The Haitian Revolution, 1791-1804: Slave Insurgency as a Background to the Abolition of Slavery[1]

Moses Joseph Yakubu[2], Paul Abiero Opondo[3]

Abstract:

This paper examines the indocility of slaves in the fight against slavery. It re-establishes slave insurgency in the Caribbean as a key precursor for the promulgation of the Acts of Emancipation by European nations in the 19th century. The slave revolution in Haiti and insurgencies generally in other states were significant precipitators of the liberation of slaves. Unfortunately, while discussing the abolition of the slave trade, studies continue to expend much attention on initiatives such as humanitarian movements and Christian religious organisations, thereby relegating the influence of slave insurgency in Haiti to the background. Besides, one area of neglect in the reconstruction of black history, and the slave trade and its abolition, is the significance of the Haitian revolution in the emancipation process. Explanations on the emancipation of slaves have significantly excluded the Haitian insurgency. Therefore, it is the position in this paper to re-appraise the importance of slave insurgency, particularly the Haitian revolution, in the emancipation of slaves and the subsequent abolition of the slave trade. The study seeks to establish slave insurgency and its attendant wanton destruction of lives and property, as a plausible background narrative for the Acts of Emancipation. The study reveals that African slaves were not docile as they fought and revolted against human travesty. The conclusion here is that the ultimate emancipation of slaves significantly had its roots in the Haitian insurgency.

Keywords:
Slave Insurgency; Haitian Revolution; Acts of Emancipation; Africa; Caribbean.

[1] DOI: https://doi.org/10.12700/jceeas.2025.5.1.347

[2] Senior Research Fellow, Institute of African and Diaspora Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos, Nigeria; ORCID: 0000-0001-6653-8338; yakubumosesjo@gmail.com.
[3] Senior Lecturer, Department of History and Political Science, Moi University, Eldoret, Kenya; ORCID: 0000-0002-0622-9434; opondopaul1@gmail.com.

Introduction

The abolition of slavery in the 19th century had its roots in slave revolts which took place in the Dutch colony of Berbice (modern Guyana) in 1773, and the French territory of St. Dominique (Haiti) between 1791 and 1804. Throughout slavery, the Caribbean and Guianas declared the abolition of slavery in the colonies as their main objective. Though the Guyana revolt was unsuccessful as it lasted for only 10 months, it significantly, like the successful Haiti insurgency, played a major role in the abolition and/or emancipation processes. While the former protest was short-lived, the latter soared on to serve as an impetus for the freedom of black slaves across the globe [Poppe-Hennessy, J., 1967].

Existing studies have given much attention to the issue of morality as an underlying factor for the abolition of the slave trade. The recent blockbuster movie, 'Amazing Grace' depicting Wilberforce as an outstanding humanitarian who sought to abolish the trade in Africans is a good example of morality at work. Most renowned historians of the Caribbean, such as Lowell Ragatz, Eric Williams, and Selwyn, H. Carrington, are, however, critical of morality as the leading factor in the abolition of the trade in 1807. Instead, these scholars have argued with deep conviction that economics was the singular most important reason for the 1807 abolition bill [Dave Gosse, 2010].

Furthermore,

> "It would also appear that, although the French Enlightenment as a whole sounded no clarion call on abolition, there was a stream of it - quite apart from Montesquieu - epitomized in the Abbe Raynal, which had considerable influence in England. Strongly hostile to slavery was his *Histoire philosophique et politique des itablissements et du commerce des luropeens dans les deux Indes,* and, significantly, the work went through fifteen English editions between its first appearance in 1776 and 1804" [Roger Anstey, 1972].

The key to the abolition is the way in which the abolitionists conceived the tactic of using a particular, fortuitous, conjunction in Britain's politico-economic position, brought about by war, to present the abolition of up to two-thirds of the British slave trade as an elementary dictate of the national interest in time of war. To this tactic, Grenville gave wholehearted and vital support [Roger Anstey, 1972].

While discussing the abolition of the slave trade, most available literature on the subject accords ample space to the role of the abolitionists, Christian religious organisations, and the various Acts of Emancipation promulgated by Britain, France, Holland, and Spain. These studies have conspicuously neglected the background role of the Haitian revolution in the abolition process. Any serious academic discussion on the precipitating factors for the abolition of slavery cannot be void of the activism of slave insurgents in Haiti and the impact this had on other subsequent initiatives, including the Acts of Emancipation in Europe. Indeed, Claudius [2010] avers that historians should have the courage to recognize Haitian emancipation as a triumph for human liberation [Claudius, 2010: 140].

This paper reappraises the Haitian revolution as one of the principal drivers of the promulgation of the Acts of Emancipation which eventually brought an end to the slave trade towards the close of the 19th century. It seeks to establish slave insurgency as the background narrative for the declaration of the Acts of Emancipation. This study examines the appalling socio-economic conditions of slaves within the colonies and how these instigated the Haitian revolution. The Haitian revolution merits particular attention for the following reasons: first, it was the only successful slave revolt in the Americas to overturn slavocracy, and in fact, the only recorded one in modern history; second, the tremendous impact of the insurgency on other slave theatres was dramatic; the specter of revolution that it created continued to haunt slave societies long after the demise of slavery. Third, it had inspirational value for black people throughout the Americas. Fourth, the reasons behind the success of the insurgency which became a revolution provide a clearer understanding of why most slave uprisings in other areas failed. Fifth, the revolution had an international dimension because of the conflicting interests of European and American powers, which further complicated the course of events. And finally, the slave insurgency in Haiti deserves more attention because of the role played by Toussaint L'overture [Thompson, 1987].

For a better understanding of this chapter on slave insurgency in Haiti, and how this played a major role in the abolition of the hideous trade, this study is structured into the following sections:

Origin of Slave Trade;
Mode and Methods of Slave Procurement;
Impact of Slave Trade on African States;
The Middle Passage and Slave Revolts;
Understanding Slave Insurgency and the Abolition of Slavery

Origin of Slave Trade

The origins of the slave trade could be traced to the trading intercourse across the Sahara to the Mediterranean world, broadly defined to include the whole of the Muslim world north of the Sahara [Fisher, A., and Fisher, B., 1970]. Although it is not possible to give a precise date for the evolution of this trade, it is generally agreed that it became quantitatively important between the ninth and sixteenth centuries. There were different demand factors in the Mediterranean slave-receiving territories. Three main sources of demand in these territories were generally distinguishable. One of these sources, and probably the most important quantitatively was the demand for domestic slaves by affluent groups in Mediterranean urban societies. Secondly, another source of Mediterranean slave demand was the military. The building of militarily powerful states in a region with a relatively low total population imposed on the Mediterranean states at an early date the necessity to recruit soldiers from outside populations. The third source of Mediterranean slave demand was labour in agriculture and mining [Curtin, 1969]. In the late 9th century, several thousands of black slaves recruited from East Africa were employed in southern Iraq to clear agricultural land. In the 11th century, the Bahrain

community of Carmatthian sectarians was said to have employed 30,000 black slaves to do their agricultural work [Alpers, 1975]. The above factors among others played a major role in the demand and flow of slaves within the Mediterranean communities up to the nineteenth century.

That as it is, the Portuguese and Spanish oceanic voyages of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries thus introduced a new form of trade. The Oceanic voyages gave rise to the establishment of European colonies in the West Indian Islands, the American mainlands, and the Indian Ocean Islands [Rout, 1976]. The phenomenal rise in European colonies within these regions informed a new demand for Black slaves which superseded the volume of trans-Saharan demand. The newly European colonies were established based on large-scale mining and highly capitalistic agriculture in regions where Indigenous labour was either non-existent or unsuitable. The Indians could not cope with the tedious task of mining and plantain agriculture. Many of the Indians lost their lives as a result of the new diseases which the Europeans brought to the Americas. Some free or indentured labour was obtained from Europe, but the quantity fell far short of the demand. Moreso, the population situation in Spain and Portugal, the two largest owners of these colonies, was such that those countries were completely incapable of supplying labour to their colonies from internal sources [Rout, 1976].

Moreover, European immigrants to the New World were not prepared to put up with wage labour in plantation agriculture. Against this backdrop, the exploitation of colonial resources from the sixteenth century onward came to depend almost entirely on the employment of Black slave labour [Rout, 1976]. Thus, the expansion of mining and agricultural production in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean territories was accompanied by an ever-growing demand for Black slaves from Africa.

It is important to note, that the slave trade across the Sahara provided the foundation for the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Before the development of European plantation agriculture overseas, following the oceanic discoveries of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries southern European countries, particularly Spain and Portugal were already obtaining Black slaves to farm their estates through the trans-Sahara trade [Mannix & Cowley, 1962]. One can say that the Atlantic slave trade began with the shipment of slaves to Portugal and Spain, following the discovery of the sea route to West Africa by the Portuguese. So large was the importation that by 1600 there were 100,000 African slaves in Spain [Rout, 1976]. By the time the labour problems of the Americas became serious, there were already European Merchants (Portuguese and Spaniards) familiar with the slave trade from Africa. These merchants were quick to respond to the profitable opportunities created by the new situation. The Dutch, the English, the French, and the Danes came to join the Portuguese and the Castilian merchants in the slave trade.

In due course, the trans-Atlantic slave trade, which later became known as the 'Triangular trade' became an elaborate organized trade. Ships were specially constructed for the regular shipping of slaves from Africa to the slave-receiving territories. Firearms, Spirits, attractive textile materials, trinkets, and metal wares of all

types were assembled by European merchants and were carried to Africa in exchange for slaves [Inikori, 1977]. The consumption incentives provided by these commodities commanded the creative response of African entrepreneurs who ensured the regular flow of slaves to the coastal regions, where the slaves were being assembled and arranged like sardines in European ships onward to the Americas.

Acquisition of slaves

Between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries, thousands of people were denied their fundamental rights such as liberty, freedom of movement, and association, and were sold as slaves to Arab and European merchants [Roger Anstey, 1975]. The Arab and European merchants acquired these slaves through various sources. Individuals who were described as anti-social elements within the African society were sold into slavery. These anti-social elements were people who committed some very serious crimes including witchcraft and murder. By way of punishment, these individuals were being sold into slavery. Crimes carrying the penalty of sale into slavery in foreign lands were those that usually carried the death penalty. Thus, since those found guilty of crimes carrying the death penalty were sold into slavery, after impartial legal processes, the external slave trade could be said to have simply taken the place of the guillotine [Roger Anstey, 1975].

Slaves were also acquired through religious institutions [Roger Anstey, 1975]. Like many pre-industrial societies, witchcraft in some African societies carried the death penalty. During the slave trade period it became a general practice to sell into slavery people found guilty of witchcraft. The quantitative importance of this source of slave supply for external trade tended to depend on the deliberate manipulation of the processes evolved by those in charge of the religious institutions, under the influence of the slave trade itself. A good example is the use by the Aro people of their famous oracle to provide slaves for the external trade [Thompson, 1987]. Thus, many innocent people were sold into slavery through such religious institutions.

The sale of relatives at times for extreme economic distress is usually cited as another source of slave supply for external trade [Thompson, 1987]. While some isolated cases of this category may have occurred, this source could not conceivably have been quantitatively important. For one thing, the low ratio of population to cultivable land must have made such institutions very rare, and probably restricted to drought zones. Even in the drought zones and wherever such situations may have arisen once in a long while, the institution of the extended family, which has always functioned in African societies as a kind of social welfare institution, must have sufficiently alleviated the consequent hardship to make the sale of relatives uncommon.

More importantly, the bulk of the people sold into slavery were acquired by force through warfare, raids and kidnapping [Rodney, 1972]. There is a growing body of evidence in this regard which makes the view indisputable. The large number of boys and girls among the slaves exported as shown by extant shipping records can only be explained in terms of forceful capture. The narratives of victims of the export trade

such as Olaudah Equiano show unmistakably the quantitative importance of forceful capture as a source of slave supply for the export trade [James, 1970]. The most telling piece of evidence is the very high preference of slave suppliers for firearms. The private records of the European slave merchants show very clearly that in the eighteenth century, every slave supplier in West Africa demanded that there should be as many firearms and as much ammunition in the assortment of goods employed in exchange for each slave as the ship captain could reasonably afford [Rodney, 1972]. Infact, for every slave sold to the Europeans, about three to five guns and large quantities of gunpowder were always included in the assortment of goods employed in exchange [Rodney, 1972]. This close connection between firearms and slaves shows very strongly that slaves were acquired largely by military actions, raids, and kidnapping. The brutal experience of slaves became worsened during shipment and movement to the Americas. This further contributed to subsequent revolts which took place in different colonies.

The middle passage and black settlements in the new world: A gory experience

It is imperative to examine the experiences of the slaves onboard European ships and within their various settlements, and how these instigated a series of revolts, as this would further help our understanding of the harsh conditions and sufferings of African slaves. Besides, it has become conventional wisdom that, for black slaves, the Atlantic was a physical and cultural divide. "Slavery", as observed by the prominent black writer, Alain Locke in 1936 [Uya, O., 1976].

> "not only physically transplanted the Negro, it cut him off from his cultural roots, and by taking away his language, abruptly changing his habits, putting him in the context of a strangely different civilization, reduced him, so to speak, to a cultural zero."

The horrors of the middle passage began with the actual sale of slaves in the coastal markets of Africa. At the coastal markets, the ship surgeons examined the slaves one at a time. The sick, old, and very young Africans were rejected, while the fit and able-bodied ones were purchased, and stored in the factories awaiting the arrival of a ship to transport them across the "endless body of water." Following the arrival of a ship, the slaves were shackled together and packed "into dark dungeons, squeezed together between the decks of stinking ships, separated often from their kinsmen, tribesmen, and speakers of the same languages [Uya, O., 1976]. So tightly packed were some of the ships that some writers have been forced to use the word "sardine" to describe the situation.

The slaves remained below the deck except when they came on the heavily guarded main deck and forecastle for meals, which they did twice a day [Klein, H., 1969]. The regular meal was porridge "made of ground Indian corn sometimes flavoured with salt, male Guetta pepper, and palm oil." Some female slaves were allowed to eat on the

quarter deck with the crew. Moreso, in the words of Alexander Falconbridge, a ship surgeon "glass beads" were issued to women to entice them to have sexual intercourse with the white crew [Uya, 1976]. Debauchery and sexual exploitation of female slaves were rampant on the ships. These practices strained the loyalty of some of the African women. Thus, a former slave, Ottobah Cugoano, reported several instances when slaves planned "to turn and blow up the ships, and perish altogether in the flames" and were betrayed by some of the country women who slept with some of the head men of the ship.

That as it is, the sanitary conditions in the ships were appalling. The ventilation in the ship was poor and thus there was excessive heat. According to Alexander Falconbridge, "the deck, that is, the floors of their rooms were so covered with blood and mucous: it is not in the power of the human imagination to picture a situation more dreadful and disgusting." The ships were usually rat-infested. Most of the crew, according to Hugh Crow, were "the very dregs of the community" – jail breakers, criminals", people of desperate character and abandoned habits" who wished to escape creditors [Uya, 1976].

The mortality and morbidity rates were very high for both crew and slaves. During the passage, according to Captain Thomas Philip, many were sick of dysentery, while a high number died, and were thrown into the ocean [Uya, 1976]. There were high incidents of smallpox, measles, and other communicable diseases. Food and water supplies were usually contaminated by infected persons. Going by the mortality rate in ships and the length of the voyage, the Portuguese described the slave ships as *tumbeiros* (*"*Floating coffins"). It is clear, however, that the middle passage was as hazardous for the European crew as it was for the slave cargo. Captain John Newton opined "that at least one-fifth part of those who went from England to the Coast of Africa, in ships which traded for slaves, never returned from hence" [Klein, 1969].

Despite the dehumanizing conditions of the ships and the sufferings experienced during the middle passage, the slaves did not allow their minds to be obliterated. With the tight security on the ships and manacles on both hands and feet of the slaves, the slaves organized and embarked on several hundred revolts against the crew. In Harvey Wish's analysis in 1937, at least there were two revolts a year for the period 1699 and 1799 [Uya, 1976]. A study of slavers emanating from the French seaport of Nantes by the French historian, Gaston Martin, shows that between 1714 and 1744 revolts occurred on an average of about one every fifteen trips or just over one and a half per year [Uya, 1976]. Daniel Mannix uncovered 300 references to slave insurrections among which he included successful attempts by the "natives" to "cut off" departing slavers [Mannix & Cowley, 1962]. Captain John Newton and Alexander Falconbridge submitted that the slaves planned to take over ships during voyages. Newton affirmed in his log, "that slaves were frequently plotting insurrections. Newton later became a vigorous abolitionist minister.

The middle passage was unquestionably a jarring and brutal experience, both physically and emotionally for the slaves. The middle passage was a bridge through

which the enslaved Africans found their way to the New World. In the Americas or elsewhere slaves continued to experience untold hardship. Though the Atlantic slave trade was the agency through which people of African extraction arrived in the new world, they were treated as sub-human and massively exploited. For example, in the Caribbean and other places, slaves contributed to the development of the sugar economy. The black population, the majority of whom were slaves from Africa also cultivated crops such as coffee, cocoa, and cotton. The colonies were designated territories to be exploited for the benefit of Europe. Eric Williams' *Capitalism and Slavery* [Williams, 1961], demonstrates how Africans helped to create the economic foundations for the Industrial Revolution. Mannix and Cowley point out in *The Black Cargoes*, "that the slave trade led to an accumulation of capital in ruthless hands, and much of the capital was reinvested in textile mills, foundries, coal mines, quarries, canals, and railways [Mannix & Cowley, 1961]

In addition to the main economic activities cited above, Africans provided several other services to the colonies. They performed all the menial tasks. They were employed as domestics, grave diggers, errand boys, boat hands, and the like. In the territories of Dutch Guiana, they were employed as beasts of burden to draw carriages in which ladies were seated [Mannix & Cowley, 1961]. Africans also performed important services as coopers, blacksmiths, carpenters, and Masons. All the torts built in the various territories resulted from the employment of Africans in large numbers. Another group of Africans fought as military auxiliaries in times of European warfare in the Caribbean. Very few of these men became members of European regular forces and advanced to positions of prominence, but they were not allowed to remain in the colonies, partly for security reasons [James, 1970, & Klein & Jacob, 1999].

The Europeans made every effort to prevent the blacks from rising economically. Africans were denied in theory and/or practice, the opportunity of securing their manumission. Manumission became as difficult as the plantation system developed in the various colonies. This was particularly true of Haiti, Cuba, and Guayana [James, 1970, and Klein & Jacob, 1999]. Even when manumitted, they were often prevented by discriminatory legislation from becoming important members of the propertied class within the societies. Blacks held in slavery had even less opportunity to acquire property. In situations where blacks acquired property, they were mostly confined to a few household amenities, livestock, and little cash.

Inspite of what some modern apologists of slavery suggest, slaves were badly fed, overworked, ill-treated, badly housed, and poorly clothed. Adult slaves were going about in the streets, or serving at their master's table, virtually naked in the Dutch territories of Guiana [James, 1970]. There was little incentive and less opportunity, for them to ameliorate their economic conditions.

A more disheartening situation was the promulgation of several anti-human laws within the slave societies. These laws regulated the relations between slaves and masters. For example, the French promulgated the Code Noir in 1685, while the Spaniards in 1680 brought together their various laws under a comprehensive code called the

Recoplicion de las leyes [Uya, 1976]. The most striking feature of the slave laws is that they gave the Africans little scope to ameliorate their economic and social conditions. It was only in the last years of slavery (the "period of amelioration", as it is often called) that some meaningful improvements began to be effected in the slaves' conditions.

The stereotype of the Black man would be the next focus of this sub-section. It should be noted that white racism against Blacks was not purely a function of the New World slavery. Evidence shows that even before the beginning of Atlantic slavery and certainly before the "Sugar revolution" in the Caribbean, whites entertained highly prejudicial notions towards Blacks [Rout, 1976]. The significant point to note is that the prejudices, before Atlantic slavery, were not institutionalized. The institutionalization of prejudicial notions regarding Blacks took place during the New World Slavery. Greater emphasis was placed upon the biological inferiority of Africans than on their "environmental inferiority"

Several attempts were made to show that Africans were intellectually sub-human and that they were not rational beings. The Whites thus kept the Blacks on the margin of social and economic existence. The Whites looked upon the system of slavery that they had instituted as though it was based upon permanent and divine foundations. Several precautions were taken by the Whites to ensure that the Blacks were kept in their place. Extensive police regulations, restricting the slaves from accessing certain spaces were among the most striking features of the slave laws [Rout, 1976]. All slave societies in the Caribbean and the Guianas attempted to proscribe the movement of slaves. Ideally, the Whites would have preferred to force plantation slaves to remain on the estates to which they belonged. However, since their mobility on and off the estates was essential to servicing the needs of the Whites, a compromise was effected, allowing them to move off the estates with their masters to hunt wild game [Rout, 1976]. They were expected to show subordination to all Whites, as insubordination to a master or manager was regarded as a grave offense. For striking a member of his master's household, a slave is liable to severe punishment, and even to have his arm amputated. In extreme cases, or for repeated insubordination of this kind, he would be put to death [Williams, 1961].

Against the background of brutality and the innate desire for liberty, Africans attempted various means to undermine the plantation system. African resistance to the institution of slavery was a very important feature of all the societies in question. African resistance could be categorized into two – passive and active. Passive resistance focused on non-violent activities. Under this form, there was no physical assault upon the person of the Whites. Examples were: go-slow, sham sickness, destruction or loss of various kinds of small property belonging to their masters, and suicide. Active resistance was that form which resulted in large-scale damage to the property of the Whites and also to physical assault against them. Poisoning the food of the owners and the water supplies of the estates was indulged in, especially in the French territories [Williams, 1961]. The most renowned poisoner was a maroon named Francois Macandal, who lived in Haiti around the mid-eighteenth century. Francois had some "expert" poisoners

under him. They created fear in the hearts of the Whites by the many incidents of poisoning.

A very important form of active resistance was running away from the plantations and setting up Maroon communities. These communities were usually set up with some degree of permanence and offered the Blacks the only serious alternative to White plantation society. Here, Blacks could create a new society, based upon their concepts of human freedom and dignity.

The most viable Maroon communities were located in Surinam, Haiti, Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic) Jamaica, Cuba, and Guyana. [Williams, 1961]. These were the largest colonies, geographically and demographically. Large sections of these territories remained uncultivated and often inaccessible to the Whites, and it was in these areas that the Maroon communities were established. The Maroons were sheltered by mountains, caves, or forests. In Jamaica, for instance, the mountains and caves offered security to the Maroons, while in Surinam and Guyana, the forests provided shelter and security. The Maroons were often in touch with the plantations. They frequently harassed the plantations, carting away various articles. Maroons cultivated the soil, as their main source of food. They also established some form of political authority among themselves and maintained strict discipline [Poppe-Hennessy, 1967].

The most feared Maroons were those in Jamaica and Surinam. In most instances, the Whites were forced to come to terms with them, by signing treaties guaranteeing their freedom and autonomy. The Maroons, on the other hand, agreed to allow a White superintendent or resident agent to live among them. They also agreed to return all future runaways to the Whites. After the signing of the treaty by the Jamaican government and the Maroons in 1739, the latter lost their revolutionary spirit [Poppe-Hennessy, 1967]. In 1795, there was a disagreement between the two parties, which resorted to conflict [Uya, 1976]. In the ensuing battle, the Maroons were defeated by the Whites. Following this defeat, many of them were deported to Nova Scotia and later to Sierra Leone.

Active resistance also involved slave revolts or mass uprisings of slaves on the plantations. For example, in 1522, there was an uprising in Hispaniola [Uya, 1976]. The most serious revolts occurred in the larger territories. Surinam which had the most viable maroon communities, never experienced a large-scale uprising. In Jamaica, there were more slave revolts than any other Caribbean territory. But the most serious of these (in 1760, 1765, and 1831-1832) occurred after the settlement made with the Maroons in 1739 [Uya, 1976]. In Cuba, in 1844, a supposed large-scale plot to revolt was nipped in the bud; the same happened in Demerara (Guyana) revolt in 1823. In 1816, Barbados witnessed a major uprising [Uya, 1976].

Understanding slave insurgency and the abolition of slavery

In the history of revolts against slavery in the various colonies in the Americas and elsewhere around the New World, the Haitian revolution stands out as the only successful insurrection that significantly influenced the emancipation process in the 19th

century. Its success in upturning slavocracy ignited a series of revolts in slave colonies and strengthened the global movement for the abolition of the slave trade. While other factors also influenced the abolitionist movement, slave insurgency, particularly the Haitian Revolution, signified the beginning of the end of slavery in the Caribbean and around the world.

The revolution was driven by both external and internal factors [Franklin Knight, [2000]. Externally, the fervour of the French Revolution for "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity" influenced Haiti. Like the French-speaking people in Europe, the Haitians sought socio-economic and political emancipation from their slave masters. The principles of the French Revolution alienated some sections of opinion in England and produced opponents. More importantly, the revolt occurred against a backdrop of frosty Anglo-French relations, and deteriorating Franco-American relations.

Internally, the revolution was fueled by the unbearable conditions in the colony. The arrogance of the planter class; the ill-treatment of African slaves and mulatto freemen, and the oppressive treatment of the lower orders by the poor whites created deep societal divisions. The accumulated grievances of these various groups provided the major causes of the revolt.

Towards the end of the 18th century, slaves in St. Dominque initiated their plans and held nocturnal meetings in the forests, waiting for the right time to strike. They observed their masters engaged each other in an internecine struggle and familiarized themselves with revolutionary literature. The arrival of the French troops from revolutionary France in 1791, who embraced the mulattos and blacks, signaled that the French had conceded equality to all. This backdrop led slaves in Port-au-Prince to seize arms and revolt, though their initial attempts were crushed by the National Guard under the leadership of Marquis de Caradeux.

On the night of August 22, 1791, under the leadership of Voodoo Priest Boukman, the leaders of the revolt assembled at the Mourne Rouge, where Voodoo incantations and prayers were rendered, marking the beginning of the beginning of the revolt. C.L.R James captured the essence of their resolve in a prayer:

> *The God who created the sun which gives us light, who rouses the waves and rules the storm, though hidden in the clouds, watches us. He sees all that the white man does. The god of the white man inspires him with crime, but our god calls upon us to* do *good works, our god, who is good to us, orders us to revenge our wrongs. He will direct our arms and aid us. Throw away the symbol of the god of the whites, who has so often caused us to weep, and listen to the voice of liberty, which speaks in the hearts of us all.* [James, 1970].

Freed blacks and Mulattos, seeing the slaves in arms, joined the uprising. Leaders such as Dessalines, Toussaint, and Christopher emerged, with Mulatto leaders including Riguad and Petion forming a second front against the French [Ferrer Ada, 2012]. The Island, originally known to its indigenous inhabitants as Haiti but renamed Hispaniola

by the Spanish, became the battleground for a twelve-year struggle. The ex-slaves defeated the French, Spanish, and British expeditions by 1803, leading to the declaration of the independent state of Haiti, which was eventually recognized by most countries [James, 1970].

General Toussaint L'overture also known as Black Napoleon was a remarkable leader who played a vital role in the success of the Haitian Revolution. He built a disciplined army from the degraded and brutalized slaves, transforming the entire society into the independent state of Haiti. He worked tirelessly to improve the economy and security of St. Domingue, restored the plantation system with paid labour, and negotiated trade treaties with Britain and the United States. His automist constitution named him governor for life, but his capture and subsequent death in April 7, 1803, did not end the revolution. Instead, it galvanized the revolutionaries to fight even harder for their liberty. Following his death, Dessalines, the Chief General of the War of 1803, urged his soldiers to continue to fight, leading to the successful conclusion of the Haitian Revolution in 1804.

The Haitian revolution should thus be regarded as the harbinger of the liberation of slaves and the ideology of subjugation of the blacks [Jeremy Teow, 2018]. Haiti played a fundamental role in providing the impetus for the abolition of the slave trade and the recognition of the rights of all humanity. As Fergus Claudius argued, "The recognition of the Haitian Revolution as a major contribution to universal freedom was a fundamental fact. During the latter-nineteenth century, with the end of most of Europe's enslaved systems behind him, Karl Marx acknowledged the universalistic hope of freedom that the Haitian Revolution had unleashed [Claudius, 2010. Marx saw the Haitian Revolution as pivotal in the struggles for world liberation and the persistent class-race antagonisms between enslavers and the enslaved. Haiti's emancipation wars provided the critical arguments that ultimately undermined the anti-abolitionist defenses, demonstrating that the Haitian Revolution was a blessing to abolitionists and a pivotal moment in the fight for universal freedom [Claudius, 2010].

Conclusion

It is inferred here that the Haitian revolution was one of the precipitating factors for the abolition of the slave trade and slavery as an institution. Just like the growth and spread of liberal ideas from the second half of the 18th century gave credence to both the American and French revolutions and also favoured the abolition of slavery, and the Industrial Revolution, which influenced the use of machines for production and relegated human labour, so also, the Haitian revolution evolved as a challenge to slavery and the slave trade in its entirety. Slave insurgency in Haiti revealed the indocility and capabilities of slaves in challenging the loathsome existing status quo.

It is further deduced that after several centuries of slavery and dehumanized activities against African slaves, the latter evolved as major actors in addressing their precarious situation which subsequently provided plausible explanations for the abolition of slavery. This chapter has thus added to the body of knowledge on the abolition of the

trans-Atlantic slave trade and affirms that intellectual discourses on the slave trade and the dismantling of the institution of slavery cannot be void of slave revolts or insurgencies, particularly the Haitian Revolution. The chapter demonstrates that the independence of Haiti gradually translated to freedom for slaves in all the colonies. Freedom thus became established through Acts of Emancipation promulgated by the British in 1833, the French and Danes in 1848, the Dutch in 1863, and the Spaniards in 1873.

Conflict of Interest

The authors hereby declare that they have no financial interest in this manuscript.

Notes on Contributors

Dr. Moses Yakubu is a scholar with well over ten years of experience in the academia. He once worked at the Lagos State University, Ojo, and University of Benin before transferring his services to the University of Lagos, Akoko. He specialises in peace and conflict studies (military history) and women and gender studies. He has published several articles in reputable journals and books. His presentation is historical and analytical. Presently, he is working on some aspects of colonial Lagos.

Dr Paul Abiero Opondo is the former Head of Department of History and Political Science at Moi University holds a BEd degree (1991) and M.Phil. (1997) degree in African History from Moi University. He has a PhD from UNISA Pretoria, South-Africa (2011). He has been a lecturer in KIE in Kigali Rwanda (2001-2006), a vising AMAS Lecturer at Edurado Mondlane University in Maputo Mozambique (2019), visiting lecturer University of Lagos (2023), and is currently a Senior Lecturer in African History at Moi University, Kenya. He also teaches post-graduate courses in Diplomacy and Foreign Relations mainly Economic Diplomacy.

References

Alpers, E. (1975). *Ivory and slaves in East Central Africa: Changing patterns of international trade to the late nineteenth century*. Heinemann.

Anstey, A. (1972). A re-interpretation of the abolition of the British slave trade, 1806-1807. *The English Historical Review*, *LXXXVII*(CCCXL), 308.

Anstey, R. (1975). *The Atlantic slave trade and British abolition, 1960-1810*. Macmillan.

Claudius, F. (2010). The bicentennial commemorations: the dilemma of the abolitionism in the shadows of the Haiti revolution. *Caribbean Quarterly*, *56*(1), 139-158.

Curtin, P. D. (1969). *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A census*. Madison.

Dave, G. (2010). Slavery, memory and meanings: the Caribbean and the bicentennial of the passing of the British abolition of the trans-Atlantic trade in Africans. *Caribbean Quarterly*, *56*(1), 1.

Ferrer, A. (2012a). *Freedom's mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the revolution*. Cambridge University Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139333672

Ferrer, A. (2012b). Haiti, free soil and anti-slavery in the revolutionary. *The American Historical Review*, *117*(1), 40-66. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr.117.1.40

Fisher, A. G., & Fisher, B. J. (1970). *Slavery and Muslim society in Africa: the institution of Sahara and Sudanic Africa and the trans-Saharan trade*. C Hurst & Co Publishers.

Inikori, J. E. (1977). The import of firearms into West Africa, 1750-1807: a quantitative analysis. *Journal of African History*(2).

James, C. L. R. (1970a). *The Atlantic slave trade and slavery*. Amistad.

James, C. L. R. (1970b). *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. Vintage Books.

Klein, H., & Jacob, K. (1999). *The Atlantic slave trade, 103-110*. Cambridge University Press.

Klein, H. S. (1969). *The middle passage. Princeton*. University Press.

Knight, W., F. (2000). The Haitian revolution. *The American Historical Review*, *105*(1), 103-155. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/2652438

Mannix, D., & Cowley, M. (1962). *Black cargoes: A history of the Atlantic slave trade*. Viking Press.

Poppe-Hennessy, J. (1967). *Sins of the fathers: a study of the Atlantic slave traders, 1441-1807*. Barnes and Noble Books.

Rodney, W. (1972). *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*. Bogle L'Ouverture.

Rout, L. B. (1976). *The African experience in Spanish America, 1502 to the present day*. Cambridge University Press.

Teow, J. (2018). Black revolt in the white mind: violence, race and slave agency in the British reception of the Haitian revolution: 1791-1805. *Australasian Journal of American Studies*, *37*(1), 87-102.

Thompson, V. B. (1987). *The making of the African diaspora in the Americans, 1441 – 1900*. Longman.

Toew, J. (2018). *The Haitian Revolution: A concise history*. Harvard University Press.

Uya, O. E. (1976). Slave revolts of the middle passage: A neglected theme. *Calabar Historical Journal 1*(1), 65-88.