponents of slavery within France dragged their feet, the half-million slaves in Saint-Domingue, the richest colony not only of France but of the entire colonial world, took the struggle for liberty into their own hands, not through petitions, but through violent, organized revolt.<sup>38</sup> In 1794 the armed blacks of Saint-Domingue forced the French Republic to acknowledge the *fait accompli* of the abolition of slavery on that island (declared by the French colonial commissioners, Sonthonax and Polverel, acting on their own) and to universalize abolition through-

37. The *Encyclopédie* edited by Diderot and D’Alembert, included entries concerning really-existing slavery. Although the article entitled “Nègres” observed simply that their labor “is indispensable for the cultivation of sugar, tobacco, indigo, etc.,” a series of entries by Jaucourt was forceful: “Esclavage” declared slavery contrary to nature; “Liberté naturelle” accused religion of using its pretext against natural right because slaves were needed for the colonies, plantations, and mines; “Traité des Nègres” declared slaves traded to be “illicit merchandise—prohibited by all the laws of humanity and equality,” so that abolition was necessary even if it ruined the colonies: “Let the colonies be destroyed rather than be the cause of so much evil.” But racism was still present in these texts (*CN*, pp. 254–61), and abolition was advised as a gradual process in order to prepare the slaves for freedom.

38. This slave conspiracy was led by Boukman, a priest of *Vodou*, a new syncretic cult that not only brought together slaves from diverse cultures of Africa, but included Western cultural symbols as well (see below, n. 114). Boukman addressed the slaves: “Throw away the symbol of the god of the whites who has so often caused us to weep, and listen to the voice of liberty, which speaks in the hearts of us all” (*BJ*, p. 87). Although slave rebellions had occurred in Saint-Domingue with great regularity—1679, 1713, 1720, 1730, 1758, 1777, 1782, and 1787, before the massive revolt in 1791; see Alex Dupuy, *Haiti in the World Economy: Class, Race, and Underdevelopment since 1700* (Boulder, Colo., 1989), p. 34—within the context of the radicalization of the French Revolution, Boukman’s uprising changed Europeans’ perception of slave revolts—no longer one of a long series of slave rebellions, but an extension of the European Revolution: “News of the summer of 1791 had focused on the flight to Varennes and capture of the French royal family and on the revolt of the slaves in Santo Domingo” (Ronald Paulson, *Representations of Revolution (1789–1820)* [New Haven, Conn., 1983], p. 93).

out the French colonies.<sup>39</sup> From 1794 to 1800, as freemen, these former slaves engaged in a struggle against invading British forces, who many of the white and mulatto land-owning colonists of Saint-Domingue hoped would reestablish slavery.<sup>40</sup> The black army under the leadership of Toussaint-Louverture defeated the British militarily in a struggle that strengthened the Abolitionist movement within Britain, setting the stage for the British suspension of the slave trade in 1807.<sup>41</sup> In 1801, Toussaint-Louverture, the former slave and now governor of Saint-Domingue, suspected that the French Directory might attempt to rescind abolition.<sup>42</sup> And yet, still loyal to the Republic,<sup>43</sup> he wrote a constitution for the colony that was in advance of any such document in the world—if not in its premises of democracy, then surely in regard to the racial inclusiveness of its definition of the citizenry.<sup>44</sup> In 1802, Napoleon did move to reestablish

39. Slavery was abolished by Polverel and Sonthonax in August 1793, acting independently of orders from Paris. The role of both men has been neglected by scholars, another case of scholarly blindness that, to use Trouillot's felicitous term (n. 25), "silences the past." See the recent symposium, *Léger-Félicité Sonthonax: La Première Abolition de l'esclavage: La Révolution française et la Révolution de Saint-Domingue*, ed. Marcel Dorigny (Saint-Denis, 1997), which begins to redress this situation; in particular, see Roland Desné, "Sonthonax vu par les dictionnaires," pp. 113–20, which traces the almost total disappearance of Sonthonax's name from the bibliographical encyclopedias of France in the course of the twentieth century.

40. The British were compelled pragmatically to grant freedom to those slaves of Saint-Domingue who agreed to fight on their side—as did Sonthonax and Polverel in the case of those fighting for the French Republic. The effect of these policies was to undermine slavery by contradicting any ontological argument that the slaves were incapable of freedom; see David Patrick Geggus, "The British Occupation of Saint Domingue, 1793–98" (Ph.D. diss., York University, England, 1978), p. 363.

41. Geggus notes: "The part played by Haiti in the anti-slavery movement's sudden resurgence in 1804 seems to have been entirely ignored in the scholarly literature. Yet its importance was apparently considerable" (Geggus, "Haiti and the Abolitionists: Opinion, Propaganda, and International Politics in Britain and France, 1804–1838," *Abolition and Its Aftermath: The Historical Context, 1790–1916*, ed. David Richardson [London, 1985], p. 116; hereafter abbreviated "HA"). Again, here is a case of scholarly blindness that silences the past.

42. In 1796 General Laveaux appointed Toussaint governor, and hailed him as savior of the Republic and redeemer of the slaves predicted by Raynal; see Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776–1848* (London, 1988), p. 233; hereafter abbreviated *OCS*. In 1802, the *Code Noir* was reestablished in Martinique and Guadeloupe (although nothing was said about Saint-Domingue).

43. Louverture had allied himself earlier with the King of Spain, setting up military operations and working in the eastern half of the island, which was a Spanish colony; but once he learned that the French Assembly had abolished slavery, he joined with Sonthonax against the British and was loyal to the French Republic until his arrest. (This change of alliances, which has been a point of controversy, is analyzed by Geggus, "'From His Most Catholic Majesty to the Godless République': The 'Volte-Face' of Toussaint Louverture and the End of Slavery in Saint Domingue," *Revue française d'histoire d'outre mer* 65, no. 241 [1978]: 488–89.)

44. To aid him in drawing up a constitution, Toussaint summoned an assembly of six men (including the Bordeaux-raised lawyer Julien Raimond, see below):

The Constitution is Toussaint L'Ouverture from the first line to the last, and in it he enshrined his principles of government. Slavery was forever abolished. Every man,

slavery and the *Code Noir* and had Toussaint arrested and deported to France, where he died in prison in 1803. When Napoleon sent French troops under Leclerc to subdue the colony, waging a brutal struggle against the black population “that amounted to a war of genocide,”<sup>45</sup> the black citizens of Saint-Domingue once again took up arms, demonstrating, in Leclerc’s own words: “It is not enough to have taken away Toussaint, there are 2,000 leaders to be taken away” (*BJ*, p. 346). On 1 January 1804, the new military leader, slave-born Jean-Jacques Dessalines, took the final step of declaring independence from France, thus combining the end of slavery with the end of colonial status. Under the banner of Liberty or Death (these words were inscribed on the red and blue flag, from which the white band of the French had been removed [see *BJ*, p. 365]),<sup>46</sup> he defeated the French troops and destroyed the white population, establishing in 1805 an independent, constitutional nation of “black” citizens, an “empire,” mirroring Napoleon’s own, which he called by the Arawak name, Haiti.<sup>47</sup> These events, leading to the complete freedom of the slaves and the colony, were unprecedented. “Never before had a slave society successfully overthrown its ruling class” (“HA,” p. 114).

The self-liberation of the African slaves of Saint-Domingue gained for them, by force, the recognition of European and American whites—if only in the form of fear. Among those with egalitarian sympathies, it gained them respect as well. For almost a decade, before the violent elimination of whites signalled their deliberate retreat from universalist principles, the black Jacobins of Saint-Domingue surpassed the metropole in actively realizing the Enlightenment goal of human liberty, seeming to give proof that the French Revolution was not simply a European phe-

---

whatever his colour, was admissible to all employments, and there was to exist no other distinction than that of virtues and talents, and no other superiority than that which the law gives in the exercise of a public function. He incorporated in the Constitution an article which preserved their rights to all proprietors absent from the colony “for whatever reason” except if they were on the list of émigrés proscribed in France. For the rest, Toussaint concentrated all power in his own hands. [*BJ*, p. 263]

Toussaint’s regime anticipated dominion status. France missed this chance to establish a policy of enlightened imperialism.

45. Geggus, “Slavery, War, and Revolution in the Greater Caribbean,” in *A Turbulent Time: The French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean*, ed. David Barry Gaspar and Geggus (Bloomington, Ind., 1997), p. 22.

46. Writing under a pseudonym in a Boston newspaper in support of the Saint-Domingue revolution, Abraham Bishop “remarked that the American revolutionaries who had taught the world to echo the cry ‘Liberty or Death!’ did not say ‘all white men are free, but all men are free’” (David Brion Davis, *Revolutions: Reflections on American Equality and Foreign Liberations* [Cambridge, Mass., 1990], p. 50).

47. Dessalines’s constitution declared all Haitians black, attempting to legislate away the categories of mulatto and various gradients of interraciality. Dessalines was assassinated in 1806; Haiti was then divided into two parts, a north “kingdom,” headed by Henri Christophe, and a south “republic,” the president of which was Alexandre Pétion.



nomenon but world-historical in its implications.<sup>48</sup> If we have become accustomed to different narratives, ones that place colonial events on the margins of European history, we have been seriously misled. Events in Saint-Domingue were central to contemporary attempts to make sense out of the reality of the French Revolution and its aftermath.<sup>49</sup> We need to be aware of the facts from this perspective.

## 6

Let us consider the logical unfolding of the overthrow of slavery in terms of the evolution in consciousness of Europeans living through it. The French revolutionaries understood themselves from the start as a liberation movement that would free people from the “slavery” of feudal inequities. In 1789 the slogans Live Freely or Die and Rather Death Than Slavery were common, and the “Marseillaise” denounced “l’esclavage antique” in this context (see *OCS*, p. 230). This was a revolution against, not merely the tyranny of a particular ruler, but of all past traditions that violated the general principles of human liberty. Reporting on the events in Paris in summer 1789, the German publicist Johann Wilhelm von Archenholz (from whom we will hear again) lost his customary journalistic neutrality and exclaimed that the French “‘people’” (*Volk*), who “‘were accustomed to kissing their chains . . . had, in a matter of hours, broken these gigantic chains with one all-conquering stroke of courage, becoming freer than the Romans and Greeks were, and the Americans and British are today.’”<sup>50</sup>

But what of the colonies, the source of wealth of such a large part of the French population? The meaning of freedom was at stake in their reaction to the events of 1789 and nowhere more so than in the crown jewel, Saint-Domingue. Would the colonists take after the Americans and

48. Trouillot calls the Haitian Revolution “the most radical political revolution of that age” (*SP*, p. 98). Blackburn writes: “Haiti was not the first independent American state but it was the first to guarantee civic liberty to all its inhabitants” (*OCS*, p. 260).

49. Was the French Revolution a “mere reform of abuses,” as Napoleon claimed the English considered it, or did it constitute “‘a complete social rebirth,’” as he was to say on his deathbed (Paulson, *Representations of Revolution*, p. 51)? At the end of his life, Napoleon regretted his treatment of Toussaint-Louverture.

50. Friedrich Ruof, *Johann Wilhelm von Archenholz: Ein deutscher Schriftsteller zur Zeit der Französischen Revolution und Napoleons (1741–1812)* (1915; Vaduz, 1965), p. 29; hereafter abbreviated *JWA*. (Ruof’s spelling of the name as “Archenholtz” is unusual.) Archenholz continued: “‘They should be honored by the German people, who thereby honor themselves’” (*JWA*, p. 30). In 1792 he again used the metaphor of slavery in describing the French revolutionary situation, asking whether the people of “‘one of the most populous nations on earth, that in the past few years had climbed out of the deepest slime of slavery, and . . . tasted the sweet fruits of freedom to the point of overfullness . . . so soon again would quietly bow their necks under the yoke, regarding their broken chains as playthings. . . . Even the combined might of Europe would be wrecked against this rock’” (*JWA*, p. 49).

revolt, as some of the Creole planters of Saint-Domingue were urging? Or would they join fraternally to proclaim their “liberty” as French citizens? And if the latter, then who were to be included as citizens? Property owners, to be sure.<sup>51</sup> But only whites? Mulattoes owned an estimated one-third of the cultivated land in Saint-Domingue.<sup>52</sup> Ought not they to be included, and not only they, but the free blacks as well? Was property or was race the litmus test for being a citizen of France? Most pertinent, if Africans could in principle be included as citizens—if, that is, the implicitly racist assumptions that underlay the *Code Noir* were not valid—then how could the continued legal enslavement of blacks be justified?<sup>53</sup> And if it could not, how could the colonial system be maintained? The unfolding of the logic of freedom in the colonies threatened to unravel the total institutional framework of the slave economy that supported such a substantial part of the French bourgeoisie, whose political revolution, of course, this was.<sup>54</sup> And yet only the logic of freedom gave legitimacy to their revolution in the universal terms in which the French saw themselves.

The Haitian Revolution was the crucible, the trial by fire for the ideals of the French Enlightenment. And every European who was part of the bourgeois reading public knew it.<sup>55</sup> “The eyes of the world are now on

51. In 1790 a colonial assembly in Saint-Domingue extended the vote to nonpropertied whites (widening the franchise further than in the metropole), hence reinforcing the racial nature of political exclusion; see *OCS*, p. 183.

52. Blackburn writes that they owned 2,000 coffee estates in the west and south, compared with 780 sugar estates, the great majority of which were owned by whites: “In St. Domingue free people of colour were almost as numerous as white colonists, indeed possibly more numerous.” The proprietors of color owned about 100,000 slaves: “nowhere else in the Americas did those of partly African descent figure so importantly in the ranks of the propertied class”; they often “bore the distinguished name of a French father” (*OCS*, pp. 168, 169).

53. The Baron de Wimpffen asked if colonists were not afraid to say *liberty* or *equality* in front of their slaves; see *Bj*, p. 82. But it was still rare in 1792 for republicans to declare forcefully, as did Sonthonax, “One cannot maintain the Blacks in slavery if free men who are equal to the Whites are also black like the slaves” (Jacques Thibau, “Saint-Domingue à l’arrivée de Sonthonax,” *Léger-Félicité Sonthonax*, p. 44).

54. In the Constituent Assembly (1789–91), consisting of approximately 1,100 deputies, one in ten had interests in Saint-Domingue; see *ibid.*, p. 41.

55. The Amis des Noirs (founded in 1788) were important in setting the stage for this discussion. Although not great in numbers, they were influential as writers and pamphleteers (Condorcet, Brissot, Mirabeau, the Abbé Grégoire), whose work deplored the conditions of the colonial slaves. Marcus Rainsford wrote in 1805 that as a result of their circulated writings, negro slaves “were the prominent subjects of conversation and regret in half the towns of Europe”; as they, with “unhappy eloquence” depicted “the miseries of slavery,” and “were certainly the cause of bringing into action, on a broad basis, that spirit of revolt which only sleeps in the enslaved African, or his descendent” (Marcus Rainsford, *An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti* [London, 1805], p. 107). The position of the Amis des Noirs was to endorse only gradual emancipation, until 1791, when they endorsed rights for free blacks and mulattoes; by the time of the actual abolition of slavery (1794) they had ceased to exist, victims of Robespierre’s purges. Abolition had come to be identified with Robespierre’s enemies the Girondins: “The Girondins were accused of having

St. Domingo.”<sup>56</sup> So begins an article published in 1804 in *Minerva*, the journal founded by Archenholz, who had been covering the French Revolution since its beginnings and reporting on the revolution in Saint-Domingue since 1792.<sup>57</sup> For a full year, from fall 1804 to the end of 1805, *Minerva* published a continuing series, totalling more than a hundred pages, including source documents, news summaries, and eyewitness accounts, that informed its readers not only of the final struggle for independence of this French colony—under the banner Liberty or Death!<sup>58</sup>—but of events over the previous ten years as well. Archenholz was critical of the violence of this revolution (as he was of the Jacobin Terror in the metropole), but he came to appreciate Toussaint-Louverture, publishing as part of his series, in German translation, a chapter from the new manuscript by a British captain, Marcus Rainsford, who praised Toussaint’s character, leadership, and humanity in superlatives.<sup>59</sup>

Archenholz’s journal borrowed freely from English and French sources so that his account reflected news widely reported to the Euro-

secretly fomented the colonial upheavals to the advantage of England and of supporting abolition in order to ruin France’s empire. . . . Robespierre himself was conspicuously absent during the February 4 session [of the Convention, which voted unanimously to abolish slavery] and did not sign the decree” (Carolyn E. Fick, “The French Revolution in Saint Domingue: A Triumph or a Failure?” in *A Turbulent Time*, p. 68; compare Yves B  not, “Comment la Convention a-t-elle vot   l’abolition de l’esclavage en l’an II?” in *R  volutions aux colonies*, ed. Michel Vovelle [Paris, 1993], pp. 13–25).

56. Johann Wilhelm von Archenholz, introduction to “Zur neuesten Geschichte von St. Domingo,” *Minerva* 4 (Nov. 1804): 340. This was Archenholz’s editorial introduction to the article (pp. 341–45), which was critical of the revolution’s violence and skeptical of the viability of the “negro-state.”

57. See “Historische Nachrichten von den letzten Unruhen in Saint Domingo: Aus verschiedenen Quellen gezogen,” *Minerva* 1 (Feb. 1792): 296–319. The article favored mulatto rights, the position of Brissot, and the Amis des Noirs.

58. This slogan, proclaimed by Dessalines in May 1803, was reported in “Zur neuesten Geschichte von St. Domingo,” *Minerva* 4 (Dec. 1804): 506.

59. Rainsford’s book, published in England in 1805 (and in full German translation the following year) asserted:

The rise of the Haytian Empire may powerfully affect the condition of the human race. . . . It will scarcely be credited in another age, that philosophers heard unmoved, of the ascertainment of a brilliant fact, hitherto unknown, or confined to the vague knowledge of those whose experience is not admitted within the pale of historical truth. . . . It is on ancient record, that negroes were capable of repelling their enemies, with vigour, in their own country; and a writer of modern date [Adanson, *Voyage    l’Afrique*, 1749–53] has assured us of the talents and virtues of these people; but it remained for the close of the eighteenth century to realize the scene, from a state of abject degeneracy:—to exhibit, a horde of negroes emancipating themselves from the vilest slavery, and at once filling the relations of society, enacting laws, and commanding armies, in the colonies of Europe. The same period has witnessed a great and polished nation [France] . . . returning to the barbarism of the earliest periods.

Rainsford ranked the Haitian Revolution “among the most remarkable and important transactions of the day” (Rainsford, *An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti*, pp. x–xi, 364).

pean reading public, and the articles in *Minerva* were picked up in turn by “countless newspapers” (a situation of cosmopolitan and open communication, despite intellectual property restrictions, that has perhaps not been matched until the early internet) (*JWA*, p. 62). Although there was censorship in the French press after 1803,<sup>60</sup> newspapers and journals in Britain (also the United States and Poland)<sup>61</sup> highlighted the events of the final revolutionary struggle in Saint-Domingue—the *Edinburgh Review*, among others (see “HA,” pp. 113–15).<sup>62</sup> William Wordsworth wrote a sonnet entitled “To Toussaint Louverture,” published in *The Morning Post* in February 1803, in which he deplored the reestablishment of the *Code Noir* in the French colonies (figs. 4 and 5).<sup>63</sup>

In the German-language press, *Minerva*'s coverage was special. Already in 1794, two years after its founding, it had established its reputation as the best of its genre of political journals. It strove to be nonpartisan, objective, and factual, aiming at “‘historical truth’” that would be “‘instructive . . . [for] our grandchildren’” (*JWA*, pp. 69–70).<sup>64</sup> Its goal, according to the journal's (English!) motto, was “to shew the very age and body of the time its form and pressure.”<sup>65</sup> By 1798 its circulation

60.

Abolitionism, always an affair of small cliques in France, now effectively ceased to exist. The attempt to reconquer Saint Domingue had been accompanied by a flood of literature concerning the colony, but it was largely the work of colonists who, with varying degrees of vituperation, blamed the black revolution on abolitionist influence. Then, as the Saint Domingue expedition came entirely to grief, a total ban was imposed on all works concerning the colonies. [“HA,” p. 117]

61. The U.S. press was full of the story of Saint-Domingue. John Adams, while lamenting the events, believed that they were the logical outcome of what the U.S. rebellion itself had caused. Others saw the slave revolution as proof that slavery needed to be abolished in the United States—in other words, both sides read it as significant for world history; see David Brion Davis, *Revolutions*, pp. 49–54. War correspondents also sent reports back regularly to Polish newspapers, as a Polish regiment was part of the military force under General Leclerc sent by Napoleon to reestablish slavery in Saint-Domingue. See Jan Pachoński and Reuel K. Wilson, *Poland's Caribbean Tragedy: A Study of Polish Legions in the Haitian War of Independence, 1802–1803* (New York, 1986).

62. In fact most of the reporting was not very favorable, with the exception of heroization of Toussaint-Louverture.

63. The sonnet was “probably written in France in August 1802” (Geggus, “British Opinion and the Emergence of Haiti, 1791–1805,” ed. *Slavery and British Society, 1776–1846*, ed. James Walvin [Baton Rouge, La., 1982], p. 140). Wordsworth was born the same year as Hegel (1770); both were in their early thirties at this time. William Blake also incorporated the Haitian revolution into his poetry.

64. Archenholz declared the “‘strictest neutrality’” (*strengste Unparteilichkeit*) to be his “‘first duty’” (*JWA*, p. 40).

65. This appeared on the title page. Note that scholars of *Minerva* need to go back to the original journal to discover the intense interest of Archenholz in Saint-Domingue and the Haitian Revolution. The two monographs that have been written on him do not mention these articles; see *JWA*, and Ute Rieger, *Johann Wilhelm von Archenholz als “Zeitbürger”*: Eine historisch-analytische Untersuchung zur Aufklärung (Berlin, 1994). But see Karin Schüller, *Die Deutsche Rezeption haitianischer Geschichte in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts, ein Beitrag*

# Minerva.

Ein Journal  
historischen und politischen Inhalts.

Herausgegeben

von

J. W. v. Archenholz,

vormals Hauptmann in Königl. Preussischen  
Dienst.

December. 1804.

— — — — — To shew  
the very age and body of the time,  
its form and pressure.

Im Verlage des Herausgebers  
und in Commission  
bey W. G. Hoffmann in Hamburg.

FIG. 4.—Cover page of *Minerva*.

anticipated,  
expedition to  
the weather,  
all frozen in.

our English

ostating be-  
e Prince of  
eive an in-  
rty situated  
at this in-  
ions on the

very active  
his country  
ft unsettled  
fidently re-  
ite Egypt;  
le obstacle,  
does space

Vienna of  
of Vienna,  
just set at  
neville, the  
in the for-  
the greater  
been tried,  
authorities,  
recovered  
are solely  
ion of, the  
nem as for-

# ORIGINAL POETRY.

## SONNET

No. III.

### TO TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE

TOUSSAINT! the most unhappy man of France,  
Whether the rural milk-maid by her cow  
Sing in thy hearing, or thou liest now  
Alone in some deep dungeon's careless den,  
O miserable Chieftain! where and when  
Wilt thou find patience? yet die not; be thou  
Life to thyself in death; with cheerful brow  
Live, loving death, nor let one thought in ten  
Be painful to thee: Thou hast left behind  
Powers that will work for thee, air, earth, and sky  
There's not a breathing of the common wind  
That will forget thee: thou hast great allies:  
Thy friends are exultations, agonies,  
And love, and man's unconquerable mind.

## SPORTING

### BETTING ROOM, JANUARY 31

OFFERED TO BET.—The field against two, for any  
Classes of the Oatlands Stakes.  
5 to 4. P. P. on Quiz, against Highland Fling,  
Stanford, and the field, against 4, for the Derby.  
BETTED.—500 to 100 against Lord Grey's colt, for the Derby,  
—11 to 1 that he did not win the Derby, and St. Leg's  
9 to 1 against Sir H. Williamson's colt for the Derby.  
7 to 2 against Duxbury, for the Oatlands.  
500 to 5 that Pipilin, Gulliver, and Walton, did not win  
three classes of Oatlands.  
500 to 5 against Pipilin, Quiz, and Walton, for the Derby.  
N. B. In both these bets the favourites were heard.

The Queens had a card party last night, at  
ingham-house, which was attended by a select  
of distinguished fashionables: among whom  
the Prince of Wales, and the Duke of York,

FIG. 5.—Wordsworth's sonnet, *Morning Post*, 2 Feb. 1803.

was three thousand copies (respectable in *our* day for an intellectually serious journal), and that number is estimated to have doubled by 1809. In the words of Archenholz's biographer, *Minerva* was "the most important political journal of the turn of the century" both in terms of quality of content, written by regular correspondents (who were important public figures in their own right), and the quality of readers, among whom were some of the most influential people in Germany (*JWA*, p. 131).<sup>66</sup> King Friedrich Wilhelm III of Prussia "read *Minerva* constantly" (*JWA*, p. 130). Both Goethe and Schiller read *Minerva* (the latter corresponded with Archenholz),<sup>67</sup> as well as Klopstock (who contributed to the journal), Schelling, and Lafayette. And—need I keep it from you any longer?—another regular reader of *Minerva*, as we know from his published letters, was the philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.<sup>68</sup>

## 7

"Where did Hegel's idea of the relation between lordship and bondage originate?" ask the Hegel experts, repeatedly, referring to the famous

---

*zum deutschen Bild vom Schwarzen* (Cologne, 1992), pp. 248–61, which includes a summary of the *Minerva* articles on Saint-Domingue as well as a discussion of the accounts of the Haitian Revolution in other German journals and books, including the very influential German translation of Rainsford (pp. 103–8). Schüller's book was brought to my attention by Geggus after the writing of this paper, and I have added references to it in the notes when appropriate.

66. Two particularly well-known correspondents were Konrad Engelbert Olsner and Georg Forster; more on them below. For circulation figures, see *JWA*, pp. 129–30.

67. Schiller wrote to Archenholz in 1794, suggesting that he do a retrospective on the American Revolution in the journal: "Ist es Ihnen noch nicht die Idee gekommen, ein kurztes, gedrängtes tableau von dem amerikanischen Freiheitskriege aufzustellen?" (*JWA*, p. 45). Although no such article appeared in *Minerva*, the series on the Saint-Domingue events, 1791–1805, was analogous in its conception.

68. Hegel wrote to Schelling from Bern, Christmas Eve, 1794: "Quite by accident I spoke a few days ago with the author of the letters signed 'O.' in Archenholz's *Minerva*. You are no doubt acquainted with them. The author, purportedly an Englishman, is in fact a Silesian named Oeslner . . . still a young man, but one sees that he has toiled much" (G. W. F. Hegel, letter to Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, 24 Dec. 1794, *Hegel: The Letters*, trans. Clark Butler and Christiane Seiler [Bloomington, Ind., 1984], p. 28). Ruof (writing in 1915) does not mention Hegel as a reader of *Minerva*. The German publication of Hegel's letters was not available to him; see Hegel, *Briefe von und an Hegel*, ed. Johannes Hoffmeister, 5 vols. in 4 (Hamburg, 1969–81). Jacques d'Hont, however, begins his book with a chapter on the influence of *Minerva* on Hegel (and Schelling), which he describes as "total" (*globale*) (Jacques d'Hont, *Hegel Secret: Recherches sur les sources cachées de la pensée de Hegel* [Paris, 1968], pp. 7–43; hereafter abbreviated *HS*). Note that d'Hont makes no mention of the articles on Saint-Domingue that appeared in *Minerva*'s pages (his point is a different one; see n. 105). Konrad Engelbert Olsner, more radically republican than Archenholz, was an (anti-Robespierre) Girondist; his hero was the Abbé Sieyès. See his history of the French Revolution (based on his eyewitness reports) *Luzifer oder gereinigte Beiträge zur Geschichte der Französischen Revolution*, ed. Jörn Garber (1797; Kronberg/Taunus, 1997).

metaphor of the “struggle to death” between the master and slave, which for Hegel provided the key to the unfolding of freedom in world history and which he first elaborated in *The Phenomenology of Mind*, written in Jena in 1805–6 (the first year of the Haitian nation’s existence) and published in 1807 (the year of the British abolition of the slave trade). Where, indeed? The intellectual historians of German philosophy know only one place to look for the answer: the writings of other intellectuals. Perhaps it was Fichte, writes George Armstrong Kelly, although “the problem of lordship and bondage is essentially Platonic.”<sup>69</sup> Judith Shklar takes the common route of connecting Hegel’s discussion to Aristotle. Otto Pöggeler—and there is no finer name in German Hegel scholarship—says that the metaphor does not come from even the ancients, but is a totally “abstract” example.<sup>70</sup> Only one scholar, Pierre-Franklin Tavarès, has ever actually made the connection of Hegel and Haiti, basing his argument on evidence that Hegel read the French abolitionist, the Abbé Grégoire.<sup>71</sup> (His work, written in the early 1990s, has as far as I can tell been resoundingly ignored by the Hegel establishment.) But even Tavarès deals with the later Hegel, after the master-slave dialectic had been conceived.<sup>72</sup> No one has dared to suggest that the idea for the dia-

69. George Armstrong Kelly, “Notes on Hegel’s ‘Lordship and Bondage,’” in *Hegel’s Dialectic of Desire and Recognition: Texts and Commentary*, ed. John O’Neill (Albany, N.Y., 1996), p. 260; hereafter abbreviated “N.” Kelly insists that Hegel’s writings have to be considered within “Hegel’s own time,” but it is a time of thought (“N,” p. 272). He considers therefore the philosophical differences between Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel: Fichte’s thematic was the more general one of mutual recognition (a theme Hegel had treated earlier), whereas in the master-slave dialectic “Hegel is defending a doctrine of original equality that is curiously and dangerously denied by Fichte” (“N,” p. 269). Many interpreters choose to discuss Hegel on this point in terms of Fichte, thereby reducing the importance of Hegel’s specific example of recognition, first introduced in 1803, the relationship of master and slave. See, for example, Robert R. Williams (who in turn follows Ludwig Siep): “The story of recognition is a story about Fichte and Hegel” (Robert R. Williams, *Hegel’s Ethics of Recognition* [Berkeley, 1997], p. 26).

70. See Judith N. Shklar, “Self-Sufficient Man: Dominion and Bondage,” in *Hegel’s Dialectic of Desire and Recognition*, pp. 289–303, and Otto Pöggeler, *Hegels Idee einer Phänomenologie des Geistes*, 2d ed. (1973; Freiburg, 1993), pp. 263–64.

71. See Pierre-Franklin Tavarès, “Hegel et l’abbé Grégoire: Question noire et révolution française,” in *Révolutions aux colonies*, pp. 155–73. The Abbé [Henri] Grégoire was surely the most loyal supporter of Haiti among the French abolitionists. In 1808 he wrote *De la littérature des Nègres*, which managed to circumvent Napoleon’s censorship on the subject “ingeniously” by ostensibly dealing with the literary efforts of blacks writing in French and English: “The book was mainly about African society, but in it Grégoire also took the opportunity to praise the Domingians Toussaint Louverture and Jean Kina (who had led a revolt on Martinique) and to observe that, if Haiti was still politically unstable, this had also been true of France in the 1790s” (“HA,” p. 117). Asked in the mid-1820s to accept a bishopric in Haiti, Grégoire refused, disappointed with the conciliatory attitude of Haiti toward France when the Haitian President Boyer agreed to pay a huge indemnity to the former colonial planters in return for recognition; see “HA,” p. 128.

72. I have yet to see Tavarès’s original article, “Hegel et Haiti, ou le silence de Hegel sur Saint-Domingue” in the Port-au-Prince journal *Chemins Critiques* 2 (May 1992): 113–31.



lectic of lordship and bondage came to Hegel in Jena in the years 1803–5 from reading the press—journals and newspapers. And yet this selfsame Hegel, in this very Jena period during which the master-slave dialectic was first conceived, made the following notation:

Reading the newspaper in early morning is a kind of realistic morning prayer. One orients one's attitude against the world and toward God [in one case], or toward that which the world is [in the other]. The former gives the same security as the latter, in that one knows where one stands.<sup>73</sup>

We are left with only two alternatives. Either Hegel was the blindest of all the blind philosophers of freedom in Enlightenment Europe, surpassing Locke and Rousseau by far in his ability to block out reality right in front of his nose (the *print* right in front of his nose at the breakfast table); or Hegel knew—knew about real slaves revolting successfully against real masters, and he elaborated his dialectic of lordship and bondage deliberately within this contemporary context.<sup>74</sup>

---

Nor have I read his doctoral dissertation, “Hegel, critique de l’Afrique” (Doctorat, Paris-1, 1990). From the article I have seen, it appears that he deals predominantly with French rather than German sources and that he has not consulted contemporary journals; his conjecture seems to be that Hegel’s concern for abolitionism came later, in the 1820s, and may have been a nostalgia for his early revolutionary dreams. Schüller, *Die Deutsche Rezeption haitianischer Geschichte in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, briefly mentions Hegel, but only his late writings (1820s), and does not suggest the direct influence I am arguing for here; nor does she suggest that Hegel read *Minerva*.

73. Karl Rosenkranz, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegels Leben* (1844; Darmstadt, 1977), p. 543. Note that this biography is still the canonical one for Hegel, hence its republication in 1977 (and again in 1998). Although philosophical accounts of Hegel’s development have been numerous and other biographies do exist, it is astonishing that Hegel has found no modern biographer to replace Rosenkranz definitively. See, for example, Horst Althaus, *Hegel und die heroischen Jahre der Philosophie: Eine Biographie* (Munich, 1992). Although certain objects of Hegeliana have received microscopic analysis (the watermarks on his manuscript papers, for example), there are startling gaps in our knowledge of his life. There are multiple reasons for this unevenness, beginning with the fact that Hegel moved repeatedly (from Württemberg to Tübingen, Bern, Frankfurt, Jena, Bamberg, Nürnberg, and Heidelberg) before settling in Berlin for the last decade of his life, and he himself disposed of many documents, including personal papers, before he died. His (legitimate) son Karl was responsible for the archive after his death and may have repressed some of the sources. (Hegel’s illegitimate son Ludwig, who is not mentioned in Rosenkranz’s biography, was conceived in Jena in 1806 when Hegel was writing *The Phenomenology of Mind*, and died in 1831, the same year as his father, in Indonesia as a member of the Dutch merchant marines.)

74. *The Phenomenology of Mind* does not mention Haiti or Saint-Domingue, but it does not mention the French Revolution either, at points where the experts are in total agreement in reading the revolution into the text. Of Hegel’s devotion to newspapers and journals we have abundant evidence, from his student days in Tübingen, when he followed the French revolutionary events, to the Frankfurt years in the late 1790s, when he read newspapers with pen in hand, to the 1810s and 1820s, when he recorded excerpts from the British papers, the *Edinburgh Review* and *Morning Chronicle* (see n. 121). Immediately after finishing

Michel-Rolph Trouillot writes in his important book *Silencing the Past* that the Haitian Revolution “entered history with the peculiar characteristic of being unthinkable even as it happened.” Of course he is correct to emphasize the incapacity of most contemporaries, given their ready-made categories, “to understand the ongoing revolution on its own terms” (*SP*, p. 73). But there is a danger in conflating two silences, the past and the present one, when it comes to the Haitian story. For if men and women in the eighteenth century did not think in nonracial terms of the “fundamental equality of humanity,” as “some of us do today,” at least they knew what was happening; today, when the Haitian slave revolution might be more thinkable, it is more invisible, due to the construction of disciplinary discourses through which knowledge of the past has been inherited (*SP*, p. 82).<sup>75</sup>

Eighteenth-century Europeans *were* thinking about the Haitian Revolution precisely because it challenged the racism of many of their preconceptions. One did not have to have been a supporter of the slave revolution to recognize its central significance to the political discourse.<sup>76</sup> “Even in the age of revolutions, contemporaries recognized the creation of Haiti as something extraordinary” (“HA,” p. 113). And even its opponents considered this “remarkable event” to be “worthy of the contemplation of philosophers.”<sup>77</sup> Marcus Rainsford wrote in 1805 that the cause of the Haitian Revolution was the “spirit of liberty.”<sup>78</sup> The fact that this spirit *could* be catching, crossing the line not only between races but between slaves and freemen, was precisely what made it possible to argue, without reverting to an abstract ontology of “nature,” that the desire for freedom

---

*The Phenomenology of Mind*, Hegel left Jena for Bamberg to become himself editor of a daily newspaper, which foundered when Hegel was accused by the censors of disclosing the whereabouts of German troops (Hegel’s defense was that he had taken this information from other, already published news sources).

75. Trouillot discusses the various “formulas of erasure” whereby generalist histories have produced that invisibility (*SP*, p. 98 and following).

76. The evangelical Tory James Stephen wrote a radical pamphlet in summer 1804, arguing that white slave owners’ authority rested primarily on the slaves’ irrational fears, “fostered by ignorance and habit” but that, like a belief in ghosts, this “instinctive dread” once dispelled, would vanish forever (“HA,” p. 115). Henry Brougham, responding to James Stephen in the *Edinburgh Review*, “believed that the slaves’ obedience derived simply from a rational calculation of the costs of resistance. . . . More free market-minded, [Brougham] thought in terms of stimulus and response” (“HA,” pp. 115–16). Brougham’s argument for abolishing the slave trade was also one of calculation and exigency, as the risk of rebellion had, after Haiti, increased a thousandfold; see “HA,” p. 116. We know for certain that Hegel read the *Edinburgh Review* in 1817–18, and there is speculation that his exposure to this and other British journals occurred much earlier (see n. 121). Given Hegel’s understanding of the modern spirit as essentially Christian, one would imagine that he would have taken Stephen’s side in this debate.

77. “The French planter Drouin de Bercy thought it a remarkable event, worthy of the contemplation of philosophers and statesmen, even though he himself wished to see it destroyed and its population massacred or deported” (“HA,” p. 113).

78. See Rainsford, *An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti*, chap. 2.

was truly universal, an event of *world* history and, indeed, the paradigm-breaking example. Prior to writing *The Phenomenology of Mind*, Hegel had dealt with the theme of mutual recognition in terms of *Sittlichkeit*: criminals against society or the mutual relations of religious community or personal affection. But now this young lecturer, still only in his early thirties, made the audacious move to reject these earlier versions (more acceptable to the established philosophical discourse) and to inaugurate, as the central metaphor of his work, not slavery versus some mythical state of nature (as those from Hobbes to Rousseau had done earlier), but slaves versus masters, thus bringing into his text the present, historical realities that surrounded it like invisible ink.

## 8

Let us consider, in more detail, Hegel's dialectic of lordship and bondage and concentrate on the salient characteristics of this relationship. (I will draw not only on the relevant passages in *The Phenomenology of Mind* but also the Jena texts that immediately preceded it, 1803–6.)<sup>79</sup>

79. To do justice to the variations in the Jena texts, and hence to the development of Hegel's idea of the master-slave dialectic within the historical context of the Haitian Revolution, would require an article in itself. A truly scholarly account cannot be attempted here. I can only suggest a hypothesis, one that considers Hegel's reading of Adam Smith in 1803 to be the turning point. In the first Jena *Systementwürfe* (1803–4) Hegel thematizes the "battle for recognition" in a way that marks a break from both the classical concept of ethical community (*Sittlichkeit*) and the Hobbesean concept of individual self-preservation (the state of nature). The crucial, final "fragment 22" (parts of which are crossed out and rewritten, and at least a page of which is missing) begins with a discussion of the "absolute necessity" of "mutual recognition": injury to property must be avenged "to the point of death" (Hegel, *Jenaer Systementwürfe*, ed. Klaus Düsing and Heinz Kimmerle, 3 vols. [Hamburg, 1986], 1:218n). Speaking of the property-owning head of family, Hegel writes: "if he will risk a wound, and not life itself," then "he becomes a slave of the other [*er wird der Sklav des andern*]" (p. 221). The German word normally is *Sklave*; note that here, and throughout his work, Hegel uses *both* terms, *Knecht* and *Sklav(e)* in the dialectic of mutual recognition. But what if the "property" is itself the injurer, the slave who rectifies the injury to *his person* by asserting his own freedom without compensation? Hegel does not raise this question but moves, rather, to a discussion of the "customs" of "the people" (*das Volk*) and the common "work" of all. This takes him in a strikingly non-Hobbesean direction, to a critique of the stunting and repetitive work of modern factory labor (the division of labor, exemplified by Smith's pin factory); see pp. 227–28. Hegel then describes critically the uncontrolled and "blind" interdependence of laborers in the global economy, the "bürgerliche Gesellschaft" of market exchange that forms a "monstrous system" (*ungeheueres System*) of mutual "dependency" (*Abhängigkeit*) and that "like a wild beast needs to be tamed" (pp. 229, 230). Fragment 22 ends (in 1804!) just at the point where Hegel's discussion of "possession" (*Besitz*), as the form in which the generality of "the thing" (*das Ding*) is "recognized" (*anerkannt*), would have led him to confront the contradiction that the law of private property treats the slave (whose existence is nothing but to labor) as a thing! The slave is the one commodity like no other, as freedom of property and freedom of person are here in direct contradiction. Is it for this reason that Hegel's manuscript breaks off suddenly? The revolt of the

Hegel understands the position of the master in both political *and* economic terms. In the *System der Sittlichkeit* (1803): “The master is in possession of an overabundance of physical necessities generally, and the other [the slave] in the lack thereof.”<sup>80</sup> At first consideration the master’s situation is “independent, and its essential nature is to be for itself”; whereas “the other,” the slave’s position, “is dependent, and its essence is life or existence for another.”<sup>81</sup> The slave is characterized by the lack of recognition he receives. He is viewed as “a thing”; “thinghood” is the essence of slave consciousness—as it was the essence of his legal status under the *Code Noir* (*PM*, p. 235). But as the dialectic develops, the apparent dominance of the master reverses itself with his awareness that he is in fact totally dependent on the slave. One has only to collectivize the figure of the master in order to see the descriptive pertinence of Hegel’s analysis: the slave-holding class is indeed totally dependent on the institution of slavery for the “overabundance” that constitutes its wealth. This class is thus incapable of being the agent of historical progress without annihilat-

---

slaves in Saint-Domingue, in this context, saved Hegel from the bad infinity (the “monstrous system”) of contract reciprocity by providing the link (via a shift in emphasis from exchange to labor) from an economic system (the infinite system of needs) to politics: the founding, through a struggle unto death, of the constitutional state.

80. Hegel, *System der Sittlichkeit*, ed. Georg Lasson (1893; Hamburg, 1967), p. 35; hereafter abbreviated *SS*; quoted in Henry S. Harris, “The Concept of Recognition in Hegel’s Jena Manuscripts,” in *HegelStudien/Beiheft 20: Hegel in Jena*, ed. Dieter Henrich and Klaus Düsing (Bonn, 1990), p. 234; hereafter abbreviated “CR.” Harris comments:

The concept of legal personality emerges hand in hand with the institution of money as the “indifference” of (i.e., the universal expression for) property. This world of formal recognition is then differentiated into masters and servants by the extent of their possessions (i.e. ultimately in terms of money). [“CR,” p. 233]

It is the *System der Sittlichkeit* that first registers Hegel’s reading of Adam Smith and also the unequal relationship of lord (*Herr*) and servant (*Knecht*) that is “established along with the inequality of the power of life” (*SS*, p. 34)—although these two themes do not yet come together. Hegel is concerned with the exchange of “surplus” as a “system of needs” that is “empirically unending”—that “borderless” commerce by which a people is “dissolved” (that is, returns to a “state of nature”?) (*SS*, pp. 82, 84–5). The fact that in the exchange of private property “things have equality with other things” becomes the basis of legal right but only through contract as the “binding middle term.” It is impossible to say of life, as one can say of other things, that the individual “possesses” it; hence the connection of “lordship” [*Herrschaft*] and “bondage” [*Knechtschaft*] is one of “relationlessness”; see *SS*, pp. 32–37. Hegel notes that “among many peoples the woman is sold off by the parents:—but this cannot be the basis of a marriage contract between man and wife” (*SS*, p. 37). (But what of his own European culture where slaves are bought and sold?) “There is no contract with the bondsman [*Knecht*] either, but there can be a contract with someone else about the bondsman or the woman” (*SS*, p. 37). Thus “the situation of slaves [*Sklavenstand*] is not a social class (*Stand*), for it is only formally a universal. The slave [*der Sklave*] is related as a singularity [*Einzelnes*] to his master” (*SS*, p. 63). The lecture manuscript from which the *System der Sittlichkeit* was written up (since lost) degenerated into “mere history,” according to Haym (Rudolf, Haym, *Hegel und seine Zeit* [Berlin, 1857]; quoted in “CR,” p. 164); it would be interesting to know just what this “mere history” concerned.

81. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J. B. Baillie (New York, 1967), p. 234.

ing its own existence.<sup>82</sup> But then the slaves (again, collectivizing the figure) achieve self-consciousness by demonstrating that they are not things, not objects, but subjects who transform material nature.<sup>83</sup> Hegel's text becomes obscure and falls silent at this point of realization.<sup>84</sup> But given the historical events that provided the context for *The Phenomenology of Mind*, the inference is clear. Those who once acquiesced to slavery demonstrate their humanity when they are willing to risk death rather than remain subjugated.<sup>85</sup> The law (the *Code Noir*!) that acknowledges them merely as "a thing" can no longer be considered binding,<sup>86</sup> although be-

82. Historical agency then passes to the slave, who "will invent history, but only after the master has made humanity possible" ("N," p. 270).

83. The stress on labor is intriguing. The slave materializes his own subjectivity through labor. Hegel seems to privilege craft or agricultural labor (as did Adam Smith, given the dehumanizing effects of the factory). But reading backward from Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of history (discussed below), this attitude toward labor describes the transformation within the slave's consciousness from an earlier, "African" spirit of seeing nature as itself subjectivity, to a modern spirit, wherein working on nature is an expression of one's own subjectivity.

84. The text states, "Through work and labor, however, this consciousness of the bondsman comes to itself"—positively, as the bondman's awareness "of himself as factually and objectively self-existent," and, negatively, as objectivized consciousness:

For in shaping the thing it [his consciousness] only becomes aware of its own proper negativity, its existence on its own account, as an object, through the fact that it cancels the actual form confronting it. But this objective negative element is precisely the alien, external reality, before which it trembled. Now, however, it destroys this extraneous alien negative, affirms and sets itself up as a negative in the element of permanence, and thereby becomes for itself a self-existent being. [*PM*, pp. 238–39]

Marxists have interpreted the slave's coming to self-consciousness as a metaphor for the working class's overcoming of false consciousness: the class-in-itself becomes for-itself. But they have criticized Hegel for not taking the next step to revolutionary practice. I am arguing that the slaves of Saint-Domingue were, as Hegel knew, taking that step for him.

85. I am suggesting that the arguments of several black scholars, which they believed to be *in opposition* to Hegel, are in fact close to Hegel's original intent. See, for example, Paul Gilroy, who reads Frederick Douglass (who was U.S. ambassador to Haiti in 1889) as providing an alternative to what he understands to be Hegel's "allegory" of the master and slave: "Douglass's version is quite different. For him, the slave actively prefers the possibility of death to the continuing condition of inhumanity on which plantation slavery depends" (Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* [Cambridge, Mass., 1993], p. 63). See also Orlando Patterson, who claims that the "social death" that characterized slavery required as the negation of the negation, not labor (which he sees as Hegel's meaning), but liberation, although (ultimately like Hegel) he sees this as possible through an institutional rather than revolutionary process; see Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), pp. 98–101.

86. Compare Hegel's statement in 1798: "Institutions, constitutions, and laws, which no longer harmonize with the opinions of mankind and from which the spirit has departed, cannot be artificially kept alive" (quoted in G. P. Gooch, *Germany and the French Revolution* [New York, 1920], p. 297). Note that Napoleon's attempt to reestablish the obsolete *Code Noir* would precisely *not* be a world-historical act; Haiti was at this moment on the side of world history, not Napoleonic France. Similarly, in the case of Germany: "Thus

fore, according to Hegel, it was the slave himself who was responsible for his lack of freedom by initially choosing life over liberty, mere self-preservation.<sup>87</sup> In *The Phenomenology of Mind*, Hegel insists that freedom cannot be granted to slaves from above. The self-liberation of the slave is required through a “trial by death”: “And it is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained. . . . The individual, who has not staked his life, may, no doubt, be recognized as a Person [the agenda of the abolitionists!]; but he has not attained the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness” (*PM*, p. 233). The goal of *this* liberation, *out* of slavery, cannot be subjugation of the master in turn, which would be merely to repeat the master’s “existential impasse,”<sup>88</sup> but, rather, elimination of the institution of slavery altogether.

Given the facility with which this dialectic of lordship and bondage lends itself to such a reading, one wonders why the topic Hegel and Haiti has for so long been ignored. Not only have Hegel scholars failed to answer this question; they have failed, for the past two hundred years, even to ask it.<sup>89</sup>

---

it was in the war with the French Republic that Germany found by its own experience that it was no longer a state,” that consciousness was only attained through a struggle of resistance against the invading French army (quoted in Williams, *Hegel’s Ethics of Recognition*, p. 346).

87. Hegel held to this insistence on the slave’s responsibility. In the *Philosophy of Right* (1821): “If a man is a slave, his own will is responsible for his slavery, just as it is its will which is responsible if a people is subjugated. Hence the wrong of slavery lies at the door not simply of enslavers or conquerors but of the slaves and the conquered themselves” (Hegel, *Hegel’s “Philosophy of Right,”* trans. T. M. Knox [London, 1967], p. 239, addition to §57).

88. This term is from Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the “Phenomenology of Spirit,”* trans. James H. Nichols, Jr., ed. Raymond Queneau and Allan Bloom (Ithaca, N.Y., 1969). Queneau assembled notes of the lectures and published them in French in 1947.

89. As far as I know, Tavarès is the sole exception, although many writers about African slavery have brought Hegel’s master-slave dialectic to bear on their concerns. See, for example, the conclusion to *PSAR*, p. 560, which suggests that we “indulge in a bit of fantasy” by interpreting Hegel’s master-slave dialectic through an imagined dialogue between Napoleon and Toussaint-Louverture. See the numerous accounts of W. E. B. Du Bois’s writings on slavery that read these texts in relation to those of Hegel; for example, see Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South since Emancipation* (New York, 1984); Shamooin Zamir, *Dark Voices: W. E. B. Du Bois and American Thought, 1888–1903* (Chicago, 1995); and David Levering Lewis, introduction to W. E. B. Du Bois, *W. E. B. Du Bois: A Reader*, ed. Lewis (New York, 1995). See also Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York, 1968), which uses European philosophy as a weapon against European (white) hegemony, interpreting the master-slave dialectic both socially (using Marx) and psychoanalytically (using Freud) in order to theorize the necessity of violent struggle by Third World nations to overcome colonial status and to reject the hypocritical humanism of Europe, attaining equal recognition in terms of their own cultural values. Martinique-born Fanon would perhaps have been the closest to seeing the connection between Hegel and Haiti, but it was not his concern.

Surely a major reason for this omission is the Marxist appropriation of a social interpretation of Hegel's dialectic. Since the 1840s, with the early writings of Karl Marx, the struggle between the master and slave has been abstracted from literal reference and read once again as a metaphor—this time for the class struggle. In the twentieth century, this Hegelian-Marxist interpretation had powerful proponents, including Georg Lukács and Herbert Marcuse, as well as Alexandre Kojève, whose lectures on *The Phenomenology of Mind* were a brilliant rereading of Hegel's texts through Marxian glasses.<sup>90</sup> The problem is that (white) Marxists, of all readers, were the least likely to consider real slavery as significant because within their stagist understanding of history, slavery—no matter how contemporary—was seen as a premodern institution, banned from the story and relegated to the past.<sup>91</sup> But only if we presume that Hegel is narrating a self-contained European story, wherein “slavery” is an ancient Mediterranean institution left behind long ago, does this reading become remotely plausible—remotely, because even within Europe itself in 1806, indentured servitude and serfdom had still not disappeared, and the laws were still being contested as to whether actual slavery would be tolerated.<sup>92</sup>

There is an element of racism implicit in official Marxism, if only because of the notion of history as a teleological progression. It was evident when (white) Marxists resisted the Marx-inspired thesis of the Jamaican-born Eric Williams in *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944)—seconded by the Marxist historian, Trinidad-born C. L. R. James in *The Black Jacobins*—that plantation slavery was a quintessentially modern institution of capitalist exploitation.<sup>93</sup> As for the field of Hegel scholarship, Ludwig Siep and

90. Kojève's reading of Hegel is phenomenological in a (Heideggerian) sense that sets it apart from the Marxists mentioned because it approaches the dialectic of recognition as an existential-ontological problem, not as a logic of historical stages. Kojève connects Hegel's discussion with ancient slavery and the writings of Aristotle at the same time that he makes visible its modern form as the structure of class struggle.

91. See the works of the historian Eugene Genovese (for example, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* [London, 1965]) for a clear example of this Marxist approach to modern slavery.

92. See above, n. 18. The freeing of the Prussian serfs (from above) would take place one year after the publication of *The Phenomenology of Mind*. The Danes, in 1804, were the first to end the slave trade, three years before the British. The British abolished slavery in 1831; France definitively in 1848; Russia (and the United States) not until 1861—but British abolitionists considered Tsar Alexander I an ally in convincing the Concert of Europe to discourage the French from seeking to reconquer Haiti. Thomas Clarkson met the tsar at the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle (1818) and “showed him a letter from the King of Haiti [Henri Christophe] to impress on him the latter's abilities” (“HA,” p. 120).

93. The second, revised edition of James's *The Black Jacobins* (1962) specifically supports the thesis that slave existence in the colonies was “in its essence a modern life” (*BJ*, p. 392). This position has been argued as well by Du Bois: “Negro slaves in America repre-

others have justifiably criticized the Marxist reading of Hegel in terms of the class struggle as anachronistic. But the result among philosophers has been a tendency to turn away from social contextualization completely.<sup>94</sup> The class-struggle interpretation of Hegel is indeed anachronistic; but that should have led interpreters to look at historical events contemporary with Hegel, not to throw out a social interpretation altogether.

Marxist-driven scholarship has, however, illuminated an entire area of Hegel's concerns that was completely underappreciated until the twentieth century. That is the fact that in 1803 Hegel read Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* and that it led him to move to an understanding of civil society—"die bürgerliche Gesellschaft"—as modern economy, the society created by the actions of bourgeois exchange. But whereas Marxists have been excited by Hegel's citing of Smith's pin factory example in the discussion of the division of labor (which in no way fits the model of the dialectic of master and slave!) they have failed to comment on the fact that Smith included an economic discussion of modern slavery in *Wealth of Nations*.<sup>95</sup>

It has long been recognized that Hegel's understanding of politics was modern, based on an interpretation of the events of the French Revolution as a decisive break from the past and that he is referring to the French Revolution in *The Phenomenology of Mind*, even when he does not mention it by name.<sup>96</sup> Why should Hegel have been a modernist in two senses only:

---

sented the worst and lowest conditions among modern laborers" (Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880* [1935; New York, 1977], p. 9; my emphasis). When it comes to Hegel interpretations, however, black scholars have generally accepted the stagism of European discourse.

94. Alex Honneth is representative here when he concludes that Marx's social reading of mutual recognition in Hegel is "highly problematic" in its coupling of the romanticists' expressive anthropology (labor), the Feuerbachian concept of love, and English national economy (Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. Joel Anderson [Cambridge, 1995], p. 147). Note that Ludwig Siep's interpretation stresses Hegel's move away from Hobbes with the master-slave dialectic, a reading that in fact bolsters the case that I am making here. See Ludwig Siep, *Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktische Philosophie: Untersuchungen zur Hegels Jenaer "Philosophie des Geistes"* (Freiburg, 1979); see also Siep's influential article "The Struggle for Recognition: Hegel's Dispute with Hobbes in the Jena Writings," trans. Charles Dudas, in *Hegel's Dialectic of Desire and Recognition*, pp. 273–88. Current discussions of the master-slave dialectic (Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, and Judith Butler) confront Kojève's reading with Nietzsche's account of master and slave, thereby changing the social significance of the debate. Nietzsche criticizes as slave mentality those who submit to the state and its laws, the institutions that Hegel affirmed as the embodiment of mutual recognition, and hence concrete freedom.

95. See Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 2 vols. (Homewood, Ill., 1979), bk. 4, chap. 7, pp. 105B75, for discussions of colonial slavery and the slave trade.

96. Experts who disagree in other ways (for example, Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's "Phenomenology of Spirit"*, trans. Samuel Cherniak and John Heckman [Evanston, Ill., 1974], and Michael Forster, *Hegel's Idea of a Phenomenology of Spirit* [Chicago,



adopting Adam Smith's theory of the economy and adopting the French Revolution as the model for politics. And, yet, when it came to slavery, the most burning social issue of his time, with slave rebellions throughout the colonies and a successful slave revolution in the wealthiest of them—why should—how *could* Hegel have stayed somehow mired in Aristotle?<sup>97</sup>

Beyond a doubt Hegel knew about real slaves and their revolutionary struggles. In perhaps the most political expression of his career, he used the sensational events of Haiti as the linchpin in his argument in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*.<sup>98</sup> The actual and successful revolution of Caribbean slaves against their masters is the moment when the dialectical logic of recognition becomes visible as the thematics of world history, the story of the universal realization of freedom. If the editor of *Minerva*, Archenholz, reporting history as it happened, did not himself suggest this on the pages of his journal, Hegel, longtime reader of them, was capable of that vision. Theory and reality converged at this historical moment. Or, to put it in Hegelian language, the rational—freedom—became real. This is the crucial point for understanding the originality of Hegel's argument, by which philosophy burst out of the confines of academic theory and became a commentary on the history of the world.

## 10

There would be much research to do. Other texts of Hegel need to be read with the Haitian connection in mind.<sup>99</sup> For example, the section

---

1998]) are in accord on this point. See also Manfred Riedel, *Between Tradition and Revolution: The Hegelian Transformation of Political Philosophy*, trans. Walter Wright (New York, 1984).

97. Compare Schelling's comment: "Who wants to bury himself in the dust of antiquity when the movement of *his own* time at every turn sweeps him up and carries him onward?" (Schelling, letter to Hegel, 5 Jan. 1795, *Hegel*, p. 29). At the time of the French Revolution, the ancients were a discourse of the *present*, not a means of relegating the present to the past. Aristotle walked among the living as a contemporary.

98. Relevant here is the argument of Theodor Haering at the Hegel Congress in Rome in 1933, whose investigation of the coming-to-be of *The Phenomenology of Mind* led him to the "astounding" conclusion that the book is *not* organically or carefully composed according to a plan but a series of sudden decisions, pressured from within and without in an almost unimaginably short time—specifically the summer of 1806; see Pöggeler, *Hegels Idee einer Phänomenologie des Geistes*, p. 193. Haering's observations are compatible with the argument I am making here.

99. The philological scrupulousness of, for example, Norbert Waszek's work on Hegel's reading of the Scottish Enlightenment philosophers provides a model, the study that illuminated Hegel's reception of Smith in a way that changed fundamentally our understanding of Hegel's philosophy of civil society; see Norbert Waszek, *The Scottish Enlightenment and Hegel's Account of "Civil Society"* (Boston, 1988). We also need research not only on *Minerva* but on other German journals, and books as well, that discussed events in Saint-Domingue. See Schüller's paradigmatic work, *Deutsche Rezeption haitianischer Geschichte in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts*.

in Hegel's *The Phenomenology of Mind* criticizing the pseudo-science of phrenology takes on a different import when it is seen as a critique of already extant theories of biological racism.<sup>100</sup> So does Hegel's reference in *The Philosophical Propaedeutic* (1803–13) to Robinson Crusoe, which insists on coupling this prototype of man in the “state of nature”—shipwrecked on a Caribbean island—with Friday, his slave, an implicit criticism of Hobbes's individualistic version of the natural state.<sup>101</sup> Hegel's earliest lectures on the philosophy of right (Heidelberg, 1817–18) contain a passage that now becomes fully legible. It begins with the crucial point of the slave's self-liberation:

Even if I am born a slave [*Sklave*], and nourished and raised by a master, and if my parents and forefathers were all slaves, still I am free in the moment that I will it, when I become conscious of my freedom. For the personality and freedom of my will are essential parts of myself, my personality.<sup>102</sup>

Hegel continues: even if freedom means to have property rights, the possession of another person is excluded—“and if I have someone whipped, it does not damage the person's freedom” (*PR*, p. 228). It is clear that Hegel is speaking here of modern slavery, and clear that consciousness of one's freedom demands that one *become* free, not only in thought, but *in the world*. The new version of these lectures given by Hegel his first year in Berlin (1818–19) connected the liberation of the slave explicitly with the historical realization of freedom: “That humans become free is thus part of a free world. That there be no slavery [*Sklaverei*] is the ethical requirement [*die sittliche Forderung*]. This requirement is only thereby fulfilled when what

100. The sections immediately following “Lordship and Bondage,” those titled “Stoicism,” “Scepticism,” and “The Unhappy Consciousness,” can be thought to refer, not to different stages of history (as Rozenkranz argued in *Hegels Leben*, p. 205), but rather to different modalities of thinking about the existing reality of slavery. As for the long section critiquing physiognomy and phrenology (see Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, pp. 338–72), Tavarès, who first broke the silence on Hegel and Haiti, finds it striking that commentators on Hegel “have never inscribed [this] critique . . . within the colonial debate” (Tavarès, “Hegel et l'abbé Grégoire,” p. 168). Although the editors of both German and English editions of *The Phenomenology of Mind* do say that Hegel, while eschewing names, was referring to the work of the anatomist Franz Joseph Gall and the physiognomist Johann Kaspar Lavater, nonetheless, they make no reference to the racism inherent in these men's theories. Against Gall's comparative anatomy of crania, Hegel states, “the spirit is not a bone,” and as a consequence, argues Tavarès, not about the color of skin (*ibid.*, p. 167).

101. Near the summary of the master-slave relation in *The Philosophical Propaedeutic*, Hegel places in parentheses: “‘History of Robinson Crusoe and Friday’” (Hegel, *The Philosophical Propaedeutic*, trans. A. V. Miller, ed. Michael George and Andrew Vincent [Oxford, 1986], p. 62). See the gloss of this comment in Paolo Guietti, “A Reading of Hegel's Master/Slave Relationship: Robinson Crusoe and Friday,” *Owl of Minerva* 25 (Fall 1993): pp. 48–60.

102. Hegel, *Die Philosophie des Rechts: Die Mitschriften Wannemann (Heidelberg 1817/18) und Homeyer (Berlin 1818/19)*, ed. Karl-Heinz Ilting (Stuttgart, 1983), p. 55; hereafter abbreviated *PR*.

a human being ought to be appears as the external world that he makes his own" (*PR*, p. 228). We would not share the perplexity of the editor of these lectures, who noted in 1983 that Hegel "spoke surprisingly frequently of slaves."<sup>103</sup> And we would consider it confirmation (whereas others have hardly noticed) that Hegel in his late work *The Philosophy of Subjective Spirit* mentions the Haitian Revolution by name.<sup>104</sup>

It would also be revealing to revisit the argument put forth by the French philosopher Jacques d'Hont that Hegel was connected with radical freemasonry during these years, because freemasonry is a part of our story at every turn.<sup>105</sup> Not only was *Minerva's* editor Archenholz a mason, along with its regular correspondents, Konrad Engelbert Olsner (whom Hegel met in 1794) and Georg Forster (whose work Hegel noted), as well as many other of Hegel's intellectual contacts;<sup>106</sup> not only was the English

103. Itling's editorial notes to Wannemann's Heidelberg notes, *PR*, p. 295 n. 69.

104. Hegel's *The Philosophy of Subjective Spirit* (pt. 3 of the *Encyclopedia* [1830]) is a crucial document, particularly the sections "Anthropology" and "Phenomenology"); it contains consequences of Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of history, with their prejudice against African culture and more racist statements about Negroes; it also contains a fuller account of the master-slave dialectic than that found in *The Phenomenology of Mind* of 1807. Here *Sklave* and *Knecht* are still used interchangeably; here the historical trajectory is codified, with European slavery referring to the ancients; here the struggle to death is still necessary: "thus, freedom has to be *struggled* for . . . bring[ing] himself as he brings others into *peril of death*," while Negroes "are sold and allow themselves to be sold without any reflection as to the rights or wrongs of it." And yet: "They cannot be said to be ineducable, for not only have they occasionally received Christianity with the greatest thankfulness . . . but in Haiti they have even formed a state on Christian principles" (Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, trans. and ed. M. J. Petry, 3 vols. [Dordrecht, 1979], 3:57, ¶431, 2:53, 55, ¶393).

105. See *HS*. This book makes the original argument that the "secret" Hegel is revealed through his connections to radical freemasonry (while d'Hont does not mention Saint-Domingue).

106. D'Hont states that Archenholz belonged to the freemasons since the 1760s; see *HS*, p. 12; see also *JWA*, p. 11, and Rieger, *Johann Wilhelm von Archenholz as "Zeübürger,"* p. 176n. See *HS*, pp. 23–29 for d'Hont's discussion of *Minerva* as a masonic publication, which included articles from the politically radical and cosmopolitan *Chronique des mois*, "the most Girondist and the most masonic of French thought. . . . It is the spirit of Condorcet [founder of the *Chronique*] and Brissot that are insinuated in *Minerva*" (*HS*, p. 26). D'Hont analyzes the masonic imagery on the cover of the first issue of *Minerva*, which, he asserts, was in the hands of Hegel, Schiller, and Hölderlin in their student days (*HS*, p. 8). D'Hont lists as freemasons in Hegel's "entourage" Georg Forster (whose writings on the French Revolution Hegel excerpted while in Bern); Konrad Engelbert Oelsner (whose meeting with Hegel in Bern [see above] might have been facilitated through masonic connections); as well as Wieland, Körner, Sömmering, Campe, Garve, and Gleim; also Johann Samuel Ersch, literary historian, friend and collaborator of Archenholz, who was in Jena at the same time as Hegel (Archenholz contemplated moving his journal to that city in 1800, but, instead, Ersch moved to Halle; see Hegel, letter to Schelling, 16 Aug. 1803, *Hegel*, p. 66); also Johann Friedrich von Cotta, Hegel's publisher and friend from 1802 to the end of his life. D'Hont remarks that historians of Hegel have neglected to inventory the influence of *Minerva* on Hegel because "without doubt" it displeased them; but he is impressed by "the extreme discretion of Hegel himself" regarding freemasonry, which d'Hont explains as necessary because of censorship and the police (*HS*, p. 9).

captain Rainsford a mason, author of the book on the history of Haitian independence, a translated chapter of which was published in *Minerva* in 1805,<sup>107</sup> but (here d'Hont's account is silent) freemasonry was a crucial factor in the uprisings in Saint-Domingue.

It was not unusual for "mulatto" children of white colonial planters (sometimes with the mothers being legal wives) to be brought back to France and educated. And it is remarkable that the egalitarian lodges of the radical French freemasons were a space in which racial, religious, and even sexual segregation could be at least temporarily overcome.<sup>108</sup> Polverel, the man who shared with Sonthonax both the post of commissioner to Saint-Domingue and responsibility for declaring abolition of slavery within the colony in 1793, had been a mason in Bordeaux in the 1770s,<sup>109</sup> a time when a surprising number of young mulattoes who later became leaders of the revolt in Saint-Domingue were also in this seaport, slave-trading town.<sup>110</sup> Two of these, Vincent Ogé and Julien Raimond, educated in France as lawyers, spoke out for mulatto rights in the first year of the French Revolution. Their lack of success led them in very different directions. With the support of the Amis des Noirs and probable masonic as well as abolitionist connections in London and Philadelphia, Ogé returned to the colony in 1790 to lead a revolt of free mulattoes for citizen rights; defeated, he was tortured and executed by the colonial court the following year.<sup>111</sup> Raimond was made commissioner of the col-

107. See Rainsford, "Toussaint-Louverture. Eine historische Schilderung für die Nachwelt," *Minerva* 56 (1805): 276–98, 392–408. See Geggus, "British Occupation of Saint Domingue, 1793–98," for Rainsford's masonic connection.

108. Local French Masonic lodges were known to include blacks, Moslems, Jews, and women, although at Bordeaux the *loge anglaise* excluded Jews and actors; see J. M. Roberts, *The Mythology of the Secret Societies* (London, 1972), p. 51. Masonic "lodges throughout France were the only places where French people, whatever their rank, trade or religion, met on an equal footing animated by a spirit of unity. Instead of the old spirit of class that formerly had bound together all the noblemen of France, Freemasonry organized a good-fellowship which included all ranks and races" (Bernard Faÿ, *Revolution and Freemasonry, 1680–1800* [Boston, 1935], p. 224).

109. Etienne de Polverel's name is connected with two lodges, L'Amitié and L'Harmonie sous Directoire Écossais, in Bordeaux. Sonthonax was not a mason (but he was a member of the Amis des Noirs). Polverel had written two days before abolition:

For a long time the African race has suffered the calumny of it being said that without slavery its members would never be accustomed to work. Let me attempt to contradict this prejudice, no less absurd than that of an aristocracy of color. . . . There will be none but brothers, Republicans, enemies of every type of tyranny—monarchy, nobility, or priesthood. [Jacques de Cauna, "Polverel et Sonthonax, deux voies pour l'abolition de l'esclavage," in *Léger-Félicité Sonthonax*, pp. 51–52]

This emphasis on the virtue of labor was a masonic value, manifested in the central allegorical importance of the "mason" craft.

110. Bordeaux in precisely these years (1802–4) briefly overtook Nantes as leader in the triangular trade of slaves and sugar. See Éric Saugera, *Bordeaux, port négrier* (Karthala, 1995).

111. Blackburn reports that Ogé, seeking to "vindicate mulatto rights before the National Assembly [in Paris], . . . returned to the colony via London, where he raised money

ony by the French government in 1796 and worked closely first with Sonthonax and then with Toussaint, whom he helped to draft the constitution of 1801. A third Bordelais-raised mulatto, André Rigaud, fought with the French army in the American War of Independence and was, after Toussaint (who became his rival), perhaps the most important general in the Saint-Dominguan struggle against the British during the decade of the 1790s.<sup>112</sup> A fourth was Alexandre Pétion, who fought with Dessalines against the French, becoming president of the Haitian republic that was established in the south of the island after Dessalines's assassination in 1806. President Pétion encouraged Simón Bolívar to demand the abolition of slavery in Latin America's struggle for independence, in which freemasonry also played a significant role. The historian de Cauna writes of this illustrious group of Saint-Dominguan leaders: "It would be interesting to research whether they also had entered the masonic lodges of Bordeaux. That research has yet to be done."<sup>113</sup> Moreover, we cannot be blind to the possibility of reciprocal influence, that the secret signs of freemasonry were themselves affected by the ritual practices of the revolutionary slaves of Saint-Domingue. There are intriguing references to *Vodou*—the secret cult of Saint-Dominguan slaves that spawned the massive uprising of August 1791—as "a sort of religious and dancing masonry."<sup>114</sup> We know far too little of freemasonry in the black/brown/white Atlantic, a major chapter in the history of hybridity and transculturation (figs. 6–13).

## 11

"The owl of *Minerva* spreads its wings only with the coming of the dusk." This often-cited statement from Hegel's lectures on *The Philosophy*

---

from Clarkson and the Abolition Society. Ogé also visited the United States where he purchased arms. These travels seem to have been facilitated by Masonic connections" (*OCS*, p. 182).

112. James tells us that Rigaud, "a genuine Mulatto, that is to say the son of a white and a black," was well educated at Bordeaux and learned the trade of a goldsmith. He enlisted as a volunteer in the French army that fought in the American War of Independence (*Bj*, pp. 96–97).

113. De Cauna, "Polverel et Sonthonax," p. 49. From Sonthonax's declaration: "All negroes and those of mixed blood presently in slavery are declared free to enjoy all rights attached to the title of French citizen" (Dorigny, "Léger-Félicité Sonthonax et la première abolition de l'esclavage," p. 3).

114. Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley, 1995), p. 151; hereafter abbreviated *HHG*. Dayan notes further: "[Father] Cabon suggests that blacks might well have found white 'confabulations' to have much in common with voodoo: 'Somewhat before the events of the month of August 1791, one was prompted to see a sort of freemasonry of blacks in certain manifestations of their activities'" (*HHG*, p. 251). See also the historical fictional account by the Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier, *El Siglo de las luces* (*Explosion in a Cathedral*) (1982), which includes the figure of Ogé and speaks explicitly of the masonic connections.



FIG. 6.—“A Temple erected by the Blacks to commemorate their Emancipation.” Illustration for Marcus Rainsford, *An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti* (1805). Line engraving by J. Barlow after the author.<sup>115</sup>

*of History* (1822), which may well have had the journal *Minerva* in mind, in fact marks a retreat from the radical politics of *The Phenomenology of Mind*—just how much of one, in regard to Hegel’s position on the French

115. On Barlow’s work for this book, see Hugh Honour, *From the American Revolution to World War I*, vol. 4 of *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, ed. Ladislav Bugner (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), p. 95.



FIG. 7.—French masonic apron of the end of the eighteenth century.

Revolution, has long been the subject of debate.<sup>116</sup> But at least in regard to the abolition of slavery, Hegel's retreat from revolutionary radicalism was clear.<sup>117</sup> Notoriously condemning African culture to prehistory and

116. See d'Hont, *Hegel et les Français* (Hildesheim, 1998). At the end of *The Philosophy of History*, Hegel could still speak of the French Revolution as “a glorious mental dawn.” And yet he criticized the Terror as “the most fearful tyranny. It exercises its power without legal formalities, and the punishment it inflicts is equally simple—*Death*. This tyranny could not last; for all inclinations, all interests, reason itself revolted against this terribly consistent Liberty which in its concentrated intensity exhibited so fanatical a shape” (Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree [1858; Buffalo, N.Y., 1991], pp. 447, 450–51; hereafter abbreviated PH).

117. In the outline to the *Logic* of 1830, Hegel remarked summarily that the “genuine reason why there are no longer any slaves in Christian Europe is to be sought in nothing but the principle of Christianity itself. The Christian religion is the religion of absolute freedom, and only for Christians does man count as such, man in his infinity and universality. What the slave lacks is the recognition of his personality; but the principle of personality is Universality” (Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic (with the Zusätze)*, trans. and ed. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris [Indianapolis, 1991], pp. 240–41). He seems to mean Protestantism here (what in his lectures on the philosophy of history he calls the modern or Germanic world). Hegel was consistently critical of the hierarchical dependencies fostered by Catholicism (the “Roman” world); he could not have welcomed France's Concordat

blaming the Africans themselves for New World slavery, Hegel repeated the banal and apologetic argument that slaves were better off in the colonies than in their African homeland, where slavery was “absolute,”<sup>118</sup> and endorsed gradualism: “Slavery is in and for itself *injustice*, for the essence of humanity is *Freedom*; but for this man must be matured. The gradual abolition of slavery is therefore wiser and more equitable than its sudden removal” (*PH*, pp. 96, 99).<sup>119</sup> This disposition, however, was not the most striking in his lectures. Rather, it was the brutal thoroughness with which he dismissed all of sub-saharan Africa, this “land of children,” of “barbarity and wildness,” from any significance for world history, due to what he deemed were deficiencies of the African “spirit.”<sup>120</sup>

Was this change simply a part of Hegel’s general conservatism during the Berlin years? Or was he reacting, again, to current events? Haiti was once again in the news in the teens and twenties, hotly debated by abolitionists and their opponents in the British press, including in the *Edinburgh Review*, which we know for certain Hegel was then reading.<sup>121</sup> In

with the Vatican in 1801. And, indeed, he may have seen Haiti’s postrevolutionary failure as in part the consequence of the Catholicism that was the official religion in both north and south. In *The Philosophy of History*: “Here it must be frankly stated, that with the Catholic Religion no rational constitution is possible”; “Napoleon could not coerce Spain into freedom any more than Philip II could force Holland into slavery” (*PH*, pp. 449, 453).

118. Compare Hegel, *Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*, ed. Johannes Hoffmeister, 5th once again improved edition (Hamburg, 1955), p. 225; hereafter abbreviated *VG*. Sibree’s translation follows Karl Hegel’s edition; Hoffmeister follows that of Georg Lasson. I am noting comparatively the German and English editions for reasons explained in note 125. Hoffmeister’s edition continues here:

In all African kingdoms with which Europeans have become acquainted, slavery is indigenous. . . . It is the basis of slavery in general that a person does not yet have consciousness of his freedom and thereby becomes an object, something worthless. The lesson we derive from this, and which alone interests us is that the state of nature [that is, before the establishment of a *vernünftiger Staat*] is one of injustice. [*VG*, pp. 225–26]

119. Compare *VG*, p. 226.

120. “In this largest part of Africa no real history can take place. There are only accidents, or surprises that follow one after another. There is no goal, no state there, that one could observe, no subjectivity, but only a series of subjects, who destroy each other” (*VG*, pp. 216–17). Hegel cites Herodotus, implying nothing had changed over the centuries: “In Africa all are sorcerers”; and he repeats the story of Africans as “fetish worshippers” that one finds in Charles de Brosses, the Enlightenment contemporary of Voltaire (*VG*, pp. 220–22; compare *PH*, p. 94).

121. Hegel was a regular reader of the *Edinburgh Review* in 1817–19, as we know from his excerpts from this journal; see “Hegels Exzerpte aus der ‘Edinburgh Review’ 1817–1819,” ed. Waszek, *Hegel-Studien* 1–2 (1979): 78–116. And he read the British *Morning Chronicle* in the 1820s; see M. J. Petry, “Hegel and ‘The Morning Chronicle,’” *Hegel-Studien* 11 (1976): 14–15. Although the preserved excerpts do not deal with Haiti, it is clear that Hegel was exposed to this new stage in the Haiti debate at a time when “the liberal *Edinburgh Review* contrasted the cruel tyranny of Christophe with the virtuous, constitutional rule of Pétion” (“HA,” p. 122). Haiti was also again topical in *Minerva* again, which in 1819 published in German translation large sections of General Pamphile de Lacroix’s “unbi-





FIG. 8.—Cosmological diagram, French freemasonry, late eighteenth century. Esoteric design by Jean-Baptiste Willermoz (Bibliothèque nationale, Paris).

The *vèvès*, traced in powdered substances about the central column of the *Vodou* dancing court, “take their structure from Fon and Kongo traditions of sacred ground painting. . . . In the process, Latin Catholic attributes, the sword of St. Jacques Majeur, the hearts of the Mater Dolorosa, and even the compass-upon-the-square of Freemasonry have come to be interspersed along the prevailing cross-shaped axes of the majority of *vèvè* ground signs” (Robert Farris Thompson, “The Flash of the Spirit: Haiti’s Africanizing Vodun Art,” *Haitian Art*, ed. Ute Stebich [New York, 1979], p. 33; italics mine).

Willermoz, a Lyonnais businessman, was head of an Order of the Temple called Strict Observance, which had connections with Bordeaux and was strongly influenced by Martinés de Pasqually, founder of the order Élus Cohens, a mystical masonry with the goal of reintegrating human beings to their original state before the Adamic Fall. Martinés, born in Grenoble, died in 1774 on the island of Saint-Domingue. See Serge Hutin, *Les Francs-Maçons* (Paris, 1960), pp. 85–90.

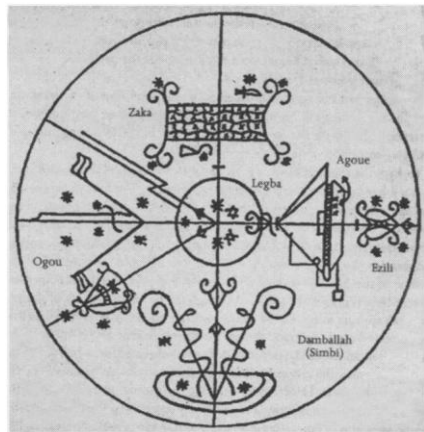


FIG. 9.—Cosmological diagram, Haitian *Vodou*, twentieth century. Ritual ground painting (*vèvè*) for the *Vodou* deities, assembled along a cross-shaped axis. From Leslie G. Desmangles, *The Faces of God: Vodou and Roman Catholicism in Haiti* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1992), p. 106.

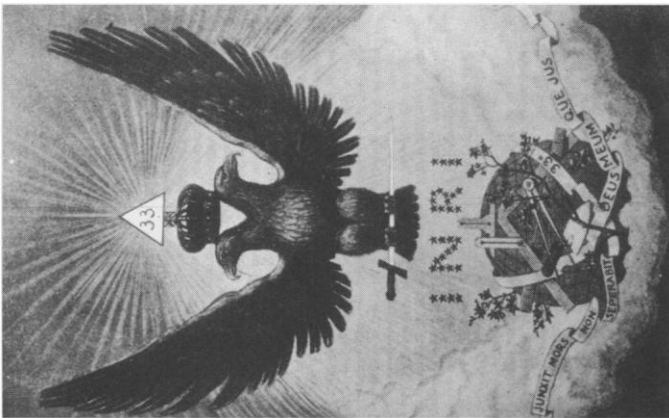


FIG. 10.—Two-headed eagle, crowned, emblem of the Supreme Council of 33 degrees, highest order of the *rite écossais* (Scottish rite), French freemasonry, eighteenth century (Bibliothèque nationale, Paris).

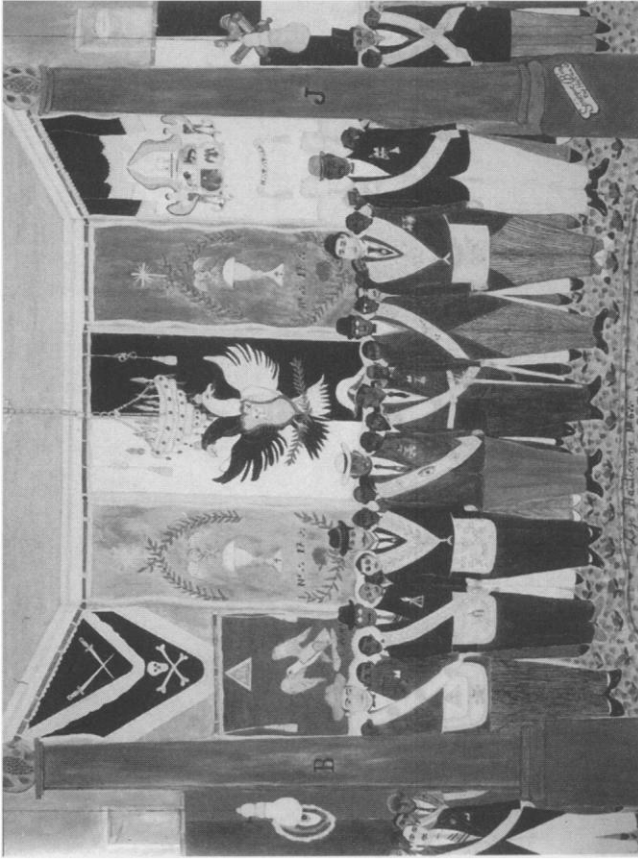
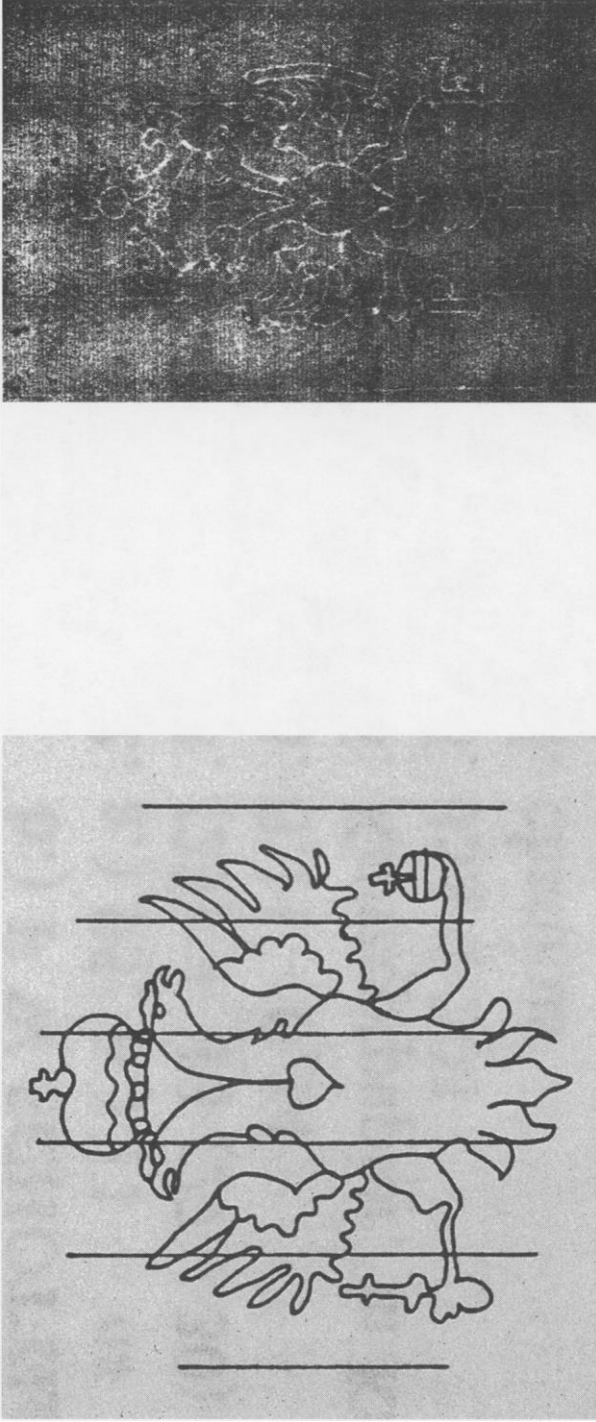


FIG. 11.—Seneque Obin, *Haitian Lodge Number 6* (1960), depicting the two-headed eagle of the *rite écossais*. In 1801 the first Supreme Council of 33 degrees was established in Charleston, South Carolina, with both American and French brothers; one of the latter, the Count de Grasse-Tilly, “founded a new Supreme Council on the isle of Saint-Domingue” (Hutin, *Les Francs-Maçons*, p. 103).



FIGS. 12 and 13.—Two-headed eagle, crowned, watermark on the paper produced by Johann Ephraim Stahl (in business from 1799, Blanckenburg an der Schwarza/Thüringen) that was used by Hegel in Jena for the last third of the manuscript of *System der Sittlichkeit* (1803); Hegel used the identical Stahl paper in September and November 1802 to record notes on politics of the day. See Eva Ziesche and Dierk Schmitzer, *Der Handschriftliche Nachlass Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegels und die Hegel-Bestände der Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz*, 2 vols. in 1 (Wiesbaden, 1995), 1:91–92, 2:31–32, 86.

the context of continued pressure for the abolition of slavery, developments in Haiti, the “great experiment,” were monitored continually, and they evoked increasing criticism even from Haiti’s former supporters.<sup>122</sup> At issue was the alleged brutality of King Henri Christophe<sup>123</sup> and the island’s decline in productivity under the system of free labor (here would be the proper moment for a Marxist critique).<sup>124</sup> We have no record as to whether these debates caused Hegel, as well, to reconsider Haiti’s “great experiment.” What is clear is that in an effort to become more erudite in African studies during the 1820s, Hegel was in fact becoming dumber.

---

ased” history of Haiti’s revolution and postrevolutionary governments; see Schüller, *Deutsche Rezeption haitianischer Geschichte in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, p. 256.

122. In the 1820s,

the British abolitionists became associated with [Christophe’s] northern kingdom, while their French counterparts developed links with [Pétion’s] republican south. . . . The division was reinforced by a number of factors: the political preferences of the French (since the only French abolitionists concerned with Haiti, Grégoire and Lafayette, were republicans); the British preference for monarchy; the cultural leanings of the mulattoes, many of whose parents had been educated in France, whereas Christophe . . . had been born in a British colony. . . . Wilberforce [the British abolitionist] professed neutrality in the matter. [“HA,” p. 122]

He, however, had personal connections with Christophe, to whom he wrote warning of the negative European press. Wilberforce told Macaulay in 1817: “‘Never have I worked harder than at my Haytian letters’” (“HA,” p. 123); whereas Christophe “wrote temptingly of how he would like to see his countrymen converted to Protestant Christianity, abandoning a Catholicism whose priests were corrupt and whose church defended slavery. . . . Wilberforce responded by sending works on morality, Bibles in English and French, a manual of political economy and histories of the Jesuits and the Inquisition” (“HA,” pp. 123–24).

123. The “thumbscrew scandal” of 1817 brought news that “a British merchant in Haiti, suspected of being an agent for the Republic, was tortured on Christophe’s orders” (“HA,” p. 125).

124. Developments in Haiti were in advance of Europe in making evident the inadequacies of political equality that did not address economic inequality. The documents granting freedom to slaves in Saint-Domingue in 1794 have been criticized as being empty-handed, as they did not challenge the property rights of the large landowners, whereas the small gardens that *had* been allowed to slaves to cultivate were deemed no longer necessary: Although “no one has the right to require you to work a single day against your wishes,” the land belongs rightly to those who inherited or bought it, so the ex-slaves needed to work, as “‘the only means for your supplying [your] wants is the produce of the land’” (Jean Fouchard, *The Haitian Maroons: Liberty or Death*, trans. A. Faulkner Watts [New York, 1981], pp. 359–60). It was in effect Sonthonax’s system of land policy (maintenance of large estates where military discipline governed the laborers) that was adapted by Toussaint several years later and generalized by Dessalines’s successor in the north, Christophe, whereas Polverel’s unrealized proposal for distributing land to its cultivators would later be implemented in part in Pétion’s republican system; see “PS,” pp. 52, 53. After 1823, despite President Boyer’s continuation (in a united Haiti) of Christophe’s policy, economic productivity was not as high as had been hoped. Boyer’s *Code Rural* of 1826, while reaffirming existing smallholdings, “reduced most Haitians . . . to essentially slave status” (*HHG*, p. 14). An 1827 article in the *Edinburgh Review* by Macaulay reflected “growing disillusionment” with “free labor” in Haiti because of its lack of productivity; and abolitionists generally ceased referring to the Haitian example (“HA,” pp. 135, 136).

He repeated his lectures on the philosophy of history every two years from 1822 to 1830, adding empirical material from his reading of the European experts on world history.<sup>125</sup> It is sadly ironic that the more faithfully his lectures reflected Europe's conventional scholarly wisdom on African society, the less enlightened and more bigoted they became.<sup>126</sup>

## 12

Why is ending the silence on Hegel and Haiti important? Given Hegel's ultimate concession to slavery's continuance—moreover, given the fact that Hegel's philosophy of history has provided for two centuries a justification for the most complacent forms of Eurocentrism (Hegel was perhaps always a cultural racist if not a biological one)—why is it of more than arcane interest to retrieve from oblivion this fragment of history, the truth of which has managed to slip away from us?

There are many possible answers, but one is surely the potential for

125. The first two editions of the lectures on the philosophy of history (1837 and 1840), edited by E. Gans and Karl Hegel, did not include all of the empirical material on world cultures, in what was then consequently a slim volume. Georg Lasson was the first to include comprehensively the empirical material in his three, ever more complete editions (1917, 1920, and 1930). Lasson commented in his editorial notes on the incompetence and even unscrupulousness of the earlier editors: "It is astounding how much important material was simply totally left out by the editors [Gans and Karl Hegel—the latter being the basis of the Sibree English translation]," in violation of the rigorous principles of critical philology (*VG*, p. 274). Yet Lasson admits that he himself doubted whether to include all of the ethnological information that exists in Hegel's lecture notebooks, "when so much of it must appear out of date," specifically "the spiritual essence of the inhabitants of Africa" (*VG*, p. 277). Note that the material on Africa that appears in the Lasson (and Hoffmeister) editions is as an appendix ("Anhang: Die Alte West-Afrika"), whereas it is incorporated into the introduction in the edition of Karl Hegel (and Sibree's translation), where it is reduced from twenty-one pages to eight. The *latest* edition of Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of history (1996) includes three separate variants. The editors conclude that, for all the controversy among the editors, so long as no definitive "full" or "main" text can be ascertained, the interpretation of Hegel's philosophy of history "must remain scientifically unsatisfying" (Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*, ed. Ilting, Karl Brehmer, and Hoo Nam Seelmann [Hamburg, 1996], p. 530).

126. The master-slave dialectic becomes allegorical in Hegel's writings, a metaphor for any relation of dependency, not only the struggle to death, but just as often those that were meant to be outgrown. Some examples: In the *Encyclopedia* (1845), the subjection of the servant is "a necessary moment in the education (*Bildung*) of every man. . . . No man can, without this will-breaking discipline, become free and worthy to command"; on nations: "Bondage and tyranny are necessary things in the history of peoples"; from the *Philosophy of Religion*: "I am not one of the fighters locked in the battle, but both, and I am the struggle itself. I am fire and water" ("N," p. 271). It is in the 1825 summer semester on the phenomenology of spirit that we have a version of master and servant stressing as the good aspect of being a servant the moment of freedom in work itself; see Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, *Sinnlichkeit und Herrschaft: Zur Konzeptualisierung der inneren Natur bei Hegel und Freud* (Königstein/Taunus, 1980), pp. 46–47.

rescuing the idea of universal human history from the uses to which white domination has put it. If the historical facts about freedom can be ripped out of the narratives told by the victors and salvaged for our own time, then the project of universal freedom does not need to be discarded but, rather, redeemed and reconstituted on a different basis. Hegel's moment of clarity of thought would need to be juxtaposed to that of others at the time: Toussaint-Louverture, Wordsworth, the Abbé Grégoire, even Dessalines. For all his brutality and revenge against whites, Dessalines saw the realities of European racism most clearly. Even more, Hegel's moment would need to be juxtaposed to the moments of clarity in action: the French soldiers sent by Napoleon to the colony who, upon hearing these former slaves singing the "Marseillaise," wondered aloud if they were not fighting on the wrong side; the Polish regiment under Leclerc's command who disobeyed orders and refused to drown six hundred captured Saint-Domingans (see *BJ*, p. 318).<sup>127</sup> There are many examples of such clarity, and they belong to no side, no one group exclusively. What if every time that the consciousness of individuals surpassed the confines of present constellations of power in perceiving the concrete meaning of freedom, *this* were valued as a moment, however transitory, of the realization of absolute spirit? What other silences would need to be broken? What *un-disciplined* stories would be told?

127. Dessalines, in gratitude, and in acknowledgement of what the Poles suffered at home (he referred to them aptly as "the white negroes of Europe," as Polish serfdom was not distinguishable from slavery), allowed them to stay in Haiti after independence (whereas all other whites were barred by Article 12 of the 1805 constitution from owning property; see *HHG*, p. 24; Dayan notes that some Germans and white women married to blacks were also allowed to stay). Pachoński and Wilson report that "freemasonry had numerous adherents in the 114th [Polish] Demibrigade and was at the same time . . . well rooted among San Domingo's population" (Pachoński and Wilson, *Poland's Caribbean Tragedy*, p. 309; see also pp. 138, 283).