

Amasa Delano, or the Unthinkability of the Black Revolution

Anna Scacchi

Herman Melville's novella "Benito Cereno", as many readers have pointed out, makes explicit reference to the Haitian Revolution, showing its centrality to the history and cultural imaginary of the United States. Based on the events narrated by Amasa Delano in his 1817 memoir, "Benito Cereno" changes the original text in ways that reframe it as a revisionist history of the Haitian Revolution where the United States sea captain successfully crushes the rebellious slaves' fight for freedom. Not only does Melville's work highlight the United States' complex relationship with the other American Revolution; in its protagonist's refusal to see the rebellion as a claiming of the right to liberty on the part of the enslaved Africans, it also exemplifies the tropes of erasure and trivialization through which, as Michel-Rolph Trouillot argued in *Silencing the Past*, Western modernity has turned the Haitian Revolution into an unthinkable event.

Intimacy and Erasure: Haiti and the United States, from Slave Revolt to Freedom Dreams

Elizabeth Maddock Dillon

This article explores the existence of a double history of the Haitian Revolution in the American imagination: one is a history of hope and one is of fear—hope for freedom for the enslaved, for black self-determination and citizenship, the promise of humanity for the dehumanized and fear of slave uprising and revolt, terror of violent retribution against white Southern slave holders,

and a resulting demonization of Haiti as a free black state. The demonization of Haiti by powerful white politicians, writers, and culture brokers in the U.S. continues to this day, to the extent that a narrative of negative exceptionalism has come to characterize Haiti. Haitian exceptionalism is mirrored in American exceptionalism, a view that sees the U.S. as unique among nations in its embodiment of freedom and democracy. These dual exceptionalisms – one remarkably negative and the other remarkably positive – hold sway in the popular imagination of Haiti and the U.S. today, and reinforce the idea that the two countries share little in common with one another. But that notion is incorrect: Haiti is not only geographically close to the U.S., but shares with the U.S. a deeply entwined history, dating from the eighteenth century, when each of these two American colonies saw world historical anti-colonial revolutions that catapulted them to independence.

Reproducing the Revolution. Antebellum Narrative Representations of Toussaint Louverture

M. Giulia Fabi

The essay examines how antebellum narrative representations of the Haitian Revolution placed it on a continuum with other forms of resistance and revolt in the United States in order to challenge prevailing racist ontologies postulating black docility. Through an analysis of the portraits of Toussaint L'Ouverture described in Frank J. Webb's *The Garies and Their Friends* (1853) and William J. Wilson's "The Afric-American Picture Gallery" (1859), Fabi argues that such descriptions train readers to question the politics of historical representation.

The insurgent vision that emerges from Webb's and Wilson's texts connects them closely with the transnational emancipation project that dominates Martin R. Delany's better known *Blake; Or, The Huts of America* (1859).

Liberty, Independence, Citizenship: Haiti and Spanish America, 1790-1820
Federica Morelli

The article deals with the impact of the Haitian Revolution on the Spanish American colonies. If on the one hand it contributed to complete the transformation of Cuba into a slave society and plantation colony, on the other it helped the spreading of new ideas about racial equality and slave emancipation in the Spanish Caribbean region. Several conspiracies and rebellions in Cuba and *Tierra Firme* (the Venezuelan and Colombian coasts) reveal that the Haitian Revolution expanded the revolutionary language of individual and natural rights among slaves and free people of color. This produced two significant consequences during the Spanish American independence wars a decade later: first, it compelled Creole elites to grant citizenship rights to free African descendants; second, the Haitian model pushed Spanish American patriots to recruit slaves in their armies, thus weakening the institution of slavery in the Spanish American countries.

"There's not a breathing of the common wind that will forget thee": Haiti Through the Black Renaissance
Renata Morresi

Ray, the Haitian intellectual, and Jake, the free-spirited main character of *Home to Harlem*, Claude McKay's successful

novel, meet in the dining car of a train to Pittsburgh, where they are both employed. An immediate sympathy is born between the two, and if the pretext for a first conversation is the book Ray is reading, *Sapho* by Alphonse Daudet, short is the step from the lexicon of female homosexuality to the reference to the Haitian Revolution and its protagonists, up to Wordsworth's sonnet dedicated to Toussaint Louverture. A dreamy Jake listens attentively to Ray's lesson on the exemplary struggles and the constellation of relationships that contribute to compose the multifarious circum-Atlantic black community. In a comparable way for many crucial writers of the Black Renaissance, Haiti came to represent – not without contradictions and disputes – one of the most significant emotional and ideal centers for the elaboration of a transnational community, making a "shared lexicon of the revolution" available, as well as the vision of a third space of resistance and imagination. We owe this configuration to the partial overlapping of intellectual fields and aesthetic projects that were not always aligned and could be, in some cases, even discordant: Johnson's demands for liberation certainly did not correspond to Hurston's ideas on safeguarding Haiti, and the sweet island imagined by Hughes and Arna Bontemps in the children's book *Popo and Fifina: Children of Haiti* (1932) does not seem close to McKay's radical realism. These articulations of Haiti as a *topos*, as an object of research, as a physical place of travel, encounters, and origins, as a melting pot of relationships, and of Haiti's memory as the cornerstone of a collective history and the occasion of an alternative one, are far from homogeneous.

Unthinkability, “Unfilmability”? The Haitian Revolution on Screen*Charles Forsdick*

The article explores Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s notion of the historic “unthinkability” of the Haitian Revolution, as set out in *Silencing the Past* (1995), and asks whether a parallel concept of contemporary “unfilmability” can be developed to address the relative absence of cinematic representations of this world historical event. Central to the study are several key films – notably *The Black Consul* by Sergei Eisenstein – which, although planned, never went into production. In addition, however, the article addresses several other films – Negulesco’s *Lydia Bailey* (1947), Pontecorvo’s *Burn* (1969), Niang’s *Toussaint Louverture* (2012), Rock’s *Top Five* (2014) – that have been released and questions the extent to which they contribute cinematically to the elaboration of “new narratives” that encourage re-engagement with Haiti’s revolutionary past.

AYITI. Memory and Oblivion of the Haitian Revolution. Haiti, 2012-2019.*Nicola Lo Calzo*

The unique aspects of Haiti, whose date of birth coincides with the abolition of slavery and the birth of the first black republic in 1804, have been determined by its history. In Haiti, the memory becomes a unifying element, perhaps the only common denominator of a vertical society divided into castes. In all social latitudes, memories of the resistance to slavery acquire a value of identity and give a sense of belonging to the same historic community. These memories have been embraced by the

different social groups living in the country, each in its own way, so that today Haiti has an exceptional heritage based on popular culture, even if largely unrecognized by the public institutions and the international community. This photographic series, realized a part of a research supported by Fokal foundation, traces the multiple experiences related to these key memories, the descendants of revolutionaries, the Voodoo pantheon, the “Poles” affair, the Carnival in Jacmel, the “relics” of national heroes, the question of the debt (or ransom) of Haiti and the new forms of re-appropriation of the past, to the impressively popular initiative of the “Movement for the Success of the Image of the Independence Heroes”.

Hidden in Plain Sight:**Data Visualization in the Humanities***Franco Moretti and Oleg Sobchuk*

A new kind of humanities, digital humanities, came with a new practice – data visualization: histograms, scatterplots, networks... In this article, we aim to uncover the hidden assumptions of this new practice, by reviewing sixty-odd DH studies published in the last decade. We distinguish three groups of visualizations: historical ones, which show temporal trends; morphological ones, which show the structural properties of texts and corpora; finally, the ones that depict “historical morphology.” Historical morphology is by far the rarest kind of visualization, and yet it should become an essential part of a theory-driven quantitative cultural history.