

Introduction

When 120 free black New Yorkers gathered in the African Zion Church in early September 1824 to attend religious services, they received a blessing for a sea voyage that promised to transform their lives, their community, and perceptions of their race.¹ They were to be the first of as many as thirteen thousand African American emigrants who set sail for Haiti in the mid-1820s, taking up an offer of Haitian lands and liberty from President Jean-Pierre Boyer, Haiti's president from 1818 to 1843.² Delivering the blessing and farewell address that evening, Rev. Peter Williams, the president of the Haytian Emigration Society of Coloured People and minister of the African Episcopal Church of St. Philips, summed up the motivations for and the significance of the coming voyages. He began by reminding his New York audience that they, "the first from this port," shouldered a great responsibility in seeing that Haitian emigration was a "success." He addressed the congregation as "the pioneers of a vast multitude" waiting to leave the "house of bondage" that was America. Emphasizing that failure would "discourage the great mass, whom you leave behind," and prolong their "degradation and sufferings," Williams reminded the departing Americans that much more than their own destiny depended on their "conduct" in Haiti.³

Echoing what other black supporters of this project said, Williams described Haiti as the "*highly favoured*, and as yet *only land*, where the sons of Africa appear as a civilized, well-ordered, and flourishing

nation.” Highlighting that “good laws” governed there, Williams promised the audience that no prejudice or racial antagonism stood in the way of advancement, because in this “land of promise,” they would become “independent and honourable, wise and good, respectable and happy.” Just in case they had not taken in the import of his words, Williams warned them that if they failed to take proper advantage of this opportunity, they would bring a “lasting disgrace” on themselves and on “their nation.”²⁴ His message was clear: emigration to Haiti had significant ramifications for the free blacks who remained behind in New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore.

Indeed, Boyer’s offer to settle African Americans in Haiti made Williams’s speech possible and made possible Williams’s emotional and ideological investment in the project. Boyer desired to tighten his cultural, diplomatic, and trade relations with the U.S. because he understood that diplomatic recognition from the neighboring state was the only guarantee against the retaking of the island by the former colonial power France. He also sought to be included in the developing New World anticolonial coalition led by the United States, known to us today as the Monroe Doctrine. His push for recognition from the U.S. gained momentum in the early 1820s, until it was stopped short by a variety of factors, the most damaging of which was a slave-revolt scandal. In some ways, when Boyer invited African American migrants to Haiti, it was his last desperate appeal for closer links with the United States.

No other nation in the New World attempted such a gambit. Many, such as Bolivarian republics, campaigned for recognition on the world stage and simultaneously received immigrants from the world powers. But none of them parlayed the cultural links forged by immigration to a strengthened recognition case, as Boyer was determined to do.

Caribbean Crossing argues that the emerging ideology of white supremacy faced a major challenge from American supporters of Haitian recognition who publicly advocated for closer American diplomatic ties to Haiti, the self-proclaimed black republic. These advocates pushed the American public further than historians have previously credited into accepting the black nation’s racial equality and recognizing its right to exist. In addition, Boyer’s own efforts brought the U.S. close to accepting a black nation as an equal twice in the 1820s, until he was foiled by a slave-conspiracy trial and then

by the disappointing outcome of the emigration project. Among the participants, emigration was fueled by the stark realities facing their community. In the U.S., the free African American community reacted vigorously to increased discrimination, decreased political and social rights, and a push from various constituencies to find an alternative to the racial profile of the country.

In Haiti, meanwhile, a succession of leaders reiterated commitments to the constitutional goal of forging a “black nation” and pushed international powers to accept the nation on those terms. Boyer—and, in the U.S., community leaders such as Rev. Peter Williams—believed the success of free black Americans in Haiti would make the potential of the nation impossible to ignore. Boyer had won over an important constituency—the African American community—and this community was given a voice by Williams.

Uppermost on Williams’s mind as he addressed the New York congregation were the implications of emigration for arguments about slavery and mass manumission. He and other Americans saw the project as countering a common objection to widespread manumission: after we free the slaves, where would we put them? In Williams’s final comments, he reminded his audience that “the happiness of millions of the present and future generations” depended on them.⁵ Emigration to Haiti resulted from the common desire of black people in the U.S. and in Haiti for the political and social empowerment of themselves, their race, and their nation.

The revolutionary events in St. Domingue in the last decade of the eighteenth century seized the attention of the free black community in the United States just as it had the rest of the world. Even before the declaration of Haitian nationhood, many free black northerners observed events in the Caribbean with a sense of pride and took an interest in the affairs of the island. The earliest surviving example comes from Prince Hall’s famous *A Charge to African Masons*, a speech delivered to his Boston African Masonic Lodge. The lodge became the leading black community institution in Boston and later became the Grand Lodge of African Freemasonry that chartered branches in Providence, Philadelphia, and New York City. In *A Charge*, Hall identified himself and his audience strongly with the island of Haiti, foreshadowing black-nationalist ideas of the common bonds of the African diaspora. In this address, Hall linked the struggle for racial uplift to the freedom struggles of Haitians in terms that

imply that his audience was familiar with the fortunes of the slaves in the Caribbean: “My brethren, let us not be cast down under these and many other abuses we at present labour under: for the darkest is before the break of day. My brethren, let us remember what a dark day it was with our African brethren six years ago in the French West Indies. Nothing but the snap of the whip was heard from morning to evening.”⁶ Here Hall uses the uprising in St. Domingue to steel his fellow black Bostonians against the insults they were “daily met with in the streets of Boston.”⁷ He reminds his fellow Masons and his wider Boston audience (for this speech was published) that not only could circumstances be worse, but they could improve overnight, as was the case in St. Domingue. This message was intended to charge the black community to confront an increasingly hostile Boston environment that had given them freedom from slavery but little else.

The palpable connection with Haiti felt by some African Americans was soon expressed—loudly—in Philadelphia. Unlike Hall’s message, however, the lesson cited this time was not one of patience but one of armed militancy. On at least one occasion in Philadelphia in 1804, African Americans responded to racist abuse in American streets with collective violence. During the Fourth of July celebration, in the same year Haiti declared its independence, a few hundred black Philadelphians gathered in the Southwark district, formed military units, elected officers, and armed themselves with bludgeons to march through the city’s streets in their own celebration of the Fourth of July. They reportedly knocked down one young man and then proceeded to pick his pockets while threatening death to several others. The next day, July 5, the marchers gathered again, “damning” any white person who came near them and declaring that “they would shew them St. Domingo.” By using St. Domingue as their rallying cry, these black Philadelphians showed that the Haitian Revolution had taken on an emblematic role in black struggles against white oppression.⁸

The Haitian Revolution, as it has come to be called, was both a war for freedom and a war for autonomy. If anything, the third war in the “Age of Revolution” was more transformative and bloody than either of its predecessors. Fending off the French, the Spanish, and eventually the English, the St. Domingue revolutionaries achieved independence against fantastic odds, and in a world of slavery, they achieved freedom for its former slave residents. Costing millions in treasure and more than 150,000 lives, the war was protracted, violent, and

profoundly transformative—a true social revolution. To understand what moved the slaves to take control of this Caribbean island, the context of the radical period must first be examined.

Without the French Revolutionary principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity that constituencies in the far-flung colonies of the Caribbean embraced for themselves, the revolution in St. Domingue would not exist.⁹ The ferment and reinvention the revolutionary principles brought to French society touched off hopes and expectations within St. Domingue's three population groups: white planters, slaves, and free coloreds.¹⁰ The *Declarations of the Rights of Man and the Citizen* and its statement that “men are born and remain free and equal in rights” ignited the free black population of St. Domingue that had been pressing for greater political and social rights in the colony's governance.¹¹ A group of St. Domingue mulattos led by Vincent Ogé and Julien Raimond traveled from the West Indies to meet with the new National Assembly to argue for equal rights, believing they were entitled to the same legal, political, and social rights as those enjoyed by St. Domingue's white residents. They, too, were free, wealthy, and landed. The *gens de couleur*, or mulattos, made up a sizeable portion of the colony's population, and in 1789, they accounted for 47 percent of the nonslave population of about thirty-two thousand. Most had accumulated wealth through the manufacture and trade of coffee, which grew in the mountainous regions of St. Domingue. Some, such as Raimond, were important indigo planters whose families went back generations.¹² They owned sizeable plantations and employed slaves to labor on these plantations. Many bought into the distinctiveness of color and the privileges of freedom, believing no commonalities existed between themselves and their mostly black slaves. By petitioning for their rights in Paris, they acted to secure the economic and political privileges that by right freedom, wealth, and landownership gave them.

Although many in the National Assembly supported the mulattos' claims, St. Domingue's white planter class resisted any extension of rights to the free blacks, believing it would be the beginning of a slippery slope: “Mulattoes today, slaves tomorrow.”¹³ They argued that the only way to maintain control over slaves was to enforce the color bar, regardless of free status. At first, the National Assembly members acquiesced to the white planters, but as the French Revolution became more radicalized, the body granted St. Domingue's free population equal rights. In so doing, they opened up a Pandora's box.

Determined to put an end to this metropolitan interference and the destructive forces that Parisian officials had unleashed, white planters took up arms—and armed their slaves—to attack mulatto instigators. They promised that unless the dangerous law was repudiated, they would revolt against colonial authority. Mulattos, for their part, defended against this violence and armed themselves—and their slaves—against white aggressors. By the end of the summer of 1791, however, both groups had a far more serious and ominous threat to contend with—widespread slave revolt.

In late August 1791, a series of slave revolts broke out in Acul parish in the Petit-Anse region, a region with some of the most productive sugar plantations on St. Domingue.¹⁴ Given the region's productivity and the extraordinarily physical demands of sugar cultivation and milling, it was commonplace for slaves in the region to be literally worked to death. Clearly they had little to lose and much to gain with successful raids on sugar mills and cane fields and the murder of refiners, overseers, managers, and planters. The revolt spread quickly, and thousands of slaves from neighboring sugar and coffee plantations joined in the bloodletting, bringing havoc to the entire region around Le Cap. Planters, their families, and overseers fled the murderous and roving bands, seeking refuge in Le Cap. Within days, an army ten thousand strong menaced the town and its inhabitants, and within a month, the slave army had doubled to twenty thousand.

Paris accepted that the crisis in its flagship colony had only grown more dangerous and widespread as warring camps of slaves, mulattos, and whites fought in every region of the colony. It finally took direct military and civil action and sent representatives of the National Assembly, Léger Sonthonax and Étienne Polverel, whom they invested with complete governing power and backed with military troops. These men were expected to regain control, restore peace, and return the colony to the business of cultivation—a big job. Upon arrival, they encountered a St. Domingue torn asunder by internal warfare and by Spanish and English assaults.

Just as the governing powers in Paris had realized what a mess St. Domingue had become, so, too, had England and Spain. Each wanted to take advantage of the turmoil and to place the pearl of the Antilles on a new string. Spain, the colonial power in the eastern half of Hispaniola, pushed into St. Domingue in its bid to win the French colony. It made astounding progress because it implemented an effective

tactic: arming slaves. Spanish authorities offered St. Domingue slaves their freedom in exchange for fighting the French army. Two insurgent leaders from the north of the island, Jean-François and Georges Biassou, brought ten thousand soldiers to join the Spanish forces, including Toussaint Louverture, who became a leading general for the Spanish army and eventually the leader of the revolution.¹⁵ To the French commissioners, Sonthonax and Polverel, the Spanish invasion—and their powerful slave allies—posed the greatest threat to the colony's future. They believed their first priority was to save the colony for France. Fearing the loss of the colony to Spain, they decided to grant freedom to slaves who joined the French forces in defending St. Domingue. When this inducement failed to stop the flow of slaves to the Spanish, the commissioners went one step further—declaring all St. Domingue's slaves free on August 29, 1793.

St. Domingue planters—both whites and free blacks—watched in horror as the entire social and economic foundation of the colony was upended. The planters took steps of their own, inviting England to take possession of the island and to reinstate slavery. By 1794, England's troops claimed territory along the coast near Port-au-Prince and, by the end of the summer, the port itself. With the English threat strengthening and the door to freedom perilously near to closing, slaves acted to save themselves and the French colony by joining the French army. That is when Toussaint Louverture, himself a former slave, deserted the Spanish and brought thousands of ex-captives to join the French army. Louverture's army helped to quickly rout the English, the Spanish, and their allies, the planters.

After 1794, Louverture became the most powerful figure in St. Domingue. His charisma, energy, and intelligence allowed him to outmaneuver black, mulatto, and white rivals. In these power struggles, Louverture fought in pitched battles that resulted in the retreat and eventual withdrawal of the British and Spanish forces, the removal of the French commissioner Sonthonax from administrative control of the colony, and eventually the removal of his most formidable rival, General André Rigaud, a mulatto soldier in control of the southern province.

Until 1802, Louverture juggled the conflicting and diverse interests of the remaining planters (even inviting planters who had fled the island to return), French metropolitan authority, and freed slaves to produce a functioning and stable dominion—all the while staying

true to his commitment to slave abolition. Increasingly, however, his policies brought into question how free these ex-slaves were, as many plantation cultivators worked under coercion.

During Louverture's tenure, he wrote a constitution, establishing a new labor system of contracts for plantation labor, a new currency, a law and court system, a new tax code, and even a public school system. He even negotiated commercial treaties with foreign powers, effectively managing the colony as an independent and autonomous state. His most important trading partner became the United States under the John Adams administration, which urged him to declare St. Domingue's independence.¹⁶ Yet he hesitated to take the final step of declaring independence, fearful that France, enraged at the loss of the island, would invade. Keenly aware that white allies would be essential to St. Domingue's future, Louverture realized how threatening St. Domingue was to potential trading partners and understood that as long as France provided some legitimate standing and protection, these powers would not isolate the island diplomatically or economically. Despite his supreme tactical abilities, however, Louverture read France's newest leader, Napoleon, incorrectly. Like many others, he underestimated the Corsican's appetite for conquest.

In 1802, Napoleon set his eyes on France's New World empire, determined to retake direct control of St. Domingue and to reinstate slavery there. To do so, Napoleon sent General Charles Victor Emmanuel Leclerc, his brother-in-law, and tens of thousands of soldiers, including veterans of the Continental army and former Rigaud supporters. These mulatto supporters wished to regain control and to oust Louverture once and for all. Neither Leclerc nor Napoleon expected widespread resistance, and they assumed Louverture and his troops would capitulate quickly. Instead, resistance was fierce, and Leclerc, desperately seeking the war's settlement, unleashed "total war" tactics that targeted black and mulatto men, putting to death all who were captured. Even women and children were targeted and subjected to public torture and mutilations.

One of Louverture's generals, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, who was to become Haiti's first premier, also used total war tactics, taking white residents hostage and often murdering them out of revenge for French atrocities. By 1802, however, Louverture's army faced defeat. Many of his generals, including Henry Christophe and Jean-Jacques Dessalines, surrendered and became soldiers in the French army. Eventually

even Louverture admitted defeat, surrendering to French forces. Soon after his capture, the French commanders deported him to France, where he died. He was considered far too powerful and influential to remain in St. Domingue. Leclerc hoped French control would meet with no further resistance.

This hoped-for peace never materialized, as many in Louverture's army refused to submit. The fight against the French intensified when news reached St. Domingue that France had reimposed slavery on its colonies of Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Tobago. Soldiers defected from the French army and joined the growing bands of insurgents and ordinary citizens determined to fight the French to the death, embracing the motto "live free or die."

Leclerc continued his barbaric tactics, ordering the systematic murder of mulattos and black families. Mass killings and drownings took place all during the summer of 1802. Dogs, which had been specifically trained to maul, arrived from Cuba to provide added support to the French soldiers, who had themselves been dying in the thousands as a yellow-fever epidemic hit. Unsurprisingly, these practices fueled ever-greater resistance, pushing the remaining mulatto soldiers, including the two future leaders Alexandre Pétion and Jean-Pierre Boyer, who had invaded with the Leclerc forces, to desert and join the revolutionary forces.

Dessalines, as a leading general under Louverture, was little more than a killing machine during these years. His strength and viciousness rallied the diverse groups of mulattos and blacks to unify under his command. By the end of November 1803, Dessalines and his army had routed the remaining French troops. At last, the French commander, General Donatien Marie Joseph de Rochambeau, who succeeded Leclerc after he died from yellow fever, agreed to leave the island. Rochambeau left, however, without signing either a formal peace treaty or a recognition of independence, leaving Haiti and its people vulnerable to future attacks.

On January 1, 1804, General Dessalines declared St. Domingue's independence from France and renamed it Haiti, a Taino term meaning "mountainous," in an effort to remove links to French colonial control.¹⁷ Yet this new name could not erase the profound internal and external problems facing the nation. Internally, the problem of freedom and whose definition would prevail—the former slaves' or the former masters'—continued to destabilize the new nation. Connected

to this issue were questions of land distribution, crop cultivation, and labor laws, issues essential to the effective establishment of the new nation. Rivalries between revolutionary leaders also continued to affect the stability of the new nation, as Pétion, Christophe, and Rigaud each carved up spheres of influence. These rivalries not only distracted these men from their real purpose as leaders of a newly formed nation; they cost the nation manpower, blood, and its international reputation as a stable and functioning place. Externally, without a French peace treaty or any other international agreements regarding the island's independence, Haiti remained insecure and paranoid, making national security the highest priority.

Neither Haiti's instability nor internal discord could erase the undeniable significance of the revolution to contemporary thought on the slave system. Scholars have long focused on the Haitian Revolution as that nation's key contribution to debates on slavery and abolition in the Atlantic world.¹⁸ Yet this scholarly attention has had the effect of muting another powerful signal from the Caribbean island: the emergence of a black-led nation and how that influenced the free black population of the United States. When rebels in St. Domingue fought for and won freedom from slavery and colonialism, they directly challenged ideas of white supremacy. When they founded and governed their own state, they again undermined this view of the world by challenging the notion that freed slaves and free people of color were incapable of sustaining independence. With the revolution, they changed the paradigm of possibilities for militant slaves; through independence, they did the same for politicized free blacks. The establishment and progress of Haiti as an independent black nation marked a political and cultural milestone in the African diaspora.¹⁹

I argue that both Haitian and African American leaders actively promoted the island as a quintessentially black nation. Haitian leaders did so by codifying the concept in the nation's constitution and also by other words and deeds. At independence, Haiti identified itself by color, declaring in Article 14 of its constitution, "Haitians henceforth will be known by the generic name of blacks."²⁰ All inhabitants, regardless of skin color, would be considered "black," suggesting an open and inclusive black identity. The constitution also outlawed all white landownership, indicating a color consciousness and a desire to keep whites from the island. Around the same time, members of the African American community began looking to the Caribbean island and embracing color

as an identifier. This choice, just as in Haiti, was a strategy to unify against white oppression and racism.²¹ Yet, in both cases, emerging black identity was not based on an essentialist or biological notion of difference but was characterized by shared goals of unity, autonomy, and freedom from white rule.²² Chapter 1 examines this migration in the context of other contemporary migrations. Haitians had embraced those goals in their foundational texts and laws, and African Americans increasingly believed that these goals could only be attained in a black-ruled dominion separated from white control. African Americans who ventured to Haiti in the 1820s believed they were settling in a black republic analogous to the United States, a country that offered equality, freedom, and a republican government.

Posterity has not been kind to Haiti's first generation of leaders. Some scholars have characterized these men as originating the economic and political morass into which the country later slid. Leading the first nation in the world to throw off slave shackles and only the second to achieve independence from colonialism, their achievements should be considered in light of the tools available and the hostility of the international community. These leaders were aware that Haiti's independence and nationhood were symbols of racial uplift and proof of racial equality, but they were also aware that world opinion and economic viability were crucial to its fortunes. These early leaders actively worked to bring African Americans to the island as part of their nation-building efforts. Chapter 2 reveals how every Haitian leader starting with Desalines actively tried to recruit African American migrants. All were motivated by both pragmatic and philanthropic goals. Settlers from America would provide Haiti badly needed workers and market-driven individuals to help transform the subsistence-based mind-set of its people. At the same time, these settlers would be adding to the wealth of Haiti and improving its image abroad. Boyer took this one step further and hoped that by opening up his country to African Americans (and helping to offset the initial costs), he could win recognition from the U.S. By asking the U.S. to accept the quintessentially black nation as an equal, Boyer pressed the government to address racial equality.

Indeed, sectional tensions between the increasingly antislavery North and the increasingly slave-dependent South heated up around the issue of Haiti in the early 1820s. Much attention has been paid to the ramifications of this third major revolution on the Caribbean and the wider world, but far less has been paid to examining the influence

that the independent nation of Haiti exerted on national U.S. politics and the growing divisions in the late 1810s and early 1820s.²³ Just as the Missouri Compromise was a domestic flash point on slavery, the diplomatic-level foreign-policy debates over recognition of and emigration to Haiti also brought out intensified sectionalist feelings. Conflicting views of Haiti as a dangerous precedent for the South and an important market for the North became entwined in this sectionalist debate. These were issues that Boyer and his supporters grappled with as they pushed for American acknowledgment of Haiti's independence and the subject of Chapter 3. Boyer understood that recognizing his state would put the U.S. on the record as accepting a black people as equals—unacceptable for southern politicians. As Boyer made traction toward support for opening up diplomatic ties, Haiti experienced unprecedented negative publicity, including rumors of its involvement in the infamous Vesey Conspiracy Trials in South Carolina and two other slave-revolt scandals in the West Indies.

Newspapers were central to those who were advocating a change in the relationship between Haiti and the United States and the focus of chapter 4. With journalism in its infancy, these publications were as much a forum for each editor's views and pet projects as they were for news reporting. These newspapers were filled with reports about Haiti and Haitian leaders, including public proclamations, the "progress" of the island, and the commercial opportunities. Even reports that focused on trade offered accounts of Haiti's government and current events as context. Editors such as Hezekiah Niles and Benjamin Lundy and countless others contributed to this public file on Haiti. Niles published *Niles' Weekly Register* and prided himself on the paper's impartiality in an era when newspapers understood their role as representing particular political parties. This stand gave his paper a national and wide-ranging audience. Benjamin Lundy, the most famous American abolitionist in the 1820s, also lived in Baltimore, moving from his native Tennessee, to publish *Genius of Universal Emancipation*. He established his paper specifically to function as an antislavery voice and pushed the cause of Haitian recognition and emigration with it.

African Americans migrated to Haiti because they viewed the nation in many ways as the black "land of the free." Haiti as a black-ruled, constitutional republic offered economic opportunity, equality, and citizenship to all its black residents. By migrating, African Americans demonstrated a belief in a black nation for all the descendants

of Africa and understood this move as an important solution to the rampant racism that they increasingly encountered in the United States. In chapter 5 and chapter 6, the individual settlers' goals and experiences are foreground, because—to echo Rev. Williams—they held the key to the success of this project.

American newspapers documented the emigration of African Americans and their initial experiences in Haiti by publishing emigrants' letters to family and friends in the United States—more than a dozen letters in all. Viewed in conjunction with the National Archives' Passenger Lists for New York and Philadelphia, these letters provide a more complete picture of individuals and families. These shipping records account for all incoming passengers into American ports from 1820 onward, allowing for a statistical analysis of the demographic profile of the emigrants. They also show the great diversity of the settlement. The chief limitation of the National Archives' Passenger Lists is that they provide information for incoming ships and register only those emigrants who returned or traveled back and forth between Haiti and the United States. They do not provide a list of all settlers. In addition, no Baltimore Passenger Lists are extant from 1821 to 1832, the main years of returns, preventing thorough knowledge of the Baltimore participants. In spite of these limitations, the lists contain thumbnail biographies of passengers such as the doctor Belfast Burton and the laundress Hannah Quincy. In addition to the ship's last port of departure, the Passenger Lists often include the full name of the passenger, the age, the sex, the occupation, and the country of origin. Not all customs officers thoroughly completed the forms, however. For many entries, only the barest of information was recorded, leaving us with nothing more than "Ann, a black woman with children," for example. Although limited, this source material demonstrates the diversity of the migrants, especially the widely differing social levels and the surprising number of female migrants who participated. The lists also serve to mark the exact time of an emigrant's return to the United States. This information enables some discussion of what provoked the return.

British consular material provides another vantage point on Haiti in the 1820s; this material also informs chapter 6. Charles Mackenzie, the black consul stationed in Port-au-Prince from 1826 to 1828, wrote extensive reports for the British government and kept a journal that was later published as *Notes on Haiti*. In this publication, Mackenzie

recorded additional economic data and what Haitian daily life was like during a period when American newspaper coverage of the settlers' experiences had faded. French consuls archived newspapers from their tenure in Haiti beginning in 1825, again providing accounts of life on the island just as American public interest was ebbing. Other sources preserved in the New York Public Library include a series of books called *Recueil général des lois et actes du gouvernement d'Haiti* that records every law ever passed in the Haitian republic from 1807 to 1833. These allow for a greater understanding of the laws, the economic problems, and the changing social environment that the migrants encountered during their residence in Haiti.

Caribbean Crossing in its entirety reveals that emigration in the 1820s was the culmination of efforts among Haitian leaders to gain for their black nation a place at the international table and the efforts of free blacks to push back against discrimination and show the black race as an equal. It also uncovers how antislavery whites and blacks saw Haiti as a solution to slavery's expansion. Finally, it restores Haiti as an important influence on America's nineteenth-century race relations and documents how close Boyer came to winning U.S. support for a black state—a potentially transformative gesture for slavery and race debates.

Black and white abolitionists invested a great deal in Haitian emigration and expected two great outcomes. First, they expected that free black American settlers could be precursors to a much-larger exodus of manumitted slaves to Haiti. Rev. Peter Williams and other black and white abolitionists in the 1820s took those white southerners at their word who said they would embrace widespread manumission if a suitable location was found for these slaves.²⁴ The second expected outcome was that business-minded African Americans would assist in developing a free labor system on the island that would allow Haiti to compete with the slave states of the Caribbean and the U.S. Abolitionists looked to the island's economic potential as the invisible hand that could once and for all free the United States from the curse of slavery. After winning the long-waged battle against the African Slave Trade in 1808, antislavery supporters had lost some focus. But the Missouri Compromise of 1820 revealed that slavery was strengthening its grip on ever-greater swaths of the United States. Disheartened at how politics had failed to stop the spread of slavery, abolitionists such as Benjamin Lundy turned to economic pressure as a strategy

and looked specifically to the free produce movement, an economic boycott of slave-produced goods.²⁵ Nevertheless, because of Haiti's popularity among the free black community and its established economy and society, supporters were confident that the Liberian debacle, which began with dreams of self-sufficiency, would not be repeated.

From the realm of diplomacy to individual African Americans, the emigration movement carried greater political and ideological meaning than historians have previously credited. While the general outlines of the story of Haitian emigration have been known for some time, the motivations and expectations of all supporters—both in the U.S. and in Haiti—have never before been fully analyzed.²⁶ If African American emigration succeeded in earning Haiti recognition, Boyer could potentially have enjoyed the military and diplomatic strength of an ally in the United States and could have focused more fully on nation building. And free and enslaved black Americans could have seen that the U.S. recognized at least some members of their race as political equals.