A Haitian Tale of Diasporas and Revolutions in the Atlantic World

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We were in our car on the way to New York, my husband, our son, and I, driving my parents home after a visit with us. As we approached Philadelphia, my father saw the road sign and said, “That’s where Tanguy was.” No one responded, and he dropped the subject. Newly-arrived immigrants, my parents trod carefully through the intergenerational minefield.

We, the young ones, were still in the midst of the ‘60s revolution in the U.S. and had embraced the African-American stance on pride and racial equality. Back home was different. Being Black and proud was for us as natural as breathing. Haiti was ours alone, and we all knew that we were a Black people whose ancestors had defeated the mighty French forces of Napoleon Bonaparte. While the colonial heritage was still present in our culture and social structures, our hometown of Les Cayes had the reputation of being one of the most liberal in terms of color and class prejudice. Local families’ ties rooted in the colonial past were not discussed or given as much importance as in some other cities. We were open and welcoming, at least in public, and that kept our town relatively at peace while social conflicts had sometimes led to bloodbaths elsewhere in the country.

“Do you want me to talk to him about Tanguy?” my father later said, referring to my young son. “Absolutely not,” I answered. Again, my father grew silent. He had never mentioned that name to us in Haiti. Whatever I had heard about our supposed connection to the former colonist had come from my mother’s story about some contact from abroad with our larger family in the 1940s regarding a possible inheritance, and from what she herself had heard in the past from her stepfather, an older man and former government official. My mother, who had moved to our town as a child, knew relatively little of the local lore.

Years later, while doing research at the Library of Congress, I found by chance the title of a newspaper that Tanguy de Laboissière had published in Philadelphia. Curiosity led to further research, and with the Internet, a new field opened. A range of multidimensional information on the very fabric of the Haitian and French Revolutions, and related diasporas in the U.S. and elsewhere, became available. Most importantly, the history of several migrations across centuries and continents started to unfold.
Philadelphia, 1793: The colonial narrative

Probably the most extraordinary Santo-Dominguan refugee was Claude-Corentin Tanguy de la Boissière. A storm center on the arrival of the Santo Dominaguans, he remained an enigma to the end (Childs, 1940, 51).

“...Tanguy was apparently a modest proprietor having some land and a share in a coffee plantation. He described himself as the ‘father of a family living on his cabbages and carrots on a mountain called Les Platons twenty miles from the town of Les Cayes...’” continues the author (Ibid, 52). The reality appears to be more complex. About to be deported to France for sedition, as a prisoner and upon his request, Tanguy stated in his March 29, 1793, *Adresse de Tanguy Laboissière à la Commission nationale civile de Saint-Domingue* that he had lived in the colony for 23 years.¹ During three of those years, however, from 1775 to 1778, Tanguy was accused of having authored libelous material, arrested, and incarcerated in France. There, following his appeal to the Minister of the Navy and Colonies, he was exonerated, reestablished in his previous function of Crown Prosecutor and transferred to the town of Les Cayes, as he had also requested.² Those two deportations would play a major role in his life, as well as in the future of Saint-Domingue (the French colony that became Haiti). In addition, before he went to France the second time, he lived in Philadelphia for a few years.

During his exile there, Tanguy momentarily resumed the publication of his *Journal des Révolutions de la partie française de St Domingue* (Menier and Debien, 1949, 469) that he had started in Cap-Français (later known as Cap-Haïtien, on Haiti’s north coast), and continued to write on various matters before returning to France. In his proposal for printing the *Journal of the Revolutions in the French Part of St Domingo*, he briefly retraced the history of the land.

Possessed at the arrival of Christopher Columbus, in 1492, by the mildest, the most ready, and perhaps the happiest of people, Spanish avarice, superstition and cruelty soon snatched it from its native soil, …one hundred and forty years after. …The religious persecution which was then spreading over France, drove a number of Frenchmen from their country...It is partly to the colony of St. Domingo that France owes the astonishing encrease [sic] of her maritime towns, the prosperity of her trade, and her superiority in the European markets (Winship, 1920, 97).

Later, Tanguy refers to the masses of enslaved Africans—who, as we know, were torn from their land and forced to produce such wealth under unimaginably harsh conditions—as “the
unknown brutes and savages of the torrid zone” benefitting from what he describes disapprovingly as France’s “utmost concern.” He also bemoans “the dismal forsaking from our mother country” under the current Revolutionary circumstances (Ibid, 98).

Missing from this narrative is the large number of free people of color, “les gens de couleur”—mostly people of mixed race and free blacks, the offspring of the above groups. At the time of the revolution, the Saint-Domingue population included 452,000 enslaved Africans, 40,000 whites, and 28,000 free people of color who owned a third of the colony’s properties and one-quarter of the slave population (Charlier, 2009, 45-46). Some were also present in the Philadelphia exile community, which had arrived following the June 1793 destruction of Cap-Français, a tragedy in which Tanguy, inciting to rebellion, had played an active role against the French Commissioners.³ Little did he know, as he left Saint-Domingue in 1793, of the unintended consequences of those actions in a chain of events that would change the course of history.

There is proof too that some mulattoes came as they apparently had some sort of organization in Philadelphia, and the term dit ci-devant citoyen de couleur occurs after certain names in lists of refugees. Once this fact was no longer obvious, everything was done to hide it—it was a secret known only to those on the inside. Creole families, however, who had for years watched the color line, knew, and their descendants know to this day which families had a touch of colored blood. Besides the mulattoes, colored people—slaves and freemen—came packed with their former masters into the refugee ships....and Pierre Toussaint,⁴ one of their number, became a familiar figure in nineteenth-century New York (Childs, 1940, 56-57).

After his first deportation to France, where he became a Freemason in 1778,⁵ Tanguy had returned to his new post in Saint-Domingue and remained active in local Masonic circles in Les Cayes and Cap-Français. There, he also joined the Cercle des Philadelphes, an “erudite” organization with a covert aim of local self-government and preservation of the racial status quo.⁶ In Philadelphia, he became a founder and president of the French Lodge l’Aménité No.73. Following Tanguy’s death in Paris in 1799, the Venerable of that lodge, de La Grange, delivered his eulogy and recounted that Tanguy, unable to return to his wife and children in Saint-Domingue, went instead to his relatives in France, only to find them destitute and his ancestral home lost (Chaudron & al, 1800, 17-25).

Among those with the above-mentioned “touch of colored blood” (Childs, 1940, 56) was
the famed Moreau de Saint-Méry, Tanguy’s fellow writer and Philadelphia exile, who was also a freemason and a member of the Cercle des Philadelphes, as well as the theoretician of a pseudo-scientific racial classification system. Opposed to equal rights between free people of color and white colonists, Moreau, however, offered to consider as white the free people of color who could pass as such, and that brought to light his own mixed ancestry (Gauthier, 2005-2016).7

Another example of the “touch of colored blood” could have been Tanguy’s own wife, née Marie-Madeleine Mathilde Sicard de Lascaze, who had remained in Saint-Domingue when he departed but seems to have left in 1804 at the time of Haiti’s Independence. She then came to Baltimore, where she lived with a nephew and died there in 1861 at the age of 99. A clipping of her obituary can be found among the papers of her friend Ann Lettice Murdoch, who was active in the colonizatization of Liberia.8 Moreau de Saint-Méry listed neither Tanguy nor his wife in his “Index des noms de personnes” (Index of People’s Names); her family name was included, however, under two different spellings, and only in terms of her sisters’ alliances.9 The first listing related to the future Baltimore (Laroque) side of that family, the second to François Faure, Tanguy’s lawyer in the libel case who had become his brother-in-law and was, like him, deeply connected to the Huguenot history of Southern France.10

Across the Atlantic: History at the Crossroads

During the 18th century, at least 45,000 to 50,000 colonists had departed from Bordeaux and nearby ports toward Saint-Domingue, following waves of previous migrations. By the end of that period, 40 percent of the French colonist population had come from Bordeaux and the surrounding Southwestern Aquitaine area.11

It was a region of tumultuous historical diversity: of Moorish raids and influence; of troubadours, courtly love and feudal strife; of Cathars, Templars, pilgrimage routes, Black Madonnas, and Freemasons; and also of Huguenots whose descendants would spread through Europe and the Americas. Among the early adherents to that new faith were populations of Moor and Visigoth origin who had long settled in the area and interacted mostly among themselves. Other adherents included Charles Faure, who was burned at the stake for heresy in 1552, and Claude Laboissière, an early church leader (Bujeaud, 1860, 14-7): a possible family connection with Tanguy and his former lawyer and brother-in-law.

Promulgated in 1598, the Edict of Nantes brought an end to France’s religious wars while
providing a measure of protection and freedom of worship to Protestants. Less than a century later, it was revoked in 1685 by the Edict of Fontainebleau, resulting in massive Huguenot migrations. Many of those who left France later established roots in a colony that would become the United States of America, a new country born amid European rivalries, discreet Masonic ties, and French support.

George Washington, “the father of his country,” could trace his roots to those early Huguenots, and that was apparently one reason for his close friendship with Lafayette, who had come from France to assist in the American War of Independence (Stoudt, 1932, Introduction xvii). They were also both freemasons, as were most other men of their generation in leadership roles, including Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, who succeeded Franklin as Minister to France. Their combined involvement added to the long campaign for religious freedom led by Voltaire and others from that country, contributed in 1787 to the promulgation of the Edict of Tolerance, which brought an end to religious persecution in France and restored some of the rights previously lost. That French-American connection also extended to France’s financial and military assistance in the American War of Independence, including a contingent of free people of color from Saint-Domingue who fought in the battle of Savannah. In 1789, the French Revolution proclaimed liberty, equality, and freedom of religion and conscience for all, through the (unfortunately named) Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen.

Amid contradictions within the colonial caste structure, it did not take long for Saint-Domingue to explode.

**From Ayiti to Saint-Domingue: the economics of race and class**

Once upon a time, on the island of Ayiti lived the Taino/Arawaks. Traces of their genetic, linguistic, and cultural presence remain in the memory, soul, and population of modern-day Haiti. Then, in 1492, the Spaniards came with forced labor, genocide, and the enslavement of African captives that they had brought to the land, renamed Hispaniola.

Two years after the inauguration of the Negro slave trade to the Caribbean in 1503, the governor of the island urged the Spanish government to suspend the traffic, on the ground that the Negroes ran away, made common cause with the Amerindians, and taught them bad habits. The trade was accordingly suspended, because the Queen thought that it impeded her cherished aim of converting the Amerindians (Williams, 1984, 66).
After they depleted the fabled gold mines of Ayiti, the Spanish invaders left for Cuba, Mexico, and other more promising ventures, dismantling the coastal cities on the western part of the island to prevent any trade with their Dutch competitors. The remaining population of Tainos, Blacks, and Whites retreated inland.\textsuperscript{15}

At the time, and since the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, the Spanish-born Pope Alexander VI had divided the world among dissatisfied European nations.

Spain had to face not only the assaults of her European rivals, but also the attacks of European pirates. Men of all nationalities and faiths, united by the fact that the majority were fugitives from justice, their only industry was war on the Spaniard…Brave, well-armed, fairly numerous, operating from Tortuga, off the coast of Hispaniola, their \textit{mission civilisatrice} was to constitute a terror to the Spaniards and a valuable auxiliary to Spain’s rivals…So popular and profitable was the profession that even women participated: the sex of Mary Read and Anne Bonny, captured in 1721, was only revealed when they declared that they were pregnant.(Ibid, 82-83).

In 1640, as British and French pirates uneasily shared Tortuga, the latter took control of the island with support from Le Vasseur, a privateer who, upon request from the French colonial authorities in Saint-Christophe (now Saint-Kitts), had initially “gathered 40 men of the protestant religion like him” toward that goal.\textsuperscript{16} So began the French colonization of the newly named Saint-Domingue, and settlers started to move to the mainland.

The recruitment of the labor force occurred in the aftermath of century-long feudal conflicts, as well as the recurring religious persecution that had resumed in France and culminated in the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. Protestants left in droves, those of means going to friendly countries of Europe, and many from there to the Americas, while others took to the seas and the colonies.\textsuperscript{17} They were not the only ones migrating, as France’s goal to increase its colonial population led to a commerce fueled by the transportation of goods and the voluntary, involuntary, or forced departures of convicts, paupers, and servants indentured for a period of three, and sometimes as much as five, years, the \textit{engagés}. If lucky and able to overcome the hardships of work and climate, “the servant was free and generally received a grant of land, from three to five acres,” at the end of the term (Williams, 1984, 95-98).

The need to increase the colonial population also prompted French authorities to promote the shipment of women to their overseas territories. That initiative met with mixed success in Saint-Domingue, since local pirates would return from their raids with slaves as well as women.
from neighboring English and Spanish possessions and, according to a then governor, because the settlers preferred local women rather than those from France, “whose names and families they did not know.”

In 1697, the Treaty of Ryswick with Spain officially gave France possession of the western third of the island. With peace came stability, rapid economic development, and increased commercial activities. “If prior to 1690 the colony had not one sugar plantation, within fifteen years there were already 120, more than 100 of these being established over a mere four-year period from 1700 to 1704” (Fick, 1990, 22). Because of the labor force required for sugar production, the transatlantic “slave trade was thus fundamental to the triangular system and, in fact, became the cornerstone to the Nantes economy,” with commercial interests in Bordeaux at “the center of the French colonial trade” (Ibid, 23).

Louis XIV’s Code noir (Black Code) of 1685 provided a legal framework to the colonies and recognized two classes of people, the free and the slaves, the latter being defined as personal property devoid of rights but subject to limited legal protection. The Code also expelled all Jews from the colonies, forbade the public practice of any religion other than Catholicism, and mandated that all slaves be baptized and instructed in that faith. It regulated the condition of slavery (which was passed through the mother) as well as the treatment of the enslaved, and also legalized manumission and encouraged marriages between enslaved women and free men living together when they were not otherwise married. The mother thus freed from bondage, the children were considered to be *ingénus*, meaning born free.

In time, the rapid increase of the enslaved population led to local amendments to the Black Code restricting the rights of the people of color. It reached the point where many colonists, often members of the French nobility and whose wives and children were people of color, chose to leave Saint-Domingue and go to France to escape segregation. Since color prejudice did not exist there, those rich colonial families of mixed race were well received, and their children married in noble or wealthy families, or both (Gauthier, 2005-2016).

Meanwhile, other freeborn people continued to be forcibly taken from their native Africa and brought to a life of horror in Saint-Domingue.

**The Age of Revolution**

It was on a peasantry in many respects superior to the serfs in large areas of
Europe, that the slave trade fell. Tribal life was broken up and the millions of detribalised [sic] Africans were let loose upon each other...Tribes had to supply slaves or be sold as slaves themselves. Violence and ferocity became the necessities for survival, and violence and ferocity survived (James, 1963, 7).

Historians as well as present-day African heads of state have acknowledged the significant role of African elites in the slave trade, especially “the slave-trading kingdoms of western and central Africa. These included the Akan of the kingdom of Asante in what is now Ghana, the Fon of Dahomey (now Benin), the Mbundu of Ndongo in modern Angola and the Kongo of today’s Congo, among several others.” As plantations developed, this diverse African diaspora would later coalesce to become a disciplined revolutionary force in a successful fight for freedom.

Resistance to slavery often began aboard the ships coming from Africa. Once arrived in Saint-Domingue after a harrowing journey, many captives did not take long to join the long line of Maroons, the fugitive slaves who had started to take refuge in the mountains since the Spanish colonization. There, they had never ceased to organize and cause havoc in neighboring plantations. The names of Cacique Henri, the first Maroon of the island, Padrejan, Santyague, Macaya, Mackandal, and Boukman, among others, are a testimony to this tradition of resistance. Individual fugitives would sometimes remain near plantations, or blend into the population of urban centers with help from free Blacks. Suicide—especially among the Ibos, who believed in the transmigration of souls and thought that death would return them to Africa—was another way to escape slavery, and so were sabotage, poisoning, infanticide, and abortion, all severely punished.

New forms of communication and religious syncretism, such as Creole and Vodou, emerged, cementing the bonds among the captives. Haitian Creole began “through the mingling of dialects of French with African languages. It was forged over several generations by many speakers: early French settlers and their slaves, free people of color, domestic and urban slaves, adult Africans brought to plantations during the height of the sugar boom, and especially children born into slavery in Saint-Domingue” (Dubois, 2004, 43). Vodou followed a similar pattern.

In Saint-Domingue, the Arada slaves from the Bight of Benin, who were the majority during the first decades of the eighteenth century, brought the traditions of the Fon and Yoruba peoples, which were joined by those brought by the Kongo slaves who eventually became the island’s majority... [R]eligious ceremonies provided ritual solace, dance and music, but most importantly a community that
extended beyond the plantation. They also provided an occasion for certain individuals to provide advice and guidance. ...Religion was, in some sense, a space of freedom in the midst of a world of bondage, and helped lay the foundation for the revolt that ultimately brought complete freedom to the slaves. (Ibid)

It is thus ironic that the greed and intolerance at the core of the initial French migrations to Saint-Domingue ultimately led to the social cohesion among the enslaved population. Africans vigilantly sought to seize any opportunity to gain their freedom. On that fateful day of June 1793, during the battle for Cap-Français mentioned above (see page 3), they agreed to join the French Commissioner Sonthonax and defend the Revolution.

**Class and caste in changing times**

By then four years old, the French Revolution had caused class contradictions to explode within the Saint-Domingue caste structure. As sugar plantations developed in the colony, it became necessary to import larger numbers of Africans, more suited than whites for the work in the tropical climate, thus making increasingly obsolete the migration of white *engagés*. At the time, and in addition to the colonial planters, royal administrators, and representatives of the French commercial interests, all designated as the *grands blancs*, the white population also included “the poor whites, the overseers, artisans, professional men, hating the planters above, determined to maintain the bridge that separated them from the men of color below” (Williams, 1970, 246).

Among that group dubbed *petits blancs* (small whites), “One type of *petit blanc* was an ambitious young man hoping to make his fortune as a planter. Tradesmen, lower government officials, and the younger sons of merchants or landowning families in France flocked to Saint-Domingue between the 1760s and 1770s with this goal” (Garrigus, 2010, 118). A second type of *petit blanc* included “ex-sailors, ex-soldiers, servants, petty criminals, and others [who] found fewer opportunities for independence than their predecessors” (Ibid).

Tanguy had arrived in Saint-Domingue at that time. His subsequent arrest, trial, and exoneration later became a *cause célèbre* (des Essarts, 1786, 168-182). After his return to the colony as a Crown Prosecutor of seemingly modest means, he became active, as mentioned above, in Masonic circles and joined the Cercle des Philadelphes,

one of the most prestigious colonial learned societies of the Ancient Regime.
...During the summer 1784, a group of white residents of Cap François conceived of a plan to elevate the intellectual culture of their colony to match their financial success. Announcing that no society could exist “without the assistance of the sciences and arts,” they created the Cercle des Philadelphes. Although formerly viewed as an outgrowth of freemasonry, the Cercle is now more generally seen as having been motivated by a complex mixture of both Royalist and patriotic impulses among the colonial elite (American Philosophical Society, Cercle des Philadelphes du Cap François Collection).23

Tanguy is also specifically mentioned among the prominent people in various fields of occupation who corresponded with Alexandre-Gui Pingré. The latter, a famed monk, scientist, astronomer, director of the no less famed Sainte-Geneviève or Panthéon Library of Paris, and member of the Académie des Sciences, was also an influential freemason who celebrated in verse that “secret society” while enthusiastically praising his grandmaster, the Duke of Orléans (Ferret, 1883, 333-347).

Like several members of the French aristocracy, Philippe, Duke of Orléans, was also an absentee owner in Saint-Domingue. Cousin of the French King Louis XVI and active in metropolitan Revolutionary circles, “[h]is liberal views were suspected of cloaking an ambition to become constitutional monarch, and as the revolution progressed he lost the confidence of both republicans and royalists.” In Saint-Domingue, his allies included Bacon de la Chevalerie who in October 1789 had initiated the first revolutionary unrest toward a “White separatist attempt,” as he fomented a riot in Le Cap that led to the departure of the then colonial Intendant. That movement, more “Orleanist” than “Royalist,” continued with support from the Cercle des Philadelphes (Cauna, 2012, 130-140).

...foremost among the agitators being those planters most heavily indebted to the maritime bourgeoisie. ...The small [poor] whites, as soon as they heard of the fall of the Bastille, had deserted their friends in the bureaucracy and joined the revolution. There was only one hope for the bureaucrats—the Mulattoes, and the Governor instructed the commandants of the districts to adopt a new attitude toward them. ...The retreat of race prejudice had begun (James, 1963, 62-63).

On July 14, 1789, the fall of La Bastille, a Paris fortified prison, had marked the beginning of the French Revolution and raised conflicting hopes within and across various segments of the Saint-Domingue population. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity were in the air. As a class, planters of all colors expected freedom from the laws that bound them exclusively to the French commercial and maritime interests. With racial oppression at the core of the system, however, the white proprietors dismissed any acceptance of political or social equality with their
counterparts of color, a right that the latter had never ceased to claim. True “aristocrats of the skin,” the poor whites hoped to join their racial brethren in revolutionary equality, while excluding the people of color.

As the various colonial factions continued to fight each other in a series of uneasy and shifting alliances, both in France and on the local scene, enslaved Africans listened, watched, and prepared. Their revolt erupted in the Northern Plain, near Cap-Français, on August 22, 1791. Prominent in organizing that revolt was Toussaint Louverture who, although a free black, or *affranchi*, for over a decade, had remained on the Bréda plantation where he served as coachman for the manager, Bayon de Libertat (Ficks, 1990, 92).

With a pass signed by the governor, Toussaint was thus permitted to circulate freely and to frequent other plantations; but he was also in communication with influential elements of the royalist faction who hoped to profit from, and who even helped stimulate, the brewing slave insurrection by invoking a common cause—the defense of the king, who had, they rumored, granted the slaves three free days per week. Once they had used the slave insurrection to defeat the rival patriot faction, once power was restored in royalist hands and the king securely on the throne of France, the blacks, they no doubt believed, could then be persuaded by their leaders to return to the plantations and be duped back into slavery (Ibid).

In the South, enslaved Africans who revolted in July 1792 established their camp near Les Cayes, in Platons, a mountain area where Tanguy was living at the time (Childs, 1940, 52), and on the recent coffee plantations that bore the names of his two brothers-in-law: “Faure” and “Laroque” (Foubert, 1974, 207). Next engaged in securing supplies for the town of Les Cayes, Tanguy supported the decree of April 4, 1792, that established the equality of all free citizens, then necessary to maintain the existing class system. This brought him in contact with the Civil Commissioners sent to the colony to enforce that law. Seeing “his marked sympathy for the revolution ...they placed him on the Commission Intermédiaire.” He later resigned from that post, objecting to the delay in enforcing the law, and denounced the Commissioners for various reasons, including “their illegal actions, their proscriptions, and their preference for the mulattoes.” Tanguy then began his *Journal des Révolutions de la Partie Française de Saint-Domingue* and became prominent. Arrested, he was “imprisoned by the Commissioners on board one of the ships in the [Cap-Français] harbor” (Childs, Ibid). The reinstatement of the Black Code of 1685, and particularly the provisions that gave the enslaved “some protection from their masters” was also a reason for Tanguy’s opposition to the French Commissioners (Popkin, 2010,
Meanwhile in France, in January 1793, the Duke of Orleans, who had renamed himself Philippe Égalité and become a member of the French National Convention, had voted for the death of his cousin Louis XVI. He was himself guillotined in November of that same year. In 1796, his son, Louis-Philippe, arrived in exile in Philadelphia, where his two younger brothers later joined him (Poore, 1848, 78-81). Tanguy was also living there at the time, and it is possible that they met in émigré circles. Louis-Philippe d’Orléans became king of France in 1830. Two years later, Tanguy’s widow, then heir to her husband and living in Baltimore, was among the last beneficiaries of the indemnity paid to the former plantation owners of Saint-Domingue.

Tanguy, who had returned to France in 1798, died in Paris the following year (Childs, 1949, 56). In keeping with the times, he was sometimes designated as Tanguy Labossière (or La Bossière), as in his eulogy, and in some historical texts related to early Haitian journalism or the destruction of Cap-Français.

The group of Maroons whose intervention, on the day of that destruction, had been crucial to the French Revolution had not included those who later became Haiti’s recognized Independence heroes. Some were fighting at that time with Toussaint Louverture and other leaders under the banner of the king of Spain who, following the execution of Louis XVI and along with the British, had entered the European war against Revolutionary France in Saint-Domingue. Toussaint Louverture and his companions had then joined the Spaniards and rapidly trained to become high-ranking officers in command of their own troops, as they helped make local inroads in a European conflict also fought in the Americas. Saint-Domingue, France’s richest colony, thus became logistically and economically indispensable to that war effort, a reality that Napoleon Bonaparte well understood 20 years later when, on the verge of defeat in Saint-Domingue, he sold Louisiana to the United States in order to minimize his losses as he faced his own European rivals.

The official abolition of slavery in the French colonies further turned the tide in favor of the Revolution, when Toussaint abandoned the Spaniards and powerfully contributed in chasing them and the British, as well as their allies, from Saint-Domingue. He then defeated his former class adversaries in a pre-civil war fanned by the French that sent many southern Saint-Domingue proprietors of color to other shores. Deported to southern France with his family, Toussaint Louverture died a prisoner in Fort-de-Joux, in the Jura mountains. His lieutenant and
“intellectual and political heir,” Jean-Jacques Dessalines—whose aunt is said to have led a group of Maroons—succeeded him at the helm toward Independence. Throughout that period, the migrations from Saint-Domingue to the Caribbean and other parts of the Atlantic World followed the fortunes of war.

**Toward Hayti**

On June 21, 1793, the Haitian Revolution had entered a pivotal phase, and the French Revolution was saved. Formerly enslaved Africans, who had taken up arms and organized to reclaim their freedom, then routed a fleet of French sailors in Cap Français and caused the royalist governor and a cohort of insurgent colonists to set sail for asylum in the United States. There, the newcomers found a number of prominent refugees from their homeland, also fugitives from the French Revolution, and whose presence in the young country reflected both ancient and recent ties. In Saint-Domingue, the struggle continued and turned into a tide of worldwide consequence.

Possibilities for Black freedom on a much larger scale erupted during the late summer and fall of 1791, when French West Indian slaves began torching plantations on the north coast of St. Domingue. They kindled a New World slave rebellion of unprecedented magnitude. When news that whites were fleeing the ravaged colony arrived in Caribbean and mainland ports, it dealt a crippling blow to the belief in the inevitability of white supremacy on which slave societies rested (Bolster, 1997, 144).

It was a story that had started long before in the mountains of Ayiti, and on January 1, 1804, a new country was born.

Revolutions are a work in progress. The Haitian Revolution was also welcoming. Poles and Germans who had defected from the French army to join the Haitian cause became instant citizens. Anyone of African or “Indian” descent was actively invited to come and stay in the country. Sailors as well as others spread the message, and many came from all corners of the Atlantic World. Haiti provided assistance and solidarity to those who similarly struggled for freedom, and survived against incredible odds. Still a work in progress.

**An ever-present colonial past**

Historical interest and curiosity about family history initially fueled my research. The perspective and distance required to prepare this essay gave me a deeper understanding of the
inhumanity and sheer brutality of a system still in place in many ways. It also made me remember in a new context the last conversation that I had with my father. He was then hospitalized in New York, and on our way back home, we stopped to say goodbye until our next visit.

More than ten years had passed since my father’s comment about Philadelphia during a previous trip. We had not since discussed the matter, although I had later inquired at times about our hometown or family history. “Never mind this,” he said, when I referred to the story about the colonial inheritance. “It is blood money, cursed money ...money for which they enslaved and killed people ...money is not important. ...those poor children who sell goods in the streets…,” he began to mumble as he drifted to sleep.

It was the 1980s, and new waves of migration had started in the Atlantic World.

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NOTES

1. Adresse de Tanguy-Laboissière à la Commission nationale civile de Saint-Domingue. L’an 2 de la République française.

2. Arrêt qui casse et annule celui du conseil supérieur de Port-au-Prince rendu, le 17 juillet 1775, contre Claude Corentin Tanguy de La Boissière, procureur à Saint-Louis, ainsi que toute la procédure instruite contre lui au conseil. L’arrêt réintègre Tanguy de La Boissière dans son état précédant la condamnation (n° 22) 26 juin 1778.
(http://anom.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr/fr?referer=nominatif&q=&ir=FRANOM_00001&persname_authfilenumber=20875); and

3. Concerning Tanguy’s role in the events that led to the destruction of Cap-Français: (Descourtiz, 1795, 272-75, 290-301), and for a different perspective: (Popkin, 2010, 155-245). While Descourtiz refers to Tanguy as “the last of the Romans” in praise of his resistance to the French Commissioners, Popkins defines him as a “white agitator.”


5. Freemasons. Parfaite Union Lodge (Philadelphia, Pa.). Tableau des membres qui composent la R.L. Française de Saint-Jean de Jerusalem, sous le titre distinctif, La Parfaite-Union: Orient de Philadelphie, en Pennsylvanie, États-Unis de l’Amérique septentrionale: À l’époque de la St. Jean, 5798. A Philadelphia: de l'imprimerie du F. Parent. [1798]. The information on page 16 of the document shows that Tanguy was born in Versailles, c.1746 (Childs, 52); more precisely on May 18, 1743, according to Gallica (http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10000246r/f365.image) where additional information on Tanguy's masonic activities in Les Cayes and Philadelphia can be found (pp. 367-370), accessed on March 23, 2018.


7. Gauthier, F. 2005-2017. « Moreau de Saint-Méry...: métissé lui-même, mais d’une teinte suffisamment claire pour ne plus être visible, il propose de déplacer la ligne de couleur et d’ouvrir aux métissés riches, blancs et qui partageaient les objectifs et les comportements des maîtres, l’accès à la classe dominante des blancs. (14) ».

8. Death of a Venerable lady. -On Friday morning last, Mrs. Tanguy de la Bossiere died rather suddenly at the residence of her nephew, Dr. J. M. Laroque. This lady was in the ninety
portion of the name while other documents had previously included it in its entirety. The mother of the bride was, however, designated by the title of “dame” and the last name of “de Bauval,” presumably her maiden name.
- According to Garrigus (2010, 165-9), “... in 1773, lawmakers decided to separate creole families into European and African branches... “A new law forbade free people of color to use names associated with white families,” and free people of color were to be identified as such in legal document. “Though notaries in the South province omitted such terms for wealthy families of color in the 1760s, by the 1780, even wealthy planters could not escape the label ‘free mulatto’ or ‘free quadroon.’”

9. Sicard de Las-Cases or de Lascaze. Index Moreau de Saint-Méry Lettre S.
- The records from the parish of Les Cayes, Saint-Domingue, for the year 1781, show on pages 14 and 15 (July13), the marriage of François Faure and Marie-Jeanne Sicard, omitting the last portion of the name while other documents had previously included it in its entirety. The mother of the bride was, however, designated by the title of “dame” and the last name of “de Bauval,” presumably her maiden name.
- According to Garrigus (2010, 165-9), “... in 1773, lawmakers decided to separate creole families into European and African branches... “A new law forbade free people of color to use names associated with white families,” and free people of color were to be identified as such in legal document. “Though notaries in the South province omitted such terms for wealthy families of color in the 1760s, by the 1780, even wealthy planters could not escape the label ‘free mulatto’ or ‘free quadroon.’”
- Other Sicards were shown as people of color in Saint-Domingue parish reports (i.e. Dominique Sicard, a “mulatto” then married to Madeleine Bourjolly a “quadroon,” Les Cayes, April 21, 1778).


17. In 1598, the Edict of Nantes had guaranteed French Protestants the freedom of conscience and the right to practice their religion within the French Catholic state. For migrations related to the revocation of that edict, see: (Hebert, 1990, 224). According to the Huguenot Society of America, the descendants of French Huguenots in the United States include George Washington and Paul Revere (http://huguenotsocietyofamerica.org/?page=Huguenot-History), accessed on February 3, 2016. Concerning George Washington, also see Stoudt, 1932.


20. Gauthier, F. 2005-2017. « Mais, parvenus à ce point de discrimination, de nombreux colons souvent nobles, dont la femme et les enfants étaient de couleur, préférèrent quitter la colonie et se réfugier dans le royaume pour échapper à la ségrégation. Or, en France, où n’existait pas le préjugé de couleur, ces familles de riches colons métissés furent favorablement accueillies et leurs enfants se marièrent noblement ou richement, ou les deux à la fois. (15) ».


25. Also, see Notes 9 and 10 above.


- Before living in Philadelphia, Tanguy had stayed for a while in New York, where his lodgings were raided and his papers seized (Popkin, 2010, 3006). Pierre Adet, the Minister Plenipotentiary of the French Republic had accused him of being an agent of the various “Émigrés” in Europe and the Colonies, as well as the prime mover behind the 1793 uprising of the French fleet anchored in the New York harbor, primarily the ship Jupiter. A warrant was then issued for his arrest [apparently with no follow-up]. Instead, Adet later commissioned Tanguy to write a book titled Mémoire sur la situation Commerciale de la France avec les États-Unis d’Amérique. Adet also expressed his distrust for Tanguy who, as he writes, had at first been a supporter of the Revolution but joined the opposition at the time of the abolition of slavery. Since Tanguy wanted to conduct research in the French Consulate’s archives for the second part of his book, Adet suggested giving him limited access to information, covering the cost of his research, and paying him a fee to be determined, so as to prevent him from making a dangerous use of his talents. Source: Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the year 1903, vol. II, Correspondence of the French Ministers to the United States, 1791-1797, edited by F.J. Turner (pp. 843-845; correspondence of P. A. ADET). (Baudrier, 2000, 30006). (www.gcheaibaueful/gchc131/p3006.rtf), accessed on March 27, 2016.

*See the related letter from Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, and explanatory notes (http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-14-02-0065).


- The name “de La Boëssière” also seems to have been a variant of “Labossière.” About Nicolas Texier de La Boëssière (also cited as Labossière), as well as his connections with the Chevalier de Saint-Georges, the General Dumas, and the Duke of Orléans, see: (http://tinyurl.com/nicolastexierdelaboessiere), accessed on March 27, 2016; also: Salles d’Armes de Paris, Chapitre II, Le Figaro (Paris. 1854, 2-4). June1, 1856. (http://tinyurl.com/sallesarmesparis), accessed on March 27, 2016.


28. In 1802, Toussaint Louverture was himself deported to Southern France with his family. He died a prisoner in Fort-de-Joux, in the Jura mountains. His family settled in Agen, near Bordeaux, and socialized with “a royalist, creole, and very Catholic circle,” including Elisabeth Bénédictine de Bologne Saint-George [sic] de Clairefontaine, half-sister of the Chevalier de Saint-Georges, as a close friend and protector (de Cauna, 2014, 234). In 1821, Toussaint’s son, Placide Louverture, married Josephine de Lacaze, whose father was “noble Joseph de Lacaze, alias marquis de Lacaze,” a “former bodyguard of the King [Louis XVI] and retired captain.” Thus, in the mid-20th century, Toussaint’s descendants included three French families in the Southwestern Aquitaine region (Ibid, 2012, 318). [Author’s Note: It is not clear whether the names Lacaze and Lascaze (see notes 9and 10 above) refer to the same family with a different spelling, or to two distinct families.]

- About Dessalines: “Dessalines was the most famous of the black generals. By some he was thought to excel [over] Toussaint in military genius; yet it was late in life before he learned to sign his name.” (James, 1963, 256); about Dessalines’ aunt, see “Victoria Montou surnommée Toya [Victoria Montou nicknamed Toya].” In Les héroïnes. Source: de la revue Le Document, Première année, No 2. Rédacteur: Mentor Laurent, Février 1940. (http://museeogierfombrun.org/2014/05/05/les-heroines/), accessed on April 1, 2016.
LIST OF REFERENCES


A Haitian Tale of Diasporas and Revolutions in the Atlantic World

Timeline of Haitian History

pre-1492  Taino/Arawaks live in Ayiti (now Haiti)
1492     Columbus and the Spaniards arrive. They rename the island Hispaniola.
1503     The first enslaved Africans brought to the island almost immediately begin to take
to the mountains, forming the first Maroon settlements along with the Tainos.
1640     French pirates seize Tortuga Island and begin the colony of Saint-Domingue on the
western third of Hispaniola.
1685     Louis XIV’s Black Code, regulating slavery and French colonial life, is enacted.
1697     The Treaty of Ryswick between Spain and France recognizes France’s possession of
Saint-Domingue.
1778     A contingent of free people of color from Saint-Domingue joins the American War of
Independence.
1789     The French Revolution begins.
1791     August 22-23. A large scale, organized revolt of enslaved Africans begins in the north of
Saint-Domingue. Toussaint Louverture is among the organizers. The Spaniards, at war
with France, recruit and train the former slaves as a quasi-autonomous military force.
1792     Enslaved Africans revolt in the south of Saint-Domingue, near Les Cayes.
The French Legislative Assembly votes the law of April 4, 1792, giving full citizenship
and equal rights to all free people of color.
1793     June 21. The French Civil Commissioners, sent to the colony to enforce the above law of
April 4, solicit help from nearby African Maroons and defeat the royalist governor
Galbaud, who departs for the United States with a fleet of colonists. The city of Cap-
Français is destroyed.
1794     February 4. The French National Convention proclaims the abolition of slavery in all
French colonies.
Toussaint Louverture joins the French in their fight to keep Saint-Domingue from the
British and the Spaniards.
1802     Toussaint Louverture fights against French control, is deported to France, imprisoned,
and dies there in 1803.
Map of the French part of Saint-Domingue 1764