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KONGOMANIA REDUX, THE HAITIAN REVOLUTION: *David Geggus Responds to John Thornton, Christina Mobley, and James Sweet*

ABSTRACT: David Geggus offers a detailed response to the three critiques of his "Kongomania" article by John Thornton, Christina Mobley, and James Sweet. Centered on demographic statistics and their link to cultural influence, the rebuttal examines evidentiary support for various assertions and hypotheses. The debate ranges over the use of certain ethnonyms (Creole, Congo, Mondongue); the creation of Vodou; the significance of Baudry des Lozières's Vocabulaire Congo; and the organization and aims of the 1791 uprising and the Haitian War of Independence.

RESPONSE TO THORNTON, MOBLEY, AND SWEET

Thornton

Despite recycling the dismissive term "numbers game," John Thornton has not neglected to use numerical data, rightly or wrongly, in his voluminous work. Here, he accepts that demographic weight was probably a significant factor, at least as regards the transmission of African military experience to Saint-Domingue. His original insight on this topic is deservedly celebrated. And it deserves further emphasis, considering that most of the European troops and militia sent to Saint-Domingue in the 1790s had military training, but no combat experience at all.[1]

My concern has always been this: Can we say how important this factor was? Focusing on the wars that beset Kongo and Dahomey and their putative impact on Saint-Domingue, Thornton contends that, together, Kongo and Fon constituted "a very substantial proportion of the population" (271). However, Kongo's 24 percent of the slave population is increased by less than one-quarter even if we add to it all the Fongbe speakers combined (Arada, Adia, Fond, Fouëda, Dahomet, and others). Although Fongbe made up 16.3 percent of

1. For example, in August 1791, only 235 of the Cap Regiment's 962 troops had combat experience. Archives d'Outre-mer, Aix, D2c/105, muster roll, September 1, 1791.

Africans on sugar estates in the North, they formed only 6.4 percent of northern sugar workers, 5.4 percent the North's slaves, and 5.9 percent of Saint-Domingue's; and they were predominantly female. If we add to their number Yoruba speakers (4.7 percent), as Dahomey's chief adversaries—although Thornton does not—we reach a total of 34.6 percent of the slave population coming from war-torn societies.

Not a "very substantial" proportion, I would say, though certainly a sizeable one.

The proportion of these people who had military experience, moreover, appears to be unknowable. Did captured soldiers outnumber the farmers and craftsmen seized from the villages and towns ravaged in these wars? Some scholars have suggested that abandoned baggage porters were the men most likely to be captured on African battlefields. Thornton hazards only this: "Soldiers must have been among the many exported slaves."[2] However many ethnic groups one adds to the sample, the dimensions of Africa's military contribution thus remain highly uncertain.

As regards the religious impact of African migrants in Saint-Domingue, Thornton again focuses on the Kongo and Fongbe culture areas but argues that numbers were less important in the religious sphere than in explaining military influence. What counted most was the nature of Kongo and Fon beliefs, specifically their concept of "mobile" deities that could cross the Atlantic (268). This (to me) novel pairing of the two cultures is very suggestive, but I would suggest that the reason Father Charlevoix (or rather his predecessor Le Pers) singled out the Fongbe, Kongo, and Senegambians in the 1720s was less because of their exceptional religious cultures than because their homelands were Saint-Domingue's three main sources of labor, then supplying 90 percent of the Africans carried by French slave ships.[3] As Fongbe clearly had much greater impact than Kongo on Vodou (its deities, lexicon, and ritual), despite their contributing overall many fewer people to Saint-Domingue's population, it has long been evident that demography alone cannot explain cultural transmission. Yet, as Mintz and Price argued, numbers plus chronology can: the Bight of Benin's overwhelming predominance as a supplier of the French slave trade during slavery's vertiginous takeoff in Saint-Domingue shaped the nature of the creole culture to which later migrants had to adapt.[4]

2. John K. Thornton, "African Soldiers in the Haitian Revolution," *Journal of Caribbean History* 25:1 (January 1991): 62–63.

3. David Geggus, "The French Slave Trade: An Overview," *William & Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, 58:1 (January 2001), Tables 2 and 5.

4. Sidney Mintz, Richard Price, *An Anthropological Approach to the Afro-American Past* (Philadelphia: ISHI, 1976), 25–26.

Thornton's hypothesis that Kongo's main influence on Vodou was in facilitating what is sometimes called its syncretic relationship with Catholicism is an interesting idea (270). Yet the Catholic influence on Candomblé in northeast Brazil (a region where Kongolese were few) implies that this intermediary role was not essential in a Catholic colony, where local Creoles could also have been a conduit between different religions. Besides, the evidence for slaves proselytizing in Saint-Domingue that Thornton alludes to is extremely limited, and none are known to have been Congos. It is true that the Church was institutionally much stronger in Brazil than in Saint-Domingue, where Christian practice was also lax, but daily communal prayers were apparently the norm on Dominguan plantations, as were annual collective baptisms at the district level.[5] Catholic feast days interrupted the plantation calendar and some two-thirds of slaves bore the name of a Catholic saint.[6]

I disagree with much of Thornton's commentary on the military narrative: the "wildly varying" leadership, the use of Spanish instructors, or the assertion that there was "probably never a clear distinction among most fighters between ethnicities or origins . . . after a year or two." Africans of course formed the majority of insurgents, but Jean-François certainly did not call them "the real fighters" (271). Thornton states that their style of fighting was "distinctly African," but also that it went back "as far as Classical antiquity" and has modern counterparts (271–272). In my view, it was shaped by the insurgents' initially possessing few weapons but superior numbers. Avoiding pitched battles, their greatest advantages were their adept use of guerilla warfare, their ability to escape pursuers, and their degree of immunity to the diseases that destroyed European armies in the Caribbean.[7] Notwithstanding the flourish of Thornton's penultimate paragraph, battlefield tactics did not destroy the French army, which, it should be remembered, forced Toussaint and Dessalines to surrender in 1802 after a hard-fought three-month campaign.

5. Anon., *Voyage de France à Saint-Domingue*, D. Geggus, ed. (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2021), 89; [Jean-Baptiste Laplace,] *Histoire des désastres de Saint-Domingue* (Paris: Garnery, 1795), 70; J.-Félix Carteau, *Soirées bermudiennes* (Bordeaux: Pellier-Lawalle, 1802), 80–81.

6. From a sample of 2,714 slaves in the 1770s and 1780s. Another 12 percent bore the diminutive form of a saint's name.

7. The British and French suffered huge military losses in Saint-Domingue that varied roughly from 60 to 85 percent. Battle casualties made up less than 5 percent of the British losses and, in 1802-03, no more than 30 percent of French losses. David Geggus, "Slavery, War, and Revolution in the Greater Caribbean, 1789–1815," in *A Turbulent Time: The French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean*, D. B. Gaspar, D. Geggus, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 24–25; Philippe R. Girard, *The Slaves Who Defeated Napoleon: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the Haitian War of Independence, 1801–1804* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2011), 179–180, 343.

Mobley

The surrender of the Creole generals in April and May 1802 serves as Christina Mobley's point of departure. Because that event began their inglorious collaboration with the French army and led to their repression of the "Congo" resistance, it sets these two groups in sharp contrast. The contrast was real, but Mobley's simplification of it is slightly misleading. Only one of the main Congo leaders, Sylla, refused to submit to the French. Sans-Souci retained his military post, just as Dessalines did, and, followed by Macaya, resumed fighting in July only after the French moved to disarm rural Blacks and ordered his arrest. Most historians, moreover, claim that the Creole generals were merely taking a pause and intended to continue fighting once disease had decimated French forces. It was they who had led resistance to the French invasion, when plantation workers, resentful of Creole hegemony, had proved reluctant to follow them, and the African leaders Laplume and Lamour Derance had in fact welcomed the French. The two groups' visions of "liberty" were indeed different, but in negotiating his surrender, Henry Christophe, the Congos' most bitter enemy, extracted a public assurance from the French captain-general that slave emancipation would remain inviolate.[8]

Mobley next introduces a more baffling dichotomy, between a supposedly "racial" interpretation of this "war within the war" (shared by nineteenth-century Haitian and European writers) and one that recognizes its economic foundations (276). She associates the latter view "especially" with Haitian scholars, but it is obviously the mainstream interpretation, albeit not in the garbled form she presents.[9] The term "racial" seems to be used modishly to denounce negative stereotypes and justified by the ideas of the colonial intellectual Moreau de Saint-Méry, which are hardly relevant to this historiographical discussion (281). As the word "Congo" has retained connotations of backwardness not just in Haiti but also in modern Jamaica, these notions clearly go back to cultural and class tensions between migrants and those locally born on the colonial plantation. It seems strange to connect the word specifically to resistance to the state, as the Haitian usage is colored by a reputation for accommodation to the colonizers and betrayal of the Revolution.[10]

8. Girard, *Slaves Who Defeated Napoleon*, 133–137, 155, 196–197; Claude B. Auguste, Marcel B. Auguste, *L'Expédition Leclerc, 1801–1803* (Port-au-Prince: Deschamps, 1985), 151–152, 160–161.

9. The Creole generals were not exactly "plantocrats"; no one at this time owned slaves; and "formerly enslaved" describes both sides to the conflict.

10. Frederick Cassidy, Robert Le Page, *Dictionary of Jamaican English* (Cambridge: CUP, 1967); Guérin Montilus, "Guinea versus Congo Lands: Aspects of the Collective Memory in Haiti," in *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora,* Joseph Harris, ed. (Washington DC: Howard University, 1982), 164–165; Jean Fouchard, *Les marrons de la liberté* (Paris: L'Ecole, 1972), 438.

Mobley's announcement that the revolution was "not just a war of independence" but a victory over slavery and the plantation system will surprise nobody (276). For Haitian nationalists, however, the Congos did not pay enough attention to the idea of national independence: they delayed its achievement. Their "political imaginaries," African or not, were parochial, warped by individual rivalries and class resentments. Failing to appreciate the Creoles' big picture, which included both exploitation of their labor and Creole dominance of the state, they risked prolonging French colonial rule. We should note that a struggle between plantation and peasantry characterized most post-slavery societies in the Americas, and in them Africans were generally few. It therefore seems questionable that the contest was driven by specifically "African ideas" or political philosophy. In Haiti, a plantation regime survived past independence, until nearly 1830; the country then became far more of a monoculture than it had ever been as a colony (276).

As for numbers, Mobley is incorrect that I dispute the numbers in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database; I dispute merely her confusion of the ethnic composition they imply with that of the entire slave population (277). I argue that the percentage of West-Central Africans in Saint-Domingue was smaller than imagined by her, Thornton, and Sweet, but not by Gabriel Debien, who understated their presence. I did not misread the slave trade statistics in her dissertation. She seems to have forgotten writing that "the population of the North Plain" and of Saint-Domingue as a whole was "overwhelmingly African" and "largely Kongolese."[11] All types of records have their fallibilities, but I would suggest that the discrepancy Mobley mentions between certain French documents and the Slave Trade Database might be due to the fact that dates of departure, trading, and arrival could fall in different years. Her reference to "traders who . . . failed to report voyages" is puzzling in that such reporting was primarily the job of port officials (278). If she could identify voyages that had escaped official attention, she would presumably have added them to the database.

My sample is of course imperfect, and I point out some of its limitations (231–232). Certainly, it provides better coverage of the sugar estates than of indigo plantations, but as an approximation of the enslaved population of Saint-Domingue it has no rival. Mobley charges that the data set cannot provide reliable averages because it does not exhibit symmetrical distribution. If she is referring to the balance between large and small plantations, I would reply that, within a given sector, there is little reason to suppose that ethnic composition varied by workforce size, or that the distribution of plantations by

11. Christina F. Mobley, "The Kongolese Atlantic: Central African Slavery & Culture from Mayombe to Haiti" (PhD diss.: Duke University, 2015), 110, 114.

size was symmetrical. If the sample is not representative of the overall slave population, it is only in the sense that it failed to include sectors that formed 12 percent of that population (notably, most urban and industrial workers). As these were disproportionately located in the South and West provinces, where Congo were least numerous, their inclusion would not likely have increased my estimate of the Kongolese presence and may well have diminished it.

After some holier-than-thou posturing about reducing people to numbers, Mobley's critique next raises the question of "unreliable ethnonyms." She mentions only one case, however, that of the Mondongues, and seems primarily concerned with their reputation for cannibalism, which I do not mention in my article (278–280). Their geographical location has long been uncertain. Mobley claims, without any justification, that the location I suggest derives from early European fantasy cartography and travelers' tales (280). In fact, my article cites on this point a 1990 study by the eminent ethnographer and linguist Jan Vansina (a work Mobley also cites). Vansina was also the source for my stating that the Mondongues spoke a non-Bantu language.[12] Mobley's alternative reality is that the word "Mondongue" was merely a social category that designated a type of captive, and had no ethnic connotation. In support of this assertion, she advances only an unconvincing etymological explanation and does not trouble to ask why informed observers in Africa and the Americas considered these captives a distinctive group (279).[13] Both the missionary Christian Oldendorp and Louis de Grandpré distinguished them from other peoples with filed teeth and extensive scarification who were believed to practice cannibalism. Oldendorp, who interviewed three "Mandungo" in the Danish Caribbean, stated they came from three dispersed, far-inland polities but shared the same language.[14]

Committed to denouncing Europeans' ignorance and prejudice, Mobley condemns "the French" and "slave traders" for associating Mondongues with cannibalism, infanticide, and human sacrifice, dismissing these as tropes rooted in ancient myth—without explaining why other Africans shared the Europeans' negative view. In places, she generalizes the accusation absurdly.[15] Oddly, she fails

12. Geggus, "Kongomania and the Haitian Revolution," *The Americas* 81:2 (April 2024), n. 39. For other Africanists who point to the same region, see Philip Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 188; and Phyllis Martin, "The External Trade of the Loango Coast" (PhD diss.: London University, 1970), 219.

13. Fernando Ortiz, *Glosario de afronegrismos* (Havana: El Siglo, 1924), 345–347, offers a different but no more convincing attempt at etymologizing.

14. *C. G. A. Oldendorp's History of the Mission of the Evangelical Brethren*, Arnold Highfield, Vladimir Barac, eds. (Ann Arbor, MI: Karoma, 1987), 168, 170; Louis de Grandpré, *Voyage à la côte occidentale d'Afrique fait dans les années 1786 et 1787* (Paris: Dentu, 1801), vol. 1, viii–xiii; vol. 2, 37–39.

15. "French slave traders insisted the captives they purchased originated from cannibalistic 'nations' in the interior of Africa" (282).

to note that the slave trader de Grandpré, one of her main sources, in fact cogently refutes the cannibalism charge. She also fails to note that her source for declaring African cannibalism imaginary, Jared Staller, not only distinguishes between mythic cannibalism and genuine anthropophagy but also makes clear that infanticide was used as a terror tactic by predecessors who have been conflated with Mondongues.[16] She also seems unaware of Caribbean observers who, without mentioning cannibalism, considered the Mondongues to be unusually carnivorous, as did de Grandpré.[17] I take no position on the cannibalism question but suggest there is evidence worth examining before settling for peremptory judgement. Each of Oldendorp's three interlocutors (one a Christian convert) said they had engaged in cannibalism in their homeland, where it was commonly practiced, as was funerary human sacrifice. A prominent alleged case occurred during a revolt on Guadeloupe in 1736. And although Mobley states there was "no physical evidence of foul play" in the midwife's case she recounts (279), it seems that the planter Pierre F. Page claimed to have witnessed the flesh-eating act.[18]

Space des not allow a response to all of Mobley's assertions. Some are rather flimsy (quantitative vs. qualitative appraisal; static vs. fluid social categories, colonial racial ideas, children's culture, my own "exclusively European" sources). Some are artfully tendentious ("Haiti's Kongo founders"), and others are startlingly mistaken (slave leadership and literacy).[19] I am somewhat sympathetic, however, to her main argument, about the importance of the northwest Kongo region (279–283).

Having suggested more than 30 years ago that Saint-Domingue's Kongo culture was clearly influenced by the region north of the River Congo that is now being championed by Mobley (without acknowledgment), I think the point needed to be made.[20] She goes much too far, however. Characteristically straining after iconoclastic but ill-supported generalizations, she now proposes an extremely narrow vision of Congo identity that is concentrated overwhelmingly on the northwest coast and its immediate hinterland and all but eliminates input from the Kongo kingdom and its eastern borderlands. Besides representing a 180-degree

16. De Grandpré, *Voyage*, vol. 1, viii–xiii; vol. 2, 37–39; Jared Staller, *Converging on Cannibals: Terrors of Slaving in Atlantic Africa, 1509–1670* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2019).

17. Charles Malenfant, *Des colonies et particulièrement de celle de Saint-Domingue* (Paris: Audibert, 1814), 186; Gabriel Debien, *Une plantation de Saint-Domingue, la sucrerie Galbaud du Fort* (Cairo: L'Institut francais du Caire, 1941), 96.

18. *C. G. A. Oldendorp's History*, 177, 178, 184, 499; Lucien-René Abénon, "La révolte avortée de 1736 et la répression du marronnage à la Guadeloupe" *Bulletin de la Société d'Histoire de la Guadeloupe* 55 (1983): 63–66; Archives Nationales, Paris, Dxxv/46/438, doc. 66.

19. "the leadership . . . were, largely, those who could correspond in writing" (281). In fact, few slave leaders could sign their names before the mid 1790s or later, and almost all, Creoles or Africans, employed free colored or white secretaries.

20. David Geggus, "Haitian Voodoo in the Eighteenth Century: Language, Culture, Resistance," *Jahrbuch für Geschichte von Staat, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Lateinamerikas* 28 (1991): 27–35.

turn from her previous, extreme claims about the topic, it conflicts with contemporary testimony, all previous scholarship on the matter, and the data in my paper on Kongo subgroups in Saint-Domingue—to which she makes no response.[21]

Mobley justifies her new opinion with linguistic data presented in Chapter 5 of her dissertation. This is of considerable interest, but problematic. The most obvious problem is that its argument is almost entirely contradicted by her preceding chapter on "documentary evidence." This material confirms that the kingdom of Kongo and the Malebo Pool market to the east were major suppliers of slaves to the Loango coast. Mobley's refrain about Europeans' ignorance of interior trade routes and captives' places of origin fails to cover up the fact that these captives were evidently not from the northwest coastal kingdoms.[22]

The linguistic evidence has its own problems. For one, it depends heavily on the workers of just one out of 7,000 plantations, that of Baudry des Lozières. They likely numbered between 50 and 100 people, and the Congo among them could easily have skewed to one regional origin or another. Moreover, the linguistic sources inevitably underrepresent enslaved speakers of minority dialects who found reason to adopt a more widely spoken lingua franca as they journeyed from the interior to the coast and thence Saint-Domingue. Finally, from the 800 or so Kongo items on Baudry's word list, and others in the collected corpus of Vodou songs, Mobley can identify only 15 as belonging exclusively to the northwest region. This is not a strong basis for radically reshaping knowledge of the slave trade.

Sweet

In his (occasionally) very generous response to my paper, James Sweet accepts (most of) my arithmetic but proposes to look at it "a little differently." This results in some numerical misapprehensions and, I think, some faulty deductions (250). It is a slight exaggeration to state that my data set shows African adults to be twice as numerous as Creole adults, and a greater exaggeration to depict Creole and Congo adults to be almost equal in number.[23] Because of the Congos' high man:woman ratio, their presence may have been marginally greater than that of Creoles in the revolutionary armies; this could make them the largest minority, but certainly not "predominant." Above all, although Africans made up the majority of insurgents, as I have always affirmed, it does not follow they were

21. Mobley, "Kongolese Atlantic," chapts. 4 and 5, esp. iv–v, 141–142, 190–191, 226–228, 276; Geggus, "Kongomania," 230.

22. Mobley, "Kongolese Atlantic," 172–179, 183.

23. When I wrote that "close to half" of Creoles were children, I should have specified "between about 40 and 47 percent." The uncertainty stems from difficulties separating African and Creole children.

"the most likely to be formulating political strategy." That is usually the domain of leadership, and as my article points out, leadership, albeit fractured and contested from 1791 to 1803, was predominantly Creole.

Sweet's challenge (note 1) to my statement about Creole adults outnumbering African adults on North Plain sugar estates similarly requires rebuttal. The data manipulation he describes does not show Creole and African adults to be "roughly the same" in number, but as, respectively, 38 percent and 35.5 percent of the sector's population.[24] More important, he does not recognize that my text referred to the *western half* of the North Plain, (232, 243), where the difference was greater. This distinction is important, because it was in the lowland region between Limonade and Limbé where the slave uprising began, was presumably planned, and was initially confined, whereas the eastern half of the plain was drawn only slowly into the revolt over the next year. The region's peculiarities therefore merit historians' attention.

Sweet next raises the "specter" of African migrant mortality in Saint-Domingue (251). Without doubt, it is shocking and salutary to recall how many vanished so quickly. How far sleight of hand, or indifference, or poor recordkeeping has obscured the issue, I do not know, but one can hardly blame quantitative history, which has shed much light on the topic. Saint-Domingue (manuscript) censuses do list deaths and births, but in a perfunctory manner. Deaths between arrival and sale are a blind spot that requires more attention.[25] As Kikongo speakers supposedly use the same term to designate "ocean" and "boundary between life and death," many transported captives must have interpreted their fate as inevitable. The destruction of African lives, however, was a drawn-out process that began in the African interior, and, in Joe Miller's famous calculation—which notably undermines the *kalunga* metaphor—the process was already half completed by the time captives reached the Americas.[26] Whether spirits of the dead lived on may have depended, I imagine, on whether kin witnessed their passing. This was probably not often.

As for the merits of Baudry des Lozières, his *Vocabulaire Congo*, and its potential to reveal important insights, I remain unpersuaded. Rather than reprise what I have already written, I will clarify just a few points. I did not term the dictionary "insignificant because only 24 percent of the enslaved were

24. If these numbers look like nitpicking, recall that the article was responding to a dominant, two-century-old belief that Africans outnumbered Creoles by two to one.

25. David Geggus, "The Slaves and Free People of Color of Cap Français," in *The Black Urban Atlantic in the Age of the Slave Trade*, Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, Matt Childs, and James Sidbury, eds. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 112.

26. Joseph C. Miller, *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 1730–1830* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 440–441.

Congolese" (253). I questioned Baudry's expertise in the language and gave my revised estimate of the Congo population as one among several reasons Sweet, Mobley, and Thornton were wrong to suggest that it became a lingua franca in Saint-Domingue.

As for Kongolese ideas penetrating "the very fabric" of white colonial society, Sweet appears to have shifted his ground a good deal (254). It is no longer a question of "deep cultural understanding" and "ideological transformations" that derived from conversations in Kikongo, but merely uncontroversial descriptions of music and dance and transcriptions of religious chants—by colonists who could neither understand them nor identify in which language they were written. The fact that Baudry showed no awareness of the supernatural meaning of *ndoki* (witch) helps make the point (256–257). Sweet's convoluted attempt to show that Baudry viewed insurgents as witches (and therefore thought like a Kongo) is quite astonishing. As Baudry used *ndoki* only as a translation for brigand, poisoner, and scoundrel, I think his interlocutors (perhaps unwilling to discuss witchcraft) must have taught it to him as a generalized smear, indicating "those having evil designs," to use the words of the ethnologist Laman.[27]

Sweet adds interesting linguistic and historical details regarding two other disputed words, *vika* and *mputu*, but remains confused about their relevance to Saint-Domingue. Unable to find evidence there of master exchange, which he relates to *vika* status, he treats as a sort of proxy the mediated return of fugitives, a process well known to the colony's historians (258/259). Mediators were usually friends and family, not of the fugitive as he states, but of the slave owner, or the local priest. It was not the fugitive's "local knowledge" that nourished the system so much as slave owners' knowledge of the enslaved. Hence it favored Creoles, although I have never claimed they established the practice. Sweet continues to assert that the two Congo fugitives' cases that constitute his sole piece of evidence show the use of mediators, and I still disagree.

He does show that *mputu* meant both Europe and France, but it is still surprising that Kongolese could not distinguish between European countries when French, English, and Portuguese ships competed for trade off their coast. Native Americans had quickly managed to do this in the sixteenth century, as did the Kongo who fled from the Carolinas to Florida, or from Saint-Domingue to Santo Domingo (257/258). Also surprising is the way this idea feeds into Sweet's faulty reading of the early Haitian Revolution and the roles of Africans and Creoles. He reasons that because Congos had no idea of France, they

27. Karl E. Laman, *The Kongo*, 4 vols. (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1953-68), 3:100–102.

remained untouched by the French Revolution, and that it was Creoles who "extolled" and "went to war in the name of" "French 'liberty'" (253, 258).

This is misleading for two reasons. The Creole leaders of the 1791-93 uprising said remarkably little about liberty and far more about defending the king. They also rejected the French Republic's turn toward slave emancipation in 1793, when the Congo leaders Pierrot and (very briefly) Macaya were among the earliest to encourage the move. The ethnic divide does not map easily onto political divisions. Sweet claims that my emphasis on Creole leadership in the Revolution is an archival artifact and that African leadership structure and strategies were less visible simply because of the Africans' oral culture, but this is nonsense (253–254).[28] While various types of documents describe the structure of black armies, African and Creole leaders served in the same forces and exchanged letters in French that were translated orally from and to Creole.

A final point to be clarified concerns the so-called "reformism" of the early slave uprising (260–261). Sweet wants to know whether it came from Creole leaders or African foot soldiers, and he accuses me of giving contradictory explanations.[29] Interest in the topic has grown as historians confront the fact that the Creole leaders rarely used a language of rights and attempted to negotiate in December 1791 (and later) a peace settlement that would free themselves and their families but offer their followers only a life of forced labor with improved working conditions. The archives contain a mass of contradictory indications as to what different groups of insurgents supposedly claimed to want, but Sweet is mistaken in thinking that "early rebel leaders demanded reforms." Evidence of reformist desires (dismissal of plantation managers, abolition of the whip), along with more revolutionary ones (eliminate the whites, divide up the land), emerged during the early months of the insurrection in statements by captured insurgents or former prisoners of the insurgents, and in brief comments surrounding the December negotiations. My view is that, rather than evolving from reformism to revolution, the slave uprising began with high ambitions that it was forced to scale back due to a military stalemate.[30]

Sweet apparently regards this issue as an authentically African intellectual contribution and an example of political contestation that I am covering up. One might also see it as an astute, even humane solution to a difficult problem.

28. See above, n. 19.

29. The text of mine that Sweet cites suggests why Africans who came from societies with their own traditions of bondage were slow to denounce the institution in the Americas. I am not sure it helps his argument about Africans willingly remaining slaves.

30. David Geggus, "Slave Resistance and Emancipation: The Case of Saint Domingue." In *Who Abolished Slavery? Slave Revolts and Abolitionism: A Debate with João Pedro Marques,* ed. Seymour Drescher, Pieter C. Emmer (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 114–115.

But I think we are talking past each other. I do not claim the leaders "invented" the reformist proposals. Obviously they reflected the aspirations of plantation workers, who were both Creoles and Africans. Seemingly spread by free colored activists, the idea of a three-day work week had been circulating in the Caribbean for two years.[31] But in insurgent politics, reformism was transparently a second-best outcome; it represented a minimum gain that the leadership hoped they (and French troops) could force their followers to accept. For this reason, the negotiations were kept secret for as long as possible. The Creole leader Jean-François must have had some stormy arguments with his subordinates, though little evidence of this survives. And in the end, he failed. As he was then seeking the freedom of only 50 leaders, he must have had lots of opponents.

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31. David Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 101, 256 n. 14.