Introduction

This book begins where so many others conclude: 1804. On January 1, 1804, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, general of the Armée Indigène, proclaimed the independent state of Haiti, marking the triumphant end to thirteen years of revolutionary fighting and over three centuries of colonial rule. The year 1804 also marked the end of the redemptive possibilities of a utopian revolution and the beginning of the fraught project of postcolonial, antislavery statehood.¹ Recent scholarship has begun to explore the challenges that Atlantic world powers posed to Haitian sovereignty and legitimacy during the Age of Revolution,² but there existed an equally important internal challenge to Haiti’s post-independence sovereignty: a civil war between those who envisioned an anticolonial, antislavery empire and those who wished to establish a liberal republic. Yet this post-1804 context of empire and civil war remains shrouded, silenced in North Atlantic scholarship on Haiti in part because of what we desire 1804 to be: a radical, liberal, universal revolution.³ The authoritarian nature of the post-1804 state troubles that narrative from its very first moments, acts, words, and texts.

I argue that this civil war context is central to understanding Haiti’s long postcolonial nineteenth century: the foundational political, intellectual, and regional tensions that constitute Haiti’s fundamental plurality.⁴ Considerable work has been dedicated to unearthing the uneven and unequal production of historical narratives about Haiti in the wake of Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s groundbreaking Silencing the Past, but many more narratives—namely, those produced from within Haitian historiography and literary history—remain to be questioned and deconstructed. In this book, I unearth and continually probe the conceptually generative possibilities of Haiti’s postrevolutionary divisions, something the current historiographic framework on Haiti’s long postcolonial nineteenth century fails to fully apprehend. Through close readings of original print sources (pamphlets, newspapers, literary magazines, ge-
ographies, histories, poems, and novels), I shed light on the internal realities, tensions, and pluralities that shaped the aftermath of the Haitian Revolution to reveal the process of contestation, mutual definition, and continual (re)inscription of Haiti’s meaning throughout its long nineteenth century.

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We need only consider the persistent slippage in North Atlantic scholarship between 1804 and 1806, between the foundation of an anticolonial, antislavery state and the foundation of a republic, to see the need for such a study. Historians regularly mislabel 1804 as a republican revolution when in fact it ushered in a postcolonial state, then empire. Not only that: the secretaries and military leaders behind the textual performance of Haitian independence in the nation’s foundational documents did their best to avoid referring to the events of 1804 as a “revolution” altogether. It was the 1806 assassination of Jean-Jacques Dessalines and overthrow of his empire, orchestrated by a faction of pro-republican military leaders, that cast itself as the true republican revolution. A similar clarification is in order for Haiti’s label as the “first black republic”: the problematic part of this formulation is not “first black,” but “republic.” Haiti was incontestably the first independent anticolonial black state in the hemisphere, but it was also a self-proclaimed empire. Civil war between republicans and Christophean monarchists divided the independent nation from 1807 to 1820, until Haiti finally unified under a republican form of government. Even then, the republic was far from inevitable: for nearly a century it remained embroiled in civil war, secessionist regimes, and the threat—and briefly, reality—of a return to empire.

To begin to make sense of the unrelenting obscurity in the naming and meaning of one of the decisive world historical events of Western modernity, we must start at the beginning of the postcolonial state: its civil war, ideological inscriptions, and partisan narrative constructions that were ultimately emplotted into the myth of the inevitable republic after 1820. My exploration of the discursive “making” of the Haitian Republic and its myth(s)—the stories that get told about it and the beliefs that result from them—is in no way intended to dim the project of Haitian independence and the very real material, political, and embodied
transformations that the Haitian Revolution brought about. Instead, I take aim at the received notions and teleological narratives that lead us to confound the republicanism of 1806 with the radical anticolonial gesture of 1804, which belonged to a different set of political beliefs. That is: North Atlantic scholars’ conflation of 1804 and 1806 is not a repeated slip-up, but the result of a blind spot created by the myth of the inevitable republic. The problem of 1804/1806, of empire/republic, reveals something profound about the way scholars read, write, and ultimately (mis)understand Haitian history: a failure to account for the foundational tensions at work in the postrevolutionary civil war and their reverberations throughout Haiti’s long nineteenth century.

I begin this work by disentangling the multiple meanings of liberté in contestation—and mutual constitution—at work in Haiti’s post-independence civil wars between the nation’s foundational, oppositional ideological factions: republicans and Dessalineans. Through a close reading of the print production of each, I reveal two very different conceptions of Haiti’s place within the progressive universalist claims of the Enlightenment—conceptions in tension that shaped the politics and writing of Haiti’s long nineteenth century. Writing and, indeed, the very meaning of literature were central to the political contests that unfolded between these two factions. Literature and literariness were concepts self-consciously and politically deployed—and resisted—in the guerre de plume, or paper war, in post-independence Haiti. Paper itself became the battleground upon which the civil war was waged.

While this book destabilizes the monolithic or homogeneous idea of Haiti through a long-view immersion in its archive, the discoveries I unlock in the process have consequences for a much wider set of fields, including Francophone and world literary studies, studies of the postcolonial Global South, and black radical studies. My reading of post-independence Haitian writing reveals key insights into the nature of literature, its relation to freedom and politics, and how fraught and politically loaded the concepts of “literature” and “civilization” really are. The competing ideas of liberté, writing, and civilization at work in postcolonial Haiti have consequences for the way we think about Haiti’s role—as an idea and a discursive interlocutor—in the elaboration of black radicalism and black Atlantic, anticolonial, and decolonial thought. For what could be more transparent than the idea of liberty in
the context of the Haitian Revolution? Yet once we look past the idea of Haiti and embrace its plurality, we begin to grasp the plurality of the seemingly monolithic, self-evident concept of *liberté*.

The Many Meanings of Liberty: Dessalinean Critique of Western Episteme

In early post-independence Haitian writing, we see two drastically different versions of postcolonial statehood vying for hegemony: possible futures for an abolitionist black state that differed precisely according to their conceptions of *liberté*. To be sure, the leading political factions of the period—Dessalineans and republicans—agreed that *liberté* meant freedom from chattel slavery. They nevertheless differed on the meaning of *liberté* as it related to rights, especially individual rights, and on the best political program for the future postcolonial state. Did *liberté* mean independence from colonial rule, or did it mean freedom from arbitrary government and the guarantee of individual rights? What differed—indeed, what was fundamentally at odds between the two—were the intellectual and philosophical bases upon which this conception of *liberté* was constructed and performed. In many ways they were mutually exclusive, constituted in dialogic opposition in the civil war and *guerre de plume* in the first two decades of independence (1804–1820). These very different conceptions of *liberté* were crucial to each faction’s self-imagining and self-representation within Haiti and the wider revolutionary Atlantic.

Republicans wanted *liberté* to encompass the meaning associated with political liberalism and Enlightenment universalism. *Liberté* meant individual rights, political equality, and the active contestation of any arbitrary government (though it often fell short of these ideals in practice). Haitian republicans embraced the revolutionary language of France’s short-lived First Republic, and saw an opportunity to make independent Haiti into the last remaining site of liberal republicanism after it faltered in France. For republicans, humanity—universal equality—was guaranteed by the philosophy of Enlightenment liberalism taken to its most radical, egalitarian conclusion. Conversely, Dessalineans meant *liberté* primarily as independence from colonial rule and not as a guarantee of individual rights,
very much akin to the *liberté générale* maintained by Toussaint Louverture. Dessalines’s state-turned-empire placed anticolonial independence above all else, such that individual liberties had to be sacrificed to the greater cause of sovereign statehood. Dessalineans flexed their radical anticolonialism and actively worked to put that political agenda out into the Atlantic world. Thus, theirs was an antiliberal *liberté*, in the sense that they directly questioned the utility of political liberalism in their fledgling anticolonial, antislavery state and challenged the putative universalism of the Enlightenment. For Dessalineans, humanity was guaranteed through their own act of self-liberation, wresting it from those who purported to grant it by defining it through their own words, acts, and terms.

By insisting on these internal tensions at work in Haiti’s early post-independence intellectual and political project, I aim to add further complexity and precision to the vital question of Haiti’s Enlightenment critique. In her superb conception of Black Atlantic humanism, Marlene Daut theorizes a Haitian intellectual project that worked to “disrupt the Enlightenment philosophies that undergirded colonial slavery and colonial racism” by countering the European discourses of black dehumanization that underwrote slavery. She casts Haitian independence and the foundational texts that narrated it as a radical assertion of black humanity and a critique of the systems of oppression that underwrote Enlightenment humanism. Crucially, however, I argue that this radical critique was achieved by a faction of Haitian post-independence writers and thinkers—Dessalineans—who elaborated it as much in opposition to the republican faction within Haiti as to the larger Atlantic world. I am insisting that we see a more complex and complicated picture of factionalism and intellectual formation in tension: between a republican faction that performed itself as the purest and most radical instantiation of Enlightenment humanism (color-blind, antislavery, pro-equality) in the Western Hemisphere, and a Dessalinean faction whose members *critiqued* Enlightenment universalism because they saw it as fundamentally flawed. By foregrounding these internal tensions, I reveal civil war factionalism as generative for the Dessalinean critique of the Western tradition, and of the republican performance of its purest instantiation. That is: the black humanistic tradition that Daut defines was born out of these two strands
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of Haitian thought—the critique of Western Enlightenment liberalism and the embrace of its most radical possibilities—that were mutually constituted in opposition. What is more, these tensions around Enlightenment thought (the meaning of humanity, civilization, liberty) produced conversation and conflict throughout Haiti’s long nineteenth century, with various intellectual and political factions continuing to evoke, repurpose, and deploy them within a larger set of Atlantic connections. In many ways, my book traces the long postrevolutionary history of what Lyonel Trouillot has termed the “modèle Dessalines”: the continual return by various political regimes and intellectual projects to the radical heritage of Dessalinean critique cut short in 1806.10

My book’s emphasis on the specifically Dessalinean contours of Haiti’s Enlightenment critique has important consequences for the study of black radical political and intellectual thought.11 If, as Anthony Bogues has argued, black radical thought serves as a “counterpoint” to the “progressive universalist claims” of modernity, Dessalinean thought goes a step further.12 As Grégory Pierrot has recently argued, Dessalinean political thought was “a bold attempt at lighting a beacon beyond the confines of white Western thoughts.”13 Dessalinean thought challenged—critiqued—the progressive universalist claims of the Enlightenment in real time, as they were being put into practice in the revolutionary Atlantic. Dessalinean thought instantiated an anticolonial, antislavery state and a people that challenged the Enlightenment’s putatively universal self-framing by positing—and living—alternative epistemologies and ontologies. We find a critical, negative idea of French republican liberty at work in the Dessalinean 1804 Acte de l’indépendance. We see a similar critique of Enlightenment universalism in Article 14 of Dessalines’s 1805 imperial constitution, which proclaimed all Haitians under the general denomination “Noirs.”14 Sibylle Fischer has argued that Article 14 “both asserts egalitarian and universalist intuitions and puts them to a test.”15 By insisting on color, Dessalines’s imperial constitution rejected the notion of color-blind republicanism born, at least in part, out of the fight for equality among lettered, propertied free men of color in Saint-Domingue. We might go further still: Dessalines’s imperial constitution recognized the limits—perhaps even the trap—of Enlightenment universalism for black, unlettered, and unpropertied men in the Atlantic world. This critique was not limited to Dessalines’s short-lived gov-
ernment, but found purchase under those who took up his ideological mantle. This book thus unearths the obscured intellectual tradition that troubles republicanism and the putative universalism of Enlightenment liberalism throughout Haiti’s long nineteenth century.

Dessalineans founded an anticolonial, antislavery state, and then an empire, all the while resisting the only other viable anticolonial state formation in the hemisphere: the republic. It nevertheless bears repeating: Dessalineans challenged and resisted Enlightenment universalism not because they were “premodern,” “uncivilized,” or any other teleological term that has been retroactively applied to the imperial state and its aberrance within the liberal order. Dessalineans challenged and critiqued the liberal bourgeois order—political liberalism, republicanism, and Enlightenment humanism—because of its basis in chattel slavery. It was always already flawed: its exclusionary conception of white, European normativity placed clear limits on a black polity. Dessalineans initiated—and embodied—what Anthony Bogues calls the “heresy” of the black radical intellectual: “becoming human” by “overturning white/European normativity.”

Following both Daut’s powerful notion of a genealogy of Black Atlantic humanism and Deborah Jenson’s presentation of “Dessalines’s documents” as a “dialogic foundation in a longer chain of radical African diasporan thinkers,” the archive of Dessalinean counterhegemonic texts offers one—though certainly not singular—discursive origin point of radical black thought. The textual and discursive practices of vindication and refutation, key aspects of black radical writing, are already instantiated in Dessalinean writing, as we shall see in this book. The spirit of Dessalinean critique of Western episteme translated and traveled to contexts outside Haiti, as we can see in the form, style, and rhetoric of many radical black thinkers.

By placing Dessalinean thought within the context of black radical thought, I aim to clarify the notion that early Haitian intellectual thought “anticipates” or should be seen as “prophetic” of the postmodern condition. Dessalinean thought and political action constituted a radical critique that revealed the abstractions upon which Enlightenment thought relied, and how these abstractions denied the forms of oppression the project itself depended upon. As a scholar firmly ensconced in a system of valuation and legibility dictated by Western episteme, I have often found myself reaching for Derrida or Butler as a
useful shorthand (and a “valuable,” legible one in the Western academy) to index a praxis and a political project that Haitian writers had already established.\textsuperscript{22} Dessalinean thought unmasked, deconstructed, and de-centered the Western tradition \textit{in formation} at the turn of the nineteenth century. Indeed, I would argue that this is why the idea of Haiti is so useful and its revolution such a central event for artistic reimagining in black radical thought: as a subject, it carries with it the full weight of its Enlightenment critique. Haiti’s very existence questioned Western episteme: the first Haitian words, the first Haitian acts pointed out the system’s fundamental structural flaws. From the very beginning, Haiti resisted organizing itself according to Western principles.\textsuperscript{23} Perversely, it is for these same reasons that Haiti is also a near-obsession for nativists and white supremacists throughout the world who instrumentalize Haiti’s “failed state” status as proof of the impossibility of a nonwhite, non-Western black state.\textsuperscript{24}

It is also because of its challenge to Western episteme that radical Dessalinean thought was rendered “unthinkable” in Haitian national history, internally by those Haitians committed to casting the nation within the dominant Western norms of civilization and humanism, and externally by those foreign powers whose own systems of oppression depended upon silencing Haiti’s radical critique of the West. As Bogues argues, black radical intellectual production is unthinkable only insofar as it challenges “the epistemic limits established by the Western intellectual tradition.”\textsuperscript{25} In the case of the revolution, scholars have overlooked or been unable to assimilate Dessalinean critique precisely because of the extent to which it challenges and refuses Western political modernity.\textsuperscript{26} In contrast, republicans did not fundamentally change the terms of the debate set out by Enlightenment universalism—they did not refute Western episteme, but rather sought to perform their revolution within the hegemonic terms of Western Enlightenment: individual reason, autonomy, civilization, perfectibility. Thus, the republican elements are “seeable,” thinkable, and able to be recuperated within a Western paradigm. In these terms, we see why scholars and histories have privileged the republican faction, pushing the Dessalinean faction to the margins of history. Dessalineans questioned the terms of the debate set out by Enlightenment universalism, and insisted on a system of thought that could hold both their fundamental blackness and their
fundamental humanity. This set them upon a different path, working to subvert and deconstruct the dominant Western paradigm with the creation of a black antislavery empire. There is also a logic in this choice of state formation: to serve a majority-illiterate population of former slaves, recalling the traditions of African kingdoms and performative, symbolic public power made a lot of sense. The choice made more sense, in many ways, than republicanism, which by 1804 was an embattled ideology in the Atlantic world and would remain so for much of the nineteenth century. But once we recognize and move beyond the limiting, silencing domain of the Western tradition, Haiti’s long nineteenth-century heritage of Dessalinean critique becomes legible once more. As we shall see in this book, Haitian writers like Emile Nau defined Haitians’ humanity and civilization not by their ability to measure up to Atlantic standards, but by their act of resistance—of reclaiming their human rights through violence against an inherently violent world system. Louis Joseph Janvier returned to Dessalinean critiques to point out the forms of oppression that were always at work in putatively liberal systems, and to define an idea of Haitian civilization that was forged in concert with, in opposition to, and as a constant challenge to the ideals of Enlightenment liberalism.

The stakes of what I’m proposing here are high. Let me address them head-on by returning to scholars’ “desire” to see Haiti as a utopian or redemptive republic that I mentioned in my opening gambit. What does it mean to assert that a faction—perhaps a majority—of Haitian intellectual and political thought engages in an antiliberal critique of the Enlightenment? What difficult, thorny questions does this bring up for our own investment in the universal Enlightenment and in Western political modernity? What does it mean to give full due to the discomfiting realities of violent antislavery anticolonialism in Dessaline’s independence, which privileged an imperial government that assured freedom from chattel slavery but eschewed any sense of individual rights? In my work, this has meant confronting the specter of anti-Enlightenment integral nationalism and fascism within Haiti. It raises with it the very real histories of Haitian intellectuals’ alignment with the anti-Enlightenment thought that gained prominence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Europe (especially in Francophone spheres of influence), and ultimately, the Duvalier dictatorship, which co-opted the long
heritage of Dessalinean critique of Western episteme into the service of a fascist, anti-Enlightenment political regime. Here, I am offering an alternative to what Robert Fatton has labeled Haiti’s “authoritarian habitus” to explain the roots of the Duvalier dictatorship in Haiti. In my analysis, there is something much more complex, and indeed tragic, at work in Haiti’s 150 years of political and intellectual history. The tragedy, it seems to me, is how Duvalier co-opted and converted Haiti’s radical Enlightenment critique in the service of his fascist dictatorship. Duvalier marshalled the pathbreaking, radical, brilliant critiques of racism and systems of oppression instantiated in Haiti’s anticolonial independence, and used them to systematically oppress, terrorize, and dehumanize his own people for a generation.

Beyond the Bourgeois Public Sphere

The concept of “literature” is equally bound up in the transformations of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that shaped Haiti’s divergent meanings of liberté. Once we evoke the radical critique of Enlightenment liberalism, we can no longer assume the category of “literature” itself to be static or politically neutral. Raymond Williams has long cautioned us against taking “literature” naïvely at face value. In his woefully underutilized socio-historicization of the concept, Williams reminds us that literature is a “specific sociohistorical development of writing,” a process of development that engages “a powerful and often forbidding system of abstraction, in which the concept of ‘literature’ becomes actively ideological.” Prior to the Enlightenment era, the term literature simply denoted “a condition of reading: of being able to read and of having read.” During the eighteenth century the concept of “literature” developed from its previous, broader meaning of “literacy,” toward the more specialized—and exclusive—notion of “creative’ or ‘imaginative’ works” of quality that were distinct from utilitarian or non-imaginative writing. The concept of “criticism” emerged alongside this modern form of “literature” to mean “the conscious exercise of ‘taste,’ ‘sensibility,’ and ‘discrimination.’”

Writers and actors at the time were making these distinctions and engaging with the emergent concepts of literature and criticism. When we disentangle our contemporary definitions and valuations of the
concept of literature and actually historicize it, we see how invested it is in the transformations of the period and the political work it does as a category. My reflection here builds on recent scholarship that directly addresses this question of literature and authorship in early Haitian writing, particularly Chris Bongie’s vital critique of Francophone postcolonial literary criticism. Yet where previous scholars have endeavored to recuperate early Haitian writing as literary, my work makes no such claims. Instead, I prefer to point out the problem with this kind of “question” in the first place, which is bound up in the practice of literary criticism and the bourgeois public sphere. Put otherwise, if cultural studies theory has come to terms with the limits and possibilities of Jürgen Habermas’s bourgeois conception of the public sphere, the notion of an all-encompassing rational, “modern,” yet narrowly defined bourgeois public sphere nevertheless remains unchecked and unmarked in our literary critical praxis. Let me first rehearse briefly Habermas’s arguments about the structural transformations of the public sphere and bourgeois society before engaging some recent debates in world literature and hermeneutics that reveal the limits of the Habermasian modern literary paradigm.

Habermas establishes the putative rupture between “premodern” (pre-Enlightenment) and “modern” (post-eighteenth-century) practices of textual production and consumption. The Enlightenment-era emergence of a bourgeois public sphere broke with what he deemed the “monarchical” and “feudal” (but also religious) practices of textual production and hermeneutics based in performance, memorization, recitation, symbolic representation, and the mystique of authority. The emergence of a literary public sphere, based in individual reason, judgment, critical reflection, and debate between private citizens, made possible the emergence of a political public sphere. Habermas’s autonomous subject exercised private reason, critique, and judgment with other such private individuals to make meaning and create a shared opinion, which led to the self-reflection of an individual’s role in society and the emergence of rationally constituted public opinion that challenged the authority of the state.

Critical interrogations of Habermas’s concept of the public sphere have long insisted on the exclusions of this white, male, propertied sphere as well as the myth of its singularity. Despite the nonbourgeois
“alternative” counterpublics that various post-Habermasian critics have highlighted, few, if any, have attended to counterpublics that reject the liberal, putatively modern practices of textual production and hermeneutics that Habermas establishes as dominant. Here, we can look to some recent critical engagements with world literature and hermeneutics questioning this narrow conceptualization of reading and writing practices that obscures many other uses of texts. Specialists in non-Western literatures reveal the degree to which “literature” as concept is never neutral, casting in its shadow “textual forms and modes of experience no longer thinkable in a modern literary paradigm.” From this perspective, what Pascale Casanova has identified as the “world republic of letters” begins to look quite reductive for its privileging of a bourgeois, liberal conception of secular, autonomous, reasoned critical reading practices to the exclusion of many other kinds of texts and readings. If indeed the practice of literary criticism and bourgeois liberal modernity are mutually constitutive, then these scholars’ call for alternative hermeneutics is especially urgent.

Put in these terms, we begin to see the problem of applying Williams’s “abstract retrospective concept” of literature, devoid of its context or its ideological content, to early post-independence Haitian writing that emerged precisely during the period in which literature, liberalism, and even liberty itself were highly contested and debated terms within post-independence Haiti. Building on these post-Habermasian critiques, I am interested here in the way that a faction of Haiti’s print sphere was elaborated precisely in critique and refusal of the bourgeois literary public sphere and its “modern” praxis of textual production and hermeneutics. That is, I am working against the notion of some Habermasian rupture that accompanied Haiti’s revolution in the practice and politics of writing (from a putatively “premodern” symbolic or performatif writing to a putatively “modern,” rational, liberal, autonomous notion of textual creation and hermeneutics). Quite the opposite: these conceptions and uses of writing remained hotly contested in both civil war and paper war between a republican, bourgeois faction (which touted individual reason, private subjectivity, and communicative rationality) and a monarchical state that relied upon symbolic representation, public performance, collective textual production, and the mystique of authority to define its political project within Haiti and the larger Atlantic sphere.
Let us see the bourgeois public sphere and its limits at work in early post-independence Haitian writing. In colonial Saint-Domingue, free men of color enjoyed some access to the emergent spaces of private deliberation and critical discourse in the early part of the eighteenth century, and then were excluded as the colonial state worked to create a unified white colonial public in the 1760s and 1770s. It was precisely because of these race-based exclusionary tactics that free men of color in the colony led the fight for equality during the early years of the French Revolution. In many ways, they constituted the Habermasian bourgeois public sphere in the colony *par excellence*: they engaged in reasoned, critical debate of the colonial state and its exclusionary policies, and were foundational to the emergence of public opinion for the equality of men of color as citizens of the republic. As we shall see in this book, post-independence Haitian republican writing constituted itself very much in the heritage of this bourgeois public sphere, writing within a nascent Francophone lettered sphere and performing the fruits of liberal republicanism to a wider Atlantic audience.

While this Habermasian bourgeois public sphere continued among a certain political faction in early post-independence Haiti, it was not the *only* sphere to emerge during the period. There was a sphere of writing, print, and critique that emerged in early post-independence Haiti that was highly critical of political liberalism and the bourgeois liberal order. We might call this the “Dessalinean sphere,” which dominated late-revolutionary Haiti and the first years of independence. Dessalinean and later Christophean writing was first and foremost a weapon of antislavery, anticolonial resistance. It was writing based on utility and defense: the performance of violent anticolonialism or the refutation of pro-colonial discourse from France through the publication of written texts. The print production in this sphere was decidedly antiliberal and antibourgeois: it was not the private, autonomous, liberal bourgeois reason that existed apart from the state, but a collective, collaborative textual production from a militarized secretarial corps that swore an oath to defend the monarchy. Indeed, the Dessalinean sphere embraced—and performed—many of the practices that Habermas considered “premodern”: public symbolic representation, the mystique of power, memorization and recitation, all in service of the state. Crucially, Dessalinean textual production and consumption encompassed decidedly more
Haitian voices outside the narrow, property-owning, literate, educated sphere of the republicans. As we shall see in this book, Dessalinean and Christophean spheres insisted on the public practice of textual creation and performance and gave voice to those who otherwise lacked the “right” or the ability to enter into print: insurgent slaves, illiterate or uneducated free men of color, and even the dead.

Having demonstrated the overdetermined, abstract retrospective concept of “literature,” I would like to describe my approach to generic, formal, and discursive structures that coded the Dessalinean and later Christophean sphere—beyond the bourgeois public sphere. I am basing my approach on a few basic assumptions. First, I assume that the process of writing is always citational and intertextual; it draws upon already existing language and structures in a process of citation and iteration that is never new. I thereby distance my approach from the either/or proposition of radical newness or colonial borrowing, derivativeness or “imitation” (which are bound up in anachronistic judgments of value that have much less to do with the textual production of the period itself) and move toward a more thorough accounting of the norms, practices, and mechanisms of print culture in early post-independence Haiti. Second, I approach published writing (that is, writing that actively sought a public) as determined by a set of implicit and sometimes explicit codes, language, syntax, and forms that determine a text’s legibility and meaning in a given time. This involves a considerable amount of modeling, adapting, and (re)iterating existing genres, forms, and language. What is more, the Haitian writing of independence was produced literally on the ground, often in the fog of war, by men (alas, no women!) with varying degrees of French-language schooling and in an entirely multilingual context: French, Kreyòl, which was the lingua franca, and Niger-Congo languages among the insurgent slaves. Dessalines’s 1804 Acte de l’indépendance provides a prime example of these codes and structures. While the radical, anticolonial gesture of 1804 was performed by other means and in other mediums (the symbolic naming of “Ayti,” the burning of plantations, and the massacre of the remaining French colons on the island), Haitians nevertheless instantiated their radical newness in the French language, in the textual act of a declaration of independence. They wrote in French to render legible—and legitimate—their radical claims to statehood and independence in
an Atlantic public sphere hell-bent on not recognizing those claims. It is both radically new and entirely the same, through a process of modeling, adaptation, and iteration.

Finally, my approach to early post-independence writing emphasizes the performativity at work in the production of text, and more specifically the performative speech acts by which formerly colonial subjects and the enslaved seized the means to (re)define themselves as human, independent, postcolonial, black writing and publishing subjects. I understand this form of performativity in early post-independence Haitian writing as related to a specific generic form: printed polemics, or pamphlets. The form and practice of polemical pamphleteering are central to questions of legitimacy, subjectivity, authority, authorship, and authorization; pamphlets were consecratory speech acts that created space for legitimatizing speech that was not otherwise “legally” granted to them. As Katie LaPorta’s research on early modern anti-absolutist pamphlets shows, writers contested authority and staked a claim to the public sphere even as they lacked the “right” to do so, and deployed the written word against established power in order to forge new subjectivities and construct new publics.

Thus the notion of performativity we see theorized in Derrida’s “performative speech acts” and Butler’s “political performativity” is, as LaPorta points out, endogenous to the early modern sphere of political pamphleteering—even as we assume it to be a contemporary theoretical term.

I would argue that we can trace Dessalinean and Christophean performative pamphleteering, as well as Faustin Soulouque’s later use of portraiture, to a longer tradition of reformist and anti-absolutist pamphlet writing of the early modern period. Indeed, we must consider their claims to sovereignty, legitimacy, and humanity via the pamphlet form as part of a longer early modern context of challenging absolutist and statist discourses and claiming authority and subjectivity. In the spirit of sixteenth-century Protestant Monarchomach pamphlets, seventeenth-century anti-absolutist “bad books” (mauvais livres), and eighteenth-century pasquinades and libelles, Dessalinean and Christophean writing challenged the legitimacy of colonialist and pro-slavery discourses by performing its own authority in print. What is more, its activation of this polemical form repairs—and renders moot—Habermas’s putative rupture between “premodern” and “modern” writing. To be sure, I con-
sider performativity across the civil war divide, and reveal the extent to which bourgeois liberal texts in Haiti’s southern republic were themselves performing a political project to an Atlantic world audience. Their new literary and political journals (revues) were performing their own political liberalism, individual reason, and private and autonomous subjectivity in opposition to what they deemed the premodern, politically complicit texts of Dessalinean and Christophean monarism.

Civil War and the Myth(s) of the Republic

My interest in the myth of Haitian republicanism is grounded in deeper reflections on the French republican myth and its paradoxes. I have found Jean-Clément Martin’s historiographic method in his work on revolution and counterrevolution in France of particular use. Martin works against the teleology of republicanism, or “against historiographic memory,” by focusing on the internal tensions and specifically the “semantic struggles” of different factions vying for discursive hegemony in the revolutionary period. Ultimately, Martin argues that revolution and counterrevolution must be considered mutually constitutive: fed by their “shared source” and exacerbated by their rivalry against one another, they participated in the cultural and political process that created the nation. David Armitage’s recent shift in thinking about civil war in the Age of Revolution offers additional clarity on new methodologies beyond revolution. Armitage shows how civil war is “paradoxically fertile”: highly destructive but also “conceptually generative,” a process that polarizes groups as they seek to define and claim legitimacy over concepts of freedom, authority, or sovereignty, which themselves become sites of “ferocious contestation.” I adapt Martin and Armitage’s approach to trouble the republican teleology at work in the historiographic memory of Haiti’s early post-independence history, focusing on the ideologies in tension during the Haitian civil war and their mutually constitutive role in creating the Haitian nation. Through close readings of fiction and nonfiction texts, I endeavor to emphasize the narrative constructions and discursive “making” at work in the production of Haitian history from within, while recognizing the stakes these local histories had for the larger Atlantic story that would be told. Republican historiography sought to nationalize
the republican narrative of the revolution, papering over the imperial and military authoritarian nature of Haiti’s revolutionary foundation. Such writing has shaped the way that scholars, both within and outside Haiti, have conceptualized the goals of the Haitian Revolution and the agendas at play in the post-independence civil war.

While I performed considerable archival research and work with original sources, readers will note that I privilege one work of Haitian historiography: Thomas Madiou’s eight-volume *Histoire d’Haïti* (1847–1848; 1989). Simply put, for want of a chronological guide to the events of the revolution and early post-independence period, I determined Madiou’s history to be more neutral than the other possibilities in early Haitian historiography: Baron de Vastey, Hérard Dumesle, Beaubrun Ardouin, and Joseph Saint-Rémy. Ardouin in particular is highly ideological in his account of the early post-independence civil war, despite his reliance on a greater amount of archival and documentary evidence. Of particular importance for me is Madiou’s method, which relied on oral testimonies from revolutionaries and insurgent slaves who had lived through the early post-independence civil war. Here, I follow Colin Dayan’s incisive assessment of Madiou’s utility: “Madiou’s interest in preserving the stories told by those who had not been educated in French, who did not share in the mastery of the text, results in those contradictions for which he has been condemned, but which help us to get closer to a history shot through with ambiguity.”

In order to foreground regional factionalism and civil war in Haiti, I privilege locally produced Haitian texts, which maintain the regional detail, the internal tensions, and the complexities of civil war that tend to get flattened by Atlantic world scholarship. I draw specifically on printed matter (including visual culture) published on the ground, by Haitian presses, which I argue offers access to a discursive self-fashioning and performance of statehood that are less mediated than writing published in Paris or other capitals of the world republic of letters. My focus on marginal writers and less-studied texts is not, however, an attempt to redeem forgotten heroes or write a redemptive counternarrative. This book has no heroes, to borrow a phrase from Michel-Rolph Trouillot. Rather, I am recovering marginalized texts in order to explain precisely why they have been overlooked in historiography and literary histories of Haiti. They are texts that are marginal and illegible...
to the world republic of letters because they actively wrote against the dominant, normative concepts of “civilization” and “literature.”

While my corpus of locally produced Haitian print culture reveals the discursively bounded debates about the meaning of liberty between Dessalineans and republicans, these textual debates must be seen in contrast to the embodied practice of liberté that a multitude of other Haitian political factions fought for. My corpus reveals much about the competing ideas for how best to self-fashion post-independence Haitian politics, identity, and culture, but cannot give voice to those factions that did not engage in (or have access to) the same self-representative print practices. The northern insurgent slaves who rallied around Sans Souci and Macaya, or the former slaves in the Grand Doco mountains led by Goman (Jean-Baptiste Perrier), produced little in the way of print and are therefore only briefly accounted for in my book. Moreover, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Haitian print was controlled by literate men and those illiterate men who had the power to command them. Many other ideological camps operated throughout Haiti’s long nineteenth century while existing between the lines of print—namely, the peasantry and women.

Finally, I take plurality as a guiding principle to unlock deeper discoveries about Haitian agency and political ideology in postcolonial Haiti. In order to reach a more capacious and inclusive understanding of Haiti in all of its iterations, I embraced a specific understanding of “regionalism” that stands apart from its customary use in Caribbean studies. Because Caribbean populations have been defined, since their inception, in relation to a European metropole, their “marginal” status makes them always already “regional” in the larger Euro-Atlantic context. The Caribbean as marginal to the metropole thus masks or obscures the complex realities within this vast, diverse “region.” How, then, to address the local realities of connections, circulations, and (im)mobilities within and across national, linguistic, and geographic boundaries, on the margins of the margin, as it were? My new regionalism allows us to acknowledge—and disabuse ourselves of—the tendency to allow Caribbean capital port cities to stand in for the entirety of the island nation. In the case of Haiti, it was only really in the mid-twentieth century that the capital city became the Republic of Port-au-Prince (Repiblik Pòtoprens): a highly centralized state bureaucratic machine that reached its comple-
tion under the Duvalier dictatorship. By privileging the diversity and plurality of Haiti’s regional existence, my work provides a more fulsome accounting of the rich history of Haiti’s long nineteenth century and its writing from the margins of the world republic of letters. Indeed, the foundational regional tensions in early post-independence Haiti are central to understanding the continued civil war, secessionist regimes, and regional conflicts that persisted in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Haiti, and even to the present day. More important for our purposes here, the revolutionary and post-independence civil wars provide crucial context for making sense of the battles over national identity and cultural legitimacy that have marked Haitian writing since independence. For, while I place great importance on the historical and political context here, my book is ultimately about writing, how it became the primary battleground upon which the internal conflict and guerres de plume were waged, and the heritage of these regional and ideological tensions in Haiti’s long nineteenth century, the Duvalier dictatorship, and even today. Through a sustained synchronic and diachronic engagement with the plurality of Haiti’s textual existence since 1804, we grasp the internal battle over the nature of freedom, civilization, and the meaning of literature that fundamentally shaped Haiti from its founding to our present day.