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## Theorizing Black Statecraft

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THEORIZING BLACK STATECRAFT

A Dissertation Presented

by

Samantha Louise Davis

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Political Science

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# **Theorizing Black Statecraft**

A Dissertation Presented

By

Samantha L. Davis

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ABSTRACT

THEORIZING BLACK STATECRAFT

SEPTEMBER 2022

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A guiding principle of black political theory and postcolonial thought, to use Audre Lorde's famous dictum: the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. As a result, scholars wanting to challenge and decolonize the canon and its concepts tends to disavow turns to the state in black politics because these efforts imply a form of false consciousness, blacks fighting for freedom and liberation are tricked or fooled by European concepts and ideas. They are *conscripts*, not agents. The disavowal of "statist impulses" across the history of black postcolonial politics in the United States and the Caribbean has the consequence of leaving turns to the state undertheorized.

In this dissertation, I argue that a reinterpretation of black state-making is necessary to disclose the complicated nature of black politics in a world organized by racism. Reconceptualizing and expanding anticolonial politics and principles, this dissertation combines original archival research and interpretative methods of textual analysis to theorize black statecraft across three key figures: Toussaint Louverture, Frederick Douglass, and C.L.R. James. I position these thinkers as black statecraft thinkers that hold together both the critique of the destructive power of the state with

liberatory visions of the state. This study offers a conceptual framework for understanding statist impulses across the tradition of black political thought including the black radical tradition. These thinkers bring into view the relationship the state has with freedom in its vision of the new state to be built. By undervaluing the state and statecraft as a topic worthy of investigation, scholarship in political theory ignores the ways in which these black statecraft thinkers provide alternatives and should be seen as part of the black radical tradition.

Through an investigation of how these theorists of black statecraft engage with and theorize the state, we are better able to reflect on the areas of political contestation reshaping the way certain concepts like the state and freedom, to name a few key concepts explored in this study, are understood, and mediated. These black political thinkers provide great reflections for what we are fighting for, to give content to the kind of political-social community we seek to build upon principles of freedom, equality, and justice.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION: THEORIZING BLACK STATECRAFT

This research comes out of my interest in the Age of Revolutions. In particular, revolutions bring attention to the problem of foundations and while this problem has garnered much scholarly work, less has been given to the ways in which black actors transform categories of political thought – from freedom to the state. Recasting the problem of foundation to attune to the work of black actors brings us to the politics of decolonization.

Founding and refounding are often central to politics of decolonization (Kohn and McBride 2011; Getachew 2019; Bernal 2017). Standard accounts of decolonization end with the creation of independent nation-states. These accounts laud the triumph of independence and self-determination but argue that the post-colonial state often replaces old forms of domination and oppressions with new ones, presenting additional problems to be overcome rather than offering the solutions professed in the revolutionary fervor of refounding. For instance, thinkers like Saidiya Hartman, Neil Roberts, and David Scott, among others, have argued that American and European antiblack and white supremacist statist discourse often masquerades as universalist discourses, fooling well-meaning black political actors into turning to Western tools (like the state) in their liberation struggles and the foundation of freedom (Hartman 1997; Scott 2004; Roberts 2015 Bogue 2003).

In a similar vein, contemporary political theory has produced an important critique of the state as the concentration of power and right to violence that establishes and reproduces racialized difference, domination, and oppression, as several scholars



have shown (Goldberg 2002; Mills 1997). Following Marx and Engels, if the state is an oppressive force of one class over and against the other, then any principle of freedom defined by or enacted through the state is only meant for the few. As an instrument of domination and oppression, consequently, the state is a tool of black oppression and is not an appropriate tool of black liberation. It follows, then, that there can be no positive content to the political organization of black freedom into a state because once achieved, the state will ultimately “mirror” the injustices and modes of domination it was meant to overcome (Brown 1995). The modern state is understood historically and empirically through historical projects of slavery, colonialism and imperialism (Pitts 2010).<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the state is a site of contestation. We obscure the ways in which political actors have opposed and offered alternatives. For instance, Wendy Brown (1995) reflects on the ways in which “emancipatory or democratic political projects ... problematically mirror the mechanisms and configurations of power which they are in effect and which they purport to oppose” (Brown 1995, 3). On the relationship between freedom and the state, she writes,

“Certainly politics, the place where our propensity to traffic in power is most explicit, is saturated with countless aims, and motivations other than freedom – from managing populations, negotiating conflicting interests, or providing for human welfare, to the expression of open revenge, aggression, spurred by injury, pleasure in domination or the prestige of power” (Brown 1995, 4).

As a result of these conflicting aims, Brown questions and thus disavows the state as a mechanism for achieving black freedom due to the state’s historical racist

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<sup>1</sup> Pitts 2010 argues that for the most part, empire and the imperial features of our current global order remain under theorized within political theory. Increasingly, however, scholars are engaging with the place of empire in canonical thinkers.

foundations. As I will argue in this dissertation, this leads, in turn, to a disavowal of the state or state-making as an important site of black political theorizing.

The problem at the heart of this dissertation, then, is that approaches to the state in contemporary political theory have situated black freedom, agency, and the political in a problematic binary. This binary situates black freedom in an opposing and almost contradictory relationship to the state.

There are two approaches to black freedom and the state that this dissertation will counter. The first holds that the state represents a form of “false consciousness” on the part of blacks fighting for freedom and liberation. This perspective follows in the wake of Audre Lorde’s famous dictum: the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They are “*conscripts*, not agents of modernity, as in David Scott’s (2004) famous words. The second approach follows from the first in viewing the state as an instrument of violence that must be rejected, and holding that true actin only exists outside the state. The first approach, I will contend, presents an uncritical view that the state and statist discourses are the sole provenance of the West. As Adom Getachew (2016) has noted, this lens thus has the negative consequence of “reducing subaltern political practices to derivative discourses.”<sup>2</sup> Due to this intractable entanglement, it is impossible within modernity to challenge modernity, to create and foster oppositional discourses or tools. In this way, questions arise with further implications as to whether it is possible to have oppositional, hybrid, or creolized discourses aimed at the destruction of oppressive forces like colonialism, imperial conquest, and fascism. At the same time, disavowing turns to the state turns these political actors into dupes, and their actions not ones of black men as

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<sup>2</sup> She continues, “by framing the response to exclusion in terms of the realization of previously articulated ideals, subaltern action is denied the possibility of reimagining those ideals or inaugurating alternatives.”

independent political agents and thinkers, navigating a deeply constrained and racist political, economic, and social landscape.

In this dissertation I contend that we have much to lose by discounting black political agency and efforts to achieve freedom that turn to the state. We discount black political agency with our critique of the state and of efforts to achieve freedom that turn to the state and statecraft. Moreover, I will argue this approach advances a disavowal of black agency in addition to its disavowal of the state, thus, painting a picture of postcolonial, black subjectivities as lacking full agency.

For the second set of approaches, black freedom can only be obtained outside state structures as true, complete freedom is only possible outside the state, among *alternative* social formations or ways of being (Fick 1990; Fischer 2004; Roberts 2015). For instance, in *Freedom as Marronage* Neil Roberts (2015) posits black freedom in terms of *marronage* in two distinct modes: sovereign marronage and sociogenic marronage, to capture “the activity of flight carried out by lawgivers, or sovereign political leaders, and agents of mass revolution” (Roberts 2015, 10). Roberts’ critique lies with sovereignty conceptualized as given through the lawgiver rather than statecraft in terms of the people’s will. According to Roberts, while “the desire for sovereignty often mirrors freedom visions” (Roberts 2015, 103). sovereignty is incapable of achieving them. As a result, sovereignty limits the popular imagination to figures of the lawgiver or leader at the expense of alternative forms of freedom operating at the time. Freedom is understood top down instead of bottom up. It is the singular lawgiver, or sovereign, to whom agents look for guidance to achieve freedom for self and community. The tensions between the sovereign lawgiver and the masses are irreconcilable. Flight from the

structures of colonialism represents the best hope for the freedom of the formerly enslaved. In other words, to realize freedom, the masses must be involved in their own governance or flee.

Roberts' work reflects broader movements, theorizing notions of black fugitivity as a form and resource of politics (Hesse 2014; Harvey and Moten 2013; Shulman 2021). This dissertation argues that these movements have ultimately led to an overwhelming disavowal of the state as a form capable of achieving and securing black liberation and black freedom. They tend to favor a deconstructive approach which aims to destroy the world as constituted by the western powers, in favor of alternatives more closely inspired by our African heritage, and which accordingly promotes narratives of separation and nationalism.

Their arguments for a search of alternative traditions urge us to flee or runaway to find freedom end right at the moment that interests me the most and that prompt the questions underpinning this dissertation. And what will they build there, at the end of revolution? How will they organize society to secure and promote black freedom, but also freedom for all within its territory? And if nationalism is the way, in what ways are they building something different from what came before or what they escaped? The question, then, becomes might there be something different in state projects that sustain racial hierarchies and those aimed at destroying them?

These are questions that attend to what David Scott terms "the problem-space" of black politics in the 19th and 20th centuries. I turn to the longstanding problem of decolonization and the state, centralizing how this issue influences/affects the post-colonial state among black thinkers and political actors in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Rather than a turn away from the state, I propose we investigate the kind of states black thinkers have shaped. Central to this task is the idea of what I term *black statecraft*.

### **Black Statecraft**

This dissertation offers *black statecraft* as a theoretical lens to capture a range of ideas and engagements/entanglements black people have had with the state. It rejects the idea that black actors engaged with state-making and theorizing are merely privileging Western categories and values. Black statecraft instead attunes us to the radical features of this revolutionary event of state-making in their connections to the contexts of decolonial revolutions in the social heterogeneity of the antislavery movement, a transnational/transcultural network and media sphere, and diverse practices of slave resistance. The Haitian Revolution and the founding of the first black independent nation in the Atlantic world, I argue begins a long tradition of black statecraft that extends across the United States and the Caribbean.

By keeping our visions of the state (political community) and freedom in view alongside our critiques of the state, black statecraft brings attention away from a shared or unified vision of the state and freedom, and instead to a shared set of questions and problems that real world political actors face, what David Scott terms “the problem space.” As Scott (2005) defines it, the problem space is,

First of all a conjunctural space, a historically constituted discursive space. This discursive conjuncture is defined by a complex of questions and answers – or better, a complex of statements, propositions, resolutions, and arguments offered in answer to largely implicit questions or problems. Or to put this another way, these statements and so on are moves in a field or space of argument, and to understand them requires reconstructing that space of problems that elicited them.

To uncover the dynamics of black statecraft, I use Scott's notion as a way of understanding and analyzing the conceptual and ideological work objects, like the state and statecraft, are meant to perform.

Throughout this dissertation, I aim to make visible black political engagements with statecraft in terms of a "theory-problem." Thinking of the state as a theory problem and statecraft as a problem-space provides an opportunity to theorize black engagements with statecraft in terms of what is viewed as a problem itself. In other words, it makes visible what the black actors under study were doing with the state, what foundations they wanted to build. At the same time, rather than explain the failures of state or ideology, I reflect on the ways in which this approach to the issue of enacting black freedom results in an antipolitical response. My main contention is that theories of the state are implicitly theories of politics. Therefore, the disavowal of the state is also a disavowal of black politics.

Black statecraft, as this dissertation will illuminate is an important part of black political practice of politics in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Through an engagement with Toussaint Louverture, Frederick Douglass, and C.L.R. James, I will illustrate how responses to the state speaks to a larger problem of the possibilities of black politics in a racialized world. Engaging with these thinkers through the lens of black statecraft and attuned to their problem-space also gets to the specificity of black freedom struggles in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

By undervaluing the state and statecraft as a topic worthy of investigation, scholarship in political theory ignores the ways in which these black statecraft thinkers provide alternatives and innovations in statemaking, bending the arc of history closer to

justice. Both approaches to black freedom and the state along with the binary thinking it encourages blunts our understanding of the contours of decolonization and limits the way we view our resources in the events and thinkers of the past.

This dissertation engages with the persistent and ongoing question of enacting black freedom in the context of a racialized world in the Caribbean and the United States in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. I aim to show the variety of ways black thinkers and actors reflected upon their experience through critical engagement to put forward political ideas and projects that continue to shape the ways in which we engage or choose to disengage the state, politics, and the political.

I insist that we must return to these questions of founding, freedom, and the state because the state is also a site of contestation. Through an investigation of how these theorists of black statecraft engage with and theorize the state, we are better able to reflect on the areas of political contestation reshaping the way certain concepts like the state and freedom, to name a few key concepts explored in this study, are understood, and mediated. These black political thinkers provide great reflections for what we are fighting for, to give content to the kind of political-social community we seek to build upon principles of freedom, equality, and justice. My work responds to the need for reconceptualizing and expanding anticolonial politics and principles, decolonizing principles of freedom, self-determination, and autonomy.

As a framework of analysis, black statecraft thus subverts statist-anti-statist binaries by holding together a critique of the state with political projects aimed toward founding a new one. Through its deconstructive critique, the black thinkers in this inquiry bring into view the relationship the state has with freedom in its vision of the new

state to be built. It captures both what black people were and continue to fight against along with keeping in view what we are fighting for.

Statecraft, here, is a political and ideological project of world-making in concert with others (Arendt 1958; Krause 2015; Markell 2003). There is no black allegiance to state, but perhaps allegiance to an idea of a principled, ethical state, one they shaped not one they mistakenly placed their belief – the sole creation of white Europeans. I aim to show the variety of ways blacks reflected upon their experience and put forward political ideas and projects that continue to shape the ways in which we engage or choose to disengage the state, politics, and the political. Black visions of the state and freedom provides a space to reflect on the possibilities of freedom and the modes in which we attempt to achieve it. This history offers stories and writings that become our resources for present and future political practice.

In this dissertation I develop this argument through an analysis of three thinkers: Toussaint Louverture, Frederick Douglass, and C.L.R. James. These thinkers, I argue, represent black statecraft thinkers that are especially positioned to hold both the critique of the destructive power of the state with liberatory visions of the state as thinkers that subvert binary-thinking on the state and state-making. They illustrate how black statecraft navigates this binary. I argue that it is valuable to reflect upon the relationship of the state suggested by these thinkers to the actualization of racial emancipation and black freedom.

I demonstrate that binaries are not productive and offer black statecraft and state-making as an alternative to the statism/anti-statism dichotomy. A reinterpretation of black state-making is necessary to disclose the complicated nature of black politics in a world



organized by racism. I want to both ‘deconstruct certain modalities’ of black political thought, critical race theory, and decolonial thought as well as construct a theory of black statecraft that holds together the critique and the (possibilities of) formation or foundation of the new. I tease out our understanding of the state as both a set of political, social, economic institutions of governance and an idea influencing how we envision our society, the principal foundations of government and the state, and the role of government/the state in the peoples lives. In this way, it’s important to keep in mind the state as object – as a site of contestation – and as an idea – another site of contestation.

My dissertation thus extends Adom Getachew’s work of expanding our understanding of decolonization beyond that of the nation-state as form and self-determination as its guiding demand. The anticolonial nationalists in her tale are worldmakers illustrating that “the age of decolonization anticipated and reconfigured our contemporary questions about international political and economic justice” (Getachew 2019, 3).

Getachew’s worldmaking is a way of extending the critique of these black figures into projects of political formation meant to build a new world order. Just like Getachew’s recovery of black Anglophone worldmakers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, I recover black statecraft, by reflecting on the problem-space of an earlier moment, an inaugural moment of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century projects of black statecraft, in which the battles remain those of the abolition of slavery. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century moment in Getachew’s text, she traces episodes of self-determination in the anticolonial internationalization of the nation-state whereas I examine episodes of universalizing the world system of states and the humanity and capability of self-governance among blacks.

Even in this early moment in what would become Haiti, the nascent state needed allies, fostering early moments of internationalism in the face of competing empires and restrictions to equal entry brought about by the legacy of racial hierarchies. Getachew's casting of these black political thinkers and state makers as "worldmakers" does similar work to my recasting of the narrative of abolition and decolonization as statecraft. As she puts it, "These worldmaking ambitions provide occasion to rethink the critique of anticolonial nationalism specifically, and nationalism more broadly" (Getachew 2019, 26).

The thinkers and political actors examined in my work worked to build the foundations of what would become the postcolonial state and nation, a project of building new foundations. In this way, black statecraft moves beyond critique, extending it and using the critique to construct new worlds. In this, it reflects on the perennial problems of political thought: What is the relationship of human freedom and the state? Upon what foundation do we come together to form a society? What is political/social organization supposed to serve? Statecraft must be seen as a dynamic field of debate within and across political movements and actors rather than an adversarial all-powerful dominant force that remains the same and consistent with itself through time. I want to tease out our understanding of the state as both a set of political, social, economic institutions of governance and an idea influencing how we envision our society, the principal foundations of government and the state, and the role of government/the state in the people's lives.

We continue to confront neocolonial imperialism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. How we understand our relationship to the past and the vestiges of the past in our present is

integral to our efforts to overcome its effects, to envision alternatives, and conditions the work we do to change things. To do so, it is important to confront the binary. Next I turn to how the problem of the binary emerges in black political thought as a problem for black politics.

### **The Problem of the Binary for the Political in Black Political Thought**

Conventional approaches to black political thought identify two main streams of thought that black thinkers fall into: assimilationist/integrationist and separatist/nationalist. Differences between these two traditions can be strategic but often coalesce around philosophical views of morality and human nature. In his classic examination of the two traditions Bernard Boxill (1992) puts the differences this way:

The assimilationist tradition maintains that a society in which racial differences have no moral, political, or economic significance—that is, a color-blind society—is both possible and desirable in America. ' The separatist tradition denies this, some separatists maintaining that a color-blind society in America is not possible, others maintaining that it is not desirable" (Boxill 1992, 119.)<sup>3</sup>

Another way of understanding the differences between the two traditions is how each shape the ways in which we choose to engage or disengage with the state and the reasons for or against such engagement. This can be seen in two key approaches to black freedom and efforts of political organization such as the state.

For an assimilationist or integrationist, the goal is to revise the state structure (in this case, abolish slavery) and incorporate its black citizens into the fabric of the country

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<sup>3</sup> See also Michael Dawson (2001) *Black Visions: The Roots of Contemporary African American Political Ideologies*, Lucius T. Outlaw Jr. (2005) *Critical Social Theory in the Interest of Black Folks*, Levine's (1997) work on Douglass and Delany, and other familiar typologies such as that between Du Bois and Washington or MLK and Malcolm X.

on terms of equality, justice, and freedom.<sup>4</sup> Common to this literature is the connection between integrationism and liberalism, on one hand, and black nationalism, on the other. Discussions of black nationalism stand as a counterpoint to the limitations and failures of liberalism for overcoming the challenges facing black people.

Black nationalist or separatist literature reflected an urge to find a place where blacks could form their own state, beyond the effects and influence of white supremacy and antiblack racism.<sup>5</sup> The idea that blacks represent a nation within a nation has a long history in African American culture. As a result, Black Nationalist schemes clearly address issues related to self-determination, sovereignty, and autonomy.

There are two unintended consequences of these typologies. First, the binary of integrationist versus nationalist typologies. Since we continue to face the effects of the “Afterlives of Slavery,” failure and tragedy is attached to the integrationist or assimilationist side, while Black Nationalism remains part of a black political imaginary of alternatives, a radical separatist path that was unable to be realized.<sup>6</sup> As a result, nationalism becomes hegemonic in the Academy, as the form *par excellence* politics is meant to take. The second is that this leads to casting off manifestations of integration or assimilation in favor of black nationalism and black cultural nationalism. In sum, the result is a disavowal of the state, a misinterpretation of certain proposals and modes of agency by black political actors via these typologies in black political theorizing.

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<sup>4</sup> Frederick Douglass and Martin Luther King Jr. are prime examples of the integrationist approach. In what Michael Dawson (2001) calls his “optimistic” phase, Douglass represents a Radical Egalitarian ideological tradition, which “strongly emphasizes that actively pressuring American society and the state is critical for achieving black justice” (16).

<sup>5</sup> Thinkers like Martin Delany, Marcus Garvey, and Malcolm X argued it was impossible to achieve black freedom among those who enslaved us. The idea that blacks represent a nation within a nation has a long history in African American culture.

<sup>6</sup> To take Saidiya V. Hartman’s (1997) useful phrase.

Nationalism, the black radical tradition, and the search for alternative traditions express a desire to escape, rupture and break with the past and the challenges and contradictions it places in the present. For real world actors, ruptures or escape may not be possible.

Black nationalism and Black culturalism predominated these inquiries early on in its academic history. Within the black nationalism trajectory, scholars are not as interested in understanding black political contributions to the nation, the state, or the nation-state, but have been more focused on establishing a tradition of radical thought as an oppositional thought by offering alternatives to the dominant and destructive paradigms of American and European culture.

We see this manifested in the simultaneous rise of Black nationalism in the Academy and scholarship corresponds with the Black liberation struggles of the 1960s and 1970s and the emergence of Black Studies departments across universities (Robinson 2001). This work is more interested in discerning the ‘nation’ rather than the ‘state.’

At the time, there were many reasons for this. One is the desire to identify black people as composing a unified, unique (ethnic) group with a shared history, fate, and culture. Following work like Melville Herskovits (1941) *The Myth of the Negro Past*, scholars sought to establish and raise black people to the position of a worthy category of study, not as a problem or in order to understand black pathology. As a result, this work has left black contributions to political concepts, such as the state, on the table. Not only is it assumed that the most interesting parts of black political thought exist in spaces outside the European or American political theories, but that radical politics exist in efforts to run away from the space of oppression in order to find a space – both physical

and political, but also cultural and intellectual - outside the system of antiblack racism and white supremacy. This includes scholarship on the history of black thought that seeks to identify alternative, radical approaches or connect black reflections on their experience and the world through transnational connections as in Africana thought (Rabaka 2009). But, it ultimately neglects the ways in which black contributions to political thought are themselves beyond the boundaries and understandings of European and American political thought.

The standard account of decolonization and the state in black liberation struggles positions black politics in a bind of imitation of European revolutionary discourses that are doomed for failure. At the same time, nationalism persists as a privileged model, while the state is viewed in terms of the inherent problems with states and power configured in states that make it difficult to achieve universal liberty.

The consequence of these kind of binaries in discussions of black political thought is that it too easily succumbs to evaluating the utility of these thinkers or politics as resources for contemporary and future politics along an either/or axis. One stream of thought is deemed more useful than the other and the latter discourse is discarded. A choice must be made. The argument throughout these chapters is that this tendency obscures the valuable contributions black thinkers have made in thinking about the state and state-building. We are unable to see clearly, for instance, how canonical thinkers such as Toussaint Louverture, Frederick Douglass, and C.L.R. James are all challenging the status quo in ways that are truly revolutionary vis-à-vis the state.

## **Why Disavow the State? Anti-statism and Fugitivity in Black Political Thought**

This disavowal of the state comes out of two concerns. First, in black political thought there is a greater valuation placed on national independence, a clear break with the colonial past, as well as a focus on the “nation”-ness of the nation-state, rather than the composition and ideas informing the “state” aspect of the term. As a result of the emphasis on nationalism throughout the literature, other ideas for organizing black freedom within alternative theorizations of the state and state forms like federalism have been largely devalued.

Second and related to the first, the logic underlying many critical readings of non-nationalist political projects can be found throughout black political thought and often deploys Audre Lorde’s dictum - the “Master’s Tools will never dismantle the Master’s house,” meaning the tools of the oppressor cannot be used by the oppressed in order to service their liberation or freedom. Black political thinkers working within the radical tradition and Afro-pessimists argue our historical resources are subversive traps and impediments toward true freedom. Our history, our traditions, and reflection upon our experiences is so connected and engaged to that which aims to destroy us, the only possible solution is to break these ties that bind us to these vacuous political visions. Leading to and only made possible through a clear break, independence, or separation.

For instance, critical race theorist David Theo Goldberg (2002) traces the genealogy of the modern state to show the ways in which it is conceived in racial terms. The modern state “is inherently contradictory and internally fractured, consisting not only of agencies and bureaucracies, legislatures and courts, but also of norms and principles, individuals and institutions” (Goldberg 2002, 7). This contradictory and fractured state

becomes something from which we must be released, in need of destruction, overcoming, and escape. These efforts to understand the empirical state (both historically and contemporarily) are motivated instead by a push to make the state a problem, not a means to achieve the solution. As a result, much black political thought addresses the issues of destruction, rather than those of construction.

A significant group of research in this strand reflects on the American black experience and provides much-needed analysis of the entanglements between slavery, freedom, and the state. These scholars investigate the relationship the state has to violence, domination, and oppression to show how invariably, discourses of freedom that employ the means and forms of the state merely reconstitute rather than destroy the violence, domination, and oppressive characteristics of the state (Brown 1995).

Another case in point, in *Empire of Liberty: Power, Desire, and Freedom* Anthony Bogues investigates the meaning of the concept of *liberty* for U.S. imperial political discourse.<sup>7</sup> He argues, “liberty becomes a code for domination, not a metaphor for freedom” (Bogues 2010, 36). This is particularly true within the state. Bogues continues, “the dialectic of freedom... emerges not from the liberal tradition and its double structure, but out of the interstices of domination” (Bogues 2010, 36).

In a similar vein, another influential scholar, Saidiya V. Hartman argues in *Scenes of Subjection* the failure of emancipation and Reconstruction in the United States “need[s] to be located in the very language of persons, rights, and liberties” because “the forms of violence and domination enabled by the recognition of humanity [was] licensed

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<sup>7</sup> Bogues urges us “to think about how a word such as liberty can generate a ‘structure of feeling,’ not as an act of culture, but as a word that represents so much about ourselves and about how we wish to live, or at least presents the possibilities of how we might live, that the word itself takes on a life in which it becomes a feeling rooted in desire” (24).



by the invocation of rights, and justified on the grounds of liberty and freedom” (Hartman 1997, 6). She provides the concept, *burdened individuality*, which helps emphasize the “double bind of freedom: being freed from slavery and free of resources, emancipated and subordinated, self-possessed and indebted, equal and inferior, liberated and encumbered, sovereign and dominated, citizen and subject” (Hartman 1997, 117). By shifting the onus of freedom’s rights and privileges to the individual, the state absolved itself of responsibility. Why, then, Hartman’s work suggests, would the state be turned to as a site of freedom struggles when the state created the conditions for new forms of domination and oppression in its name. In particular, Hartman contends that rights discourses facilitated relations of domination and new forms of bondage as well as the transformation of self from slave to rational, acquisitive, and responsible individuals.

Both of these scholars trace the indelible connections freedom and liberty has to domination for Black people. Rather than providing an opportunity to achieve a meaningful freedom, the state is often the mechanism that maintains the powers of domination. Thinkers like Hartman, Bogue and others attune us to the ways in which American and European antiblack and white supremacist statist discourse often masquerades as universalist discourses, fooling well-meaning black political actors into offering Western tools (like the state) in their liberation struggles and the foundation of freedom. The question, then, becomes might there be something different in state projects that sustain racial hierarchies and those aimed at destroying them? What is missing from these narratives is the contested nature of the state. Dominant forces often manipulate the tools in their favor but cannot destroy the counterrevolution it engenders.

In a recent lecture, “Black Liberation and the Paradox of Political Engagement” Frank Wilderson (2014) argues, that black political projects and the extreme and effective state violence that anticipates and shuts down the black position – the political antagonism does not allow an exit – black political *struggle*, then, is tragically only ever a *repetition*.

These critical readings from the literature to a worrying degree, succumb to taking agency away from the black actors under study. In David Scott black people can only be conscripts, while in Hartman, the unequal incorporation of blacks into society in the U.S. led to individuals whose humanity was “constricted,” “abased” and “encumbered” challenging efforts to live in a free society (Hartman 1997, 6).

Critical theories of racial slavery urge us to revisit the foundations of antiblackness as it conditions the structures of the modern world.<sup>8</sup> Yet, the significance of this fact leads to an understanding of black life in ways that lack agency. For example, Orlando Patterson’s text *Slavery and Social Death* remains a classic among black political theorists grappling with the contradictions of the state (Patterson 1982). Likewise, Frank Wilderson argues, death of the black body is a) foundational to the life of American civil society (just as foundational as it is to the drama of value – wage slavery, and b) foundational to the fantasy space of desires which underwrite the industrialist’s hegemony” (Wilderson 2003, 233). Jared Sexton similarly urges an understanding of the afro-pessimist project as being one that points us to the fact that “black life is not social, or rather that black life is lived in social death” (2011, 29). Fred Moten, another influential thinker, has argued, *black pathology* underpins all discourse

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<sup>8</sup> Bogue (2010) *Empire of Liberty*, “Antiblack racism as a structured form of domination [that] reaches out and transforms human relations, becoming the framework within which the social is lived in America,” 45.

about blacks and blackness. Black radical discourse is “animated by the question, What’s wrong with black folk?” (Moten 2008, 177).<sup>9</sup>

From Du Bois questioning what it means to be a problem to Patterson’s contention of black social death, the idea permeates that black life is too constrained to be considered life at all. It also raises issues about the possibility of black political practice constructing new and better worlds. A problem is without power to build new worlds. A Thing cannot found a new state. The pathological Moten is tracing has the consequence of making certain acts legible as agentive acts or not. What struggles for liberation, freedom, and foundation can come from such a position?

Whereas Moten’s essay shows the ways in which blackness becomes a pathology in Afropessimist’s work, Sexton writes, “no, blackness is not the pathogen in afro-pessimism, the world is. Not the earth, but the world, and maybe even the whole possibility of and desire for a world” (Sexton 2011, 31).

All of this leads to a desire among scholars to search for alternative traditions and political formations no longer associated with the attendant problems of “the tragic continuity between slavery and freedom” (Sexton 2011, 23). Jared Sexton describes it this way: there is a need to establish an “ontological priority or previousness of blackness relative to the antiblackness that establishes itself against it, a priority or previousness that is also termed “knowledge of freedom” or pace Chandler, comprehension of ‘the constitutive force of the African American subject(s)’” (Sexton 2011, 24).

The importance of a critique of the state, the state form, and power, cannot be understated. At the same time, it has resulted in an overall turn away from the state as an

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<sup>9</sup> See also Fanon *Black Skin White Masks* on this problem of black ontology, the problem of nonbeing, and social death.

important site of inquiry toward progressive ends, staging a rigid and unproductive binary between statism and antistatism. If, as the authors above argue, the state is not a suitable tool for addressing barriers to black freedom, this is because of what the state has historically been and continues to be, not a reflection of what is possible. Anti-statism is clearly defined throughout contemporary political thought, however, statism is rigidly implied as unwavering support for the state. Statism need not be associated with an *apologia*, an attempt to justify the actions of modern states, to support the means as necessary in order to ultimately support the state despite apparent discretions against its professed principles. Not only does this understanding of statism not reflect most black responses to the state but removes from view black contributions to our understanding of the possible/potential relationship of black freedom to the state and how it can potentially be achieved.<sup>10</sup>

I tease out our understanding of the state as both a set of political, social, economic institutions of governance and an idea influencing how we envision our society, the principal foundations of government and the state, and the role of government/the state in the people's lives. In this way, it is important to keep in mind the state as object – as a site of contestation – and as an idea – another site of contestation.

## **Organization of Dissertation**

Chapter One focuses on the first and only successful slave revolution in world history to give rise to the first independent black nation-state. The Haitian Revolution

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Dawson (2001) has an excellent discussion of the “diverse shades” of the black liberal tradition (from black conservatism to militantly egalitarian), which maps onto the typology of statism. He writes, “African American liberalism differs substantially from traditional American liberalism, particularly...thin liberalism” (240)

provided the oppressed the world over with a compelling model for liberation and decolonization. It continues to represent the unfinished project of decolonization, offering the classic account of decolonization efforts in the face of competing empires. I turn to the founding period in Haiti through the statecraft originated by Toussaint Louverture and continued and expanded upon by Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Henri Christophe, and Alexandre Pétion.

In a chaotic, unstable world of arbitrary power, the Constitution of 1801 has two main purposes for Toussaint Louverture. The first is to undo the wrong of slavery and the colonial system by establishing black freedom; the second is to establish autonomy and self-government in the island in order to bring security and stability following the revolutionary period. His project exists in an inchoate area between the colonial past and the unknown postcolonial future.

Chapter two offers a reading of Frederick Douglass and refounding in the United States in the Nineteenth century. He is often looked to enlighten our conceptions of democracy and freedom (Bennett 2014; Bromell 2001; Frank 2010; Roberts 2007). Over the course of his life, he saw his goal of a multiracial democracy continually impeded by white supremacy and antiblack racism, making him as much a democratic theorist as a critical theorist of the state and society (Hooker 2017). This chapter asks what does it mean to refound the polity, what comprises the fundamental foundations of a multiracial democracy, a new order, for Douglass?

Scholarship on Douglass in political theory tends to focus on periodization and his placement within larger intellectual traditions or his second autobiography *My Bondage My Freedom* (Buccola 2012; Gooding-Williams 2009; Martin 1984). Debates range over

the fundamental influences on Douglass's thought and his central contribution to political theory and political philosophy. In this chapter, I will explore Douglass's evolving philosophy to show that contrary to the standard periodization of Douglass's political thought in terms of an overriding influence of white Abolitionist mentors, his change of opinion reveals his distinct contribution to American political thought.

When he broke with the Garrisonian-wing of the Abolitionist movement, he famously changed his opinion and interpretation of the Constitution, giving us some early insight on the meaning he gave to the state and its correlation with freedom. Often characterized as a Garrisonian-influenced moral beginning and a Gerrit Smith influenced political end. Instead, I explore how his development as a political thinker demonstrates a unique contribution to an American tradition of philosophy, wherein the moral informs the political. In this way, Frederick Douglass offers statecraft in terms of the moral constitution of the state.

In Chapter three, I turn, again, to the politics of decolonization in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the work of C.L.R. James. He contributed the foundational text on decolonization and black revolution in *The Black Jacobins*, but he was also active in the political debates surrounding Caribbean politics, advocating for a West Indies Federation. Black thinkers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century internationalized the nation-state brings attention to this central feature of political activism at the time, Pan-Africanism and the Internationals, for example. Internationalism in James sees a need to foster international structures of coalitions among the Left – anticolonial, anticapitalism, anti-black racism, to name a few. This engagement expands our understanding of the political projects of decolonization beyond that of the nation-state as form and self-determination as its guiding demand (Getachew

2019). The black statecraft in James serves two functions: first, it represents an opposition to capitalism, colonialism, and capitalism and relatedly, second, it serves the formation of a counter-hegemonic, alternative discourse that critiques, challenges, offers solutions, and presents a vision for new ways of structuring the state.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE POSTCOLONIAL STATE: BLACK STATECRAFT IN POSTREVOLUTIONARY HAITI

This dissertation engages with the persistent and ongoing question of enacting black freedom in the context of a racialized world. In this chapter, I turn to the Haitian revolution, the classic account of black decolonization efforts in the face of competing empires. It is important here because it is the first and only successful slave revolution in world history to give rise to the first independent black nation-state.<sup>11</sup> The Haitian case provided the oppressed the world over with a compelling model for liberation and decolonization. Influential scholars like Michel Rolph Trouillot (1990) and historian Laurent Dubois (2004; 2006) have shown the ways in which the state early founder's formed set-in motion a tradition of statecraft imbued with authoritarian impulses (Geggus 2001; Ghachem 2012).<sup>12</sup> Statecraft that rests with the complete power and control of one man remained an obstacle in Haitian society to decolonizing principles of freedom, self-determination, and autonomy. This characteristic of the Haitian state can be traced to contemporary events on the island from the 2010 earthquake to the recent assassination of President Moïse as well as in the literature of comparative politics that views Haiti as a failed state. Taken together, the state in Haiti is considered a problem, perhaps *the* problem impeding progress. Yet this tells only part of the story.

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<sup>11</sup> In "The 1805 Haitian Constitution: The Making of Slave Freedom in the Atlantic World," Anthony Bogues (2009) recounts the new ground forged through the collective events of the Haitian revolution on our understanding of both freedom and the organization of the human polity. It is important to note, scholarship on the Haitian revolution alternates between viewing it as a revolution or a slave revolt. For more on the distinctions, see the Introduction.

<sup>12</sup> Scholarship on the postcolonial state in the Caribbean discuss the legacy of statecraft not as a substantiation of antislavery revolutionary impulse that offers an alternative modernity, but reproduces the domination of the former colonial regime.



Seeking explanations for the failures produces scholarship that posits a rejection of the state in favor of searching for traditions alternative to such Western tools like the state and sovereignty. Some examples from political theory, such as, Wendy Brown reflects on the ways in which “emancipatory or democratic political projects ...problematically mirror the mechanisms and configurations of power which they are in effect and which they purport to oppose” (Brown 1995, 3-4). Similarly, Joan Cocks warns “those struggling for sovereign freedom from those with sovereign power,” that turning to the state will “likely to re-create for others the political injuries they are trying to escape for themselves unless they find a way to transcend the sovereign power ideal” (Cocks 2014, 10). These thinkers attune us to the ways in which American and European antiblack and white supremacist statist discourse often masquerades as universalist discourses, fooling well-meaning black political actors into turning to Western tools (like the state) in their liberation struggles and the foundation of freedom.

A similar disposition guides much of the literature on the Haitian revolution. In this chapter, I argue that this has the consequence of disavowing through its rejection of Haitian experiments in statehood and turns the political machinations of Haitian leaders into those of dupes, not the actions of black men as independent political agents and thinkers, navigating a deeply constrained and racist political, economic, and social landscape (Fick 1990, Fischer 2004; Scott 2004; Dubois 2004; Roberts 2015). For instance, David Scott presents Toussaint Louverture as a conscripted figure, one too bedeviled by French revolutionary thought and political traditions (Scott 2004, 105-6; 2014). As a result, he paints a picture of postcolonial, black subjectivities as lacking agency.

A binary in this literature situates black freedom in an opposing and almost contradictory relationship to the state, discounting black political agency and efforts to achieve freedom that turn to the state and statecraft. It advances a disavowal of black agency in addition to its disavowal of the state. Consequently, the best chance for enacting black emancipation, liberation, and the foundation of freedom must exist outside the state, among our efforts to escape its boundaries. For me, inquiries that urge us to flee or runaway to find freedom end right at the moment that interests me the most. And what will they build there? The question, then, becomes might there be something different in state projects that sustain racial hierarchies and those aimed at destroying them?

These are questions that attend to the problem-space of black politics in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. As Getachew (2019) has shown in the worldmaking projects of 20<sup>th</sup> century anticolonial nationalists, the European imperial order complicates the quest of freedom through self-determination and sovereignty because a condition of domination persists. Throughout my dissertation I extend Getachew's work by reflecting on 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century projects of black statecraft. I turn to the longstanding problem of decolonization and the state, centralizing how this issue influences/affects the post-colonial state among black thinkers and political actors in the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Decolonization raises important questions about whether it is possible or credible to use the "master's tools" to destroy "the master's house" (Lorde 1984).<sup>13</sup> Due to this intractable entanglement, it is impossible within modernity to challenge

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<sup>13</sup> Audre Lorde, see also Gordon, Lewis R. and Jane Anna Gordon, eds. 2015. *Not Only the Master's Tools: African American Studies in Theory and Practice*. New York: Paradigm Publishers. They argue "dismantling the master's tools is a misguided project," partly because former slaves and blacks have "historically done something more provocative with such tools than attempt to dismantle the Big House" (ix).

modernity, to create and foster oppositional discourses or tools (Scott 2004). In this way, questions arise with further implications of whether it is possible to have oppositional, hybrid, or creolized discourses aimed at the destruction of oppressive forces like colonialism, imperial conquest, and fascism. At the same time, Toussaint Louverture and Jean Jacques Dessalines were killed for turning to the state. Understanding Louverture and Dessalines' statecraft as merely privileging Western categories and values overlooks the radical features of this revolutionary event of state-making as connected to more celebrated features of the revolution such as the social heterogeneity of the antislavery movement, a transnational/transcultural network and media sphere, and diverse practices of slave resistance. Though they worked to build the foundations of what would become the postcolonial state and nation, respectively, the project of building foundations was fraught with the competition of global empires and the ever-present threat of those powers reinstating slavery in the former colony. To uncover the dynamics of black statecraft, I use the notion of a "problem-space" as a way of understanding and analyzing the conceptual and ideological work objects, like the state and statecraft, are meant to perform. Throughout this dissertation, I aim to make visible black political engagements with statecraft in terms of a "theory-problem" (Scott 2014, 116).<sup>14</sup> My approach is informed by R.G. Collingwood, Quentin Skinner, and David Scott. David Scott's work offers two useful conceptual tools: the problem-space; and the theory-problem. Thinking of the state as a theory problem and statecraft as a problem-space provides an opportunity to theorize black engagements with statecraft in terms of what is viewed as a problem itself. In other words, it makes visible what the black actors under study were doing with

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<sup>14</sup> Although Scott is concerned with the uses of Haiti as a discursive object in scholarship, I extend his reflection to black politics more generally.

the state, what foundations they wanted to build. At the same time, rather than explain the failures of state or ideology, I reflect on the ways in which this approach to the issue of enacting black freedom results in an antipolitical response. My main contention is that theories of the state are implicitly theories of politics. Therefore, the disavowal of the state is also a disavowal of black politics (Carnoy 1984).

The disavowal of the state in political theory results in three distinct problems that this chapter will critique. First, it leads to a disavowal of the action and agency of the founders themselves by treating them as conscripts of modernity or sovereignty. Second, it imposes a rupture between old and new, colonial, and post-colonial in a way that makes it impossible to see continuities in the problem-space these founders were dealing with; and third, it relies on a tendency to rank order founding figures which leads to an inability to understand each in their own contexts. Essentially, this rank-ordering impulse reinforces the prior two problems. Viewing statism in this way removes from view black contributions to conceptualizing the state.<sup>15</sup> I will illustrate how responses to the state speaks to a larger problem of the possibilities of black politics in a racialized world.

In what follows, I argue that Toussaint Louverture inaugurated a model of statecraft informed by two key legal principles: abolitionism and equal protection under law that continues with Dessalines. Rather than representing a radical break from Toussaint, I demonstrate the ways in which both leaders respond in similar ways to the problem of decolonization in Haiti as they occupied a shared problem-space. Though they worked to build the foundations of what would become the postcolonial state and

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<sup>15</sup> Michael Dawson (2001) has an excellent discussion of the “diverse shades” of the black liberal tradition (from black conservatism to militantly egalitarian), which maps onto the typology of statism. He writes, “African American liberalism differs substantially from traditional American liberalism, particularly...thin liberalism” (240)

nation, respectively, the project of building foundations was fraught with the competition of global empires and the ever-present threat of those powers reinstating slavery in the former colony.

I begin by exploring foundational readings of the Haitian revolution to show how scholarship on the revolution developed. Then, I trace the continuities among Haiti's political founders Toussaint Louverture and Jean-Jacques Dessalines. To do so, first I analyze the shared problem-space of Saint Domingue in the Age of Revolutions. Then, I move to my analysis of the political thought and practice of Toussaint Louverture as evidenced through the 1801 Constitution of Saint Domingue. Lastly, I move on to an analysis of Jean Jacques Dessalines Declaration of Independence from France and the 1805 Constitution.

### **From Black Jacobins to the Search for Alternative Traditions**

C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins* remains a foundational text in studies of the Haitian revolution. In the words of Anthony Bogues, "it is a text to be studied, critiqued, and deployed as a probe into our present while engaging with the historical past" (Bogues, 2017, 197). Critiques of James's emphasis on the complexities of revolutionary leader Toussaint Louverture fueled a robust revision of the narrative of the Haitian revolution. James had so beautifully shown the way Toussaint Louverture took up the task of extending the principles of France's Declaration of 1789 to Saint Domingue. Recent studies of the revolution redirect studies away from leaders, the state, and sovereignty to bring attention to what the formerly enslaved masses, mostly African in origin, thought about what they were struggling to achieve. In this section, I discuss the

implications and potential dangers of this turn away from leaders and statecraft for future of scholarship on the revolution. In chapter 4 of the dissertation, I will extend the analysis of C.L.R. James classic work to incorporate additional key texts.

Critiques of James's emphasis on the complexities of Toussaint Louverture fueled a robust revision of the narrative of the Haitian revolution. One less focused on the leaders of the revolution, unearthing what the revolutionary masses thought about what they were fighting for. This new direction was inspired by C.L.R. James himself.

Historian of the Haitian Revolution, Carolyn Fick recounts her 40-year relationship with James, one of her mentors. In 1971, then a doctoral student, "the seeds were first planted for the project that eventually culminated in the publication," but she had originally envisioned the study as one on the French Revolution (Forsdick and Høgsbjerg 2017, 60). He encouraged her to focus on the popular history of the revolution, turning to work on the social history in French historiography. In the same year, James (1971; 2000) gave a series of lectures in Atlanta at the Institute of the Black World, discussing *The Black Jacobins*. During the lecture series, C.L.R. James discussed the many things he would do differently if he were to approach the book again, namely he would forego the focus on Toussaint Louverture as hero and leader of the revolutionary struggle. In addition to the encouragement and advising on her doctoral dissertation project that would become her book, Fick refers to a correspondence James had in 1955 with the Haitian Marxist historian Etienne Charlier. Though she was unaware of it at the time, as early as 1955 "James was already thinking beyond the biographical analysis of the revolutionary personality of Toussaint Louverture ... toward an analysis of 'the classes and forces in conflict' during the Saint Domingue revolution, with a primary interest in 'the

revolutionary and creative power of untaught slaves” (Forsdick and Høgsbjerg 2017, 64). Bringing attention to the historical role of revolutionary leaders entailed a dire warning for the future: leaders of the revolution become rulers, “los[ing] contact with the mass of the population” (Forsdick and Høgsbjerg 2017, 78). James (1971; 2000) argues this is a part of the historical development of revolutions and founding. He describes the development of Toussaint from anti-imperialist revolutionary leader to one building the foundation of the rule of law, justice, and taking on the economic burdens of Saint Domingue:

They take over and something happens to them. And when we study the French Revolution and study what is taking place, we see it is not the weakness of individual men but it is a certain objective situation in which they find themselves that tends to corruption and makes them lose that interest and concern in mobilizing the mass of the population and makes them get lost in the questions of the details of government. It happens to all of them today, and it happened to one of the greatest of them all, Toussaint L’Ouverture [sic] That is what this book is saying (78).

It is not a fault in Toussaint’s character or tragic in a classical sense of the term. Instead, it was Louverture’s “moral weakness. It was a specific error, a total miscalculation of the constituent events. Yet what is lost by the imaginative freedom and creative logic of the great dramatists is to some degree atoned for by the historical actuality of his dilemma” (Forsdick and Høgsbjerg 2017, 111).

Rather than centralizing struggles facing leadership, James also spoke of what changes he would make with the archival sources he originally used. Inspired by the French historiography of Henri Lefebvre’s lectures at the Sorbonne about the sansculottes in Paris – “with an immense accumulation of material from the French archives, elucidate what the crowds and the mass of the Saint Domingue population actually did and their

effect on the development of the revolution and the speeches and policies of the acknowledged leaders” (James 1971; 2000, 63)

CLR James encouraged Fick to take up the challenge. His own take on future scholarship encouraged two developments in studies on the Haitian Revolution. Firstly, focus on the masses, not individual leaders. Secondly (and inextricably linked to the first), stick as closely as possible to what the masses were saying in the archives, not what others thought of what the masses were doing. These two developments inspired future directions in black political thought as well.

Carolyn Fick’s dissertation evolved into the equally groundbreaking 1990 book, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below*. Following the advice of C.L.R. James, the text concentrates on popular practices and politics by the masses rather than through the traditional historiographical focus on leaders. She argues the first successful slave rebellion was created through the actions of black enslaved masses, which is opposed to Toussaint Louverture’s statecraft. Fick argues that restricting the focus to leaders instead of the masses,

Risk[s] reducing to a level of impertinence those vital social, economic, and cultural realities of the ex-slaves whose independent relationship to the land, African in outlook, formed the foundation of their own vision of freedom, while it flew in the face of the needs of the modern state that Toussaint was trying to build (Fick 1990, 250).

It was through the actions of black enslaved masses that the first successful slave rebellion was created; whereas Toussaint Louverture’s most radical achievement, according to Fick, general emancipation, was based on a “political abstraction” that was too “bourgeois-democratic” to be able to speak for the people’s interest (Fick 1990,



222).<sup>16</sup> The people viewed freedom as the ability “to possess and to till their own soil, to labor for themselves and their families, with no constraints other than their own self-defined needs and to sell or dispose of the products of their labor in their own interest” (Fick 1990, 180).

As Fick shows, the masses and Toussaint Louverture operated with a different understanding of the meaning of freedom. The state form as *Leviathan* provides a strong basis for a critique of the totalizing power in the state – a criticism often brought against Toussaint, his 1801 Constitution and the policies he pursued during his brief “reign.” Louverture thought building a foundation for the hard-fought freedom entailed turning to the state as a form of security. Although he did not formally declare independence from France, and the future relationship between the former colony and the empire was unclear, it became the first step toward autonomy and self-determination for the island. Retaining ties with France complicates periodization of the Haitian revolution, often resulting in rank ordering the founders in terms of who remained faithful to the principles of the revolution they were fighting in the colony, not the principles of the French revolution. As James shows throughout *The Black Jacobins*, the French and Haitian revolutions are intimately linked, especially in the eyes of Toussaint Louverture.

Another scholar centralizing the antagonism between leaders and the masses is political theorist Neil Roberts. *Freedom as Marronage* challenges histories and

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<sup>16</sup> “Freedom is a great revolutionary ideal, a watchword of the great revolutions in history, and in the hands of prominent and influential leaders, it can often be imbued with emotionalism and used as an effective propaganda piece. On one level, Toussaint used it to define and justify most of his own actions and ambitions, all in the name of his people. But even here, toward the latter years of his regime, general emancipation had, in many ways, become little more than a political abstraction with no meaningful substance in the daily lives of the greater mass of black laborers. For these blacks, freedom had little to do with bourgeois-democratic ideals. They were now once again living and experiencing the horrible realities of this life-and-death struggle” (222)

literatures of the revolution that limit popular imagination to the single figure of Toussaint and his actions bringing attention to the fact that “Toussaint’s vision of a future is not the only notion of freedom operative in the uprising” (Roberts 2015, 24). To centralize the figure of Toussaint, at the expense of other socio-political experiments being enacted throughout the course of the Haitian revolution, like the act of marronage, only limits our thinking. He sets up an opposition between goals of independence and sovereignty and those of liberation. According to Roberts, while “the desire for sovereignty often mirrors freedom visions sovereignty is incapable of achieving them” (Roberts 2015, 103). Flight from the structures of colonialism represents the best hope for the freedom of the formerly enslaved. Part of Roberts’ critique lies with sovereignty conceptualized as given through the lawgiver rather than statecraft in terms of the people’s will. Toussaint as the sovereign - a charismatic lawgiver, who is able to muster a significant amount of sympathy and support from a group of people because they share similar experiences of enslavement, but whose political philosophy of freedom is vested in “the singular lawgiver, or sovereign, to whom agents look for guidance to achieve freedom for self and community” (Roberts 2015, 103). Toussaint’s particular form of sovereign marronage relied too heavily upon legal instruments that concentrated power at the top.

In this reading, radical politics exist in efforts to run away from the space of oppression to find a space outside the system of antiblack racism and white supremacy. There remains a challenge to our understanding of agency if it is only possible and visible in marronage. More consequentially, Roberts reproduces and is guided by the adage, “the Master’s tools will never dismantle the Master’s house.” In this way, blacks are unable to

be truly oppositional or incapable of world-making activities like statecraft, because the black as subject is not able to disrupt through means such as the state, a tool of the oppressor. Like in David Scott who suggests blacks are conscripts, they are passive; according to Neil Roberts the very act of running away makes black political agency active.

Literary scholar, Sibylle Fischer (2004) presents a particular image of revolution as well as political and social change, where Dessalines represents a true radical break, while Toussaint represents continuity with the French empire. The assumption here is that true “liberation from oppression is imagined through a complete break with the inherited past” (Fischer 2004, 233). Fischer’s intervention is to demonstrate the erasure and disavowal of the radical antislavery politics as seen in the Haitian masses during the revolution. For her, privileging Western categories and values like national sovereignty or the state overlooks the most radical features of this event such as the social heterogeneity of the antislavery movement, a transnational/transcultural network and media sphere, and practices of slave resistance. Rather than realizing the professed goals of radical antislavery and emancipatory politics, Fischer argues the ultimate “failure” of the Haitian state had to do with the nature of the exploitative colonial regime and the “deficiencies in post-Enlightenment theories of liberation and the state” (Fischer 2004, 262). In this sense, radical antislavery and emancipatory politics were “forced into the mold of the nation-state” ultimately, limiting our vision for the possible grounds for radical politics with its focus on institutional mechanisms like the state (Fischer 2004, 3).

Scholars like Fischer highlight Jean Jacques Dessalines’s more traditional declaration and constitution in 1805 as a moment that seals the postcolonial break of the

revolution. A clear finishing point for the revolution that started 13 years before. The revolutionary leaders Toussaint Louverture and Jean Jacques Dessalines come to represent different and opposing factions within Saint Domingue society as well as representatives of political forms like statism and nationalism, respectively. For Louverture, who did not declare independence and advocated for the island's continued, though autonomous relationship with France; while Dessalines chose to break with France, declaring independence in 1805. As a result, this scholarship positions Toussaint Louverture and Jean Jacques Dessalines as antagonists: where Dessalines is celebrated as a radical black figure. By contrast, Toussaint Louverture's Constitution of 1801 is unlike Dessalines' declaration or for that matter other historical constitutions. It claims self-determination, autonomy, and sovereignty but not independence. Because the 1801 Constitution does not establish a clear break between France and Saint Domingue, most scholars have devalued Toussaint's project. Instead, Dessalines is valorized across the literature on the Haitian revolution, in postcolonial and black political thought as a radical post-colonial actor. Rather than recognizing the 1801 Constitution, they dismiss it as incapable of achieving the central goal of the revolution – freedom.

Carolyn Fick, Sibylle Fischer, David Scott, and Neil Roberts make similar interventions, to demonstrate the erasure and disavowal of the radical antislavery politics as seen in the Haitian masses during the revolution. Revolutionary rhetoric of liberty and equality became part of the foundation for notions of the Haitian nation; while economic concerns, leading to the maintenance of the plantation-export economy, and paternalist authoritarian regimes came to embody notions of the state. In this sense, radical antislavery and emancipatory politics were “forced into the mold of the nation-state”

(Fischer, 3) ultimately, limiting our vision for the possible grounds for radical politics with its focus on institutional mechanisms like the state. At the same time, studies of this sort have the unintended consequence of pitting early Haitian state-makers against each other in ways that encourages a ranking system of their valuation. It also leads to an overall disavowal of the state.

This scholarship produces a narrative that places Toussaint Louverture and Jean Jacques Dessalines in direct competition, rank ordering their responses to slavery's abolition and the global politics of competing empires. It is tempting to reduce the complexities of the problem-space they shared by emphasizing either Toussaint's dogged attachment to statism and the ideals of the French revolution or Dessalines injunction of France in favor of creating a black nation. Yet, I read a continuous thread connecting Toussaint Louverture and Jean Jacques Dessalines. In the next section I use the notion of *black statecraft* in order to serve as a real and critical problem space through which black politics and global political actions can be read, formulated and critiqued" (Salt 2019, 114). What unites these founders of black statecraft is not a shared or unified vision of the state and freedom, but a shared set of questions, i.e. a problem-space. Then, I will demonstrate how these figures shared a style of posing and seeing the problem.

Rather than succumb to a limited narrative of revolution as ruptures and founding leaders in competition, I submit a more layered approach that attends to the problem-space of enacting post-colonial politics in a world organized by competing empires, slavery, and anti-black racism. Scholarship should reflect this multivalence. It is important to see the actors as diverse with conflicting ideas of why they were doing what they were doing and to achieve what ends. What it shows is a dynamic field of action and

contestation over the meaning of freedom, autonomy, and self-determination. In what follows I unpack the meaning of concepts like sovereignty, self-determination, freedom, and equality undergirding Haitian statecraft in this period. Louverture and Dessalines statecraft demonstrate how these ideals are not always in conflict but represent mutually necessary and reinforcing ideals (Jagmohan 2020). This section shows the ways in which Louverture defined the foundational principles of Haitian constitutionalism with the Constitution of 1801. These principles extend to all forms of Haitian state-making, from Toussaint Louverture's autonomous colony and its connection with France, Dessalines independent empire, Petion's republic or Christophe's monarchy. In the next section, I begin to theorize the problem-space of black statecraft in the Age of Revolutions. Then, I highlight the particular and linked responses of Louverture and Dessalines in the constitutions of 1801 and 1805.

### **Saint Domingue in the Age of Revolutions and Empire: Law and Power**

The problem-space in Saint Domingue entails an understanding of the dynamic relationship between the colony and France. Both experienced precarity in their ability to wield autonomous power over their future. Considering its changing political position during the revolutionary process, France sought to reclaim its global status and power. Saint Domingue held a prized place as the "Jewel" of the French empire and was often used as a pawn in France's geopolitical maneuvering. For those in the colony, a debate raged over increasing the colony's autonomy in its own governance. Complicating debates on the island, France's passage of the Declaration of Rights of Man led to further questions on whether the rights enshrined therein extended to those on the colony: slave,

planting class, free peoples of color, etc. The British and French empires were competing for power and rule over the direction of world politics. Principles of liberty and freedom played important roles in touting the professed virtues of either empire. These principles were also used as pawns in the power-plays Britain and France wielded over their colonies. This created an opportunity among those in the colonies - slaves, planters, marginally free people of color, etc. to define for themselves what substantive freedom would look like for them.

As French colonial administrators tried to extract more power to act on their own without oversight from the metropole, the Code Noir became an increasingly contested site among Saint Domingue's various communities. Manumission served as a powerful tool for ameliorating white colonial fears of slave revolt and resistance (Peabody 1996; Peabody, Grinberg, Keila 2007; Dubois 2004). The slave was both a subject of the Crown and outside the traditional boundaries of sovereign authority. However, the politics of manumission granted from the Code also created a growing free colored community, which became politically active in the years following the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen in 1789. The Code's other prime goal was to establish the rules of the plantation. It was a way to curb the excessive violence over slaves promoted by planters because it posed a similar danger to the stability of the slave system. The greatest danger is fostering conditions for slave revolution. The Code manifests tensions between the slaves, free coloreds, and white planters. Ultimately, the strain of these multiple and conflicting sources of power was untenable to the system (Dubois and Garrigus 2006). Historian Malick W. Ghachem (2012) demonstrates how the law was used to create order and stability for the smooth functioning of the slave system. He writes,

The law of slavery in Saint Domingue posited a state of chronic danger that flowed naturally from the forms of domestic license and coercion at work in plantation society. The strategic ethics of this regime were shaped by many factors, but most prominently and persistently by an ambivalent preoccupation with manumission and planter brutality: the polar extremes of slave society (7).

The law contributes to this tension and attempts to absolve its effects. In 1791 the National Assembly decrees as an article to the Constitution that the legislature shall make no law on the status of un-free persons in the colonies except at the specific unprompted request of the colonial assemblies. While seemingly giving more autonomy to colonial administrators to decide how to respond, they were often slow to take direct action, choosing instead to safeguard the status quo despite the changing colonial landscape.

After 1789, it became more difficult to ignore the image the French imperial state promoted of itself as bearer of human freedom. Laurent Dubois (2004) writes,

But even as the colonial state presented itself as the bearer of the liberatory possibilities of democracy, administrators argued the majority of the colonized did not have the cultural and intellectual capacities necessary to responsibly exercise political rights. The promise of access to rights was extended by the colonial administration but was constantly deferred to some unspecified moment in the future (4).

A year after the revolution broke out in Saint Domingue, Louverture admonishes the General Assembly in a letter for their failure to support the rights of all men. He saw in the Declaration and Constitution unrealized principles of universalism. The slaves must be freed, and slavery must be forever abolished. Universal application of those principles to every member of society ensured both equality and fraternity. Freeing the inhabitants of St. Domingue from slavery and instituting universal liberty and equality for all citizens is viewed as a form of justice. By taking the rights of man due them,



Toussaint aims to undo the grave injustice of slavery, not only for themselves, but also for all who have suffered under its cruelty.

In a 1792 Letter to the General Assembly he writes,

These are men who don't know how to choose big words, but who are going to show you and all the world the justice of their cause; finally, they are those whom you call your slaves and who claim the rights to which all men may aspire. Yes, gentlemen, we are free like you, and it is only by your avarice and our ignorance that anyone is still held in slavery up to this day, and we can neither see nor find the right that you pretend to have over us... We are your equals then, by natural right, and if nature pleases itself to diversify colors within the human race, it is not a crime to be born black nor an advantage to be white (Aristide 2008, 5-7).

Louverture directly engages with heartbreaking surprised of the failure to extend the defining principles of the French Revolution expressed by the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizen/ *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen de 1789* to those in the colony. Notice the posture he takes in this letter to the General Assembly. He is speaking both as an advocate of those fighting the revolution in Saint Domingue, "These are men who don't know how to choose big words" and "they are those whom you call your slaves" quickly shifts becoming "we are free like you" and "we are your equals." It is "we," the people of Saint Domingue that have been placed in this unnatural antagonistic position in relation to "you." Rather than dividing the people on the basis of color or basing society on an individual's or a nation's greed, Louverture and the revolutionaries are fighting for the realization of universalism's truth and the rights naturally conferred upon humanity. The drive of universal rights for all is a movement of justice that inarguably raises the stakes of the abolitionist movement worldwide and signals an irreversible early death blow to the transnational system of slavery itself. He asks France,

Have you forgotten that you have formally vowed the Declaration of the Rights of Man, which says that men are born free, equal in their rights; that their natural rights include liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression? So then, as you cannot deny what you have sworn, we are within our rights, and you ought to recognize yourselves as perjurers; by your decrees you recognize that all men are free, but you want to maintain servitude for 480,000 individuals who allow you to enjoy all that you possess...If you want to accord us the benefits that are due to us, they must also shower onto all of our brothers (Aristide 2008, 5-7).

Writing in 1792, the revolution in Haiti broke out a year earlier in August and the slave rebels already controlled most of the island. But the former colony was heavily disputed as Britain and Spain entered the fight to win Saint Domingue from the French. At this time, Spain controlled the other half of Hispaniola and intermittently fought the French whether through arms or with the British in supporting the revolutionary fighters with supplies like food, ammunition, and arms.... Yet, by and large, the enslaved were bargaining chips for the imperial powers, each making promises to the revolutionary fighters. The security and maintenance of the slave system became a point of distrust of the true intentions of the European empires for Saint Domingue's revolutionary leaders. Everywhere the British went, they restored slavery, so while the grands blancs in Saint Domingue and those who profited from the slave trade encouraged British success, the black masses could find no imperial power to trust, perhaps leading to the idea that we need our own state to support our goal of abolishing slavery (Dubois 2004, 167).

Although abolition appears to be in the works in the metropole, as these early letters demonstrate, it is doubtful that France will place much stake in achieving those goals for its citizens in Saint Domingue. To secure these freedoms, the law and the new political state Toussaint is advocating served multiple functions. Firstly, the law was seen as a mechanism to bolster their claim to freedom in a world designed to deny it to them.

Secondly, appeals to law served to justify slave revolt. Toussaint tried to make a state built upon the foundation of those principles – a state that could serve as a tool to achieve liberation and a source of security for freedom’s endurance, in other words, a postcolonial state. It is in this new political arrangement with France that freedom is realized. Before any of these appeals could serve these functions, Toussaint and the other officers had to win the war they started.

### **Black Jacobins: Politics of Critique – Politics of Principle**

Louverture’s Letters and Proclamations in this period leading up to the Constitution of 1801 tellingly reveal what Louverture sought to achieve from statecraft, what problems it was meant to alleviate, and what principles guided the project. These documents also signify Toussaint’s understanding of the revolution itself, forming a justification of its machinations as responses to imperial threats. Winning the war also meant linking the revolutionary cause in St. Domingue with its moral politics of critique and principle. In his first public proclamation, Toussaint Breda announces his new name, Toussaint L’Ouverture; “perhaps my name has made itself known to you” (Aristide 2008, 1). An opening for abolition had begun.

A tradition of revolutionary fervor in the making, Toussaint links the cause of general liberty with the French Revolution as well as earlier acts in Saint Domingue, like Vincent Ogé, who was severely punished and killed for his participation on behalf of abolition. Louverture writes,

Remember the brave Ogé, dear comrades, who was killed for having defended the cause of liberty. The cause of liberty unites all who fight for it. The cause is one of vengeance. You know, brothers, that I have undertaken this vengeance, and that I want liberty and equality to reign in St. Domingue. I have worked since the beginning [of the revolt] to

make that happen, and to bring happiness to all. Unite yourselves to us, brothers, and fight with us for the same cause (Aristide 2008, 1).

In this initial proclamation, Toussaint demonstrates his understanding of the chief obstacles facing him, as leader, and all, in terms of presenting obstacles in front of the ultimate cause – liberty and equality. An early call to subordinate a plurality of competing demands within a unified struggle for liberty. For Toussaint, liberty was more than merely an abstract term. It drew upon and revised the natural rights, the republican, and the Jacobin tradition of the French Revolution. Abolitionism and a newly constituted rule of law secured the gains. He repeats this point, “you say that you are fighting for your liberty and equality? Is it possible that we could destroy ourselves, one against the other, and all fighting for the same cause? It is I who have undertaken [this struggle] and I wish to fight until it [exists]... among us. Equality cannot exist without liberty. And for liberty to exist, we must have unity” (Aristide 2008, 1-2).

To maintain its hold over the colony, in August 1793 French commissioners Léger-Félicité Sonthonax and Étienne Polverel began the process of the abolition of slavery. Sonthonax, then, sent his deputies, colonist Louis Duffay, a free black army officer Jean-Baptist Belley, and Jean-Baptiste Mills a free man of color to implore France’s National Convention to include abolishing slavery in its drafting of the constitution as a means to keep the rich colony under French control. Soon afterward, the National Convention decreed the abolition of slavery with the Law of 4 February 1794. The Convention declared, “slavery of the blacks is abolished in all the colonies; consequently, it decrees that all men living in the colonies, without distinction of color, are French citizens and enjoy all the rights guaranteed by the constitution” (Dubois and Garrigus 2006). Although the French constitutions of 1793 and 1795 both included the

abolition of slavery, although the 1793 constitution was never applied the 1795 constitution lasted until it was replaced by the imperial constitutions of Napoleon Bonaparte. The revolutionary government of France, at least initially, viewed abolition with optimism, idealism, and took it as a sign of France's moral triumph over England.

Unfortunately, this was also a period of great political reversals in France. The same year France abolished slavery also marks the end of Jacobin rule, a period known as the Reign of Terror, and the fall of Robespierre. France's commitment to abolition was questionable, to say the least as political factions within France vied for control over the direction the republic would take. Saint Domingue's history with France had been a series of reversals - from giving and taking back forms of limited sovereignty and freedom over colonial affairs and one's own person. the strain of these multiple and conflicting sources of power was untenable to the system. The final death knell for the French Revolution occurred with the coup by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1799. France's return to absolutism signals a drastic change in the context and opportunities open to the formerly enslaved fighting to be free.

Toussaint Louverture did not set out to establish a state in Saint Domingue. To paraphrase CLR James from *The Black Jacobins*, the revolution made the man. The revolution itself led him to building a secure foundation for slavery's abolition, freedom, and universalism. The content of Louverture's 1801 Constitution, "the culmination of Toussaint's decades-old attempt to reorient the society of Saint Domingue away from the arbitrary violence of slavery and to ground social relations upon the universal, abstract law of human autonomy" that represents the "founding moment in the history of postcolonialism" not 1804 with Dessalines (Nesbitt 2013, 155). It is through "assert[ing]

their right to manage the process of modernization” that the Caribbean revolutionaries “redefined certain fundamental parameters and hierarchies of modernity... both in theory (as a defense of political egalitarianism) and in fact (as a bid for decolonization and full control to manage autonomously the process of modernization” (Nesbitt 2013, 131).

Ghachem (2012) poses the central question that arises when reflecting on the postcolonial Haitian state: How to overcome the complex legacies of the law of slavery in a society that had known essentially no other form of government or social organization?

Beginning with Toussaint Louverture’s Constitution, Haiti inaugurated two innovative legal principles: the abolition of slavery and equal protection under law. In turning to statecraft, Louverture establishes an opening for slavery’s abolition. A postcolonial state run by former slaves was viewed with resentment across the globe. The burgeoning state represented the ultimate affront to the antiblack philosophy that argues blacks are not capable of self-government, lacking the intelligence for statecraft and philosophical thought. Complicating this seeming “unthinkable” feat among black actors, the entire economic system of the Atlantic world was threatened by Louverture’s provocation. Existentially provocative, the Haitian state was not only “unthinkable” or “unimaginable” in Trouillot’s (1995) sense, but it was also an affront to global politics as presently constituted and supported by Atlantic Slave Trade.<sup>17</sup>

The Constitution is inspired by French Republicanism but develops a state form that is more federal, with a central governing structure that is “subject to particular laws” [Art. 1]. While it is unclear what this would have looked like in practice or how

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<sup>17</sup> In 1853, Haitian Commercial Agent to the USA, Benjamin C. Clark published *A Plea for Hayti, with a Glance at her relations with France, England, and the United States for the Last Sixty Years* – argues the failure to recognize Haiti was not merely due to the USA’s (in particular) continued practice of Atlantic racial slavery, but from a deep resentment of its very existence.

governance would be shared between France and its former colony, Toussaint, the Black Jacobin uses French revolutionary discourses to advance abolition and equality. Scholars from C.L.R. James to recent work by Lorenzo Ravano (2021) understands Louverture as “situat[ing] the struggle for black liberation within the history and temporality of the French Revolutio” (727).

The first Constitution of Haiti in 1801 was drafted on the seventh anniversary of the abolition of slavery by the National Assembly in France, invoking the antislavery rhetoric to be found among the French abolitionists and within the corpus of natural rights and humanism. Although it did not establish Haitian sovereignty, instead pledging allegiance to the French nation-state, it did enshrine the policy of abolishment within its foundation, establishing explicitly a state built upon the grounds of antislavery revolutionary politics.

Article 3 set the foundation for Haitian constitutionalism, reading: “There can be no slaves on this territory; servitude has been forever abolished. All men are born, live and die there free..” Unlike Jean Jacques Dessalines (and all other leaders to follow), for Louverture maintaining the connection of the struggle for black liberation and universalism with the French revolution means “free and French.”<sup>18</sup>

The security of abolition and the foundation of freedom can take many shapes. As a postcolonial state, moving from a slavocracy into a republic (of sorts), security, freedom, equality, and order are central to Louverturean statecraft. More than any other

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<sup>18</sup> Toussaint’s adherence to French revolutionary principles and culture reflects what I take to be genuine. Unlike many of the formerly enslaved masses who are mostly new arrivals from the west coast of Africa, Louverture was by or an attempt to flatter French government throughout. Notably in official religion, Catholicism, and the ban on divorce.

Haitian constitution of the period, his includes detailed provisions for setting up legislative authority and the legal apparatus of the state.

The importance of the rule of law also comes out of and is meant to respond directly to the experience of the colonial slave system's myriad forms of arbitrary power, making a case for the need of laws and the state. The rule of law establishes order and freedom from arbitrary power as well as the legality, legitimacy, and authority of Toussaint's provisional government. There are hints that certain measures contained in the constitution may at some future date be unnecessary and removed by Central Assembly, leading me to believe that the authoritarian posture exhibited by Toussaint is suggestive of something like Agamben's (2003) "emergency politics," a moment to reflect and interrogate on the relationship between theory and practice as well as the range of political activities able to bring about the political change that is sought in turbulent times like revolutionary periods.

Equal protection under the law appears throughout the 1801 constitution. Moving from a law that separates the inhabitants of Saint Domingue by color, labor, and property to a new structure ridding itself of this history. Equality and universalism are guiding moral principles in Toussaint's political ideology. However, Toussaint's Louverture's political ideology requires another principle: general liberty. The universal justice brought with the revolution's successful triumph of destroying slavery is a critique of the system of slavery and its foundation of equality prescribing the postcolonial society as justice.

After 13 long years the revolution was ending and the need to replace what they destroyed with new foundations and principles of their own quickly became a practical



reality. The formation of an autonomous state, a product of the right of self-determination, became the chief goal of Louverture. The drive of universal rights for all is a movement of justice that inarguably raises the stakes of the abolitionist movement worldwide and signals an irreversible early death blow to the transnational system of slavery itself. He saw in the state and in constitutionalism a statement of this self-determination and the only means to ensure the abolition and autonomy they fought for. But this was not the only goal. Saint Domingue was destroyed by war. It needed to be rebuilt. It needed to find ways to become economically self-sufficient. And it would not hurt to find a few friends among the global and smaller powers of the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

As discussed in previous sections, central to critiques of the state is the notion that state projects are inspired by sovereign desires. However, this is complicated by the history in Haiti following its revolution and independence. As Haitian scholar, Alex Dupuy (2014) notes,

“If by sovereignty we mean the right and the ability of a people and their government to determine their agenda [then this right and ability is compromised and undermined] when the state is subordinated to the dictates of foreign governments and international financial institutions, and/or the interests of powerful private foreign and domestic actors who are not accountable to the people or their government” (117).

Black claims to sovereignty and the rights of self-determination (including right to freedom, security, etc.) are mutually necessary and reinforcing ideals in Louverture’s constitutionalism and Dessalines nationalism. To achieve sovereignty, the state form becomes a mode in which to achieve recognition on the grounds of equality. After the successful completion of the revolution and formal independence declared, Haitian leaders believed they would have to be recognized by other states around the world and

respected as such. However, the history shows the white world was hesitant to recognize the newly constituted Haitian state. Black Sovereignty always compromised because external entities viewed the nation as being in need of external control, can't control itself.<sup>19</sup> In the Atlantic world, there was no category for black political entities, placing it in the category of oddity and the way this political entity was achieved (through slave revolt/insurrection) turned the black actors and the state into criminals, outlaws.

In addition to these international concerns over recognition, a belief in the principle of sovereignty often outweighed the ideal of the black sovereignty under formation. Black statecraft is one element of black revolutionary politics in early Haiti, the innovation being the act of doing statecraft or state-making at all, to founding a state for the purpose of buttressing antislavery and antiracism. Sovereignty and constitutionalism are tools to achieve recognition (for one's humanity, previous condition of enslavement) in a world that recognizes humanity, rights, and sovereignty in terms of states. Recognition in this sense is an inexplicable fact of the boundedness of life and for human liberation. While the existence of a black state ran counter to the Atlantic world as constituted at the time, the policies of these early states either rejected or were hesitant to publicly decry the system of slavery. Although each successive Haitian leader codified the abolition of slavery and the slave trade as a foundational principle of state, their tentativeness to use this principle to guide its foreign relations says more about their strong beliefs in the sovereignty of states, chiefly their own. The security of the narrowly achieved independent state rested on its ability not to incur even greater ire from the international community.

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<sup>19</sup> U.S. trade embargoes against Haiti in the early 1800s followed by military occupation from 1915-1940; France's indemnity of 150 million francs in 1825.

By bringing together ideas and political action, Louverture enacts a form of critique Nesbitt (2013) calls, a *politics of principle*. He defines it in the following way:

The *politics of principle* refuses the false separation of idea and politics. Politics properly understood is the experimentation of a thought, the determination of the implications of its truth for a given situation... as a mode of critique, [it] enforces and pursues the articulation of distinctions. Terror is not torture. Forced plantation labor under Louverture and Christophe is not slavery, but already a new, experimental regime of postcolonial violence in the context of the extreme precarity of global antislavery after 1804 (18).

Nesbitt is pointing to an issue in studies of revolutions and postcolonial politics engenders a narrative that seeks ruptures and clear separations between the past and the different future. Seeking the innovations at work in revolutions is a complicated task. What I characterize as problems of revolution as breaks and ruptures separating a before from after that is not entirely apparent or possible in postcolonial settings or among revolutions among the oppressed.

Ideology, here, is distinct from statecraft just as statecraft must be seen as a dynamic field of contestation rather than an all-powerful dominant force that remains the same and consistent with itself through time. The new political arrangement he presents is an attempt to found a state upon the ideals and principles of equality and freedom. It is about bending political practice toward humanity's highest ideals. In this way the state is one manifestation of the relationship between ideology or principles and political practice and action. Justice cannot be achieved without liberty and liberty cannot be gained without accepting the equality of human beings. In fact, intrinsic to Louverture's principled equality is his understanding of substantive justice. Freedom and equality are assured through the equal protection of the law and under the law.

In a letter written soon after Leclerc's troops landed in Le Cap (Feb. 4), Louverture, working in tandem with Henri Christophe in the north, encourages Dessalines to adopt a scorched earth strategy of guerilla warfare. He writes with a tone credited to Dessalines,

"Do not forget, while waiting for the rainy season which will rid us of our foes, that we have no other resource than destruction and fire. Bear in mind that the soil bathed with our sweat must not furnish our enemies with the smallest sustenance. Tear up the roads with shot; throw corpses and horses into all the foundations, burn and annihilate everything in order that those who have come to reduce us to slavery may have before their eyes the image of the hell which they deserve" (Peabody 2007, 76).

The shared cause of liberty "is one of vengeance," as Louverture puts it in his first Proclamation of 1793. These sentiments are echoed in the statecraft of Jean Jacques Dessalines.

With the capture, imprisonment, and subsequent death of Toussaint Louverture in the French mountains of Jura, Jean Jacques Dessalines justifiably struck out with a drastically different tone from that of the former leader. His approach to the heightened problems-space following in the wake of Toussaint Louverture's death is an unequivocal severing of ties with France.

After France's treachery the delicate unification of Saint Domingue's different interests began to crumble, but not before staging the last battles over French control of the island. Severing ties and all relationship with France, Dessalines declares independence in 1804. After successfully defeating the French and other imperial powers, a new dawn rose along the Caribbean horizon. Breaking its relationship to France involved political and symbolic solutions. First Dessalines declares independence from France, destroying French authority over its once-wealthy and geographically useful

colony. He accomplishes this break in several key ways: Independence leads to the need for a clearly post-colonial signal – renaming Saint Domingue Hayti, recalling the island’s indigenous roots before French settlement and control; ripping the white from the Saint Domingue flag to create the new Haitian flag. Dessalines’ statecraft demonstrates and signals black power through renaming Saint Domingue to reflect its past before French settlement and control.

His is a government formed with the intent to sever all ties with France, to excise France and white colonial power from Haiti, the new flag, too, signals stripping away the grip of white control and power. Making all citizens black and creating a space for blacks the world over to find a place to call home on its shores. Dessalines statecraft is about black power *avant la lettre*.<sup>20</sup> A rebuke of France and severing of all ties – cultural, economic, political.

## **Conclusion**

Although Jean-Jacques Dessalines distinguished his statecraft with national independence. Toussaint Louverture inaugurated a form of abolition constitutionalism that continues through the Founding generation leaders Dessalines, Henri Christophe, and Alexandre Pétion. The revolutionary statecraft of all these leaders comes out of the principle of politics initiated with the Opening left by Toussaint.

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<sup>20</sup> French: before the letter: before the concept existed.

### CHAPTER 3

#### FREDERICK DOUGLASS AND THE ABOLITIONIST REFOUNDING OF THE UNITED STATES

Readers often turn to Frederick Douglass to enlighten our conceptions of democracy and freedom (Bennet 2014; Bromell 2001; Frank 2010; Roberts 2015). The narrative of Frederick Douglass, the political thinker, follows a pattern that will be familiar to many. After escaping slavery, he joined the abolitionist movement led by William Lloyd Garrison. When he broke with the Garrisonian-wing, he famously changed his opinion and interpretation of the Constitution, giving us some early insight on the meaning he gave to the state and its correlation with freedom. Undergirding many readings of Douglass is the assumption that Frederick Douglass was inordinately influenced by his white male patrons, adopting their moral and/or political stances over time. In fact, often to understand Frederick Douglass, one situates him within his time, as he is its *Representative Man*. This work periodizes Douglass's political thought into a moral abolitionist beginning and a political abolitionist end, influenced by William Lloyd Garrison and Gerrit Smith respectively.

Douglass's change of opinion regarding the Constitution follows the arguments waged in abolitionist circles about the proper way to interpret the Constitution and the relationship it should have to reform movements. Abolitionist political and constitutional theory was a moment of "critical reflection on our constitutionalism" (Richards 1992, 1189). The crisis over the meaning of the constitution and the role of government led to growing tensions between abolitionists and antislavery activists, proslavery advocates, and all U.S. citizens. While the text and history of the Constitution legitimized slavery on

the state and federal level, it also expressed a rights-based theory condemning slavery as a violation of inalienable human rights.

In the beginning of his public career, committed to the practice of moral suasion, Douglass viewed the Constitution like his friends, Garrison, and supporters in the American Anti-Slavery Society. Among what became known as the moral abolitionists, the state and the Constitution was a tool that was powerfully utilized by the slave power throughout the country. As a result, Garrisonians abandoned this “covenant with the devil” as a resource for abolition, severing ties with a social contract permitting human slavery. In this period, moral abolitionism sought to affect the hearts and minds of American citizens, to appeal to their moral reasoning. This, the belief held, would lead to growing numbers of antislavery activists that could effectively abolish the institution of slavery in the United States.

The question, among abolitionists, was whether the state was a tool that could only be used to serve the interests of slavery, whether it was a tool founded for the expressed purpose of instituting slavery, or whether the state could be a tool made in the service of anti-slavery. As early as the 1850s, Douglass began to question the ability of moral suasion alone to change or direct society and therefore the state in an anti-slavery direction. In this period, Douglass demonstrates the role the state has to society and conversely society to the state. Although this insight can be found throughout Douglass’s writing, the move to political abolitionism required a different kind of engagement with society and the state beyond the direction supplied by moral abolitionism. Persuaded by the arguments of William Goodell, Lysander Spooner, and other political abolitionists, Douglass incorporates their rights-based political theory with moral suasion to develop

his own political philosophy and practice of abolition-politics. The politics of sentiment and moral suasion are intertwined in Douglass's political thinking.

Importantly, Douglass suggests that cultivation of sentiment is a crucial practice that would enable human beings to enliven the constitution's declaration of natural rights protection. How does Douglass define "moral sentiment" in his works, if we take "sentiment" to mean "the cultivation of a moral and proper repertoire of feelings?" (Hendler 2001, 2). He suggests that, absent this fundamental relationality, the Constitution's declaration of natural right protection is a nothing more than a theoretical expression.

Douglass addresses existential questions regarding human beings and the requirements of human societies based upon a tradition of natural rights. As Lewis Gordon (1999) points out not only does Douglass shed light on the human being as project in an individual sense (I work on myself) but more importantly it is about the human-species project which in a similar turn to Hegel or Kant requires that we take action to propose solutions to the problems facing us to create a better more just and equitable world.

This chapter explores how these issues play out in his constitutional thinking. I argue that Douglass's position on the U.S. constitution is also an expression of the theory of the human he was developing at the time through moral sentimentalism. I follow and contribute to Frank Kirkland, Charles Mills, and Nick Bromell's many insights to argue that Douglass's understanding of human nature is connected to his view of politics and the state.<sup>21</sup> In these discussions, I have explored some major themes and areas of critique

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<sup>21</sup> See Gooding-Williams, Robert (2009) *In the Shadows of Du Bois: Afro-Modern Political Thought in America*. He shows the ways in which Du Bois inaugurated a problematic bipartite view of black politics



in Douglass's work by Buccola, Mills, and Kirkland. However, Douglass is making a more substantial argument in urging us to see our foundations, if not then certainly in our efforts now to bring about a more perfect union. He wants to get everyone to see in the founding documents a moral obligation toward inclusivity, universalism, anti-racism, and humanism, to name a few. He seeks a renewed agreement upon these lines of the purpose of the union in the first place, calling the nation and its citizens to a higher order.

Douglass is not speaking and writing about what was (originalism), what is (politics and sentiments of the time) but how it should be.

I show how Douglass's understanding of human beings, human societies, and the meaning of democracy rests on a conviction that: 1) sentiments are more than human endowments. They are relationalities. 2) sentiments reflect our individual and collective sense of duty; 3) sentiments provide the moral vantage point from which to critique human laws and practices and 4) Because of the three previous points, sentiments are an important element of political organizing, reform, and abolition democracy. The problem is not with Master's Tools but with all who would be masters. True transformational change requires transforming preconceived sentiments. One part of that transformation takes place with the meaning we attach to our founding documents and sense of selves as part of a nation with certain principles.

### **The Abolitionist Movement**

A familiar historical and political claim is that the Reconstruction Amendments were informed and inspired by abolitionist political and constitutional theory of the

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and political thought into assimilationist and integrationist strands; critiques of leadership; republican tradition (p.166, 179, 208-209).

antebellum period. Constitutional and moral philosopher, David A.J. Richards (1992) argues this is too simplistic and does not tell us how this claim should guide our interpretation of the Amendments. Whose concrete convictions should prevail in shaping constitutional interpretation today? Throughout this chapter, I contend that Frederick Douglass provides an indelible notion of statecraft that continues to enliven our constitutional interpretations.

In 19<sup>th</sup> century United States, debates over the constitutionality of slavery among Abolitionists led to questions over the legitimacy of the Constitution. The crisis over the meaning and proper interpretation, for the abolitionists, then, is the growing tension between the text and history of the Constitution legitimizing slavery on the state and federal level, while it also expressed a rights-based theory condemning slavery as a violation of inalienable human rights. How we interpret the constitution is important because as one of the founding documents, the Constitution sheds light on the purpose and intent of the United States Government in framing its powers, roles, and duties to its citizens.

As a rights-based document, many Abolitionists connected legitimacy to the degree to which the federal government secures the conditions necessary for respect for human rights. How could one interpret the text and history of the Constitution of the United States as consistent with the political theory in light of its putative toleration of slavery, an institution resting on the abridgement of basic human rights?<sup>22</sup> On what principles was the United States founded? If the United States professes to be founded on a principle of equality, does slavery make the government of the United States

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<sup>22</sup>Other examples of proslavery constitutionalism in this period, repeal of Missouri Compromise in the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 and Stephen Douglass's theory of popular sovereignty (*ibid*).

illegitimate? These questions and more were hotly debated among Abolitionists.

Abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips argued to abandon the attempt to interpret the Constitution in terms of rights-based political theory, while radical antislavery abolitionist – William Goodell, Lysander Spooner, Joel Tiffany – advanced a position of constitutional interpretation that viewed political theory as primary, rather than looking to history we should focus instead on the text. The question among abolitionists became, was the constitution a proslavery or an anti-slavery document?

We cannot begin to answer these questions without understanding the role black abolitionists played in these constitutional deliberations. The black public sphere among black intellectuals and activists played a leading role in these debates and the efforts of black statecraft in refounding the nation.<sup>23</sup> Not only can we see black statecraft in the Reconstruction Amendments and federal projects of the period, but this chapter goes further to theorize an abolition social contract for the United States. Douglass offers an essential body of work reflecting on the meaning of the social contract in the United States. More than mere reform, black thinkers and activists advocated for fundamental, foundational change in our understanding of the principles guiding this country, like “all men are created equal.”

Those espousing a proslavery constitutionalism disengage from the Lockean political theory of the Declaration (and understanding of American Founding) that all persons subject to political power have inalienable human rights. Proslavery statesmen John C. Calhoun, for example, was skeptical whether rights could be a defensible

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<sup>23</sup> Some black abolitionists central to the debates in this chapter include David Walker, Maria W. Stewart, Henry Highland Garnett, Martin Delany, and James McCune Smith, to name a few.

political value, choosing to ground the legitimacy of the Constitution on Hobbesian theory of state sovereignty rather than Lockean rights-theory.

Legal scholar Alfred L. Brophy (2008) has argued: “Across the common law, from torts and contracts to property, judges remade - or at least reaffirmed – the law to bring it in line with the dominant philosophy of the era, which sought to promote economic growth. Their opinions subordinated concern for individuals to considerations of precedent and to an increasing respect for considerations of utility” (111). He opposes this to the sentimental impulse among white abolitionist writers like Harriet Beecher Stowe and Henry David Thoreau, which he views as “a religiously inspired search for moral perfection and individual humanity” (Brophy 2008, 113). By ignoring the critique waged against utility as the guiding principle of the rule of law coming from Black Abolitionist (and many radical white Abolitionist), Brophy is able to construct a story in which the explicit goal is to revitalize the voice of the silenced conservative in our historical analysis and interpretation of FGA, Civil War and abolitionism. Yet, he presents a grossly simplistic view of abolition as (only/merely) sentiment – as seen in Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Emerson, and Thoreau but very few examples from the diverse field of action among abolitionists during this period. Brophy imagines all abolitionist as fanatics of the single-minded pursuit of perfection, one whose moral calculus is determinate and absolute.<sup>24</sup>

Through his attendant focus on the tradition of conservative legal thought in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we can clearly identify the antagonism between abolitionist constitutionalism and the conservative mode of constitutional interpretation that

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<sup>24</sup> See also Joshua Simon (2014; 2017) on the contingency of economics for ideologies of American national development.

buttresses the status quo. In this period, the conservative mode was dominant and bent on securing and expanding its power. Yet with the question of whether newly admitted states were to be slave or free, the Free Soilers, Republicans and Abolitionist arguments were ascendant.

### **Douglass's Change of Opinion**

Douglass's change of mind regarding the Constitution follows the arguments waged in abolitionist circles about the proper way to interpret the document. In 1849, Douglass boldly writes of his position: "I now hold, as I have ever done, that the original intent and meaning of the Constitution (the one given to it by the men who framed it, those who adopted, and the one given to it by the Supreme Court of the United States) makes it a pro-slavery instrument – such as one as I cannot bring myself to vote under or swear to support" (Foner 1950, 352).

A reflection of his early stance, Douglass's arguments share in the broader position of the Anti-Slavery Society and William Lloyd Garrison. Central to this stance is how "the political power of the slave states... had so constitutionally entrenched the political power of slave owning interests that their power as an effective political faction had flourished to the degree that, inconsistent with the aims and theory of Madisonian constitutionalism, these factions actually had subverted the Constitution" (Richards 1992, 1194). Later in the same year, Douglass clarifies his position: "What we meant then, and what we would be understood to mean now, is simply this – that the Constitution of the United States, standing alone, and construed *only* in the light of its letter, without reference to the opinions of men who framed and adopted it, or to the uniform, universal

and undeviated practice of the nation under it, from the time of its adoption until now, is not a pro-slavery document” (Foner 1950, 361-362).

In “Constitution and Slavery,” written a month later, he is trying to understand the relationship between slavery and the foundation of the United States in the constitution. He finds in the various compromises support for and encouragement of the slave power. So, while he can turn to the letter of the constitution and see in it antislavery, he also sees slavery. More important, for Douglass, is how the document has been interpreted and used in ways that support slave power opening up ways the document could be used in the service of antislavery.

Douglass announces his split with Garrison’s American Anti-Slavery Society and their position on the Constitution as a pro-slavery document in 1851. After studying the works of other (political) Abolitionist, like Lysander Spooner, Gerrit Smith, and William Goodell, Douglass begins to see these other interpretations as more valid and re-orient the positions espoused in newspapers like *The North Star* and *The Liberator*. He writes, “We [have] arrived at the firm conviction that the Constitution, construed in the light of well-established rules of legal interpretation, might be made consistent in its details with the noble purposes avowed in its preamble; and that hereafter we should insist upon the application of such rules to that instrument, and demand that it be wielded in behalf of emancipation” (Foner 1950, 155).

What is important here is what Douglass views as the ultimate purpose of constitutions – to ensure order. He argues the current system is rife with “lawless violence” that can never be made lawful without overthrowing slavery. In “Is the United States Constitution for or Against Slavery” (1851), Douglass argues the original

intentions should be sought within the Constitution itself because it is the product of agreement and compromise (meaning, not everyone agreed or was in support of slavery).

At the same time, Douglass feels compelled to invoke the Declaration of Independence to make that argument, going both outside the letter of the Constitution and toward the conflict surrounding its formation. For him, the Declaration stands as evidence that the original intent of the Founders was to establish a government whose basis was the natural rights of human beings, therefore, Douglass argued the United States should be committed to those ends. For Douglass's hermeneutics, the original intent of the authors is paramount, and evidence suggest they were committed to the natural rights of human beings. The question at issue here is whether the United States Constitution can be read as a document supporting the natural rights of all human beings?

Philosophers Charles W. Mills and Frank Kirkland have questioned Douglass's constitutional interpretations. Mills addresses four conclusions that result from Douglass's interpretation of the constitution and use of natural law. One is the question of whether natural law is the appropriate framework for considering moral and jurisprudential issues. Second, original intent is crucial for Douglass's argument and for him this intent was antislavery and anti-white supremacy. Third, it follows then, that there is an inconsistency between the actuality and the founding principles of the American polity which through using moral suasion can be exploited by those agitating for racial equality. In this way, Mills raises the question of what use do or should Douglass's interpretation/argument have for our current politics against antiblack racism. Lastly, Douglass concludes that there are grounds for optimism that blacks will eventually be accepted as full citizens in the American polity (Mills 1999, 104-5).

For Douglass, there is reason to see the foundational documents and its underlying principles as grounds upon which to advance anti-slavery and anti-white supremacy agendas – there is moral justification to do so. Whether he is also arguing that the intent of the founders met those same standards is questionable. For Mills, this is exactly what leads Douglass and integrationists astray. While original intent leads Douglass to argue that “slavery is a betrayal of the Revolutionary past” and we can see this in the founding documents because they reflect a “commitment to universal equality” (Mills 1999, 105). His optimism has seemingly proven to be misguided. Douglass reads the social contract as one oriented to human rights and equality, yet humans are allowed to hold other humans in enslavement with impunity. According to Mills, the issue here is that Douglass’s optimism leads him to lose sight of the problem of racism. Instead of a social contract of universal human rights, the U.S. social contract is a racial contract. Consequently, “‘man’ is by no means an unambiguously inclusive category, but one that is internally divided, tacitly contrasted with ‘savages.’ And for these beings, a different set of normative rules applies; natural law speaks differently” (Mills 1999, 122).

Many white people may be able to accept that idea that blacks are human beings. It does not mean that they believe blacks are endowed with the same rights. Complicating the intent of the Founding Fathers, Mills writes: “In their own eyes, these Framers would not then have been doing something wrong in codifying black subordination (if not necessarily slavery itself), since blacks were in fact lesser beings of a lower order and this had both moral and metaphysical implications. It was by no means merely a matter of white human convention and positive law” (121).



Douglass is making a more substantial argument in urging us to see our foundations, if not then certainly in our efforts in the “ever-present now” to bring about a more perfect union. Douglass’s political abolitionism, informed as it was by his moral orientation, is what he is fighting for, though many see in this dream “a mistaken belief that white moral opposition to slavery also included a white moral commitment to black equality, leading to the withering away of racism” (Mills 1999, 127).

The problem, then, of Douglass’s political philosophy and belief in the power of the constitution as a resource of universal equality and human rights is that it insufficiently addresses the fact of racism at the root of the system. Since the United States is a racial contract, the only way to achieve transformation requires facing the reality of racial subordination and exclusion. Mills (1999) writes, “Since that America has been constructed precisely on racial exclusion, transformation of the polity would require the genuine transcendence of race, not through an evasive colorblindness that encodes and perpetuates white privilege without naming it, but through the dismantling of the objective structures and subjective psychology of racial subordination” (128).

For Mills, the real trouble lies with the fact that the real power in bringing about this transformation lies with the white majority. He writes, “The shifting meaning of the Constitution is then really determined by the white majority. Thus while constitutional reform is important, it is ultimately subject to a racialized interpretive logic, by which federal action or inaction is determined by taking a status quo of historic white privilege as neutral, rather than as the legacy of the racial polity” (133).

Ultimately, Mills’ assessment of Douglass’s constitutionalism sees only how it “failed to fully recognize this structure itself, to realize how deeply race and racial self-

interest had entered into the creation of the polity and its citizens' identities, so that he would later underestimate, and be astonished by, the extent of white resistance to racial equality" (128).

However, in his reading of Douglass's speech, he misses other insights Douglass offers over the course of his life. I argue that his focus on human nature and statecraft show how important the problem of racism was for Douglass. Douglass's use of sentimentalism throughout the war years demonstrates an attempt on one hand to change the white hearts and minds estimation of black men, in particular, but also to foster a sentiment among black men as members of the political community of the United States. Therefore, Douglass's political philosophy is geared toward establishing a foundation for universal public sentiment in a way that differed from the sentimentalism of the period because it was meant as a radical transformation of the social contract of the United States away from its racialized beginnings.

Similar to Mills' take, philosopher Frank Kirkland (1999) raises an important discussion of the inability of moral suasion to achieve abolition, teasing out differences between sentimentalism. Moral suasion follows Kant's maxim of making public use of one's reason, where using their capacities to reason, people will see the moral validity of the argument that all human beings have inalienable rights. The campaign of moral suasion among Abolitionists wanted to move its audience to agree that slavery was morally wrong and should be ended. William Lloyd Garrison argues slavery makes the social contract invalid. Frederick Douglass saw a strong argument that the social contract was founded upon equality and equal rights. Therefore, the natural rights of black people

would be conceded among white audiences. One merely had to move them.

Kirkland (1999) argues,

Rational acceptability of Douglass' claim that human nature and rights of black people are self-evident would have to rely less on intuitive insight and linked at the outset to discursive deliberations seeking general agreement. Moral suasion, then, would be the discursive articulation about the validity and violation of norms concerning the immorality of enslavement, the humanity of enslaved Africans, and extension of rights to them, with the aim of seeking general agreement for their validity and against their violation (247-248).

For Kirkland, two problems arise with moral suasion: First, it obscures the relation between obligation and motivation; and second, it leaves the impression that moral suasion alone can serve as the exclusive antidote to enslavement. Kirkland underlines two modalities of moral suasion – moral sentimentalism (of Garrison) and political abolitionism (connected to and informed by the idea of natural law). Kirkland argues we need to divorce moral suasion from moral sentimentalism. He identifies one central problem with Douglass's constitutional interpretation and strategy of employing natural rights doctrine. On this point, Kirkland comes to the same conclusion as Mills regarding where the fault lies: the connection Douglass makes between the “moral fact of natural law doctrine” and it being a guiding virtue among the Framers of the constitution. To make this connection, Douglass must present the original intent of the Framers as “carry[ing] the meaning or sense of natural law as a ground of obligation against slavery” (274).

However, the relationship of the founding documents to natural law is questionable, for Mills and Kirkland, given positive law, as well as “constitutional compromises” like the 3/5th clause. In this way, the founding documents “[carry] no moral orientation beyond which they are framed and bearing the empirical, pragmatic, and historical imprimatur of the social context in which they are established” (Kirkland

1999, 274). On this point, both Kirkland and Mills see a better and more correct reading of the founding documents in Douglass's earlier position to read the constitution as a proslavery document. The principle of natural law relies on "the eternal character of natural law" with little to no "interest in historical causes" (Mills, 1999, 108). On the other hand, positivism, as a legal doctrine, opens the conceptual door to more politically sophisticated and sociologically informed variants like the American legal realism of the 1920s, and the critical legal studies and critical race theory of the present, is its demystified focus on actual laws and law-making, and their embeddedness in social context and power relations" (Mills, 108-109).

While the original intent and meaning of the Constitution as the framers adopted and put the weight of government was to support the institution of slavery, there were also unestablished intents in need of resolution. For Douglass, the legitimacy of the state rests on its facility to its professed intents. It should not be based on contradictions. He wants to resolve the contradictions between the founding documents and positive law. To do so, Douglass turns to natural law doctrine. He begins to understand the Declaration and the Constitution by its letter alone. On that basis, there is reason to see a moral orientation toward natural law in the lines: "we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." What was needed, then, was a new public philosophy to guide the reconstituted United States upon a renewed understanding and commitment to inclusive principles of equality and human rights (Bromell 2021).

For Douglass, the intent and meaning are clear. Unlike William Lloyd Garrison who rejected the legitimacy of the government, Douglass saw an opportunity. He saw how the Constitution and the laws of the country had been used to foster the slavery. Instead of conceding those powerful words, he chose to use them for his own purposes. In this way, we see that Douglass does not give up on moral suasion or moral sentimentalism as methods of communication but bolsters his project of abolition with them. Those lines provide a ground of optimism that abolition will be achieved, and blacks will be incorporated into the nation with an equal share in the rights the state professes.

In Douglass's embrace of political abolitionism, we see how moralism of Garrison's kind is not enough. In his change of opinion, one gleans an early insight into viewing political institutions as *instruments*, that may be in service of different opposing ones for the cause of abolition. We see the way Douglass writes and speaks about the law and political institutions as instruments (tools to be used to gain particular ends/goals), as such the role of power, how it is wielded, and toward what ends becomes an important pivot point for Douglass. One where he sees the ways in which the slave power has utilized the law to foster a hegemonic interpretation of the foundational documents in ways that benefit the slavocracy. Later, in his *Change of Opinion Announced*, he sees this too as a space of struggle, one worthy of fighting over to use the instruments to create a more principled state in practice. He came to see moral abolitionism's stance of avoiding politics altogether as conceding power rather than fighting for it. Since he saw that he was in the right, occupying the moral high ground, Douglass could not make that concession. Rather than viewing his change of opinion as the "rejection of one view and

the adoption of another,” we should see this moment as a pivotal statement that “he had begun to think for himself” (Bromell 2021, 102).

Further, we miss Douglass’s contribution to the formation of radical antislavery’s rights-based egalitarian political theory and practice. Black abolitionists, like Frederick Douglass should be included in discussions of “the longstanding project of American revolutionary constitutionalism” (Richards 1992, 1200). The culminating moment for the United States came with the end of the Civil War, the end of slavery, and reunion of the states in the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments. Writing in 1865, William Lloyd Garrison called for the American Anti-Slavery Society to dissolve, marking the end of the abolitionist struggle. Garrison wrote, the amendment had transformed “a covenant with death” into “a covenant with life” ending his “vocation as an abolitionist” (Foner 1950, 52).

Instead of abolition ending the struggle of a multiracial polity of principle, like many others, Douglass found it merely entered a different stage.<sup>25</sup> One of the stages this problematic plays out is in the state itself. The Refounding period offers great insight into what antislavery, anti-black racist activist like Douglass were fighting for and how that reform movement continues. Interpretations of the founding documents, coming out of the Abolitionist movement seriously elaborate on human rights and the political arrangements meant to support and secure them. Perhaps no more than in Douglass do we receive such an impassioned philosophy of a politics of principle. In the next section, I explore Douglass’s understanding of human nature at the heart of natural rights.

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<sup>25</sup> Many disagreed, so even though Garrison stepped down the AASS continued with Wendell Phillips as its new president. Phillips argued, without further measures to ensure freed peoples rights were protected, their rights would be denied by the states (see *Liberator* Feb 3, 10, 17 & *NAS* Feb. 3, Mar. 4 1865).

## **Refounding the United States**

According to Frederick Douglass's view, in order to understand the Constitution as a document that supports the natural rights of all human beings, one must first understand human nature. What Douglass is attempting to do is present a renewed understanding of originalism and an inclusive understanding of natural law as a basis for refounding the United States. In "Black Sister to Massachusetts" Juliet Hooker (2015) argues of his political philosophy, Douglass "was committed to working toward the refoundation of the U.S. polity on more egalitarian terms; he envisioned its radical transformation based on an expansive notion of multiraciality that would decenter whiteness" (692). Robert Gooding Williams (2009), instead, offers a view of black political thought as its own tradition, beginning with Frederick Douglass and influencing black scholars and intellectuals ever since. Douglass theorizes a new public philosophy, not merely an extension of existing traditions to black life. The novel contribution of his thinking is often missed in the efforts of scholars to place him within one of these classic traditions.

To do so, Douglass develops a theory of the human being to ground the center of rights and democratic politics. Following his assessment of natural rights, black people are human beings, therefore the United States needed an understanding of the American project that included them. At the same time, as early as 1954, he identifies the problem of antiblack racism for the nation in the speech "The Negro Ethnologically Considered." He discusses the need to overcome "the relation subsisting between the white and black people of this country." He discusses how the common ancestry in the human family shared by both blacks and whites has been the subject of inimical attack among scientific

racists like Josiah Nott and Samuel Morton, who promoted the view that blacks were not human in the same way as whites were human. Douglass was certainly aware of this sentiment, though he would not go as far as Mills to suggest the United States was founded upon a racial contract. He is interested in reforming the contract to clarify its principles of human rights and equality upon inclusive grounds. He makes a similar point in 1866 on woman's suffrage:

If woman is admitted to be a moral and intellectual being, possessing a sense of good and evil, and a power of choice between them, her case is already half gained. Our natural powers are the foundation of our natural rights; and it is a consciousness of powers which suggests the exercise of rights. Man can only exercise the powers he possesses, and he can only conceive of rights in the presence of powers (Foner 1950, 232-33).

The foundation of our political rights are based upon natural rights, but to truly feel empowered in this way these rights must be socially sanctioned as well. It is not enough to say all humans have rights and blacks and women are human, therefore, they have rights, but a recognition of human power, the ability for human development must be a shared capacity. Human freedom cannot exist while the problem of the individual in a society that accepts inequality/oppression persists. In this way, sentiment is an important component of statecraft. Recently, scholar Nick Bromell makes a similar point in his discussion of the shortcomings of the Declaration of Independence. Not only does the Declaration not offer a “substantive conception of ‘man’ beyond the assertion that he is ‘endowed’ with rights,” but moreover it does not provide a “broad affective basis on which citizens might build and sustain political community” (Bromell 2021, 6). According to common conceptions of liberalism, only individual self-interest binds those in a polity, however, as Bromell notes, “the pursuit of individual self-interest, or “happiness,” cannot provide the feelings of mutual belonging and solidarity required to create and sustain a self-governing community”



(Bromell 2021, 6).<sup>26</sup> He continues, “consequently, citizens may be disposed to turn to *supplementary* sources of political and social solidarity, such as nationalism, race, and gender” (Bromell 2021, 6).<sup>27</sup> Rather than the primacy of the individual as rights holder, Douglass fought for a political ethos attendant to our humanity (our powers and abilities) as a source of communal strength. Human powers include our capacity for courage and sense of integrity. Though this may be a natural endowment, human beings are susceptible to weakness and avarice.

According to Mills, Douglass’s moral views left him blind to the insidious barrier racism posed. Instead, during the years leading up to the Civil War he believed racism would “wither away” with the end of slavery. In this way, Douglass subscribes to the view that racism is abnormal and inconsistent with our principles as a social contract. At the same time, he is keenly aware of the Slave Power’s reach in shaping people’s attitudes. Yet, even after becoming a free man, Douglass saw the barriers blacks would continue to face due to antiblack sentiment and white racism. Neil Roberts has described the freedom Douglass experienced and gave voice to was “comparative freedom,” a freedom always already circumscribed by how whites viewed him.

At the close of the Civil War and the attack on radical Reconstruction, Douglass’s view on racism’s inimical hold could not be ignored. To overcome the preposterous challenge of proving black humanity as equal bearers of the natural rights that bind our nation, “he would examine and transform the category of the human itself” (Bromell 2021, 39). Douglass’s thinking on the human involves the capacity of human conscious reflection and morality moving human beings to right action or to take responsibility as

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<sup>26</sup> On liberalism, see Phillip Pettit *Republicanism* and the work of Quentin Skinner.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, italics in original.

well as the recognition of shared humanity. He speaks of human faculties and powers suggesting that our human power is the driver of politics and our government. Douglass wants us to see it as part of statecraft, building a human community where all are equal and free.

Throughout his last autobiography, *Life and Times*, Douglass depicts scenarios of the indignity black people faced in being regarded as less than human. Despite the fact that the Union was preserved, and slavery abolished, “the wrongs of my people were not ended,” Douglass writes. The importance of sentiment to politics and who we are as a people is a central concern for Douglass throughout his life. he writes of the importance of sentiment for the U.S. polity, a lesson the Civil War and defeat of Reconstruction made clear, rights alone are not enough. In these scenarios, Douglass suggests that human nature is relationally shaped. Douglass describes the relationship in the following way:

...for no man who lives at all lives unto himself – he either helps or hinders all who are in any wise connected with him... Though slavery was abolished, the wrongs of my people were not ended. Though they were not slaves, they were not yet quite free. No man can be truly free whose liberty is dependent upon the thought, feeling, and action of others, and who has himself no means in his own hands for guarding, protecting, defending, and maintaining that liberty. Yet the Negro, after his emancipation, was precisely in this state of destitution. The law on the side of freedom is of great advantage only where there is power to make that law respected. I know of no class of my fellow men, however just, enlightened, and humane, which can be wisely and safely trusted absolutely with the liberties of any other class.... And yet the government had left the freedmen in a worse condition than either of these. It felt that it had done enough for him. It had made him free, and henceforth he must make his own way in the world. Yet he had none of the conditions for self-preservation or self-protection. He was free from the individual master, but the slave of society. He had neither money, property, nor friends (2003, 815).

In moments such as this, it is clear Douglass understands the durability of racism across the society in the U.S. Nevertheless, the social antagonism Douglass identifies is not merely one of white against and over black, but is a struggle between two sides of humanity – one fighting for it; another against it. Douglass (1883) says of this

“irrepressible conflict” as “two hostile and irreconcilable tendencies... good and evil, truth and error, enlightenment and superstition” (383).

He sees in this longstanding battle an essential struggle of humanity itself. He states:

Progress and reaction, the ideal and the actual, the spiritual and material, the old and the new, are in perpetual conflict, and the battle must go on till the ideal, the spiritual side of humanity shall gain perfect victory over all that is low and vile in the world. This must be so unless we concede that what is divine is less potent than what is animal; that truth is less powerful than error; that ignorance is mightier than enlightenment, and that progress is less to be desired than reaction, darkness, and stagnation” (1883, 383).

In fact, he views all efforts at progress or reform as “effort[s] to bring man more and more in harmony with the laws of his own being and with those of the universe” (1883, 387). As a result, progress and reform rely on human nature and human action. He says, “A denial of progress and the assumption of retrogression is a point-blank contradiction to the ascertained and essential nature of man. It opposes the known natural desire for change and denies the instinctive hope and aspiration of humanity for something better” (1883, 381).

Although he views progress as part of the essential nature of man, there are obstacles that often inhibit progress. He states:

Of course the message of reform is in itself an impeachment of the existing order of things. It is a call to those who think them-selves already high, to come up higher, and, naturally enough, they resent the implied censure. It is also worthy of remark that, in every struggle between the worse and better, the old and the new, the advantage at the commencement is, in all cases, with the former. It is the few against the mass. The old and long established has the advantage of organization and respectability. It has possession. It occupies the ground, which is said to be nine points of the law.

Besides, everything which is of long standing in this world has power to beget a character and condition in the men and things around it, favorable to its own continuance. Even a thing so shocking and hateful as slavery had power to intrench and fortify itself behind the ramparts of church and state, and to make the pulpit defend it as a divine institution (1883, 388).

One can see in Douglass's political thought the essence of Douglass's statecraft, and black statecraft more generally, is the acknowledgment that the task is up to us, human beings too create a more perfect union. "So far as the laws of the universe have been discovered and understood, they seem to teach that the mission of man's improvement and perfection has been wholly committed to man himself. So is he to be his own savior or his own destroyer. He has neither angels to help him nor devils to hinder him" (1883, 390).

Fortunately, for us all, we have Frederick Douglass to remind us of this fact and the moral obligation to continue fighting for all to be equal and free. The Constitution is a living document, Douglass argues, meaning the foundations of state are not on stable principled or ideological ground, but represent a struggle of interpretation.<sup>28</sup> A land of liberty is a utopian desire, seen in the eloquent struggle between the world and the world worth making as described by Douglass. His end-of-life reflections are haunted by his earlier idealism and the distance that remained to be crossed in order to achieve that vision. Yet, these setbacks did not deter him. He kept fighting, speaking, and writing. His persistence and steadfast idealism in the face of opposition, reversals, violence, and rejections gives us reason to pause and reflect on why we should participate in politics, in world-making activities aimed toward improving the lives of all in the first place. He speaks to the meaning of struggle, what it looks like, what it feels like. In his critiques of the status quo, government, and society, there is an opportunity to move seamlessly

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<sup>28</sup> Jason Frank argues Douglass's reading of American history as a process of self-enactment forever promised yet forever unfulfilled contrasts with common readings of American history. In this way, Douglass becomes a powerful role model and symbol for Frank's view of constituent moments, insurgent citizenship, and the importance of history for contemporary socio-political problems. He urges us to take ownership of our past and our voice because ultimately it characterizes the nature of our democracy. He warns, "How we imagine our relationship to a revolutionary past gives shape to who and how we are as democratic people" (39).

between the relationship between our critique and what we hope to build in its place. This methodological dance is something I think Douglass was aware of, the distance between theory/ideals and practice. He wanted to point out the ways in which our political practices ran afoul of our professed ideals and offered solutions on how to correct the error. Instead of offering answers or ways of addressing antiblack racism, my point is that he is giving us what is required.

### **Conclusion**

Douglass urges us to see our foundations, if not then certainly in our efforts now to bring about a more perfect union. He wants to get everyone to see in the founding documents a moral obligation toward inclusivity, universalism, anti-racism, and humanism. He seeks a renewed agreement upon these lines of the purpose of the union in the first place, calling the nation and its citizens to a higher order. Douglass is not speaking and writing about what was (originalism), what is (politics and sentiments of the time) but how it should be.

## CHAPTER 4

### C.L.R. JAMES AND FRAMEWORKS OF ANTICOLONIAL INTERNATIONALISM

This dissertation explores a framework of black statecraft. In chapter 1, I explore the problem-space of an inaugural moment of black statecraft following the Haitian Revolution. Toussaint Louverture and Jean Jacques Dessalines give us constitutional (institutional) liberation of founding. For Louverture constitutionalism was a means of securing abolition from slavery. In chapter 2, Douglass brings out black statecraft not only as institutional refounding but also refounding in a moral, sentiment, and civic sense. Douglass illustrates the ways in which statecraft says more about who we are as a people, or more pointedly who we are called to be by the principles of our governments. Each of these periods follow certain historical dynamics: Haitian founding in 19<sup>th</sup> century; Douglass Refounding in the U.S. in the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century (1840s -1895, when he passed). In this way, this dissertation outlines the historical development of black statecraft as well as theorizing black statecraft. In this chapter, I bring black statecraft to the 20<sup>th</sup> century with C.L.R. James.

C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins* remains a classic text among scholars working on revolutions and anticolonialism. He helps us to understand the historical development and dynamics of black revolutionary movements throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Scholars of black intellectuals and political movements in the 20<sup>th</sup> century often turn to C.L.R. James. He is a prominent scholar and prolific writer whose work spans from the 1930s to the 1980s. His valuable insights and lessons for revolutionary politics greatly influence the ways we understand our past, our present, and offers an inspirational guide for the future.

This chapter explores what happens after the revolution. The dimension of founding and statecraft has thus far received little attention. Instead, scholars focus on the lessons James provides for revolutionary leaders. James offers more than a critique of leadership and political representation in his character studies of Toussaint Louverture, Lenin, and Nkrumah. James' own reflection on this work led him to urge future scholars to focus on the masses rather than the leaders of the revolution.

In chapter 2, I demonstrate the ways in which this led scholars to disavow the state in bringing attention to the masses; in this chapter, I show what his work on leaders, revolution, and the state says about his theory of the state and politics. Centralizing the masses did not lead James down an antistatist direction implicit in many contemporary readings of the text, in fact, the masses inform his view of the state. In *Black Jacobins* and elsewhere, James provides a warning of what he takes as the natural historical development of revolution, leadership, and the post-revolutionary state. It is the disconnection with the masses that brings revolutionary leaders to power that often leads to the failures of its professed aims.<sup>29</sup> Unlike most character studies, James is most interested in showing how objective historical situations affect a leader's responses.

His analysis of the historical development of revolutionary struggles is instructive. A warning not of an inherent weakness in human nature, but of the historically objective conditions of a situation that have placed a political actor in a certain problem-space. James offers more than a critique of leadership and political representation in his character studies of Toussaint Louverture, Lenin, and Nkrumah.

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<sup>29</sup> Speaking of Toussaint, "But he becomes a ruler, he starts to take charge of laws and economic demands and justice and this and that and the other, and he loses contact with the mass of the population. That's what happens to all of them. It is a historical development," p. 78 in "How I Wrote the Black Jacobins" lecture June 14, 1971.

Central to James' own scholarship is to situate the global and world historical role black people have played in the making of the modern world, particularly in what is known as the age of revolutions as well as the age of independence/postcolonial movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Paying particular attention to broader historical currents, James clearly sees which way the wind blows and prepares the proper response for those on the global Left. The historical development of political life, key to James methodology and outlook. Historical development and revolutions are key components of C.L.R. James' work, but so too is a vision of a new world after capitalism, colonialism, antiblack racism.<sup>30</sup> This chapter asks what does the state mean for C.L.R. James? How do these character studies lead to a theory of the state? What is the role of the state or state projects aimed at destroying racial/social/economic hierarchies, domination, and oppression (socialist world revolution)? This chapter begins to answer these questions as I lay out the contours of the debates among black intellectuals in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

James writes during a period in which the model of the nation-state ascends as the unquestioned path of self-determination and independence. Black Statecraft, as seen from James's perspective, extends beyond the nation-state's territorial boundaries, linking people and states together in political formations capable of responding to their needs. In this way, James internationalizes the state. Taking an active role in the politics of the time, James promotes building black solidarity across national borders in his agitation for anticolonial, Pan-African international organizations and for a federation of the Caribbean. James's state is an oppositional force, at moments representing the necessary

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<sup>30</sup> In *Modern Politics* he writes of St. John's (of Revelation) vision of a Harmonious Society after the Romans were defeated in which all would be happy. "He was dominated by the vision of a peaceful and harmonious society" (8)



counter to colonialism, imperialism, fascism, and capitalism. We need ideas and political formations that are aimed at and driven by principles different from those that guide the former. The legitimacy of the state and its representatives is weighed against the extent to which forms of life and living are centered and supported. This can be seen throughout his writings.

In this chapter, I explore the historical dynamics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, ushering in a new phase of postcolonial statecraft that responds to the global transformations of the World Wars. The period was equally marked by a new age of revolutionary movements as colonies around the world strove for self-governance through independence. The development of a clear alternative to the new phase of imperialism, colonialism, and attendant global capitalism from the Left became an urgent goal among intellectuals and activists. Creating a viable alternative gave rise to a series of debates over the meaning of self-determination, nationalism, and the nation-state.

### **Connections and Disconnections Across the International Left**

The narrative of 20<sup>th</sup> century often begins with the world historical disruption of the first World War. In his statement on the principles for peace, Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points gave shape to political movements of independence and refounding. Across the globe, revolutionary nationalist had self-determination on their minds. Consequently, self-determination is primary idea and organizing principle of politics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century for many scholars. The nation-state became the dominant political formation of these movements, cementing itself as a political norm around the world (Stephens 2005); Getachew 2019). At the same time, another political formation emerges

among the European world powers in response to the World Wars. The international formation of The League of Nations and later, following World War II, the West re-aligned to form the United Nations.

Recently scholars are writing with and against standard accounts of decolonization demonstrating the ways in which black intellectuals and activist engaged in models of statecraft beyond nationalism and the nation-state. Brent Hayes Edwards (2003) and Adom Getachew (2019) show a concomitant move toward international political formations and activism among black activists. Scholarship on the transnational dimensions of black thought and practice has attracted many in recent years. Much of this work occurs along forms of discourse rising in the period between the world wars. What is termed a black international, then, as Brent Hayes Edwards (2003) argues, “was molded through attempts to appropriate and transform the discourses of internationalism that seemed to center the ‘destinies of mankind,’ as Du Bois put it in 1919 – the discourse of international civil society as embodied in the League of Nations, the counter-universalism of proletarian revolution envisioned by the Communist International, and the globe-carving discourse of European colonialism” (3).

Scholarship on decolonization touches upon transnational dimensions that are integral to our understanding of what these political thinkers and activist were working for as well as providing an analytical critique of what they are fighting against. International communism and Marxist-Leninist thought informed much of this critique. C.L.R. James is or should be central to this narrative due to his active and prominent presence in the debates of the time. As we shall see, however, James does not play an active role in recent scholarship of black politics and thought in this period. Revisiting

this historical moment leads many scholars to focus on less well-known figures, their work signaling the need to include additional figures who played a prominent part in the debates and struggles of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For example, Brent Hayes Edwards (2003) revises the standard depiction of the black internationalism, which centralizes London and black figures from the British colonies, like C.L.R. James, George Padmore, and Eric Williams to include both a British formation (among British colonials, time in London) and a French formation, which scholars give less attention to when bringing out the international/transnational dynamics of leftist/radical politics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He writes,

Histories of blacks and organized communism and histories of Pan-Africanism both tend to focus on Anglophone intellectuals such as Padmore and C.L.R. James, neglecting their Francophone counterparts and sometime collaborators such as Kouyate, Lamine Senghor, and Emile Faure” (242) His main task is to revive the figure of Kouyate, an understudied and little-known figure in the narrative of 20<sup>th</sup> century black transnational politics and to bring “the role of the French context in interwar black anticolonialism (242).

In *Worldmaking After Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*, Adom Getachew explores the internationalization of the nation-state through thinkers Du Bois, George Padmore, Eric Williams, Kwame Nkrumah, and Julius Nyerere. She shows how the anticolonial nationalists in her study reinvented self-determination, transforming it from a principle to a right in their efforts to found a new anti-imperial world order based on non-domination and egalitarianism. Self-Determination exists within, across, and beyond national boundaries in more ways than in territorial power and control. In this way she adds complexity to 20<sup>th</sup> century projects of decolonization among black actors as she provides “an expansive account of empire that situated alien rule within international structures of unequal integration and racial hierarchy. On this view, empire was a form of domination that exceeded the bilateral relations of colonizer and colonized. As a result, it

required a similarly global anticolonial counterpoint that would undo the hierarchies that facilitated domination” (2).

In other words, Getachew’s worldmaking is a way of extending the critique of these black figures into projects of political formation meant to build a new egalitarian world order of nondomination. Central to her claim about these black worldmaking projects is that they not only internationalized the nation-state, but also internationalized self-determination in turning it into more than a principle guiding action toward self-determination as a right secured by international structures, coalitions of nations meant to secure the hard-won peace of the Second World War.<sup>31</sup>

The Anticolonial nationalists in Getachew and Edwards were not merely operating within an international framework, they were working within a Pan-Africanist framework. Revisiting this period leads many scholars to focus on less well-known figures, their work signaling the need to include additional figures who played a prominent part in the debates and struggles of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. C.L.R. James is or should be central to this narrative due to his active and prominent presence in the debates of the time. As we shall see, however, James does not play an active role in recent scholarship of black politics and thought in this period. Scholarship on decolonization touches upon transnational dimensions that are integral to our understanding of what these political thinkers and activist were working for as well as providing an analytical critique of what they are fighting against. International communism and Marxist-Leninist thought informed much of this critique.

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<sup>31</sup> “The central actors of this study reinvented self-determination reaching beyond its association with the nation to insist that the achievement of this ideal required juridical, political, and economic institutions in the international realm that would secure nondomination” (Getachew, 2).

Left Internationalism organized around the shared concerns of the global working classes. A universalism underlies this project with the aim to alleviate the oppression, domination, and alienation capitalism causes to limit the capacity of individuals to meet their needs. Pan Africanism is an example of a movement and project within the broader left international coalition whose aims are to speak for the experience and lives of African-descended peoples across the globe who face problems specific to their position in the global economy, history and affects of racism in limiting their capacities and life options. Both projects are guided by the belief that their cause should unify the working classes and Afro-descendants, yet tensions persists between the goals of universalism and the reality of particularity, making it difficult at times to join forces.

The black response to Italy's invasion of Ethiopia provided an inflection moment for the movement. Different takes on the legacy and limits of the international communism led to deep cleavages among black thinkers and activists. Padmore leaves the communist international in 1933 on the basis that communists did not take race seriously. Getachew takes this point as reflective of a split between Padmore and C.L.R. James. In *World Revolution*, James responds to Italy's invasion of Ethiopia by stressing a need to revise the International, which fell with the Third's Stalinist takeover. The Fourth International, an international workers movement was necessary, he argued, to abolish capitalism. On the other hand, George Padmore "was less optimistic about its revival" (Getachew 2019, 69).

Preceding the rise of Stalin, though, as scholars note, the Communist International posed complications for those who wanted to organize black workers and speak to the specificities of their experience and place in the dynamics of imperial geopolitics. Both

Padmore and Kouyate had an “uneasy, shifting affiliations with the Comintern – strove in the early 1930s to find a way to ‘develop racial solidarity’ and to institutionalize an autonomous ‘center of diffusion’ for black internationalism *within* the structures of communism” (244) italics in original. As Edwards notes,

The Padmore-Kouyate collaboration is on the one hand a function of the Comintern policy envisioning an ‘international trade union’ approach to black labor. But their circumventing of the French national party points toward another internationalism as well, one not wholly subsumed in a Comintern agenda, one that emphasizes race-based organizing and anticolonial alliances among differently positioned revolutionaries of African descent.

Another way to make this point is to note that it is precisely the discourse of the Communist International – even if the Comintern insists that race-specific movements are ultimately antithetical to (and even a threat to) worldwide proletarian revolution” (264).

In Getachew’s narrative the uneasy affiliations with Marxist-Leninist internationalism for the sake of black solidarity demonstrate a key turning point, with James’s supposed fidelity to forging communist/socialist international serving as evidence of his “hesitancy” to espouse a doctrine of race over class. Getachew’s focus on self-determination as an organizing idea for anticolonial nationalist and the federal idea leaves James largely out of the narrative. The debates among Caribbean statesmen is less in focus here. The exception is in the way Getachew describes the relationship of black activists to the broader communist movement. Ultimately, both Edwards and Getachew view a split in the movement between James and Padmore that signals: James’s position in the debate as one of choosing class over race. As a result, both table James in their narratives of 20<sup>th</sup> century black intellectuals.

However, without attending to the debates over these questions among Caribbean thinkers, we are unable to grasp how the specificities of both were central to their arguments. Especially with James, it is difficult to argue that he chose race over class. In

fact, a class analysis informed his analysis of race in varying contexts as much as his analysis of race informed his analysis of class. Consequently, without further engagement with James's arguments, his actual position and insight gets lost.

### **James's Revolutionary Internationalism**

Edwards and Getachew's narrative of the movement in this period as a split between those still enmeshed with European Communist International rather than an autonomous black radicalism (anticolonialism, anticapitalist) leave readers unable to see James's contribution to both Marxism and Pan-Africanism. One informs the other. His internationalism was connected to his politics and what he saw as the new path for the movement in the 20<sup>th</sup> century – federation. In fact, in 1948, James addressed this issue.

In a speech at the Socialist Workers Party Conference, James describes the issue:

We can compare what we have to say that is new by comparing it to previous positions on the Negro question in the socialist movement. The proletariat, as we know, must lead the struggles of all the oppressed and all those who are persecuted by capitalism. But this has been interpreted in the past – and by some very good socialists too – in the following sense: the independent struggles of the Negro people have not got much more than an episodic value and as a matter of fact, can constitute a great danger not only to the Negroes themselves, but to the organized labor movement. The real leadership of the Negro struggle must rest in the hands of organized labor and of the Marxist party. Without that the Negro struggle is not only weak but is likely to cause difficulties for the Negroes and dangers to organized labor.

In the speech to the Socialist Workers Party, James explains the historical hesitancy among the organized labor movement to embrace what then was called “the Negro question.” He says, “as Bolsheviks we are jealous, not only theoretically but practically, of the primary role of the organized labor movement in all fundamental struggles against capitalism.” Contrasting from this tendency in the movement, James uses this speech in particular to “challenge directly any attempt to subordinate or to push

to the rear the social and political significance of the independent Negro struggle for democratic rights. That is our position. It was the position of Lenin thirty years ago. It was the position of Trotsky which he fought for during many years” (James 1948).

Rather than positing class and race as antagonistic, he views black people and the histories of black struggle as integral to communism’s proletariat. Beginning with *The Black Jacobins*, he uses his work to show the relationship black people have had with revolutionary elements and struggles in the past. James sees lessons in this history that are useful to the communist movement. His body of work continues this engagement in his own time, following and writing about anticolonial movements in the United States, Africa, and across the Caribbean. At the same time, he wanted to make this history and its connections to contemporary dynamics and politics known. He writes, “the Negro’s revolutionary history is rich, inspiring, and unknown” (James 1939). The important thing for James was to build a movement capable of fighting capitalism and imperialism. The first step of building this movement is the political development of the working classes. As he says, “Small groups, nations, nationalities, themselves powerless against imperialism, nevertheless can act as one of the ferments, one of the bacilli which will bring on to the scene the real fundamental force against capitalism – the socialist proletariat” (James 1948).

For that reason, James did not see Pan-Africanism and the movement of international communists as separate movements but worked to promote an understanding that both were necessary to the future success of the movement. Although slaves are not peasants or laborers/proletarians.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, to use the language of

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<sup>32</sup> Sidney Mintz (1976) argues the point that the people themselves were the commodity not only that they labored.



labor grants slaves dignity that is often not afforded to slaves. It also makes of slaves an essential agent of history and the creation of wealth. For any revolutionary movement to be successful in overthrowing capitalism, tyranny, and oppression, it must have the power of revolutionary alliances across national and racial boundaries (material and political support) in order to fight an imperialist dominant world power. C.L.R. James biographer, Kent Worcester (1995) describes the connections, “By its very nature, Pan-Africanism was concerned with linking movements across the diaspora, and with the exchange of ideas, personnel and tactical advice across national and regional boundaries. In this sense, Pan-Africanism shared an internationalist character in common with Marxism” (37).

James’s contribution to Marxism can be seen throughout the 30s and 40s, distinguished by his understanding of historical materialism, the promotion of a fundamental role of black people to an anticapitalist, antiimperialist movement, and Trotskyism. Worcester (1995) notes, “In the early 1930s, the maverick Trotskyist offered a pugnaciously Marxist alternative to Communism, anarchism, and social democracy” (40). Although Pan-Africanism does not seem to correspond with Trotskyism, for James the two were complimentary forms of revolutionary socialism. “Trotskyism anticipated the emergence of new revolutionary movements in the coming period, and it placed a critical emphasis on the importance of linking and extending radical struggles across national borders. Permanent revolution, Trotsky’s theory of the interpenetration of radical movements in the core and periphery of the world system, conveniently (and for James, persuasively) arranged world-historic forces in such a way as to allow for the complete and secure abolition of colonialism and imperialism” (Worcester 1995, 40-41).

Worcester continues, “Trotskyism promised to fuse theory and practice through the creation of a genuinely revolutionary international vanguard that could decisively intervene in the struggles of the day” (41).

Years later, James admonished international Marxism for its failures in building a necessary international coalition to oppose imperialism and capitalism. Instead, the debates within international communism led to splits and continued efforts of discrete nation-building, limiting its ability to represent an opposition to imperialist world powers. Self-determination could only be useful as a slogan if it exists within, across, and beyond national boundaries in more ways than in territorial power and control. The failure of self-determination, according to James, are a result of nationalism. For self-determination, the right to control one’s own destiny as a people, to work each needed to join with others struggling for the same. Solidarity of these movements builds strength for the movement, can represent an alternative to the capitalist states of former empires. Internationalism is the only hope for the international Left. After the failures of the First and Second International and the need to re-establish its intent from the Stalinist takeover of the Third International, James still viewed a Fourth International as necessary.

At the same time, there was another more fundamental source of hope for C.L.R.

James and that was among the people. He writes,

At critical moments when the great masses of people, who usually are not particularly active in politics, see an opportunity to shape the course of political events, they usually, or they have often attempted to establish a society of equality, of harmony and of progress. We saw, also, that the writers who wrote round and about those events themselves were moved by the desire, if possible, to work out in theory what, at critical moments, the masses tried to do in practice (James 1973, 42).

Getachew’s casting of these black political thinkers and state makers as “worldmakers” does similar work to what I hope to achieve in my recasting of the

narrative of abolition and decolonization as statecraft. In fact, I show the ways in which this anticolonial vision is statecraft. It is important to bring attention to the myriad ways political actors attempt to shape the structures and conditions of their worlds. Theorizing these visions as statecraft complicates the narrative of decolonization and the model of the nation-state to include not only different formations – one’s that are international or regional-federations – but brings attention to the very real challenge they represented to the dominant order. We both seek to expand our understanding of the political projects of decolonization beyond that of the nation-state as form. Getachew’s worldmaking is a way of extending the critique of these black figures into projects of political formation meant to build a new world order. The framework of worldmaking brings into view the ways in which internationalism underlined anticolonialist nation-building, therefore extending the boundaries of the state. It is also this boundary-exceeding quality that illustrates the globality and world restructuring movement among Anglophone thinkers.

Unlike Getachew, this project does not focus on leaders and state projects whose federal idea leads to top-down organization and administration. She looks at the federal projects and failures of self-determination in guiding anticolonial nationalism. Perhaps wanting to bring attention to under-recognized black thinkers, C.L.R. James plays a minimal role in her text. In Getachew, his absence may at first appear glaring, but he does not share the position explored in her text. Instead, his vision of federation does not include or use self-determination as its guiding slogan.

At the same time, to table James on the grounds that he chose class over race, in this period, simplifies James’s position and obscures James’s important contributions to these debates. James’s “singular contribution” to Pan-Africanism can be seen throughout

the 1930s, distinguished by his Marxism, historical materialism, and Trotskyism (Worcester 1995). Internationalism in James sees a need to foster international structures of coalitions across the Left that are informed by anticolonialism, anticapitalism, and antiback racism. Building such transnational coalitions serves two key functions. First, it represents an organized opposition to colonialism, capitalism, and racism; and relatedly, second, it fosters the formation of a counter-hegemonic, alternative discourse that critiques, challenges, offers solutions, and presents a vision for new ways of structuring the state.

The lesson James takes from his historical research and analysis of contemporary (decolonial/anticapitalist) movements is a connection between a specific vision of the state to mass-mobilization and the self-fashioning of the masses – this is a distinction from Getachew representing a top-down federal idea rather than a bottom-up & top or more dynamic view of the relationship between leaders and the masses. He advocated internationalism in many moments as the necessary response to the machinations of geopolitics. In the case of Trinidad, for transnational workers solidarity, and for black or pan-Africanist federation/solidarity. Each demonstrates the role internationalism had for his politics and for political formations throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Again, this internationalism was meant to stand in opposition to other competing transnational forms and realities, capitalism and business transnationally affects the material conditions of life across nation-state borders. For decolonization to achieve its aims international solidarity is a requirement.

In the next section, I turn to James's position in the debates over the next steps in Caribbean development through federation. Rather than represent an ideal choice for

political formation in the Caribbean, federation, for James, was a historical necessity and next step for modernization shaped by the material conditions of the region at the moment. However, this alone does not offer the best exposition of James's thinking on the state and statecraft. For that, we must turn to his writings on the model of ancient Greek city-states.

### **On Federation: James & the Caribbean debate**

Writing in 1958, James's analysis of the period brought him to the conclusion that the best way for Trinidad to navigate the political problem-space was to form a federation. One reason James promotes federation for Trinidad and the Caribbean is because it is composed of smaller states with limited resources. As postcolonial states, a historical dimension of its relationship to dominant powers, former empires, adds shared experiences and other similarities like racial dynamics. He describes the development of postcolonial states in the following way:

“It has been observed that when a colonial country is approaching national independence, there are two distinct phases. First, all the progressive elements in the country begin by supporting the national independence movement. Then, when this is well under way, you have the second stage. Each section of the nationalist movement begins to interpret the coming freedom in terms of its own interests, its own perspectives, its own desires” (James 1984, 87).

He identifies a similar process at the end of the Haitian Revolution and the Russian Revolution to name a few. Although each nascent state faces many similar challenges (rebuilding, economic concerns, institutionalization of the state, etc), some are regionally and historically specific. In the 1958 essay, “On Federation” James outlines the process of development for small post-colonial states, focusing on the West Indies. While this

essay addresses contemporary geopolitics and offers an analysis of the next steps, it also shares many of the concerns James identifies and warns against in *The Black Jacobins*. Chief among these concerns is the relationship of revolutionary leaders cum founders to the masses and the relationship of the masses and the postcolonial, newly founded state.

In the essay, James offers his analysis of the global problem-space after World War II. He describes the times as one of transition from 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century imperialism and colonial possession to one in which the former European world powers no longer occupy the same position and their former colonies are claiming national independence. As a result of this changing position, all are entering into new terrain, facing new challenges. In postcolonial states, especially, a federation is necessary “to unify, diversify, and develop the economy” (96)

This process of forming federation can be seen in other postcolonial spaces, giving a stronger sense that this political formation is necessary, representing this new stage in the historical development of states and their relation in the world system. A period of transition brings world historical challenges, but it also brings opportunities to break old connections rooted in imperialism and colonialism and create new connections.<sup>33</sup> Building new connections, like a federation, though we will see the other means of connection James has in mind, is necessary for survival. Solidarity is about survival. For James, the potential for economic growth and development are only possible for the Caribbean with a federation. He writes, “Federation is the means and the only means whereby the West Indies and British Guiana can accomplish the transition from colonialism to national independence, can create the basis of a new nation; and by

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<sup>33</sup> “*But if we are breaking the old connections, we have to establish new ones*” (99, italics in original)

reorganizing the economic system and the national life give us our place in the modern community of nations” (90).

He is clear in saying he advocates for a federation in the Caribbean, not based on an ideal of political formation, as in, federation is a goal to strive for. Instead, federation represents a stage of development and the means with which to achieve development in the Caribbean. His analysis of historical development arises from his assessment of world politics in a moment of transition. As empires fall, losing their colonial possessions, the former ruling powers of the world – Britain, France, Italy, Spain, Holland, and Belgium, are no longer world powers. He describes this moment in this way:

The world in which they ruled and shaped our destinies according to their will, imposed upon us their ideas of the economics and the politics that they thought suitable for us, that world is gone. We shall enter as a free people into a world that we never knew and which our masters never knew until recently. If they were merely losing their colonies and *continuing as before* that would be one thing not only for them but for us. What is happening is something entirely different, and, as I believe that most of the shortcomings in our thinking of our future spring from an inadequate grasp of this central fact, I shall spend some time on it (1984, 90-91).

The shape of the international social order, an analysis of the steps in its historical development are central to his black statecraft. This is what we aim to achieve. The forms of political organization are only valuable to the extent that they are useful, how well can governments “handle the problems of the day?” (James 1973, 91). To meet the challenge of the changing conditions, James offers support for federation. The method includes many features James highlights throughout his work like internationalism and strength in solidarity. His view of the challenges facing postcolonial nations and the world in the 20<sup>th</sup> century extend beyond the political to include the economic and social as well. For James, the success and security of states generally, but postcolonial states, in particular, involve fostering connections between the state and the masses. The masses must be

included in the method of development, to feel they are part of establishing a polity that centralizes the welfare of its citizens. Similar to his reading of historical events facing the postcolony, the inclusion of the masses is meant as a salve against the dangers of class or racial divisions that have often disrupted the best laid plans of postcolonial statecraft. As he puts it, the “people have to be lifted out of themselves and will give up their petty preoccupations only on the prospect of a larger vision” (1984, 111).

But what did this larger vision of the state look like James? To answer that question, I turn to James’s writing on the ideal example of the ancient Greek city-state.

### **The Lost Tradition of Statecraft Among the Ancient Greeks**

Across his writings, the model of the ancient Greek city-state serves as a guide to his thinking on statecraft. In it he saw two fundamental principles of statecraft: the principle of direct democracy and equity. Direct democracy in ancient Athens meant a method of organization and administration where all the citizens took part. Rather than a form of representation like that we have become used to, the system of direct democracy functioned by sortition, or selection by lot. He describes the choice of direct democracy over representative government this way:

The democracy knew representative government and rejected it. It refused to believe that the ordinary citizen was not able to perform practically all the business of government. Not only did the public assembly of all the citizens keep all the important decisions in its own hands. For the Greek, the word *isonomia*, which meant equality, was used interchangeably for democracy. For the Greek, the two meant the same thing. For the Greek, a man who did not take part in politics was an *idiotes*, an idiot, from which we get our modern word idiot, whose meaning, however, we have limited. Not only did the Greeks choose all officials by lot, they limited their time of service. When a man had served once, as a general rule, he was excluded from serving again because the Greeks believed in rotation, everybody taking his turn to administer the state (James 1956).



Equality goes beyond the idea that every person can vote. The Athenian system of direct democracy went further with its method of sortition. It meant that the people of Athens shared in the responsibility of governance, as everyone took their turn in its administration. The common people all took a share in this duty, not experts. James (1956) writes, “At every turn we see the extraordinary confidence that these people had in the ability of the ordinary person, the grocer, the candlestick maker, the carpenter, the sailor, the tailor. Whatever the trade of the individual, whatever his education, he was chosen by lot to do the work the state required.”

As a result, one of the great lessons he takes from the Greek city-state is the way in which it takes the principle of equality to its extreme, which paves the way for one of the most enduringly influential civilizations in world history. As he puts it, “This is the greatest lesson of the Athenian democracy for us today. It was in the days when every citizen could and did govern equally with any other citizen, when in other words, equality was carried to its extreme, that the city produced the most varied, comprehensive, and brilliant body of geniuses that the world has ever known” (James 1956).

How was Athens able to produce figures like Homer, Sappho, Aeschylus, Thucydides, Socrates, Pericles, to name a few? It is the relation created between the state and the people. If everyone, in turn, takes responsibility for governance in this way, the people develop ownership and responsibility for the state as part of themselves. He describes the ability of the relationship between the Greek and the state to achieve such great heights:

The Greek democrat achieved this extraordinary force and versatility because he had two great advantages over the modern democrat. The first was that in the best days of

the democracy, he did not understand individualism as we know it. For him an individual was unthinkable except in the city-state. The city-state of democracy was unthinkable except as a collection of free individuals. He could not see himself or other people as individuals in opposition to the city-state. That came later when the democracy declined. It was this perfect balance, instinctive and unconscious, between the individual and the city-state which gave him the enormous force and the enormous freedom of his personality. Pericles shows us that freedom, the freedom to do and think as you please, not only in politics but in private life, was the very life-blood of the Greeks (James 1956).

He continues,

Politics, therefore, was not the activity of your spare time, nor the activity of experts paid specially to do it. And there is no question that in the socialist society the politics, for example, of the workers' organizations and the politics of the state will be looked upon as the Greeks looked upon it, a necessary and important part of work, a part of the working day. A simple change like that would revolutionize contemporary politics overnight (James 1956).

All ancient Greece's great achievements are due to this "belief in the creative power of freedom and the capacity of the ordinary man to govern" James laments the loss of this way of viewing government and community, though he acknowledges it would be difficult to achieve in the same way as the Greeks. At the same time, small and large communities benefit from this kind of arrangement, James (1956) even goes so far to say: "the larger the modern community, the more imperative it is for it to govern itself by the principle of direct democracy (it need not be a mere copy of the Greek)."

Unlike current forms of representative democracy, power is shared, as is one's individual responsibility to their community. James laments the loss of this way of viewing government and community. The state as relation is a lost tradition in need of revival for a better future. The model of the Greek city-state stands in idealistic relief as model for the meaning of the social contract: "the sense that he belongs to the state and the state belongs to him" (James 1973, 97). The conceptual tool of the social contract,

especially the work of Jean Jacques Rousseau is something James often returned to. Rousseau's politics takes up the task of finding the proper basis of government. He quotes Rousseau on this point: 'Before we have any kind of government, we have agreed to meet together, to work together; and I take my liberty, which is mine, my property, and I give it to the government along with yours, so that when I obey that government, I am in reality obeying myself' (qtd 97).

James continues,

There the good life for the individual citizen begins. Today we do not see much of that. We do not see that very much except in periods of revolution when people get together behind a program and leaders. It is very rarely the state, an actual government. Sometimes it is a political party, sometimes it is a leader; and then you get an example again of what Rousseau means when he says that if the minority has to obey the majority merely because it is a majority, that is not liberty, that is not freedom (James 1973, 98).

How is this feeling of belonging supposed to be engendered among the people?

James places his earlier activism on educating workers (and everyone) on Marxism. A study of Marxism provides the foundation for what every citizen will need, an understanding of historical development, power, and the social antagonisms between two 'classes,' the people and the leaders; the idea of historical development But just like Gramsci and Hegel, C.L.R. James is invested in and sees a need to foster a counter-alternative ideology. Building solidarity across borders and movements, for as James saw it, all the movements were part of the same oppositional force. The oppressed everywhere unite, a sign of their Marxism.

James's focus is on revolutionary movements and the best ways to move the masses toward the achievement of liberatory goals through various methods of political action. For James this consisted of consciousness-raising efforts to realize one's individual interest and build the capacity of identifying which interests are being served

by particular policies. In this sense, James provides meaning and method of democratic praxis. He doesn't use the language of "responsibility" or "duty" in his reflections of democratic citizenship, which is different from someone like Douglass, for example. But, throughout his writings there's this implied responsibility and duty dialectic at work between the people and the state. Both have responsibilities and duties they owe to the other in order to be worth the name, *democratic state or polity*.

His conclusions here and his own method of analysis reflects how seriously he takes Hegel's and Rousseau's conclusions, working to show them throughout his life. In fact, Hegel is very important for how he views the process of historical development and statecraft, not as an ideal but as a solution to a problem. Like Hegel, James understands human society as an organism and all historical movement relies on contradiction as "the creative moving principle of history" (James 1973, 99). As a result, "There must be opposition, contradiction – not necessarily contradiction amounting to antagonism, but difference, obstacles to be overcome. Without that there is no movement, there is only stagnation and decay" (James 1973, 99).

As he writes above about Rousseau's social contract, if the government "doesn't do what is satisfactory we are done with it." That is the key, not the state, as such, but the political formations given/taking the role of creating and responding to conditions for the benefit of all its members. A principle of equality, universality, and freedom underlies some political formations like democracy and become the basis of critique for whether they are meeting these professed aims satisfactorily. The notion of critique is more clearly understood than that of statecraft. We have highly developed ways of identifying the problem (although we may be misguided here as James notes, how we understand the

problem and come to the conclusion that something is a problem are all important to defining what the problem is) but less developed ways of identifying potential solutions.

Further inspired by Hegel on this point, it is from the masses that this wellspring of opposition must come. As James writes,

It is within the organism itself, i.e. within the society that there must be realized new motives, new possibilities. The citizen is alive when he feels that he himself in his own national community is overcoming difficulties. He has a sense of moving forward through the struggle of antagonisms or contradictions and difficulties within the society, not by fighting against external forces (James 1973, 100).

Just like Du Bois's declaration that the "problem of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is that of the color line," James couples this notion with the idea that the problem in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is capitalism, as economic system ideology and force. It encourages individual and collective alienation, fear, precarity and anxiety. He writes, "Capital controls us. We do not control it" He continues, "And this has reached such a stage that the great masses of men live in fear and anxiety. The good life for the modern citizen is impossible" (James 1973, 101).

Contrary to a world system that promotes a life full of these horrors, James returns to the fundamentals, asking:

What is the good life? An individual cannot be comfortable and easy or creative unless it is in harmony to some degree with the society in which it lives. The individual must have a sense of community with the state. That is where we began. And that today is impossible. We tend to think of the good life in terms of individual well-being, personal progress, health, love, family life, success, physical and spiritual fulfillment. The whole point is that far more than we are consciously aware of, these are matters of our relation to society (James 1973, 103).

## **Conclusion**

C.L.R. James offers great insight into a Marxist theory of state and politics that joins Hegel and Marx in ways that subvert the binary thinking that often accompanies

their work. Further, he incorporates the history of African-descendent peoples into his Marxist analysis in ways that challenge the standard depiction of 20<sup>th</sup> century politics as split along the lines of race and class. His statecraft is beyond nationalism and the nation-state toward international formations that can signify an opposition, a counter to pose a challenge and represent an alternative to the dominate formations of imperialism, neocolonialism, and global capital. James develops a counterhegemonic ideology through his method of historical development and work with international groups of the Left and formations of Pan-Africanism.

## CONCLUSION

The problem of the binary traced throughout this dissertation is connected to a longstanding problem of political thought. Contemporary political thought did not create the unconstructive binary between statism and anti-statism. Instead, it is part of a much longer critical intellectual tradition. The work of Hegel and Marx are illustrative of the problematic this dissertation responds to. One where the state is viewed in a speculative fashion as ethical ideal, as in Hegel, and another rooted in material society that conceives the state as an instrument of domination, in Marx. However, the binary that comes out of Marx and Hegel disavows the world-making possibilities of the human in statecraft. Statecraft is not simply a tool of the dominant, but also reflects many victories from among the oppressed.

We must maintain in view a notion of statecraft as an oppositional force in a battle of contestation over the meaning of the state. Tracing episodes of black statecraft in the modern period begins with the abolitionist statecraft of Toussaint Louverture. The framework of black statecraft, as inaugurated with the Haitian Revolution represented an alternative and opposing idea of abolition and black self-governance that presented an affront to colonialism and imperialism at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

By keeping our visions of the state in view alongside our critiques of the state, black statecraft brings attention to the politics of principle attendant to political foundations. From this, we can fashion alternatives to counter destructive forms of the state like those of authoritarianism and fascism. Throughout my dissertation, I position statism and antistatism as a tendency in contemporary political theory this dissertation is

working with and against as I theorize black statecraft. Overcoming binaries such as these will enable us to better find solutions to the problems we face.

Statecraft is not only constitutionalism, but includes discourses of meaning and principles, as well as moral dispositions and formations of community, identity, and belonging. Together, the framework of black statecraft brings attention to the importance of relation – an individual’s relationship with and to the state, relationship to others, and to the world.

As a framework, statecraft brings attention to an understanding of the state as both a set of political, social, economic institutions of governance and an idea influencing how we envision our society, the principles underlying the foundations of government and the state, and the role of government/the state in the people’s lives. In this way, it is important to keep in mind what we are building along with what we want to dismantle and destroy.



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