

SEEDS OF DISCONTENT:
ANTECEDENTS TO THE HAITIAN REVOLUTION
1750-1791

By

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ABSTRACT

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This paper is a sociological exploration of interactive processes between 1750 and 1791 that fostered an emergent collective intentionality and contributed to the Haitian Revolution, the only successful uprising of enslaved African and African descended people. The project employs concepts pertaining to the African Diaspora to understand members of that global process as creators of their own reality. *Collective intentionality* brings focus to how enslaved Africans and their descendants invoked shared historical and cultural memory as they aimed toward liberation. Other theoretical ideas from the social movements arena of sociology provide a basis for understanding antecedent activities as critical to the analysis of revolutions and other contentious politics.

Africans' intentionality in late 18th century Haiti (Saint Domingue) was oppositional to enslavement; and it was grounded in a shared African cosmic orientation, reinforced by common status, and further diffused by ongoing interactions in protected social spaces. With specific attention to northern Saint Domingue, I collected and analyzed data using secondary source documentary review and content analysis of primary source data from the *Marronnage in Saint Domingue* online database. The research found that African and African descendants' deliberate removal of self – *self-liberation* – from enslavement and their participation in culturally distinct sacred rituals were important forms of resistance prior to the Haitian Revolution.

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Introduction

The Haitian Revolution began in 1791 and ended in 1804 with the establishment of an independent nation. This was the only successful insurrection begun by enslaved Africans and African descendants that culminated in the establishment of an independent nation (James [1938] 1989; Ott 1973; Fick 1990; Geggus 2002; Dubois 2004). Despite these singular accomplishments by those in their time considered to be among the lowest of the human species, the discipline of sociology particularly has failed to examine the Haitian Revolution or its antecedents for such contributions to the historic outcomes. Researchers in the arenas of social movements and historical sociology specifically have rarely if yet taken up this global phenomenon. The work of this paper is to report on beginning research in an attempt to bring the endeavors of enslaved populations in Haiti to the forefront of sociological analysis.

A strong analysis of this social change phenomenon might focus on its beginnings as antecedents to the revolution. Many have chosen to give priority to the revolution itself and attributed its impetus to a ‘trickle down’ of political and philosophical ideas from the French Revolution. However, the research upon which this paper is based was grounded in assumptions that even before the revolution was afoot, late 18th century Africans and African descendants in Haiti, known then as Saint Domingue, expressed a collective intentionality and consciousness of themselves as non-enslaved human beings.

This paper reports findings from an investigation specifically focused on Africans’ pre-revolution activities that were “seeds of liberation” to Haiti’s revolutionary success. The paper begins with an explanation of the rationale for conducting the research, and then proceeds with a consideration of concepts crucial to the theoretical posture of the project. I next present a description of investigative methods employed to collect data from primary and secondary

sources relating to Haiti's pre-revolution period. The paper segues to a 'preface' designed to provide the reader with clarifying understandings of the pre-revolution historical context. Next is a review of salient sociological literature regarding social movements and collective consciousness. After a discussion of findings from the research, the paper moves to analyze the data, and concludes with closing thoughts on the project's implications for future directions of similarly themed research.

Rationale

The research from which this paper emerges was a sociological exploration that employed primary and secondary sources about enslaved, mid-18th century African and African descendants in Haiti. The research for sociological themes and forces within historical phenomena is not the most popular investigative posture of our discipline, and the Haitian Revolution stands as a primary example of the absence. This author identified three reasons for an apparent omission of sociological work on the Haitian Revolution, despite its radical transformative challenge to the social institution of slavery.

As a first reason, social movement researchers have rarely examined historical collective actions such as enslaved people's rebellions because contentious politics of the past tend to complicate theoretical concepts grounded in contemporary social movement phenomena (Calhoun 1995; Clemens and Hughes 2002; Gould 2005). A second reason for the omission of Haitians' revolutionary activities is that most researchers appear not to discuss collective actions that occur prior to, and eventually leading to social revolutions (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 1996). Finally, this author has yet to find strong indication that the social movements field has fully considered phenomena of African and African descendant populations, with the noted exception of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement and to a lesser degree the Black Power Movement (Martin 2005, 8). The failure of the discipline to consider rebellious social activities of this segment of the world populace demands further study, specifically of those activities that occurred prior to and during the contentious 18th and 19th centuries, often referred to as the Age of Revolutions. This research aims to help fill this empirical void with theoretical guidance from interactionist sociology.

Inherent within Homo sapiens' nature are interactive social processes that create individual and collective identity for all within society. The social interactionist school of thought is the sociological arena of work in which these ideas have come together and is exemplified by social constructionism and symbolic interactionism. The interactionist perspective offers foundational understandings about human life that allow this author to examine African and African descendants' interactions that constructed a pro-active social agenda for Haiti to come into being as a nation. Though thinkers rarely have focused on these processes within historical situations (Diehl and McFarland 2010), this research attempted to focus on the interactions of Africans and their descendants to determine what contributions were made to the Haitian Revolution.

Concepts

This project evolved from theoretical work of the late Ruth Simms Hamilton, Michigan State University sociologist, who developed a paradigm for studying the African Diaspora. The paradigm, enhanced and studied by others (Hamilton 1988, 2007; Dodson 2011, 2014), is a salient and overarching conceptual posture for studying behaviors of African descendants no matter their geography, and was especially appropriate for this investigation of enslaved African Haitians' activities prior to their revolution. Hamilton posited that the African Diaspora, initiated in the 1400s, was the first of its kind in the creation of the modern world and continues to be a global, social phenomenon that structures the lives of African descendants (Hamilton 2007, 4). Elements of the Hamilton paradigm have served as the theoretical engine for this paper and the research that undergirds it. The following are the four discrete, yet interconnected propositions Hamilton put forward for studying the African Diaspora:

- It is part of global system(s) of domination;
- Its members are part of geo-circular movement;
- It creates communities of consciousness and resistance; and
- Its members sustain myth(s) and realities of homeland return (1988; 2007, 2-3).

Hamilton's third proposition regarding diasporic Africans and African descendants' creation of *communities of consciousness* was an exceptionally fitting conceptual focus for discerning activities that fed into the Haitian Revolution. Communities of consciousness can be thought of as populations in diaspora whose internal interactive processes give rise to distinct understandings their sense of self (Hamilton 2007, 29-31; Dodson 2011, 12-14). *Collective intentionality* matches well with Hamilton's ideas, as it evolves from communities of consciousness, and similarly can be applicable for any human group in diaspora such as enslaved

Haitian Africans. Intentionality is a concept derived from my work with the African Atlantic Research Team (AART)¹ who defines the idea as “purposeful acts of a people, individually and collectively, that invoke[s] their shared historical and cultural memory and [are] focused on their partial or full liberation (Dodson 2008, 37).”

Within diasporic and other human communities are *sacred rituals*, which are prescribed, often-repeated activities related to phenomena they have set apart from normal, daily activities of survival. Sacred rituals serve to “reinforce shared knowledge just as they reinforce sacred and creative acts from past and recent present time (Ibid., 56).” The practices are particularly important within communities of consciousness of the African Diaspora wherein members employ ritualized behaviors to aide in retaining and/or re-inventing their cultural identities. Additionally, the rituals can be and often are combined with other activities to focus on freedom from the oppressive structures that produced the African Diaspora as a process of societal inequality and maintain African descendants place in it.

One such manner in which Africans and African descendants rejected enslavement as the dominant social institution was through *self-liberation*. Self-liberation is defined as the internally motivated removal of the individual, or collective of individuals, from constraining social structures such as enslavement. The idea of self-liberation represents a symbolic effort to conceptualize those who are supposedly “powerless” as active participants in their history who seek to establish patterns of human existence of their own design. These concept definitions

¹ The African Atlantic Research Team of Michigan State University (www.soc.msu.edu/aart) is an award-winning, multi-disciplinary ‘mentoring collective’ of graduate students, post-doctoral fellows, faculty and community members focused on issues related to people of African descent and other racial/ethnic communities that share social and geographic spaces throughout the Atlantic World.

were guided by the contributions from Hamilton and the AART, and serve as the foundation for this research.

Hypotheses

The conceptual foundations about the African Diaspora guided the formation of hypotheses regarding African and African descendants' behaviors prior to the Haitian Revolution. The first hypothesis is that self-liberation was a consistent manifestation of enslaved African and African descendants' deliberate efforts to create a mode of living more aligned with their subconscious values and beliefs about human life. The desires for such self-identified living arrangements were expressed within the communities of consciousness that were formed external to the normality of their enslavement. Therefore the communities were an extension of enslaved African and African descendants' collective intentionality for freedom, which existed among the earliest and subsequent generations of captives brought to colonial Haiti.

My second hypothesis postulates that communities of consciousness among enslaved Africans and African descendants in Saint Domingue were formed on the basis of shared African cultural heritages, and were shaped by common experiences within the de-humanizing social conditions of enslavement. I also propose that sacred rituals were performed by individual members within communities of consciousness, and were vehicles for groups to express African cultural knowledge and openly identify with these counter-hegemonic beliefs and practices in shared time and space. To test these hypotheses, I collected data to determine if they could reveal information about African and African descendants' lived reality inside the pre-revolutionary system of enslavement.

Methods

Before undertaking data collection for this or any social research, the African Atlantic Research Team and other sociologists recommend a diligent comprehension of the research subject(s)' historical, social, political, cultural and economic conditions (Dodson 2013, 11-14). By using this process, described as pre-research, I was able to identify and comprehend an abundance of materials that described Haiti's 17th and 18th century plantation economy; composition of the African and African descendant population; their cultural practices and social activities; as well as their methods of resisting enslavement (Hall 1971; Dupuy 1989; Stinchcombe 1995; Geggus 1999; Bellegarde-Smith 2004; Garrigus 2006; Cheney 2013). There were also many sources directly concerned with providing detailed accounts of the Haitian Revolution, its multiple phases, and significant leadership figures.

A key method of data collection for this research was the review of secondary source documents pertaining specifically to the Haitian Revolution. I systematically analyzed seven journal articles, ten book chapters, two unpublished Master's theses, one unpublished PhD dissertation, and ten full book publications. These sources also pointed toward important primary sources from the colonial era. Of particular importance were colonial advertisements for African and African descendants who had removed themselves - self-liberated - from enslavement.

The second method of data collection was review of the primary source advertisements that appeared from 1766 to 1791 in the Saint Domingue colonial newspaper *Les Affiches Américaines*. The ads were frequently used by plantation owners as a device for reclaiming their "property" – women and men who chose to liberate themselves from enslavement. I reviewed these advertisements and they provided strong indicators for the concept of self-liberation. The

ads number more than 10,000 and have been digitized and complied into a searchable online database, *Marronnage in Saint-Domingue: History, Memory, Technology*.

Advertisements from the search engine were gathered in five-year increments that spanned the publication 1766-1791 dates ². I further narrowed the advertisements geographically by using ‘au Cap’, a commonly used shorthand denoting the northern port city Cap Français, to search for and capture ads from the city and its immediately surrounding districts. As presented in Table 1, these temporal and geographic criteria generated 3,013 advertisements. I selected a random 25% selection of those 3,013 ads, which produced a total of 757 advertisements used for the research study. Many of those 757 advertisements contained information pertaining to only one self-liberated person, while some mentioned as many as 20 people. Therefore an actual sample size of 1,029 self-liberated women, men, and children emerged from the random selection of advertisements ³. Table 1 also represents the numerical differential findings during each five-year grouping.

Table 1: Distribution of Advertisements, From ‘au Cap’

Advertisement Year Grouping	1766 - 70	1771 - 75	1776 - 80	1781 - 85	1786 - 91	TOTAL
Number of Ads	569	591	517	675	661	3,013
25% Random Selection of Ads	142	148	129	169	169	757
ACTUAL Sample Size	<i>193</i>	<i>231</i>	<i>160</i>	<i>218</i>	<i>227</i>	<i>N = 1,029</i>

² The search results for 1791 produced only five advertisements; therefore these were added to the 1786-1790 grouping.

³ This is the final observation count after subtracting 29 advertisements that appeared repeatedly in the random selection.

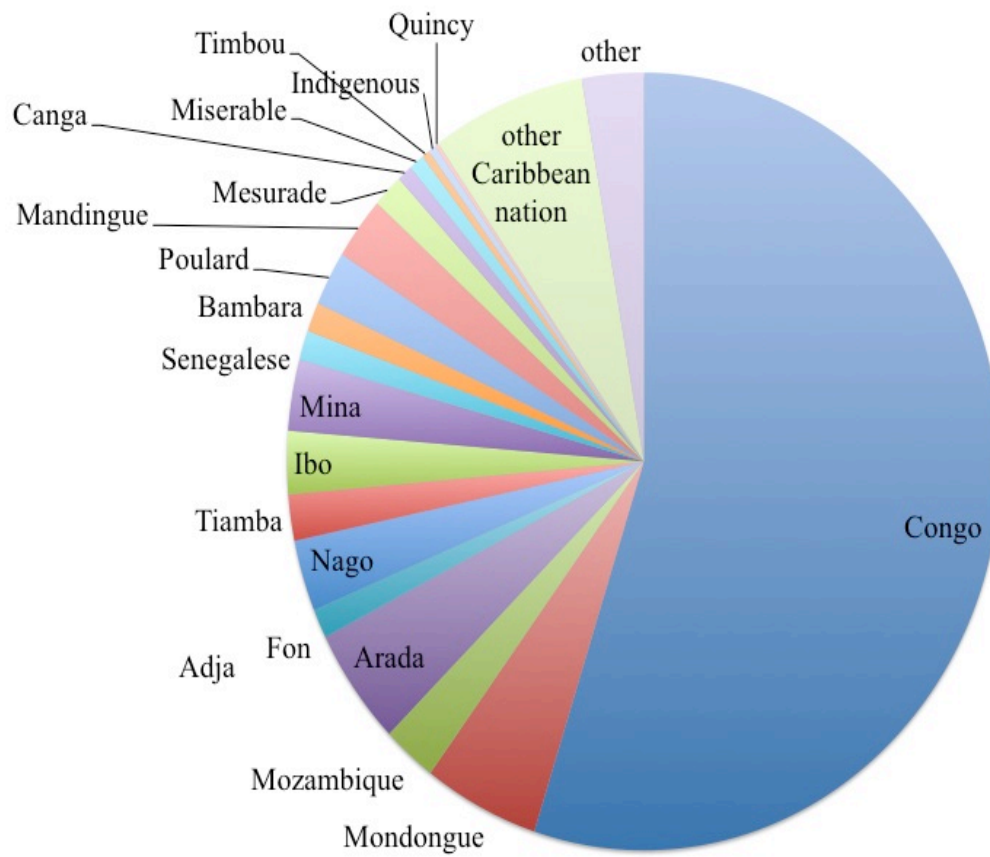
A deeper review of the 1,029-person sample revealed a series of demographic information that consistently pertained to individual and/or group of individuals that could be used for this research. The ads presented such demographic characteristics as the escapee's name, age, gender, and birth origin as a means of locating the missing enslaved person(s) and returning them to their plantation owners. Table 2 shows two of the demographics characteristics of *gender* and *birth origin*. Birth origin indicated whether the self-liberated person(s) had been a 'creole' African descendant born in Saint Domingue or another location of the Americas, or was a continent-born African. Of the 1,029-person sample, just over half were of the continent-born African demographic category, and Figure 1 displays a disaggregation of the various African ethnicities present in the sample. Other qualitative information from the advertisements allowed the data to be aligned with the research goals of understanding African and African descendants' interactive patterns. I will discuss these later.

Table 2: Distribution of Demographics, Gender and Birth Origin

N = 1,029

	TOTAL	PERCENT
GENDER		
Women	186	18.1%
Men	843	81.9%
BIRTH ORIGIN		
Continent-born Africans	533	51.8%
Creole African descendants	306	29.7%
Unspecified/ No data	190	18.5%

Figure 1: Pie Chart Distribution of Continent-born African Ethnicities



Background

It is not possible to discuss the place of Africans before the Haitian Revolution without first clarifying the diasporic events that brought the colonial society into being for Western Europeans. Such a clarification is equally necessary to provide the foundation for the assertion of this paper that even before the revolution, enslaved and free Africans and African descendants' actions were consistent with a self-directed thrust. To provide such historical clarifications aligns with appeals for strong sociology as scholars Philip Abrams (1982), Theda Skocpol (1984), and Craig Calhoun (1996) have put forth. These thinkers and others instruct researchers to comprehend the temporal context in which research subjects have created their world (Diehl and McFarland 2010; Dodson 2013). In this regard the following discussion presents the background to circumstances prior to the Haitian Revolution.

Autochthonous Taíno AmerIndians of the Arawak family first inhabited the Caribbean set of islands of the Western Hemisphere, including the island then known as *Quisqueya* meaning 'vast country', or *Ayiti*, land of the mountains (Heinl Jr. and Heinl 1978, 11; Wilson 1990, 59; Bellegarde-Smith 2004, 14). As Christopher Columbus and his European *conquistadors* arrived in 1492, they claimed the island from the indigenous Indians and rename it Hispaniola. Hispaniola is the second largest island of the Greater Antilles, situated between the Atlantic Ocean to its north and the Caribbean Sea to its south and Puerto Rico and Cuba to its east and west, respectively. Columbus returned to the Americas on three occasions and visited Hispaniola, Cuba, the Bahamas, and South and Central American coasts in search of gold before his death in 1506 (Monzote 2011, 88).

In the first years of the 16th century, other Spanish conquistadors invaded Hispaniola and also enslaved Taínos to work in gold mining, agriculture, and later sugar cane cultivation. However

the social organization of the Taíno was swiftly decimated through slaughter in combat, starvation, and infectious disease that stemmed from contact with Europeans (Wilson 1990, ch. 3). To replenish their supply of cheap labor force, the Spanish began importing Africans to Hispaniola during the last years of the 15th century (Guitar 2006, 43-45; Pons 2007, 7). The earliest of these Africans were free *Ladinos* who were assimilated Catholics from the Iberian coast of Spain; and later African continent-born *bozales* were brought through legal and illegal channels of enslavement (Guitar 2006, 45; Landers 2009; Sued-Badillo 2011, 107-109).

Spanish settlers maintained a base on eastern locations of the island while the western portions essentially were abandoned and left vulnerable to numerous raids from French, British and Dutch pirates operating in the Caribbean (Heinl Jr. and Heinl 1978, 17; Knight 1990, 48-54). By 1659, the French were settling on the island's western region in stronger numbers. After decades of conflict between the French and Spanish, the Spanish officially ceded the contested territory with the signing of the 1697 Treaty of Ryswick (Knight 1990, 54; Pons 2007, 93). The Treaty formally recognized French presence on the island space, then named Saint Domingue, and marked the increased cultivation of cocoa, indigo, coffee, tobacco, and especially sugar, which had thrived on smaller Caribbean islands of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and St. Christopher (Munford 1991, 505-522; Boucher 2011, 218-219). French capital accumulation in the 18th century grew increasingly dependent on the labor exploitation of enslaved Africans on crop producing plantations in the Americas.

In the most active years of the international trade of enslaved Africans, millions of captives were thrust into involuntary removal from their home continent and forced into unpaid servitude in unknown lands – the African Diaspora. It is estimated that in the 18th century, the French exported between 1.1 and 1.25 million captive Africans, bound for port cities of the Americas.

In the early parts of the 18th century, enslaved Africans were taken from the Benin and Biafra Western coastal areas, and later French traders acquired most captives from West Central Africa through the coastal cities of Loango, Malembo, and Cabina (Stein 1979, 79; Richardson 1989, 14-15; Geggus 2001a, 123). Of those captured, at least 800,000 were taken to Saint Domingue (Geggus 2001a, 121; Estimates 2009; Dubois 2009, 139; 2011a, 442). In the colony, living conditions for the enslaved were so deadly that the Africans did not sustain and reproduce themselves, which led plantation owners to continually replace that pool of laborers with new, Africa-born captives. By 1789, the enslaved population of Saint Domingue was nearly 500,000, two-thirds of which were adults who had been born and raised in Africa (Munford 1988, 13-14; Dubois 2009, 140; Dubois 2011a, 442).

While enslavement in Saint Domingue was almost unyielding in its constrain on African and African descendants' ability to move about freely, there were opportunities wherein enslaved people interacted with each other without direct contact or supervision from white plantation owners and managers. The absence of these whites was partially due to absentee ownership of plantations, a common practice in Saint Domingue as the French typically found the tropical environments to be inhospitable. This resulted in enslaved African and African descendants in Saint Domingue outnumbering the white population nearly nine to one (Dubois 2004, 19; 2011a, 442). The population imbalance contributed to creating a situation wherein those who had been deliberate in maintaining the plantation structure were often oblivious to enslaved peoples' non-labor related activities.

Whites often did not observe the interactions between Africans and African descendants in settings such as work fields, housing quarters, and at clandestine nighttime and weekend gatherings. These homogenous social locations functioned as "free spaces" (Polletta 1999) that

allowed enslaved women and men to communicate their emotions, thoughts and ideas. The interactions were grounded in a shared consciousness of their social status, and were crucibles for organizing resistance efforts that challenged the legitimacy of the social institution of enslavement. Collective participation in outlawed sacred rituals and self-liberation were only two among various forms of resistance that regularly occurred in the colony. The importance of shared consciousness and acts of resistance resulting from interactions within a structurally oppressive environment is fundamental to this project, therefore I engaged literature from within the sociology discipline that would lend further conceptual clarity to African and African descendants' activities in Saint Domingue.

Literature Review

Literature in the social movement field of sociology has been constraining yet influential in providing a conceptual lens through which to understand ‘antecedents’ as pre-revolutionary activity. Social movements are generally defined as collective human behavior that is sustained and intentional in efforts to affect social change, typically from outside of established institutional channels (Snow, Soule and Kriesi 2004, 6). More recently, there has been a move toward specifying the definition of a social movement by incorporating other constitutional categories such as claims-making against authorities, distinctive combinations of tactics known as repertoires, and public framing of a cause’s legitimacy (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 1996; Tilly 2004, 7). Writings on social movements locate the origins of these specific types of political activity within the rise of industrialization and struggles for democracy, particularly in England and the United States (Tilly 2004, 3). Therefore, ‘social movements’ as a sociological field of inquiry and a concept has been confined by its ecological origins to a limited scope of phenomena.

The reigning conceptualization of social movements has been deemed problematic because of temporal (Gould 2005), geographical (Martin 2005), as well as conceptual parameters. Scholars also have observed a conflation of terms wherein many types of ‘collective actions’ are mistakenly classified as ‘social movements’. In response, theorists Charles Tilly, Sidney Tarrow, and Doug McAdam have advanced *contentious politics* as a conceptual umbrella for understanding the commonalities between various forms and stages of political activity including riots, rebellions, social movements and revolutions (1996, 2001; Tarrow 2012). With such clarifications, the notion of contentious politics widens social movement theory, and provides a

basis to investigate non-contemporary and non-Western processes, as well as those that eventually lead to revolution.

This study of Africans and African descendants' collective consciousness and pre-revolutionary actions in colonial Haiti is further supported by theoretical directions in social movements that borrow from materialist modes of thinking. Karl Marx introduced the notion that industrial workers in exploitative social conditions developed a class-consciousness needed to overthrow a capitalist order. Subsequently, several others have extended Marx's ideas to explore collective consciousness as it emerges within groups whose social positions are similarly structured by oppressive systems of domination.

Marginalized groups, especially those that share history and space, formulate common understandings of themselves and their societal circumstances. Collective consciousness and identities can be shaped, in part, around attitudinal postures that then inform their challenges posed to the larger society. For example, Roger V. Gould's (1995) *Insurgent Identities* examines the role of an urban, neighborhood network-based identity in community protests beginning in 1848 and ending with the 1871 Paris Commune. Jane Mansbridge and Aldon Morris' (2001) edited volume *Oppositional Consciousness* explores shared identities of resistance among social movement communities in the United States such as African descendants, the disability community, and AIDS activists.

Recent social movement research has grappled with understanding how culture and collective identity promotes, or perhaps at times hinders mobilization (Polletta 2008). Researchers Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans' edited volume *Social Movements and Culture* (1995) includes a selection of essays that assess how culture as an analytical tool has begun to shape the social movements arena. *Culture, Social Movements, and Protest* (2009),

also edited by Hank Johnston, expands explorations of cultural analyses in social movement research with focus on performances, artifacts, and ideations. These collections of essays do include chapters on the role of Islam in movement activity, but do not expand beyond that particular tradition to discuss religion and sacred rituals as agents of mobilization.

Scholars that engage the question of collective identity and consciousness in social movements tend to rely on microsociological frameworks to explain how mobilization develops. Similarly, this paper draws from interactionist theoretical propositions pioneered by Peter Berger, Thomas Luckmann, and Herbert Blumer, who conceptualize all human interaction as the basis for the creation of social worlds. These works support the posture that even groups who are considered subaltern within the organization of the social order are able to produce independent, distinct spheres of living. David Diehl and Daniel McFarland (2010) extend these ideas in “Toward a Historical Sociology of Social Situations,” which brings attention to a needed integration of interactionist perspectives to time and location-specific contexts. Daniel A. McFarland’s (2004) “Resistance as Social Drama” explores resistance as an interactive process that emerges from social settings wherein actors strategically attempt to alter a situation through incipient acts that lead to rebellion or revolution. These ideas elucidate how African and African descendants’ patterns of action and interaction within the context of Saint Domingue was the basis of their shared experiences, which then gave rise to their self-determining understandings of and intentions for their social reality.

Findings

Intentionality Substantial evidence in the history of the Saint Domingue colonial landscape points to enslaved Africans and African descendants' individual and collective efforts for partial or full liberation – intentionality. The intent for freedom was a sustained, generational struggle as Africans and African descendants regularly liberated themselves from enslavement and staged revolts against Spanish and French plantation owners throughout the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries. The freedom intentionality guided enslaved persons to self-liberate from their bondage and to enact other self-identified ideas, objectives and goals of collective resistance to their dehumanizing social conditions.

Enslaved Africans' orientation to their newly encountered circumstances was noted as rebellious from the onset of their arrival on the Caribbean island. As early as 1503, Governor of Hispaniola Nicolás de Ovando lamented to the Spanish crown that African runaways were consistently escaping and taking up residence with members of the remaining Taíno population. Some of these self-liberated Africans participated in the 1519 to 1534 war against the Spanish, led by the Taíno cacique Enriquillo. The first uprising comprised solely of enslaved Africans in Hispaniola took place on Christmas Day of 1521, when a group of twenty Wolofs from a sugar mill recruited several other enslaved Africans and autochthonous individuals in an attempt to seize the town of Azua (Fouchard 1972, 300-307; Guitar 2006, 41, 49; Daniels 2008, 44-45; Landers 2009, 35). This rebellion was put down, however it is suspected that later 16th century uprisings were concealed by Spanish officials who did not wish to admit loss of control over the enslaved population (Guitar 2006, 53). Such local resistance to colonialism and enslavement was but one contributing factor to the loosening of the Spanish imperial stronghold in Hispaniola.

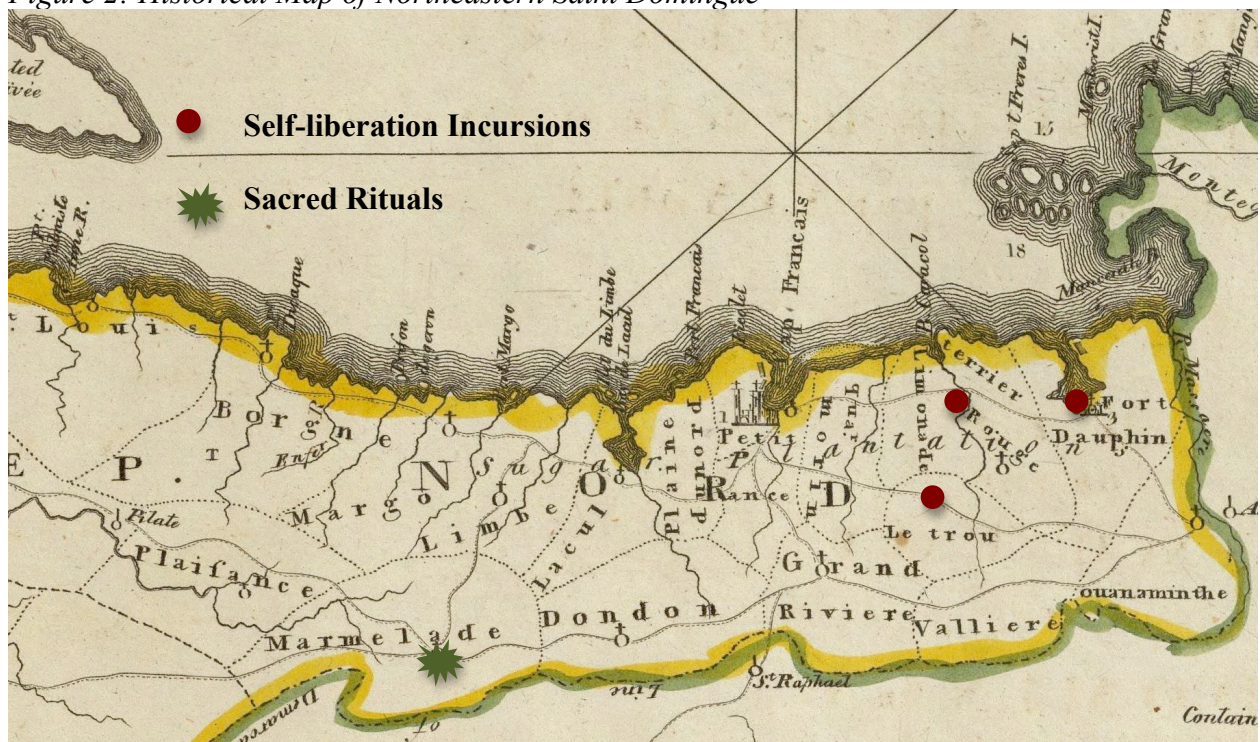
In the early 17th century, Spanish presence in western Hispaniola was on the decline and a greater number of French began settling there. The lapse in European plantation development during this period might explain a gap in African and African descendants' overt actions against enslavement. After the Treaty of Ryswick with the Spanish, the French increasingly began using enslaved African labor to cultivate the land and resistance efforts resumed, to continue late into 17th and early 18th centuries. A well-known conflict between colonists and self-liberated bands included Padre Jean, who in 1679 killed the owner of a plantation in the town of Santo Domingo. Jean then headed toward to the northwestern peninsula of the island, mobilizing other enslaved Africans and pillaging several plantations along the way. These self-liberated Africans then retreated to the mountains near Port-de-Paix and eventually were found and killed by French settlers' defensive units (Fouchard 1972, 307; Cauna 1996, 327; Daniels 2008, 46).

By the early 18th century, large-scale as well as loosely organized settlements of self-liberated women, men and children were a constant presence in French Saint Domingue. Of primary importance for the survival of these communities was access to food, clothing, work tools and weaponry, all of which were not easily obtained. Consequentially, armed self-liberated bands often would attack nearby towns or plantations to gather needed resources. These types of raids were consistently reported as 'disturbances' to which several iterations of colonial constabularies were galvanized to respond. Especially targeted were the leaders of these settlements, such as notable figures Colas Jambes Coupées, captured and executed in 1724; Plymouth, killed in 1730; and Polydor who was found in 1734 after his several incursions in the northern Trou district. The most notorious self-liberated leader in Haitian history was François Mackandal, a charismatic herbalist who in 1758 was arrested and publicly burned at the stake after his 18-year escape from enslavement. While at-large, he amassed a following of enslaved

Africans and African descendants and orchestrated among them a plan to poison the whites of Saint Domingue and abolish the plantation system (Fouchard 1972, 274, 310-321; Cauna 1996, 328; Daniels 2008, 47-48).

Self-liberation was a centuries-long form of Africans and African descendants' resistance to enslavement. The ongoing struggle demonstrated that their intentionality for freedom was not merely fleeting but was sustained over time and carried into the latter half of the 18th century as the Haitian Revolution was close at hand. African and African descendants' shared consciousness is further underscored by evidence from secondary and primary source literature. These data reflect events and processes that occurred in the regions that surrounded the port city of Cap Français, which also was the location of the first activities of the revolution. Figure 2 highlights the geographic study areas and provides visual backdrop for findings of the research on self-liberation and sacred rituals.

Figure 2: Historical Map of Northeastern Saint Domingue



1814 Map, *Carte de la Partie Française de St. Domingue* by Mathew Carey ⁴

Self-liberation via Runaway Advertisements Content analysis of the *Les Affiches* runaway ads, published between 1766 and 1791, produced some indicators of African and African descendants' self-liberation patterns that were aligned with the intentionality concept. Each ad contained an indication of the duration of time the self-liberated person(s) had been missing, the area from which she or he had escaped, with whom they escaped, and where or with whom they were suspected to be hiding. The demographic and categorical contents from each advertisement were entered into STATA, a data analysis and statistical software program. Chi-squared tests of independence were determined to be the most appropriate tool to analyze the relationships between the several variables, particularly given the size of the study's sample.

⁴ Map image from David Rumsey Historical Map Collection: www.davidrumsey.com. The image was cropped to focus on the districts surrounding the port city Cap Français. Icons representing key self-liberation activities and sacred rituals are my addition.

Table 3 provides an aggregate distribution of the self-liberation indicators found in the sample of 1,029 runaways from northeastern Saint Domingue. Just over half of self-liberators were noted to have escaped individually, while 43% escaped within a small group. Close to 19% of the sample sought to use other relationship ties to facilitate their escape and find a place of refuge to hide. Additionally, the advertisements often contained an indication of the duration of time the self-liberated person(s) had been missing. More than two-thirds of the sample was reported to have escaped within the previous six months, but nearly 10% had been at-large for more than six months.

Table 3: Distribution of Self-liberation Indicators

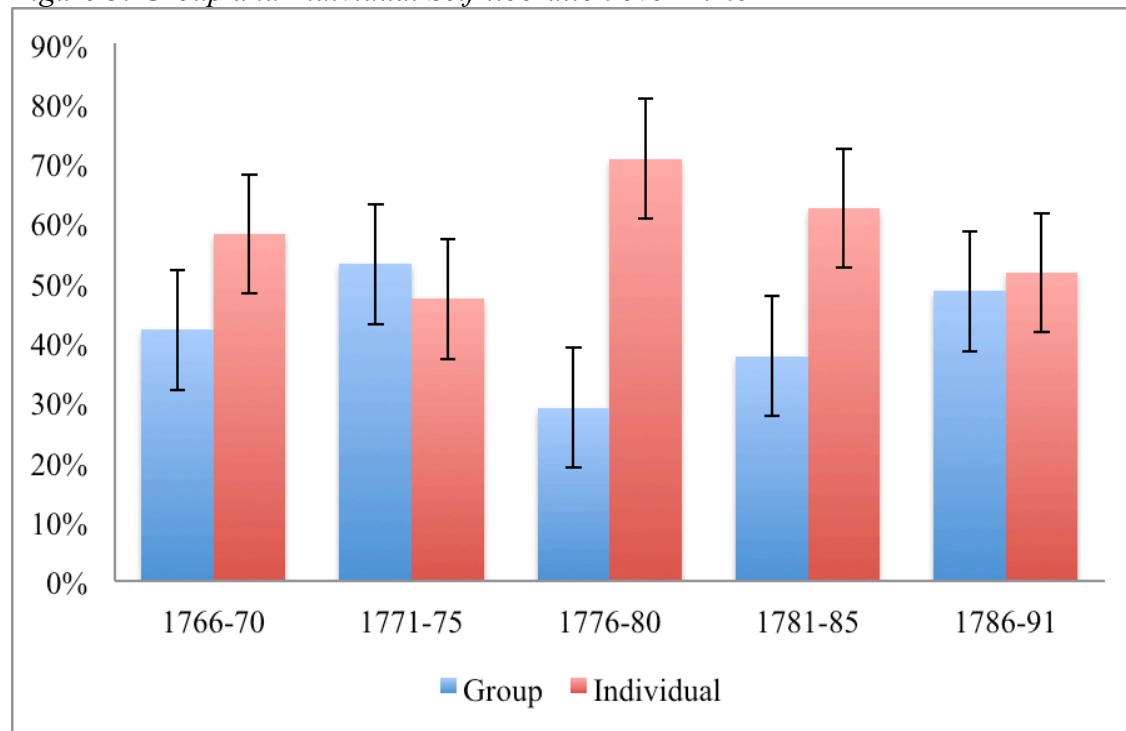
N=1,029

	TOTAL	PERCENT
GROUP	442	43%
INDIVIDUAL	587	57%
RELATIONSHIP TIE	193	18.8%
ESCAPED <6 MONTHS	787	76.5%
ESCAPED >6 MONTHS	98	9.5%

The distribution of these indicators shifted over time and can be situated within happenings in the colonial context. Figure 3 shows that ‘group’ self-liberation patterns over time coincided with ongoing militant incursions in northeastern Saint Domingue. There was a rise in ‘group’ self-liberation beginning in 1770 - also the year of a massive earthquake that destabilized much of the colony. One at-large self-liberated band, led by a man named Noël, took advantage of the disarray from the earthquake in order to attack Forth Dauphin in 1774. Colonial police and militia responded in 1775 with concerted efforts to pursue and eradicate self-liberated groups, especially those that were staging violent incursions; Noël was then captured and executed in

Cap Français (Fouchard 1972, 327). The public execution and government-led repression efforts served as visible deterrents to other enslaved Africans and African descendants, thus accounting for the decrease of self-liberation overall (Table 1) and particularly among groups after 1775 (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Group and Individual Self-liberation over Time



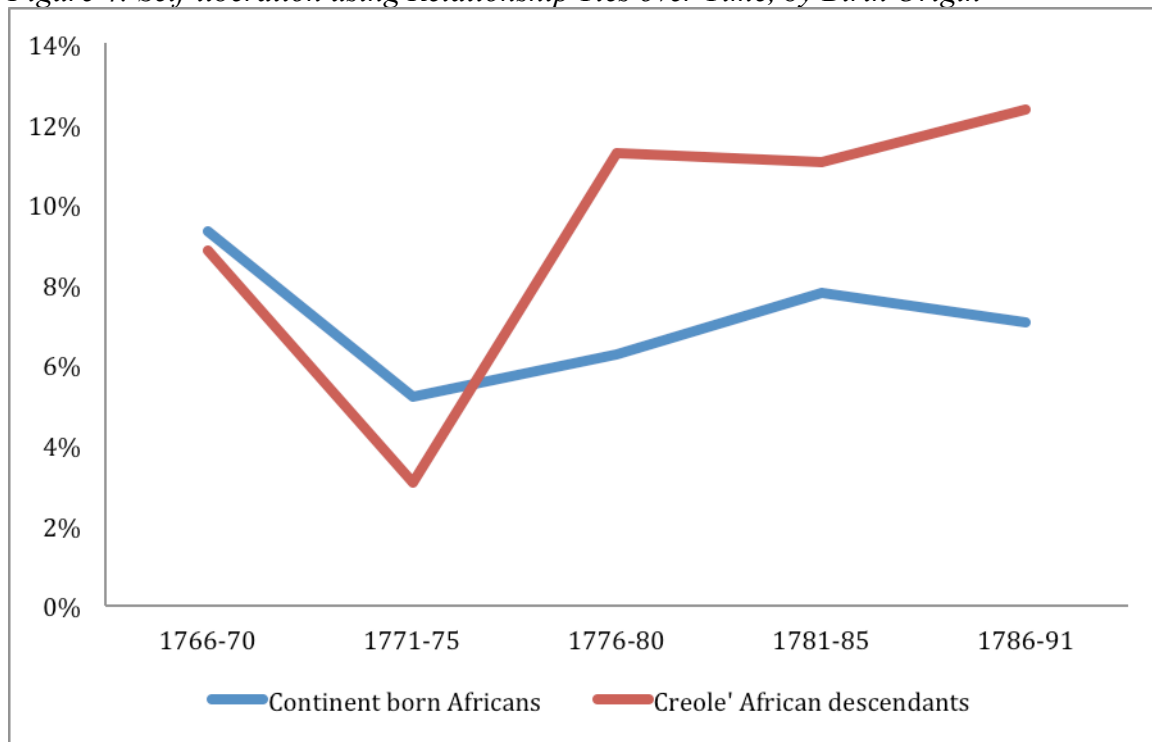
*95% confidence interval; chi-square test p-score = 0.000

The campaigns against self-liberated groups were effective for a time, yet did not permanently dissuade Africans and African descendants from attempting to intentionally free themselves from enslavement. Though group self-liberation decreased markedly after 1775, it was nonetheless reported in 1776 that Télémaque Canga and brothers Isaac and Pyrrhus Candide led some 300 others to strike Le Trou, a district less than 20 kilometers from Fort Dauphin (Fick 1990, 74; Cauna 1996, 328). Despite the impact of militia and police pursuits on group escapes demonstrated in Figure 3, the suppressive campaigns did not deter self-liberation by individuals.

In the face of repression, runaways strategically adjusted their active response toward individual self-liberation, which peaked from 1776 to 1780 (Figure 3).

The increase of self-liberation by individuals as a response to repression from 1776 to 1780 overlapped with increased strategic use of relationship ties to facilitate freedom, especially by creole African descendants (Figure 4). Though enslavement commonly disrupted many familial ties, these relationships were not wholly destroyed or lost. It was not uncommon for enslaved people to actively preserve biological relationships, or to create ‘fictive kin’ networks for the community’s survival (Genovese 1974, 450-458; Mintz and Price 1976, 61-80). When self-liberators escaped enslavement individually, many would attempt to re-connect with a romance partner or family member in another area. At times, this assisting connection could have been a free person, other enslaved people, or other runaways. Alternatively, some self-liberators utilized their contacts to hide in densely populated areas under assumed identities, using any trade skills at their disposal to make a living (Fouchard 1972, 271-273).

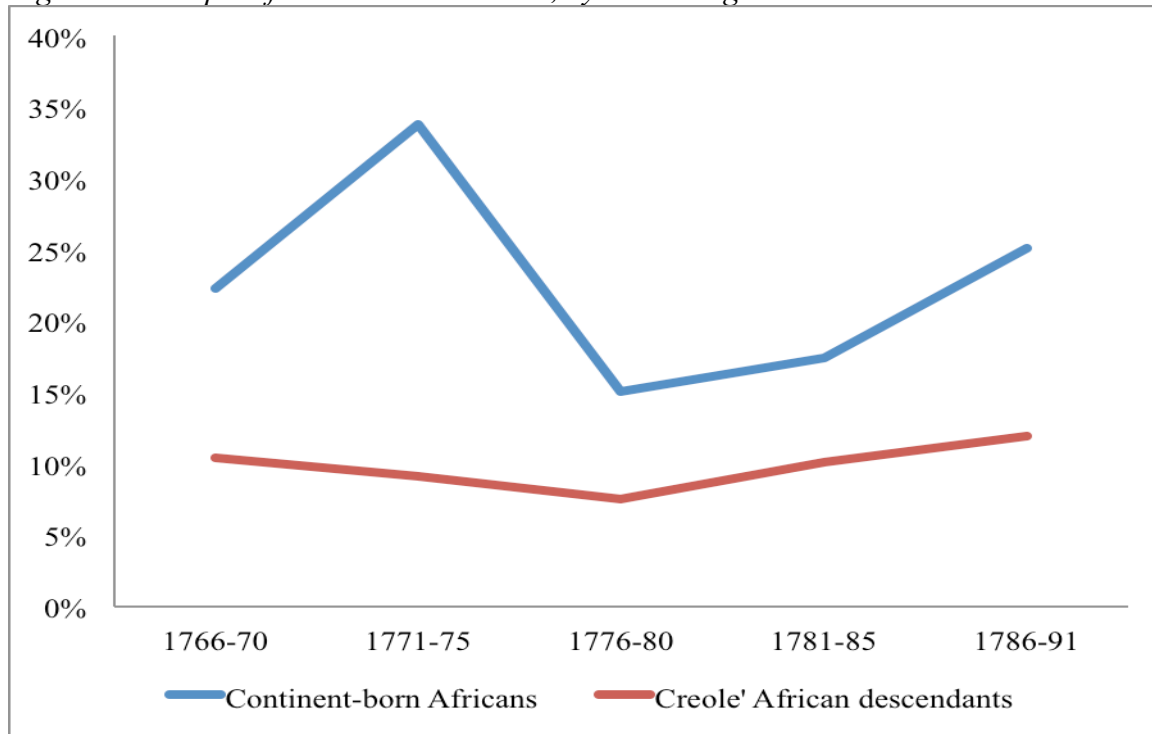
Figure 4: Self-liberation using Relationship Ties over Time, by Birth Origin



The use of relationship ties to aid in self-liberation was at its lowest from 1771-75 for continent-born Africans and creole African descendants (Figure 4); it is likely that both categories of enslaved people were able to escape without social ties because of the instability caused by the earthquake. As repression increased in 1775, self-liberation again became a more challenging endeavor that required the assistance of others and/or familiarity with the island landscape. Since most African descendants were born and socialized in Saint Domingue⁵, they were more likely than continent-born Africans to have access to these types of social ties, therefore accounting for their increased use of relationships to facilitate escape. In the face of significant repression, utilizing relationship ties became an increasingly useful strategy for creole African descendants.

⁵ Some 'creole' African descendants were foreign to Saint Domingue, and were from other Caribbean locations such as Jamaica or Martinique, Spanish-speaking or North American territories, or less frequently from Europe.

Figure 5: Group Self-liberation over Time, by Birth Origin

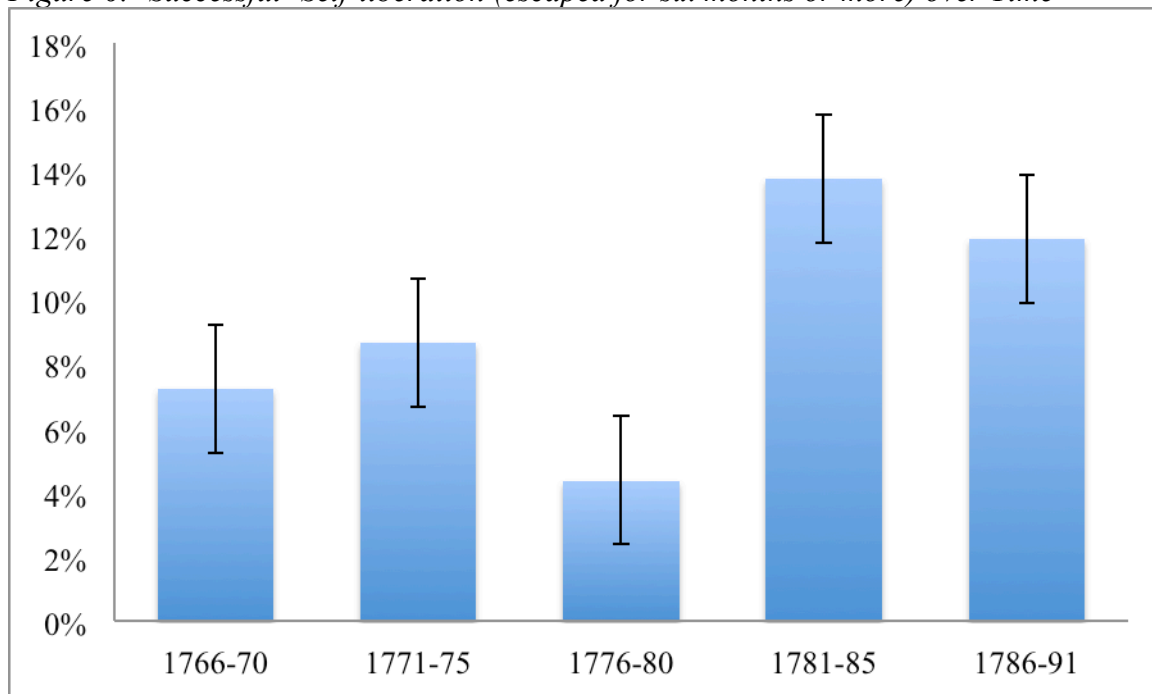


As previously observed, repression efforts by police and militia in 1775 made it more difficult for groups to escape enslavement. These groups were over twice as likely to be comprised of continent-born Africans than creole African descendants, presumably because Africans were more reliant upon each other in a new and unfamiliar landscape. As Figure 5 shows, the evident decrease in escapes by African groups in 1776 shows that they were disproportionately affected by repression efforts compared to African descendant groups. After 1780, the impact of repression appears to have lost effectiveness as there was a steady rise of group self-liberation particularly among continent-born Africans. A Royal Ordinance in 1784 restricting permitted cruelties toward the enslaved (Fouchard 1972, 329) may have further incentivized the influx by reducing the fear of punishment for desertion. Group self-liberation again rose in the early 1780s (Figure 3); soon in 1787, Le Trou and Terrier Rouge, the district that sits between Trou and Fort Dauphin, were under siege, this time by a group led by a man

named Gilot. Gilot was known by the nickname Yaya, and was also captured and executed for his actions (Fouchard 1972, 327, 338; Debien 1996, 110; Daniels 2008, 49).

The increase in African group self-liberation and African descendants' elevated use of relationship ties during the 1780s may have contributed to their ability to remain at large for a longer period of time. In Figure 6, the trend of successful self-liberation, or evasion of escape for six months or more, seems to mirror the temporal patterns found in Figures 3 and 5. Repression reduced the rate of successful self-liberation by approximately 50%, but as the impact of the repression lessened, the success rate remained above 10% leading up to the Haitian Revolution (Figure 6). These thrusts in self-liberation served as important antecedent behaviors to the collective force of the revolution, as they likely facilitated diffusion of growing shared consciousness.

Figure 6: 'Successful' Self-liberation (escaped for six months or more) over Time



*95% confidence interval; chi-square test p-score = 0.000

The collective consciousness of self-liberated Africans and African descendants directly countered their condition as enslaved human beings, and was further strengthened by participation in sacred rituals of their design. Self-liberation provided latitude for Africans and African descendants to traverse the colony to take part in these gatherings, which often took place at night in secret locations and doubled as open forums to disseminate ideas of freedom and liberation. The rituals themselves were grounded in an African based cosmic orientation, further indicating community members' self-identification with a shared consciousness that opposed enslavement as the system of domination. The increasing self-liberation momentum during the 1780s, in conjunction with the presence of significant sacred ritual gatherings in 1786 may have represented a watershed period for Africans and African descendants to articulate their liberation impulses leading to the Haitian Revolution's earliest insurrections.

Communities of Consciousness African Diaspora communities of consciousness in Saint Domingue produced distinct understandings of self through ongoing interactions with each other, other cultural groups, and oppressive social environments. The consciousness of these African groups was grounded in a common worldview, which included belief in a creator force, and the notion that all living and non-living, material and non-material entities share a spiritual core and space in the world (Mbiti 1990). Though the enslaved Africans were not able to fully replicate their known practices, cognitive knowledge of the recent past allowed them to interact with the social and natural environment in order to re-organize a spiritual world (Genovese 1974, 209-232; Mintz and Price 1976, 7-22, 52-60; Raboteau 1978). Within these communities, Africans and African descendants carried out behaviors that were developed from a shared consciousness and reinforced their collective identities.

Members of the various African ethnic groups, along with enslaved creole African descendants born in the colony, formed ritual persuasions that were distinct from each other yet shared a common worldview. These groups were described as “nations”, and were distinguished by dances, songs, association with spirit forces, and the use of flora and fauna that facilitated healing, divination, and protection. Among others, the *Calenda*, *Chica*, *Wangua*, and the dominant Dahomean *Vodou* and West Central African *Petro* rites were the predecessors to what would become the Haitian Vodou religion (Cauna 1996, 335; Fick 2000, 40-45; Vanhee 2002, 246-250, 254; Dubois 2004, 49). Initiation processes and vows of secrecy characterized several of these rites. Sacred practices often occurred when Africans and African descendants gathered in wooded areas after dark, in unused churches or burial processions, as these were protected places away from plantation drivers (Fick 1990, 40-45; Ramsey 2011, 35-36). These assemblies

were not merely spiritual in nature, but were protected spaces for Africans and African descendants to express their intentionality for liberation.

The cultural influence of enslaved West Central Africans was particularly strong in the north plain of Saint Domingue where they represented approximately 64% of the enslaved population on coffee and indigo plantations and roughly 40-44% on sugar plantations (Geggus 1989a, 395; 1999, 39; 2001a, 128; Vanhee 2002, 246; Dubois 2004, 40-42). The north plain also included the colony's key port city, Cap Français, and several surrounding districts. These are the areas where the 1791 plantation insurrections of the Haitian Revolution began and were central locations for ongoing interactions between enslaved Africans and African descendants. Their activities were antecedents to the Haitian Revolution and can be comprehended by exploring the direct context from which the first uprisings occurred.

Sacred Rituals The calenda was a dance ritual originating from West Central Africa involving two drummers and a violin player, and women who danced in a surrounding counterclockwise circle while singing in a call and response fashion to invoke African spirit beings (Sweet 2006). In Saint Domingue and other French Caribbean colonies, *kalendas* also referred to West Central African martial art-styled stick fighting gatherings. The sticks, called *mayombo*, were filled with a limestone-based powder *maman-bila* and were sold along with red and black seeds called *poto*. Nails were often inserted into the blunt end of the sticks for additional force and to indicate leadership within the community of consciousness network. These materials match the description of elements used in West Central African *nkisi* bags, and were used to imbue the sticks with sacred power that would protect users (mostly men) against opponents who were not similarly armed (Debien 1972; Geggus 1991, 32-34; Vanhee 2002, 252; Weaver 2006, 103-111; Desch-Obi 2008, 143-151; Ramsey 2011, 38-39).

Stick fighting existed within many African cultural communities, however the West Central African fighting style seemed to have been more prevalent in northern Saint Domingue. In addition to mayombo sticks, other weapons such as machetes and blunt metal-headed clubs were used during the calenda gatherings. The assemblies were not merely performance activities, however; there is evidence to suggest that expertise in hand-to-hand combat and non-firearm weaponry gleaned from calendas was a significant contribution to successes during the early phases of the Haitian Revolution uprisings (Desch-Obi 2008, 145-151). Calendas might then be viewed as training grounds that reinforced spiritual and military organizational knowledge that former Kongo civil war soldiers brought with them to Saint Domingue (Thornton 2000).

In 1786, there were several reports of these calendas occurring in the Marmelade district, an area dominated by enslaved Congolese Africans on newly formed coffee plantations. Four men: Jérôme Pôteau, Télémaque, Jean Lodot and Julien were accused of orchestrating many secret assemblies that frequently drew as many as 200 participants. In addition to facing charges for organizing the outlawed gatherings, witness testimonies asserted that the men were known for selling nkisis and performing other sacred rituals. Jean Lodot was seen leading at least two ceremonies where participants drank a rum concoction while using fruit leaves, garlic, pepper, nails, gunpowder and pebbles to spiritually consecrate and protect themselves from any harm or punishment. This process induced a sedative state from which Jean would raise them with the flat end of a machete (Debien 1972). This process symbolized participants' death and rebirth, and connected machetes to Africans and African descendants' sacred world (Desch-Obi 2008, 147).

Jérôme Pôteau, a man of mixed racial descent, was chiefly responsible for selling the mayombo sticks at the calendas. He and Télémaque had been enslaved on the same plantation

from which they subsequently liberated themselves. Another witness testimony stated that Télémaque led a separate ritual assembly and upon dispersal of that gathering, he threatened the witness' servant with "the power of the negroes of Horn Island." The witness stated that the servant mysteriously died the next day as the result of a violent colic, insinuating that Télémaque's supernatural abilities were responsible for the mortality (Debien 1972). Télémaque and Jérôme were also accused of preaching liberation and independence at the gatherings, attempting to instigate rebellion among the enslaved. A mass revolt would indeed occur five years later, but without any known contribution from the four men. Jean was condemned to a public execution; Julien was forced to watch Jean's death and then was returned to his owner; and Télémaque and Jérôme were never captured but ultimately hung in effigy for their "crimes" (Debien 1972, 280; Fick 1990, 74; Weaver 2006, 103-111; Ramsey 2011, 40).

Fundamental tools and messages were embedded in these cultural community-based sacred rituals, and empowered the enslaved population to demonstrate their intentionality that was inherently oppositional to enslavement. Participants in the *calendas* imbued material culture artifacts with spiritual power to enhance their effectiveness as self-protective armaments. Further, the training in combat action combined with declarations of liberation and the power of Africans and African descendants indicated their anticipation of and preparation for events that would eventually lead to the dismantling of the enslavement system. The intentionality that undergirded these sacred activities fed into the Haitian Revolution and also was apparent in its various stages across the colony; particularly the August 1791 Bois Caïman ceremony that ordained the revolution's commencement, and the leadership of Georges Biassou along with other revolutionaries who relied on the sacred world to draw a following of insurrectionists and to bolster their strength in combat: Romaine Rivière, called *la Prophetess*; Macaya Congo;

Halaou; Hyacinthe Ducoudray; Jean-François Papillion, and Jeanot Bullet (Fick 1990, 127-129, 139; Thornton 1993, 207, 210; Cauna 1996, 332; Rey 1998; Rey 2002, 270-271).

Analysis

Microsociological analysis of interactions over time has been demonstrated to be a helpful approach for understanding group solidarity development aimed toward collective action (Blee and Currier 2005). Though the research of this study did not compare two or more social movement groups as Blee and Currier recommend, the temporal analysis employed does lend itself well to understanding how collective intentionality, purposeful activities that are focused on individual or collective, and/or partial or full liberation (Dodson 2008), might have been actualized for social change. Findings from content analysis of enslaved runaway advertisements show that leading to the Haitian Revolution, there were statistically significant patterns that reflected Africans and African descendants' shared consciousness to liberate themselves. Runaways' collective intentionality for liberation was especially evident in their strategic responses to repression using newly formed and previously established relationship ties.

By and large, self-liberation was not a classically defined 'social movement', nor were the participants members of any official protest organization. However, thoughts from the social movement arena on the dialectical relationship between activism and police repression can help clarify the self-liberation patterns found in this research. Social movement actors generally respond to repression by retreating until the repression ends, intensifying their activist measures, or some combination of both (Davenport 2005). Alternatively, mobilizers may attempt to circumvent structural suppression by adapting their tactics and strategies (Francisco 1996; della Porta 1998). Adaptation is evident as self-liberation in Saint Domingue came under intensified siege in 1775 resulted in an adjustment away from group escape, especially among continent-born Africans, toward individual self-liberation (Figures 3 and 4).

Another strategic transition in self-liberation was increased utilization of networks and known relationship ties (Figure 5), which are acknowledged to be important in cultivating participation in collective action (McAdam 1986, Diani 2003). Birth origin was a key variable that impacted enslaved runaways' ability to respond to repression by adopting relationship ties as a new self-liberation pattern. Lesley J. Wood (2007) asserts that repression disproportionately impacts mobilizers whose statuses in society differ by race and class, and these differences may lead those with a wider repertoire of options to employ a new strategy for activity. In the Saint Domingue colonial context, relationship ties were not often available to enslaved people born and socialized on the African continent. However, enslaved creole African descendants who were raised in the colony did have access to familial, linguistic, and cultural resources in order to establish wider webs of social networks. These forms of social capital afforded to creole African descendants are likely to account for why they were less affected by repression than continent-born Africans (Figures 4 and 5).

While birth origin introduced a significant difference to the manner in which people self-liberated from enslavement, those differences did not translate to disparities in oppositional consciousness and cultural practices. Africans and creole African descendants were subjected to similar social conditions, and shared some fundamental understandings about their world. Many creoles' parentage was directly from the African continent; through these familial relations (fictive or biological) African descendants were able to sustain cultural values, sacred rituals, and linguistic patterns (Dubois 2011b, 276). African descendants' ongoing interactions with the constant influx of continent-born Africans were equally important for reinforcing and strengthening the shared consciousness that existed in the colony. The enculturation of creole African descendants can explain why calenda leaders Jérôme Pôteau, Télémaque, Jean Lodot and

Julien were adept to West Central African sacred practices, yet none of the men were described as continent-born Africans.

Theorists in the social movements arena have engaged the significance of culture, collective identity, and other forms of consciousness as interpretive avenues for mobilizers to express resistance against social structures (Polletta and Jasper 2001; Polletta 1997; 2008). Interactions between members of a group and with the larger society produce an awareness of their shared status, and this awareness undergirds their activities that are oppositional to oppressive institutions (Mansbridge and Morris 2001). No less is true for members of the African Diaspora, whose social conditions have been and continue to be shaped by global systems of domination such as enslavement, colonialism, and racial/ethnic oppression. Communities of consciousness therefore become products of social, economic and geo-political forces such as forced migration, involuntary servitude, and restrictive living conditions.

Given these distinct social realities, African and African descendants' deliberate adherence to cultural practices that reflect a shared identity apart from one imposed upon them is a counterhegemonic demonstration and an important form of their everyday resistance to various forms of oppression (Kuumba and Ajanaku 1998). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the past origins of Saint Domingue's enslaved populations in order to fully understand how they employed their distinctive cultural knowledge to cope with the colonial situation and express their full humanity. These ideas portend significance for collective action phenomena in other colonial settings, as it is acknowledged that cultural and religious practices - minimally Christianity, Obeah, North American conjure, and Islam - have been consistently associated with African and African descendants' overt rebellions against enslavement throughout the Americas (Suttles Jr., 1971; Reis 1993; Rucker 2001). In northern Saint Domingue, sacred rituals were

grounded in a specifically West Central African consciousness that was anti-enslavement in nature and constantly revitalized in the colony until the Haitian Revolution was set in motion.

Conclusion and Implications

This paper has presented findings that demonstrate the collective intentionality of Africans and African descendants inside their activities that were antecedent to the Haitian Revolution. The African Diaspora theoretical framework, as well as concepts from the social movements arena, enabled me to conceptualize self-liberation and sacred rituals as tools of resistance from the subjective understandings of the participants. The project's orientation to Africans and African descendants' as active purveyors of their own reality offers an alternative perspective for a nuanced elucidation of the politicized human consciousness embedded in everyday ways of living.

The uncovering of enslaved Africans and African descendants' self-initiated activities that were precursory to the Haitian Revolution is significant for the sociology discipline; particularly as historical sociology takes social revolution as its *raison d'être*, and the social movements arena engages mobilization from below. Though these two fields of sociology have largely excluded Africans and African descendants, the project's focus on the micro-level means of resistance contributes to sociological concerns with contentious politics that feed into full revolutions. Further, the insertion of an example of successful collective action from the African Diaspora can advance sociology in comprehending the wider reverberations of the Haitian Revolution in global 18th and 19th century spheres of political economy, and in African and African descendants' socio-political activities in other colonial settings.

Additionally, this project portends additional implications for social movement researchers who seek to apply new theoretical concepts to historical situations. In geographical and temporal settings where classically defined social movements seemingly are absent, one might begin to look for important indicators of collective consciousness such as culture, social network ties

(Clemens and Hughes 2002), and common responses to structural repression. Underutilized data such as the *Marronnage in Saint Domingue* online database and other such digitized runaway advertisements are novel resources for researchers in African Diaspora studies and sociology to discern collective processes relating to social change over time (Gallant 1992; Costa 2001).

The self-liberation activities and sacred rituals identified in this research are a small but important aspect of what led to the Haitian Revolution. In a 13-year struggle, Africans and African descendants on the Caribbean island radically altered their social reality by organizing themselves into an armed military force that successfully achieved freedom from enslavement and independence from their colonial yoke. In order to fully understand how this upheaval occurred, it is critical to consider not only macro-level trends and shifts, but also the pre-revolution stage from within the participants' historical context and intentional actions (Sohrabi 2005). Such research can illuminate ways in which Africans and African descendants throughout the diaspora envisioned and articulated themselves as full human beings beyond the constraints of enslavement.

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