

UNEXPLOITED SOURCES FOR THE HISTORY OF THE HAITIAN REVOLUTION

David P. Geggus
University of Florida

One of the greatest servile rebellions and the sole successful slave revolt in world history, the insurrection that destroyed France's richest colony and led to the creation of Haiti has been the subject of a great deal of writing and controversy, but relatively little basic research. The destruction of Saint Domingue and the career of the black leader Toussaint Louverture have inspired innumerable popular and partisan works, but at the level of primary research, we have not progressed far beyond Ardouin's *Études* of 1853 and Pauléus Sannon's *Histoire* of the 1920s.¹

The appearance of a new scholarly biography of Toussaint Louverture provides a good occasion for reviewing the vast quantity of largely neglected manuscript material that concerns this unique and profound event.² Pierre Pluchon's stimulating and controversial *De l'esclavage au pouvoir* certainly shows the way forward, being based solidly, but almost solely, on the main series of government correspondence in the Archives Nationales in Paris. It breaks new ground in the systematic use of these sources (principally the series CC9), but it remains, even regarding the material in Paris, an unbalanced achievement. Apart from its primarily political slant, the work ignores to its cost the enormous Dxxv series generated by the *Comités des Colonies* and also the well-known collections in the Bibliothèque Nationale of Sonthonax and Laveaux correspondence, whose six volumes contain a large part of Toussaint's surviving letters.³ Although far from fully exploited, all this material, along with the invaluable collection of miscellanea left by Moreau de Saint-Méry (A.N., Colonies, F3), has been dipped into frequently by writers on the revolution and is the primary source of most scholarly work on the subject. The purpose of this article is to draw attention to some of the entirely neglected material to be found not only in France but also in Spain, Great Britain, the Caribbean, and the United States that might illuminate further the strange twilight period in which Saint Domingue was transformed into Haiti.

Spain

Undoubtedly the most neglected material is that in Spanish from Saint Domingue's neighbour colony, Santo Domingo. The Spanish authorities observed closely the revolution that threatened to engulf them and particularly the slave rebels with whom they traded across their common frontier. When war broke out in Europe, the governor of Santo Domingo enlisted thousands of rebel blacks into his army, and the Spaniards thus became major participants in the revolution. The documentation they left behind is substantial, in excellent condition, and has been accessible for decades.⁴ For any study of the slave revolt of 1791 and of its development, this material is vital.

The Spanish documents are divided between the Archivo General de Indias in Seville and the Archivo General de Simancas near Valladolid. The two collections overlap considerably, but for the war years 1793–95, Simancas has the more important holding (Guerra Moderna, 7157–64). The Seville holding, however, is the larger, being distributed between Estado 11, 13, 14 and Audiencia de Santo Domingo 1027–35, 1089, 1102, 1110, with duplicates in 954–57.⁵

These papers are unique in several respects. They provide a first-hand account of Saint Domingue's revolution by persons not directly involved in it. They register the shock waves of that revolution in the colony where they were felt most severely. They describe the extraordinary experiment of recruiting rebel slaves into a European army to defend a slave society. They also cast light on the early career of Toussaint Louverture, both before and after he joined the Spaniards. Although they include practically no letters by him, the two collections contain a large number by other rebel leaders, in particular Jean-François, Biasou, and Gabriel Bellair. Most are translated copies, but there are some signed originals and autographs as well. They reveal much about the structure of the rebel forces and the identity of their leaders, and they are especially interesting when the rebel chiefs discuss the origins of the revolt. Other unexplored topics that are abundantly documented are the relations between the Spanish Church and the slave rebels, and the mysterious Fort Dauphin massacre, in which hundreds of French colonists were murdered by Jean-François's soldiers under the eyes of the Spanish authorities. The Seville holding also contains a large body of material (Aud. Santo Domingo, 1039, 1102) relating to the famous maroon band of the Maniel, about whom we know very little, despite their notoriety. Especially obscure is the period between their treaty with the colonial authorities in 1785 and their first contact with Toussaint Louverture in 1796, the period from which this material derives. The connection between *marronage* and revolution in Saint Domingue has been hotly debated, and here we have an important test case.

The Caribbean

Scholars working in the Caribbean might like to know that many of the most important items from the Seville and Simancas collections can be found in typescript copies in the Dominican Republic. Made by the historian J. M. Incháustegui, they are kept at the Universidad Católica de Madre y Maestra at Santiago de los Caballeros.⁶ Apart from a few proclamations by the governor of Santo Domingo, however, little has survived of the original colonial archives, creating something of a mystery.⁷ When Spain relinquished control of Santo Domingo in the summer of 1796, its archives were sent to Cuba; but, judging from José Luciano Franco's *Documentos para la historia de Haití en el Archivo Nacional*, they are evidently no longer there.⁸ They may have been returned to Santo Domingo early in the nineteenth century because Beaubrun Ardouin, writing around 1850, cited Louverture letters that he claimed to have found in Santo Domingo.⁹ As they are very important, it is unfortunate that nothing of the sort can now be found in the Archivo General de la Nación.¹⁰ Nevertheless, we have in del Monte y Tejada's *Historia de Santo Domingo* some compensation for the loss of this material, as well as presumptive evidence of its existence up to the end of the nineteenth century.¹¹ All of volume 4 of this little-known work and an appendix to volume 3 consist of letters passed between local military commanders and the governor during the revolutionary period. They admirably complement the documents in Spain by introducing a broader range of opinion and providing a finer focus on day-to-day events.

In Jamaica are found a number of small collections directly relevant to the Haitian revolution. The papers of Governor Nugent, kept in the Institute of Jamaica in Kingston, contain over twenty reports by British agents who resided in Saint Domingue during the ascendancy of Toussaint Louverture (1799–1801), as well as some seven letters by Toussaint and eleven by Jean-Jacques Dessalines.¹² These are contemporary duplicates of originals in the Public Record Office in London, or in the John Rylands Library in Manchester. The Institute of Jamaica more recently acquired the Fischer Collection (Ms 36F) of some hundred small dossiers, many of which concern the southern region of the Grand Anse. They include wills, legislative acts, records of property transactions, and political correspondence. The Fischer and the Haitian Manuscript (Ms 36) collections together contain about half a dozen letters by Toussaint or Dessalines. The Jamaica Archives at Spanish Town include among the papers of the Vice-Admiralty Court captured correspondence from Saint Domingue and the trial papers of ships seized after March 1793. These documents shed light on U.S. commercial activity in the colony and could be combined usefully with North American sources.

Paradoxically but understandably enough, Haiti itself seems to possess no primary sources concerning its revolution that destroyed so much. According to its director, the Archives Nationales in Port-au-Prince contains no documents from the colonial period. In the late 1970s, the private collection of Edmond Mangonès was donated to the Institut Saint Louis de Gonzague, an invaluable storehouse for Haitian studies, but its holdings reportedly have been transferred to its parent house in Rome.

Great Britain

One of the major finds of recent years occurred when twenty-seven letters signed by Toussaint Louverture surfaced in Scotland. They date from the summer of 1798 and concern the black leader's negotiations with General Thomas Maitland to have the British forces of occupation evacuate Saint Domingue. Although duplicates of these items exist in Paris, they occasionally differ from the text of the originals, and herein lies the great interest of the new find. While Toussaint was pretending to the French government that he was acting as a loyal vassal, he was negotiating with the British as an independent ruler. Descendants of General Maitland deposited the collection in the Scottish Record Office. It also contains a considerable quantity of the general's papers from the years 1797–98 not found in the Public Record Office (PRO) that provide much valuable information unavailable elsewhere.¹³

Three other collections concerning the period 1797–98 also deserve note, especially because none of them appears in *Walne's Guide to Manuscript Sources*.¹⁴ The Devon Record Office at Exeter holds numerous papers of John Simcoe, Maitland's predecessor as commander of the British-occupied zone. Like the Steel-Maitland papers, these form a valuable supplement to the material in the PRO and throw much light on the latter stages of the war between the forces of Toussaint Louverture and the British.¹⁵ Of similar extent and nature are the papers of Edward Littlehales, General Simcoe's aide-de-camp. Part of the Spencer Bernard private collection, they illuminate the everyday life of the European troops fighting the ex-slaves.¹⁶ The same is also true of the smaller collection left by Captain James Guthrie, who served as acting quartermaster.¹⁷ His accounts yield much information about price levels in the colony, but their importance derives from the data on casualties, which fill many lacunae in the PRO statistics. All these collections, however, contain plenty of French material, and their interest extends far beyond purely military matters.

It was Britain's five-year attempt to conquer Saint Domingue that generated the enormous documentation on the revolution to be found in the Public Record Office, making it the second most important reposi-

tory in this respect after the Archives Nationales. All the series relating to the occupation have now received at least cursory attention,¹⁸ but some material lying outside this subject might be noted. The records of the High Court of Admiralty include a rich holding of captured correspondence from Saint Domingue much larger than that in the Jamaica Archives.¹⁹ Coming from mailbags, it provides detailed pictures of particular regions at specific moments. For instance, it contains nearly four hundred letters posted in the Port-au-Prince region around January 1793, when political divisions were sharpening and the voodoo priest Hyacinthe was gaining prominence in the surrounding countryside. Bernard Foubert's analysis of soldiers' letters from the Cayes region exemplifies what excellent use can be made of such material.²⁰

Rhodes House Library at Oxford has recently acquired two volumes of correspondence on the Caribbean by British War Minister Henry Dundas.²¹ These include a section on Saint Domingue that supplements the existing Dundas material in the PRO, British Library, National Library of Scotland, and the collection of Gabriel Debien. Rather surprisingly, the British Library also contains a brief miscellany of official correspondence from Santo Domingo dating from 1792–93. All the items, which largely concern relations between the Spaniards and the black rebels, can be found also in either Simancas or Seville. They include letters by the governor, the archbishop, and Jean-François.²²

France

Despite the enormous boost given to plantation studies by Gabriel Debien, far less is known about the slaves of Saint Domingue's North Province, where the great uprising of 1791 took place, than about those of its other two provinces. In his analysis of the slave population during the late colonial period, Debien provides details of thirty-three plantations in the South, nineteen in the West, and only eleven in the North, although the latter regions contained forty percent of the slaves.²³ The sources seem to be most scarce for this wealthiest part of the colony, yet much remains to be done. Unresearched plantation papers from the Plaine du Nord are to be found in the series T and AP of the Archives Nationales, in the departmental archives or municipal libraries of La Rochelle, Le Mans, Rouen, Arras, and elsewhere, as well as in private collections.²⁴ Probably the most profitable field for this kind of investigation is the huge collection of colonial notaries' papers in the Archives Nationales, Section d'Outre-Mer. Thirty years ago, M. R. Richard wrote an article lamenting the neglect of its untapped riches,²⁵ and the situation remains unchanged. At present we know almost nothing about the structure of the slave population that produced this greatest of revolts, let alone about any changes in its makeup or living conditions that may

have contributed to the cataclysm of 1791.²⁶ This area of study could prove to be a rewarding one.

Among the most important, yet least used, sources for the history of the entire revolution in Saint Domingue is a little-known, anonymous manuscript of some two hundred and seventy-five thousand words, entitled the *Précis historique des annales de la colonie française de Saint-Domingue depuis 1789*. . . . Part of the Debien collection, a typescript copy of it also exists in the Bibliothèque Nationale.²⁷ It is in many respects an essential counterpart to the "official history" published by the Girondin deputy Garran-Coulon, the four-volume *Rapport sur les troubles de Saint-Domingue*, which actually has been more ignored than read by writers on the revolution. The anonymous manuscript presents the subject from the standpoint of a colonist unsympathetic to the French Revolution, and yet, like the *Rapport*, it maintains a degree of objectivity that distinguishes it from many other merely polemical works. While Garran-Coulon's study ends in 1794, the *Précis Historique* continues up to the surrender of Toussaint Louverture in floréal Year Ten (May of 1802). Rich in quotations from documents, it is above all an eyewitness account by one who lived in the colony throughout the course of the revolution. Moreover, while most first-hand accounts from these years were written in Cap Français, the author of the *Précis Historique* lived in Port-au-Prince. All these factors produced a unique work well worthy of careful scrutiny.

A manuscript of comparable length and scope, although less useful, is the *Histoire de la Révolution* by the *avocat* Listré, who practiced before the Conseil Supérieur du Cap.²⁸ Unlike his legal colleagues P. M. Duboys (probable author of the *Précis*) and Moreau de Saint-Méry (author of the famous *Description* of Saint Domingue), Listré gives his prejudices full rein, and consequently, his reliability becomes suspect in parts. Even so, while his *Histoire* lacks the acuity, originality, and balanced judgment of the *Précis*, it contains much valuable information on events in the North Province and is itself vivid evidence of the blinkered and violent self-righteousness of *l'esprit colon*. Another neglected manuscript history of the revolution, written in 1800, is to be found in the Bibliothèque Municipale de Rouen.²⁹ Its author was probably from the north-west region of the colony, and certainly its most interesting pages concern the Fort Dauphin massacre. The library's collection also contains a key document devoted entirely to the subject of the massacre.³⁰ It combines an eyewitness description with a list of the victims, an analytic attempt to deduce the role of the Spaniards in the affair, and an account of life in the town during the following eight months. This document contains much information about Jean-François's army and about the relations existing between *nouveaux* and *anciens libres*. It forms a major

addition to the material on the massacre in the Spanish archives and the PRO.

United States

Two contrasting, but very important, collections have passed from private hands in the last twenty years to the library at the University of Florida at Gainesville. One consists of the papers of General Rochambeau, who commanded the French army during the bloodiest stage of Haiti's war for independence (1802–3). They exceed one thousand items, and an excellent calendar of them has been published.³¹ Less eye-catching, but potentially rather exciting, are the Jérémie Papers, notarial records from the southern region of the Grand Anse. Wills, inventories, marriage contracts, records of property transactions, and similar documents fill some eighteen boxes and are supplemented by microform copies of other notaries' records from the same region held by the Archives Nationales, Section d'Outre-Mer. On the eve of the revolution, the Grand Anse was Saint Domingue's frontier, the scene of frantic pioneer activity riding on the coffee boom of the 1780s. An isolated region with a distinct personality, it experienced the impact of the revolution in a unique way. The plantation regime survived there, embattled but largely intact, until 1802. Notarial records go back to the 1770s, but are clustered in rare abundance from the 1780s and 1790s.³² The Grand Anse is also well represented in the inventories of the Administration des Biens des Absents of the mid-1790s and in the Recensements des Biens Domaniaux of the late-1790s,³³ both held by the Section d'Outre-Mer. These documents offer an opportunity for a fascinating area study.

"Lieutenant Howard's Journal," in the Boston Public Library, has been mentioned occasionally in historical works for over fifty years, but has actually received little attention.³⁴ It is an unsigned manuscript of some fifty-five thousand words written by a British soldier named Thomas Phipps Howard, who served in the West Province between mid-1796 and early 1798. It provides valuable evidence on three subjects in particular: colonial society during the revolution, the mortality suffered by European troops, and the fighting between the Anglo-colonials and the forces of Toussaint Louverture. The journal is full of memorable images, but it becomes especially atmospheric near its end, when the futility of the British position weighed heavily on the young officer. Camped amid the overgrown ruins of the Cul-de-Sac, he paints a picture of apocalyptic desolation, well aware it would be the epitaph of slave-owning Saint Domingue. "Unhappy colony, I do not know if you merited your fate . . . I leave that to Him who in His wrath sends the destroying Angel 'to ride on the whirlwind and direct the Storm'."³⁵

NOTES

1. Beaubrun Ardouin, *Études sur l'histoire d'Haiti* (Paris, 1853–60). Horace Pauléus Sanon, *Histoire de Toussaint-Louverture* (Port-au-Prince, 1920–33).
2. Pierre Pluchon, *Toussaint Louverture: de l'esclavage au pouvoir* (Paris, 1979), which I reviewed in an article entitled "Haitian Divorce" in the *Times Literary Supplement* (London), 5 December 1980, p. 1381.
3. Definitive collections of Louverture correspondence are being compiled by Professors Joseph Boromé of The City College of New York and Michel Laguerre of the University of California, Berkeley. Many of the published versions of Toussaint's letters and related items contain substantial errors. See my article, "The Volte-Face of Toussaint Louverture," *Revue française d'histoire d'Outre-Mer* 65, no. 241 (1978):483, 488–89, 494.
4. Gérard Laurent's pioneer work, *Trois mois aux archives d'Espagne* (Port-au-Prince, 1956), is extremely disappointing because it limits itself to printing two or three items of minor interest (one already published) from the AGI collection. Spanish material relating to the later stages of the Haitian revolution, albeit tangentially, has been published in great quantity by Emilio Rodríguez Demorizi in *Invasiones haitianas de 1801, 1805, y 1822* (Ciudad Trujillo, 1955), *La era de Francia en Santo Domingo* (Ciudad Trujillo, 1955), and *Cesió de Santo Domingo a Francia* (Ciudad Trujillo, 1958).
5. Summaries of the Estado material can be found in Cristóbal Bermúdez Plata, *Catálogo de documentos de la Sección Novena del Archivo General de Indias* (Seville, 1949), vol. 1.
6. Documentos AGI-AGS 1750–99, vol. 2, Colección Incháustegui, Universidad Católica de Madre y Maestra, Santiago de los Caballeros.
7. Legajos 22/48–52, Archivo Real de Higüey, Archivo General de la Nación, Santo Domingo.
8. José Luciano Franco, *Documentos para la historia de Haití en el Archivo Nacional* (Havana, 1954).
9. Ardouin, *Études* 2:419–26.
10. In 1975 all that could be located in the archivo were photocopies of documents concerning a slave conspiracy in Hinche in March 1793. The originals were apparently in Cuba, although they do not appear in Franco's published collection.
11. Antonio del Monte y Tejada, *Historia de Santo Domingo* (Santo Domingo, 1890–92).
12. This collection's use is cited only in the brief article by H. B. L. Hughes, "British Policy towards Haiti, 1801–1805," *Canadian Historical Review* 25, no. 4 (1944):397–408, and in Thomas Ott, *The Haitian Revolution* (Knoxville, 1973).
13. GD 193, boxes 2, 3, and 6, Steel/Maitland Papers, Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh. The Toussaint material is in box 2, dossier 12.
14. Peter Walne, *A Guide to the Manuscript Sources for the History of Latin America and the Caribbean in the British Isles* (London, 1973).
15. 0/boxes 10–21, Simcoe Papers, Devon Record Office, Exeter. Also at Exeter, the well-catalogued Addington Papers contain a few relevant items. The William Clements Library at the University of Michigan possesses five volumes of Simcoe papers covering the years 1770–1824.
16. OM dossiers 7–11, Spencer Bernard Papers, property of Mrs. Phyllis Spencer Bernard, Nether Winchendon, near Aylesbury.
17. GD 188/box 28, James Guthrie collection, Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh.
18. For a general study, see my book *Slavery, War and Revolution: The British Occupation of Saint Domingue, 1793–1798* (London, 1982).
19. HCA 30/boxes 380–401, Public Records Office, London. Ships seized in the eastern Atlantic were sold in London. Because they had been sailing to Europe, they were likely to be carrying more mail than those seized nearer the West Indies, which were bound mostly for the United States and were sold locally.
20. Bernard Foubert, "Lettres de combattants aubois (1792–93) écrivant de Saint-Domingue," *La vie en Champagne* 27, nos. 292 and 293 (Oct./Nov. 1979): These articles are an abridgement of a larger work which is to be published in *Annales d'histoire de la Guadeloupe*.
21. West Indies Mss. s. 7, Rhodes House, Oxford.
22. Egerton Ms. 1794, 255–328, British Library, London.

23. Gabriel Debien, *Les esclaves aux Antilles françaises aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles* (Basse Terre, Fort de France, 1974), pp. 56–65.
24. See the very useful bibliography in *ibid.*, pp. 16–20.
25. Robert Richard, "Les minutes des notaires de Saint-Domingue," *Revue d'histoire des colonies* 35, no. 135 (1951):281–338. See also the articles by Marie-Antoinette Menier on the Archives Nationales collections: "Dépôt des papiers publics des colonies: Saint-Domingue, notariat," *Revue d'histoire des colonies* 35, no. 135 (1951):339–58; "Saint-Domingue, abornements, recensements des biens domaniaux et urbains," *Revue française d'histoire d'Outre-Mer* 44, no. 155 (1957):223–50; "Les sources de l'histoire de la partie française de l'île de Saint-Domingue aux Archives Nationales de la France," *Conjonction* 140 (Oct.-Nov. 1978):119–35; "Les sources de l'histoire des Antilles dans les Archives Nationales de la France," *Bulletin de la Société d'Histoire de la Guadeloupe* 36, no. 2 (1978):7–39.
26. For a tantalizing case study, however, see Gabriel Debien, *Etudes antillaises* (Paris, 1956), pp. 143–73.
27. Manuscrits, Nouvelles acquisitions françaises 14878–79, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. See also my attempt to identify the author by using internal evidence: "Pélagie-Marie Duboys, The Anonymous Author of the 'Précis Historique'," *Archives Antillaises* 3 (1975):5–10. The identification of Duboys would seem confirmed by the subsequent discovery in the Bibliothèque Nationale (Lk¹² 213) of a Paris publisher's prospectus entitled *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la révolution de Saint-Domingue par feu P. M. Duboys, publiés d'après les manuscrits autographes de l'auteur par M. P. Lacroix*. Prospectus (Paris, 1826). The publisher, Jéhenne, was seeking subscribers for the first of three five-hundred-page octavo volumes. The work apparently never appeared. A manuscript introduction to it, now lost, was once held by the Institut Saint Louis de Gonzague in Port-au-Prince.
28. "Histoire de la révolution et des événements de Saint-Domingue, depuis 1786 jusqu'en 1812," Ms. 1809, Bibliothèque de Nantes. The manuscript consists of 598 pages of extremely small and densely packed writing.
29. "Le paysan du Danube ou considérations . . . sur la révolution . . . de Saint Domingue par un colon de cette isle," Ms. Montbret 574, 360 pp., Bibliothèque Municipale de Rouen.
30. "Récit du massacre arrivé au Fort Dauphin le 7 juillet 1794," Ms. Leber 5847, Bibliothèque Municipale de Rouen.
31. Laura V. Monti, *A Calendar of the Rochambeau Papers at the University of Florida Libraries* (Gainesville, 1972).
32. I am told that these papers have scarcely been used, except by Zvi Loker, who has published a number of short pieces in the review *Conjonction*.
33. On the first collection, see my article, "The Slaves of British-Occupied Saint Domingue: An Analysis of the Workforces of 197 Absentee Plantations, 1796–97," *Caribbean Studies* 18, no. 1–2 (1978): 5–43. On the second, see the articles by Menier, cited above in note 25.
34. "Journal of a Voyage to the West Indies," anonymous manuscript known as "Lieutenant Howard's Journal," 3 vols. of 86, 88, and 67 pp., Boston Public Library. The author can be identified as Thomas Phipps Howard, who served with the York Hussars.
35. *Ibid.*, 3:55.