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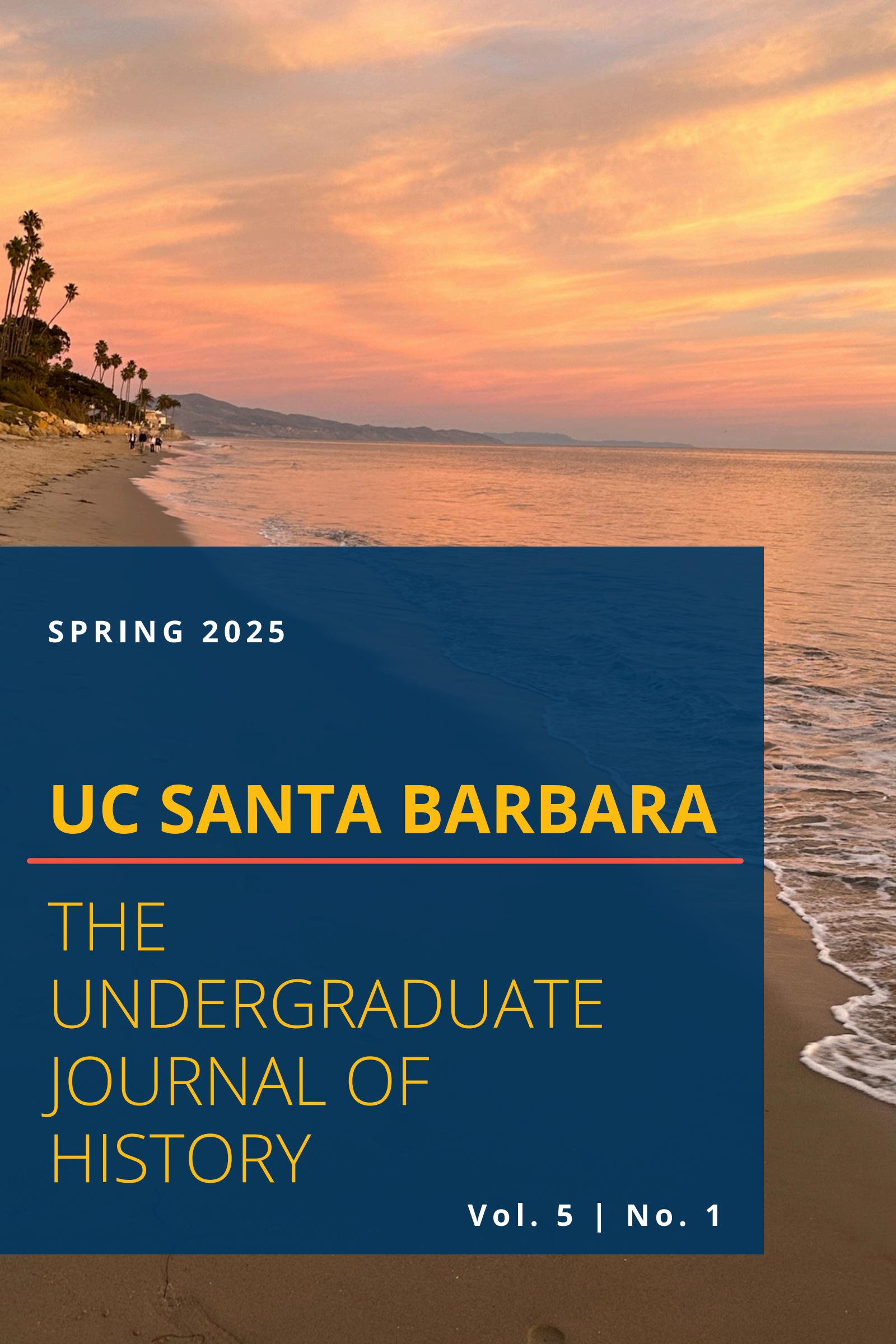
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Communication Networks That Tied Together Free And Enslaved People In The Era Of The Haitian Revolution

*Catriona Hobson*¹

Introduction: Haiti as a Symbol of Freedom

In early September 1791, members of the city council in Havana congregated to address the shortage of pork in the city's meat markets.² The origin of this pork shortage was rather unusual, as in the council's statement, the Spanish word *beneficio* was used to describe the slaughter, which was commonly associated with knife killings, bloodletting, and the quartering of animals.³ The council concluded that the slaughtering of pigs was not enacted for market purposes, but rather in the interests of foreign Black insurgents.⁴ Whilst the motives of these killings may seem perplexing, they become clearer when surveyed from a circum-Caribbean perspective. Indeed, this meeting occurred just three weeks after the Bois Caïman ceremony in Saint Domingue, which ignited the Haitian Revolution on 14 August 1791.⁵ In this ceremony, the ritual of killing a pig signified the start of a Black revolution.⁶ The Black Cubans were inspired by the actions of their fellow enslaved population in Saint Domingue and therefore acted in moral support through their own rituals in solidarity with the Black rebellion. Hence, the slaughtering of pigs in both Havana and Saint Domingue within three weeks of each other unveils an underground network of revolutionary consciousness amongst the African diaspora in the era of the Haitian Revolution, which has been coined "the common wind" by Julius Scott and is central throughout this essay.⁷

From 1791 to 1804, Haiti emerged from the ruins of the most lucrative slave colony in the world, Saint Domingue.⁸ What began as a conflict over French imperial rule amongst the colonial whites escalated into a Black revolution challenging the institution of slavery in the wake of the French Revolution and its principles of the "Rights of Man."⁹ Subsequently, the Haitian Revolution served as the largest and only successful slave revolt in the Age of Revolutions between

¹ Catriona Hobson is in her final year at the University of Edinburgh studying History.

² Ada Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 5.

³ Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror*, p. 5.

⁴ Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror*, p. 6.

⁵ Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror*, p. 5.

⁶ Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror*, p. 6.

⁷ Julius Scott, *The Common Wind, Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution* (London: Verso, 2018), p. 1.

⁸ Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2005), p. 1.

⁹ Dubois, *Avengers*, p. 3.

the 1770s and 1830s.¹⁰ This new nation was encircled by European colonies, which remained deeply entrenched in the institution of slavery.¹¹ The juxtaposition of Haiti's freedom and the colonies' subjugation within close geographical proximity meant that Haiti symbolised a significant challenge to the prevailing colonial order and attracted aspiring revolutionaries throughout the region.¹²

To analyse the extensive communication network operating across imperial boundaries, this essay will draw upon a Humboldtian framework. Between 1799 and 1804, Alexander von Humboldt witnessed the effects of the Haitian Revolution throughout the Caribbean first-hand.¹³ In his *Political Essay on the island of Cuba*, Humboldt noted that Cuba's geographical location "merits the most serious attention" as neighbouring regions were "home to more than 2.8 million Africans."¹⁴ By foregrounding demographic similarities between the islands, Humboldt recognised that this African diaspora dispersed throughout the Caribbean created opportunities for an awakening of Black political consciousness in opposition to European colonialism.¹⁵ Certainly, the Black population forged extensive communication networks that penetrated the Caribbean Sea to circumvent colonial pressures. Having travelled extensively around the Caribbean in the late 1790s, Humboldt recognised how the Haitian Revolution became a symbol for freedom amongst the peripheries and the sea came to signify the potential for escape beyond rigid imperial boundaries with maritime mobile actors serving as vectors between the islands.¹⁶ Conversely, historiography has tended to focus narrowly on the experiences within Haiti, without factoring in the agency of Black individuals on the Revolution's periphery.¹⁷

Humboldt's regional perspective will be essential throughout this essay to analyse the ways in which slave societies interacted, transcending imperial, geographic and linguistic frameworks to uncover circum-Atlantic networks of communication.¹⁸ This essay will foreground different strands of these communication networks to underscore how Black political consciousness mobilised under colonial domination. As actors at the foreground of these communication networks, the role of sailors will be assessed at the start of this essay, drawing upon case studies of mobile individuals including Olaudah Equiano and Newport Bowers. The importance of these

¹⁰ Dubois, *Avengers*, p. 1.

¹¹ Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror*, p. 4.

¹² Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror*, p. 4; Maurice Jackson and Jacqueline Bacon (eds.) *African Americans and the Haitian Revolution: Selected Essays and Historical Documents* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2009), p. 33.

¹³ Jackson & Bacon, *African Americans*, p. 25.

¹⁴ Alexander Humboldt, Vera Kutzinski(ed.), and Ottmar Ette (ed.), *Political Essay on the Island of Cuba: A Critical Edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 24.

¹⁵ Jackson & Bacon, *African Americans*, p. 25.

¹⁶ Jackson & Bacon, *African Americans*, p. 25.

¹⁷ Dubois, *Avengers*, p. 5.

¹⁸ Scott, *The Common Wind*, p. 13.

sailors correlates with the significance of port cities in this era as hubs of commerce and communication. The ports of Cap Français, Baracoa in Cuba, and Dominica will be discussed to stress the correlation between the Black underground markets and revolutionary fervor. Furthermore, mass migration of refugees from Saint Domingue to other islands in the Caribbean and southern cities in United States expanded the geographical reach of this network; in the face of language barriers and colonial censorship, Black political consciousness manifested itself through mnemonic devices, which operated as a common language for communication amongst enslaved and free Black populations. Finally, the role of printed journalism, disseminating the accounts of ship captains, will be understood in relation to the Denmark Vesey Conspiracy in Charleston. A grassroots analysis of the Haitian Revolution reveals how Black political consciousness throughout the circum-Caribbean region engendered a network of communication that operated in the face of adversity.

Maritime Mobility: Sailors as Revolutionary Agents

In the era of the Haitian Revolution, the political consciousness of sailors was a critical factor in pioneering the regional networks of communication between enslaved and free people. They facilitated communication flows in the Caribbean underground by establishing a plethora of local connections in different port cities, spreading news of revolutionary fervor, and contravening against the colonial authorities.¹⁹ Whilst in the colonies, plantation society operated a strict hierarchical order, the Caribbean Sea came to signify an escape from enslaved life and the potential for mobility and liberation, attracting many slaves.²⁰ Olaudah Equiano, a slave who turned to sailing in the 1760s and 1770s, documented his experiences in his autobiography.²¹ A key reason for his attraction to a life at sea was to secure his own rights and to not be “imposed on as other negroes were;” instead as a sailor he felt more empowered to demand respect and “plainly tell him [his master] my mind.”²² This underscores how the sea symbolized a welcome psychological space outside of the strict imperial order on land and fostered a more rebellious spirit amongst mobile individuals. Moreover, his new occupation enabled Equiano to “become a master of a few pounds” by trading with locals in each new port he visited.²³ Through trading with these local actors, Equiano was able to form new relationships at various ports; mobile individuals were a linchpin for connecting communities across the Caribbean Sea. Indeed, Equiano’s occupation enabled him to observe Stamp Act demonstrations in Charleston, make friends in Savannah, and listen to a sermon by George Whitefield in Philadelphia.²⁴ His experiences as a sailor highlight how these

¹⁹ Scott, *The Common Wind*, p. 37.

²⁰ Jackson & Bacon, *African Americans*, p. 26; Scott, *The Common Wind*, p. 49.

²¹ Scott, *The Common Wind*, p. 37.

²² Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano Written by Himself* (Auckland: Floating Press, 2009), p. 164.

²³ Jackson & Bacon, *African Americans*, p. 26.

²⁴ Scott, *The Common Wind*, p. 47.

mobile actors were a catalyst for spreading news about the Haitian Revolution as they moved from port to port, bridging the geographical gap within the region, and awakening a political consciousness amongst the African diaspora in the Caribbean and southern US states, representing a crucial strand within this network of communication.

Not only did sailors pose a threat to the plantation order back on land, but the act of being at sea enabled these mobile actors to run afoul of local laws and project the revolutionary agenda of the Haitian Revolution beyond the island's borders. For example, French privateers began cruising against Spanish and British ships in this era to usurp colonial authority.²⁵ In 1793, a Spanish ship travelling from Jamaica to Cuba was intercepted by a French one and the sixty-eight slaves for sale on board were freed whilst the Spanish sailors were tossed overboard; French sailors extended their revolutionary agenda beyond the boundaries of their own island.²⁶ Furthermore, French privateers served as a symbol of freedom for slaves throughout the Caribbean basin, with Trinidad's governor, José María Chacón, describing how when these privateers came into contact with slaves, their conversations were "perverting the ideas of our slaves."²⁷ His report proceeds to illuminate on how Trinidad's slaves intentionally attempted to flee towards French privateer ships and were not in fact, as previously believed, "Black victims of French kidnappers."²⁸ Hence, the anti-colonial and anti-authoritarian nature of these crews on French corsairs served as a source of hope for enslaved populations on nearby islands. This highlights how mobile workers were essential agents in maritime culture, spreading revolutionary ideals through their interactions with locals in port cities and their regular movements between the islands.²⁹ The role of sailors in the Haitian Revolution is particularly poignant as their local connections, rebellious nature, and storytelling abilities rapidly expanded the borders of the Haitian Revolution beyond the geographical boundaries of the island and out into the Caribbean basin.

Port Cities: Hubs of Commerce, Contraband and Connection

Olaudah Equiano, in his autobiography, details how whilst he was a sailor, he also "endeavoured to try my luck and commence merchant."³⁰ This correlation between being a sailor, but also being a merchant underscores the role and importance of port cities as hubs of commerce and connection in this era. Indeed, port cities functioned as centres of exchange in a period where communication was crucial to enable slaves and free black people to hear and disseminate stories of the Haitian Revolution.³¹ Slaves were able to listen to various accounts from sailors whilst they were loading

²⁵ Jackson & Bacon, *African Americans*, p. 33.

²⁶ Jackson & Bacon, *African Americans*, p. 33.

²⁷ Jackson & Bacon, *African Americans*, p. 34.

²⁸ Jackson & Bacon, *African Americans*, p. 34.

²⁹ Jackson & Bacon, *African Americans*, p. 36.

³⁰ Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, p. 158.

³¹ Jackson & Bacon, *African Americans*, p. 28.

and unloading cargo within these port towns.³² Certainly, an Irish merchant, James Kelly, remarked on how “slaves and negroes are ever on the most amicable terms” and had a relationship of “mutual confidence and familiarity”.³³ This respectful relationship between locals and sailors was an important node in communication networks, with sailors projecting Black political consciousness into the minds of island slaves.³⁴ Indeed, the tradition of shantying can be traced back to relations between sailors and locals along the coastlines of the Caribbean as many popular sea shanties echoed Caribbean slave songs.³⁵ This underscores the close-knit relationships developed in port cities, which transcended linguistic and geographical boundaries, harnessing Black consciousness to spur on the revolutionary zeal of the era.

Cap Français, as the central port in Saint Domingue, is an important case study for the networks of communication operating in port cities. According to an estimation by Moreau de Saint-Méry, 2,550 maritime workers were present in Cap Français at any given time, acting as valuable consumers for local slaves in the market.³⁶ The case study of Newport Bowers is drawn upon by Julius Scott to exemplify one of these maritime workers. Whilst there are few written traces left behind by central protagonists of the revolution, Scott illustrates how sources must be read “against the grain” to detail a history from below and restore the agency of those who have been marginalized.³⁷ The limited written sources available by Newport Bowers can be located at a time of great historical significance, when he resided in Cap Français for six months in 1793, running a stall in the wharf district.³⁸ Stands were erected on a Sunday in this district of Cap Français for sailors and locals alike to sell their products.³⁹ Bowers was therefore well placed to witness not only the revolutionary struggle on the island, but also oversee the diffusion of knowledge from locals to sailors and eventually to the wider Caribbean basin. For example, he would have often interacted with the “brown men from Curaçao,” who appear often on the crew lists of Cap Français; these men were evidently influenced by a transmission of revolutionary zeal at the port as by 1795 a slave revolt in Curaçao sought to mirror the events of Saint Domingue.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the high levels of interaction between sailors and slaves is reflected in the island’s creole language that often incorporated sea terms and phrases.⁴¹ For example, local women would call each other “sailors” as a term of solidarity.⁴² This demonstrates the significance of the

³² Ferrer, *Freedom’s Mirror*, p. 54.

³³ Scott, *The Common Wind*, p. 39.

³⁴ Scott, *The Common Wind*, p. 39.

³⁵ Scott, *The Common Wind*, p. 39.

³⁶ Scott, *The Common Wind*, p. 38.

³⁷ Dubois, *Avengers*, p. 6.

³⁸ Jackson & Bacon, *African Americans*, pp. 27-32.

³⁹ Scott, *The Common Wind*, p. 40.

⁴⁰ Jackson & Bacon, *African Americans*, p. 32.

⁴¹ Scott, *The Common Wind*, p. 40.

⁴² Scott, *The Common Wind*, p. 40.

relationships between locals and sailors at port cities, which was employed during the Haitian Revolution to spur on a Black political consciousness.

In neighbouring Cuba, word of the uprising reached the eastern city of Baracoa first, given that the city was Cuba's maritime frontier with Saint Domingue.⁴³ The regularity of maritime shipments between Cuba and Saint Domingue and their close geographical proximity meant that accounts of the slave revolt arrived swiftly on the island, with the news spreading outwards from the port city of Baracoa.⁴⁴ The arrival of narratives of the revolution had a dual effect in Cuba; although it ignited a revolutionary fervor amongst the slave population who were inspired by their counterparts in Saint Domingue, simultaneously it led to the more aggressive implementation of slavery due to fears of a potential revolt on the island and the need to fill the gap in the sugar market left by Saint Domingue.⁴⁵ The ships that arrived in Baracoa epitomised this dual effect of the revolution. Authorities searched incoming shipments for items that could be inscribed with revolutionary inscriptions, such as jewellery, coins, and tobacco boxes.⁴⁶ However, these ships were also holding slaves on board to be sold in Cuba, embedding the system of slavery further on the island; "news of the slave revolution arrived in the same vessels that were facilitating its antithesis."⁴⁷ This underscores the importance of the resilience of Black political consciousness in this era; the formation of this network of communication resisted strong colonial pressures to continue to find new ways to spread revolutionary fervor, both on board ships and within port cities such as Baracoa.

In these port cities, alongside the exchange of goods and trade, was a system of smuggling, fraud, and bribery of illegal intercolonial trade.⁴⁸ This contraband trade was facilitated by sailors, runaway slaves and fugitives who utilised the network to spread anti-colonial and anti-slavery sentiments. The most poignant example of this illegal commerce at play is in Dominica. In conjunction with Dominica's legal foreign trade system, a strong underground economy capitalised on the extensive unprotected coastline to evade detection.⁴⁹ The dense forest on this side of the island provided shelter for runaway slaves from Martinique and Guadeloupe as well as illicit traders.⁵⁰ The political activism that corresponded with this black-market subculture is evident in the Dominican uprising of 1791, which closely followed the example set by their French counterparts.⁵¹ The revolt began in the French Quarter of the island as slaves took up arms and

⁴³ Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror*, p. 45.

⁴⁴ Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror*, p. 52.

⁴⁵ Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror*, p. 1.

⁴⁶ Scott, *The Common Wind*, p. 83.

⁴⁷ Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror*, p. 58.

⁴⁸ Scott, *The Common Wind*, p. 41.

⁴⁹ Scott, *The Common Wind*, p. 89.

⁵⁰ Scott, *The Common Wind*, p. 88.

⁵¹ Scott, *The Common Wind*, p. 88.

threatened colonisers with violence, although the revolt was swiftly quelled by the military.⁵² The political unrest was attributed to the “constant and improper intercourse of foreign vessels” along the miles of unguarded coastline, where the disturbances had originated from and where a rebel leader, along with thirty followers, had planned his escape.⁵³ Hence, the black-market counterculture that emerged in conjunction with regular trade provided a framework of communication amongst the marginalized African diaspora to disseminate revolutionary agendas.

Mnemonic Devices: Migration and the Creation of a Common Cultural Language

Whilst port cities operated as hubs of cross-cultural exchange, mnemonic devices, such as dance and song, formed another strand of the communication network as these were utilised as a common dialect to overcome language barriers and entice a Black political consciousness. In the era of the Haitian Revolution, an outpour of emigrants from Saint Domingue flowed into various locations such as Cuba and Jamaica, and later US cities such as New York, Charleston, New Orleans, and Philadelphia.⁵⁴ These migrants were displaced into unfamiliar cultures with languages they could not understand and therefore music, dance, and gestures were utilised to make sense of the new world around them.⁵⁵ These mnemonic devices were used to not only connect with their new communities, but also to disseminate old memories of revolution from home.⁵⁶ Certainly, song was a central apparatus of passive resistance adopted throughout the Caribbean, gaining a new sense of urgency with the Haitian Revolution.⁵⁷ For example, the oral culture in Jamaica shifted in this era with traditional slave songs incorporating a new stanza about “the Negroes having made a rebellion in Hispaniola” by September 1791.⁵⁸ This corroborates how the use of music to recount revolutionary narratives resulted in the widespread dissemination of news surrounding Black revolution, extending its reach into the Caribbean basin and southern US cities. Sara Johnson-La O employs the case-study of the *cinquillo* to demonstrate how musical traditions throughout the Caribbean can trace their roots back to the oral culture of Saint Domingue and its revolution.⁵⁹ This five-note pattern (ta-pi-ta-pi-ta) was a central feature of Haitian music traditions, and materialised in songs throughout the Caribbean, unsurprisingly in locations where Haitian

⁵² Scott, *The Common Wind*, p. 90.

⁵³ Scott, *The Common Wind*, p. 90.

⁵⁴ Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror*, p. 49.

⁵⁵ Sara Johnson, *The Fear of French Negroes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), p. 123.

⁵⁶ Johnson, *The Fear*, p. 123.

⁵⁷ Benjamin Barson, *Brassroots Democracy and the Birth of Jazz: Listening for Counter-Plantation in Black Atlantic Sonic Culture, 1791-1927* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 2021), p. 14.

⁵⁸ Scott, *The Common Wind*, p. 95.

⁵⁹ Sara Johnson-La O, “Migrant Recitals: Pan-Caribbean Interchanges in the Aftermath of the Haitian Revolution, 1791–1850” Ph.D. Dissertation (Stanford, California: Stanford University, 2001), p. 96.

refugees resettled following the revolution.⁶⁰ More specifically, the *cinquillo* resurfaced in the Cuban *tumba francesa*, the Jamaican *tambo* and the Puerto Rican *bomba*.⁶¹ Whilst the origins of the *bomba* have often been traced back to Africa, Jorge Duany argues that this tradition was heavily influenced by the influx of French migrants as the six sub-types of *bomba*: *bambulé*, *calinde*, *cuaya*, *grasima*, *lério*, and *sica*, have clear French/Haitian names.⁶² The shift in oral traditions in Cuba, Jamaica and Puerto Rico with the influx of Haitian refugees suggests that the Black political consciousness of these arrivals was expressed through mnemonic devices, serving as a shared knowledge system to disseminate revolutionary ideas. According to Johnson-La O, this common language fostered a “cognizance of unity” amongst the Afro-Caribbean populations, spurring on revolutionary fervor by perpetuating stories of a Black revolution.⁶³

A further example of how music and dance integrated disparate populations through being a common language is in Issac Mendes Belisario’s painting, *The French Set Girls*, as illustrated in Figure 1.⁶⁴ This painting is part of a series *Sketches of Character in Illustration of the Habits, Occupation, and Costume of the Negro Population in the Island of Jamaica* by Belisario during Christmas celebrations of 1836.⁶⁵ It depicts a colourful portrait of Black dancers and musicians performing outdoors, perhaps in a town square.⁶⁶ The female dancers are dressed in fancy jewellery, headwraps, and elaborate clothing, which was in the style of the ‘folkloric doudou’ of the French colonies and mirrors the regalia worn by French creoles.⁶⁷ Furthermore, these clothes, as well as the body language and instruments, suggest that these women were performing a dance similar to the Cuban *tumba francesa* and the Puerto Rican *bomba*; both of which included the Haitian *cinquillo*, as illustrated earlier.⁶⁸ Hence, this dance genre echoes the musical traditions of French Creoles in Saint Domingue, who resettled in the coastal towns of Puerto Rico and the eastern regions of Cuba during the Haitian Revolution.⁶⁹ Dances, such as the one in this source, illustrate the enduring legacies of the Haitian Revolution, where mnemonic devices represent another aspect of these networks of communication. They demonstrate how Black political consciousness manifested itself in various formats to overcome barriers of language, culture and colonial oppression. The title of this primary source illustrates the extent of inter-island exchanges in this period. The concept of Jamaican ‘French Set Girls’ illustrates the overlapping of cultures within the Caribbean basin and

⁶⁰ Johnson-La O, “Migrant Recitals,” p. 98.

⁶¹ Barson, *Brassroots Democracy*, p. 28.

⁶² Johnson-La O, “Migrant Recitals,” p. 109.

⁶³ Johnson-La O, “Migrant Recitals,” p. 2.

⁶⁴ Isaac Mendes Belisario, *French Set-Girls, Plate 7 from “Sketches of Character”* (Yale Centre for British Art: Bridgeman Images, 1838).

⁶⁵ Johnson, *The Fear*, p. 125.

⁶⁶ Johnson-La O, “Migrant Recitals,” p. 85.

⁶⁷ Johnson, *The Fear*, p. 125 & Johnson-La O, “Migrant Recitals,” p. 87.

⁶⁸ Johnson-La O, “Migrant Recitals,” p. 88.

⁶⁹ Johnson-La O, “Migrant Recitals,” p. 88.

by specifically referring to their ‘French’ heritage Belisario assumes inherent cultural connections whilst the ‘Girls’ underscores the prevalent participation of women in disseminating political consciousness via these communication networks.⁷⁰ Almost forty years after the initial influx of French Creole migrants into Jamaica, these immigrants managed to diffuse their cultural traditions throughout the different islands, whilst simultaneously maintaining a self-identifying Haitian diaspora.⁷¹ This further confirms the extensive reach of inter-island exchanges in this era of the Haitian revolution, with Black political consciousness framing communication networks that employed dance and music as a shared knowledge system.

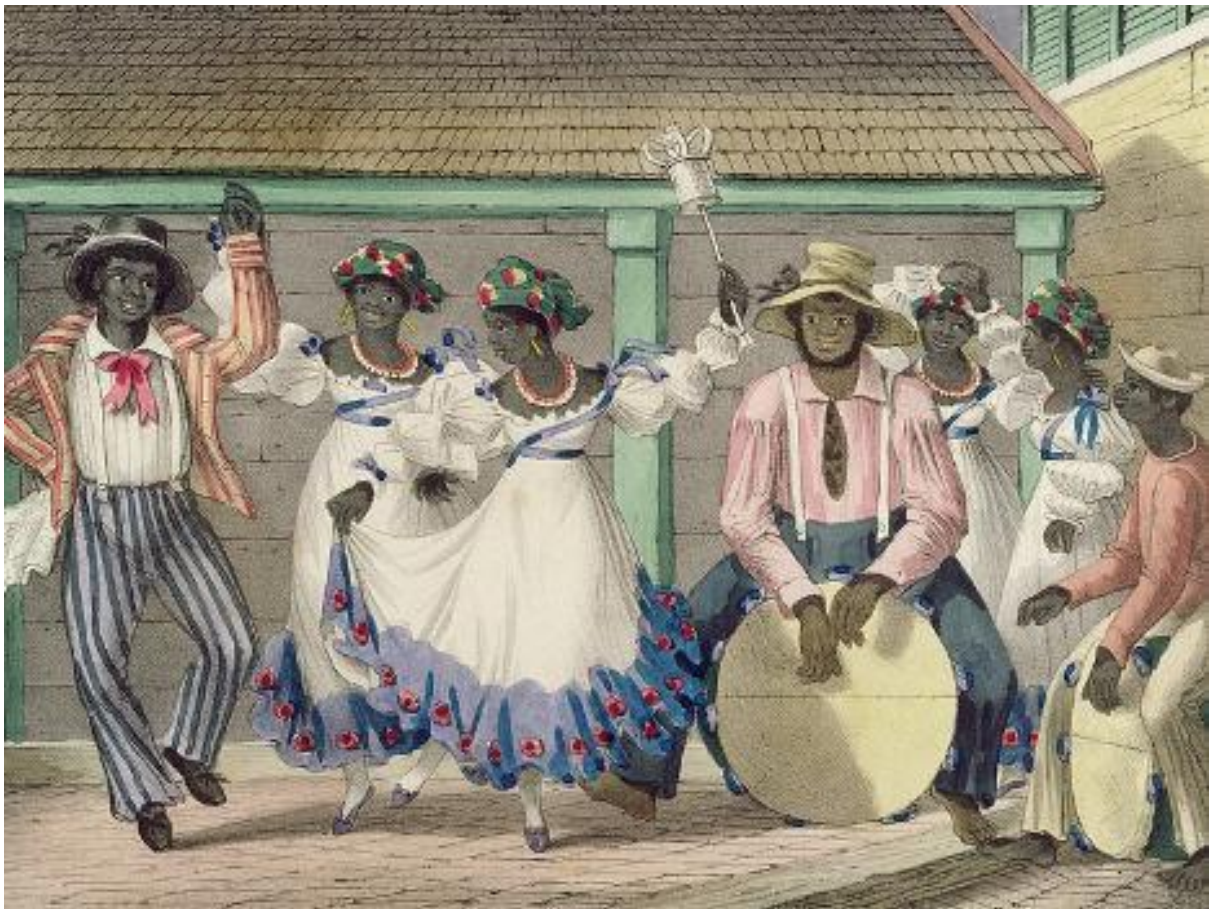


Figure 1: Isaac Mendes Belisario, *French Set-Girls*, Plate 7 from ‘*Sketches of Character*,’ 1838.⁷²

Not only did Haitian musical traditions extend into the Caribbean basin, but they were also heavily influential in the southern cities of the United States, more specifically, New Orleans. Over the course of the Haitian Revolution, a total of twenty thousand refugees arrived in

⁷⁰ Johnson, *The Fear*, p. 131.

⁷¹ Johnson, *The Fear*, p. 130.

⁷² Belisario, *French Set-Girls*.

Louisiana, doubling the population of New Orleans from 1791 to 1810.⁷³ Most French Creoles resettled in New Orleans as their second migratory destination; there was an influx in 1803-4 from Jamaica and another one in 1809-10 from Cuba.⁷⁴ This second wave of migrants from Cuba brought in 10,000 people, transforming the cultural landscape of the city.⁷⁵ The population of free black people in New Orleans tripled over this period and culminated in a jazz revolution within the city.⁷⁶ Certainly, these migrants, as they had previously done in the Caribbean islands, brought with them a tidal wave of oral and material culture alongside an invigorated political agenda, having borne witness to the revolution back home.⁷⁷ This fostered heightened anxieties amongst colonial whites, which were justified by the 1811 German Coast Uprising.⁷⁸ This rebellion was spearheaded by a Saint Domingue slave, Charles Deslondes, who led a two-day, twenty-mile march from Saint John the Baptist Parish towards the city of New Orleans.⁷⁹ An important feature of this rebellion was the incorporation of music during the march; slaves were drumming and singing as they marched between the sugar plantations in a military-like fashion.⁸⁰ Interestingly, a similar technique was adopted in the Haitian Revolution; supposedly the Maroon leader Halou marched his revolutionaries to the beat of music, drums, and lambis (conch shells) in the Port-Au-Prince region of Saint Domingue.⁸¹ The echoes of this practice by the revolutionaries in New Orleans illustrate how the extensive influence of Haitian music traditions was politicized as a form of resistance by the African diaspora. This “sonic common wind” underscores another mode of communication amongst free and enslaved peoples in this era to engender revolutionary zeal and undermine the colonial order.⁸²

The Power of the Press: Print Journalism and Radical Papers

Whilst mnemonic devices were adopted to bridge linguistic barriers and form a concrete knowledge system, printed journalism indicates another branch by which news of the revolution was

⁷³ Barson, *Brassroots Democracy*, p. 17.

⁷⁴ Martin Munroe, Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw, Edward Baptist, Nathalie Dessens, Charles Forsdick, Kathleen Gyssels, Brenna Munro, Martin Munro, Adlai Murdoch & William Scott (eds.) *Echoes of the Haitian Revolution, 1804-2004* (University of the West Indies Press, 2009), p. 28.

⁷⁵ Munro, Walcott-Hackshaw, Baptist, Dessens, Forsdick, Gyssels, Munro, Munro, Murdoch, & Scott, *Echoes*, p. 28.

⁷⁶ Barson, *Brassroots Democracy*, p. 22.

⁷⁷ Barson, *Brassroots Democracy*, p. 18.

⁷⁸ Paul Lachance, “The 1809 Immigration of Saint-Domingue Refugees to New Orleans: Reception, Integration and Impact,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* Vol.29, No. 2 (1988), p. 120.

⁷⁹ Barson, *Brassroots Democracy*, p. 24.

⁸⁰ Barson, *Brassroots Democracy*, p. 24.

⁸¹ Barson, *Brassroots Democracy*, p. 25.

⁸² Barson, *Brassroots Democracy*, p. 17.

circulated. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, newspapers were the primary conduit of public knowledge and were widely read and circulated.⁸³ Although the majority of these publications were written by white colonialists and have racist undertones, if read against the grain, this body of literature can reveal information about the unfolding of the Haitian Revolution and its consequences.⁸⁴ Many of these newspapers began with “people were saying,” hinting at the general conversation that seemed to be taking place in this era, which started aboard ships and in port cities and diffused through inter-island exchanges, reflecting the vast communication networks at play.⁸⁵ Moreover, not all the literature was written from a top-down colonial perspective, the circulation of more radical publications formed part of the Black counterculture and posed a threat to the white colonial order. These radical papers often included pamphlets of the “Rights of Man” as well as accounts of the Black revolution in Saint Domingue, circulating in not only French colonies, but in Spanish and British ones as well.⁸⁶ The fact that many local authorities throughout the Caribbean basin found justifications for confiscating newspapers and articles on ships and amongst the local population illustrates that these papers posed a threat to the imperial hierarchy and served as another form of communication to engender Black political consciousness.⁸⁷

The power of these more radical papers is illustrated in Charleston and the Denmark Vesey Conspiracy. The republican *City Gazette* was publishing at the time of the initial Haitian Revolution and prided itself on its ability to publish narratives of the events transpiring with minimal delay; “papers... from the French West Indian Islands’ were circulated to ‘furnish our readers with some interesting extracts.”⁸⁸ Evidently, the revolutionary power in the papers was not realised by the publishing house until the Gazette Editor noticed that two hundred copies of newspapers detailing information about the Black revolt had been purloined by the slaves working in his office.⁸⁹ These papers were vastly circulated throughout South Carolina and New England with many hearing tales about the initial revolt barely a month after it had begun.⁹⁰ The minimal delay in these publications can be credited to the regular income of ships from the Caribbean and as soon as editors could confirm verbal reports from ship captains, they began printing these narratives, which disseminated from South Carolinian port cities.⁹¹ The power of these papers inspired a generation of enslaved and free people, many of whom had migrated themselves from Saint Domingue, to continue the revolutionary mission. Nearly thirty years after the initial Haitian

⁸³ Johnson-La O, “Migrant Recitals,” p. 31.

⁸⁴ Marlene Daut, *Tropics of Haiti: race and the literary history of the Haitian revolution in the Atlantic* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), p. 3.

⁸⁵ Ferrer, *Freedom’s Mirror*, p. 54.

⁸⁶ Ferrer, *Freedom’s Mirror*, p. 53.

⁸⁷ Ferrer, *Freedom’s Mirror*, p. 53.

⁸⁸ Jackson & Bacon, *African Americans*, p. 28.

⁸⁹ Jackson & Bacon, *African Americans*, p. 28.

⁹⁰ Jackson & Bacon, *African Americans*, p. 29.

⁹¹ Scott, *The Common Wind*, p. 93.

uprising, Denmark Vesey organised a rebellion in Charleston in 1822.⁹² Vesey himself had spent some time on Saint Domingue as a child in the last months of 1781 and the spring of 1782 working as a slave.⁹³ Vesey's experiences in the Caribbean evidently shaped his outlook as his revolutionary agenda was inspired by circum-Caribbean and Atlantic dynamics.⁹⁴ The carpenter living in Charleston in 1822 reflected on his experiences in Cap Français and closely followed the events happening on the island, which he procured through various newspaper articles.⁹⁵ Certainly, the Haitian Revolution played a central role in Vesey's conspiracy, as demonstrated by the trial records available. The trial manuscripts detail how Vesey informed his co-conspirators, "we must unite together as the St. Domingo people did, never to betray one another and to die before we would tell upon one another," and also said he "expected the St. Domingo people would send some troops to help us."⁹⁶ This account of Vesey's words illuminates how the events that had transpired in Haiti were formative in the consolidation and action plan of his own rebellion, and at the forefront of his revolutionary agenda was this concept of Black radical consciousness that tied together free and enslaved people in the Atlantic world.⁹⁷ Despite the city magistrates later minimizing Haiti's significance in Vesey's plan, it is undeniable that the revolution remained pivotal to his plot.⁹⁸ Denmark Vesey's concepts of Pan-Africanism in the Atlantic world arguably emerged due to the vast communication networks amongst the African diaspora, which were perpetuated further by the role of print journalism.

Concluding Thoughts

The regional perspective adopted throughout this essay provides a clearer insight into the true reasons for the Havana pork shortage of 1791: ultimately, the impact of the Haitian Revolution sparked a Black political consciousness, which extended beyond the island's geographical boundaries and overflowed into the Atlantic Sea, neighbouring islands, and southern US cities due to an extensive network of communication that operated between free and enslaved peoples in this era. Primarily, the work of mobile actors and port cities facilitated the spread of news to nearby regions. Individuals who had oriented themselves towards the sea, including Olaudah Equiano and Newport Bowers, were central vectors in perpetuating the revolutionary mission. These mobile individuals, though cultivating close connections with local slaves and free people in a plethora of port cities around the Caribbean basin, were able to disseminate accounts of what was happening

⁹² Douglas Egerton, "Caribbean Dreams, Haitian Nightmares: Race and class in the competing visions of Denmark Vesey and Simón Bolívar," *Atlantic Studies*, Vol.2, No.2, (2005), p. 116.

⁹³ Egerton, "Caribbean Dreams," p. 112.

⁹⁴ Tracy Flemming, "Denmark Vesey: An Atlantic Perspective," *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, Vol.7, No.4 (2014), p. 7.

⁹⁵ Jackson & Bacon, *African Americans*, p. 36.

⁹⁶ Flemming, "Denmark Vesey," p. 14.

⁹⁷ Flemming, "Denmark Vesey," p. 13.

⁹⁸ Egerton, "Caribbean Dreams," p. 116.

in Saint Domingue and inspire the upcoming revolutionaries to engender new revolts. Moreover, any language barriers that arose through the mass migration in this era were overcome through music and dance, strengthening inter-island cultural exchanges. This was illustrated by the prevalence of the *cinquillo* in different island's musical traditions and the painting of *The French Set Girls*. These mnemonic devices were politicized to continue the revolutionary fervor that had been sparked by Haiti, as confirmed by the drumming and singing by slaves of the German Coast Uprising echoing the actions of revolutionaries in Haiti. Finally, the accounts of the Haitian Revolution that arrived by ship in coastal cities were printed to extend their geographical reach. Newspapers disseminating narratives of the uprisings inspired the next generation of enslaved and free people to repeat the history of those in Haiti and served to strengthen Black solidarity, as demonstrated by the Denmark Vesey Conspiracy. This revolutionary fervor transcended imperial boundaries and instead operated on cultural ties with Saint Domingue acting as a rallying point for future revolutionaries and fostering a politically conscious agenda amongst the African diaspora in the circum-Atlantic region.