

A topographic map of Haiti with a red line tracing a path across the island. The path starts in the northwest near Baracoa and Maisi, passes through the Windward Passage, and continues through various regions including Cap-Haïtien, Port-de-Paix, Fort Liberté, Gonaïves, Hinche, Jérémie, Massif de la Hotte, Petit-Goâve, Jacmel, Pedernales, Barahona, and Les Cayes. The word 'Hispaniola' is visible at the bottom of the map.

# An “Unthinkable” Revolution

24.908 Spring 2017



# Introduction

*“Dem tell me wha dem want to tell me/ But now I checking out me own history/ I carving out me identity”* -- “Checking Out Me History”, John Agard

Different presentations of history around the Haitian Revolution

1. Definitions of Identity
2. Knowledge is Power
3. Historical perspectives on credit or blame
4. Justice

# Defining Identity

**Who** defines identity? **What** do they define it as? **Why** do they define it as such?

**Who** is **excluded** from these definitions?

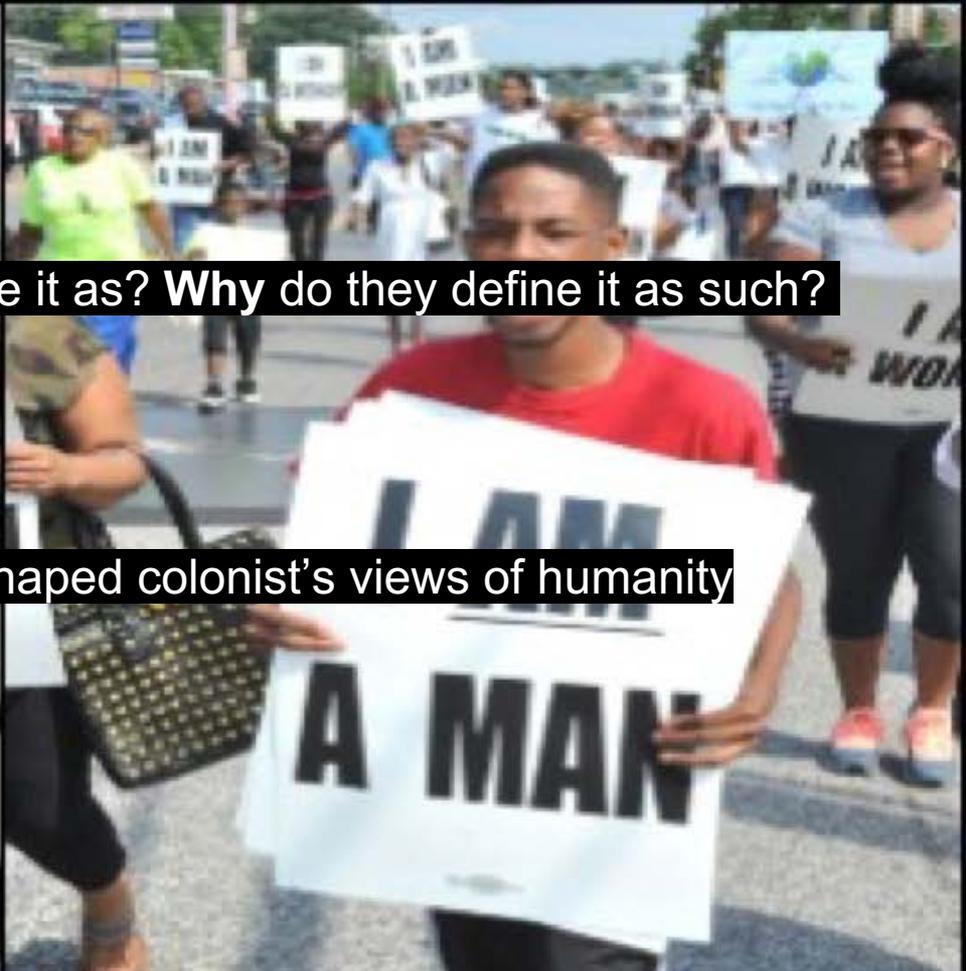
Human or “Man”

(Trouillot) European Enlightenment shaped colonist’s views of humanity

- Europeans vs. Non Europeans

- “Man” as European males

- history of the 3/5th compromise



# Defining Identity (con't)

## Non-white (internal and external definitions)

- *Gens de couleur*

- (Trouillot) slavery cemented a historical perception of black/ negre as bad, stigmatized gens de couleur as not white. Counted as a fraction of white Europeans

- (DuBois) granted power within Haiti, but within racial hierarchy

- *Slaves*

- *Haitian*

(DuBois, Jenson) During Revolution, Haiti changing alliances with European entities

Port Marchand.

Ile S<sup>t</sup> Domingue.

Gouvernement.

Batterie S<sup>te</sup> Claire.

Paroisse.

Instance where two warring factions had the same war chant



# Knowledge/Power

- Historiography often produces knowledge which serves to legitimize the status quo
- Bender: nationalist histories of the 19th century
- Bender: Atlantic histories in the Cold War context, NATO
- Trouillot: Haitian histories construct positive image of Blackness
  - Dubois: “[Haitian history] can - indeed must - serve as a source of inspiration, even hope”

# Knowledge/Power, cont.

Trouillot: Histories of the Haitian Revolution in the academy often silenced through erasure and banalization

Rainsford's two engravings; only Black violence tends to be represented

Slave manager: "I live tranquilly in the midst of them without a single thought of their uprising unless that was fomented by the whites themselves" (Trouillot)

Above attitude reinscribed in academic discursive practices?

"[Haitian] slaves took inspiration [from the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen]"  
(wiki)

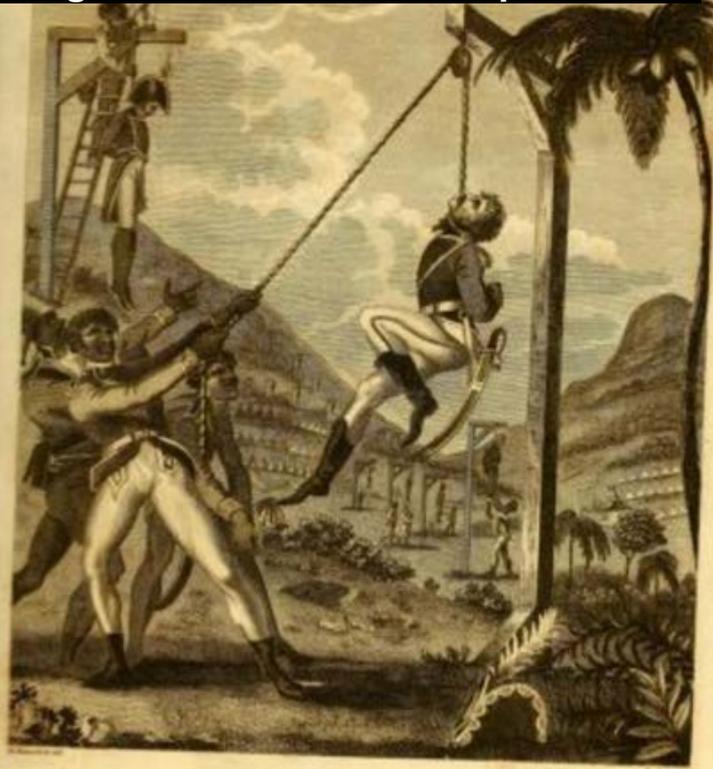
CODE NOIR.  
RECUEIL D'EDITS,  
DECLARATIONS ET ARRETS  
CONCERNANT  
LES Esclaves Nègres de l'Amérique  
AVEC  
Un Recueil de Réglemens, concernant la  
police des Nègres Françoises de l'Amérique  
et les Esclaves.



Do Rainsford's engravings make a false moral equivalence?



*Their threats of exterminating the Black Army are frustrated by the French.*



*Revenge taken by the Black Army for the Cruelties practiced on them by the French.*

# Giving Credit, Laying Blame

- What caused the Haitian Revolution to occur?

- Role of Enlightenment thought

- Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen

- Who is man?

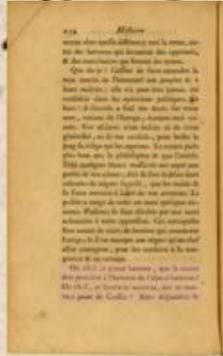
- “Liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression”

- Liberty is in tension with property

- Thomas Jefferson, slave-owner, influential in drafting document

- Scientific racism

- Justifies differential treatment of men



This image is in the public domain.

This image is in the public domain.

# Giving Credit, Laying Blame, cont.

- **Gens Du Couleur, Free Blacks**
  - First use rights-based discourse to advocate for full civic equality in front of National Assembly
  - Were not necessarily invested in the fate of slave laborers
- Sonthonax and Polverel
  - Issue emancipation proclamation
  - Issue economic and social sanctions restricting freedom of freed people
- **Toussaint Louverture**
  - Put pressure on Sonthonax and Polverel to issue emancipation proclamation



This image is in the public domain.

# Giving Credit, Laying Blame, cont.

- Majority of (Formerly) Enslaved People
  - Give life to new democratic institutions
    - Plantation Assembly
    - Counter-Plantation
  - Engage in massive resistance even when elites surrender/compromise



This image is in the public domain.

VUE DES 40. JOURS D'INCENDIE DES HABITATIONS DE LA PLAINE DU CAP FRANÇAIS.

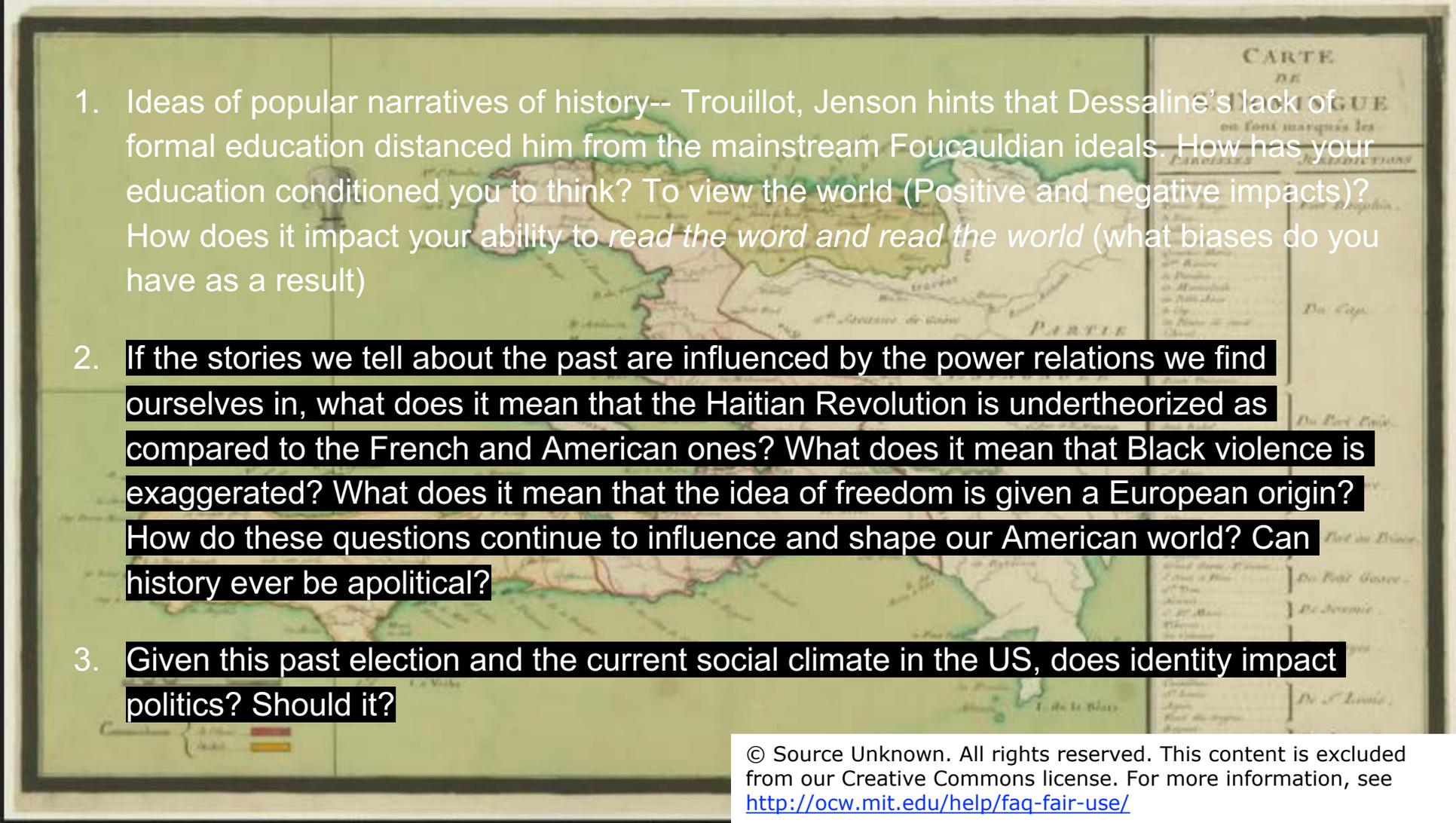
*Arrivée le 25. Août 1791. (Werner, 1874)*

This image is in the public domain.

# Justice and the Haitian Revolution

Was the Revolution started to achieve justice? Was justice achieved? By whom/for whom? What forms did justice take?

- During the Revolution
  - Violence (Black vs. White retributions)
- During the ceasefire
  - Returning former plantation owners reception
    - (DuBois) potatoes
- After the Revolution
  - End to plantation system beginning of cultivars?



1. Ideas of popular narratives of history-- Trouillot, Jenson hints that Dessaline's lack of formal education distanced him from the mainstream Foucauldian ideals. How has your education conditioned you to think? To view the world (Positive and negative impacts)? How does it impact your ability to *read the word and read the world* (what biases do you have as a result)

2. If the stories we tell about the past are influenced by the power relations we find ourselves in, what does it mean that the Haitian Revolution is undertheorized as compared to the French and American ones? What does it mean that Black violence is exaggerated? What does it mean that the idea of freedom is given a European origin? How do these questions continue to influence and shape our American world? Can history ever be apolitical?

3. Given this past election and the current social climate in the US, does identity impact politics? Should it?

MIT OpenCourseWare

<http://ocw.mit.edu>

24.908 Creole Languages and Caribbean Identities

Spring 2017

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.