THE NEW URBAN ATLANTIC

BARON DE VASTEY AND THE ORIGINS OF BLACK ATLANTIC HUMANISM

MARLENE L. DAUT

The New Urban Atlantic

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palgrave
macmillan

Marlene L. Daut
Carter G. Woodson Institute
University of Virginia
Charlottesville, VA, USA

The New Urban Atlantic
ISBN 978-1-137-47969-3 ISBN 978-1-137-47067-6 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-47067-6

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017944610

Cover illustration: © Nina Dietzel

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Nature America, Inc. part of Springer Nature
The registered company address is: 1 New York Plaza, New York, NY 10004, U.S.A.

Merci, les enfants

Acknowledgements

This book on the life and works of Baron de Vastey represents the culmination of nearly nine years of research. I have a very patient family. My partner (Sam) and our two children (Samy and Sébastien) probably know more about Vastey than they do about me … but perhaps that is the point of academic scholarship when it turns around a single historical figure: to live and breathe one individual's life as much as it is possible to do so nearly 200 years after his death. I can only hope that my enthusiasm for bringing Vastey's writing to a larger audience will incite infectious interest outside of my family, whose members are hardly the only people who have had to listen to me discuss the painstaking details of Vastey's life. Indeed, there has rarely been an academic talk I have given in the last decade when I didn't sneak in some reference to Vastey.

There are so many people I have to thank, starting with Deborah Jenson who, in 2011, organized a Baron de Vastey colloquium as a part of Duke University's Haiti Lab. The comments of my fellow participants in that two-day experience, including Nick Nesbitt, Jean Casimir, Chris Bongie, and Cary Hector, were extremely helpful. Bongie deserves special mention since he may be the only person on earth who cares about Vastey as much as I do. I'd like also to thank Vastey's biographer, Laurent Quevilly, for his spirited dialogue about the ongoing controversies of the baron's life. I also want to thank Laurent Dubois

for invaluable friendship and for helping me to perform emergency surgery at the 11th hour. Julia Gaffield, Lesley Curtis, Chelsea Stieber, Sara Johnson, Nathan Dize, and Grégory Pierrot have been enthusiastic friends (and patient listeners). The entire Duke Haiti crew deserves recognition, including, Mary-Caton Lingold, Laurent Dubois (again), Laura Wagner, Claire Payton, and Jonathan Katz, who all managed to keep me sane during a year's sabbatical alone with two children at the National Humanities Center in Research Triangle Park, NC.

At the Humanities Center, I also had the pleasure of making new friends, including Tsitsi Jaji and Adriane Lentz-Smith, and re-connecting with old ones like Harry Karahalios. Fellow humanists at the Center including Benjamin Kahan, Kim Hall, Richard Turits, James Mulholland, and Hannah Rosen also provided much needed laughs. My former advisors Glenn Hendler, Ivy Wilson, Julia Douthwaite, and Karen Richman have championed my work from the beginning.

Several colleagues at the Claremont Colleges lent an ear when it was most needed: Eve Oishi, April Mayes, Myriam Chancy, Marie-Denise Shelton, Terri Geis, Sheila Walker, and David Luis-Brown. New colleagues at the University of Virginia: Deborah McDowell, Anna Brickhouse, Cindy Hoelhler-Fatton, Robert Fatton, Jr., Njelle Hamilton, Tom Klubock, and Christina Mobley. Elizabeth Maddock Dillon and Michael Drexler gave me the opportunity to bring Vastey to early American studies circles. I must also thank Nazera Wright, Doris Garraway, Flora Cassen, Barbara Pelet, Maxine Reger, Gina Rho, Misty Schieberle, Christoper Freeburg, Gina Ulysse, Nadège Clitandre, Matthew Smith, and Daniel Desormeaux.

This work has been supported with funds from the University of Miami, the Claremont Graduate University, and the University of Virginia. My large family supported this work in non-monetary ways too. Sincere thanks to Rodney Daut I and Martha Flores, Leydy and Donald Kemper; Rodney Daut II and Anna Caples Daut; Tatiana and Deshano Kelly; Austin and Veronica Daut; Erika and Daniels Stewart; David Kemper; Jennifer and Matt Grubaugh; Samy Zaka, Sr. and Chantal Temple; and Roselinde and Dean Otto. I should also mention that my work was completed in Dakar, Senegal in the summer of 2016, and the

many people I met, dined with, and who cared for me all enriched this book.

Sustenance comes in many forms. My partner loved me. My children and their hugs saved me.

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Prologue: On the Origins of Black Atlantic Humanism

Baron de Vastey, pronounced Vâtay (Romain 67), is best remembered as the most prolific secretary of early nineteenth-century Haiti's King Henry Christophe I and as the author of a scathing indictment of colonial slavery entitled, *Le Système colonial dévoilé* (1814). Although he is largely unknown outside of academic circles today, in the early nineteenth century Vastey was an international public figure, well known for his anti-colonial and black positivist writing. Vastey's damning exposé of the inhumanity of the "colonial system" circulated all across the nineteenth-century Atlantic World and was reviewed in French, US, German, and British journals and newspapers (Daut "The 'Alpha'" 60, Fanning 70, Schuller 40). By the time of his execution in 1820, Vastey's works had become so well-regarded that his two most widely referenced and reviewed books almost immediately appeared in English translation as *Reflections on the Blacks and Whites* (1817) and *Political Remarks on Some French Works and Newspapers* (1818); while a third British translation of Vastey's writing, *An Essay on the Causes of the Revolution and Civil Wars of Hayti*, would appear posthumously in 1823.

Translations of Vastey's writings helped his words travel far and wide in transatlantic abolitionist networks. In 1821, Vastey's *Essai sur les causes de la révolution et des guerres civiles d'Hayti* (1819), the first full-length

history of Haiti written by a Haitian, appeared in Dutch translation.[1] In 1817, the Swiss anti-slavery historian Jean Charles Léonard (Sismonde) de Sismondi produced an important review, with large sections translated into Italian, of Vastey's *Réflexions politiques sur quelques ouvrages et journaux francais concernant Hayti* (1817), demonstrating that Vastey's reach had extended into the Mediterranean.[2] Reprints of the English translation of Vastey's *Réflexions sur une lettre de Mazères* (1816), probably one of the first examples of what is now known as critical race theory, appeared in 1828 and 1829 in the first African American newspaper *Freedom's Journal*.[3]

Many other anti-slavery writers from the Atlantic world incorporated the Haitian baron's publications into their analyses of slavery in smaller but no less significant ways.[4] Referred to by one nineteenth-century reviewer as "the most able Haytian of the present era" ("Review of New Books," 1818), Vastey's writings were often quoted in U.S. newspapers to produce compelling arguments for the humanity of black people or to

[1] The first of Vastey's works to be translated into English was his much less well-known *Communication officielle de trois lettres de Catineau Laroche, ex-Colon, Agent de Pétion* (1816), which was published for the British historian Marcus Rainsford in 1816. Although *Le Système colonial dévoilé* was not fully translated into English until 2014 when Chris Bongie produced *The Colonial System Unveiled* for Liverpool University Press, in November of 1816 *The Scots Magazine, and Edinburgh Literary Miscellany* did publish a lengthy of summary of the text along with a brief excerpt in English translation (Bongie, *The Colonial System*, 74 ftn19). The Dutch translation was called, *De Negerstaat van Hayti of Sint Domingo, geschetst in zijne geschiedenis en in zijnen tegenwoordigen toestand*.

[2] The Italian review of *Riflessioni Politiche sovra alcune Opere e Giorgnali francesi riguardanti Haytì* was apparently prevented from being published due to Austrian censorship (Pagliai, *Sismondiana*, 85). Sismondi's review was eventually published much later, however, in the *Museo del Risorgimento Nazionale's Pagine inedite del "Conciliatore" Publicate per Cura Del Comune di Milano* (1930), edited by Marcello Visconte di Modrone. See Cordié.

[3] For the excerpts in *Freedom's Journal*, see, "Extracts from the Baron De Vastey's work in answer to the ex-colonist Mazeres and others." *Freedom's Journal*. December 12, 1828; "AFRICA. Extract from Baron De Vastey," *Freedom's Journal*. February 7, 1829; "AFRICA. Extracts from Baron De Vastey." *Freedom's Journal*. February 14, 1829.

[4] For abolitionist works that refer to Vastey see, for example, John Wright's *A Refutation of the Sophisms, Gross Misrepresentations, and Erroneous Quotations Contained in 'An American's 'Letter to the Edinburgh Reviewers'* (1820, 33), William Newnham Blane's *Travels through the United States and Canada* (1824, 219), and Jeremy Bentham's *Canada: Emancipate Your Colonies!* (1838, iv).

demonstrate "African" literary abilities (see, Daut "Alpha and Omega"). Perhaps, most notably, the U.S. abolitionist James McCune Smith referred to Vastey's life and works as evidence of the inherent degradations of slavery in his famous *Lecture on the Haytian Revolutions* (1841, 4–5).

Although Vastey's popularity appears to have briefly waned in the later nineteenth-century, by the early 1900s, his writings began to once again distinctly enter U.S. African-American discourse. W.E.B. Du Bois (1905, 45), Alain Locke (1925, 425), Arthur Schomburg (1925, 671), and Mercer Cook (1948, 12) all reference Vastey's contributions to the cause of promoting racial justice. And his life was intriguing enough for several twentieth-century playwrights to promote him as the subject for dramatic performance.

Vastey was first immortalized in the theatrical work of May Miller in *Christophe's Daughters* (1935), and he would once again appear as a principal character in Selden Rodman's three-act play, *The Revolutionists* in 1942. In 1945, Dan Hammerman produced his own historical drama featuring Vastey called *Henri Christophe*. In 1963 Aimé Césaire placed Vastey center stage in his famous dramatization of the northern kingdom of Haiti, *La Tragédie du roi Christophe* (1963). The Haitian poet and playwright René Philoctète, one of the founders of the postmodern technique of "spiralism," would go even further by staging an important homage to the baron with the eponymous *Monsieur de Vastey* (1975). Perhaps most famously, Nobel prize winner Derek Walcott published a complicated vision of Vastey in two of the plays that make up his *Haitian Trilogy* (2002): *Henri Christophe* (1949) and *The Haitian Earth* (1984).[5]

The object of this exploration into the legacy of Vastey's writing is two-fold: to bring attention to a thinker who produced at least eleven different anti-slavery and anti-colonialist book-length publications in a span of only five years (1814–1819),[6] and to document how these

[5] Vastey does not appear in Walcott's *Drums and Colours* (1958).

[6] *Le Système colonial dévoilé* (1814); *Notes à M. le Baron V.P. de Malouet* (1814); *Le Cri de la patrie* (1815); *Le Cri de la conscience* (1815); *À mes concitoyens, Haytiens!* (1815); *Réflexions adressées aux Haytiens de partie de l'ouest et du sud, sur l'horrible assassinat du Général Delvare, commis au Port- au-Prince, dans la nuit du 25 décembre, 1815, par les ordres de Pétion* (1816); *Communication officielle de trois lettres de Catineau Laroche, ex-colon, agent de Pétion* (1816); *Relation de la fête de la Reine S. M. D'Hayti* (1816); *Réflexions sur une lettre de Mazères, ex-colon français,* […] *sur les noirs et les blancs, la civilization de l'Afrique, le Royaume d'Hayti, etc.* (1816); *Réflexions politiques sur quelques ouvrages et journaux français concernant Hayti* (1817); and *Essai sur les causes de la Révolution et des guerres civiles d'Hayti* (1819).

writings were read from Vastey's era up until the present day. In so doing, I hope to capture the various rhetorical and ideological functions that his often *avant la lettre* arguments have been made to perform. For, I suggest that the significant *use* of Vastey's writings by both nineteenth-century abolitionists and twentieth-century anti-colonialists makes Vastey a foundational figure in a philosophical movement of Black Atlantic humanism whose goal was to disrupt the Enlightenment philosophies that undergirded colonial slavery and colonial racism.

The definition of what we might call Black Atlantic humanism and its parameters are intentionally broad. The term describes an intellectual endeavor begun in the eighteenth century on both sides of the Atlantic with the principal aim to prove that black people were equal to the white people who were enslaving them. The most well-known of early Black Atlantic writers, including Olaudah Equiano (1745–1797), John Marrant (1755–1791), Ottobah Cugoano (1757–1791), Ukawsaw Gronniosaw (1705–1775), Ignatius Sancho (1729–1780), and Phillis Wheatley (1753–1784) made the case that the people called negroes by enslavers deserved equality with whites. By chronicling in various forms the depredations of color prejudice that they had personally experienced, including in autobiographies, slave narratives, sermons, and lyric poetry, these writers argued for the recognition of black humanity in a world of chattel slavery.

Afro-diasporans in the public sphere pursued the mission of proving that their dark skin did not make them uncivilizable savages, destined for enslavement, because from the ancient to the early modern world reams of paper had been devoted to characterizing Africans as somehow less than human. "The roots of European and American prejudices against Africans are ancient," Bruce Dain reminds us, "preceding the introduction of slavery to the New World and much before then too. Rationalized languages of race are something else again. They are the product of eighteenth-century 'natural history', which was the first systematic modern attempt to describe and understand living nature on the basis of observation and reason operating upon sense experience" (6). The irony is that in much of the writing that has come to be described as "natural history" blackness was seen as anything other than natural.

Although he was a believer in monogenism, the generally anti-slavery Comte de Buffon wrote that the whiteness of European skin, because it was the "hue of heaven," was preferable to the putatively degenerate dark skin to be found among the blacks of Africa (6: 330). While blackness signified a form of human degradation to a natural scientist like Buffon, it

was used by many other European *philosophes* in the eighteenth century to more directly justify the enslavement of Africans on American shores.[7] The collaboratively written, *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (1770–1780), a work signed by the Abbé Raynal, argues that the supposedly inherent ugliness and lack of intelligence of "Africans" could justify their enslavement:

> The passions, therefore, of fear and love, are carried to excess among these people; and this is the reason they are more effeminate, more indolent, weaker, and unhappily more fit for slavery. Besides, their intellectual faculties being nearly exhausted, by the excesses of sensual pleasures, they have neither memory nor understanding to supply by art the deficiency of their strength. (1776, 1: 101)[8]

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[7] In the writings of many Enlightenment era thinkers, blackness was variously figured as ugly, inhuman, unintelligent, and uncivilizable, all of which could therefore be used as a justification for slavery. The famous philosopher David Hume claimed, for example, in a now infamous footnote in his *Essays on Treatises and Several Subjects* (1753–54),

> "I am apt to suspect the Negroes, and in general all the other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufacturers amongst them, no arts, no sciences … Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen, in so many countries and ages, if nature had not made an original distinction betwixt these breeds of men." (337)

Immanuel Kant, too, contributed to such white supremacy when he wrote in his *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1764), "[t]he Negroes of Africa have, by nature, no feeling that rises above the trifling … So fundamental is the difference between these two races of man, and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in color … [if a] man [is] black from head to foot, [it is] a clear proof that what he said was stupid" (110–111). Thomas Jefferson's white supremacist theories about *negroes* are by now also well-known: "Comparing them by their faculties of memory, reason, and imagination," Jefferson writes, "it appears to me that in memory they are equal to whites, in reason much inferior, as I think one could scarcely be found capable of tracing and comprehending the investigations of Euclid; and that in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous" (139).

[8] The Abbé Raynal is often cited as an abolitionist, even though he contested this label himself, and if he was anti-slavery at all, he believed in a policy of gradual emancipation (Reinhardt 51). Srinivas Aravamudan tells us, in fact, that even though the Jacobins adopted Raynal as a revolutionist, Raynal "was not prepared to assume this identity … [it] was constructed as such a posteriori through the mechanisms of authorship" (295).

Attempts to justify slavery on the basis of blackness compelled one of the most famous Black Atlantic poets, Phillis Wheatley, to oppose the time-worn association of dark skin with evil in her famous poem, "On Being Brought from Africa to America:"

> Some view our sable race with scornful eye,
> "Their colour is a diabolic die."
> Remember, Christians, Negro's, black as Cain,
> May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train. (18)

Yet even in a world that had seen the publication of the first book of poetry produced by a writer of color when Wheatley's *Poems on Various Subjects* was published in 1773, it had been comparatively difficult for the voices of people of color to be heard. Baron de Vastey recognized as much when he lamented: "The small number of our unfortunate class have had a difficult time to throw even some small retorts against their numerous calumnies, having been compromised by the confluence of all the circumstances that smothered their voices" (*Système* 95). In citing a host of European writers, including Bernardin de Saint-Pierre and the Abbé Grégoire, however, Vastey acknowledged that resistance to discourses of black dehumanization could effectively come from many different corners. "If I were required to cite and recount here the whole of the testimony of every virtuous European who has resisted and braved all the insults of the ex-colonists in order to prove our equality with whites," Vastey wrote, "I would be prolific" (*RM* 12).

Indeed, the writings and speeches of many white eighteenth-century abolitionists and anti-slavery activists such as Anthony Benezet, Thomas Paine, and Granville Sharp, as well as those of their early nineteenth-century counterparts including Thomas Clarkson, the Abbé Grégoire, Zachary Macaulay, and William Wilberforce, contain elements of Black Atlantic humanism. These allies of the Black Atlantic helped to counter the voluminous narratives seeking to justify the enslavement and torture of black people produced in the European public sphere. They did so by using the privileges of whiteness (in the sense that their voices could be *heard*) to expose the iniquities of the slave trade and the inherent depredations of slavery. Baron de Vastey remarked, thus, that it was with "sentiments of appreciation and gratitude" toward those Europeans who had bravely taken on the subject before him that he had gained the courage and inspiration to himself "tackle the Gordian knot" of "proving to the ex-colonists, with the sword and the pen, that morally and physically [blacks] are not inferior to their type" (*RM* 13).

We might think of Vastey's comments as a reflection of the kind of "interdependency of black and white thinkers" that led to Paul Gilroy's development of the term "Black Atlantic" (31). Gilroy argued that framing the history of black thought within an Atlantic context (comprising the Americas, Africa, and Europe) could result in "a single, complex unit of analysis […] of the modern world" whereby writings by people of African descent could be considered a crucial part of "the intellectual heritage of the West since the Enlightenment" (2). Studying Afro-diasporic thought as a central rather than marginal development in western history, Gilroy said, could "produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective" (15). This is because, as Lisa A. Lindsay and John Wood Sweet have recently put it, "the Black Atlantic is both a space and an argument" (1), one that props up rather than sublimates the voices of people of color.

Black Atlantic humanism, then, as the most immediate space from which we can glimpse the weight of the contribution of black voices to anti-racist and anti-colonial thought, is not about the perceived race or skin color of the author. Rather, it names the discursive mode of challenging color prejudice and the strategies of argumentation deployed to contest the theories and material practices that have supported myriad forms of colonial violence against black people across the Atlantic World. The discourse of Black Atlantic humanism can, therefore, be entered into by anyone devoted to deconstructing the twin axes of colonial racism and colonial slavery.

The collaboration of anti-slavery activists with the post-independence Haitian state that produced Vastey is central to my examination of the wave of Black Atlantic humanistic thought that surfaced in the wake of the Haitian Revolution. The writings of early Haitian authors, including Vastey, can help us trace how attempts to argue for the end of slavery by abolitionists and other anti-slavery writers in the eighteenth-century led directly to the efforts of nineteenth-century activists to defend black sovereignty. It was one thing to make the case for the abolition of slavery, but it was quite another to assert that black people could become independent rulers of their own sovereign state.

In fact, Baron de Vastey's writing stands at the origins of a crucial shift in early Black Atlantic thought from being almost solely focused on the abolition of black slavery to arguing for the creation of black political institutions. Many earlier eighteenth-century formerly enslaved writers used their biographies to argue primarily for their own humanity. The racial politics discernible in these writings suggests to a large

extent that slavery was a personal issue to be overcome either through religion or dogged individual resistance. Wheatley's famous poem, "On Being Brought from Africa to America" and many of Marrant's sermons imply that Christian conversion was the path to encouraging the recognition of black people as human beings, in effect arguing that Africans deserved equality in spite of their blackness rather than because of it (for Marrant, see Saillant, "Wipe Away all Tears from their Eyes"). Moreover, Equiano's role in enslaving others after his own emancipation, which is detailed in his 1789 autobiography (101–105), complicates his strongly worded arguments for the abolition of the slave trade; and Gronniosaw, in his *Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African Prince, as Related by Himself* (1772), does not denounce slavery at all. Only Sancho and Cugoano unequivocally condemn both slavery and the slave trade, but like most European and American abolitionists, they could not envision black sovereignty (see, Sancho, "Letter to Jack Wingrave;" Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Human Species*).[9]

In contrast, Vastey identified the U.S. American and French revolutions as incomplete because neither ended slavery nor promoted black freedom, comparing their outcomes to what he called the "fatal truth" of Haitian independence (*RM* 90). Vastey's comparison of the conflicting consequences of the Age of Revolutions focused not only on denouncing the oppression of all black people but on promoting black sovereignty as the necessary outcome of abolition. In his most important work, *Le Système colonial dévoilé*, he describes slavery and colonialism as an entire network of legal, social, and textual practices aimed at reproducing institutional rather than individual inequalities. Vastey recognized that color prejudice had been institutionalized to prevent black liberty when he discussed the difficulty of contesting black dehumanization in a white discursive space: "The friends of slavery, those eternal enemies of the human race have written thousands of volumes freely…they have made all the presses of Europe groan

[9] Most eighteenth-century abolitionists were proponents of policies of gradual emancipation. The nineteenth-century Haitian historian Thomas Madiou acknowledged as much in the specific context of French Saint-Domingue when he wrote, "you would have to be completely misled by passion or be completely ignorant of the facts to submit that in 1789, 1790, and 1792 ideas of general liberty had been completely formed […], be it of the blacks, be it of the *hommes de couleur*" (565). For more on the various positions held by eighteenth and early nineteenth-century aboltionists, see Daut, *Tropics of Haiti* (565–567).

for centuries in order to reduce the black man below the brute" (*Système* 95). As a member of the only sovereign state of the Americas where slavery had been abolished, he viewed opposition to anti-black writing as both a necessary obligation and a logical consequence of Haiti's sovereignty, writing, "now that we have Haytian printing presses, we can reveal the crimes of the colonists and respond to even the most absurd calumnies invented by the prejudice and greed of our oppressors" (95). Vastey's identification here of the press as Haitian was more than just rhetorical. The press to which he refers was actually created by the state, meaning that in many ways, the defense of blackness was for the first time derived from the state itself.

One of these "oppressors" whom Vastey exposed through this state-sanctioned printing press was the former French colonist, Baron de Malouet.[10] In his *Collection de mémoires sur les colonies* (1802) Malouet made the argument that France needed to institute a "new" and improved form of colonization that could rectify what he called "this secret full of horror: the liberty of the blacks means their domination! It means the massacre or the enslavement of the whites, the burning of our fields and our cities." (quoted in Vastey, *Notes* 14; see also, Malouet, 4: 46) Vastey challenged Malouet's claim by using the strategy of what might today be referred to as a "postcolonial reversal" in exhorting: "*Now this secret full of horror can be known*: *Le Système Colonial*, means domination by Whites and the massacre and enslavement of Blacks." In the pages that follow, Vastey focuses on narrating dozens of specific atrocities committed against individual enslaved people and free people of color as the inevitable effect of a system that could only occasion black death and prevent black freedom, rather than as isolated examples of personal injury under slavery. What Vastey's analysis of blackness as a collective condition of oppression shared by Africans and their descendants all over the world (whether enslaved or free) shows us is that the idea of Afro-diasporic solidarity surfaces more apparently in the nineteenth-century era of Haitian independence than it did in the eighteenth-century world of European slavery.

Examination of the political theories and material practices developed in Haiti in the wake of independence, alongside that of transatlantic abolitionist writing, provides a clear illustration of how our understanding of the genesis, continuities, and contours of Black Atlantic thought remain incomplete without the inclusion of nineteenth-century Haitian

[10] For more on the state-run press of Christophe's kingdom, see, Patrick Tardieu (2004).

writers like Baron de Vastey. Although studies of first-person narratives composed and published by black authors from the pre-twentieth-century Caribbean are notoriously sparse, Haitian independence in 1804 ushered in a vibrant and diverse print culture that included poetry, plays, newspapers, and historical writing. From the pages of *La Gazette royale d'Hayti* (1811–1820)[11] to the poems of Jean-Baptiste Romane (1807–1858) to the historical writings of Louis-Félix Boisrond-Tonnerre (1776–1806) to the operas of Juste Chanlatte (1766–1828), there arose a distinct nineteenth-century literary culture in Haiti that was explicitly anti-slavery and decidedly pro-black sovereignty. Few of these writers, however, are ordinarily included in examinations of early African American or early Caribbean print culture,[12] largely because the transatlantic, transnational, and multi-racial abolitionist movement often theorized in scholarship as the "Black Atlantic" has traditionally excluded nineteenth-century Haitian authors through various kinds of epistemological silencing.[13]

[11] *La Gazette royale* was a continuation of *La Gazette officielle d'Hayti* (1807–1811), which dates from the time that Christophe first assumed control over the north of Haiti.

[12] For example, *Caribbeana* (1999), an anthology edited by Thomas Krise, contains only English-language writings. Scholarship by Haitians living in Haiti, in contrast, has long been devoted to remembering and recognizing early Haitian authorship, but only recently have Anglophone scholars joined them. What we are lacking remain volumes that place early Haitian writing in comparative, diasporic context. Deborah Jenson and Doris Kadish's recent volume, *The Poetry of Haitian Independence* (2015), for instance, brings the poetry of early Haitian poets like Antoine Dupré, Juste Chanlatte, Jules Solime Milscent, and Jean-Baptiste Romane to a wider audience through translation; Catherine A. Reinhardt, in *Claims to Memory* (2006), has examined some of the memoirs of free people of color along with plays, letters, and pamphlets from French Saint-Domingue; and Chris Bongie has recently provided some groundbreaking information about Juste Chanlatte's role in the construction of the Haitian Declaration of Independence in his article, "The Cry of History: Juste Chanlatte and the Unsettling (Presence) of Race in Early Haitian Literature" (2015).

[13] Trouillot characterized pro-slavery European apologists's reactions to the Haitian Revolution as a form of epistemological silencing: "It did not *really* happen; it was not that bad, or that important" (*Silencing* 96). A similar "formula of erasure" and "formula of banalization" has been used against early Haitian authors: either they did not really write these narratives (a charge often made against Toussaint Louverture [for examples, see Desormeaux 135]) or even if they did, their narratives are not really that important. For a description of ways in which nineteenth-century Haitian writing has been "dismissed as a time blind imitation," see Dash "Nineteenth-Century Haiti and the Archipelago of the Americas" (46).

The omission of early Haitian writers from Afro-diasporic intellectual and literary history is unfortunate since nineteenth-century Haitian intellectuals and political leaders were some of the first people of color to systematically deconstruct the racist perspectives of Western philosophers, and Haiti was the first postcolonial state in the Americas to insist upon freedom and equality for all of its citizens.[14] The transformation of French colonial Saint-Domingue into sovereign Haiti contributed not only to the making of the modern world system but to contemporary ideas about the meanings of freedom and liberation. Rewriting early Haitian authors, alongside the Haitian revolutionaries themselves, back into the intellectual history of modern humanism is crucial to this project of tracing how Black Atlantic ideas have contributed to our modern sense of what it means to be free.

Although the idea of the absolute logic of freedom is typically attributed to European philosophers like Georg Wilhem Friedrich Hegel or Baruch Spinoza (Buck-Morss 60; Nesbitt, *Universal* 22–23), Toussaint Louverture, who probably never read either of them, also espoused the concept when he wrote, "It is not a circumstantial liberty conceded to us that we wish, but the unequivocal adoption of the principle that no man, whether he be born red, black or white, can become the property of his fellow men" (qtd. in Hutton 54). The founder of independent Haiti, Jean-Jacques Dessalines' 1805 constitution not only forever abolished slavery (Article 2), but declared all Haitians, regardless of skin color, class, or social status, to be "equal before the law" (Article 3), making Haiti the first state to explicitly outlaw prejudice (Article 14). Henry Christophe's 1807 constitution similarly forbade slavery in perpetuity (Article 2), and proscribed that "Any person, resident in the territory of Haiti, is free with all rights" (Article 1). Christophe's constitution was also explicitly anti-imperial. While Article 36 suggested that Haiti would not interfere in the affairs of neighboring colonies, Article 37 proclaimed, "The people of Haiti will never pursue any conquests outside of this island, and limits itself to conserving its own territory." Vastey, too, explicitly noted that Haitians did not desire to create a Caribbean empire when he wrote: "The revolution did not transfer from the whites to the blacks the question of control over the West Indies …

[14] Michael Drexler and Ed White's article, "The Constitution of Toussaint: Another Origin of African American Literature" (2010), is a step in the right direction towards recognizing these contributions.

Haiti is one of the islands of this archipelago and is not itself the Caribbean" (*Notes* 7).[15]

What needs to be emphasized here is Haiti's role in creating the circumstances for anti-slavery and anti-racism positionalities to be considered normative elements of American democracy, pushing back against ideas of inevitable historical progress that begin with Europe. Before Haitian independence in 1804, there was little to suggest that the wholesale abolition of transatlantic slavery was forthcoming or that the other islands in the Caribbean would eventually become decolonized. Similiarly, Haiti's connection to the anti-colonial/anti-conquest stance of postcolonial studies should not be taken for granted either, since in a very real sense the argument that empire was bad was derived from the first states of Haiti.

Despite increasing recognition of the centrality of the Haitian Revolution to political, philosophical, and intellectual histories of the modern world, scholars have had a difficult time incorporating discussions of early nineteenth-century Haitian political ideas into world-systems analyses. Immanuel Wallerstein, probably the most well-known of world-systems analysts, writes only of Haiti, "[t]he key element to remember is that there was a slave rebellion that succeeded, establishing the first Black state in the modern world-system, but that this state was marginalized and excluded by the world and other states in the Americas" (15). While the abstract state of Haiti has been painted as exceptionally isolated from the ideas of democracy governing the modern political world, Haitian leaders have been portrayed as autocratic rulers isolated from and by their own people. "Authoritarianism on the part of the government and political irresponsibility or apathy on the part of the mass of the population," David Nicholls writes, "have gone together in independent Haiti" (*From Dessalines* 246). Perpetuating the twin mythologies of the Haitian state's essential disconnectedness from world politics and the Haitian people's putative disregard for political participation

[15] Here, Vastey specifically refutes the writing of the former French colonist Malouet, who had written that "the [Haitian] revolution has transferred from the whites to the blacks the question of control over the Caribbean, and our unfortunate rivalries must give way in the face of the great interest in the region that is obviously developing" (*Collection de mémoires*, 4: 2). Christophe's Code had followed in the stead of Dessalines's constitution, which had mandated, "The Emperor will never form any enterprise with the view of conquest or of troubling the peace or domestic regimes of foreign colonies" (Art. 36).

and domestic governance,[16] contributes toward erasing the role of early Haitian political leaders in developing anti-slavery and anti-color prejudice policies more immediately associated with post-1848 France and the post-Civil War U.S. Moreover, the silencing of what Deborah Jenson has called the "radical anti-colonial" discourse of early Haiti obscures the "provocative recontextualization of the Enlightenment as an ideology both illuminated and refashioned" not only by "slaves or former slaves," (Jenson, "Malcom" 331) but also by the very real, as opposed to "apparent states" (Glick-Schiller and Fouron, *Georges Woke Up Laughing*, 27; Braziel, "Haiti, Guantánamo" 12) of early nineteenth-century Haiti.

It is important to affirm how the early state(s) of Haiti challenged the concept of (white) Enlightenment humanism with unequivocal proclamations of (black) liberty, and to emphasize Haiti's role in the implementation of universal equality as a democratic sine qua non. Haitian independence marks not only a signal transformation in the history of modern democracy, but the theories undergirding it contributed to contemporary philosophical ideas about what it means to be free and to live a good life: the Haitian state was the first to proclaim that no human beings could ever be enslaved by, for, or in the state. Acknowledging Vastey's own contributions to the intellectual fields we now call postcolonial studies and critical race theory allows us to emphasize the impact of the Haitian state on the decolonization of the Americas, as well as the involvement of the Haitian people in promoting the very ideas of racial equality that have shaped the trajectory of modern political theory.

Bringing early Haitian writing to the fore of Atlantic intellectual history also illuminates the contributions of nineteenth-century Haitian historians like Vastey to a discourse of historicizing slavery that has been much more closely associated with either U.S. or European abolitionists and/or later nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Anglophone African American and Caribbean writers. Vastey was one of the most prolific and widely read historians of color in the nineteenth century on both sides of the Atlantic, leading one early nineteenth-century U.S. newspaper editor to refer to him as "the Alpha and Omega of Haytian intellect and literature" (see, Daut, "The 'Alpha and Omega'"). Even though the 1971 Annual Report of the Library Company of Philadelphia

[16] For a recent counter to the idea of Haiti's disconnectedness from world politics and general isolation from the world powers in the nineteenth century, see Julia Gaffield's meticulous, *Haitian Connections in the Atlantic World: Recognition After Revolution* (2015).

wrote that Vastey was not only "a pioneer […] in positive black thinking, but [he] probably [produced] the first scholarly, serious socio-ethnological study by a Negro" (52), there has been little attempt to produce sustained comparative study within the larger history of the African diaspora of Vastey's efforts to document the habits of mind and daily experiences of the enslaved.[17]

Including discussions of Haitian authors within histories that study black people writing about other black people, which in many ways "followed the creation of the Haitian republic," to use Ifeoma Nwankwo's words (20), might seem like common sense. The striking reality is that early Haitian writers have been historically disregarded or dismissed as directly contributing to the development of the kinds of anti-colonial and anti-racist intellectual discourse more immediately associated with later black writers, including W.E.B. Du Bois.[18] This often occurs because of (mis)perceptions about early Haitian authors' usage of the French language and/or pre-conceived notions about the connection between their skin color or class and their political and ideological affiliations.

Vastey's own position as the son of an affluent French enslaver also complicates our understanding of the relationship of class and color to nineteenth-century black emancipationist and twentieth-century black radical writing and the genealogies that link them together. Baron de Vastey was the phenotypically white son of a French colonist from

[17] Passing comparisons of Vastey's writing to central figures of the Enlightenment, Négritude, and the U.S. American abolitionist movement can hint at the kind of rhetorical resonance that Vastey's style of writing calls forth in readers of his works. Vastey's centrality to theorizing a post-slavery Atlantic World has led scholar Laurie Maffly-Kipp to compare his writing style to that of the Enlightenment thinker Baron de Montesquieu and the abolitionists David Walker and William Lloyd Garrison (Maffly-Kipp, 62). David Nicholls, J. Michael Dash, and Chris Bongie have all seen similarities between Vastey's writing and the anti-colonialist thought of Frantz Fanon (Dash, *Literature and Ideology* 4; Nicholls, "Pompée," 130; Bongie, *Friends* 228). For my own part, I have written about Vastey in connection with both Aimé Césaire and Jean-Paul Sartre's much later theorizations of colonialism as a system (Daut 2008, 52–53).

[18] Haitian intellectuals have long been attuned to the importance of Vastey's writings. For example, the literary historian Duraciné Vaval (1933) once wrote, "One does not know history, if one is not familiar with the works of Vastey (129)." I suggest, however, that it is not necessarily Haitian intellectual historians who need to remember early Haitian writers, but rather that transnational American, transatlantic, and Afrodiasporic scholars from Europe and the rest of the Americas have been slow to include early Haitian authors in their considerations of early Caribbean and other Black Atlantic print cultures.

Normandy and a free woman of color from a wealthy plantation owning family in Saint-Domingue. Yet, despite having possibly owned slaves himself as a young man in the French-controlled colony, Vastey aligned himself with Dessalines's *armée indigène* during the war of Haitian independence and subsequently became one of the most important officials in the government of the only sovereign, free and black state of the Americas under King Henry Christophe I. Nevertheless, assumptions about Vastey's life, including his social and economic status, his status as enslaved or free(d), as well as his race and skin color, have overdetermined interpretations of his writings.[19]

In scholarship on the Caribbean and the Atlantic World as a whole, where Vastey is discussed at all, he is most often discursively referred to and sometimes even dismissed as an "ideologist," a "propagandist," or a mere "publicist."[20] These characterizations highlight a tension in interpretations of Vastey's works. Because radical European intellectual traditions often view themselves as completely removed from the violence of state power, scholars have had a difficult time thinking about how to read the works of a phenotypically white and European educated Haitian intellectual who was also a member of the Haitian state. Vastey's works need to be seen, however, as a part of a tradition of Black Atlantic humanism that can be traced to post-independence Haiti and which reflects the complicated positions of power occupied by the former slaves and free people of color of the first black independent state of the Americas.

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[19] Although I aim in this work to present the most comprehensive biographical information available on Vastey to date, this work is not a biography and cannot purport to provide anything more than a speculative assessment of the relationship of Vastey's life in colonial Saint-Domingue under slavery to his works. But Vastey's personal history is central to this analysis of his role in the origins of Black Atlantic humanism, if only because his life helps to partially explain why a phenotypically white writer who became one of the most ardent and popular anti-slavery and anti-colonial writers of the nineteenth-century Atlantic World, fell into virtual obscurity in twentieth-century histories of race and decolonization.

[20] The idea that Vastey is a "propagandist," "ideologist," "publicist," and/or an "ideologue" is repeated in nearly all works that discuss him at length. See, Sepinwall, "Exporting the Revolution;" Dain 125; Cole 1967, 220; Griggs and Prator, 44; Dash, "Before and Beyond Negritude," 53; S. Fisher, 311 ftn13; Lewis, *Main Currents in Caribbean Thought*, 218; Maffly-Kip 56; Castera 45; Davis, *Inhuman* 174; Garraway, "Introduction" 17ftn12. Vastey's biographer refers to him as an "ideologue implacable" (Quevilly 244), and the twentieth-century translator of Vastey's *Le Système colonial dévoilé*, Chris Bongie, calls Vastey the "principal ideologue" of the northern kingdom (*Friends* 227).

Vastey's *Le Système* can provide a material example of the possibilities and the complications of such post-revolutionary collaboration of the state with both an intellectual class and the broader mass of people in Haiti. Even though Vastey had never been enslaved, he claimed that he had spoken to the dead as well as to the formerly enslaved (including consulting their maimed bodies) to produce what he called "these testimonies" in *Le Système* (40). In using his writing to collaborate with the dead and those who lacked the opportunity to publish their own words, Vastey spoke both from a position of power and produced intimate knowledge from below of the physical, social, and spiritual ramifications of enslavement. His methodology, which combines oral history with textual analysis, provides a unique example of adaptive strategies of narration that have come to be associated with diasporic and indigenous forms of storytelling. Vastey's writings collectivize the experience of slavery to ground a critique of colonialism and racism in a form of witnessing that approaches the collaborative genre of the "testimonio," usually associated with twentieth-century Latin American writing.

This form of collaboration—a writer using his own privileged voice as a stand-in for the relatively powerless one of the people—also makes Vastey's *Le Système* both similar and dissimilar to prior black writing about slavery. Nicole Aljoe has written that one distinguishing feature of Anglophone slave narratives from the Caribbean is the "floating 'I," which she says "has the grammatical status of what linguists call a 'shifter', a linguistic function that can be assumed by anyone" (18). This "shifter" is important to Aljoe's analysis of eighteenth and nineteenth-century "creole testimonies" from the British-claimed Caribbean because, as she contends, "every West Indian slave narrative is explicitly mediated in some way—by a white transcriber, editor, or translator" (14). What makes Vastey's writing different from these Anglophone "creole testimonies" is that it is not just Vastey who acts as a mediator between the enslaved and the never enslaved, but the anti-slavery Haitian state also fills in the role of mediator, at least metaphorically.

In *Le Système*, Vastey suggests that he had collected his descriptions of slave tortures and punishments from the formerly enslaved themselves in service of the king. His use of the royal *we* makes him, as a member of the Haitian state, similar to literary history's other mediators, such as those found in Anglophone slave narratives. But Vastey officially makes the depredations of the slave's life a metonymy for the history of all Haitians by channeling these narratives through the state. In *Le Système*