

Professor Accilien

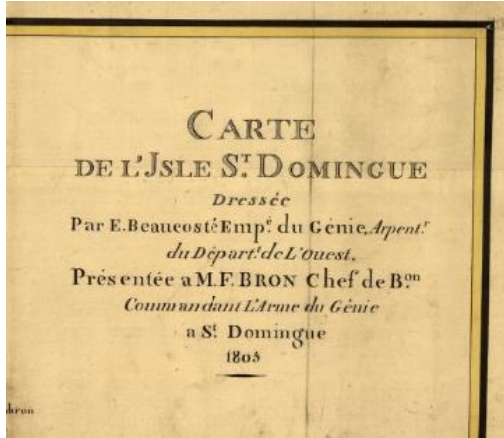
HNRS190: Art Connection: Haiti and Louisiana

15 November 2018

Haitian Independence as Depicted in Historical Maps

When the island of Haiti was first found by Christopher Columbus in 1492, it was immediately established as a territory dominated by the white male invaders and their dependence on slavery. To advance the agricultural development of the land and the profits gained, the natives of the island were enslaved, and additional African slaves were brought in for labor. A power vacuum quickly developed in Hispaniola in which the white settlers gained more and more influence as agricultural trade increased while those forced into the institution of slavery saw no means of escape. As the French settled the western side of the island in 1625, entitling their territory Saint-Domingue, the same power structure was also instituted. Despite the oppression faced, slaves and natives rebelled against their slavers and fought to create an independent Haiti, succeeding in this effort in 1804. This revolution was radical in that it was the first successful slave revolution that resulted in a free nation and many powerful countries that utilized slavery did not know how to respond to this success. Despite being free, Haiti still lacked the power that other western countries enjoyed, including France and the United States of America. These countries had the control and were able to produce biased information about the country of Haiti to the citizens of the world. Maps created of western territories and the United States demonstrate that these countries censored information about the success of Haiti and refused to acknowledge any aspect of their existence in an attempt to stop additional slave rebellions and to keep a nation of freed natives and Africans subordinate to their power and influence.

Throughout the years leading up to and during the Haitian Revolution, France was also experiencing its own revolution at home from 1789 to 1799. Despite their own people's thirst for freedom, France maintained control of various colonies including Saint-Domingue. After the revolution symbolically started in 1791, France fought back for control of the territory. In a map



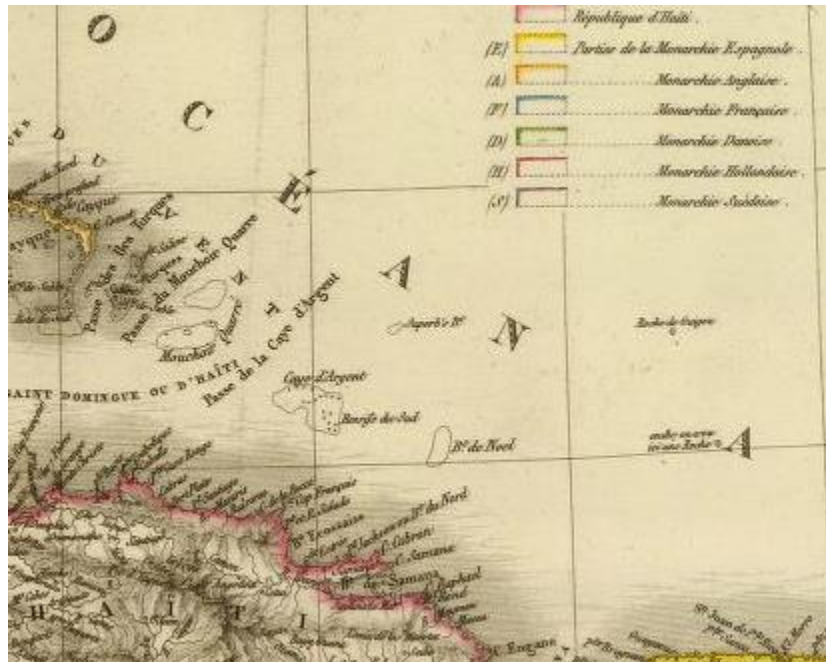
created in 1805, 4 years after Toussaint Louverture captured Santo Domingo and the Spanish had already left the eastern side of Hispaniola, the whole island of Haiti was still represented as St. Domingue, showing no evidence that the people of Haiti had declared independence. Additionally, the map states it was made

for the commander of the French army in St. Domingue, creating a perplexing situation in which the artist was acknowledging the fighting taking place, and therefore was obviously aware that the rebels had gained control by that point, but refused to show this change in leadership on his map of the island. This contradiction suggests that France refused to recognize the success of the rebels because of their own pride and ignorance. By 1794 France had formally freed all slaves in their colonies, yet still failed to admit that these freed slaves had completely gained their independence in Haiti. France was able to identify that these African slaves were in fact people that deserved rights in 1794 when slaves were freed, but most likely embarrassed by the loss of control of the island, they would not even give Haiti recognition on the map. France was denying its loss and simultaneously voicing their views that while slaves may be freed, they still belonged to a subordinate race that needed to be controlled and guided by Caucasian men. With the privilege of being an established and well respected predominantly white nation, they believed

that just because they were a world power they had the authority to decide if Haiti could be deemed a true country or not.

Unable to humbly accept that they were in the wrong for enslaving and controlling nations that were not originally their own, France did not formally recognize Haiti as a country

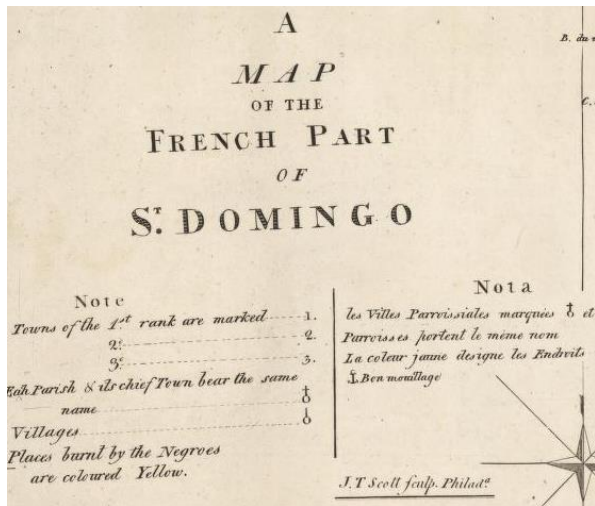
until 1825, over 20 years after the original conflict. This long overdue recognition can be seen in a French map from 1828 in which Haiti is outlined in pink and in the key entitled the Republique d'Haiti. France was a powerful nation accustomed to having control



over others and because of this blinding privilege could not see that Haiti had the right to govern itself. It was not until much later than acceptable that the leaders of France were finally able to accept that Haiti had become its own nation of capable freed ex-slaves entitled to governing itself.

As a newly established nation, the United States held a surprising amount of power in the world at the time of Haitian independence. As a country rooted in slavery, the U.S. refused to acknowledge Haiti as that would have been an admission that their own institution was in fact immoral and inhumane. As a country that had recently fought to gain their independence, the United States was extremely hypocritical in their refusal to acknowledge Haiti, compounded by the fact that Haitian natives and freed slaves aided the U.S. in their fight against the British

during the Revolutionary War by traveling to Savannah, Georgia to fight side by side with the American revolutionaries. Yet the greed and thirst for power was too strong in the leaders of the United States and Haiti was not recognized. In a map created in Philadelphia in 1818 there is blatant disrespect to the Haitian people and disregard of their hard-fought independence. The



map is entitled, “A Map of the French Part of St. Domingo,” years after France had lost control of the nation and many different independent Haitian governments had already been established and overthrown, including the Kingdom of Haiti in the north in 1811. The only mention of the revolts at all is in the note section

where it states, “places burnt by the Negroes are colored Yellow.” An entire revolution and establishment of a new nation in which slaves were finally able to be free was reduced to a seemingly disgusting act of violence by an inferior group of people against the wonderful nation of France. To recognize the country for what it was would have been to admit that people of color had the intelligence and skills to govern themselves, and as a nation vying for world power, the U.S. could not afford to chance Haiti inspiring their own slaves to revolt as they were the labor source exploited to fuel the economy and promote the United States’ success. The leaders of the U.S. wielded their power to camouflage the existence of Haiti from the people of their own nation, going as far as creating false maps to defend their practices.

It wasn’t until 1862, during the U.S. Civil War that the United States formally recognized the Republic of Haiti. By this point, the south had seceded from the union and the north had abolished slavery, creating a situation in which Abraham Lincoln could accept that Haiti was a

nation without fear of the country losing control of the slaves. This long overdue acceptance is shown in a Philadelphian map from 1862, the very year the U.S. recognized Haiti. This detailed map of North America labels the country as the Republic of Hayti, for the first time accepting their independence and sharing this knowledge with the citizens of the United States. Yet, by this point the recognition was not truly valued. Though



the U.S. was finally admitting at that time that slavery was an immoral institution, the act of recognizing Haiti was more of a political act than a celebration of equality. Accepting Haiti would promote their own agenda of regaining the southern states and bringing the nation back together. Abraham Lincoln had been president since 1860 but waited until the Civil War had commenced and the north needed a cause to fight for to take the time to formally acknowledge that Haiti even existed. This showcases the corrupt power structure of world politics in which controlling nations only do what is most convenient for them—what will gain them more supremacy. Haiti, though at least now seen as a country, was still just a small nation with no status itself being used as a pawn by the powerful countries of the world so they could more easily get what they want and gain even greater influence and authority.

After Haitians fought so nobly for their well-deserved independence, it was solely a result of privilege that two of the most powerful nations in the world refused to accept them for the strong autonomous nation that they were. Full of pride and self-importance, both France and the U.S. made decisions for the sole purpose of promoting their own agendas to maintain control.

Using their influence over their own people and other countries of the world, both manipulated the maps that they produced, providing false information that cloaked the success of Haiti for their own selfish reasons. This not only speaks to the dangers of ignorance and all-powerful governments, but the importance of art and images in politics. Art is a very powerful medium that can be used to create change but can also be used as propaganda and an effective method of misinforming the populace. The power and influence the privileged in society have over art must be monitored and fought constantly by those experiencing oppression to create free thinking and just societies. It is crucial to think independently and fight for change as the Haitian revolutionaries did all those years ago to discourage powerful countries from continuing acts such as those committed against Haiti. Despite not being acknowledged by most nations of the world, these Haitians were sure of their own worth and fought against the corrupt power structure of the world to initiate change and pave the way for the dissolution of slavery.

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