

The Haitian Revolt of 1791 (and the Revolution after)

Autonomous Spaces, Covert
Networks, and Vodoun

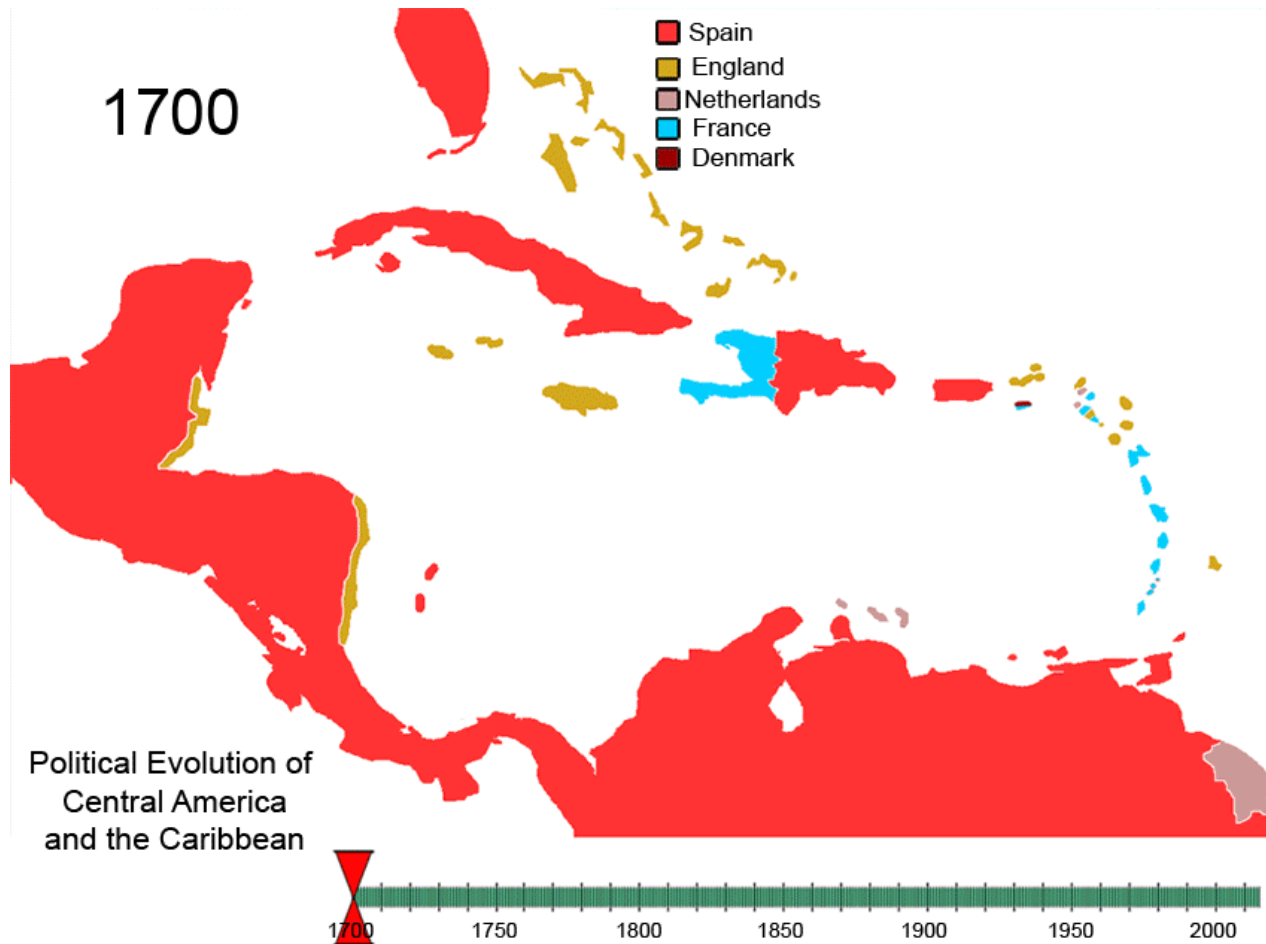
Where we're going:

- What's the role of religious practices, outsider communities, and revolutionary rhetoric in the Haitian revolution?
- Consider the insurgent captured with these items in his pockets:
- “Laws of Liberty,” including reference to the “Rights of Man”
- Ammunition
- A “fetish” amulet of protection, probably made by a Houngan.

The Caribbean Islands



Colonization of the Caribbean 1700s



Haiti



In more detail



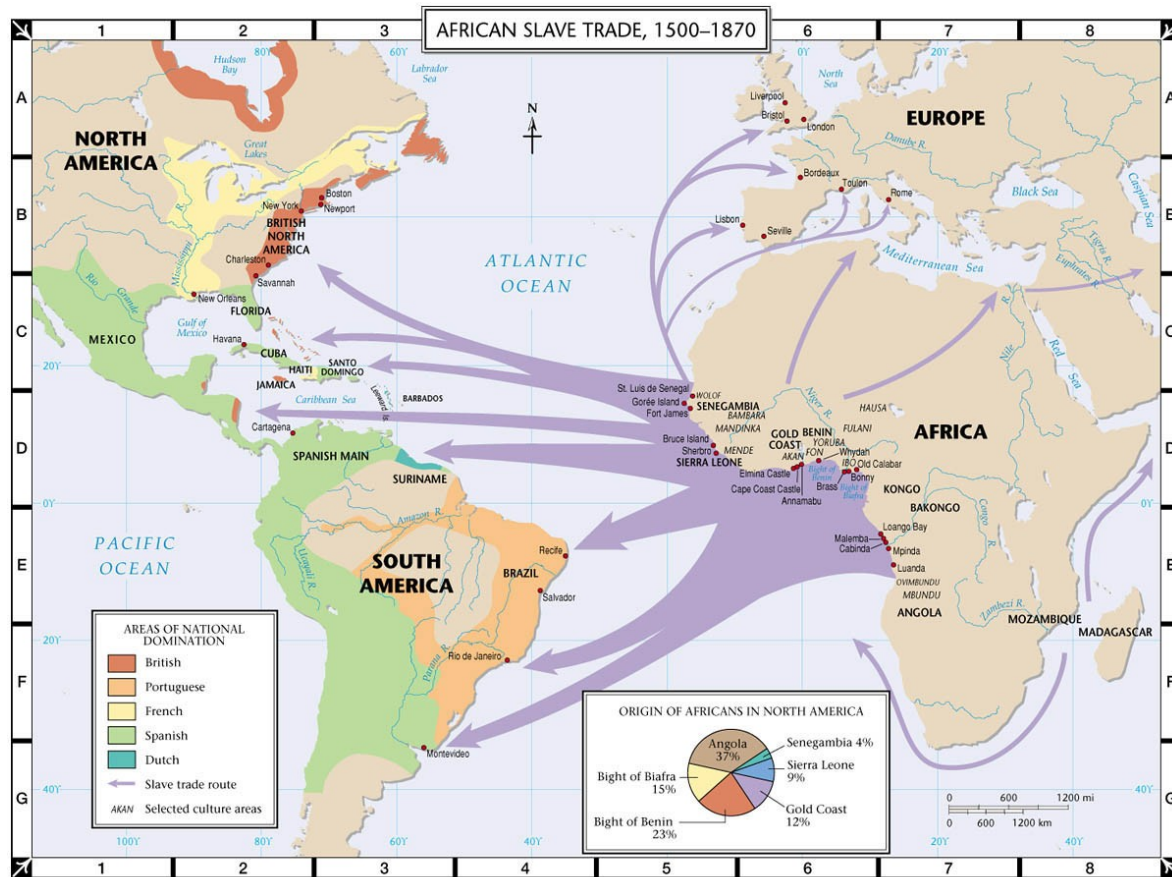
Haitian – Dominican Border region



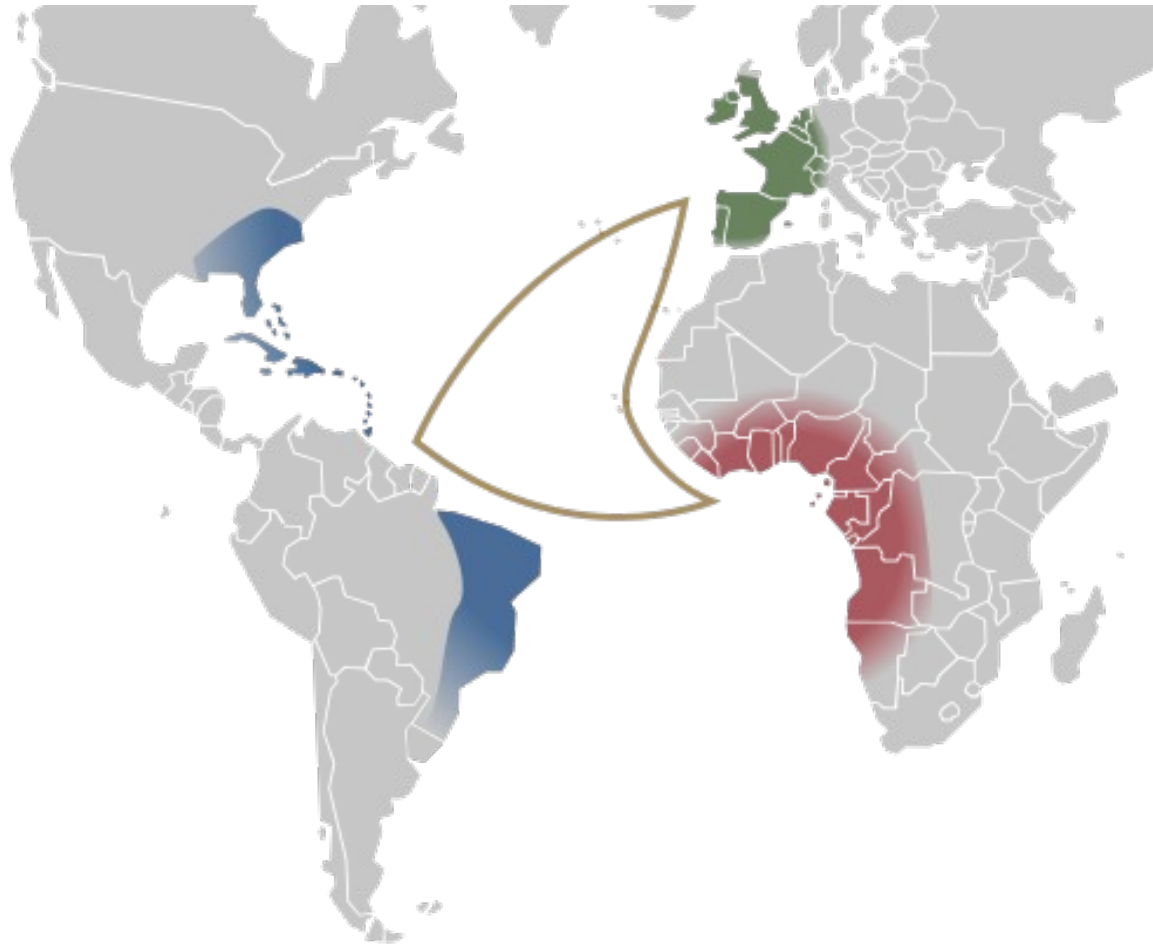
Larger Historical Picture

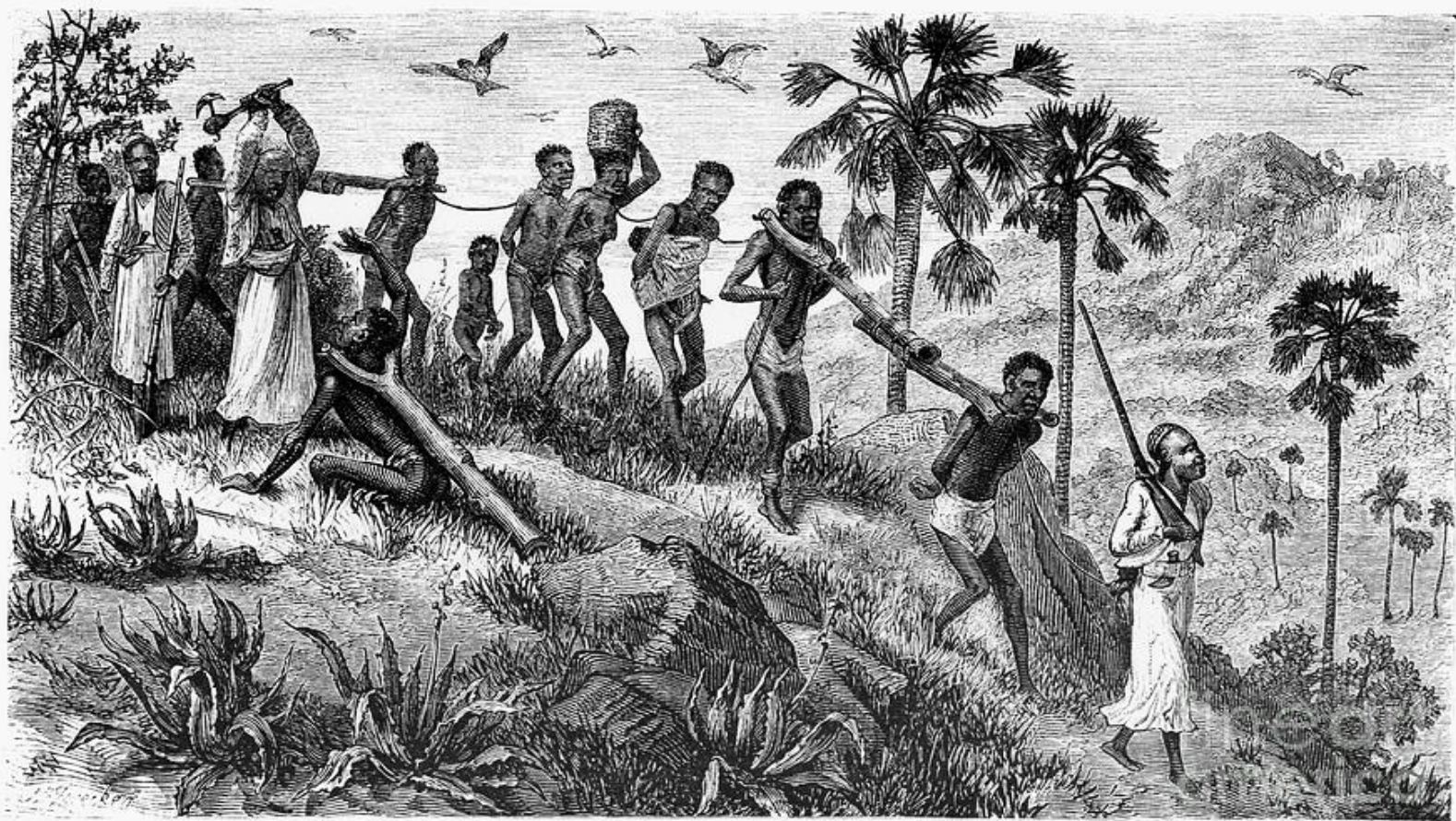
- Hispaniola (La Isla Espanola...) = the first of the “New World” colonized by Columbus for Spain.
- The indigenous people there called themselves Taina and were members of the larger people called Arawak. In 1492 their population may have been as large as 625,000. 22 years later, in 1514: 29,000. 35 years after that: 0.
- The Spanish employed the Taina in the “encomienda” system, where their labor was guaranteed by right to Spanish settlers running mines.
- In the course of the destruction of the Taina population, African slaves were brought as miners.
- By the mid-1600s the Spanish were more interested in Cuba, and then primarily Mexico.
- In the late 1600s French pirates made bases in Tortuga, an island to the NW of Haiti, and French “buccaneers” settled in western Hispaniola.
- The French crown, after defeating Spanish forces to the East, established a colony on the west of Hispaniola, called Saint Domingue. This would be the name of Haiti until its independence in 1804.
- In the Caribbean, as elsewhere in the world, persistent conflicts between European colonizing powers, especially Britain and France, took place. Haiti’s own movement to independence would depend largely on oppositions between Britain, France, and Spain, and between France and other continental powers.
- The French colony grew quickly and ultimately Saint Domingue was the largest and most lucrative colony in the world. It produced, for example, half the world’s coffee. French bourgeoisie invested hundreds of millions of dollars in the island, and derived much more in return.
- Thus, as CLR James points out, the French economy was entirely dependent upon the colony and thus upon the slave trade, and the French Revolution was effectively financed by slave labor on the island. 15% of members of the National Assembly in 1790 owned property there, and perhaps 20% more were involved in industries directly related to it. There was serious abolitionist talk in France during the Revolution and France did in fact abolish slavery some time after the initial Haitian uprisings, but this opposition may not have extended much past words. When Napoleon landed troops on Hispaniola in 1802 one goal was to re-impose slavery.

The Slave Trade

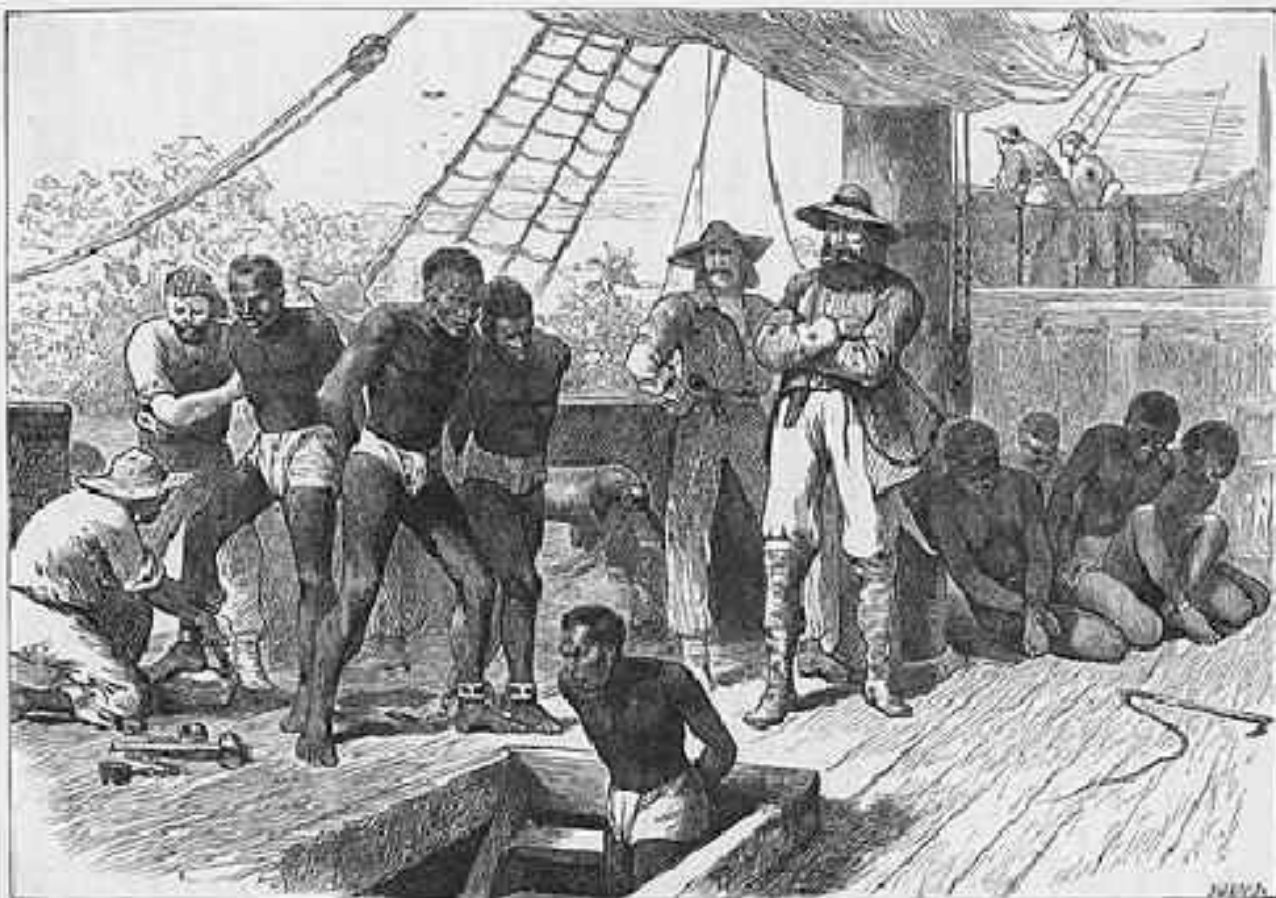


Triangular slave trade: base of the triangle =
“The Middle Passage”

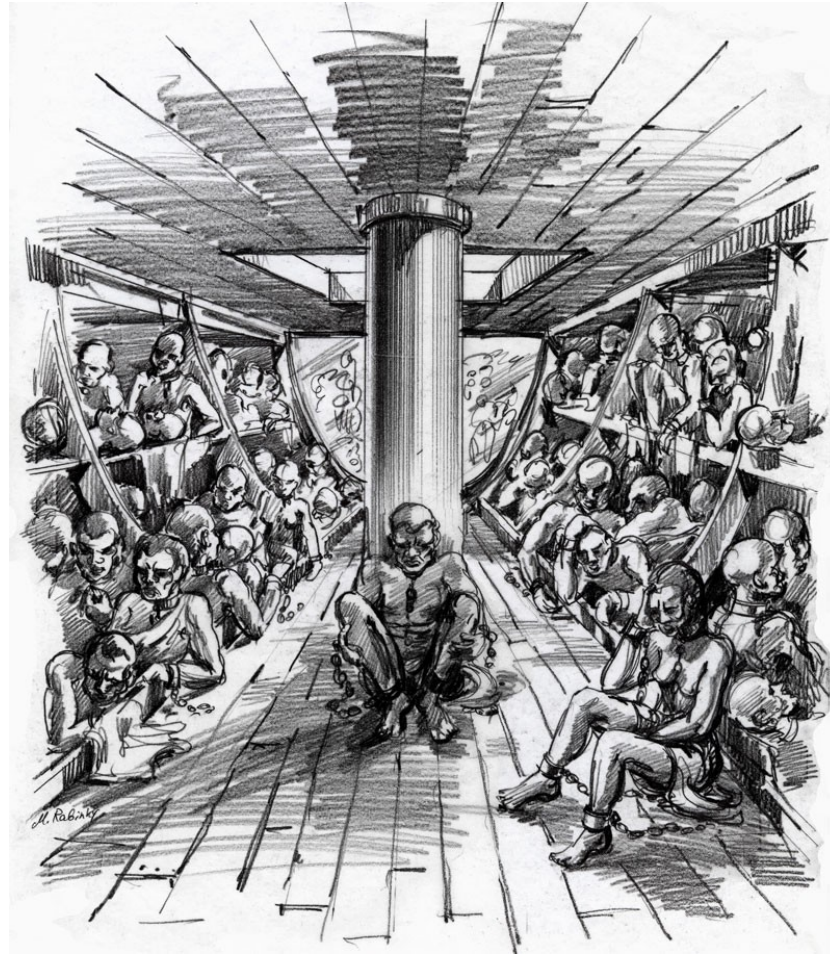




SLAVERS REVENGING THEIR LOSSES.



ON BOARD A SLAVE-SHIP.



France 1790



French relations to Saint Domingue

- Huge merchant fleets originate in Nantes, Bourdeaux, and Marseilles.
- Some traveled South to The Western Coast of Africa, particularly to Senegambia, the Bight of Benin, and the Port of Allada, where they picked up slaves captured in Yoruba wars, raids by the Kingdom of Dahomey, and Portugese slaving raids.
- Others headed straight to the Caribbean, carrying Irish salt beef, materials for slave and other clothing... Then returned with sugar, coffee, tobacco, indigo, cotton.
- France placed caps on prices on Saint Domingue, so merchants could purchase at low cost and then sell high, both in France, or (the majority of their volume) to other European nations. These merchants grew rich.
- Spreading out from these key ports, industries related to colonial exports sprung up: sugar refineries, distilleries, and large manufacturing of cotton...
- Further, bankers in France financed colonial endeavors, whether maritime or agricultural, and they inherited plantation land when planters defaulted. So French bankers RAN many plantations, indirectly.

Classes involved in this revolution

- Bankers, shipowners, merchants and manufacturers in France.
- Plantation owners on St. Domingue. Large, wealthy ones (esp. sugarcane); smaller ones (e.g. in the mountains with coffee)
- Poorer whites, some arriving early on as indentured servants and working together with African slaves for 3 years.
- Freed people of color within the cities. (From here the militia is increasingly drawn). This is the first class of non-whites to be granted citizenship.
- *Outsider communities: especially those of “Maroons” in the hills, but also on occasion of poorer, oppositional whites, for example the anarchist community along the Artibonite River, which allied with the slaves, and banned marriage and private property.
- Within the slaves: field slaves and (=4/5), then ones with more privilege: specialists in cooking sugar, artisans making barrels, drivers of horses and of other slaves (these were actually the primary leaders of the 1791 revolt), then domestic servants in houses...

Conditions of the Slaves on Saint Domingue

- Remember the Arawak...
- $\frac{1}{2}$ of all slaves die before 40. It's cheaper to buy new than to sustain the existing population.
- $\frac{1}{2}$ of all children die. Some midwives kill children as mercy.
- Regular torture of slaves: burying alive, burning at the stake, removal of body parts like ears, imposition of actual balls and chains, spiked collars welded to the neck...
- Regular sexual assault by slave-masters...

What conditions made this revolution possible?

- Shared religious practices...
- American and French revolutions, with their discourse of rights, but more importantly the perception that the French revolution meant the French Revolutionaries would liberate the slaves, which they did, though half-heartedly, and with the opposite of military aid/
- **Rebel Spaces: the Maroon communities in the mountains, the smaller communities of runaways on the fringes of plantations, the gambling joints in cities, and perhaps most importantly, the religious gatherings that would lead to “vodoun,” sometimes in cemeteries
- Rebel *networks*: those set up by the ongoing practices of marronage, those correspondent to religion, and those set up specifically for revolt, for example by Francois Mackandal
- Symbols of rebellion like Mackandal himself, and later Dutty Boukman.
- *Military aid* from Britain and Spain, due to the larger rivalries between those powers and France.
- Educated leaders like Toussaint L'Ouverture and Jean-Jacques Dessalines

The initiation: The ceremony at Bois - Caïmon

- Led by Dutty Boukman (Houngan), and Cécile Fatiman (Mambo)
- Involving one to two sacrifices, perhaps of a black pig and a cow. Blood was drunk from these sacrifices and amulets made from the hairs of the sacrificed animals. Boukman recommended throwing out the white religion and embracing the African religions instead.

Vodoun and the Revolution

- It plays this initiating role, both as networking and as invigorating to violent action.
- It begins as a synthesized religion with this gathering at Bois-Caïmon – thus a new nation and a new nation correspond in time.
- It comes to incorporate, particularly in the “petro” rites, vestiges of slavery (e.g. repetitive cracking of the whip), and moments of the revolution itself (the final battles against the Napoleonic forces

After the uprising

- Haitian independence doesn't come about till 1804, so 13 years elapse...
- These years involve shifting alliances with the British and the Spanish, and strange relations with France.
- 1792: Free people of color are made citizens. 6000 French troops to the island.
- 1793: Britain and Spain arming the rebels. Slaves freed by the Robespierre-led French Revolutionaries.
- 1801: general Toussaint L'Ouverture asserts autonomy and declares himself governor for life.
- 1802: Napoleon sends troops to squash autonomy and restore slavery. L'Ouverture is defeated and imprisoned in France.
- On learning of the French plans re. slavery, another general, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, leads an uprising.
- 1803: Dessalines' forces defeat the Napoleonic forces, which had been scaled back due to Napoleonic conflicts elsewhere...

Ironies and Confusions:

- England 1801: a large-scale theater spectacle stars a “Romantic Hero” – style character called Mackandal, who is “a stranger to fear” (meanwhile England allows slavery all over)
- etc