SUGAR, SLAVES, AND REVOLUTIONARY WAVES: THE ORIGINS AND LEGACY OF THE 1811 GERMAN COAST UPRISING

by

Christian Hayes McLain

Master of Arts, History, 2023

Master's Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of

AddRan College of Liberal Arts

Texas Christian University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

History, MA

Spring Semester

2023

APPROVAL

SUGAR, SLAVES, AND REVOLUTIONARY WAVES: THE ORIGINS AND LEGACY OF THE 1811 GERMAN COAST UPRISING

by

Christian Hayes McLain

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

This paper highlights an incredibly understudied yet vitally important event in Louisiana's history—the 1811 German Coast Uprising. Before January 1811, slave rebellion weighed heavily on the minds of Louisiana citizens. The diverse and complex social environment led to racial and ethnic divisions. Louisianans avoided major slave uprisings for quite some time, but racialized tensions heightened significantly after 1791 with the success of the Haitian Revolution. The territory finally succumbed to slave revolution when Charles Deslondes, a slave on the Manuel André plantation, called upon his fellow enslaved Africans to overthrow their masters and demand their freedom. This paper analyzes the environment in present-day Louisiana and beyond in the years preceding 1811, the factors that contributed to the outbreak of rebellion, the suppression of the rebellion in popular history and memory, and the overall ramifications of the slaves' efforts to obtain autonomy and basic human rights.

INTRODUCTION

Donning 19th-century colonial garb and chanting messages of emancipation to the sound of African drums, hundreds of black activists marched alongside the wild, curving Mississippi River towards the great city of New Orleans in an organized and purposeful fashion. The scene described here is not only one of antebellum Louisiana but also of the 21st century. Beginning in 2019, artist Dread Scott and filmmaker John Akomfrah organized a reenactment of the 1811 German Coast Uprising. This reenactment and commemoration, now an annual event attracting participants from all around the country as well as significant media coverage, began with a realization by Scott and Akomfrah that this event, often described as one of the largest slave revolts in American history, was not as well-known and discussed as it should be.

In a YouTube video titled "The Largest Slave Rebellion was Hidden from U.S. History," Dread Scott says that the people who participated in the 1811 German Coast Uprising are "heroes" whose "history needs to be known." Even though some historians have recently begun writing about the event, the true story of this vitally important event in American history eludes popular history. This is due primarily to a purposeful suppression of the story immediately following the rebellion and a host of inaccurate, misleading, and unjust accounts by certain historians regarding the motives and actions of the rebel slaves and the overall ramifications of their decision to rebel.

With a past wracked by resistance and rebellion and an enduring general division among most of its inhabitants, Louisiana has a relatively chaotic history. Initially claimed and settled for France by René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle in the late seventeenth century, Spain eventually received the Louisiana territory in 1763 following the Seven Years' War. Unfortunately for the French and Spanish Empires, neither committed the necessary resources,

people, and attention to see the burgeoning colony thrive and yield profits. This vast territory, marked by its humid climate and diverse population, only realized its full potential in the international economy when the United States acquired it in 1803 following the Louisiana Purchase.

Plantation-style agriculture came to dominate the Lower Mississippi Valley. With farmers taking advantage of the nutrient-rich soil and the steady rise of agricultural success, scores of planters bought land along the river in hopes of raising cash crops like cotton, indigo, and, especially, sugarcane. To ensure economic success through plantation-style agriculture, planters relied on enslaved Africans, living in the territory as early as the 1720s, to work their fields and maximize their yield and subsequent profits. In the eyes of the Louisiana planter, they could not compete economically without the hard labor of slaves. With the continued importation of African slaves to Louisiana in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, they quickly outnumbered the white population.[1]

Alongside the considerable number of free and enslaved Africans as well as French and Spanish inhabitants, Louisiana's demography splintered further in the 1750s and 1760s when a large group of French Acadians exiled from Nova Scotia made their way to Louisiana.[2] These Acadians, having lived apart from other French for so long, created a unique culture that they transferred to the territory. A few decades later, Louisiana became home to another group—French exiles from Cuba alongside free and enslaved blacks, forced to relocate following the Haitian Revolution. This particular migration weighed heavy on the minds of Louisianians, who

[1] Light Townsend Cummins, Judith Kelleher Schafer, Edward F. Haas, Michael L. Kurtz, *Louisiana: A History*, ed. Bennett H. Wall and John C. Rodrigue, 6th ed. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 9-10.
[2] Carl A. Brasseaux, *The Founding of New Acadia: The Beginnings of Acadian Life in Louisiana, 1765-1803* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 73.

feared the revolutionary ideology so prevalent in Saint Domingue would transfer to their sizeable black population.

Another ethnic group, often overlooked by students of Louisiana history, are the Germans. Early attempts to populate the vast Louisiana territory by the French generally proved unsuccessful, leading to a more concerted effort by the French and, more specifically, John Law, a Scottish economist who served as Controller General of Finances under the Duke of Orleans. Law recruited settlers and workers from France but also parts of Germany and Switzerland. German immigrants settled in Louisiana during the 1720s, claiming the area along the Mississippi River approximately 35 miles upriver from New Orleans as the German Coast—a settlement thrown into utter disarray with the outbreak of a mass slave revolt less than a century later.[3]

On December 20, 1803, William Charles Cole Claiborne became the new Governor of the Territory of Orleans, assuming control of a volatile area marked by many social and political divisions. While attempting to establish an American government and implement American laws in the face of large groups of French and Spanish in Louisiana, hardship defined Claiborne's first few years as he struggled to foster social cohesion and stability in the region. As time passed, the importation of slaves grew alongside plantation-style agriculture in Louisiana, and by 1810, the rise in enslaved Africans posed another potential threat to Claiborne's Louisiana—insurrection.

With the substantial influx of Haitian refugees to Louisiana via Cuba in 1809 came the threat of revolutionary ideology spreading among the considerable black population. This

[3] Helmut Blume, *The German Coast During the Colonial Era, 1722-1803: The Evolution of a Distinct Cultural Landscape in the Lower Mississippi Delta during the Colonial Era With Special Reference to the Development of Louisiana's German Coast*, trans. Ellen C. Merrill (Destrehan, LA: German-Acadian Coast Historical and Genealogical Society, 1990), 7-9.

dangerous ideology, paired with stories regarding the French Revolution and the insurrection in Saint Domingue, brought economic, political, and demographic instability, effectively increasing the likelihood of resistance and rebellion in Louisiana. Over 86% of homes on the German Coast had slaves, with an average of forty-three slaves per household. With the work that accompanied the widespread sugar industry so arduous and brutal, it could be argued that this stretch along the east bank of the Mississippi River remained particularly susceptible to ideologies of black liberation.[4]

The 1811 German Coast Uprising came with the end of the sugarcane harvest. Following the harvesting season, when slaves sometimes worked through the night to maximize profits for their masters, they often received a break from this laborious work at the end of the calendar year around Christmas.[5] As the slaves enjoyed this break, the masters celebrated the end of their harvest by attending social events in the homes of other planters on the German Coast and in New Orleans during the holiday season. In December of 1810, enslaved Africans on the German Coast took advantage of this time marked by a general lack of surveillance to plot their uprising. Their plans would be put into action on January 8, 1811, mounting one of the largest slave rebellions in North American history. Not only would their rebellion fail in a particularly violent fashion, but their courageous actions would be lost to history for decades to come.

This thesis addresses the historiography concerning the 1811 German Coast Uprising, establishes the environment in Louisiana and beyond in the years leading up to the event, analyzes factors that contributed to the outbreak of rebellion in early 1811, narrates the uprising itself, and evaluates the revolt's lasting impact. Chapter One focuses specifically on the

[4] Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 107-108.
[5] Richard Follett, *The Sugar Masters: Planters and Slaves in Louisiana's Cane World, 1820-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 10-13, 161-164.

environment in Louisiana. It highlights how events such as the French Revolution and the Haitian Revolution affected Louisiana, how the territory became more susceptible to large-scale slave rebellion, and how certain events might have contributed to the outbreak of rebellion on the German Coast in 1811. The French and Haitian Revolutions, cataclysmic events that remained the source of worry and anxiety for many in the area, caused many enslaved Africans to entertain the idea of replicating the success of Toussaint Loverture and his fellow Haitians in the world of south Louisiana. The white population of Louisiana, however, feared how their slaves would interpret French revolutionary ideology coming from Saint Domingue, going to great lengths to prevent the political contamination of their enslaved Africans. The importation of Haitian refugees only made matters worse, preventing Governor Claiborne's efforts to establish peace in an already divided community.

Chapter Two provides an overview of the rebellion and its harsh suppression. Although there are only a few sources that provide insight into the minds of the rebel slaves, details regarding the organization and objectives of the uprising remain abundant. Chapter Three shifts focus and examines the historical memory of the event through the analysis of newspaper articles and accounts of the time. It also assesses the overall legacy of the revolt. The paper concludes with an analysis into some of the ways in which the rebellion succeeded, even though the rebel slaves failed to achieve their ultimate goal of conquering New Orleans.

While there are now a host of detailed, fact-based accounts regarding the 1811 German Coast Uprising, there are aspects of these works that fail to provide a wide enough scope to truly understand this important event in Louisiana's history. While Junius Peter Rodriguez, Jr., and Adam Rothman both provide great insight into the rebellion's ramifications, they fall short in their analysis of Louisiana's environment leading up to the event and what factors contributed to

the uprising. While James H. Dorman and Robert Paquette, in their respective works on the rebellion, highlight the environment of Territorial Louisiana leading up to the rebellion, their focus is on general dissent and rebellion and therefore lacks a detailed analysis of how such an environment contributed to the outbreak of rebellion on the German Coast in 1811.[6] Albert Thrasher's work on the uprising, while containing minor errors throughout as well as a clear bias in favor of the slave rebels, remains remarkably useful for scholars examining this event through its compilation of relevant primary sources.[7] While there remain numerous works that provide a general overview or examine a specific factor of the revolt, the fact remains that previous accounts have not fully explained how and why this event occurred in Louisiana in 1811 and, perhaps most importantly, how it impacted areas near and far, influencing new legislation and possibly inspiring new instances of resistance and revolt in nearby areas and around the country.

The leaders of the revolt took great care in planning and organizing their fight for freedom. They did not rise up in an impulsive and unprepared manner as some claim. Their decision to rebel and demand liberty in the face of near-certain death took incredible courage and mental fortitude. In order to widen the scope and truly understand the 1811 German Coast Uprising, the event must be considered within the context of the larger Western world and in an extended timeline. By reexamining existing source material from a different perspective and incorporating fresh material in this extended geographical and chronological scale, I can help

[6] James H. Dormon, "The Persistent Specter: Slave Rebellion in Territorial Louisiana," *Louisiana History* 18 (1977): 389-404; Junius Peter Rodriguez, Jr., "Ripe for Revolt: Louisiana and the Tradition of Slave Insurrection, 1803-1865." (Ph.D. diss., Auburn University, 1992); Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Robert L. Paquette, "Revolutionary Saint Domingue in the Making of Territorial Louisiana," in *A Turbulent Time: The French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean*, eds. David Geggus and David Gaspar (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1997);
[7] Albert Thrasher, *On to New Orleans!*: *Louisiana's Heroic 1811 Slave Revolt* (New Orleans, LA: Cypress Press, 1996).

honor the memory of those who gave their lives in the uprising—as their story rightfully deserves a comprehensive and just account.

CHAPTER 1

THE ROOTS OF REVOLUTION

The 1811 German Coast Uprising, which occurred approximately 35 miles upriver from New Orleans, remains one of the largest slave rebellions in North American history, yet it's one whose origins remain debated. On the one hand, the slaves of the German Coast revolted against their masters in an act of defiance and solidarity in response to years of harsh and inhumane treatment. On the other hand, several factors played into the ideological development of the slaves of the German Coast—factors that require scholars to look beyond the plantation where this rebellion started, beyond the German Coast, beyond Louisiana, and even beyond the United States of America.

The revolutionary ideological development of these slave rebels was years in the making and more convoluted than it may first appear. The French Revolution, the Haitian Revolution, the actions of nearby French and Spanish peoples in Louisiana and West Florida, and a combination of favorable conditions—alongside inhumane treatment at the hands of their masters—all contributed to the outbreak of widespread rebellion on the German Coast in January of 1811. By analyzing certain conditions, events, and movements, as well as by situating the environment of the wider world, of New Orleans, and of other areas in Louisiana in the years leading up to the rebellion, connections between the revolutionary ideology circling Louisiana and the decision to rebel by enslaved Africans become more apparent, as do the origins of this important event in the history of the early American republic.

While many in the Orleans Territory quickly blamed Spanish, French, or Haitian influence in the igniting of the 1811 German Coast Uprising through revolutionary ideology, Governor Claiborne—in letters, official reports, and newspapers—purposefully stripped the rebellion of

wider geopolitical significance and instead blamed basic black delinquency. By considering this event in the context of the wider world and by looking back before American rule in Louisiana, we may resituate the uprising's geopolitical ties and significance and better understand the factors that contributed to the outbreak of rebellion.

The most direct link that can be made to the rebellion is perhaps the 1791 Haitian Revolution, but to understand the wider scope and influence of the Haitian Revolution, one must consider a rather significant event that occurred just a few years prior—the French Revolution. Radical countrywide political and social upheaval characterized the French Revolution from 1789 to 1799 and resulted in the dismantling of the monarchy and of feudalism while promoting ideas of liberty, equality, and fraternity.[8] As the early nineteenth-century German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel observed, the French Revolution was "World-Historical,"—meaning it changed history on a global scale.[9]

French colonies around the world felt the impact of the French Revolution and its radical ideals. Places where people of French descent resided outside of the French Empire also felt the impact, including and especially the area that would be the future state of Louisiana. The ideas and movements associated with the French Revolution plagued Spain's administration, which ruled Louisiana from 1763-1803. With the Spanish Empire heavily preoccupied with the Anglo-Spanish wars, they could not seriously attend to the potentially dangerous ideology stirring among Louisiana's residents. The Spanish representative at Natchez and future governor of Louisiana, Colonel Don Manuel Gayoso, remarked that the French in Lower Louisiana "have communicated with France and … hear with the greatest pleasure of the revolution in that

[8] Suzanne Desan, Lynn Hunt, & William Max Nelson, *The French Revolution in Global Perspective* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 1-2.
[9] Georg W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956), 285.

kingdom. Especially do the inhabitants of New Orleans and its vicinity conceal but little their mode of thinking. I fear that if war were declared on France, we would find but few inhabitants of Lower Louisiana who would sincerely defend the country from any undertaking of that nation."[10]

The French Revolution impacted the jewel in the crown of the French Empire, Saint Domingue, the hardest, where the large slave population fully adopted a version of the message and mission of those in mainland France. In 1767 alone, Saint Domingue exported 123 million tons of sugar, two million tons of cotton, and a million tons of indigo. In 1789, Saint Domingue "received in its ports 1,587 ships … employing 24,000 sailors," with its trade accounting for nearly £11 million—over double the amount of Britain's colonial trade that same year. Nearing the end of the 18th century, many considered Saint Domingue the "market of the new world" and undoubtedly the French Empire's most important colony. However, achieving this level of production came at a steep cost.[11]

A darker and more twisted reality existed beneath the image of wealth and riches associated with Saint Domingue. Sugar, cotton, and indigo, the crops that made Haiti the cash cow of the French Empire, required strenuous and grueling labor at an excessive level. This kind of work, which no human should have been forced to endure, fell on the backs of Saint Domingue's African slaves. Try as they might, the island's slave owners could not force this degree of work without experiencing resistance.

---

[10] Manuel Gayoso de Lemos, "Political Condition of the Province of Louisiana," Archivo General de Indias, Papeles Procedentes de Cuba 313, July 5, 1792, translated in James Alexander Robertson, ed., *Louisiana Under the Rule of Spain, France, and the United States, 1785-1807: Social, Economic and Political Conditions of the Territory Represented in the Louisiana Purchase*, 2 vols. (Cleveland, 1911), I:283.

[11] C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1989), 45-50.

Alexandre-Stanislas, Baron de Wimpffen, a French nobleman that undertook a tour of Saint Domingue from 1788 to 1790, observed obvious resentment from the slaves towards their owners when by themselves, claiming that "one has to hear with what warmth and what volubility, and at the same time with what precision of ideas and accuracy of judgment, this creature … tells stories, talks, gesticulates, argues, passes opinions, approves or condemns both his master and everyone who surrounds him." Even more telling is the meaning of the African chant "Eh! Eh! Bomba! Heu! Heu! Canga, bafio té! Canga, mouné de lé! Canga, do ki la! Canga, li!," sung by slaves years before the Haitian Revolution. The English translation: "We swear to destroy the whites and all that they possess; let us die rather than fail to keep this vow."[12] In August 1791, the slaves of Saint Domingue, motivated by their harsh conditions and radical ideas of the French Revolution, took up arms and demanded their freedom through violence. According to one planter, their attacks "spread like a torrent."[13]

The rebel slaves overthrew their rulers and set sugar plantations aflame, steadily building momentum as they marched. One planter, obviously unaware of their central role in triggering this uprising, remarked that the slaveowners of the colony "cannot come to know … [the] motor that powers them and keeps powering them …."[14] Eight days into the revolution, the slave army caused a substantial amount of damage, toppling almost 200 sugar plantations. Just a few months later, over 20,000 of Haiti's inhabitants had joined the cause.[15] They did not know it yet, but these slaves had initiated arguably the most profound revolution in the history of the Western world. Over the next twelve years, these rebels fought and defeated their former masters,

---

[12] James, *The Black Jacobins*, 18.
[13] Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 100.
[14] Pierre Mossut to Marquis de Gallifet, September 19, 1791, in Laurent Dubois & John D. Garrigus, *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804: A Brief History with Documents*, 94.
[15] Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 113.

soldiers of the French empire, a Spanish invasion, and a British expedition of over 60,000 men.[16] But their greatest challenge was the infamous armies of the French emperor, Napoleon Bonaparte.

Bonaparte envisioned France's empire in the Western world centered on Saint Domingue, with the North American colony of Louisiana, once acquired from Spain in 1802, as the breadbasket for the sugar colony. He provided his brother-in-law and right-hand man, Charles Victor Emmanuel LeClerc, a force of 42,000 men to subdue Saint Domingue.[17] LeClerc landed in Saint Domingue expecting an easy victory, and in the first few months, he achieved those expectations. Within ten days of arrival, the French controlled most of the island's ports and cities, and within three months, they controlled nearly the entire island and forced the main Haitian generals—including Toussaint L'Ouverture—to lay down arms. But fate came to the rebels' aid. Yellow fever ravaged the French army, and by the end of 1802, LeClerc himself, along with half of the French forces, fell prey to the disease. Just over a year later, the rebel forces of St. Domingue had driven what remained of Bonaparte's soldiers out of the country, with over 80% of the French army sent there dying on the island.[18]

Following the retreat of Bonaparte's forces, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, one of the chief figures of the revolution and eventual ruler of Haiti, declared the eternal liberty of Haiti: "Let us imitate those people who, extending their concern into the future and dreading to leave an example of cowardice for posterity, preferred to be exterminated rather than lose their place as one of the world's free peoples."[19] The vast Atlantic world of shipping and slavery, of

---

[16] Nathalie Dessens, *From Saint-Domingue to New Orleans: Migration and Influences* (Gainsville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2007), 12-14.
[17] Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 251-260.
[18] Paul Lachance, "Repercussions of the Haitian Revolution in Louisiana," in David P. Geggus, *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), 210.
[19] Jean-Jacques Dessalines, "The Haitian Declaration of Independence", January 1, 1804, in Dubois & Garrigus, *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean,* 188.

commerce and capital, could not help but take notice of this monumental achievement. While a republic in the New World would certainly have been ideal, Bonaparte was forced to focus elsewhere, simply unable to afford the massive costs of maintaining France's sugar colonies in the New World. With Haiti in flames, he saw relatively little use for his other newly acquired colony, Louisiana.

Guarding the outlet into the Gulf of Mexico and, therefore, controlling nearly all interior trade in North America west of the Appalachians, New Orleans—and, by extension, the entire Louisiana territory—held intrinsic valuable. Thomas Jefferson and his fellow republicans recognized the geopolitical importance of the region to the United States' future. While the outcome of the Haitian Revolution played a massive role in Bonaparte's decision to sell Louisiana to the United States, the demise of Saint Domingue and the rise of a free Haiti also wrought radical change in America and, especially, Louisiana.

In a letter to Rufus King, the U.S. Minister to Great Britain, Jefferson relayed his concerns, stating that "the course of things in the neighbouring islands of the West Indies appears to have given a considerable impulse to the minds of slaves in different parts of the U.S.," and a "great disposition to insurgency has manifested itself among them."[20] Planters in Louisiana, however, saw the opportunity that the Haitian Revolution afforded and quickly began transforming their land to suit sugar production to replace what Saint Domingue once supplied. An influx of Haitian refugees added to the momentum. By 1802, a mere seven years after the first planter converted his entire plantation to sugar, Louisiana boasted seventy sugar plantations producing over 3,000 tons of sugar per year.[21] In a few short years, Louisiana grew from a small

[20] Thomas Jefferson, "To the U.S. Minister to Great Britain," July 13, 1802, in Dubois & Garrigus, *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean*, 162.
[21] Lachance, "Repercussions of the Haitian Revolution in Louisiana," in Geggus, *Impact of the Haitian Revolution*, 210.

borderland colony centered on cotton and indigo to the peak of the plantation economy in the United States—one that revolved around sugar and slaves.[22]

French planters like Jean Noël Destrehan worked to build a new Saint Domingue on the shores of the Mississippi by exploiting the large enslaved African population and raking in the profits. However, they did not realize the extent to which they also created the conditions that allowed the Haitian revolution to occur. After observing several sugar estates, one traveler in Louisiana described the work as "intensely trying" and that "nothing but involuntary servitude could go through the toil and suffering required to produce sugar."[23] Neither the American immigrants who rushed into Louisiana following its purchase by Thomas Jefferson nor the large population of French and German planters already established there fully realized the dangers that threatened their economic prosperity and general peace. The white planters of New Orleans, the German Coast, and other neighboring areas also failed to realize how their own history of organized resistance and revolt might affect the mindset of enslaved Africans working their plantations, possibly even serving as inspiration for their future uprising in 1811. One of the most notable events came shortly after Spain formally took possession of Louisiana from France in 1766 and is commonly referred to as the Creole Revolt or the Revolution of 1768.

With the end of the Seven Years' War and the Treaty of Paris in 1763, France surrendered all of Louisiana to Spain, effectively removing the French from all of North America—apart from their colony in Saint Domingue. From the very onset of Spanish rule in Louisiana, a large percentage of French people alongside various other groups in the colony resisted and wrestled for the continuation of their practices and power and, ultimately, for

[22] Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 325.
[23] William H. Russell, *My Diary North and South* (Boston, MA: T.O.H.P. Burnham, 1863), 259.

general autonomy.[24] The tempers and tension reached a boiling point after just two years of Spanish administration, resulting in a full-blown insurrection. According to J. Hanno Deiler, the leading historian of German communities in Louisiana at the turn of the nineteenth century, it was "on the German Coast that the revolution of 1768 began." Deiler also said that Karl Friedrich D'Arensbourg, "the patriarch of the Germans, defied the messenger of the Spanish governor" and that "surely D'Arensbourg's word and [his] influence … enabled Villeré [his grandson] to march two days later with 400 Germans upon New Orleans where the Germans took the Chapitoulas Gate." On the morning of October 29, the Germans, alongside the French, the Acadians, the militia, and many people from the city, marched on Jackson Square before the building of the Superior Council to chants of "'Vive le roi!" "Vive Louis le bien aimé!" "Vive le vin de Bordeaux!" [and] "A bás le poison de Catalogne!'"[25]

Dissatisfied with the economic policies of Don Antonio de Ulloa, the Spanish governor who lacked the military strength to enforce his unpopular decrees, the elite merchant and planter class revolted in 1768, expelling Ulloa from the colony and establishing a government that lasted ten months, during which time it tried to negotiate a retrocession of Louisiana to France. Spain, determined to keep Louisiana, dispatched an overwhelming force to New Orleans under the command of General Alexander O'Reilly, an Irishman whose severity towards the leaders of the revolt, which included the execution of two of D'Arensbourg's grandsons, earned him the nickname "Bloody O'Reilly."[26] The futile 1768 uprising of mainly French and German colonists against Spanish authority emerged as a significant event in the history of colonial Louisiana. It

[24] Cécile Vidal, *Louisiana: Crossroads of the Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 71-72.
[25] J. Hanno Deiler, *The Settlement of the German Coast of Louisiana and The Creoles of German Descent* (Philadelphia: The German American Historical Society, 1909), 45-46.
[26] René Le Conte and Glenn R. Conrad, "The Germans in Louisiana in the Eighteenth Century," *Louisiana History* 8, No. 1 (Winter 1967): 79.

marked the end of French dominance and the beginning of over thirty years under the Spanish crown. It also marked the beginning of a practice that would subsist in Louisiana for many years to come—violent resistance and sometimes outright rebellion towards perceived oppression.

Under O'Reily's administration, Louisiana truly became a Spanish colony with Spanish law, language, and policies supplanting long-held French policies. This hostile, combative response by the French and German people of Louisiana signified the transfer of power in Louisiana, but it also contributed to a wider precedent of violent resistance in Louisiana during Spanish rule and, consequentially, American rule.[27] While it is impossible to determine the degree to which this movement inspired the slaves of the German Coast in 1811—especially given that it failed,—this event did signify to slaves that their masters could be thwarted, and, at the very least, it demonstrated that even when facing almost certain defeat, organized, violent uprising can sometimes be the only means to make your voice heard.

While the Creole Revolt of 1768 marked a significant hurdle in the early days of Spanish rule in Louisiana, it would ultimately pale in comparison to the impact felt there by the Haitian Revolution years later. Don Francisco Luis Hector, Baron de Carondelet, governor of the colony from 1791 to 1797, in a letter to his brother-in-law and governor of Havana, Luis de las Casas, wrote, "Convinced of the rapidity with which the new ideas of equality and independence are spreading, which, if not stopped immediately, will cause general insurrection and the loss of the province, I decided to publish a proclamation."[28] In his proclamation on February 15, 1793, Carondelet prohibited the reading of printed material related to France as well as gatherings that

[27] Frances Kolb, "The New Orleans Revolt of 1768: Uniting against Real and Perceived Threats of Empire," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 59, no. 1 (2018), 5-39.
[28] Don Francisco Luis Hector, Baron de Carondelet to Luis de las Casas, February 15, 1793, in Janet Allured, John Keeling, and Michael S. Martin *Firsthand Louisiana: Primary Sources in the History of the State* (Lafayette, LA: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2020), 103-106.

discussed the country's political affairs.[29] Furthermore, Spain's administrators in Louisiana attempted to shield their colony's population from French loyalist uprisings and slave rebellions through the reinforcement of defenses and an increase in patrols. Carondelet even resorted to propaganda through letters, newspaper reports, and public announcements to portray the French and Haitian Revolutions at their worst.[30]

The free people of color in New Orleans, who comprised 15.5% of the population in 1788 and 19% of the population in 1805, provided the Spanish regime with another group that could potentially combine forces—internally or externally—and ride the momentum of the French and Haitian Revolution to undermine their authority.[31] Throughout the New World, free people of color held many important roles in their respective colonies. In Louisiana, for example, free people of color helped authorities establish peace and prosperity in numerous ways, fortifying the colony's defenses, keeping guard, serving in the militia, pursuing runaway slaves, and even attempting to uncover rebellious activity. There were some free blacks, however, who took the opposite stance, participating in traitorous plots with the hope of toppling the Spanish regime and reinstating more liberal laws based on the sentiments of the French Revolution. In their minds, these laws would ultimately grant free people of color more freedom and rights and maybe even abolish slavery.[32]

Considering the potential threat free blacks posed at this particular juncture, authorities closely scrutinized the words and actions of such figures in New Orleans more than usual. Many administrators in Louisiana feared that those from Saint Domingue, Cuba, and other Caribbean

---

[29] Proclamation by Carondelet, February 15, 1793, in Allured, Keeling, & Martin, *Firsthand Louisiana*, 106-107.
[30] Paul F. Lachance, "The Politics of Fear: French Louisianians and the Slave Trade, 1786-1809," in Paul Finkelman *The Slave Trade and Migration: Domestic and Foreign* (Oxfordshire, England: Routledge, 1990), 182-188.
[31] Caryn Cossé Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press), 78-79.
[32] David W. Cohen and Jack P. Greene, *Neither Slave nor Free: The Freedmen of African Descent in the Slave Societies of the New World* (Baltimore, 1972), 1-18.

colonies brought news of the somewhat chaotic Atlantic World and, with it, dangerous notions of liberty and equality to the majority black population. At one point, Governor Carondelet exiled a free man of color from New Orleans. He asserted that the man "is a native of the part of Santo Domingo that belongs to the French and is mixed up in all the intrigues and harassments of the French colony …," and concluded that "having such a character around under the present circumstances in which I am placed might produce bad results."[33]

In October 1791, authorities accused Pedro Bailly, a free New Orleans mulatto and a lieutenant in a militia unit composed of light-skinned free blacks in New Orleans, of trying to encourage free people of color to initiate a revolution similar to the one ravaging Saint Domingue. More specifically, authorities accused Bailly of approaching two free people of color and asking them specifically if they would help lead a revolt against the whites like the one in Saint Domingue, even if it came to violence. These charges did not amount to anything, however, because a month later, the accusers rescinded their testimony, leading to Louisiana Governor Esteban Miró acquitting Bailly.[34]

Two and a half years later though, with the French Revolution at its zenith, authorities accused Pedro Bailly of espousing ideas of equality between people of all colors as well as generally undermining the efforts of the Spanish administration. They also accused him of a plot in which Bailly planned to murder his free black commander to take his sport as the leader of his company. With a more convincing and solid argument and with widespread anxiety flowing through Louisiana regarding pro-French rebellious activity, Carondelet found Bailly guilty and exiled him to Havana, Cuba, where he would be imprisoned for a minimum of two years.[35]

---

[33] Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America*, 26-27.
[34] Kimberly Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1769–1803* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 152-153.
[35] Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places,* 152-153.

Indeed, the Spanish administration considered any efforts that derived from the ideals coming from the French or Haitian Revolution as dangerous. According to historian Alfred N. Hunt, the Carondelet administration considered these dangerous individuals, who often included free blacks, as "a direct link between the events in St. Domingue and … attempts to disrupt Spanish rule in Louisiana."[36]

Pedro Bailly's two cases in 1791 and 1794 provide a glimpse into the frustration experienced by free people of color in a racially divided society as well as a glimpse into their desires to achieve the ideas of liberty and equality promoted in mainland France. In addition to exemplifying the resistance that the Spanish regime faced because of the French and Haitian Revolutions, the Bailly cases and other conspiracy plots, such as those uncovered at Pointe Coupée in 1791 and 1795, point to the existence of communication networks within Louisiana and between the colony and those in the Caribbean.

The ideals that defined the French Revolution, liberté, égalité, and fraternité,[37] quickly infiltrated south Louisiana through newspaper coverage and letters and spread orally through sailors and immigrants—which included free people of color as well as the enslaved population. Free blacks met with enslaved individuals as well as whites in marketplaces, bars, shops, dance halls, billiard rooms, private homes, slave quarters, and maroon settlements to discuss the latest developments in the revolutionary world.[38] This ideology, which had already permeated the city of New Orleans and proved so dangerous for the Spanish administration to contain, found its way outside of the city—specifically to places like Pointe Coupée and, eventually, the German Coast.

---

[36] Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum American*, 26.
[37] Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana*, 20.
[38] Dessens, *From Saint-Domingue to New Orleans*, 48-50.

In 1791, Governor Miro commented on a plot at Pointe Coupée, Louisiana, roughly one hundred miles upriver from the German Coast, saying he "had supposedly unmasked free mulattoes from Saint Domingue as instigators." During the trial of the suspects, one free man of color said that he and his associates expected orders "to start a coup that would have resembled the one in Cap Français." While authorities discovered and handled this plot before any significant action could take place, it evinces how fast the events on Saint Domingue infiltrated Louisiana—even in an area like Pointe Coupée, which is relatively distant from the port city of New Orleans. Furthermore, the events in Pointe Coupée signify how fast these revolutionary ideas can catch on and materialize into something tangible and ultimately, just how treacherously fast a repressive regime can be threatened.[39]

The Pointe Coupée rebellion of 1795 represents one of the more well-documented cases of slave rebellion in the Spanish era. Multiple sources from the time cited a free man of color, Louis Benoit, for initiating the plot. Both a letter from Governor Carondelet to Las Casas in June of 1795 and an account by a prominent doctor in Louisiana, Paul Alliot, clearly lay the blame on him. Alliot described Benoit as "… an inhabitant of New Orleans, famous at Jérémie, on the island of Saint-Domingue, for his murders, thefts, and devastations" and claimed that he convinced the slaves to rebel by revealing to them the success of the revolution in the island and the advantages the former slaves now enjoyed in Saint Domingue.[40] Spanish authorities declared Louis Benoit "ungovernable" and "audacious" and banished him from the colony.[41] Trial records alongside the testimonies of rebellious slaves from the Pointe Coupée parish regarding

[39] Gabriel Debien and René J. Le Gardeur, "The Saint-Domingue Refugees in Louisiana, 1792–1804," in Carl A. Brasseaux and Glenn R. Conrad, eds., *The Road to Louisiana: The Saint-Domingue Refugees, 1792-1809*, (Lafayette, LA: University of Southwestern Louisiana Press, 1992), 176.
[40] Cited in Robertson, ed., *Louisiana Under the Rule of France, Spain, and the United States*, 117-118.
[41] Letter from Carondelet to Las Casas, June 18, 1795, in Jack D.L. Holmes, "The Abortive Slave Revolt at Pointe Coupée, 1795," *Louisiana History* Vol. 11, No. 4 (Autumn, 1970), 345.

the incident, however, point to a much more complex situation than one man inciting riot with rebellious ideology.

Pointe Coupée's enslaved population remained knowledgeable regarding the radical actions of those in Saint Domingue as well as the French Convention's abolition of slavery in all French colonies. Joseph Bouyavel, a teacher of French descent who lived in Pointe Coupée, supposedly read to the enslaved Africans about the revolution in France and in Saint Domingue. Authorities found a copy of *Théorie de l'impôt*, a book on tax theory that contained the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, in Bouyavel's possession, and once questioned about it, he admitted that the book belonged to him but denied sharing its contents with the slaves of Pointe Coupée. However, one slave testified that Bouyavel came into his quarters and read from the book "… in the presence of my wife," explaining "… that all slaves were free in the Capital," New Orleans, and assured him that the slaves in Pointe Coupée would "undoubtedly" be freed soon, too.[42]

There were others in Pointe Coupée besides Bouyavel that circulated rumors among the slaves there that they had already been freed and that their masters chose to withhold the information. According to Antoine, a slave driver on Widow Lacour's plantation, a group of slaves reported to him that some men traveling upriver from New Orleans announced that France had won the War of the First Coalition currently ravaging Europe and that they should all be free. Similarly, another slave on a different plantation in Pointe Coupée noted that just a few

[42] Testimony of Jean Baptiste, May 10, 1795, fol. 73, *Original Acts*, Pointe Coupée Parish, Pointe Coupée Parish Courthouse, New Roads, Louisiana [hereafter Pointe Coupée Parish, *Original Acts*]; Testimony of Joseph Bouyavel, May 16, 1795, folder 232, Pointe Coupée Parish, *Original Acts*.

months earlier, two mulattoes headed for Natchez stopped their boat and told them that the King had freed all slaves.[43]

Some sources even suggest that the slaves involved in the Pointe Coupée rebellion coordinated with slaves on the German Coast as well as with slaves at the Opelousas Post, roughly thirty-five miles west, where a slave revolt had occurred just a few months prior. An English settler, Theodore Collins, wrote to the captain of the militia and *comandante* of Opelousas Post and reported that several slaves snuck into his slave quarters as he and his family slept. They told his slaves that they remained "'only three days from Pointe Coupée where the slaves were all in arms against the whites, and they had been assigned to make lead, and if possible to drive the whites out of the country.'" They also enquired about the amount of ammunition in the house and where they were kept. The next day, a 13-year-old slave boy belonging to Collins told him of the meeting.[44] Just days later on the night of April 22, a prominent planter on the German Coast, Bringier, heard loud noises from across the Mississippi River and decided to investigate. Hiding behind a bush, Bringier heard three black men discussing the availability of arms and the strength and conviction of their fellow plotters.[45] While the direct connection between this meeting and the plots at Pointe Coupée and at the Opelousas Post remains hard to determine, the timing certainly warrants suspicion.

Just a few weeks before the attack, plantation owner Frederick Riché overheard one of his slaves say to another, "We are free, but the settlers do not want to give us our freedom. We must wipe them all out. We have enough axes and sticks to kill them. We missed once, but I do

[43] Testimony of Antoine, May 11, 1795, folders 86-88, Pointe Coupée Parish, *Original Acts*; Testimony of Sarrasin, May 11, 1795, folders 88-91, Pointe Coupée Parish, *Original Acts*.
[44] Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth-Century* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 354-355.
[45] James T. McGowan, "Creation of a Slave Society: Louisiana Plantations in the Eighteenth Century," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Rochester, 1976), 363-364.

not think this coup will miss ….” Following the failed plot of 1791, the slaves at Pointe Coupée remained determined to overthrow their oppressive masters the second time around.[46] Even closer to the outbreak of rebellion, several slaves, as well as four poor white men, met to discuss the revolutionary world unfolding around them. One of the white men reportedly asked, “Why make petitions? “… would [it] not be better for you to do like the [blacks of Saint Domingue]?” After hearing a similar sentiment expressed, Noël Capitaine, a slave owned by Julien Poydras, one of the most prominent planters in Pointe Coupée who had lived in Saint Domingue for some time, began to “jump with joy” and took the petition that one of the white men was writing and said that “he would bring it to town when he went with his master.” He also stated that should their petition fail, “… they would kill all the whites”—unintentionally mirroring the African chant used by the slave rebels of Saint Domingue.[47]

If no direct involvement of Saint Domingan slaves in the Pointe Coupée rebellion took place, the revolution in the French colony undoubtedly played an indirect role in the minds of these slaves and of slaves elsewhere in Louisiana. Berquin Duvallon, a traveler in Louisiana during this time, asserts that the Louisiana slaves remained aware of the revolutionary events happening in the Caribbean and were “much more ready for a general insurrection than they were in San Domingo at the time of the revolutionary crisis.”[48] Even when attempting to destroy the “historical myths . . . deeply implanted into the consciousness of white Louisianans” that the leaders of the Pointe Coupée rebellion hailed from Haiti, historian Gwendolyn Midlo Hall

[46] Testimony of Frederick Riché, April 24, 1795, Pointe Coupée Parish, *Original Acts*.
[47] Testimony of Philipe Juneau, May 12, 1795, folders 117-119, Pointe Coupée Parish, *Original Acts*; Testimony of Jean Sorgo, May 16, 1795, folder 236, Pointe Coupée Parish, *Original Acts*.
[48] Cited in Robertson, ed., *Louisiana Under the Rule of France, Spain, and the United States*, 180.

concedes that the slaves of Pointe Coupée remained perfectly aware of the revolutionary events in Saint Domingue, which inspired the conspiracy.[49]

Hall also points out the secular nature of both the Louisiana and Saint Domingue rebellions. Contrary to the religiously inspired rebellions such as Nat Turner's, where destroying the leader sometimes suppressed the rebellion altogether, the pattern in Louisiana closely resembled that described by Toussaint, who said that revolution would survive him, for "he was only the trunk of the revolution: it would spring up again by its roots, because they were many and deep."[50]

Once informed of the 1795 Pointe Coupée rebellion, Governor Carondelet ordered his men to use whatever force necessary and arrest all suspected revolutionaries, which included several white Frenchmen. Authorities soundly defeated the movement, and after capturing many of the participants, Carondelet decided to execute or imprison twenty-nine of the slave rebels and exile the several white Frenchmen involved.[51] Despite the harsh suppression of the rebellion, it did not end the precedent of violent uprising in Louisiana, where the roots of rebellion remained many and deep indeed. When administrative power transferred from Spain to France and then to the United States just a few months later in 1803, the colony's French inhabitants resisted the transfer of power—once again advocating in a rather boisterous manner for the continuation of French practices and customs as well as for policies that would see the French merchant and planter classes continue to thrive economically.

More importantly, the actions of these citizens once again signaled to all oppressed people in Louisiana that if you truly want something, sometimes you must take it by force.

---

[49] Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 350-351.
[50] Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 371-372.
[51] Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America*, 26.

Referencing the French merchants and planters but also the slumbering volcano that comprised the large enslaved population of Louisiana, Claiborne claimed, "the materials for a mob are abundant, and it requires all my vigilance to prevent disorders."[52] After ten months in office trying to promote peace and harmony among Louisiana's diverse inhabitants, Claiborne had not made much progress, claiming, "the seeds of discontent, were sown, previous to my arrival in the province, and they have deriv'd nourishment from causes, which I cou'd neither controul or counteract."[53]

Tensions remained remarkably high in Louisiana following the transfer of power in 1803. To put it in perspective, the French remained dissatisfied as Louisiana passed into the hands of another foreign power; the Spanish remained dissatisfied as they lost their power and standing entirely; free people of color remained dissatisfied due to the general disrespect and racism they faced on a daily basis; African slaves remained dissatisfied for similar reasons as well as to see the United States take over Louisiana instead of France; American citizens remained dissatisfied, surrounded by political tension and division; and the newly instated American officials remained dissatisfied to have inherited a chaotic and fractured colony that resisted their authority at every turn. The French and Spanish inhabitants, alongside enslaved Africans and free people of color, attempted to undermine the power of the American administration every chance they got, with spurts of resistance in varying forms cropping up every so often in the years leading up to the 1811 German Coast Uprising.

While Governor Claiborne and many Louisianians had many positive and beneficial dealings with nearby Native American tribes, they also contributed to the tension and division on

[52] William C.C. Claiborne to Secretary of State James Madison, New Orleans, February 4, 1804, in *Official Letter Books of W.C.C. Claiborne, 1801-1816* [hereafter *OLB*], ed. Dunbar Rowland (Jackson, MS: Mississippi State Department of Archives and History, 1917), 1:359.
[53] Claiborne to James Madison, New Orleans, October 16, 1804, *OLB*, 2:359.

occasion. In June 1804, six months into his stint as Governor of Louisiana, Claiborne received a report that a "banditti of Creek Indians … have committed recent depredations."[54] Writing to Secretary of State James Madison a few months later, Claiborne stated, "I fear Some of the Indian Tribes West of the Mississippi are disposed to be troublesome, and … are encouraged by the Spaniards to War against the United States." He concluded, "there is no doubt [that] the lives and property of the Citizens on our extreme Frontiers will be somewhat insecure."[55] Tensions heightened further when in October, Claiborne received a report that Spaniards outside of Natchitoches had been trying to "… induce the Indians to Commit depredations upon the American frontier."[56] Writing to Colonel Richard Butler regarding a plan of action, Claiborne admitted that "attempts have recently been made by subjects of his Catholic Majesty to excite certain Indian Tribes West of the Mississippi to wage war against the United States," which led to some "unpleasant movements among the slaves" in Natchitoches.[57]

Things came to a head just a few weeks later when the commandant of the Natchitoches District informed Governor Claiborne that he had uncovered a traitorous plot, saying, "I hasten to inform you that the tranquility of this District has received a violent shock, and the Inhabitants are now in the greatest state of alarm …." Authorities discovered a potentially dangerous rebellion involving roughly thirty blacks, who were apparently persuaded by the Spanish in Nacogdoches that if the slaves "… went to the Spanish Country they would be made free." Furthermore, it was noted that "Indians were among the Negroes [the night before] exciting them to be firm and determined."[58] So, not only were enslaved Africans in Louisiana tempted towards

[54] Claiborne to Amos Stoddart, New Orleans, June 26, 1804, *OLB*, 2:222.
[55] Claiborne to James Madison, New Orleans, September 25, 1804, *OLB*, 2:341.
[56] Edw. D. Turner to Claiborne, New Orleans, October 13, 1804, *OLB*, 2:385.
[57] Claiborne to Colonel Butler, New Orleans, November 1, 1804, *OLB*, 2:384.
[58] Edw. D. Turner to Claiborne, New Orleans, November 16, 1804, *OLB*, 2:386-387.

Revolution through stories from France and Saint Domingue, but large groups of Native Americans and nearby Spanish actively encouraged and aided them in their efforts to organize, overthrow their masters, and commit acts of vandalism and violence. While attempting to establish peace and prosperity through an American government among a large French and Spanish majority in Louisiana and amid general disarray, Claiborne faced a serious uphill battle. Much to his dismay, the plots did not end.

The following month, Governor Claiborne sent troops to Pointe Coupée, as "a spirit of Insurrection among the Negroes at Point Coupee has occasioned considerable alarm in that District …."[59] Less than a year later in October 1805, authorities uncovered a plot in New Orleans involving a considerable number of slaves, "thirty at least," who intended to "kill all the city officials and take over the city."[60] While authorities prevailed, the peril it posed weighed heavily on the minds of those in the city—particularly the white population of New Orleans. Perhaps the French and their demanding nature inspired these slaves, or maybe the Spanish and their constant attempts to undermine American authority. Maybe the general chaos and confusion due to the transfer of power motivated these slaves. At the very least, it is likely that the slaves organized and revolted again with thoughts of their rebellious predecessors in Pointe Coupée and in Saint Domingue in mind. While New Orleans and Pointe Coupée did not see another violent slave insurrection for several years, their neighbors on the German Coast found themselves less fortunate.

A few major events in Louisiana occurred right before the 1811 German Coast Uprising that contributed to the dissemination of revolutionary ideology from Saint Domingue and the precedent of resistance and rebellion in Louisiana. The first of these events concerned a mass

[59] Claiborne to Colonel Butler, New Orleans, November 8, 1804, *OLB*, 3:5.
[60] Joe Gray Taylor, *Negro Slavery in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1963), 212.

migration of white and black refugees from the West Indies to Louisiana. While refugees from Saint Domingue arrived regularly from 1791 to 1810, the largest influx and perhaps the most influential in the minds of slaves living on the German Coast arrived in 1809 and 1810 via Cuba. This came after Napoleon Bonaparte's attempt to invade Spain and place his brother Joseph on the Spanish throne. In response, Cuban authorities expelled the French refugees from Saint Domingue who had settled in Cuba. The first boat carrying refugees from Cuba reached New Orleans on May 12, and by January 1810, at least 9,000 refugees had entered the crescent city.[61]

Three categories of refugees arrived from Cuba to New Orleans, with each group amounting to roughly one-third of the total number. From this mass migration alone, 2,731 whites, 3,102 free people of color, and 3,226 slaves arrived in New Orleans, according to the mayor, essentially "doubl[ing] the number of French-speakers in New Orleans."[62] While a lack of sources prevents scholars from tracking refugees from the Haitian Revolution to settlements on the German Coast, their migration from the Caribbean colony to Louisiana effectively increased the discussions of slave uprisings, and, ultimately, fear among whites living in New Orleans and the surrounding areas. Indeed, once German Coast planters had fled their homes and arrived in New Orleans after the uprising of 1811 broke out, observers in New Orleans quickly dubbed the event a "miniature representation of the horrors of Santo Domingo."[63]

Another significant event that occurred near the German Coast in the year leading up to the uprising was the 1810 West Florida Rebellion. In this event, American settlers attacked the Spanish fort in Baton Rouge, eventually winning and claiming Baton Rouge as part of the

---

[61] "An Extract from the Lists of Passengers Reported at the Said Office by the Captains of Vessels Who Have Come to This Port from the Island of Cuba," July 18 and August 7, 1809, *OLB*, 4:381-82.
[62] *Louisiana Moniteur*, January 27, 1810; Debien and Le Gardeur, "The Saint-Domingue Refugees in Louisiana," 114.
[63] Letter from "A Gentleman at New Orleans" to "A Member of Congress," January 11, 1811, published in the *New York Evening Post* on February 19, 1811.

Orleans Territory that should be considered American. This rebellion, which took place roughly 60 miles upriver from the German Coast, provides yet another example of the general political weakness in the area and the opportunities that emerged through violent resistance. While Claiborne and many others in New Orleans were quick to attribute the sole revolutionary inspiration of the German Coast rebels to the Haitian Revolution, historian William C. Davis argues that "what happened at Baton Rouge fewer than three months earlier had played a role."[64]

In the varying forms of resistance or moments of outright rebellion mentioned above, even those that involved no Saint Domingan slaves, the roots of the revolution in Saint Domingue had clearly spread to the local slave populations of Louisiana. The Crescent City remained an incredibly active port, defined by ceaseless movement and various people. Both the narratives of refugees and the songs of sailors and slaves spread knowledge of the revolutionary events in the Caribbean and beyond. In a letter written by prominent planters to Claiborne in November 1804, they confirmed as much, stating: "The news of the revolution of Saint-Domingue and other places has become common among our blacks."[65] They knew about the revolution and other rebellions and remained generally well-informed of ongoing events, as the world of enslaved Africans remained in constant interconnectedness with the rest.

By analyzing certain conditions, events, and movements, as well as by situating the environment of the wider world, of New Orleans, and of other areas in Louisiana in the years leading up to the rebellion, connections between the revolutionary ideology circling Louisiana and the decision to rebel by the enslaved Africans of the German Coast become more apparent,

---

[64] William C. Davis, *The Rogue Republic: How Would-Be Patriots Waged the Shortest Revolution in American History* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011), 261. For detailed insight into the actions of filibusters and expansionists in the first two decades of the 19th century in the United States, see Frank Lawrence Owsley, Jr. and Gene A. Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists: Jeffersonian Manifest Destiny, 1800-1821*, (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2004).

[65] Letter to Claiborne, November 9, 1804, in Debien and Le Gardeur, "The Saint-Domingue Refugees in Louisiana," 186.

as do the origins of this important event in the history of the early American republic. Through this analysis, it becomes clear that an internationalist, revolutionary enthusiasm among varying classes and ethnicities washed up on the shores of Louisiana following the French and Haitian Revolutions, soaking Louisiana and spreading along her main waterways. New Orleans in particular became flooded with witnesses of the Haitian Revolution, all from different backgrounds and ethnicities. These witnesses, proponents and opponents alike, shared their experiences and knowledge at ports, shops, and saloons, among the merchants, the working class, and the sizable refuge population. Though the exact effect and impact of this flood remains incalculable, it certainly plagued the efforts of those in power to ensure tranquility in the area.

While it is difficult to determine the exact political and ideological thoughts of the rebels in the 1811 German Coast Uprising, they undeniably experienced a degree of exposure to events such as the Creole Revolt of 1768, the French Revolution, the Haitian Revolution, the Pointe Coupée rebellions, and the West Florida Rebellion. At the very least, the stories of numerous groups around the world as well as those closer to home fighting for liberty, respect, or power all served as an inspiration to the slaves along the German Coast. All people along the German Coast, slave owners and enslaved, heard about the French across the Atlantic, the Saint Domingan slaves in the Caribbean, the attempted uprisings in Pointe Coupée, and the Americans just up the river in 1810. In the midst of the Age of Revolution, Charles Deslondes and other courageous slaves on the German Coast, after years of inhumane treatment and brutal, back-breaking work on sugar plantations, saw the political weakness of those in New Orleans and surrounding areas, the general division among its diverse inhabitants, and groups all over the

world fighting for their rights—and decided to act, paving an avenue towards increased individualism, freedom, and agency.

CHAPTER 2

CONQUERING THE COAST

The 1811 German Coast Uprising came with the end of the sugarcane harvest. As the winter frost approached, slaves—and sometimes the masters as well—would begin working day and night, gathering loads of sugarcane for processing. Extracting sugar from the cane provided the slaves with another consuming job, as the sugar kettles needed constant heat and attention. Following the harvesting season, when slaves sometimes worked through the night to maximize profits for their masters, they often received a break from this laborious work at the end of the calendar year.[66] As the slaves enjoyed a break from their hard labor, the masters would celebrate the end of their harvest by attending balls and other social events during the holiday season.

For the planters and slaves alike, January and the new year emerged as a time of celebration and relative relaxation. The period of 16-hour workdays that accompanied many sugarcane plantations along the German Coast was over. For the enslaved Africans of the German Coast, this meant less work and more free time. Days into the new year, powerful thunderstorms rocked the Territory of Orleans, and by January 6, a local naval officer described the roads as "half leg deep in Mud."[67] The excessive amount of rain and general timing of the storm did not bode well for the planters of the German Coast, as their slaves could now focus on goals outside of their work.

While slaveowners considered gatherings of enslaved individuals as commonplace, a few planters on the German Coast—once it was too late—grasped the meaning of such a gathering

[66] Follett, *The Sugar Masters,* 10-13, 161-164.
[67] Wade Hampton to the Secretary of War William Eustis, January 16, 1811, *The Territorial Papers of the United States* [hereafter *Territorial Papers*] ed. Clarence Edwin Carter (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1940), 9:916-917.

on the André (sometimes spelled "Andry") plantation, just two days before the outbreak of rebellion. One traveler described André's home as "large and handsome … two stories high, with a piazza and a very broad gallery … [and] large curtains extended from pillar to pillar."[68] On Sunday, January 6, four enslaved Africans belonging to three of the most prominent planters in the area, convened in secret on Manuel André's plantation. Charles Deslondes, frequently described as the leader of the rebellion, lived one plantation over from the André plantation, but was temporarily employed by André as a slave driver. The other three slaves at this meeting were Cook (20), Quamana (26), and Henry (25). Cook and Quamana belonged to James Brown and worked on his plantation for nearly five years, while Henry, described as in "good health," "knowledgeable of the works of a sugar house," and "a bit of a carpenter," worked on the Kenner and Henderson plantation, roughly 20 miles downriver from the André plantation.[69] While no one knows exactly what the slaves discussed in this meeting, one can assume that it revolved around their imminent uprising, as the planters observed that they seemed to be "deliberating among themselves."[70]

As a slave driver, Charles Deslondes knew the consequences of resistance and nonconformity intimately, having to dish out punishments to fellow slaves on such occasions. These punishments paled in comparison to what would happen should their uprising fail. This is why Charles Deslondes and his trusted insurgents planned this insurrection with great care, contrary to the portrayal in newspapers and historical accounts in the years that followed. In his unique position as a slave driver, Deslondes gained a degree of trust from his masters, enabling

---

[68] Duke Bernhard of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach, *Travels by His Highness Duke Bernhard of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach through North America in the Years 1825 and 1826*, ed. C.J. Jeronimus, trans. William Jeronimus (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2001), 80.
[69] *Original* Acts, St. Charles Parish, trans. Glenn R. Conrad, Amistad Research Center, New Orleans [hereafter St. Charles Parish, *Original Acts*] Act 24, March 7, 1811, 147-148.
[70] Glenn R. Conrad, *The German Coast: Abstracts of the Civil Records of St. Charles and St. John the Baptist parishes, 1804-1812* [hereafter *The German Coast*] (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, 1981), 108.

him to move between plantations and more adequately develop his plan for a widespread uprising.

This degree of freedom certainly contributed to the dissemination of rebellious ideology along the coast, as well as in the general organization of the slaves leading up to the uprising. Deslondes reportedly "had a woman" at the Trépagnier estate, where his frequent presence allowed him to build a rapport with a handful of slaves there, ultimately convincing them to defy their masters and join the crusade when the time came.[71] Furthermore, as Deslondes made the trip to and from the Trépagnier plantation, he also stopped at the James Brown estate to coordinate with Cook and Quamana. While many of the conspirators existed in this close geographical area, the presence of Harry at the January 6 meeting on the André plantation suggests that Deslondes's plans penetrated plantations much further downriver along the German Coast.

Deslondes and the slaves he entrusted with his plot met in the slave quarters but also in the field, where they would oftentimes send a slave up a tree to serve as a lookout and warn them if the master approached. Every encounter that involved a new potential rebel came with risk though, as they could just as easily betray their trust and tell their masters as well as join the cause. On January 7, to prevent such a risk, Deslondes and his trusted accomplices collectively restrained a slave on the Trépagnier plantation whom they suspected of being a spy.[72]

In the days preceding the rebellion, Governor Claiborne became aware of a concerted effort by runaway slaves to intercept mail carriers upriver, prompting him to "order an escort, for the Bearer who carries the Mail thro' such part of the Territory, as you suppose may be infested

[71] Conrad, *The German Coast*, 108.
[72] St. Charles Parish, *Original Acts*, Act 20, February 25, 1811, 112.

by the Brigands."[73] Some evidence suggests that this was a coordinated effort with the slaves of the German Coast to alienate forces in Baton Rouge, New Orleans, and beyond and provide the rebels with an advantage once the uprising began. Furthermore, there is also evidence that the uprising coordinated with free people of color in New Orleans, where a large group of them attempted to take over an arsenal at the same time Deslondes decided to rebel.[74] While the evidence linking these specific events remains rather scant, the timing warrants suspicion.

Just after sundown on January 8, 1811, slaves collectively stormed and overtook their masters on an estate owned by Colonel Manuel André, a man "… who is well known for his great harshness toward his Negroes."[75] When recounting his experience during this initial assault to Governor Claiborne, Colonel André said the rebels tried to "… assassinate me by the stroke of an axe"; while André managed to escape with his life, his son, Gilbert, had been, in André's own words, "ferociously murdered by a hord of brigands."[76] Claiborne responded with his condolences, saying, "I sympathize with you, in the untimely and unfortunate death of your amiable Son. But our lamentations are useless. He is gone to a better and a happier world!"[77] Claiborne, a father who had lost a child just a few years earlier, conveyed sympathy towards André and his loss but also showed that his real overwhelming concern remained the rebellious slaves.[78]

During the action at the André plantation, the rebels helped themselves to a few muskets and some sabers. Even though they managed to arm themselves, the slaves remained woefully short on weapons and ammunition. Apparently, the rebels counted on a much larger haul of guns

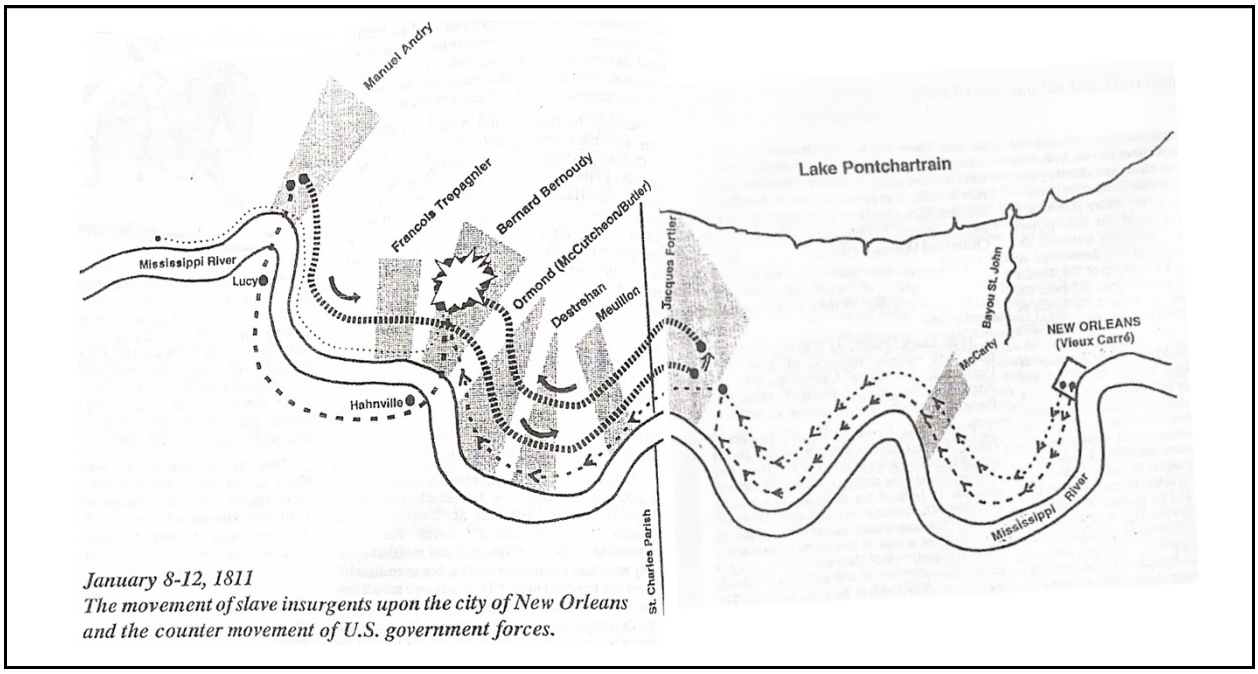
---

[73] Claiborne to General Hampton, New Orleans, January 7, 1811, *OLB*, 5:94.
[74] Thrasher, *On to New Orleans!*, 56-57.
[75] Duke Bernhard, *Travels*, 367.
[76] André to Claiborne, *Territorial Papers*, 9:915-916.
[77] Claiborne to Colonel André, New Orleans, January 13, 1811, *OLB*, 5:97.
[78] Joseph T. Hatfield, *William Claiborne: Jeffersonian Centurion in the American Southwest* (Lafayette, LA: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2016), 208.

since André, who served as commandant for the parish for many years, housed a small arsenal at his estate.[79] However, it turned out that André had relocated the weapons by the time the rebellion broke out. The revolutionary Africans, now fully committed to seeing this uprising to its end, armed themselves with available agricultural tools. They grabbed hold of hoes, machetes, clubs, tree branches, spears, and other tools that served as makeshift weapons.

What the rebels lacked in guns, they made up with determination, strong organization, and discipline. Even Charles Gayarré, who became known as the infamous mouthpiece of the slaveowners, grudgingly commented on the exceptional organization of the rebel slaves in his rather one-sided and racist account of the revolt. The rebels, he recounted, "marched along the river toward the city, divided into companies, each under an officer, with the beat of drums and flags displayed …."[80] Historian Joe Gray Taylor, who, like Gayarré, denounced the actions of the rebel slaves and defended the slaveowners, also surprisingly highlighted the organization of the insurrectionists. In his book *Negro Slavery in Louisiana*, Taylor described the organization of the rebel army as "advanced," also complimenting the division of their forces. He continues, "The array was armed with whatever weapons came to hand, mainly agricultural implements. The Negroes advanced down the River Road with flags flying and drums beating, [chanting] 'On to Orleans!'"[81]

[79] Thrasher, *On to New Orleans!*, 50.
[80] Charles Gayarré, *History of Louisiana*. Vol. 4. (New York: William J. Widdleton, 1866), 266.
[81] Joe Gray Taylor, *Negro Slavery in Louisiana*, 212-214.



January 8-12, 1811, The movement of slave insurgents upon the city of New Orleans and the counter movement of U.S. government forces.
Albert Thrasher, *On to New Orleans!: Louisiana's Heroic 1811 Slave Revolt*, 60-61.

As the rebels prepared for their journey ahead, their minds likely returned to the African elders who charged them "to die a glorious death rather than live a miserable life."[82] Or maybe their minds recalled the challenge Dessalines put to his fellow revolutionary Africans in Haiti: "Those who wish to die free rally around me now."[83] Oral history tells us that Charles Deslondes and his compatriots declared a similar sentiment: "Freedom or death!" "Defying the whites and declaring themselves to be free," said one source, they swept downriver with enthusiasm.[84] When asked why he wanted to leave the André plantation, Jupiter, one of the rebel slaves described as "one of the leaders of the uprising," said that the rebels "wanted to go to the

[82] J.C. DeGraft-Johnson, *African Glory: The Story of Vanished Negro Civilizations*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Publishing, 1986), 142.
[83] Stephen Alexis, *Black Liberator: The Life of Toussaint Louverture*, William Stirling trans. (New York: Macmillan, 1949), 193.
[84] Lyle Saxon, Edward Dryer, and Robert Tallant, *Gumbo Ya-Ya: A Collection of Louisiana Folktales*, (New Orleans: Pelican Publishing, 1987), 255.

city to kill whites," echoing the slaves of both the Pointe Coupée Rebellion and the Haitian Revolution. [85]

After securing weapons and horses from the André plantation, Deslondes and his fellow insurrectionists proceeded down River Road toward New Orleans in an organized and militaristic fashion.[86] Meanwhile, a wounded Colonel André managed to reach the west bank of the Mississippi River on a pirogue, where he began to heal and plan his revenge. [87] Increasing their numbers and gaining strength and momentum at every plantation they overtook, the army continued its march toward the city. They soon reached Charles's home, the Deslondes plantation, near present-day LaPlace, where eight more slaves, led by an African man named Zeno, joined the movement. At the next plantation, belonging to George Weinprender, a slave named Hans convinced several other men on the plantation to join the cause.[88] More slaves joined the enthusiastic band of revolutionaries at the plantation of Achille Trouard, including Mathurin, who "commanded [the other slaves]" with a "sabre."[89] Achille Trouard, facing this oncoming slave army, abandoned his ancestral home and led his two nieces to safety in the nearby swamps. [90] Continuing, the now rather large group of slaves marched towards New Orleans, levees of the Mississippi River to the right, the plantations of the German Coast to the left.

As word of the uprising spread throughout the German Coast, variously sized groups of enslaved Africans, consisting of mostly younger men, assembled at each plantation to

[85] St. Charles Parish, *Original Acts*, Act 17, February 20, 1811, 183.
[86] *Louisiana Gazette* (New Orleans), January 17, 1811.
[87] *Louisiana Moniteur*, January 17, 1811.
[88] *Louisiana Moniteur*, January 17, 1811.
[89] St. Charles Parish, *Original Acts*, Act 2, January 13, 1811, 19.
[90] Stanley L. Engerman, Seymour Drescher, and Robert L. Paquette, eds., *Slavery* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 2001), 325.

accompany Deslondes and his fellow insurgents on their march.[91] Following a stop at the plantation of Widow Jean Trépagnier, Deslondes's army continued, adding many slaves to their cause at the nearby Delhomme plantation, including slaves named Pierre, Allo, Acara, Jacques, Robert, and Etienne. Next, at the plantation of Jean Barre Trépagnier, a handful of older slaves joined the movement, including three slaves from Africa, Joseph (30), Charlot (40), and Hippolite (30), one slave from Guinea, Louis (40), and a creole slave, Barthelemy (30).[92] The slave Hippolite reportedly stole his master's horse and took charge, yelling at his fellow rebels and "exciting" them.[93]

The rebel army continued through the night, and, after marching roughly six miles, came across the plantation of James Brown around sunrise on Wednesday morning January 9. Here, Deslondes generals, Cook and Quamana, as well as several other slaves, bolstered their rank and added momentum to their march.[94] While Charles Deslondes, Cook, and Quamana, encouraged the enslaved population of the German Coast to defy their masters and join their revolution, some slaves remained loyal to their masters and worked against the movement in numerous ways. At Francois Trépagnier's plantation, a slave named Dominique, whom Bernard Bernoudy owned, heard rumors of the oncoming horde and rushed to relay the news to Trépagnier, informing him that an army of rebellious slave marched "… down the river, pillaging the farms and killing whites."[95]

After escorting his family to safety in the swamps behind the plantation, Trépagnier returned to his home alongside his close personal slave, Gustave, to face the oncoming slave

[91] While the African women of the German Coast might have played a role in the uprising, the records ignore them entirely.
[92] St. Charles Parish, *Original Acts*, Act 24, March 7, 1811, 156; St. Charles Parish, *Original Acts*, Act 24, March 7, 1811, 159-160.
[93] Conrad, *The German Coast*, 107.
[94] St. Charles Parish, *Original Acts*, Act 2, January 13, 1811, 2-5.
[95] Conrad, *The German Coast*, 107.

army—which at this point had reached a considerable size. Reportedly, Trépagnier treated Gustave as some might treat a pet dog, throwing him bits of food under the table. Having promised Gustave emancipation on multiple occasions and then going back on his word, Trépagnier effectively pitted his closest slave against himself. When the rebel army broke down his doors, Gustave, who was waiting with his master, "… threw himself upon the man he hated, and the others poured after him."[96]

Jean François Trépagnier was the second casualty of the 1811 German Coast Uprising, killed at the hands of insurgents but ultimately died because of his hubris and his incredibly cruel treatment of his closest and most loyal slave. Coincidentally, someone staying with the Trépagniers in 1803 commented on the cruel treatment of their slaves and hinted that Jean François's father was murdered by a disgruntled slave, saying, "One night, someone asked for Trépagnier at his door, and he was never seen alive again."[97] While authorities never caught the culprit, it was widely believed that one of his slaves betrayed him. Unfortunately, this incident did not deter Jean François from following in his father's footsteps—and meeting a similar fate.

Dominique escaped the violence at the Trépagnier plantation and continued downriver, warning residents of the German Coast along the way. Once he arrived home at the Bernoudy plantation, his master told Dominique to continue his path downriver, warning other "whites" along the way.[98] Many enslaved individuals resisted Deslondes and his rebel army, helping minimize the damage and death count as much as they could. Pierre, a slave driver at the plantation of Hermogene Labranche, heard of the approaching rebels from a few slaves who had

---

[96] Harnett Thomas Kane, *Plantation Parade: The Grand Manner in Louisiana* (New York City: William Morrow and Co., 1945), 128-129.
[97] Pierre-Clément de Laussat, *Memoirs of My Life to My Son During the Years 1803 and After, Which I Spent in Public Service of Louisiana as Commissioner of the French Government for the Retrocession to France of that Colony and for Its Transfer to the United States* (Baton Rouge: Published for the Historic New Orleans Collection by the Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 62.
[98] Conrad, *The German Coast*, 107.

come down ahead of the slave army and rushed to warn his master, imploring that Labranche flee and save himself. As the rebel army approached ever closer, another slave on the Labranche plantation, Francois, advised Labranche to "flee immediately into the woods …." Francois and Pierre helped their master and his family hide in the nearby woods and eventually escape across the river.[99]

The slave Orestes, at the request of his master Jacques Charbonnet, went to Widow Charbonnet's farm and took her to the Destrehan plantation in preparation for an eventual evacuation of the area.[100] The actions of these "loyal" slaves allowed most of the German Coast's residents to get out ahead of the rebels. This greatly facilitated the military counterattack, as many of these slave owners probably took their arsenal of weapons with them, denying the slave rebels the needed firepower to compete with the military strength of their opponents. As scores of planters and slaves fled the German Coast, one planter recalled the "torrent of rain and … frigid cold" weather that marked their exodus.[101] While some residents remained fortunate enough to travel by horse to the city or by boat to the west bank of the Mississippi River, many concealed themselves in the woods and in the swamps, waiting and praying for the blood-thirsty "brigands" and wearisome weather to pass.

At the Labranche plantation, Deslondes and other leaders of the uprising recruited a handful of men to join their cause, including slaves named Bernard, Jean Baptist, Charles, Eugene, and Louis. Pressing further downriver, the rebel army come upon the plantation of Bernard Bernoudy, adding numbers to their army, including slaves named Valentin, Lexiterre, Maniga, and Augustine.[102] The steadily growing slave army soon arrived at the plantation of

[99] Conrad, *The German Coast*, 107-108.
[100] St. Charles Parish, *Original Acts*, Act 18, February 25, 1811, 45.
[101] Engerman, Drescher, & Paquette, *Slavery*, 324.
[102] St. Charles Parish, *Original Acts*, Act 24, March 7, 1811, 158-160.

Richard Butler and Samuel McCutcheon (now known as the Ormond Plantation), one of the largest on the German Coast and one known for its brutality. In the last year alone leading up to the uprising, at least three slaves risked certain severe punishment and decided to run away from the plantation—following the footsteps of numerous others in years past.[103] Here, a group of young men all described as in "good health", including Daniel (25), Simeon (20), Abram (26), Dawson (27), and Joe Wilkes (28), jumped at the chance to overthrow their violent masters and joined the band of insurrectionists in their march towards New Orleans.[104] Continuing east, the slave army soon came upon another of the German Coast's largest estates, the sprawling Destrehan plantation, where a large group of slaves joined the mix, including slaves named Gros Lindor, Petit Lindor, Jean, Jasmin, Little Baptist, Bastien, James, Simon, Noel, Antony, and Big Hyacinth.[105]

Pushing on, the rebels come upon the plantation of Alexander Labranche, Hermogene's brother, where several more slaves sided with Deslondes and his army. The rebels then burned to the ground a guest home on the property occupied by a doctor named John Laclareve, who, coincidentally, was a refugee from the Haitian Revolution several years earlier.[106] Once they arrived on the adjoining plantation of Pierre Reine, the rebel army burned down the main plantation house there, too. The next home along the east bank of the German Coast belonged to the Meuillon family, one of the wealthiest on the German Coast. Here, the rebel army added at least 13 slaves to their ranks and laid waste to the main home on the Meuillon estate.[107] They intended to burn this home, too, but one of Meuillon's slaves, a half-Native American slave

[103] *Louisiana Gazette*, July 24, 1810, *Louisiana Moniteur*, January 31, 1810, *Louisiana Gazette*, December 6, 1810.
[104] St. Charles Parish, *Original Acts*, Act 21, March 7, 1811, 141-143.
[105] St. Charles Parish, *Original Acts*, Act 2, January 13, 1811, 9-10.
[106] *Louisiana Moniteur*, May 17, 1806.
[107] Conrad, *The German Coast*, viii; St. Charles Parish, *Original Acts*, Act 2, January 13, 1811, 3-4.

named Bazile defied the rebels and extinguished "the fire which the brigands had set to the principal house of the plantation, of the late Mr. Meuillon …." Following the uprising's defeat, the "heirs of the … late Mr. Meuillon" freed Bazile, "in consideration of his good conduct and zeal."[108]

Other slaves on the German Coast remained less enthusiastic to join up with Charles Deslondes and his fellow insurgents as well. Dagobert, a slave owned by Francois Delhomme, reportedly "'denounced … [those who] marched of their own free will'" and claimed that many were "'… forced to march.'"[109] When authorities finally captured a slave owned by Etienne Trépagnier, Augustin, over a month following the uprising's demise, they questioned Etienne's involvement in the recent event. Augustin denied a role in the rebellion, saying he "… had nothing to do with the recent insurrection" and that participants of the uprising abducted him and "threatened" him.[110] While evidence has shown that many slaves did indeed side with the slaveowners, preferring stability through slavery rather than risking their lives and the lives of their loved ones for freedom, the testaments of Dagobert and Augustin remain problematic, as they come from the mouths of men under extreme duress. Regardless of the validity of these statements, it remains clear that without the actions of slaves like Dominique, Pierre, Francois, Orestes, and Bazile, who defied the majority of their fellow slaves on the German Coast, the damage, death count, and subsequent ramifications of the uprising could have been considerably worse.

Well into the night now, Deslondes and his followers passed the plantations of Zenon Trudeau, Lilly Sarpy, and Israel E. Trask, and came upon one of the largest estates in the area,

[108] St. Charles Parish, *Original Acts*, Act 17, February 20, 1811, 158.
[109] St. Charles Parish, *Original Acts*, Act 6, 89-93; *Louisiana Courier*, February 30, 1811.
[110] Conrad, *The German Coast*, 108.

the Kenner and Henderson plantation. Here, they added nearly a dozen men to their numbers, including Harry, who attended the meeting at the André plantation alongside Deslondes, Cook, and Quamana days before. Harry gathered the support of many on the Kenner and Henderson plantation. The owners described seven of the men who participated in the uprising, Joseph, Lindor, Charles, Nontoun, Smillét, Peter, and Croaker (ranging in age from 22-28), as either carters, coachmen, or ploughmen. Elisha, a driver, Jerry, a "first rate" blacksmith, and Major, a house servant and hostler, all took part in the insurrection as well.[111] After declaring for Deslondes's cause, Lindor, a "sound and healthy … carter and coachman," brought out a drum and began beating it alongside the songs and chants of the rebel army, inspiring others to join their march down the river road and motivating members of the army to maintain their mental fortitude.[112]

The rebel army arrived next at Jacques Fortier's plantation, having marched most of the day and covering nearly 25 miles despite the mud, rain, and cold weather. Although the numbers vary considerably, Deslondes's forces totaled anywhere from 124-500, but based on the calculations provided in court documents in the weeks following the rebellion, the bare minimum number of slave rebels was 115.[113] Despite years of physical and mental abuse and an inferior societal status, the German Coast slaves who chose to fight for freedom achieved much more in one day than many thought possible. Apart from the killing of Francois Trépagnier and Gilbert André and the burning of a few homes, Deslondes's rebel army forced the German Coast planters to their knees, driving them from their homes and providing a genuine threat to their dominion.

---

[111] St. Charles Parish, *Original Acts*, Act 21, March 7, 1811, 141-143.
[112] St. Charles Parish, *Original Acts*, Act 21, March 7, 1811, 142; St. Charles Parish, *Original Acts*, Act 2, January 13, 1811, 3-4.
[113] St. Charles Parish, *Original Acts*, Act 2, January 13, 1811, 3-4.

Deslondes's band of insurrectionists also created a liberated area for the enslaved Africans of the German Coast, from the André plantation to the Fortier plantation. Even if it only lasted a short time, this feat meant the slaves of the German Coast could come and go as they wanted, eat what they wanted, speak how they wanted, and live as they wanted. No matter how brief, these were opportunities that many slaves never experienced in their entire lives. The slaves that chose not to participate in Deslondes rebellion still contributed to the cause by refusing to leave with their masters and remaining in the liberated area. This particular group of dissenters probably took advantage of the lack of oversight and enjoyed this degree of freedom while they could, possibly reuniting with lost friends or relatives or freeing enslaved individuals in jail or in chains.

Having marched many miles, acquiring a considerable number of slaves, weapons, and horses while razing houses along the way, the rebels decided to stay the night at the Fortier plantation and resume their advance on the city promptly the next morning.[114] While Deslondes's army amassed a formidable force, they lacked a proper supply of weapons. According to an article in the *Louisiana Gazette* following the uprising, only "half … were armed with bullets and fusils," and the rest with "sabers and cane knives."[115] The rebel army's failure to secure weapons and ammunition would be costly to their cause. While the rebels rested, forces downriver in New Orleans and across the river on the west bank prepared their retaliation.

Heeding the warnings of "loyal" slaves like Dominique and others, many planters from the German Coast sent their families ahead to the city with news of destruction and danger. In an article from the *New York Evening Post*, a New Orleans resident provided insight into the

[114] Hampton to the Secretary of War, *Territorial Papers,* 9:916-917.
[115] *Louisiana Gazette*, January 17, 1811.

exodus, stating that "women and children flocked to the town for refuge, and every face wore the marks of consternation." Additionally, those escaping the path of the rebel slaves arrived in New Orleans "in a state of shock, bewilderment, complete desperation. All of their pompous, airs, 'civilized behavior,' and confidence that they bantered about and flung in the face of the slaves … had completely evaporated."[116] Another article from the *New York Evening Post* described the waves of people flooding into the city "… bringing the most terrible accounts."[117] While the arrival of German Coast residents to New Orleans meant their safety and survival, their descriptions of the slaves and their strength only made the situation worse for Governor Claiborne and the citizens of New Orleans.

With New Orleans citizens effectively terrorized by the spreading of stories from German Coast residents, government officials feared a second organized attack from free blacks inside the city or maroon communities nearby. Closing the primary entry point to New Orleans from the German Coast, Governor Claiborne had to separate the threat from those in the city. His feelings of anxiety regarding the tense situation are apparent in a letter he sent to General Wade Hampton, in which Claiborne says, "Sir, I pray you to have the goodness to order, a Guard to the Bayou Bridge, with instructions to the Officer to permit no Negroes to pass or repass the same."[118] Clearly, Claiborne understood the extent of calamity that could ensue if communication between the German Coast rebels and the black community within the city remained intact.

The mayor of New Orleans, also aware of this dangerous prospect, described "the natural fear that there might exist some communications between the rebel negroes and the City negroes,

[116] *New York Evening Post*, February 20, 1811.
[117] *New York Evening Post*, February 19, 1811.
[118] Claiborne to General Wade Hampton, New Orleans, January 9, 1811, *OLB*, 5:93.

have for some days created in our midst a state of alarm."[119] Claiborne, in hopes of pacifying such fears, ordered "strong Militia patroles by day and night; and … a strict police among the Slaves…."[120] He also targeted areas with higher concentrations of colored people, shutting down entertainment halls and other venues where they might gather. From his headquarters in the Cabildo, Claiborne ordered that all of "the Cabarets in the City and Suburbs of New Orleans are ordered to be immediately closed" and that "no male Negro is to be permitted to pass the streets after 6 o'clock."[121] When writing to a handful of judges and colonels on the coast, Claiborne assured them that, "New Orleans is in perfect safety."[122] Since the Territory of Orleans's central government resided in New Orleans, Claiborne understood the widespread, detrimental consequences should he fail to protect the city from rebels. While these measures helped remove the possibility of a coordinated uprising within the city, Claiborne still had Charles Deslondes and hundreds of rebellious slaves outside the city walls threatening that assuredness of "perfect safety."

On January 9, Claiborne informed Secretary of State Robert Smith that his previously mentioned concerns regarding a slave uprising had come true and that 180 to 500 slaves of the German Coast had revolted, but, in the same letter, he assured Smith that "the most prompt and effectual measures, have been taken for the protection of the persons and property of the Citizens."[123] In a letter to the Secretary of War, General Hampton described the situation, saying that a "formidable insurrection had commenced among the blacks … about 40 Miles above this city, which was rapidly advancing towards it, and carrying in it's train fire, Murder, & pillage"

---

[119] "Message from the Mayor, January 12, 1811" in *On to New Orleans!*, 274-275.
[120] Claiborne to Several Colonels of Regiments, and the several Parish Judges on the Coast, New Orleans, January 10, 1811, *OLB*, 5:96.
[121] *Louisiana Moniteur,* January 12, 1811.
[122] Claiborne to Several Colonels of Regiments, and the several Parish Judges on the Coast, New Orleans, January 10, 1811, *OLB*, 5:96.
[123] Claiborne to Robert Smith, New Orleans, January 9, 1811, *OLB*, 5:95.

and informed the Secretary of War that the "regular force in the City was inconsiderable, and as there was nothing like an organized Militia, the confusion was great beyond description."[124] By the end of the day, under orders from Governor Claiborne, Hampton had gathered "two companies of Volunteer Militia and 30 Regulars … to meet the brigands," stating it was "all the force except a small garrison left in the Fort, which at that time appeared susceptible of command."[125] With a sense of urgency, Hampton and his forces left the city after sunset on January 9 to face a slave army that threatened the peace and stability of not only New Orleans but the entire territory.

While Hampton and Claiborne remained somewhat optimistic for their assembled forces, Commodore John Shaw, who commanded the fleet at New Orleans, appeared less hopeful, calling it a "weak detachment." Shaw wanted to ensure victory, as he worried that their failure would bring "the whole coast a general sense of devastation … [with] the country laid waste by the Rioters."[126] While strong winds and heavy rains prevented Shaw's vessels from moving upriver, the Commodore decided to send a detachment of 40 seamen overland in hopes of aiding Hampton's lackluster forces and preventing his fears from becoming a reality. While Claiborne, Hampton, and Shaw provided every man and resource they could muster towards eliminating the threat, this more than likely had an unintended negative effect on the already-fragile minds of those in New Orleans—a general feeling of uneasiness and vulnerability following the departure of the soldiers, seamen, and militia. According to Shaw, "All were on the alert … [as] General confusion and dismay … prevailed throughout the city." He also pointed out that "… scarcely a

[124] Hampton to the Secretary of War, *Territorial Papers,* 9:916-917.
[125] Ibid., 9:916-917.
[126] Shaw to Hamilton, January 18, 1811.

single person in it possessed a musket for the protection of himself and property … [as] all our cutlasses, muskets, pistols, and … [ammunition] were drawn from the stores."[127]

Knowing that the fate of the city and the territory at large were now out of his hands, Governor Claiborne, in a letter to militia leader Major St. Amand, stated, "… several hundred men have marched up the Coast by my orders … to protect the lives and property of my fellow citizens …." He continued, saying, "… I pray God that the force … may soon meet the Brigands and arrest them in their murdering carreer." Claiborne then encouraged St. Amand to "continue with your Neighbours and maintain order and discipline."[128] Governor Claiborne's last resort consisted of prayer, calling on God to save his "fellow citizens" and "neighbours" from the murderous "brigands" who threatened their peace and civility along with their lives. The particular words Claiborne uses following the outbreak of rebellion mark the beginning of a particular narrative that contrasted "citizens" and "neighbours," defined by order, religion, and general civility, to the rebels, defined by murder, destruction, and as a serious threat to the values of New Orleans citizens.

The combined forces sent from New Orleans traveled through the night, reaching the Jacques Fortier plantation in the early hours of the morning on 10 January. General Hampton later recalled the scene, saying, "The Brigands had posted themselves within a strong picket fence, having also the advantage of two strong brick building[s] belonging to Colonel Fortier's Sugar works."[129] After organizing their forces and laying out their plan of attack, General Hampton and his men rushed the Fortier plantation to put an end to this insurrection once and for all. But much to their surprise and dismay, the slave army was not there. Hampton, in his

[127] Ibid.
[128] Claiborne to Major St. Amand, New Orleans, January 9, 1811, in *OLB*, 5:93.
[129] Hampton to the Secretary of War, *Territorial Papers,* 9:916-917.

recollection of the event, wrote that "the Brigands had been alarmed in the night by a few young men who had advanced so near as to discharge their pieces at them" and "were therefore upon the alert, and as the line advanced to encompass them, retired in great silence."[130] The *Richmond Enquirer* ran a piece citing the Louisiana *Gazette*, the original of which could not be found, stating that Claiborne's assorted forces had determined that the slave army had been at the Fortier plantation for some time, "killing poultry, cooking, eating, drinking, and rioting," and while Hampton and Shaw had the rebels on the run, they decided to camp there for a few hours and rest.[131] Meanwhile, Deslondes's rebel army had backtracked 15 miles along the Mississippi River to Bernard Bernoudy's plantation. They were not the only force on the move, however. Not long after the slave army reached Bernoudy's plantation, they met a grim fate at the hands of a group of planters 80-strong looking to "hunt for the brigands, and … halt the progress of the revolt."[132]

Unbeknownst to Claiborne and his forces, as the rebellious slaves had gathered numbers and strength on the way to New Orleans, so too had Colonel André, whose makeshift militia made up of planters and farmers had been pursuing the rebels. Following the attack at his home, which kickstarted the rebellion, Manuel André made his way across the river to the home of a fellow planter, Charles Perret. In his report to Governor Claiborne, André claimed he and Perret had "been able to collect a detachment of about eighty men, and although wounded, [he had] taken the command of brave fellow planters."[133] Though they had less men, André's forces remained highly motivated and far better armed than the slaves. They decided to cross the river in hopes of stamping out the rebellion themselves and soon came across Deslondes and his rebel

[130] Ibid.
[131] *Richmond Enquirer*, February 22, 1811.
[132] Engerman, Drescher, and Paquette, *Slavery*, 324.
[133] André to Claiborne, *Territorial Papers,* 9:915-916.

army. According to Perret, they "saw the enemy at a very short distance, numbering about 200 men, as many mounted as on foot," and, after little deliberation, Perret called out to his men, "Let those who are willing follow me, and let's move out!"[134] Coming upon the slave army, whom André described as "full of arrogance," they "rushed upon [the rebel army] … [and] made considerable slaughter."[135]

While the planter militia killed some of the rebels, a considerable number escaped "to the woods, and the chiefs principally being on horseback, made their escape with greater facility."[136] Hoping to provide some closure to this calamity, Perret started after them a large group of planters "… to beat the bushes, to harass the enemy, and to make contact with those who had fled."[137] As they gave chase to the fleeing rebels, André and the rest of the planter militia began detaining the slaves who had survived their attack. Among this group was Charles Deslondes, the leader and main perpetrator of the rebellion. Describing the fate of Deslondes, Samuel Hambleton said he "had his Hands chopped off then shot in one thigh and then the other, until they were both broken—then shot in the Body and before he had expired was put into a bundle of straw and roasted!"[138] As for the fate of the other leaders, their heads were chopped off and "carried to the Andry estate."[139] André reported their victorious results to Claiborne following their violent attack but remained worried about the escaped slave rebels. When writing to Claiborne, André asked for "a detachment of regular troops" to ensure the "tranquility of our coast, because I am obliged to order many detachments of militia to meet and destroy the remaining of those brigands."[140] Understanding the general precariousness of the situation and,

---

[134] Perret in a Letter to the *Louisiana Moniteur*, in Engerman, Drescher, & Paquette, *Slavery*, 324-326.
[135] André to Claiborne, *Territorial Papers*, 9:915-916.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Perret in a Letter to the *Louisiana Moniteur*, in Engerman, Drescher, & Paquette, *Slavery*, 324-326.
[138] Samuel Hambleton to David Porter, in Engerman, Drescher, & Paquette, *Slavery*, 326.
[139] Perret in a Letter to the *Louisiana Moniteur*, in Engerman, Drescher, & Paquette, *Slavery*, 324-326.
[140] André to Claiborne, *Territorial Papers*, 9:915-916.

more than likely, his lack of authority, André decided to wait for reinforcements—who, coincidentally, were just down the road.

Soon after Hampton, Shaw, and their assembled forces came upon this scene of carnage, further reinforcements arrived on the morning of January 11. Major Homer Virgil Milton, leading a company of artillery alongside a company of dragoons, heard the news around midday on Thursday in Baton Rouge and traveled nearly 15 miles downriver to provide aid to Claiborne's forces.[141] Milton arrived in the area because just days before, as he had recently led a mission to attack Spanish forces in West Florida.[142] Erring on the side of caution, Hampton, when writing to Claiborne, said, "I have Judged it expedient to Order down a Company of L'Artillery and one of Dragoons to Descend from Baton Rouge & to touch at Every Settlement of Consequence, and to Crush any disturbances that May have taken place higher Up."[143]

General Hampton remained alert, convinced that the rebellious slaves of the German Coast did not act alone. He claimed that the uprising was "… unquestionably of Spanish Origin …" and although "The Chiefs of the party that took the field are both taken … there is Without doubt Others behind the Curtain Still More formidable."[144] Hampton's worries of Spanish collusion made sense, as Spanish inhabitants agitated slaves in Louisiana on numerous occasions in the past.[145] More importantly, nine months prior to the uprising, a group of American filibusters attacked a Spanish fort in Baton Rouge. While the United States government might not have been privy to the plans of the West Florida Rebellion, it still led to a decision by the United States to annex the territory just a few months later. In Hampton's mind, this served as

[141] Hampton to Claiborne, *Territorial Papers,* 9:916-917.
[142] Peter J. Kastor, *The Nation's Crucible: The Louisiana Purchase and the Creation of America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 102.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Hampton to Claiborne, *Territorial Papers*, 9:916-917.
[145] Edw. D. Turner to Claiborne, New Orleans, November 16, 1804, *OLB*, 2:386-387.

sufficient motivation for the Spanish to instigate Deslonde's rebellion as a disguised Spanish counterattack.[146]

As Hampton and others deliberated the origins of Deslondes's rebellion and continued to surveil the area, the citizens of the German Coast returned to their homes. The planters saw the rebellion as effectively over, with Perret calling out for the planters to "… return to their properties" and for the drivers "… to carry out the accustomed work at the usual hours … so as to maintain good order."[147] In the eyes of these planters who so ferociously and savagely butchered the rebel slaves, the goal of reestablishing order and slave compliance was now the concern—only their method of reinstating civility on the German Coast was anything but civil and was only just beginning.

[146] Owsley & Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists*, 63.
[147] Perret in a Letter to the *Moniteur de la Louisiane*, in Engerman, Drescher, & Paquette, *Slavery*, 324-326.

CHAPTER 3

REMEMBERING THE REBELS

Along the German Coast and in the city of New Orleans, authorities captured and interrogated nearly sixty blacks following the defeat of the uprising, with tribunals of slave owners formed to determine their fate. In the City of New Orleans, Judge Moreau Lislet held tribunals for at least fourteen enslaved men charged with insurrection. In St. John the Baptist Parish, Judge A. Troward held a tribunal that tried at least ten rebels with insurrection. In St. Charles Parish, Judge Pierre Baquette St. Martin organized tribunals of slaveowners which tried at least thirty-six slaves on charges of insurrection. Some rebels died when they were captured or surrendered. Authorities held many of the rebels for trial, most of whom the tribunals decided to execute in short order. In general, those interrogated faced torture, and those condemned to execution faced a firing squad or a noose. There were also many rebels whose heads were cut off and stuck on poles along the river, on the plantations of their masters, or on plantations where resistance had taken place.[148]

In St. Charles Parish, the tribunals composed of prominent planters in the area, including Jean Noel Destrehan, Alexandre Labranche, Adelard and Edmond Fortier, and Pierre Bauchet St. Martin, serving as judge. From January 13 to January 15, these men sentenced twenty-one Africans to death for the act of insurrection. The tribunal sentenced these men to be shot in front of their respective residences.[149] After these executions, the tribunal suspended its proceedings to make an accounting of all the slaves killed or still missing. This survey provided information on all plantations on the east bank of the river, from Jacques Fortier's estate to the Manuel André

[148] St. Charles Parish, *Original Acts*, Acts 2, 17, 21, 22, & 24; New Orleans City Court, Louisiana Division, New Orleans Public Library, Cases 186-195.
[149] St. Charles Parish, *Original Acts*, Act 2, January 13, 1811, 17-20.

plantation. The results of this tabulation indicated that a total of sixty-six Africans had been killed in the fighting or executed, twenty-two were still held in prisons, and twenty were still missing. Remarkably, several slaves listed as being killed or executed came from plantations in St. James Parish and upper St. John the Baptist Parish. This finding supports the conclusion that Charles Deslondes may have coordinated with enslaved Africans further up the river than previously thought. There's also a possibility that the revolt actually started in St. James Parish, although the evidence pointing towards that conclusion remains entirely based on the information gleaned from this survey.[150]

The captured slave rebels who were tried in New Orleans remained in the Cabildo jail while the tribunals took place on the second floor. The slaveowners on the tribunal included Louis LaBlanc, J.E. Boré, Daniel Clark, Peter Colssen, Stephen Hendersen, Chas Jumonville, Thomas Porée, P. Dennis LaRonde, Jacques Villeré, J. B. Labatut, and L. Moreau Lislet, serving as judge once again. The court remained in session from January 15 to January 18 and, after a two-week hiatus, concluded on February 2, with the tribunal sentencing at least eight slaves to death.[151]

According to court records, authorities executed a slave named Daniel Garret, whom McCutcheon and Butler owned, at the Place d'Armes in front of the St. Louis Cathedral. They also exposed his head and decapitated body at the lower entrance to the city on the levee road. Apparently, Garret encouraged insurrection within the municipality of the city of New Orleans. Due to this, the tribunal considered Garret as a key link in the network of insurrectionists, given his ability to connect the revolutionary efforts on the German Coast and efforts within the city. Another notable detail of these court records involved the fate of the slave Hector, who was

[150] St. Charles Parish, *Original Acts*, Act 2, January 13, 1811, 17-20.
[151] New Orleans City Court, Louisiana Division, New Orleans Public Library, Cases 186-195.

hanged and had his head stuck on a poke on the Villeré plantation, ten miles downriver from New Orleans on the east bank (on the other side of New Orleans from the German Coast). These particular cases also point to the conclusion that the participants of the 1811 German Coast Uprising planned and organized the event on a larger scale than previously imagined.[152]

The plantation slaves also remained in contact with the extensive network of maroon colonies running up and down the river on both sides, including those colonies in the rear of the city of New Orleans, further aiding this hypothesis. On foot or by boat, maroons moved regularly and quickly from one colony to another carrying information. This is extremely important given that a number of the participants and leaders in the uprising had in fact run away into the swamps and became maroons prior to the January uprising. From this base, they almost certainly communicated with the slaves on plantations and aided in organizing the revolt.

For example, an African man named Simon ran away from the Butler plantation in St. Charles Parish on July 12, 1810.[153] He participated in the revolt in January of 1811 and died via execution.[154] Joseph, an African man on the plantation of Kenner and Henderson in St. Charles Parish, ran away on May 9, 1810, and either died in the fighting or via execution.[155] Two African slaves named Croaker and Charles ran away in January of 1810 from the plantation of John Palfrey. Charles and Croaker participated in Deslondes's uprising, and both died in the fighting or via execution.[156] A slave named Appollon ran away from the Meuillon estate prior to 1811; he also participated in the revolt and died in the fighting.[157] As evidence from these court

[152] New Orleans City Court, Louisiana Division, New Orleans Public Library, Case 188, January 17, 1811.
[153] *Louisiana Gazette*, July 24, 1810.
[154] St. Charles Parish, *Original Acts*, Act 21, March 7, 1811, 141-143.
[155] *Louisiana Gazette*, June 21, 1810; St. Charles Parish, *Original Acts*, Act 21, March 7, 1811, 141-143.
[156] St. Charles Parish, *Original Acts*, Act 21, March 7, 1811, 141-143.
[157] St. Charles Parish, *Original Acts*, Act 21, March 7, 1811, 141-143.

trials shows, the leaders of the 1811 German Coast Uprising organized this movement with great care and coordinated their efforts on a much larger scale than previously thought.

Following the planter militia's barbaric form of justice, the St. Charles Parish Tribunal decreed that "The heads of the executed shall be cut off and placed atop a pole on the spot where all can see the punishment meted out for such crimes, also as a terrible example to all who would disturb the public tranquility in the future," essentially justifying the violent actions of the planter militia.[158] A witness described the gruesome scene in detail, stating that "they were brung [to the German Coast] for the sake of their Heads, which decorate our Levee, all the way up the coast … and look like crows sitting on long poles."[159] In the words of Manuel André, the planters of the German Coast wanted to "make a great example" of the rebel slaves.[160] In this sense, the planters used savage methods to fight savagery. Although, they were not the first to do this. Louisiana and other places nearby had a precedent of chopping off heads and displaying them, hoping their "great example" would send a message to other slaves contemplating rebellion or revolution.

During the era later known as the Age of Revolutions, which remains loosely defined but typically seen as starting with the American Revolution and ending sometime in the mid-nineteenth century, several revolts and wars dramatically affected the world's top imperial powers and their foothold in the Atlantic world. In Jamaica in 1760, a large group of slaves rebelled against the white planter class in what was the world's largest slave revolt of the time. Tacky's Revolt—also referred to as the Coromantee War by historian Vincent Brown—ended

[158] Conrad, *The German Coast*, 102.
[159] Samuel Hambleton to David Porter, in Engerman, Drescher, & Paquette, *Slavery*, 326.
[160] André to Claiborne, *Territorial Papers,* 9:915-916.

with Tacky's capture and decapitation, "with his head exhibited on a pole in Spanish Town."[161] This practice escalated substantially during the Haitian Revolution, where "the heads of white prisoners, placed on stakes, surrounded the camps of the blacks, and the corpses of black prisoners were hung from the trees and bushes along the roads …."[162] Even during a slave revolt in Pointe Coupée, Louisiana, slaves went from plantation to plantation "cutting off the heads of the whites …."[163] The local planters responded swiftly and brutally, decapitating "… twenty-three slaves," nailing their "… heads … on posts at several places along the Mississippi River from New Orleans to Pointe Coupee."[164]

In the years leading up to the 1811 German Coast Uprising, there existed a clear pattern of decapitation and the disgracing of corpses in Louisiana and nearby Caribbean colonies. Describing the scene in New Orleans on 18 January, Commodore John Shaw said that "Condemnation, and execution by hanging and beheading are going daily, [and] our citizens appear to be again at ease, and in short, tranquility is in a fair way of being again established."[165] In a grim piece of irony, the tribunals following the German Coast uprising tried to reestablish the lines between the civility of the white planters and the savageness of the African slaves through the inherently savage punishment of decapitation and the displaying of heads. For the white population, this practice ultimately served to strike fear in the hearts of slaves, to reassure themselves of their power and control, and to tarnish the image of the slaves who rebelled—the consequences of which can still be felt today with the general lack of historical coverage regarding such courageous figures.

---

[161] Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Buford Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 222.
[162] Dubois, *Avengers of the New World,* 116.
[163] Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana,* 329.
[164] Ibid., 344.
[165] Shaw to Hamilton, January 18, 1811.

Besides the inhumane and savage methods chosen to suppress the rebellion and punish the rebels, another major factor in the widespread historical amnesia regarding the 1811 German Coast Uprising—and perhaps the biggest— is Governor William Claiborne, whom many looked to for answers and leadership following the rebellion. Writing to Secretary of State Robert Smith following the end of the revolt, Claiborne claimed that "… we have nothing further to apprehend from the Brigands" as "Col: Andre [gave] me information of their entire defeat and discomfiture. Every exertion shall be made to cause an early arrest of such as have escaped, and in the mean time the measures I have ordered, with a View to the public safety and tranquility will be continued."[166] Just two days later, Claiborne, in a letter to Major St. Amand and Colonel André, said that "… we must continue our vigilance; and patroles by night must be maintained."[167] He would repeat this message to Colonel Vilerae two days later on 16 January.[168] The following day, on 17 January, Claiborne wrote again to the Secretary of State, claiming that "everything is now tranquil … my authority is respected … and good order is restored."[169] Claiborne clearly articulated different narratives depending on whom he talked to, and this should not come as a surprise. He was, after all, a politician under scrutiny.

With Louisiana statehood on the horizon, with New Orleans growing in size and prominence, and with war looming, Claiborne had to prove himself capable of maintaining control over his post without the need for external assistance. The suppression of the German Coast uprising provided Claiborne with that opportunity. While many in the area quickly blamed Spanish, Haitian, or French influence in the igniting of the German Coast uprising through revolutionary ideology, Claiborne—in letters, in official reports, and in newspapers—

[166] Claiborne to the Secretary of State, New Orleans, January 12, 1811, in *OLB*, 5:97.
[167] Claiborne to Major St. Amand and Col: Andre, New Orleans, January 14, 1811, in *OLB*, 5:99.
[168] Claiborne to Col: Vilerae, New Orleans, January 16, 1811, in *OLB*, 5:101.
[169] Claiborne to the Secretary of State, New Orleans, January 17, 1811, in *OLB*, 5:103.

purposefully stripped the rebellion of wider, geopolitical significance and dismissed it as basic delinquency.

In a letter to the Secretary of War, General Hampton, days after the uprising's defeat, claimed the event "… might have inflicted more human misery than ever has been felt within the United States" had it succeeded.[170] While Claiborne had previously acknowledged the massive potential of Deslondes's rebellion, he later referred to the insurrection as "mischief" and wrote that "only" two planters were murdered.[171] Furthermore, in a speech to the Orleans territorial legislature, Claiborne called the insurrection "a small uprising among the slaves of several neighboring plantations that did not reflect the feelings of loyal slaves in the rest of the territory." With the appearance of this text in the *Louisiana Gazette* on 30 January, Claiborne's attempts to minimize this event on a larger scale had started.[172] By diminishing the threat posed by the rebels and extolling his own efforts as well as those under his orders, Claiborne effectively turned the planter militia's triumph into his own political triumph.

Claiborne's desire for Louisiana statehood and general political aspirations might partly explain the lack of coverage following the suppression of the uprising, but he alone cannot be held accountable—as he was certainly not the only one who knew details of the insurrection. Less than two days after the end of the revolt, the story emerged in the *Louisiana Courier*, the *Louisiana Moniteur,* and the *Louisiana Gazette.* These outlets printed the full decrees issued by Governor Claiborne in the days following the outbreak of rebellion on the German Coast, as well as a general description of the situation and efforts underway to defeat the uprising.[173] An

[170] Hampton to the Secretary of War, *Territorial Papers,* 9:916-917.
[171] Claiborne to Doctor Steele, New Orleans, January 20, 1811, in *OLB*, 112-113.
[172] *Louisiana Gazette*, January 30, 1811.
[173] *Louisiana Courier,* January 11, 1811; *Louisiana Moniteur*, January 12, 1811; *Louisiana Gazette*, January 10, 1811.

article in the *Louisiana Gazette* on January 11 mentioned "Charles … [as] the property of Mr. Andre" and a "leader of the miscreants." This was the first time that the uprising's chief leader was mentioned, although his name would be lost to popular memory for some time. As the days passed, articles regarding the uprising and uncaptured participants flooded the local newspapers. One story read that while soldiers persisted in their search for the remaining insurrectionists, "… in a few days the planters can, with safety, return to their farms."[174] The *Louisiana Gazette* later ran a story detailing the number of rebel causalities, stating that sixty-six were killed, sixteen were "sent to New Orleans for trial," and at least seventeen were still at large, with a handful thought to be "dead in the woods."[175] To alleviate any lingering fears of further insurrection or rebellion, General Hampton, possibly at the request of Governor Claiborne, made a public announcement saying that the "chiefs of the party" had been all accounted for and that New Orleans citizens had nothing to fear.[176]

Examining the 1811 German Coast Uprising through its coverage in American newspapers provides evidence for this study. Not only does such an examination relay the popular perception of the event from nearby and far away locations, but the lack of coverage in certain areas, the changing of pertinent details, and the sometimes-strategic wording of certain accounts all serve to further illuminate the reasons why this massive event in American history was lost for so long. Though one of the largest and most prominent cities in the United States at the time of the rebellion, New Orleans remained a frontier territory and somewhat isolated in terms of other nearby cities. This is an important point when considering the historical memory of an event—especially in a comparative manner. While no major newspapers existed anywhere

[174] *Louisiana Militia*, 13.
[175] *Louisiana Gazette*, January 21, 1811.
[176] *Louisiana Militia*, 14.

near New Orleans, certain details of the story still reached the East Coast of the country and other faraway places.

In the weeks following the 1811 German Coast Uprising, ships from the Crescent City, heading to the East Coast as well as up the Mississippi River, brought news of the uprising to their respective destinations. Just over a month after Deslondes and other slaves of the German Coast revolted, the *New York Gazette* published an article about the rebellion.[177] News of the revolt quickly spread to nearby states, including North Carolina, where the *Raleigh Minerva* ran a thorough story on the revolt, but minimized its scale by describing it as "mischief" and stating that the "plot was not as extensive, nor concerted in the manner which was apprehended."[178] A paper in Milledgeville, Georgia, ran a story on the revolt, failing to mention the casualties or damages but, when referring to the rebels, including a line stating that there was "no doubt" of their "total subdual."[179]

The lack of stories in areas like Savannah and Charleston suggests a purposeful suppression of the story considering the large slave populations there. On March 7, nearly two months after the rebellion, the event was first mentioned in a newspaper in present-day Missouri—only after authorities there had passed new, stricter laws regarding slavery.[180] It remains unclear whether or not the St. Louis *Louisiana Gazette*—not to be confused with the New Orleans *Louisiana Gazette*—purposefully delayed the printing of the story until local authorities could decree and enact these new slave control acts, but the timing is certainly suspicious.

[177] *New York Gazette*, February 15, 1811.
[178] *Raleigh Minerva*, February 28, 1811.
[179] *Milledgeville Georgia Journal*, March 6, 1811.
[180] (St. Louis) *Louisiana Gazette*, March 7, 1811.

Mistakes in certain newspapers regarding details of the revolt may also have played a role in the story being lost to history. For example, a handful of newspapers in New England mistakenly claimed that Manuel André was the "father of Governor Claiborne."[181] Based on a letter written by a New Orleans citizen that appeared in newspapers both in Pennsylvania and New York, an article classified Deslondes, the "leader" of the uprising, as a free man of color.[182] This mistake, which some might consider small, could have certainly led to a more widespread fear of not only slaves in Louisiana but their large population of free blacks as well. For example, the *Hampshire Gazette* in Massachusetts, which based its information on the same letter mentioned above, ran a story condemning the United State's "acquisition [of] the new state of Orleans," where people of color, free and enslaved, plotted to rise up and "cut the throats of their white fellow citizens."[183] Even exaggerations can play into this widespread misremembering of the event. In the *Martinsburg Gazette*, a report on the insurrection claimed that the slave army killed "many" slaveowners and burned down "many" homes along the German Coast, a subjective observation, true, but an exaggeration nonetheless that holds serious weight.[184]

Many newspapers also emphasized the severity of the suppression. Newspapers in Pennsylvania, New York, and Ohio all reprinted the same message, saying, "We are sorry to learn that ferocious sanguinary disposition marked the character of some of the inhabitants. Civilized man ought to remember well his standing, and never let himself sink down to the level of savage; our laws are summary enough and let them govern."[185] Adding to this sentiment, the

[181] *Concord New Hampshire Patriot*, February 26, 1811; *Hallowell American Advocate*, February 27, 1811.
[182] *Political and Commercial Advertiser*, February 19, 1811; *New York Evening Post*, February 20, 1811.
[183] *Hampshire Gazette*, February 27, 1811.
[184] *Martinsburg Gazette*, February 22, 1811.
[185] *Chillicothe Supporter*, February 16, 1811; *Philadelphia Political and Commercial Advertiser*, February 19, 1811; *New York Weekly Museum*, March 2, 1811.

same Pennsylvania newspaper included a quote from a gentleman in New Orleans that said, "One negro was killed after he became a prisoner, for what reason I know not, unless to gratify the revengeful feel turned him loose in a lane and shot him as he ran." And in Cincinnati, the *Western Spy* ran a story based on a letter sent from Natchez that the slaves had guns but no musket balls during the revolt and that, following its defeat, authorities "ornamented" the levee "… [with] the heads of these unfortunate wretches."[186]

In contrast to the stories condemning the harsh punishment of the slaves, the St. Louis *Louisiana Gazette*, among others in the South, focused on those killed or wounded by the slaves, the property damaged by the rebels, and the heroic actions of those who helped stamp out the rebellion. This specific article praised General Wade Hampton's role in the suppression and described his actions as "prompt" and "judicious."[187] This story had eerily similar wording to Claiborne's reports on the incident and the many local newspapers that covered it. There was even a newspaper in Rhode Island, over a thousand miles away, that published an article assuring its citizens that the threat on the German Coast was neutralized and that authorities in the area, through their harsh suppression, successfully restored "complete … tranquility."[188]

Claiborne's official portrayal of the events on the German Coast held considerable weight and value in New Orleans and Washington D.C., where people in positions of power might have been able to constitute positive change—or at least begin the discussion. The one newspaper in Washington that reported on the story, the *National Intelligencer*, emphasized the lack of threat that the rebels posed, stating that they suffered "total defeat … [with the help of] the United States Army."[189] Historian Junius Rodriguez argues that "many accounts of unrest reported in

[186] *Cincinnati Western Spy*, March 2, 1811.
[187] (St. Louis) *Louisiana Gazette*, March 7, 1811.
[188] *Newport Mercury*, March 2, 1811.
[189] *National Intelligencer*, February 19, 1811.

local newspapers never reached the New Orleans press where such intelligence might adversely influence the slave market."[190] While newspapers in New Orleans commented on certain details of the revolt on the German Coast as well as the suppression, it is not unreasonable to suggest that these accounts remained almost entirely based on the words and actions of Governor Claiborne—who had many reasons to downplay the severity of the threat. In effect, William Claiborne stripped the event of geopolitical significance, negatively affecting the historical memory of Deslondes's rebellion for years to come.

The first historical account of the rebellion came 18 years after it had been so violently defeated. In 1829, former Attorney General of Louisiana Francois Xavier Martin published the second volume of *The History of Louisiana, from the Earliest Period*. In it, Martin devotes a single paragraph to the 1811 German Coast Uprising. His account, while getting a few minor details wrong, provides a straightforward account of the proceedings—essentially creating a foundation for future historians to build upon.[191] Unfortunately, the accounts that followed radically differed.

The second account of the rebellion came during Reconstruction, a time in American history following the Civil War defined by considerable sociopolitical changes—primarily by addressing the inequities of slavery. While this era had overwhelmingly positive consequences, one unfortunate side effect was an increased effort by certain individuals—typically in the South—to see the continuation of this evil institution by any means possible. For 62-year-old ex-Confederate Charles Gayarré, this came in the form of inaccurate and often racist accounts throughout his multi-volume *History of Louisiana.*

---

[190] Junius Peter Rodriguez, Jr., "Ripe for Revolt: Louisiana and the Tradition of Slave Insurrection, 1803-1865." (Ph.D. diss., Auburn University, 1992), 18, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
[191] Martin François Xavier, *The History of Louisiana: From the Earliest Period*. Vol. 2 (New Orleans, LA: Lyman and Beardslee, 1829), shorturl.at/gFHV0.

In his fourth and final volume, published in 1866, Gayarré provides an account of the 1811 German Coast Uprising in which he wholeheartedly defends the brutal suppression of the revolt. According to Gayarré, the revolt "shows how little that population is to be dreaded, when confronted by the superior race to whose care Providence has entrusted their protection and gradual civilization." The slaves who rebelled, referred to as "misguided negroes" by Gayarreé, had been misled "… into this foolish attempt at gaining a position in society, which, for the welfare of their own race, will ever be denied to it in the Southern States of North America, as long as their white population is not annihilated or subjugated," and once they saw Major Milton and General Hampton, "they fled in every direction with wild cries of despair …." Gayarré approved entirely of the extreme measures enacted by the white planters when punishing their rebel slaves. Regarding the decapitation and displaying of heads specifically, Gayarré wrote that "… it was intended to make a warning example of them," to "spread terror far and wide, and further to insure tranquility and to quiet alarm …." Like Governor Claiborne and the white planters on the German Coast in 1811, Charles Gayarré saw the punishment as entirely fitting and justified.[192]

Gayarré also provided a story of François Trépagnier in his account of the rebellion—though how he obtained his information remains entirely unclear. According to him, Trépagnier, after sending his wife and children to safety, chose to stay behind, stand up to the rebels, and protect his property. Gayerré claims that as the slaves made their way into the mansion-home of Trépagnier, they "wavered … at the sight of the double-barreled gun which was levelled at them … which they knew to be in the hands of a most expert shot … [and lacking] self-sacrificing devotion to accomplish their end, [they] finally passed on, after having vented their disappointed

[192] Gayarré, *History of Louisiana*, 267-268.

wrath in fearful shrieks and demoniacal gesticulations." He continues, stating that the slaves "… swore soon to come back for the purpose of cutting his throat. They were about five hundred, and one single man … kept them at bay.[193] Considering multiple authors mention Trépagnier's death, Gayarré's clear bias, as well as the general ludicrousness of the story, makes it hard to take his account as accurate. Considering Gayarré's "history" provided the public with essentially the only account for decades, there is a good chance many people might have taken it at face value. This kind of inaccurate, misleading, and racist depiction is one of the chief reasons why the history of Deslondes's rebellion became warped and, ultimately, neglected as time passed.

Unfortunately, the effects of Gayarré's shameful account reappear in the major depictions that followed. More than 100 years after the rebellion, Yale historian Ulrich Bonnell Phillips published his book *American Negro Slavery* in 1918, devoting just a few sentences to the uprising—but even just a few sentences can speak volumes about a person and their era. Providing his account in a chapter titled "Slave Crime," Phillips says that "the negroes were in a strange land … [and it was] to be expected that their conduct in general would be widely different from that of the whites who were citizens and proprietors." He also conveyed that "the natural amenability of the blacks … had been a decisive factor in their initial enslavement, and the reckoning which their captors and rulers made of this was on the whole well founded." According to Phillips, the rebellious slaves had "few distinctive characteristics" and gave "… no special concern to the public except as regards rape and revolt."[194] For Phillips, as for men like Claiborne, André, and Gayarré, the South had been defined by its commitment to white

[193] Ibid., 268.
[194] Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, "Slave Crime," in *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment & Control of Negro Labor As Determined by the Plantation Regime*, (Boston: D. Appleton & Co., 1918), 245-265.

superiority. Even 100 years later, no one had provided anything resembling a fair description of the story of Charles Deslondes and his courageous followers.

Contrary to the account provided by Francois Xavier Martin, John S. Kendall, a journalist, and later professor, provided a rather lengthy account of the rebellion in an essay published in 1939 titled "Shadow over the City." Like Phillips and Gayarré, however, Kendall's account contained misleading evidence and racist overtones—most evidently in his title, which derives from his point that black people cast a "shadow" over New Orleans. Alongside his depiction of slaves as savages and animal-like, Kendall repeats Gayarré's farfetched story of Trépagnier's defiant stand against the rebels, praising his actions.[195]

While men like Gayarré, Phillips, and Kendall helped solidify the original narrative introduced by Claiborne in 1811, their time as experts on the subject came to a swift end. Just a few years after Kendall's unjust and racist essay, Herbert Aptheker, a 28-year-old Ph.D. student, published his book *American Negro Slave Revolts* in 1943. In this work, Aptheker heavily criticized Ulrich Phillips's work and condemned his claim that blacks remained inherently "'stupid, negligent, docile, inconstant, dilatory, and … submissive,'" and suffered from "'inherited ineptitude.'"[196] While Aptheker's account of the 1811 German Coast Uprising remained brief and lacked detail, his attack on Phillips signaled a larger change to come in the historiography of the event.

While Aptheker's attack on blatant racism in historical works signaled a step in the right direction, it took more than 30 years for someone to revisit the uprising and cast it in a new light. In 1977, James H. Dormon produced the event's first thorough account based on facts. While discussing the many details of the event, including the main characters, timeline, possible

[195] John S. Kendall, "Shadow over the City," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 22 (January 1939), 142-165.
[196] Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York City: Columbia University Press, 1943), 13.

external influences, and outcome, Dormon also uncovered the court records from the trials of the captured slaves. This vital discovery remains the only source that allows historians a glimpse into the minds of the rebels. Building off the work of James H. Dormon, historians Junius P. Rodriguez and Albert Thrasher made significant strides in the 1990s. More recently, Adam Rothman, Robert Paquette, and Daniel Rasmussen have all published respectable, detailed accounts based on thorough research in the years since. While these more recent historians have contributed significantly to the story of Charles Deslondes and his revolution, they, like Dorman, Rodriguez, and Thrasher, fall short in certain aspects.[197]

While Rothman and Rodriguez's works both include descriptions of the 1811 German Coast Uprising and Louisiana's general environment following the event, they lack an in-depth analysis of Louisiana's environment leading up to the uprising as well as how other major events such as the Haitian Revolution played a role in its formation. Conversely, the works of Dorman and Paquette, while including an analysis of Louisiana's environment in the years leading up to the uprising, fall short in explaining the specific factors that led to rebellion because of their wider scope. They also fail to analyze the rebellion's historical memory and its impact on legislation as well as other instances of resistance in the area in the years that followed its defeat. While Thrasher and Rasmussen both address the environment in Louisiana preceding the rebellion as well as its possible impact on nearby events following its conclusion, much of their work is not grounded in fact-based academic research and therefore calls into question much of

[197] James H. Dormon, "The Persistent Specter: Slave Rebellion in Territorial Louisiana," *Louisiana History* 18 (1977): 389-404; Junius Peter Rodriguez, Jr., "Ripe for Revolt: Louisiana and the Tradition of Slave Insurrection, 1803-1865." (Ph.D. diss., Auburn University, 1992); Albert Thrasher, *On to New Orleans!*: *Louisiana's Heroic 1811 Slave Revolt* (New Orleans, LA: Cypress Press, 1996); Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Robert L. Paquette, "Revolutionary Saint Domingue in the Making of Territorial Louisiana," in *A Turbulent Time: The French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean*, eds. David Geggus and David Gaspar (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1997); Daniel Rasmussen, *American Uprising: The Untold Story of America's Largest Slave Revolt* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011).

their claims. The efforts of these scholars are certainly commendable and undeniably valuable to the progression of research regarding such an important event, but as of yet, there remains no work that encompasses all of the major components of the rebellion.

An important facet of this story that many historians have not considered is the uprising's impact on legislative change in the United States and how it might have served to inspire future action by enslaved individuals. The 1811 German Coast Uprising contributed to the passing of several new laws regarding the control and importation of enslaved individuals as well as militia reform in Louisiana. Three weeks after the rebellion began, Claiborne, in a speech to legislative officials, minimized the revolt and threat it posed and affirmed the inhumane methods deployed in its suppression and ultimate defeat.[198] Since Claiborne considered the revolt as a one-off event and not reflective of the majority of slaves in the area, which he described as "loyal," he did not push for new legislation regarding the treatment and control of enslaved individuals. He did, however, suggest stricter laws regarding the importation of slaves into Louisiana who authorities elsewhere charged with crimes. The legislative officials, many of whom were wealthy slaveowners, rejected Claiborne's idea, probably estimating the profit to be made from these individuals as more than the risk they posed.[199]

Governor Claiborne, in the same assembly, suggested an overhaul of the Louisiana militia, a long-held concern of his and many others since in the Louisiana Purchase. The Spanish administration, when in power, actually suppressed the militia's might on purpose. They worried that a local militia consisting of mainly French planters might be a vehicle in which to overthrow the Spanish administration.[200] In 1809, Claiborne, in a letter to then Secretary of State James

[198] *Louisiana Gazette*, January 30, 1811.
[199] *Louisiana Courier*, April 13, 1811.
[200] McGowan, "Creation of a Slave Society: Louisiana Plantations in the Eighteenth Century," 217-224.

Madison, referred to the militia as an "inefficient force" and "badly armed." He continued, claiming that if another uprising occurred or if they were attacked by nearby Spanish forces in West Florida, "the negroes are so numerous in the settlement on the Mississippi, that it might be dangerous to draw a considerable detachment of the militia, to any one point."[201] Following the rebellion on the German Coast, Claiborne suggested an increase in fines and harsher penalties to hold militiamen more accountable. Claiborne's proposal resulted in the passing of the Militia Act, which completely restructured the local militia. It also resulted in the permanent stationing of army troops in New Orleans.[202]

Ignoring Governor Claiborne's efforts to diminish the uprising's gravity and escape the need to pass new slave control laws, the city council decided to pass a number of new laws that restricted the movement and freedoms of slaves in the territory. One of the newly passed laws stated that enslaved individuals whose masters lived outside of the city could not be in New Orleans, granting authorities in the city the power to whip or jail suspected violators. The new laws also made it illegal for slaves within the city to gather, except for events authorized by the mayor. The council also approved an increase in fines for residents who fail to notify authorities of illegal slave gatherings.[203] Even with their own governor insisting that authorities should not react to this event with fear, worry, or any sort of significant legislative change, the city council of New Orleans could not ignore the severity of the event and the potential dangers it spelled for the future of their territory. While some took Claiborne's narrative at face value, many across the United States, white and black, free and enslaved, saw through Claiborne's attempted concealment of the story and recognized the true threat and power of the uprising.

[201] William Claiborne to James Madison, New Orleans, January 1, 1809, *OLB*, 4:284.
[202] *Louisiana Courier*, February 4, 1811.
[203] *Louisiana Courier*, January 18, 1811.

The actions of Charles Deslondes and his fellow rebellious slaves prompted swift legislative change in New Orleans and possibly other areas in the United States, but, more importantly, their actions also set the stage for future slave revolts and the eventual victory over slavery. As word of the uprising spread far and wide, from plantation to plantation, town to town, and across the South, more and more slaves began resisting. Since it occurred on the banks of the Mississippi waterway, which connected trade routes in the Gulf of Mexico, the Caribbean, and throughout the interior of the United States, word of the revolt could have very well reached the ears of slaves across the Western Hemisphere. It is not surprising, then, that many major acts of resistance and revolt at the hands of Africans, such as those organized by Denmark Vesey in South Carolina in 1822 and Nat Turner in Virginia in 1831, occurred in its wake.

Following the uprising in 1811, slaveowners faced a series of coordinated and spontaneous acts of reprisal from their slaves in the Territory of Orleans. Atys, a slave belonging to A. Harang of Orleans Parish, attacked his master and several overseers on May 13, 1811. In this clash, Atys struck Harang with a stick, and when another overseer tried to intervene, Atys stabbed him with a knife. Atys was subsequently captured, tried, and eventually executed on May 22, 1811.[204] A few months later, a plantation house belonging to Benjamin Farrar was set on fire on October 28 and burned to the ground. Authorities indicted a slave named Ambrose for the action.[205] Weeks later, in December of 1811, scores of enslaved Africans rose again on the German Coast and in New Orleans. Governor Claiborne dispatched troops to the German Coast, and, in a letter from Claiborne to Major MacRae, the commander of federal troops at Fort St. Charles, the Governor said, "… the negroes in the county of German Coast had again evidenced

[204] New Orleans City Court, Louisiana Division, New Orleans Public Library, Case 202, May 22, 1811.
[205] New Orleans City Court, Louisiana Division, New Orleans Public Library, Case 214, November 7, 1811.

a disposition to rise in insurrection and that this spirit was supposed also to exist among the negroes" here in New Orleans.[206] Days later on December 30, in conjunction with this revolt it seems, a few slaves poisoned several slave owners of the German Coast, including Francois St. Amant, Antoine Dapremont, Claudius Laloive, and Francis Debuey. Authorities indicted two African slaves, Simon and Juliet, belonging to Mr. Drausin and Lucian Labranche, for the poisoning.[207]

The tide of revolt had seemingly seeped into the year 1812. In July, a slave named Thomas killed his master Joseph Parran in St. James Parish.[208] Months later on October 18, 1812, authorities in New Orleans uncovered a major plot involving a large group of slaves. They came from the plantations of McCarty and Laneusse, Bellechasse, Castanato, Bienville, and Thomas. Authorities captured the slaves and a tribunal of slave owners, including Armand Duplantier, L. Derbigny, Etienne Bore, Dusuau DeLaCroix, B.C. Duvergé, and L. Moreau Lislet, condemned them to death.[209]

One of the indictments against the Africans reads as follows: "Joseph, a negro man slave, belonging to Mr. Bellechasse … did knowingly, wickedly, maliciously, and feloniously persuade, encourage, and advise, Monchiu, slave to Mr. MaCarty and Laneusse, Lindor a slave of Mr. Bienvenu, Orphee, slave to Father Thomas, and other slaves unknown by word and actions to an insurrection against the white inhabitants of the state of Louisiana." The tribunal noted that one of the slave rebels, Honore, a slave belonging to Mr. Lemege, had been born in St. Domingue and probably participated in the uprising there at some point between 1791 and

[206] Claiborne to Major McRae, New Orleans, December 24, 1811, *OLB*, 6:16.
[207] New Orleans City Court, Louisiana Division, New Orleans Public Library, Case 215, January 18, 1812.
[208] *Louisiana Moniteur*, July 25, 1812.
[209] New Orleans City Court, Louisiana Division, New Orleans Public Library, Cases 228-233, 1812.

1804.[210] When he heard of the planned revolt, a slave named Lewis informed his master, William Waters Clark, who then alerted authorities to the impending danger. For his part in stopping the attack, the Louisiana state legislature rewarded Lewis with his freedom on February 25, 1813.[211]

In November of 1812, authorities discovered another plot involving Colon, a slave of Mr. Villamil; Antoine, a slave of M. Boniquet; Charles, a slave of Mr. Bienvenu; and Charles, a mulatto belonging to Mr. Marigny. In this case, however, there was insufficient evidence to convict them, and they were acquitted. Just over a month later, in December of 1812, authorities arrested a slave named Butler, deeming him as a member of a "Band of negroes in revolt." Authorities subsequently tried, convicted, and executed Butler.[212]

The year 1813 brought no let-up in the struggle. On June 27, Africans burned down several houses and stores in the city and the suburbs. Mayor Nicholas Girod, who took over the governorship from William C.C. Claiborne in late 1812, issued an order granting a reward to "any person who shall discover one or more incendiaries …." His order also highlighted the following clause of the Black Code, stating that "… the slave who shall discover any species of plot, rebellion, conspiracy, insurrection … shall receive … his freedom as the price of his fidelity …."[213] Meanwhile, on the west bank of the German Coast, several rebellious slaves attacked and severely wounded their master, Zenon Rixner, at his plantation on the West Bank.[214] Less than two years later in the same parish, a slave owner named Frederick Gano and his wife were killed at their home by their mulatto slave on July 10, 1815.[215]

---

[210] New Orleans City Court, Louisiana Division, New Orleans Public Library, Case 231, October 30, 1812.
[211] *Louisiana Courier*, February 25, 1813.
[212] New Orleans City Court, Louisiana Division, New Orleans Public Library, Cases 240, 241, 242, & 246, 1812.
[213] *Louisiana Courier*, June 30, 1813.
[214] Affidavits of Jacques Rixner, St. Charles Parish Police Jury Minutes, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, May 22, 1813.
[215] *Louisiana Gazette*, July 11, 1815.

The growing tensions between the U.S. and England did not go unnoticed by the enslaved population in the years following the 1811 German Coast Uprising. Many slaves attempted to use this conflict to forward their own agendas for further independence and freedom. Authorities in New Orleans and other cities across the United States were aware of this potential problem and enacted measures to ensure other uprisings would be thwarted. On September 20, 1814, the City Council discussed this matter and observed that "… some suspicious persons had already arrived in New Orleans" to stir up the slaves. The City Council, who had determined that the British were behind these attempts, decided to "give the militia patrols the power to arrest any suspicious or unknown person encountered in the streets …."[216] While sources regarding the inspiration for rebellious enslaved Africans in and around the German Coast in the years following the 1811 uprising are lacking, the sheer frequency of such events in this time frame and general similarities between the 1811 German Coast Uprising and those in its wake make these events worth noting.

Despite its savage repression, the crowning achievement of the 1811 revolt revolved around its demonstration to the African masses of the enormous power they possessed when united and led by dedicated leaders. The uprising also demonstrated the enormous courage and moral force possessed by Africans. The 1811 German Coast Uprising participants willingly accepted the necessary sacrifices in the fight for freedom. They accepted death as the price of failure and ultimately preferred this steep price compared to living as a slave. This, more than anything, gave succeeding generations confidence in their eventual victory. Their fearlessness in the face of death laid the foundation for coming generations. In the decades that followed, many

[216] New Orleans City Council, Louisiana Division, New Orleans Public Library, September 20, 1814.

came forth to follow in their tracks—despite the best efforts of Claiborne and others to minimize their efforts.

The general public and scholars of every kind overlooked the history of America's largest slave revolt for nearly 200 years. As previously stated, the suppression of the true severity and magnitude of the rebellion by Governor Claiborne provides one of the leading causes of this historical amnesia. Facing national scrutiny, Claiborne wrote the rebels and their threat to the White-dominant South out of history, portraying them not as revolutionaries but as petty lawbreakers. Also, a host of inaccurate and racist accounts dominated newspapers and history books and bolstered Claiborne's position of white supremacy and social cohesion in Louisiana. These accounts minimized the impact the rebel slaves had on legislative change across the country as well as their role in inspiring future instances of resistance and revolt in the surrounding areas. While legislators around the country and other rebellious slaves might not directly cite Charles Deslondes and his followers for their part in instituting or inspiring change, the connections are there to draw. Thankfully, because of the respectable work of recent historians, artists, filmmakers, and normal everyday people on the German Coast today, the true story of the 1811 German Coast Uprising, which affected so many lives in Louisiana and beyond, has begun permeating the popular world and the getting the recognition it rightfully deserves.

CONCLUSION

As hundreds of people marched to New Orleans in 2019 to honor one of the most significant slave revolts in American history, they simultaneously participated in America's largest slave revolt commemoration. No such events take place in South Carolina for the Stono Rebellion or the Vesey Conspiracy or in Virginia for the Nat Turner Rebellion, even though these events have certainly received much more historical analysis than the revolt on the German Coast. The hard truth is that the wider historical amnesia of the Deslondes rebellion was an unfortunate side effect of the harsh suppression that ended their march.

Pastor of Rising Star Baptist Church Donald Ray August, Sr., whose great-grandparents came to the United States as slaves and whose mother was born on a plantation, was born, raised, and has lived his whole life in LaPlace, Louisiana, where he leads a church that sits on the land of former slave quarters. Though the rebellion happened in his hometown, he did not learn about it until the reenactment led by Dread Scott. When asked about it, Pastor Donald said, "I don't remember ever hearing anything about the 1811 slave uprising. Even the elders in this area have spoken very little about something that occurred here … it's that unspoken, maybe even uncomfortable part of history that many people didn't want to delve into."[217] After participating in the reenactment, Pastor Donald defined the experience as "empowering" and "enlightening" and an experience that helped him understand the mindset of those who "fought for freedom."[218]

Unlike the rebellion of 1811, Dread Scott's 2019 reenactment successfully makes it to New Orleans. Scott was deliberate in his choice not to visualize the uprising's brutal end,

[217] AJ+, "The Largest Slave Rebellion was Hidden from U.S. History," November 26, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m8Ar1PpnQCk&ab_channel=AJ%2B.
[218] Oliver Laughland, "'It Makes it Real': Hundreds March to Re-enact 1811 Louisiana Slave Rebellion," *The Guardian* (November 11, 2019): https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/nov/11/louisiana-slave-rebellion-reenactment-artist-dread-scott.

saying, "white people did some terrible things during the times of slavery, that's not news. What is news is that black people … [had] the most radical ideas of freedom in the United States at the time."[219] Instead, the demonstrators end their march with a festival in Congo Square, celebrating in honor of those who gave their lives in search of freedom. Alongside the respected scholars who gather evidence and provide accurate, unbiased accounts, men like Dread Scott and John Akomfrah give Charles Deslondes and his fellow brave rebels the spotlight they deserve, proving that their efforts, even though they were suppressed so harshly, were indicative of the agency, self-determination, and power that Louisiana slaves possessed.

While many might focus on the uprising's defeats, Charles Deslondes and his fellow slaves on the German Coast achieved much in their uprising. From the immediate tactical point of view, they did indeed fail to seize New Orleans and liberate the colony, but from the strategic point of view, they succeeded beyond expectations. Organized and disciplined far beyond the expectations of many, Deslondes's rebel army conquered the German Coast in two days, posed a legitimate threat to the entirety of the territory, and demanded the respect and attention of all in their path. Just as the revolutionary waves of the French Revolution, the Haitian Revolution, and other minor rebellions across Louisiana flooded the territory and inspired its people to fight for freedom, the 1811 German Coast Uprising had a similar effect. The actions of these brave souls contributed to a wide array of resistance among the enslaved Africans in the Territory of Orleans, and, most importantly, it contributed to the momentum of broader anti-slave movements across the United States.

The uprising of 1811 reaffirmed the humanity and dignity of African Americans and delivered a serious blow to the ideas of white supremacy. It demonstrated on a grand scale that

[219] Ibid.

African Americans, like all human beings, are willing and capable of using force against their oppressors. The uprising also demonstrated the enormous ingenuity, skill, and organizing talents of African Americans. The rebels were able to find the means to suppress, temporarily, the system of the slaveowners, conduct revolutionary work over an extended area of some sixty miles, and expel their masters from their homes. And this was all accomplished through clandestine organization. Through their courageous efforts, they were able to stimulate the revolutionary movements of the African masses in this area—which lasted not for a few weeks but for generations.

The January uprising was an enormously positive action, for through this struggle, the African Slaves demonstrated to themselves and to the entire world their total and complete rejection of slavery. Nothing is more rewarding and positive for an oppressed people, for their esteem, for their pride, and for their confidence, than to find the means and courage to rise up against their oppressors no matter what the outcome. These were herculean accomplishments for people who were prevented from holding legal gatherings, who were beaten down by the inhumane system of labor, and who were degraded by systematic campaigns of repression. The leaders of the slaves were not "brutes," "banditti," or "brigands," but revolutionary heroes that all African Americans and all people who struggle against the exploiting classes should hold in high esteem and great awe.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources:

Allured, Janet, John Keeling, and Michael S. Martin. *Firsthand Louisiana: Primary Sources in the History of the State*. Lafayette, LA: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2020.

Bernhard, Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach. *Travels by His Highness Duke Bernhard of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach through North America in the Years 1825 and 1826*. Edited by C.J. Jeronimus. Translated by William Jeronimus. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2001.

Carter, Clarence Edwin. *The Territorial Papers of the United States*. Vol. 9. Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1940.

Claiborne, William C.C. *Official Letter Books of W.C.C. Claiborne, 1801-1816*, Edited by Dunbar Rowland. Jackson, Mississippi: Mississippi State Department of Archives and History, 1917.

Conrad, Glenn R. *The German Coast: Abstracts of the Civil Records of St. Charles and St. John the Baptist parishes, 1804-1812*. Lafayette, LA: Center for Louisiana Studies, 1981.

Dubois, Laurent, and John D. Garrigus. *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804: A Brief History with Documents*. Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

Engerman, Stanley L., Robert Paquette, Seymour Drescher. *Slavery*. New York City: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Gayarré, Charles. *History of Louisiana.* Vol. 4. New York: William J. Widdleton, 1866.

de Laussat, Pierre-Clément. *Memoirs of My Life to My Son During the Years 1803 and After, Which I Spent in Public Service of Louisiana as Commissioner of the French Government for the Retrocession to France of that Colony and for Its Transfer to the United States*. Baton Rouge, LA: Published for the Historic New Orleans Collection by the Louisiana State University Press, 1978.

Martin, François Xavier, *The History of Louisiana: From the Earliest Period*. Vol. 2. New Orleans, LA: Lyman and Beardslee, 1829.

New Orleans City Archives, Louisiana Division, New Orleans Public Library

Pointe Coupée Parish, *Original Acts*, Pointe Coupée Parish Courthouse, New Roads, LA: 1795.

Russell, William Howard. *My Diary North and South*. Boston, MA: T.O.H.P. Burnham, 1863.

Shaw, John to Paul Hamilton. Washington, D.C.: National Archives, Record Group 45, Microfilm 149, January 18, 1811.

St. Charles Parish, *Original Acts.* Translated by Glenn R. Conrad. New Orleans: Amistad Research Center, 1811.

St. Charles Parish Police Jury Minutes, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, 1812.

Newspapers:

Chillicothe Supporter

Cincinnati Western Spy

Concord New Hampshire Patriot

Hallowell American Advocate

Hampshire Gazette

Louisiana Courier

Louisiana Gazette

Louisiana Gazette (St. Louis)

Louisiana Militia

Louisiana Moniteur

Martinsburg Gazette

Milledgeville Georgia Journal

National Intelligencer

New York Evening Post

New York Gazette

New York Weekly Museum

Newport Mercury

Philadelphia Political and Commercial Advertiser

Political and Commercial Advertiser

Raleigh Minerva

Richmond Enquirer

Secondary Sources:

Alexis, Stephen. *Black Liberator: The Life of Toussaint Louverture*. Translated by William Stirling. New York: Macmillan, 1949.

Aptheker, Herbert. *American Negro Slave Revolts*. New York City: Columbia University Press, 1943.

Bell, Caryn Cossé – *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana, 1718-1868*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1997.

Berlin, Ira. *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998.

Blume, Helmut. *The German Coast During the Colonial Era, 1722-1803: The Evolution of a Distinct Cultural Landscape in the Lower Mississippi Delta during the Colonial Era With Special Reference to the Development of Louisiana's German Coast*. Translated and Edited by Ellen C. Merrill. Destrehan, LA: German-Acadian Coast Historical and Genealogical Society, 1990.

Brasseaux, Carl A. *The Founding of New Acadia: The Beginnings of Acadian Life in Louisiana, 1765-1803*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1987.

Brasseaux, Carl A., and Glenn R. Conrad, eds. *The Road to Louisiana: The Saint-Domingue Refugees, 1792-1809*. Lafayette, LA: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 1992.

Cohen, David W., and Jack P. Greene. *Neither Slave nor Free: The Freedmen of African Descent in the Slave Societies of the New World.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972.

Cummins, Light Townsend, Judith Kelleher Schafer, Edward F. Haas, and Michael L. Kurtz. *Louisiana: A History*. Edited by Bennett H. Wall and John C. Rodrigue. 6th ed. John Wiley & Sons, 2014.

Davis, William C. *The Rogue Republic: How Would-Be Patriots Waged the Shortest Revolution in American History*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011.

Deiler, J. Hanno. *The Settlement of the German Coast of Louisiana and The Creoles of German Descent.* Philadelphia: The German American Historical Society, 1909.

DeGraft-Johnson, J.C. *African Glory: The Story of Vanished Negro Civilizations*. Baltimore, MA: Black Classic Publishing, 1986.

Desan, Suzanne, Lynn Hunt, and William Max Nelson, eds. The French Revolution in Global Perspective. Cornell University Press, 2013.

Dessens, Nathalie. *From Saint-Domingue to New Orleans: Migration and Influences*. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2007.

Dormon, James H. "The Persistent Specter: Slave Rebellion in Territorial Louisiana." *Louisiana History* 18, 1977.

Dubois, Laurent. *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004.

Finkelman, Paul. *The Slave Trade and Migration: Domestic and Foreign* (Oxfordshire, England: Routledge, 1990.

Follett, Richard. *The Sugar Masters: Planters and Slaves in Louisiana's Cane World, 1820-1860*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2005.

Geggus, David P. *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2001.

Hall, Gwendolyn Midlo. *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1992.

Hanger, Kimberly S. *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1769-1803*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997.

Hatfield, Joseph T. *William Claiborne: Jeffersonian Centurion in the American Southwest* Lafayette, LA: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2016.

Hegel, Georg W.F. *The Philosophy of History*. Translated by John Sibree. New York: Dover, 1956.

Holmes, Jack D.L. "The Abortive Slave Revolt at Pointe Coupée, 1795." *Louisiana History* 11, no. 4 (Autumn, 1970), 341-362.

Hunt, Alfred N. *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988.

James, C.L.R. *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. New York: Vintage, 1989.

Kane, Harnett Thomas. *Plantation Parade: The Grand Manner in Louisiana*. New York City: William Morrow and Co., 1945.

Kastor, Peter J. *The Nation's Crucible: The Louisiana Purchase and the Creation of America* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004.

Kendall, John S. "Shadow over the City." *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 22, January 1939.

Kolb, Frances. "The New Orleans Revolt of 1768: Uniting against Real and Perceived Threats of Empire." *Louisiana History* 59, no. 1 (2018), 5-39.

Le Conte, René, and Glenn R. Conrad. "The Germans in Louisiana in the Eighteenth Century." *Louisiana History* 8, no. 1 (Winter 1967): 67-84.

Linebaugh, Peter, and Marcus Buford Rediker. *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic.* Boston: Beacon Press, 2000.

McGowan, James T. "Creation of a Slave Society: Louisiana Plantations in the Eighteenth Century." PhD Diss., University of Rochester, 1976. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Paquette, Robert L. "Revolutionary Saint Domingue in the Making of Territorial Louisiana." in *A Turbulent Time: The French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean*, Edited by David Geggus and David Gaspar. Bloomington, Indiana: University of Indiana Press, 1997.

Phillips, Ulrich Bonnell. *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment & Control of Negro Labor As Determined by the Plantation Regime.* Boston: D. Appleton & Co., 1918.

Rasmussen, Daniel. *American Uprising: The Untold Story of America's Largest Slave Revolt*. New York City: Harper Collins, 2011.

Robertson, James Alexander, ed., *Louisiana Under the Rule of Spain, France, and the United States, 1785-1807: Social, Economic and Political Conditions of the Territory Represented in the Louisiana Purchase*. Vol. 1. Cedar Rapids, IA: The Torch Press, 1910.

Rodriguez, Jr., Junius Peter. "Ripe for Revolt: Louisiana and the Tradition of Slave Insurrection, 1803-1865." PhD diss., Auburn University, 1992. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Rothman, Adam. *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005.

Saxon, Lyle, Edward Dryer, Robert Tallant. *Gumbo Ya-Ya: A Collection of Louisiana Folktales*. New Orleans: Pelican Publishing, 1987.

Taylor, Joe Gray. *Negro Slavery in Louisiana*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1963.

Thrasher, Albert. *On to New Orleans!: Louisiana's Heroic 1811 Slave Revolt*. New Orleans, LA: Cypress Press, 1996.

Vidal, Cécile. *Louisiana: Crossroads of the Atlantic* World. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014.

VITA

Born January 28, 1997, in Lafayette, Louisiana, Christian Hayes McLain eventually attended his hometown university, the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, from 2016 to 2019. In 2019, Mr. McLain graduated cum laude with his Bachelor of Arts degree in history from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. He is currently seeking a Master of Arts degree in history from Texas Christian University, where he studies under Dr. Gene Allen Smith.