

Silencing the Past

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Power and
the Production
of History



Beacon Press

Boston

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did, they embody the ambiguities of history. They give us the power to touch it, but not that to hold it firmly in our hands—hence the mystery of their battered walls. We suspect that their concreteness hides secrets so deep that no revelation may fully dissipate their silences. We imagine the lives under the mortar, but how do we recognize the end of a bottomless silence?

The Three Faces of Sans Souci

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Glory and
Silences in
the Haitian
Revolution



2

I walked in silence between the old walls, trying to guess at the stories they would never dare tell. I had been in the fort since daybreak. I had lost my companions on purpose: I wanted to tiptoe alone through the remains of history. Here and there, I touched a stone, a piece of iron hanging from the mortar, overlooked or left by unknown hands for unknown reasons. I almost tripped over a rail track, a deep cut on the concrete floor, which led to a piece of artillery lost in a darkened corner.

At the end of the alley, the sunlight caught me by surprise. I saw the grave at once, an indifferent piece of cement lying in the middle of the open courtyard. Crossing the Place d'Armes, I imagined the royal cavalry, black-skinned men and women one and all on their black horses, swearing to fight until the death rather than to let go of this fort and return to slavery.

I stepped across my dreams up to the pile of concrete. As I moved closer, the letters on the stone became more visible. I did not need to read the inscription to know the man who was lying under the concrete. This was his fort, his kingdom, the most daring of his buildings—The Citadel, his legacy of stone and arrogance. I bent over, letting my fingers run across the marble plaque, then closed my eyes to

let the fact sink in. I was as close as I would ever be to the body of Christophe—Henry I, King of Haiti.

I knew the man. I had read about him in my history books as do all Haitian schoolchildren; but that was not why I felt close to him, why ✓ I wanted to be closer. More than a hero, he was a friend of the family. My father and my uncle talked about him by the hour when I was still a child. They were often critical, for reasons I did not always understand; but they were also proud of him. They both belonged to The Society of King Christophe's Friends, a small intellectual fraternity that included Aimé Césaire and Alejo Carpentier—people I knew to be famous. Back then, I thought of the society as something of a fan club engaged in secret medieval rites. I found out later that I was not entirely wrong. As playwrights, novelists, and historians, the writer-friends of Henry Christophe were alchemists of memory, proud guardians of a past that they neither lived nor wished to have shared.

The mass of the Citadel towering over me, I stood alone in the Place d'Armes, my eyes still closed, summoning images too bright to settle in the late morning sun. I tried to recall the face of Henry at various stages of his life. I had seen many pictures of him, but none of them came back. All I could reach for here were this stone and the cold cannonballs scattered a few feet away in the courtyard. I reached further ✓ into myself. Relics danced behind my eyelids in fleeting shapes and colors: the royal star of St. Henry, a medal that my father handled, a green costume, a monochrome of the royal saber, an old coin I once touched, a carriage I once imagined. These were the things of which my memory of Christophe was made but they were failing me when I most needed them.

I opened my eyes to the securing sight of the Citadel standing tall against the sky. Memories are made of stone, and Henry I built more than his share of forts and palaces so that we could come visit him. Walking over to the edge of the terrace, I surveyed the kingdom as he

imagined it: the fields, the roads, the past in the present; and below, right below the clouds, the royal walls of Sans Souci, the King's favorite residence.

Sans Souci: The Palace

In the northern mountains of the Republic of Haiti, there is an old palace called Sans Souci that many urbanites and neighboring peasants revere as one of the most important historical monuments of their country. The palace—what remains of it—stands on a small elevation between the higher hills surrounding the town of Milot. It is impressive if only because of its size—or what one can now guess to have been its size. It was built to instill a long lasting deference, and it still does. One does not stumble upon these ruins; they are both too remote and too often mentioned within Haiti for the encounter to be fully accidental. Anyone who comes here, enticed by the posters of Haiti's Département du Tourisme or by one or another narrative of glory, is at least vaguely familiar with Haiti's record and assumes history to be dormant within these crumbling walls. Anyone who comes here knows that this huge dwelling was built in the early nineteenth century, for a black king, by blacks barely out of slavery. Thus the traveler is soon caught between the sense of desolation ✓ that molds Sans Souci's present and a furtive awareness of bygone glory. There is so little here to see and so much to infer. Anyone ✓ who comes here comes too late, after a climax of which little has been preserved, yet early enough to dare imagine what it might have been.

What it might have been is not left entirely to the visitor's imagination. Soon enough a peasant of the area will force himself upon you and serve as your impromptu guide. He will take you through the ruins and, for a small fee, will talk about Sans Souci.



Henry I, King of Haiti, by British painter Richard Evans

He will tell you that the palace was built by Henry Christophe, a hero of the Haitian Revolution who fought against slavery and became King of Haiti soon after the French defeat and the 1804 independence. He may or not mention that Haiti was then cut into two states with Christophe ruling the northern one. He may

or not know that Millot [*sic*] was an old French plantation that Christophe took over and managed for some time during the revolution; but he will surely relate the fabulous feasts that went on at Sans Souci when Christophe became king, the opulent dinners, the dances, the brilliant costumes. He might tell you that the price was heavy, in currency and in human blood: the King was both rich and ruthless. Hundreds of Haitians died building his favorite residence, its surrounding town, and the neighboring Citadel Henry, either because of the harsh labor conditions or because they faced the firing squad for a minor breach of discipline. At this point, you may start wondering if Sans Souci was worth the price. But the peasant will continue describing the property. He will dwell on its immense gardens now denuded, its dependencies now gone, and especially its waterworks: its artificial springs and the hidden channels that were directed through the walls, supposedly to cool the castle during the summer. In the words of an old hand who took me around the ruins: "Christophe made water flow within these walls." If your guide is seasoned enough, he will preserve his main effect until the very end: having seduced your imagination, he will conclude with a touch of pride that this extravagance was meant to impress the *blan* (whites/foreigners), meant to provide the world with irrefutable evidence of the ability of the black race.¹ ✓ *imagination*

On these and many other points, the printed record—the pictures and the words left behind by those who saw Sans Souci and the town of Milot before the 1842 earthquake that precipitated its ruin—corroborates the crux of the peasant's story and some of its amazing details. Geographer Karl Ritter, who drew a sketch of the palace a few days after Christophe's death, found it "very impressive to the eye." British visitor John Candler, who saw a deserted building he judged to be in poor style, admitted that it must have been "splendid" in Christophe's time. U.S. physician Jonathan Brown wrote that Sans Souci had "the reputation of" ✓

having been one of the most magnificent edifices of the West Indies." Writers also preserved passing descriptions of the waterworks: Christophe did not make water flow within the walls, but Sans Souci did have an artificial spring and numerous waterworks. Similarly, the King's ruthless reputation is well established in books, some of which were written by his contemporaries; professional historians are uncertain only about the actual number of laborers who died during the construction of the palace. Christophe's racial pride is also well known: it exudes from what remains of his correspondence; it has inspired Caribbean writers from Martiniquan playwright and poet Aimé Césaire to Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier. Long before this pride was fictionalized, one of Christophe's closest advisers, Baron Valentin de Vastey, chancellor of the kingdom, evoked the 1813 completion of Sans Souci and the adjacent Royal Church of Milot in grandiose terms that anticipated Afrocentrism by more than a century: "These two structures, erected by descendants of Africans, show that we have not lost the architectural taste and genius of our ancestors who covered Ethiopia, Egypt, Carthage, and old Spain with their superb monuments."²

Though the written record and the oral history transmitted by the local guides match quite closely on most substantial points, there is one topic of importance on which the peasants remain more evasive. If asked about the name of the palace, even a neophyte guide will reply, quite correctly, that "san souci" means "carefree" in Haitian (as "sans souci" does in French) and that the words are commonly used to qualify someone who worries about little. Some may even add that the expression aptly describes the King himself, or at least the side of him that sought relaxation and the easy life of Sans Souci. Others may recall that, during Christophe's reign, the name of Sans Souci was extended to the town newly built around the palace, now a rural burg more often re-

ferred to as Milot. But few guides are prone to volunteer that "Sans Souci" was also the name of a man and that this man was killed by Henry Christophe himself.

Christophe's
adversary

The War Within the War

The circumstances surrounding the death of Sans Souci, the man, are often mentioned—though always in passing and rarely in detail—in historical works dealing with the Haitian war of independence. The main story line of the Haitian Revolution, which augured the end of American slavery and eventuated in the birth of Haiti from the ashes of French Saint-Domingue, will receive only a summary treatment here. In August 1791, slaves in northern Saint-Domingue launched an uprising that spread throughout the colony and turned into a successful revolution that toppled both slavery and the French colonial order. The revolution took nearly thirteen years to unfold from the initial uprising to the proclamation of Haitian independence in January 1804.

Key markers along that path are successive concessions made by France and the increasing political and military achievements of the revolutionary slaves under the leadership of a Creole black, Toussaint Louverture. In 1794, France's formal abolition of slavery recognized the freedom *de facto* gained by the slaves in arms. Soon after, Louverture moved under the French banner with his troops. From 1794 to 1798, he fought the Spaniards, who controlled the eastern part of the island, and helped the French counter an invasion by British forces. By 1797, the black general had become the most influential political and military figure in French Saint-Domingue. His "colonial" army, composed mainly of former slaves, at times numbered more than twenty thousand men. In 1801, his successful invasion of the Spanish part of Hispaniola gave him control over the entire island. Although Lou-

1801 - Toussaint
entire Hispaniola

verture ruled in the name of France, he promulgated an independent Constitution that recognized him as Governor-for-life with absolute power.

Revolutionary France had followed these developments with great concern. Many in the metropolis and most whites in the colony were waiting for the first opportunity to reestablish the old order. That chance came with the Consulate. First Consul Napoleon Bonaparte took advantage of the relative calm that followed his coup d'état of 18 Brumaire to prepare an expedition with secret instructions to reestablish slavery in Saint-Domingue. The historical sketch that most concerns us, which lasted less than one year, starts with the 1802 landing of the French forces. ✓ Fr

✓ The French expedition was led by no less than Pauline Bonaparte's husband, General Charles Leclerc, Napoleon's brother-in-law. When Leclerc reached Saint-Domingue, one key figure of Louverture's army in the north of the country, the man responsible for Cap Français, the most important town of the colony, was General Henry Christophe. Born in neighboring Grenada, a free man long before the 1791 uprising, Christophe had an unusually broad life experience for a black man of that time; he had been, in turn, a scullion, a major-domo, and a hotel manager. He had been slightly wounded in Georgia, at the battle of Savannah, while fighting on the side of the American revolutionaries in the Comte d'Estaing's regiment. When the French forces reached the port of Cap, Leclerc promptly sent Christophe a written ultimatum threatening to invade the town with fifteen thousand troops if the blacks did not surrender by daybreak. The letter Christophe wrote to Leclerc was characteristic of the man: "If you have the means with which you threaten me, I shall offer you all the resistance worthy of a general; and if fate favors your weapons, you will not enter the town of Cap until I reduce it to ashes and, then and there, I shall keep on fighting you."³

Then, Christophe set fire to his own sumptuous house and prepared his troops for combat.

After a few months of bloody engagements, Leclerc's forces broke down many of the revolutionaries' defenses. Henry Christophe surrendered and joined the French forces in April 1802. Soon after Christophe's defection, other prominent black officers (including Louverture's most important second, General Jean-Jacques Dessalines) also joined the French forces, quite probably with Louverture's consent. In early May 1802, Louverture himself capitulated. Even though a number of former slaves rejected that cease-fire and maintained isolated pockets of armed resistance, Leclerc used the limited calm to entrap the black general. Louverture was captured in June 1802 and sent to jail in France. Dessalines + Christophe join French

Armed resistance had not stopped completely with the successive submissions of Christophe, Dessalines, and Louverture. It escalated after Louverture's exile, especially when Leclerc ordered the disarmament of all former slaves who did not belong to the colonial regiments now formally integrated within his army. Many former slaves, now free cultivators or soldiers, had seen in Louverture's arrest a testimony of Leclerc's treachery. They viewed the disarmament decree as additional proof that the French intended to reestablish slavery. They joined the resistance in increasing numbers in August and September 1802. By October, most of the Louverture followers who had formally accepted Leclerc's authority the previous summer rejoined the resistance with their troops. Louverture join France (betrayal) These black officers forged a new alliance with light-skinned free coloreds who until then had supported the expedition. By November 1802, Dessalines had become the leader of the alliance with the blessing of the most prominent of the free coloreds, mulatto general Alexandre Pétion, a former member of Leclerc's army. Dessalines against French A year later, the reconstituted revolutionary troops gained full control of the colony, the French acknowl-

edged defeat, and Haiti became an independent country with Dessalines as its first chief of state.

Historians generally agree on most of these facts, with the Haitians usually insisting on the courage of their ancestors, and the foreigners—especially white foreigners—usually emphasizing the role of yellow fever in weakening the French troops. Both groups mention only in passing that the Haitian war of independence involved more than two camps. The army first put together by Toussaint Louverture and reconstituted by Dessalines did not only fight against the French expeditionary forces. At crucial moments of the war, black officers turned also against their own, engaging into what was, in effect, a war within the war.

The series of events that I call the “war within the war” stretches from about June 1802 to mid-1803. It comprises mainly two major campaigns: 1) the one led by the black officers reintegrated under Leclerc’s command against the former slaves who had refused to surrender to the French (June 1802–October 1802); and 2) the one led by the same generals and the free colored officers associated with Pétion against the former slaves who refused to acknowledge the revolutionary hierarchy and the supreme authority of Dessalines (November 1802–April 1803). Crucial to the story is the fact that in both campaigns the leaders are mainly black Creoles (i.e., natives of the island, or of the Caribbean) and the dissident groups are composed of—and led by—Bossales (i.e., African-born) ex-slaves, mainly from the Congo. The story of Jean-Baptiste Sans Souci ties together these two campaigns.

Sans Souci: The Man

Colonel Jean-Baptiste Sans Souci was a Bossale slave, probably from the Congo, who played an important role in the Haitian Revolution from the very first days of the 1791 uprising. He may have obtained his name from a *quartier* called Sans Souci, which

bordered the parishes of Vallières and Grande Rivière.⁴ At any rate, it is in that area that we first find him in the written record. Gros, a petty French official captured by the slaves in October 1791, identified Sans Souci as the rebel commander of the camp the slaves had set up on the Cardinaux plantation in Grande Rivière. The prisoner seemed to know of the man, whom he described only as a black slave and “a very bad lot” (*très mauvais sujet*). However, since Gros stayed only one night in Cardinaux before being moved to another plantation seized by the ex-slaves, he does not provide any details about this camp or its commander.⁵

We know from other sources that Sans Souci remained active within the same area. Like other Congo military leaders, he excelled at the guerrilla-type tactics, reminiscent of the Congo civil wars of the eighteenth century, which were critical to the military evolution of the Haitian Revolution.⁶ After Toussaint Louverture unified the revolutionary forces, Sans Souci maintained his influence and became one of Henry Christophe’s immediate subalterns. At the time of the French invasion, he was military commander of the *arrondissement* of Grande Rivière, then an important military district in the north of Saint-Domingue that included his original Cardinaux camp. Between February and April 1802 he repeatedly won out over the French expeditionary forces in the areas he controlled. Like many other black officers, he tacitly accepted Leclerc’s victory after Louverture’s surrender. I do not know of a document indicating Sans Souci’s formal submission, but for the month of June at least, the French referred to him by his colonial grade—which suggests his integration within Leclerc’s military organization.

Sans Souci’s formal presence in the French camp was quite short—lasting less than a month. Leclerc, who had reports that the Colonel was covertly reorganizing the colonial troops and calling on cultivators to join a new rebellion, gave a secret order for his arrest on July 4, 1802. French general Philibert Fressinet,

a veteran of Napoleon's Italian campaigns (then, nominally at least, the superior of both Christophe and Sans Souci who were technically French colonial officers), took steps to implement that order. But Sans Souci did not wait for Fressinet. He defected with most of his troops, launching a vigorous attack on a neighboring French camp on July 7. Fressinet then wrote to Leclerc: "I am warning you, General, that *le nommé* [the so-called] Sans Souci has just rebelled and tries to win to his party as many cultivators as he can. He is even now encircling the Cardinaux [Cardinaux] camp. General Henry Christophe is marching against him."⁷

Between early July and November, troops from both the colonial and expeditionary forces, led in turn by Christophe, Dessalines, and Fressinet himself, among others, tried unsuccessfully to overpower Sans Souci. The African, meanwhile, gained the loyalty of other blacks, soldiers and cultivators alike. He soon became the leader of a substantial army, at least one powerful enough to give constant concern to the French. Using primarily guerrilla-type tactics, Sans Souci exploited his greater knowledge of the topography and his troops' better adaptation to the local environment to keep at bay both the French and the colonial forces still affiliated with Leclerc. While Christophe, Pétion, and Dessalines managed to subdue other foci of resistance, the extreme mobility of Sans Souci's small units made it impossible to dislodge him from his moving retreats in the northern mountains.⁸

By early September 1802, Leclerc ordered French general Jean Boudet to launch an all-out effort against Sans Souci with the backing of French general Jean-Baptiste Brunet and Dessalines himself, then recognized by the French as the most capable of the Creole higher ranks. Brunet alone led three thousand troops. Sans Souci's riposte was brisk and fierce. Commenting soon after on the massive offensive of 15 September, Leclerc wrote to Napo-

leon: "This day alone cost me 400 men." By the end of September Sans Souci and his most important allies, Makaya and Sylla, had nearly reversed the military situation in the northern part of the country. They never occupied any lowland territory for long, if at all; but they made it impossible for the French troops and their Creole allies to do so securely.⁹

The sustained resistance of various dissident groups (composed mainly of Africans—among whom those controlled or influenced by Sans Souci were the most important) and their continuous harassment of the French created an untenable situation for both Leclerc and the Creole officers under his command. On the one hand, an ailing and exasperated Leclerc (he died before the end of the war) took much less care to hide his ultimate plan: the deportation of most black and mulatto officers and the restoration of slavery. On the other hand, the Creole officers, constantly suspected by the French to be in connivance with Sans Souci or other leaders of the resistance, found themselves under increasing pressure to defect. By November 1802, most colonial officers had turned once more against the French, and Dessalines was acknowledged as the military leader of the new alliance forged between himself, Pétion, and Christophe.

But just as some former slaves had refused to submit to the French, some (often the same) contested the new revolutionary hierarchy. Jean-Baptiste Sans Souci notably declined the new leaders' repeated invitations to join ranks with them, arguing that his own unconditional resistance to the French exempted him from obedience to his former superiors. He would not serve under men whose allegiance to the cause of freedom was, at the very least, dubious; and he especially resented Christophe whom he considered a traitor. It is in this second phase of the war within the war that Sans Souci marched to his death. Within a few weeks, the Creole generals defeated or won out over most of the dissidents. Sans Souci resisted longer than most but eventually

factual
highland
usage

Leclerc
plan to
restore
slavery

Christophe
traitor
to Sans
Souci

Sans Souci
submits
to Dessalines

↓

Christophe
kills
Sans Souci

omitted

Berlin
Sans Souci
palace

agreed to negotiations with Dessalines, Pétion, and Christophe about his role in the new hierarchy. At one of these meetings, he virtually assured Dessalines that he would recognize his supreme authority, thus in effect reversing his dissidence but without appearing to bow to Christophe personally. Still, Christophe asked for one more meeting with his former subaltern. Sans Souci showed up at Christophe's headquarters on the Grand Pré plantation with only a small guard. He and his followers fell under the bayonets of Christophe's soldiers.

Sans Souci's existence and death are mentioned in most written accounts of the Haitian war of independence. Likewise, professional historians who deal with Christophe's rule always note the king's fondness for grandiose constructions and his predilection for the Milot palace, his favorite residence. But few writers have puzzled over the palace's peculiar name. Fewer have commented on the obvious: that its name and the patronym of the man killed by Christophe ten years before the erection of his royal residence are the same. Even fewer have noted, let alone emphasized, that there were three, rather than two, "Sans Soucis": the man and two palaces. Six decades before Christophe's coronation, Prussian Emperor Frederick the Great had built himself a grandiose palace on top of a hill in the town of Potsdam, a few miles from Berlin. That palace, a *haut-lieu* of the European Enlightenment, which some observers claim to have been part inspiration for the purpose—and perhaps the architectural design—of Milot, was called Sans Souci.

Sans Souci Revisited

With their various layers of silences, the three faces of Sans Souci provide numerous vantage points from which to examine the means and process of historical production. Concrete reminders that the uneven power of historical production is expressed also

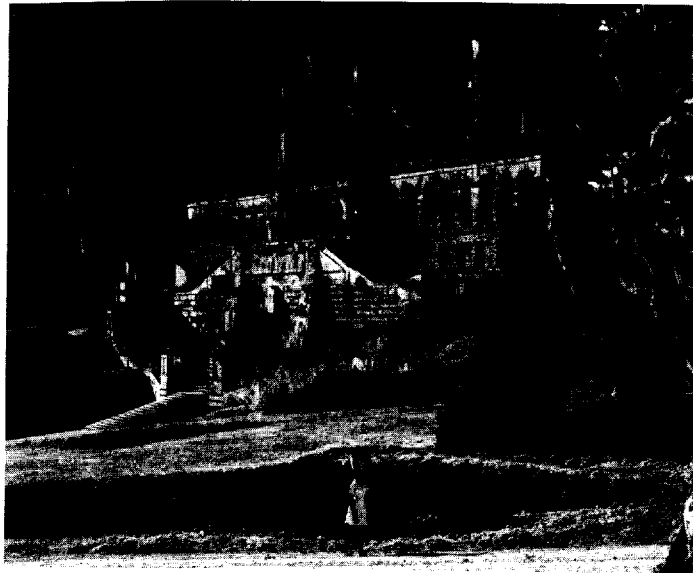
through the power to touch, to see, and to feel, they span a material continuum that goes from the solidity of Potsdam to the missing body of the Colonel. They also provide us with a concrete example of the interplay between inequalities in the historical process and inequalities in the historical narrative, an interplay which starts long before the historian (qua collector, narrator, or interpreter) comes to the scene.

Romantic reevaluation of the weak and defeated notwithstanding, the starting points are different. Sans Souci-Potsdam is knowable in ways that Sans Souci-Milot will never be. The Potsdam palace is still standing. Its mass of stone and mortar has retained most of its shape and weight, and it is still furnished with what passes for the best of rococo elegance. Indeed, Frederick's successor started its historical maintenance, its transformation into an archive of a sort, by reconstructing Frederick's room the very year of Frederick's death. Frederick's own body, in his well-kept coffin, has become a marker of German history. Hitler stood at his Potsdam grave to proclaim the Third Reich. Devoted German officers removed the coffin from Potsdam as the Soviet army moved into Berlin. Chancellor Kohl had the coffin reinterred in the Potsdam garden in the early 1990s as a tribute to—and symbol of—German reunification. Frederick has been reburied beside his beloved dogs. Two centuries after Frederick's death, both he and his palace have a materiality that history needs both to explain and to acknowledge.

In contrast to Potsdam, the Milot palace is a wreck. Its walls were breached by civil war, neglect, and natural disasters. They testify to a physical decline that started the very year of Christophe's death and accelerated over the years. Christophe had no political heir, certainly no immediate successor eager and able to preserve his personal quarters. He committed suicide in the midst of an uprising, and the republicans who took over his kingdom had no wish to transform Sans Souci into a monument. Although

Sans Souci
Potsdam

+ part
successor
in
Christophe



Sans Souci-Milot, today

✓ Christophe's stature as myth preceded his death, his full-fledged conversion into national hero came much later. Still, like Frederick, he is buried in his most famous construction, the Citadel Henry, now a UNESCO World Heritage landmark not far away from Sans Souci. The Milot palace itself has become a monument—though one which reflects both the limited means and the determination of the Haitian government and people to invest in historical preservation. In spite of the devotion of two Haitian architects, its restoration lags behind schedule, in part for lack of funds. Further, even a reconstructed Milot will not have the same claims to history as a regularly maintained historical monument, such as the palace at Potsdam. The surrounding town of Milot, in turn, has lost historical significance.

As for the body of the Colonel, it is somewhat misleading to state it as "missing," for it was never reported as such. As far as we know, no one ever claimed it, and its memory does not even live in the bodies of his descendants—if any—in or around Milot. Further, whereas we know what both Christophe and Frederick looked like because both had the wish and the power to have their features engraved for posterity, one of the three faces of Sans Souci may have disappeared forever, at least in its most material form. The royal portrait commissioned by Henry I from Richard Evans, reproduced in many recent books, remains a source that Sans Souci the man has yet to match: there is no known image of the Colonel. In short, because historical traces are inherently uneven, sources are not created equal.

✓
existence of
Sans Souci
the 02

But if lived inequalities yield unequal historical power, they do so in ways we have yet to determine. The distribution of historical power does not necessarily replicate the inequalities (victories and setbacks, gains and losses) lived by the actors. Historical power is not a direct reflection of a past occurrence, or a simple sum of past inequalities measured from an actor's perspective or from the standpoint of any "objective" standard, even at the first moment. The French superiority in artillery, the strategic superiority of Sans Souci, and the political superiority of Christophe can all be demonstrated, but no such demonstration would enable us to predict their relative significance then and now. Similarly, sources do not encapsulate the whole range of significance of the occurrences to which they testify.

✓

Further, the outcome itself does not determine in any linear way how an event or a series of events enters into history. The French expeditionary forces lost the Haitian war. (They thought they did, and they did.) Similarly, Colonel Sans Souci was the loser and Christophe the ultimate winner both politically and militarily within the black camp. Yet the papers preserved by General Donatien Rochambeau (Leclerc's successor as commander of the

French expedition) show more than fifty entries about French general Fressinet in spite of the fact that Fressinet was, by any one's standard, a fairly minor figure in the Saint-Domingue campaigns. In comparison, there are eleven entries about Christophe, whom we know gave both Leclerc and Rochambeau much more to think about than Fressinet ever did. Sans Souci, in turn—who came close to upsetting the plans of both the French and colonial officers and indeed forced both to change tactics in mid-course—received a single entry.¹⁰ → *efface Christophe & write to S. Souci*

Thus the presences and absences embodied in sources (artifacts and bodies that turn an event into fact) or archives (facts collected, thematized, and processed as documents and monuments) are neither neutral or natural. They are created. As such, they are not mere presences and absences, but mentions or silences of various kinds and degrees. By silence, I mean an active and transitive process: one "silences" a fact or an individual as a silencer silences a gun. One engages in the practice of silencing. Mentions and silences are thus active, dialectical counterparts of which history is the synthesis. Almost every mention of Sans Souci, the palace, the very resilience of the physical structure itself, effectively silences Sans Souci, the man, his political goals, his military genius.

Inequalities experienced by the actors lead to uneven historical power in the inscription of traces. Sources built upon these traces in turn privilege some events over others, not always the ones privileged by the actors. Sources are thus instances of inclusion, the other face of which is, of course, what is excluded. This may now be obvious enough to those of us who have learned (though more recently than we care to remember) that sources imply choices. But the conclusion we tend to draw that some occurrences have the capacity (a physical one, I would insist) to enter history and become "fact" at the first stage while others do not is much too general, and ultimately useless in its ecumenical form. That some peoples and things are absent of history, lost, as it

were, to the possible world of knowledge, is much less relevant to the historical practice than the fact that some peoples and things are absent in history, and that this absence itself is constitutive of the process of historical production.

Silences are inherent in history because any single event enters history with some of its constituting parts missing. Something is always left out while something else is recorded. There is no perfect closure of any event, however one chooses to define the boundaries of that event. Thus whatever becomes fact does so with its own inborn absences, specific to its production. In other words, the very mechanisms that make any historical recording possible also ensure that historical facts are not created equal. They reflect differential control of the means of historical production at the very first engraving that transforms an event into a fact.¹¹ Silences of this kind show the limits of strategies that imply a more accurate reconstitution of the past, and therefore the production of a "better" history, simply by an enlargement of the empirical base.¹² To be sure, the continuous enlargement of the physical boundaries of historical production is useful and necessary. The turn toward hitherto neglected sources (e.g., diaries, images, bodies) and the emphasis on unused facts (e.g., facts of gender, race, and class, facts of the life cycle, facts of resistance) are pathbreaking developments. My point is that when these tactical gains are made to dictate strategy they lead, at worst, to a neo-empiricist enterprise and, at best, to an unnecessary restriction of the battleground for historical power.

As sources fill the historical landscape with their facts, they reduce the room available to other facts. Even if we imagine the landscape to be forever expandable, the rule of interdependence implies that new facts cannot emerge in a vacuum. They will have to gain their right to existence in light of the field constituted by previously created facts. They may dethrone some of these facts, erase or qualify others. The point remains that sources occupy

✓ competing positions in the historical landscape. These positions themselves are inherently imbued with meaning since facts cannot be created meaningless. Even as an ideal recorder, the chronicler necessarily produces meaning and, therefore, silences.

The tenets of the distinction between chronicler and narrator are well known.¹³ The chronicler provides a play-by-play account of every event he witnesses, the narrator describes the life of an entity, person, thing, or institution. The chronicler deals with discrete chunks of time united only by his record-keeping; the narrator deals with a continuity provided by the life span of the entity described. The chronicler describes only events that he witnessed; the narrator can tell stories both about what he saw and what he learned to be true from others. The chronicler does not know the end of the story—indeed, there is no point to the story; the narrator knows the full story. The speech of the chronicler is akin to that of a radio announcer giving a play-by-play account of a sports game; the speech of the narrator is akin to that of a storyteller.¹⁴

Even if we admit that distinction as couched, silences are inherent in the chronicle. The sportscaster's account is a play-by-play description but only of the occurrences that matter to the game. Even if it is guided mainly by the seriality of occurrences, it tends to leave out from the series witnesses, participants, and events

omissions considered generally as marginal. The audience enters primarily when it is seen as influencing the players. Players on the bench are left out. Players in the field are mentioned mainly when they capture the ball, or at least when they try to capture it or are meant to do so. Silences are necessary to the account, for if the sportscaster told us every "thing" that happened at each and every moment, we would not understand anything. If the account was indeed fully comprehensive of all facts it would be incomprehensible. Further, the selection of what matters, the dual creation of mentions and silences, is premised on the understanding of the

rules of the game by broadcaster and audience alike. In short, play-by-play accounts are restricted in terms of what may enter them and in terms of the order in which these elements may enter.

What is true of play-by-play accounts is no less true of notary records, business accounts, population censuses, parish registers. Historians familiar with the plantation records that inscribe the daily life of Caribbean slaves are well aware that births are under-reported in these records.¹⁵ Planters or overseers often preferred not to register the existence of a black baby whose survival was unlikely, given the high incidence of infant mortality. Temporary omission made more sense: it could be corrected if the child survived beyond a certain age.

under reporting infant mortality

We are not dealing here with a case in which technical or ideological blinders skewed the reporting of the chronicler. It is not as if these lives and deaths were missed by negligence. Nor were they inconsequential to the chronicler: pregnancies and births considerably affected the amount of available labor, the linchpin of the slave system. Masters were not even trying to conceal these births. Rather, both births and deaths were actively silenced in the records for a combination of practical reasons inherent in the reporting itself. To be sure, slavery and racism provided the context within which these silences occurred, but in no way were the silences themselves the direct products of ideology. They made sense in terms of the reporting, in terms of the logic of its accounting procedures. In short, the chronicler-accountant is no less passive than the chronicler-sportscaster. As Emile Benveniste reminds us, the census taker is always a censor—and not only because of a lucky play of etymology: he who counts heads always silences facts and voices.¹⁶ Silences are inherent in the creation of sources, the first moment of historical production.

✓ *historical context*

mediation

✓ Unequal control over historical production obtains also in the ② second moment of historical production, the making of archives

and documents. Of course, sources and documents can emerge simultaneously and some analysts conflate the two.¹⁷ My own insistence on distinguishing a moment of fact-assembly from that of fact-creation is meant first to emphasize that uneven historical power obtains even before any work of classification by non-participants. Slave plantation records entered history as sources with the added value of the inequalities that made them possible long before they were classified into archives. Second, I want to insist that the kind of power used in the creation of sources is not necessarily the same that allows the creation of archives.¹⁸

By archives, I mean the institutions that organize facts and sources and condition the possibility of existence of historical statements. Archival power determines the difference between a historian, amateur or professional, and a charlatan.

Archives assemble. Their assembly work is not limited to a more or less passive act of collecting. Rather, it is an active act of production that prepares facts for historical intelligibility. Archives set up both the substantive and formal elements of the narrative.

They are the institutionalized sites of mediation between the sociohistorical process and the narrative about that process. They enforce the constraints on "debatability" we noted earlier with Appadurai: they convey authority and set the rules for credibility and interdependence; they help select the stories that matter.

So conceived, the category covers competing institutions with various conditions of existence and various modes of labor organization. It includes not only the libraries or depositories sponsored by states and foundations, but less visible institutions that also sort sources to organize facts, according to themes or periods, into documents to be used and monuments to be explored. In that sense, a tourist guide, a museum tour, an archaeological expedition, or an auction at Sotheby's can perform as much an archival role as the Library of Congress.¹⁹ The historical guild or, more properly, the rules that condition academic history perform

similar archival duties. These rules enforce constraints that belie the romantic image of the professional historian as an independent artist or isolated artisan. The historian is never alone even within the most obscure corner of the archive: the encounter with the document is also an encounter with the guild even for the amateur.

In short, the making of archives involves a number of selective operations: selection of producers, selection of evidence, selection of themes, selection of procedures—which means, at best the differential ranking and, at worst, the exclusion of some producers, some evidence, some themes, some procedures. Power enters here both obviously and surreptitiously. Jean-Baptiste Sans Souci was silenced not only because some narrators may have consciously chosen not to mention him but primarily because most writers followed the acknowledged rules of their time.

Silences in the Historical Narrative

The dialectics of mentions and silences obtain also at the third moment of the process, when events that have become facts (and may have been processed through archives) are retrieved. Even if we assume instances of pure historical "narrativity," that is, accounts that describe an alleged past in a way analogous to a sportscaster's play-by-play description of a game, even if we postulate a recording angel—with no stakes in the story—who would dutifully note all that was mentioned and collected, any subsequent narrative (or any corpus of such narratives) would demonstrate to us that retrieval and recollection proceed unequally. Occurrences equally noted, and supposedly not yet subject to interpretation in the most common sense of the word, exhibit in the historical corpus an unequal frequency of retrieval, unequal (factual) weight, indeed unequal degrees of factualness. Some facts are recalled more often than others; some strings of

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+
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assigned
certain
documents

✓
Archival
power

✓
set up
credibility/
authority

✓
power to
cont.
knowledge
even outside
of institutions

✓
continue
classical
guild or
caste

✓
unequal
factual
weight
etc

facts are recalled with more empirical richness than others even in play-by-play accounts.

Every fact recorded in my narrative of the Sans Souci story is part of the available record in relatively accessible form since I have used only sources available in multiple copies: memoirs, published accounts, so-called "secondary" sources—that is, material already produced as history. But the frequency with which they appear in the total corpus from which the narrative was drawn varies. So does the material weight of mention, that is, the sheer empirical value of the string within which any single fact is enmeshed.

That Colonel Sans Souci was not the leader of an impromptu or marginal rebel band but an early leader in the slave uprising and, later, a high-ranking officer of Louverture's army turned dissident has been a constant fact within the published record from the late eighteenth century to our times.²⁰ But that fact remained largely unused until recently: its frequency of retrieval was low, its empirical elaboration defective in terms of the information already available in that corpus. Sans Souci was most often alluded to without mention of grade or origins, without even a first name, all available facts within the corpus. Little was said of the size of his troops, of the details of his death, of his few stated positions.²¹ Yet there was enough to sketch a picture of Sans Souci, even if a very fleeting one, certainly not as elaborate as that of Christophe.

Still, materials of that sort had to re-enter the corpus, so to speak, quite slowly and in restricted ways—for instance, as part of a catalogue of documents within which they remained more or less inconspicuous.²² Only in the 1980s have they surfaced as (re)discoveries in their own right within a narrative.²³ Thus, to many readers who had access to most of this corpus and who may or may not have different stakes in the narrative, the extent of Sans Souci's political dissidence—if not that of his existence—is likely to be apprehended as "news." So is (for a different group

of readers, overlapping—and as substantial as—the first one) the suggestion that the palace at Milot may have been modeled after the palace at Potsdam to an extent still undetermined.

Now, the individuals who constructed this corpus came from various times and backgrounds, sought to offer various interpretations of the Haitian Revolution, and passed at times opposite value judgments on either the revolution itself or Christophe. Given these conflicting viewpoints, what explains the greater frequency of certain silences in the corpus?

Let us go back to the actual practice of an Ideal Chronicler. Our description of that practice suggests that play-by-play accounts and even inventory lists are restricted, not only in terms of the occurrences they register, but also in terms of the order in which these occurrences are registered. In other words, no chronicle can avoid a minimal structure of narration, a movement that gives it some sense. That structure, barely visible in the typical chronicle, becomes fundamental to the narrative proper.

Historical narratives are premised on previous understandings, which are themselves premised on the distribution of archival power. In the case of Haitian historiography, as in the case of most Third World countries, these previous understandings have been profoundly shaped by Western conventions and procedures. First, the writing and reading of Haitian historiography implies literacy and formal access to a Western—primarily French—language and culture, two prerequisites that already exclude the majority of Haitians from direct participation in its production. Most Haitians are illiterate and unilingual speakers of Haitian, a French-based Creole. Only a few members of the already tiny elite are native bilingual speakers of French and Haitian. The first published memoirs and histories of the revolution were written almost exclusively in French. So were most of the written traces (letters, proclamations) that have become primary documents. Currently, the vast majority of history books about Saint-

material
produced
after 1800

info
available
just
unused

written in
French -
Haitian
pop + have
access

Domingue/Haiti is written in French, with a substantial minority of those published in France itself. The first full-length history book (and for that matter the first full-length non-fiction book) written in Haitian Creole is my own work on the revolution, which dates from 1977.²⁴

Second, regardless of their training and the degree to which they may be considered members of a guild, Haitian and foreign narrators aim to conform to guild practice. The division between guild historians and amateurs is, of course, premised on a particular Western-dominated practice. In the Haitian case, few if any individuals make a living writing history. Haitian historians have included physicians, lawyers, journalists, businessmen, bureaucrats and politicians, high school teachers and clergymen. Status as historian is not conferred by an academic doctoral degree but by a mixture of publications that conform to a large extent to the standards of the Western guild and active participation in ongoing historical debates. Previous understandings here include an acknowledgment of the now global academic division of labor as shaped by the particular history of Western Europe. Just as sportscasters assume an audience's limited knowledge of the players (who is who, what are the two sides), so do historians build their narrative on the shoulders of previous ones. The knowledge that narrators assume about their audience limits both their use of the archives and the context within which their story finds significance. To contribute to new knowledge and to add new significance, the narrator must both acknowledge and contradict the power embedded in previous understandings.

② This chapter itself exemplifies the point. My narrative of the Haitian Revolution assumed both a certain way of reading history and the reader's greater knowledge of French than of Haitian history. Whether or not these assumptions were correct, they reflect a presumption about the unevenness of historical power. But if they were correct, the narrative had to present an overview of

the last years of the Haitian Revolution. Otherwise, the story of Sans Souci would not make sense to most readers. I did not feel the need to underscore that Haiti is in the Caribbean and that Afro-American slavery had been going on in the Caribbean for exactly three centuries when these events occurred. These mentions would have added to the empirical weight of the narrative, but the story still made sense without them. Further, I assumed that most of my readers knew these facts. Still, expecting many of my readers to be North American undergraduates, I took the precaution of inserting throughout the text some clues about Haiti's topography and its general history. I did not report that Toussaint's capture (which I qualified as an entrapment) occurred on June 7, 1802, because the exact date did not seem to matter much in the narrative. But if I had done so I would have used, as I do now, the Christian calendar, the year indexation system the West inherited from Dionysius Exiguus rather than, say, an oriental system. Nowhere in this text do I use the *calendrier républicain* (the system that indexed months and years in most of the primary documents of this story) because it did not prevail in post-revolutionary narratives and lost, therefore, its archival power. Even individuals who were forced to learn its correspondence with Dionysius's system at an early age (as I was in school) would take some time to ascertain that "le 18 prairial de l'an dix" was indeed June 7, 1802. In short, I bowed to some rules, inherited from a history of uneven power, to ensure the accessibility of my narrative.

Thus, in many ways, my account followed a conventional line—but only up to a certain point because of my treatment of Sans Souci. Until now indeed, the combined effect of previous understandings about plot structures and common empirical knowledge resulted in a partial silencing of the life and death of the Colonel. Players have been distributed according to the major leagues, and the event-units of Haitian history have been cut in

Trouillot
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slices that cannot be easily modified. Thus the war within the war has been subsumed within accounts of the war between the French and the colonial troops, rarely (if ever) detailed as a narrative in its own right. In that sense, indeed, it never constituted a complete sequence, a play-by-play account of any "thing."

Rather, its constituting events were retrieved as marginal subparts of other accounts, and the life and death of Sans Souci himself as a smaller segment of these subparts. To unearth Colonel Sans Souci as more than a negligible figure within the story of Haiti's emergence, I chose to add a section that recast his story as a separate account after the chronological sketch of the revolution. This was a choice based on both possible procedures and assessment of my readers' knowledge. That choice acknowledges power, but it also introduces some dissidence by setting up the war within the war as a historical topic.

To be sure, I could have highlighted the figure of the Colonel in a different way. But I had to resort to a procedure of emphasis based on both content and form in order to reach my final goal, that of suggesting new significance to both the Haitian Revolution and to the Colonel's life. I could not leave to chance the transformation of some silences into mentions or the possibility that mentions alone would add retrospective significance.

In short, this unearthing of Sans Souci required extra labor not so much in the production of new facts but in their transformation into a new narrative.

Silences Within Silences

The unearthing of silences, and the historian's subsequent emphasis on the retrospective significance of hitherto neglected events, requires not only extra labor at the archives—whether or not one uses primary sources—but also a project linked to an interpretation. This is so because the combined silences accrued

through the first three steps of the process of historical production intermesh and solidify at the fourth and final moment when retrospective significance itself is produced. To call this moment "final" does not suggest that it follows the chronological disappearance of the actors. Retrospective significance can be created by the actors themselves, as a past within their past, or as a future within their present. Henry I killed Sans Souci twice: first, literally, during their last meeting; second, symbolically, by naming his most famous palace Sans Souci. This killing in history was as much for his benefit as it was for our wonder. It erased Sans Souci from Christophe's own past, and it erased him from his future, what has become the historians' present. It did not erase Sans Souci from Christophe's memory or even from the sources. Historian Hénock Trouillot, one of the few Haitians to emphasize the similarity between the two names, suggests that Christophe may even have wanted to perpetuate the memory of his enemy as the most formidable one he defeated. In other words, the silencing of Sans Souci could be read as an engraving of Christophe himself, the ultimate victor over all mortal enemies and over death itself.

In erecting Sans Souci at the foothills of Milot, did Christophe want to prove how solidly his power was implanted in this soil? Or else, was he dominated by a more obscure thought? For a legend reports that a diviner foretold Christophe that he would die by the hand of a Congo. Then, superstitious as he was, having satisfied his propensity for magic, did he believe that in erecting this town he could defy destiny? . . . We do not know.²⁵

The suggestion is not far-fetched. That Christophe deemed himself one notch above most mortals was well known even in his lifetime. Further, his reliance on transformative rituals, his desire

there was never a linear play by play

his focus on S. Souci is an act of power but also creates a new narrative

even the act of recovering silence is colored by silence

Christophe silenced Sans Souci twice

Question why Christophe named castle S. Souci

to control both humans and death itself are epitomized in his last moments. Having engaged unsuccessfully in various rituals to restore his failing health and knowing that he had lost the personal magnetism that made his contemporaries tremble at his sight, a paralyzed Christophe shot himself, reportedly with a silver bullet, before a growing crowd of insurgents reached Sans Souci. Whether that bullet was meant to save him from a Congo, as such, we do not know.

But we know that the silencing was effective, that Sans Souci's life and death have been endowed with only marginal retrospective significance while neither Christophe's apologists nor his detractors fail to mention the king's thirst for glory and the extent to which he achieved it in his lifetime and thereafter. The legend of the diviner may one day be transformed into fact. But Trouillot's references to superstition notwithstanding, the real magic remains this dual production of a highly significant mention of glory and an equally significant silence. Christophe indeed defied the future with this silencing.

For silencing here is an erasure more effective than the absence or failure of memory, whether faked or genuine.²⁶ French general Pamphile de Lacroix had no particular reason to take publicly the side of either man at the time that he wrote his memoirs. He knew them both. His own life intersected with theirs in ways that usually inscribe events in memory: they were both his enemies and his subalterns at different times in a foreign war about which he was half-convinced and ended up losing. He is the only human being we know to have left records of a conversation with Christophe about Colonel Sans Souci. That sixty pages after he reports this conversation, de Lacroix mentions by name the favorite palace of Henry I without commenting on the connection between that name and the Colonel's patronym testifies to the effectiveness of Christophe's silencing.²⁷

Indeed, de Lacroix's silence typifies an obliteration that may

have gone beyond Christophe's wishes. For in many non-Haitian circles, the disappearance of Sans Souci the man tied the entire significance of the palace at Milot to Sans Souci-Potsdam. Jonathan Brown, the physician from New Hampshire who visited Haiti a decade after Christophe's death and failed to note the connection between the Colonel and the palace, wrote: "[Christophe] was particularly delighted with history, of which his knowledge was extensive and accurate; and Frederick the Great of Prussia was a personage with whom above all others he was captivated, the name of Sans Souci having been borrowed from Potsdam."²⁸

The excerpt from Brown is one of the earliest written mentions of a relationship between the two palaces and the most likely source for subsequent writers in the English language. The only reference to Potsdam prior to Brown in the corpus covered here is buried in a diatribe against Christophe by Haitian writer and politician Hérard Dumesle. Dumesle does not say that the Milot palace was designed or named after Potsdam. Rather, he emphasizes a fundamental contradiction between what he perceives as Frederick's love of justice and Christophe's tyranny.²⁹ Elsewhere in the book, Dumesle also compares Christophe with Nero and Caligula. He derides Christophe's ceremonial corps of amazons who, in his view, were much less graceful than the real amazons of pre-conquest South America. In short, as mentioned by Dumesle, the connection between Potsdam and Milot is purely rhetorical. Has history turned this rhetoric into a source? Hubert Cole, who wrote an important biography of Christophe, expands on the theme of German influence on Haitian architecture of the time and claims that "German engineers" built the Citadel. Cole, like Brown, does not cite sources for his suggestions.

Implicitly contradicting Brown and Cole, Haitian historian Vergniaud Leconte credits Christophe's military engineer, Henri Barré, for the design of the Citadel and one Chéri Warloppe for

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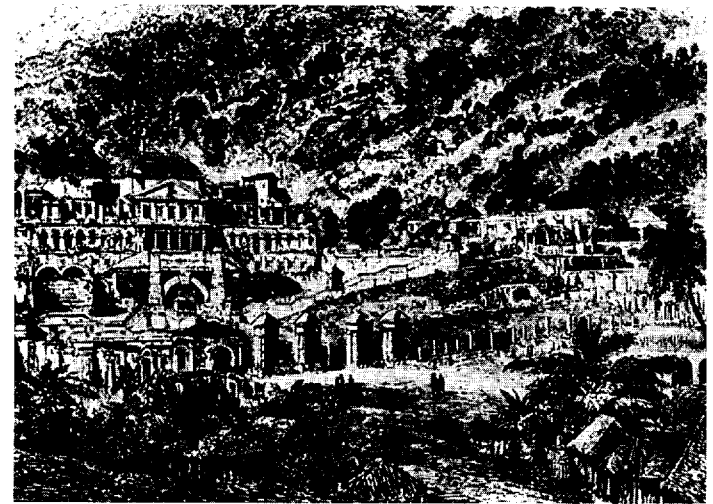
✓ rhetoric
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the design and building of Sans Souci.³⁰ Leconte examined most writings then available about Christophe and claimed to have used new documents as well as oral sources, but except for locating Warloppe's grave in a cemetery in northern Haiti, he does not tie his data to specific archives or sources. Leconte does not allude to any German influence. Explicitly rejecting such influence, Haitian architect Patrick Delatour, who is involved in the restoration of the palace, insists upon viewing it within Christophe's larger project of building a royal town. For Delatour (personal communications), the foreign association—if any—is that of French urban planning at the turn of the century. Did someone dream of the German connection?

There were German—and other European—residents in Christophe's kingdom. There were Haitians fluent in German—and in other European languages—at the king's personal service.³¹ Moreover, Christophe did hire German military engineers to strengthen the defenses of his kingdom. Charles Mackenzie, the British consul in Haiti and a self-avowed spy, describes the case of two of these Germans whom Christophe jailed in order to prevent them from divulging military secrets. Yet Mackenzie, who visited and described Sans Souci less than ten years after Christophe's death, does not connect the two palaces.³²

Still, given what we know of Henry I, and given the presence of German military architects in his kingdom, it is more than probable that he was aware of Potsdam's existence and that he knew what it looked like. That Frederick contributed to the design of Sans Souci-Potsdam, wrote poetry, received in his palace celebrities of his time, men like Johann Sebastian Bach and Voltaire—also suggest an example that could have inspired Christophe. Henry I indeed supervised personally the construction of Sans Souci-Milot and maintained there the closest Haitian equivalent to an intellectual salon, thus reproducing, knowingly or not, aspects of the dream of Potsdam. None of this authenticates a



Sans Souci-Milot, a nineteenth-century engraving

strong Potsdam connection. Having compared numerous images of the two palaces, which include sketches of Sans Souci before 1842, I find that they betray some vague similarities both in general layout and in some details (the cupola of the church, the front arcades). But I will immediately confess that my amateurish associations require at least a suspicion of influence. How grounded is such a suspicion?

The strongest evidence against a strong Potsdam connection is yet another silence. Austro-German geographer Karl Ritter, a seasoned traveler and a keen observer of peoples and places, visited Sans Souci eight days after Christophe's death. Ritter climbed upon a hill and drew a picture of the palace. His text describes in detail a building that was "built entirely according to European taste" and emphasizes such features as Christophe's bathroom and the "European" plants in the garden.³³ Indeed, the word "Eu-

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1
Potsdam also a
Silencing the Past
intellectual salon

ropean" returns many times in the written description, but nowhere is there the suggestion of an affinity between Christophe's residence and that of Frederick.

Ritter had the benefit of both immediacy and hindsight. Most resident foreigners had been kept away from the road to the Citadel and, therefore, from Sans Souci during Christophe's tenure. A few days after the king's suicide, some European residents rushed to discover by themselves Christophe's two most famous constructions. Ritter joined that party. Thus, he visited the palace in the company of other whites at a time when Sans Souci "triggered so much interest" among the few white residents of Haiti that "every white had to talk about it."³⁴

Ritter does not report these conversations but one can presume that he took them into consideration while writing his text. At the same time, since that text was published much later, indeed after that of Dumesle and that of Mackenzie, Ritter could have picked up from either of these two writers hints to a German connection. Yet Ritter never alludes to a specifically "German" or "Prussian" influence on Sans Souci-Milot.³⁵ Either he never heard of it, even from fellow German speakers residing in Haiti, or he thought it inconsequential both then and later. How interesting, in light of this silence, that later writers gave Potsdam so much retrospective significance.

✓ Hubert Cole is one of the few writers to have noted explicitly the connection between Potsdam, Milot, and Sans Souci the man, whom he identifies as a major-general. But he depreciates the link between the latter two and makes Potsdam pivotal. Cole spends a single sentence on the three faces of Sans Souci to produce a quite eloquent silence: "Here, at the foot of the Pic de la Ferrière, guarded by the fortress that he called Citadel-Henry, he built Sans-Souci, naming it out of admiration for Frederick the Great and despite the fact that it was also the name of the bitter enemy whom he had murdered."³⁶

For Cole, the coincidence between Sans Souci-Milot and Sans Souci the man was an accident that the king easily bypassed. The Colonel had no symbolic significance (I am aware of being redundant in phrasing it this way), only a factual one. In retrospect, only Sans Souci-Potsdam mattered, though Cole does not say why it should matter so much. In so stressing Potsdam, Cole not only silences the Colonel, he also denies Christophe's own attempt to silence Sans Souci the man. Cole's silencing thus produces a Christophe who is a remorseless murderer, a tasteless potentate, a bare mimic of Frederick, a man who consumes his victim and appropriates his war name, not through a ritual of reckoning but by gross inadvertence.³⁷ ✓

Such a picture is not convincing. A 1786 map of northern Saint-Domingue shows the main Grand Pré plantation to be adjacent to the Millot [*sic*] plantation.³⁸ Christophe used both places as headquarters. Given the size of the palace and its dependencies, the royal domain may have run over part of Grand Pré. In other words, Christophe built Sans Souci, the palace, a few yards away from—if not exactly—where he killed Sans Souci, the man. Coincidence and inadvertence seem quite improbable. More likely, the king was engaged in a transformative ritual to absorb his old enemy.³⁹

Dahoman oral history reports that the country was founded by Tacoodonou after a successful war against Da, the ruler of Abomey. Tacoodonou "put Da to death by cutting open his belly, and placed his body under the foundation of a palace that he built in Abomey, as a memorial of his victory; which he called Dahomy, from Da the unfortunate victim, and Homy his belly: that is a house built in Da's belly."⁴⁰ The elements of the Sans Souci plot are there: the war, the killing, the building of a palace, and the naming of it after the dead enemy. Chances are that Christophe knew this story. He praised Dahomans as great warriors. He bought or recruited four thousand blacks—many of whom were ✓

reportedly from Dahomey—to bolster his army. A hundred and fifty of his Royal-Dahomets, based at Sans Souci, formed his cherished cadet troop.⁴¹ In light of this, the emphasis on Potsdam by non-Haitian historians, which deprives the Colonel's death of any significance, is also an act of silencing.

The Defeat of the Barbarians

For Haitians, the silencing is elsewhere. To start with, Potsdam is not even a matter of fact. When I raised the issue of the influence of the German palace on the construction of Sans Souci, most of my Haitian interlocutors acknowledged ignorance. Some historians conceded that they had “heard of it,” but the connection was never taken seriously. In that sense, Haitian historians are playing by the rules of the Western guild: there is no irrefutable evidence of a connection between Milot and Potsdam. But for most Haitians (most urbanites at least), the silencing goes way beyond this mere matter of fact. The literate Haitians with whom I raised the Potsdam connection did not simply question the evidence. Rather, the attitude was that, even if proven, this “fact” itself did not much matter. Just as the Colonel's name and murder—of which they are well aware—does not much matter.

→ For the Haitian urban elites, only Milot counts, and two of the faces of Sans Souci are ghosts that are best left undisturbed. The Colonel is for them the epitome of the war within the war, an episode that, until recently, they have denied, any retrospective significance. This fratricide sequence is the only blemish in the glorious epic of their ancestors' victory against France, the only shameful page in the history of the sole successful slave revolution in the annals of humankind. Thus, understandably, it is the one page they would have written otherwise if history depended only on the wishes of the narrator. And indeed, they tried to rewrite it as much as they could. For most writers sympathetic to the cause

of freedom, Haitians and foreigners alike, the war within the war is an amalgam of unhappy incidents that pitted the black Jacobins, Creole slaves and freedmen alike, against hordes of uneducated “Congos,” African-born slaves, Bossale men with strange surnames, like Sans Souci, Makaya, Sylla, Mavougou, Lamour de la Rance, Petit-Noël Prieur (or Prière), Va-Malheureux, Macaque, Alaou, Coco, Sanglaou—slave names quite distinguishable from the French sounding ones of Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Alexandre Pétion, Henry Christophe, Augustin Clervaux, and the like.

That many of these Congos were early leaders of the 1791 uprising, that a few had become bona fide officers of Louverture's army, that all were staunch defenders of the cause of freedom have been passed over. The military experience gathered in Africa during the Congo civil wars, which may have been crucial to the slave revolution, is a non-issue in Haiti.⁴² Not just because few Haitians are intimate with African history, but because Haitian historians (like everyone else) long assumed that victorious strategies could only come from the Europeans or the most Europeanized slaves. Words like Congo and Bossale carry negative connotations in the Caribbean today. Never mind that Haiti was born with a majority of Bossales. As the Auguste brothers have recently noted, no one wondered how the label “Congo” came to describe a purported political minority at a time when the bulk of the population was certainly African-born and probably from the Congo region.⁴³ ✓

Jean-Baptiste Sans Souci is the Congo par excellence. He was the most renowned of the African rebels and the most effective from the point of view of both French and “colonial” higher ranks. He is a ghost that most Haitian historians—urban, literate, French speakers, as they all are—would rather lay to rest. “Mulatto” historian Beaubrun Ardouin, who helped launch Haitian historiography on a modern path, and whose thousands of

pages have been pruned, acclaimed, plagiarized, and contested, is known for his hatred of Christophe and his harsh criticism of the dark-skinned heroes of Haitian independence. Yet, when it came to Sans Souci, Ardouin the "mulatto" took the black Creole's side. Describing a meeting during the negotiations over the leadership in which a "courageous," "energetic," "distinguished," "intelligent" and (suddenly) "good-looking" Christophe used his legendary magnetism to influence Sans Souci, Ardouin writes:

[B]randishing his sword, (Christophe) moved toward (Sans Souci) and asked him to declare whether or not he did not acknowledge him as a général, his superior. . . . [S]ubjugated by the ascendance of a civilized man, and a former commander at that, the African told him: "General, what do you want to do?" "You are calling me général (replied Christophe); then, you do acknowledge me as your chief, since you are not a general yourself." Sans Souci did not dare reply. . . . The Barbarian was defeated.⁴⁴

Ardouin is quick to choose sides not only because he may feel culturally closer to Christophe, a "civilized man," but also because, as a nationalist historian, he needs Christophe against Sans Souci.

As the first independent modern state of the so-called Third World, Haiti experienced early all the trials of postcolonial nation-building. In contrast to the United States, the only postcolonial case before 1804, it did so within a context characterized by a dependent economy and freedom for all. Thus, while the elites' claims to state control required, as elsewhere, the partial appropriation of the culture-history of the masses, they also required, perhaps more than elsewhere, the silencing of dissent. Both the silencing of dissent and the building of state institutions

started with the Louverture regime whose closest equivalent in post-independent Haiti was Henry I's kingdom. In short, Christophe's fame as a builder, both figuratively and literally, and his reputation as a ruthless leader are two sides of the same coin. Ardouin, a political kingmaker in his own time, knows this. Both he and Christophe belong to the same elites that must control and normalize the aspirations of the barbarians.⁴⁵

Ardouin also needs Christophe against the French. In spite of the attributes that Ardouin abhors and that he finds elsewhere hard to reconcile with civilization, Christophe is part of the glory that Ardouin claims to be his past. Christophe beat the French; Sans Souci did not. Christophe erected these monuments to the honor of the black race, whereas Sans Souci, the African, nearly stalled the epic. *was Christophe to his point. end*

For Ardouin, as for many other Haitians, Sans Souci is an inconvenience inasmuch as the war within the war may prove to be a distraction from the main event of 1791–1804: the successful revolution that their ancestors launched against both slavery and colonialism and that the white world did its best to forget. Here, the silencing of Sans Souci the man and that of Sans Souci–Potsdam converge. They are silences of resistance, silences thrown against a superior silence, that which Western historiography has produced around the revolution of Saint-Domingue/Haiti. In the context of this silencing, which we explore in the next chapter, Potsdam remains a vague suggestion, the Colonel's death is a mere matter of fact, while the crumbling walls of Milot still stand as a last defense against oblivion.