Chapter One

REVOLUTION

My brother, William, was born with sickle cell anemia, a disease that predominantly affects people of African descent. Sickle cell causes the body's red blood cells, which are usually round, to change into a C shape, becoming stiff and distorted. Because these "sickled" cells have difficulty passing through blood vessels, they obstruct blood flow throughout the body, causing an array of ailments. William battled fatigue and pain throughout his childhood. My parents were in and out of hospitals with him and spent many sleepless nights worried about his survival. But when my brother was sixteen years old, he was cured. Yes, cured.

His medical team discovered that a bone marrow transplant from a healthy sibling could cure someone with sickle cell, if—and this is a big if—the sibling's bone marrow cells perfectly matched the recipient's. It turned out that my sister, Crystal, was this perfect match for William. The process was long, hard, and complicated, but ultimately successful. My brother's abnormal stem cells were replaced with my sister's healthy stem cells, and his body began making healthy red blood cells. He was the second person in the state of Illinois to be cured of sickle cell and the thirty-second in the country. From then on, my brother lived a normal life. He did things he could never do before, like play sports, attend college, and join the military. For the first time he could have basic long-term plans for his life. William's healing was a revolution for my family. It completely changed the trajectory of his life, and ours, for the better.

Revolutions do not necessarily require bloodshed, but they do require sacrifice. My sister could have refused to donate her cells. But the procedure did not require her life. She spent a day or two in the hospital and was sore in the places where they extracted cells, but mostly, she was happy. She did miss her prom, but that was minor compared to what her sacrifice made possible. My brother was going to live. Everyone in my family got a fresh start now that William was healed. The writer and activist Vicky Osterweil reminds us that revolutions can demonstrate the "possibility of better lives for all of us."[1] A revolution requires sacrificial, life-altering, permanent change for the benefit of everyone, particularly those in most need. A revolution is not a revolution unless it pursues a better society for all. Accordingly, we can turn toward revolution with "joy, attention, and solidarity and fight to spread [these moments of political, economic, and social rupture] to every corner of the globe."[2] As a family, we embarked on my brother's

health journey with fear—*What if the procedure does not work?*—and faith—*What if it does work?* If my brother had died, we would have been changed forever. That my brother lived also changed us forever. If my family had focused only on the technical details of the medical procedures such as the surgery, extraction, or risk, we would have missed all of the hope and benefits that came with healing. We should not get stuck on the revolution as forfeiture alone. What is possible is what matters: a better society for all.

Revolutions are complicated. Americans venerate the American Revolution and the French Revolution, but other revolutions, particularly ones that involve violence committed by people of color, are rejected and feared. There is a tendency to think that revolution is scary, full of merciless violence, akin to Armageddon or some other apocalypse. But when I think of revolutions, I think of new beginnings. I think of Frantz Fanon's hope to "combine our muscles and our brains in a new direction."[3] Revolutions do not necessarily ask for consent; they demand cooperation.

American society has trained people to believe not only that white supremacy is the natural way of things but that white supremacy is the savior that ends revolutions begun by people of color and the poor. Racism and classism has blinded Americans so they cannot see white supremacy as their own Armageddon against Black people. How might our thinking change if we considered mass incarceration an apocalypse? Or economic inequality a catastrophe instead of the status quo? For Black people, the state of Black health, wealth, education, and housing is the end of the world in slow motion.

Revolutions are birthed from oppression. Thus, revolution is first and foremost a response that seeks change for the benefit of

humanity. Revolutions are not needed to improve a system. They are needed to create a new world. And, unlike an uncontrollable asteroid headed toward Earth, white state violence is neither natural nor unstoppable. Equality, equity, and reparations are not impossible—they seem that way only when we believe that white people are omnipotent.[4]

Revolutions are how the powerless procure power and transform it to work to the benefit of everyone instead of a select few. Whether a revolution succeeds or fails, the attempt to gain recognition, insurance, and protection for human rights is at the heart of the struggle. The force and violence used to bring down exploitative systems and oppressive leadership do not determine a people's way of life, only their attempts to break free from violence.[5] Revolutionary violence is a means to an end. No one wants to live an existence fraught with constant violence. Historically, revolutionary violence in the hands of Black people was used to stop harm that white people refused to acknowledge as a crime. In short, revolutions create structural change by employing forfeiture to radically redistribute resources and foster an equitable society. Revolution speaks directly to landowners, slaveholders, and colonizers who hoard power, land, profits, and even dominate the law to ensure they have control over everything and everyone. Forfeiture is intended to redistribute power, wealth, land, and access to Indigenous people, Black people, people of color, women, and anyone who has been robbed, marginalized, erased, and violated as a result of slavery, capitalism, and patriarchy. It is about keeping the promises of democracy.

Civil rights activist and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) leader Ella Baker believed in revolution, what she might have called radical change. She claimed, "In order for us as poor and oppressed people to become a part of a society that is

meaningful, the system under which we now exist has to be radically changed. That means we are going to have to learn to think in radical terms. I use the term 'radical' in its original meaning—getting down to and understanding the root cause. It means facing a system that does not lend itself to your needs and devising means by which you can change that system." Baker admitted that this work is "easier said than done." But she also understood that at the heart of revolution is asking hard questions about our own identity. "How much have we got to do to find out who we are, where we have come from and where we are going[?] . . . In order to see where we are going, we not only must remember where we have been, but we must understand where we have been."[6] The past, even a very distant past, is useful for understanding both who we are and where we might go. The past shapes our creative potential to think a new, better world into being.

This chapter examines the American Revolution, the Haitian Revolution, and revolution in the French Antilles, which teach us valuable lessons about the transformative work of revolution. Indeed, the late eighteenth century was referred to as the Age of Revolutions because of the political upheavals in the United States and France. The United States was breaking away from its mother country, England, and France was overthrowing its monarchy. The ideals of liberty, equality, and democracy were being wielded as weapons against aristocratic power structures.

In a hemisphere dominated by chattel slavery, emancipation was a revolution. In Haiti and on the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe, the enslaved population understood that liberty and equality were not aspects of revolution; they *were* revolution. On these islands, undeterred Black leaders employed violence in an attempt to make life better for everyone. Their actions gave life and legitimacy to the rhetoric the American Founding Fathers and European colonizers

merely performed. The people of Haiti and Guadeloupe showed courage in the face of insurmountable odds. But the hardest work of revolution is sustainability.

The victory of the American Revolution appears sustaining, but only if we examine white power structures. The American Revolution, per my definition, was not revolutionary. It did not protect Indigenous peoples. It did not free the enslaved. It did not replace an exploitative system with an equitable one. It did not forfeit or radically redistribute power and wealth to the most marginalized groups. Revolution is possible; Haiti and Guadeloupe proved as much. In the United States, the real revolution was the Civil War. Americans do not speak of the Civil War as revolution because the American Revolution is what created the United States, but the Civil War was its rebirth. The United States, Haiti, the French Antilles, and other places in the Atlantic World struggle with the ongoing battle to maintain the victories of emancipation and the transformational power of justice.

The Taíno people were the original inhabitants of Haiti, before it was known as Haiti. When Spanish explorer Christopher Columbus arrived at the island in 1492, he set a course of destruction and disease that brought the Taíno people to the brink of extinction. Columbus named the entire island Hispaniola. The Spanish enslaved many of the Taíno people until 1697, when the French took over the western side of the island and named it Saint-Domingue. Building on the work of the Spanish, who continued to control the eastern side of the island, named Santo Domingo, the French created a colony with violence and sustained it with violence. They imported stolen African lives to work on Saint-Domingue's vast sugarcane plantations.

In a relatively short time, Saint-Domingue became the crown jewel of the Caribbean and the French colonial empire. It produced more sugar, coffee, cotton, and indigo than any other colony in the Western Hemisphere. By 1789, Saint-Domingue, the size of Vermont and even more mountainous, exported nearly half of the world's coffee and sugar. These exports totaled more than those of Jamaica, Cuba, and Brazil combined. Because of the massive amounts of labor that sugar and coffee plantations required, enslaved people vastly outnumbered French planters and officials. By 1790, there were close to half a million enslaved, constituting 80 percent of the colony's population.

The island was also notorious for its brutality toward enslaved people. It was said that if an enslaved person rebelled on another island, they were sent to Saint-Domingue as punishment. Sugar mills were run twenty-four hours a day, 365 days of the year. The work was long, hard, and dangerous. Cultivating sugar took place not on flat plains of land but on mountainsides and along steep hills. In the sugar mills, it was easy to lose a limb—or one's life. In fact, the labor was so intense and the violence so harsh that the average life expectancy for enslaved people was just seven to eight years after arriving on the island, and one-third of enslaved laborers died within the first few years. Diseases such as smallpox and typhoid were rampant.

In 1789, when the French Revolution began, the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity motivated marginalized groups such as poor whites and the *gens de couleur libres*, a group of free mixed-race people who desired citizenship alongside the ruling elite. Social and economic instability and flagrant inequality provoked rebellion among the lower classes. The goals of the French Revolution particularly resonated with enslaved populations of Saint-Domingue. Revolution in France spread to revolution in

the colonies. On August 22, 1791, two religious leaders, a vodou *houngan* (high male priest) named Dutty Boukman and a vodou priestess, or *manbo*, named Cécile Fatiman, organized a rebellion. It began with a religious ceremony at the Bois Caïman, a clearing just removed from the French planter Lenormand de Mézy's plantation in the north part of the colony. Boukman prophesied that three enslaved people—Jean-François Papillon, Georges Biassou, and Jeannot Bullet—would be leaders of a resistance movement and revolt that would free all enslaved people of Saint-Domingue. A pig was sacrificed, an oath was taken, and Boukman and Fatiman urged their listeners to take revenge on their French oppressors. Boukman declared, "Throw away the image of the god of the whites who thirsts for our tears and listen to the voice of liberty which speaks in the hearts of all of us."[7] A week later, nearly 1,800 plantations had been destroyed and over 1,000 slaveholders killed.[8] The revolution was only getting started. Boukman was captured and beheaded, but the enslaved in Saint-Domingue were not deterred. They continued to burn down plantations and slaughter French planters and their families. Within two years, slavery was abolished throughout Saint-Domingue.

Knowing the French were vulnerable because of their losses, the British and the Spanish, who wanted part of the French Empire for economic and political gains, set their eyes on Saint-Domingue. But even they could not compete against the Black forces led by the former slave and trained soldier Toussaint Louverture, who had joined Georges Biassou, Jean-François Papillon, and Jeannot Bullet to take up the revolution after Boukman's death. In 1798, Louverture defeated the British. Two years later he kicked out Spain, successfully safeguarding the entire island of Hispaniola and freeing Santo Domingo, which later became the Dominican Republic, from the institution of slavery. By 1801, Louverture had

taken control of Hispaniola and declared himself to be governor for life. The island was still to be connected to the French Empire, but Toussaint created a new constitution.[9] France was now under the rule of Napoleon Bonaparte, who was incredulous that Louverture could appoint himself governor for life. Napoleon sought to put an end to Louverture and reinstate slavery.

Napoleon ordered General Charles Leclerc to lead a military campaign to reestablish slavery in Saint-Domingue and reinstitute it as a colony of France. In December 1801, Leclerc set sail from France with the greatest show of force in French history to this day: over forty thousand soldiers on warships. (Later reinforcements would bring the total number of French soldiers fighting in Haiti to over eighty thousand.) Under the pretense of negotiation, Louverture was duped into boarding a French ship in 1802 and died the next year in Fort de Joux, a French prison primarily reserved for France's political opponents. He famously declared, "In overthrowing me, you have done no more than cut down the trunk of the tree of the black liberty in St. Domingue—it will spring back from the roots, for they are numerous and deep."[10] He was right. While Leclerc managed to capture Louverture and regain French control of Saint-Domingue, he did not disarm Louverture's former officers, believing that the rebellion hinged on one man alone and not the collective resistance of Black people.

Now freed, Black people refused to be enslaved again. The capture of Louverture rallied together the rebels, *gens de couleur libres*, and their allies. The fight was for not just freedom from slavery but independence from France. With the rebels now led by Black generals Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Alexandre Pétion, and Henri Christophe, the violence intensified. Dessalines picked up the liberation mantle and did something radical: in an act of revolution, he took the French flag, a vertical tricolor of blue, white, and red, and ripped the white stripe out, signaling an end to colonial white rule

and the beginning of an all-Black nation. Shortly after, Dessalines declared himself emperor of the first Black independent nation in the Caribbean, which he called Haiti. Named by the Indigenous people of the island, "Haiti" or "Hayti" in the Taíno language meant "land of high mountains." Haiti became the first nation to grant universal emancipation. This was a revolution. Black men and women created a new world for the benefit of all oppressed peoples.

Napoleon, Leclerc, and the other French generals were incensed. After Christophe massacred several hundred Polish soldiers at Port-de-Paix, Leclerc ordered the arrest of all remaining Black Haitian troops in Le Cap, a city on the north side, and executed one thousand of them by tying a sacks of flour to their necks and pushing them off the sides of ships.[11] In October 1802, Leclerc wrote to Napoleon essentially encouraging genocide: "We must destroy all the blacks of the mountains—men and women—and spare only children under 12 years of age. We must destroy half of those in the plains and must not leave a single colored person in the colony who has worn an epaulette." In that same letter Leclerc also lamented his role in war: "My soul is withered, and no joyful thought can ever make me forget these hideous scenes."[12] The violence deployed by the Black Haitian troops was effective; it may have made the French think the cost of war was too high. Perhaps Leclerc realized that white colonialist violence harmed both the oppressed and the souls of the oppressors. Napoleon did not care. He wanted to secure dominance at any cost.

One month later, in November 1802, Leclerc died of yellow fever. Napoleon was still undeterred. He sent Donatien-Marie-Joseph de Vimeur, vicomte de Rochambeau, as Leclerc's successor. Rochambeau was the son of Jean-Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur,

comte de Rochambeau, who had famously fought in the American Revolution at the Battle of Yorktown. The vicomte had served alongside his father as an aide during the American Revolution and was known for his brutal and barbaric tactics. In fact, before Leclerc died, he endorsed Rochambeau to Napoleon for his animosity: "He is a person of integrity, a good military man, and he hates the blacks."[13] Rochambeau was charged to restore French control by any means necessary. Extreme violence was the only tool Rochambeau thought to employ. He put to death five hundred Black people at Le Cap and buried them in a large hole they dug while they waited for execution. In response, Dessalines hanged five hundred French soldiers for Rochambeau and the white citizens in Le Cap to see.

The French habitually employed and even enjoyed public displays of political executions. During the revolution, three Black men were condemned to be burned alive before a huge crowd. Spectators claimed two of them screamed horribly, but the third prisoner was a young man, just nineteen years old, who refused to give the depraved crowd a show. Blindfolded and bound, he called out to the other two men in Creole, "You do not know how to die. See how to die." He then twisted his body out from his bonds and sat down, placing his feet in the flames. He was burned alive without uttering a groan. "I was there," said French Captain Jean-Baptiste Lemonnier-Delafosse, "spectator of the heroic death of this wretch, greater than Mucius Scaevola. . . . These were the men we had to fight against."[14] Another prisoner who was thrown to the dogs showed no anger but stroked them and encouraged them while he presented his limbs to be destroyed.[15] The violence revealed the French as the ultimate criminals. The French were barbaric, but the Haitians were brave. The revolution was a refusal to be stripped of one's spirit. The oppressive system was based

on using fear of violence to keep Black people under control, but when the enslaved showed no fear of violence, they could not be kept under control and the system fell apart.

With Black women it was no different. According to Marxist cultural theorist and Pan-Africanist C. L. R. James, when a Black chief named Chevalier was to be executed by the French, he wavered at the sight of the scaffold. Standing by his side, his wife shamed him. "You do not know how sweet it is to die for liberty!" Undaunted, she embraced her death and refused to allow the executioner or the French the satisfaction of killing her: she grabbed hold of the rope and hanged herself.[16] Even in defeat, Black women's belief in the struggle never waned.

Structural change brought about by revolution requires recognition; in other words, the French would have to acknowledge their defeat and the wrongness of slavery. But instead of reckoning with the innate powerful human desire to be free, the French attributed Black courage to dark magic. C. L. R. James wrote, "The muscles of a Negro, they said, contracted with so much force as to make him insensible to pain. [The French] enslaved the Negro, they said, because he was not a man, and when he behaved like a man they called him a monster."[17] The French preferred to concede defeat to a monster or a myth than admit their own loss and liberate Black people.

In the end, Haiti's independence was won by its generals and its people. Former slaves burned the island beyond recognition. They razed nearly every plantation in sight. When a French soldier questioned a Haitian prisoner about the logic of arson, the rebel retorted, "We have a right to burn what we cultivate because a man has a right to dispose of his own labour."[18] The rebelling enslaved men and women met French terrorism and violence with courage and, as they saw it, justice. It took thirteen years for the enslaved

to achieve independence for Haiti, but then, it was the first colonial island largely inhabited by enslaved people to overthrow an imperial power. As a result of the revolution, Napoleon lost the centerpiece of his empire and was forced to sell the Louisiana Territory to the United States to cover the war's expenses. Enraged, Napoleon cursed the collection of his woes: "Damn sugar, damn coffee, damn colonies."[19]

Revolutions create new standards. In Haiti, there were no longer slaves or masters. The revolution could have been summed up in one common Creole phrase: "Tout moun. Se moun," which loosely translates as "Every person is a person." This might seem obvious, but in the context of white supremacy and anti-Blackness, it was a revolutionary statement. Starvation, prejudice, and violence were not necessary to preserve social, economic, and political order, as Saint-Domingue's French colonizers had believed. In fact, Haitians lived free and well. They farmed their own land and, though briefly, claimed the second-highest standard of living in the Americas.[20] In Haiti, Black people were not merely liberated; they were fully human. Every person was a person.

Louverture's constitution established the framework of liberty and equality and prohibited slavery and all forms of racial discrimination. Moreover, it did something unique. Louverture did not refer to rights being conferred on "men" and "citizens" but on "inhabitants," meaning anyone who lived in Haiti was automatically entitled to the same rights as anyone else. Freedom was not applied arbitrarily or in the abstract. Louverture's constitution was a revolutionary reworking of existing so-called universal language, which had, until now, really only enshrined the rights of a few.[21] His constitution spread throughout the United States and arguably became the most widely read piece of literature authored by a Black person, and it may have remained so until the publication

of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* in 1845.[22] When Dessalines took power he pushed freedom further. He endorsed abolition, but unlike Louverture, he declared Haiti's independence from France altogether. The Haitian Declaration of Independence anchors the ideas of revolutionary nation-making and Black humanity in the early nineteenth century. Liberation meant untethering the island from its colonial ruler.

What happened in Haiti echoed throughout the Atlantic World. Over three hundred miles away, in neighboring Jamaica, enslaved people were singing songs about the revolution within one month of the 1791 uprising. It affirmed what they already knew about themselves. Jamaica held the record for the highest number of slave rebellions. A successful revolution meant fighting was not in vain and victory was possible. Within a few years of the Haitian Revolution, slave owners in the Atlantic World complained of "insolence" on the part of their enslaved property that they frequently attributed to awareness of the successful Black revolution. Enslaved Africans in Trinidad parodied a Catholic mass and declared, "The bread we eat is the white man's flesh. The wine we drink is the white man's blood. Remember St. Domingo."[23] In 1804, just six months after Haiti achieved independence, a group of Black Americans began to protest their exclusion from Fourth of July festivals in Philadelphia. They stormed the streets and knocked white people out of their way, "damning the whites and saying that they would shew [*sic*] them St. Domingo."[24] Songs, symbols, and political sentiments left no question that Haiti was a model for Black power and authority.

The same events terrified slave owners. To them, Louverture was a villain and murderer, not a hero. White people fleeing Haiti were traumatized by their experiences. Stories spread that white

people were slaughtered during the revolution and Dessalines's subsequent rule as well. One eyewitness reported seeing "young children transfixed upon the points of bayonets." Others described former slaves "dragging white planters from their homes and tearing off their limbs one by one or strapping them to wooden racks and sawing them in half."[25] Some stories were true. Some stories were exaggerated. The revolution was violent. As white families fled to other islands throughout the Caribbean and to the United States, they carried their stories of terror and Black criminality with them. Few, however, responded to the war by questioning the institution of slavery. All violence committed by Black people was deemed unwarranted and evil. Americans disregarded the history that American patriots had sought their independence with the help of Haitian soldiers and that French peasants had overthrown the monarchy with the aid of the guillotine. American hypocrisy reasoned that violence was only legitimate if it supported their own political, economic, and social order. The West could not accept the success of formerly enslaved leadership and refused to acknowledge Haitian sovereignty for decades. For white people, violence should only operate in one direction. Because the West's highest allegiance is to whiteness, Haiti's very existence was catastrophic.[26]

While news of the events in Haiti terrified white people, Black people throughout the Western Hemisphere, both free and enslaved, continued to be inspired. In 1805, Black soldiers in Rio de Janeiro wore medallion portraits of the Haitian emperor Dessalines.[27] It was this spirit that sustained the revolutionary victory of Haiti. Throughout Brazil, protest songs were passed down that praised the leaders of the Haitian Revolution and inspired the people to pursue similar means of liberation.

I will imitate [Henri] Christophe
Qual eu imito a Cristovao

The immortal Haitian Leader
Esse imotal haitiano

Hurrah! We will imitate his people
Eia! Imitai a seu povo

Oh, my sovereign people!
Oh, meu povo soberano![28]

In 1812, a free Black Cuban named José Antonio Aponte began plotting a slave revolution and encouraging the overthrow of slavery in Cuba. Aponte told the story of the Haitian Revolution to those who joined him and assured them that Haiti would support their efforts. "Word ran through Havana," according to one enslaved person in Cuba, that "generals and captains" from Haiti had come to seek "freedom for all the slaves on the island."[29] When Aponte was caught by colonial authorities, portraits of Henri Christophe, Toussaint Louverture, Jean-François Papillon, and Jean-Jacques Dessalines were found in his home. The help from Haiti was not forthcoming; it was only a rumor.

Simón Bolívar, the first president of Colombia, befriended Alexandre Pétion, then president of Haiti. Pétion convinced Bolívar to abolish slavery in all of the territories he controlled. To support his efforts, Pétion sent supplies and money to Bolívar to defeat the Spanish. Bolívar credited Haitian resources for his successful revolution. Haiti wanted an end to slavery everywhere. It shared resources with any country that shared its revolutionary goals.

No issue having to do with slavery and the role of Black people in society was discussed "so many different times, in so many different ways, for so many different reasons as the lessons of the Haitian Revolution."[30] The events in Haiti helped to advance legislation in some American states that would not otherwise have been passed. For example, New York and New Jersey passed moderate emancipation laws in 1799 and 1804, respectively.[31] New

York had one of the largest enslaved populations. One out of every five people was of African descent. It is likely New York did not want to be the site of a revolution. Similar proposals had failed in both states in the 1780s.[32] The federal government's closing of the slave trade in 1807 was also a direct result of the Haitian Revolution. Though the law ended only international (not domestic) slave trading to the United States (the illegal pirating of slave ships continued for some time), it represented a larger trend of scaling back the use of African labor. These changes were reforms, but they stemmed from revolutionary change. The United States did not move to abandon slavery, as the Haitians had done. For the moment, white people's terror of Black equality trumped their fear of Black violence. On the whole, white Americans continued to peddle the horrors of the Haitian Revolution and refused to give diplomatic recognition to Haiti.

Black people, particularly Black Americans, were never convinced by the attempts to dismiss or downplay the outcome of the Haitian Revolution.[33] Samuel E. Cornish and John B. Russwurm, the founders and editors of *Freedom's Journal*, America's first Black newspaper, routinely published supportive sentiments about Haiti.[34] "There are very few events on record which have produced more extraordinary men than the revolution in St. Domingo," they wrote in May 1827. In terms of Black leadership, Haiti had produced "the most incontestable proofs, that the negro is not, in general, wanting in the higher qualifications of the mind." Cornish and Russwurm understood that the same desire for the "advantages of liberty, independence and education, as their white brethren of Europe and America" could be found in Black people as well. Especially in the aftermath of the American and Haitian Revolutions, they wrote, the leaders of the United States should not be surprised by their desire to be free—all men

deprived of liberty will make attempts to recover their inalienable rights. "We may delay the evils of insurrections and revolutions; but like the eruptions of Vesuvius, they will burst forth more awfully amid the horrors of midnight."[35] Through force and revolutionary violence, Black Haitians wielded the sword of war and swayed an empire. *Freedom's Journal* warned that calamity would come to anyone connected with the institution of slavery and wherever slavery was tolerated.[36] It cautioned that the day would come when the horrors of Haiti would be enacted before American eyes.[37] For Cornish and Russwurm, an independent Haiti represented the impossible made possible. Throughout the antebellum period, abolitionists used the success of the Haitian Revolution to threaten the institution of slavery.[38] For decades, the revolution was sustained not only by its victory but by the threat it represented to any slaveholding country.

Haiti's revolution endured, but Guadeloupe is the story of revolution delayed. If you travel to the small, butterfly-shaped island of Guadeloupe, you can visit the commune of Les Abymes, the largest urban area with nearly sixty thousand inhabitants. Located on the west side of Grande-Terre, the eastern part of Guadeloupe, the town buzzes with people preparing for work or going to school or shopping.[39] While there, you might drive past murals and sculptures representing the history of the island: images of the slave trade, scenes from colonial plantation life, and Guadeloupean figures of slave resistance. La Mulâtresse Solitude is unquestionably the most striking of these statues, a warrior who gave her life during a major rebellion against the French. She stands tall and fierce with her hands on her hips and her protruding pregnant belly centering her planted stance.[40] She is positioned looking

west, facing the coast. She represents the precarity of freedom in the New World, a life that was stolen, then recovered, and, in the cause of freedom, lost again.

Solitude's mother was transported from West Africa to Guadeloupe in 1772. Before slave ships docked in the New World, slavery began at sea.[41] African men, women, and children were packed onto ships up to and often over capacity. From infants to the elderly, Black people were torn away from all they knew to face a world of labor and hell. Over 15 percent of enslaved Africans never survived to see the New World. Murder, neglect, and suicide stole the lives of millions. Enslaved women were constantly starved, beaten, and raped by sailors. Rape was so common during the Middle Passage that one in three women were impregnated by a European sailor.[42] An African woman could arrive in the New World just as she was entering her second trimester. Such was the case for Solitude's mother. She would have likely worked the lucrative sugar plantations that made the island a prized jewel for the French, alongside Saint-Domingue. In the eighteenth century, Guadeloupe was dominated by sugar, one of the most labor-intensive commodities of the slave trade. The Atlantic slave trade was a cruel irony. Sugar-sweetened tea, coffee, and other confections were produced by bitter and brutal exploitation of Black bodies.

Sometime during 1772, Solitude's mother gave birth. She named her daughter Solitude, perhaps to signify all of the things she felt: alone, isolated, and violently cut off from all she knew. It was said that Solitude had fair skin and gray eyes, revealing that she may have been conceived by rape. While she was referred to in history by the moniker La Mulâtresse Solitude, being mixed race afforded her no favors or rights. She spent all of her childhood and adolescence in bondage, trapped by a dangerous life of domestic

work, where sexual and physical assault were common given the proximity to white slave owners and their families. Both Solitude and her mother were strangers in a world that sought to violate them at every turn.

However, in 1794, at age twenty-two, Solitude had reason to hope. Saint-Domingue, the crown jewel of the French Empire, was three years into a full-fledged revolution. When it was rumored that the enslaved in Guadeloupe might also win their freedom, they did not hesitate to commence their own revolution. Historian Antoine Métral wrote, "These were no longer timid slaves. Women, children, and the elderly had all experienced the perils of slavery for a considerable period and regarded war as indispensable to liberty."[43] Oral history claims Solitude immediately escaped the plantation and went to live with the maroons, a group of former slaves who had found protection and haven in the mountains. They created communities that were often impenetrable to their white owners, who might come seeking to retrieve them.

But even in isolated regions, word spread fast that slavery was ending in the French Empire. The enslaved took their cue from Saint-Domingue, which in 1794 had abolished slavery and was in the midst of revolution, and freed themselves through violence and by abandoning plantations. However, amid chaos, Britain sought to gain control of the French islands, just as it had with Saint-Domingue. In April 1794, British troops arrived in Basse-Terre and gained temporary control. Just two months later, Victor Hugues, a representative of the French National Convention, arrived in Guadeloupe with a decree officially abolishing the institution of slavery. Hugues enlisted the help of the formerly enslaved to fight against the British to ensure their liberty. Empowered and mobilized, the formerly enslaved banded together against the British. By December 1794, the struggle with the British

ended. Freedom won and hundreds of white slaveholders lost their lives. For a brief period, the Black men and women of Guadeloupe lived as free people. The revolution was settled in Guadeloupe earlier than in France, where people were still fighting to dismantle the monarchy.

While the citizens of Guadeloupe were able to maintain control of their island and their freedom, their neighboring island Martinique was still under British control and enslavement. In 1799, Napoleon—newly risen to power in the aftermath of the French Revolution—sought to retake control of all of France's former colonies and reinstitute slavery there. In 1802, he managed to regain sovereignty over Martinique from the British. On May 6, he sent General Antoine Richepanse and 3,400 troops to Pointe-à-Pitre, the capital of Guadeloupe, with specific orders to enslave the people, again.[44] Saint-Domingue may have become a lost cause for him, but Napoleon felt confident about Guadeloupe.

Having lived in freedom for eight years, no Black person on Guadeloupe was going to go back to the plantation without a fight. The Martinique-born, mixed-race colonel Louis Delgrès led an army of formerly enslaved men, women, and children, including Solitude. Pregnant but undeterred, she actively participated in the battle against the French, as did scores of other Black women. Black women were crucial to every battle, transporting food, supplies, and ammunition to those wielding arms. Historian Bernard Moitt wrote that rebel women "served as messengers, cared for the sick, acted as cover for men under fire, and chanted revolutionary slogans," which kept spirits high in the insurrectionary forces of Delgrès and other Black leaders.

Guadeloupean historian Auguste Lacour wrote that during the battle, while the city was barricaded, Black rebel women could be heard singing the French national anthem as they transported

ammunition, mocking their oppressors. In describing the women warriors, Lacour claimed, "It was not their fault if their fathers, their sons, their mothers, and their lovers were not endowed with superhuman courage. When a bullet whistled above their heads or a bomb exploded near them, they sang loudly, holding hands while making their hellish rounds interrupted by the chant: 'Vive la mort!' (Long live death!)."[45] The Black people of Guadeloupe knew well what they were fighting for and what they were fighting against. Death was always preferred to a life in slavery.

Mothers who gave birth to enslaved children, who experienced the grief of bondage, were perhaps most motivated to combat the violence they so desperately sought to eradicate. This was what Solitude fought for: her life and the liberty of her unborn child. One of the few stories scholars have of Solitude is telling and comes from Lacour's *History of Guadeloupe*:

> La mulâtresse Solitude, who came from Pointe-à-Pitre to Basse-Terre, was then in the Palermo camp. She let her hatred and fury burst out on all occasions. She had rabbits. One of them having escaped, she armed herself with a pin, ran, pierced him, lifted him up, and presented him to the prison women: "Here," she said, by mixing with her words the most offensive epithets, "this is how I will treat you when it is time!" And this unfortunate woman was about to become a mother! Solitude did not abandon the rebels and remained close to them, like their evil genius, to excite them to the greatest crimes.[46]

Solitude hated slavery. She hated her oppressors. She hated the evil that Europeans perpetuated during the slave trade in the New World. Her genius was in her desire to create not just a better world but a new world, where freedom was a God-given right

bestowed at birth and impossible to take away. She was bent on fighting until the end.

Despite the courage and heart of the Black rebel fighters, French forces overwhelmed them. On May 28, 1802, Delgrès and his men and women took their last stand in the battle of Matouba. They lined their outposts with gunpowder and placed explosives around the plantation where they were stationed, then waited for French soldiers to storm their posts. As the French approached, Delgrès and over five hundred men, women, and children shouted "Vivre libre ou mourir!" (Liberty or death!) In one of the greatest acts of solidarity that revolutionary violence has ever seen, they set the gunpowder on fire. The explosions killed some four hundred French soldiers and nearly all of Delgrès's rebelling force. Certain accounts claim Delgrès played the violin as shells and gunpowder exploded around him.[47] In the words of Dessalines, Black Guadeloupeans extended "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."[48] In Guadeloupe they lived free, for a moment, and then chose death.

On July 16, 1802, the French successfully reestablished slavery on the island. Solitude was captured and sentenced to death, but given her pregnancy, officials agreed to execute her after the birth of her child. This was no act of mercy. It is likely Solitude's former owners claimed the child as their property. On November 28, Solitude delivered her baby. On November 29, she marched to her execution. Some stories say she died with breast milk stains on her clothes. Solitude had conceived her child in freedom and fought valiantly all throughout her pregnancy. And yet she could not promise her child a life of freedom. Solitude's actions were no less revolutionary despite her inability to win against her oppressors.

Solitude was not alone in her bravery. A woman named Marthe-Rose was known as Delgrès's mistress, and the French held her liable for inspiring Delgrès to incite the enslaved to rebel and for killing white prisoners held as their captives. Though she suffered from a broken leg, the French brought her before the tribunal on a stretcher. They condemned her to be hanged publicly. As the rope was placed around her neck, Marthe-Rose condemned her onlookers: "Having killed their king and left their country, these men have come to ours to bring trouble and confusion. May God judge them!"[49] She correctly described the Revolutionary Era. During the French Revolution, nine years before Marthe-Rose's execution, King Louis XVI was beheaded by guillotine. After achieving victory for his nation, Napoleon could not contemplate ruling without violence and slavery. No white people in the Western world could imagine their own revolutions without the suppression of Black people. Black equality was unthinkable. Rather than acknowledge Black agency, the West employed "trouble and confusion" by promoting categories of race. Marthe-Rose was right.

Two weeks before his last stand at Matouba, Delgrès wrote a final proclamation. His address "To the Entire Universe" was written to be a powerful republican plea for racial equality. He reasoned that "resistance to oppression is a natural right. Even the divinity cannot be offended that we defend our cause; it is that of justice and humanity: we will not defile it by the very shadow of crime. Yes, we are resolved to keep ourselves on a fair defense; but we will never become the aggressors."[50] Delgrès was not addressing Napoleon or the French or even Europe. He was addressing *the entire universe* in a message that slavery was warfare and racism was inhuman. He believed no one should be born into a world with adversaries. Moreover, he adamantly refuted the idea

that revolution and revolutionary violence, as an act of collective defense against oppression, were not just. Today, there remains no original copy of his proclamation. We know of its existence only because of Lacour's history and copious interviews with survivors. But Delgrès's message and meaning echo to this very day.

During the late 1990s, officials in the French Antilles and the public grappled with how to commemorate iconic figures of resistance to slavery. The people wanted their historical heroes to be acknowledged. Several sculptures were installed in public spaces to honor the Black women and men who fought against slavery in the French Antilles. Sculptures of the heroic figures such as La Mulâtresse Solitude, Joseph Ignace, and Louis Delgrès were placed around the city center. Though the statue of Solitude was commissioned to represent a heroine, history, resistance, and marronage in Guadeloupe, its placement was political. The statue of Solitude, created by Black artist Jacky Poulier, and bust of Delgrès were not placed in central squares, parks, or gardens for people to contemplate. Solitude stands in the middle of a roundabout. Many other statues of revolutionaries were placed in the middle of multilane highways and hectic thoroughfares. Critics have argued that "this type of historical representation does not promote a sustained engagement with the past, but instead encourages one to simply 'drive by' the past with little reflection."[51] Guadeloupe's French road system prohibits the kind of large collective gathering that would allow these statues to serve as meeting places.

Sociologist Jean Casimir recognized that the challenge many scholars face is "to extract the vision of the vanquished from historical circumstances in which the vanquishers worked constantly to silence and destroy the elaboration of even the most basic means of expression on the part of the colonized."[52] In other words, the sustainability of revolution is dependent on not just victory but how

that victory is remembered. Statues are not superficial. They offer a shortcut to the past, a way of valuing what was accomplished. Extracting history is difficult and preserving memory can be even more fraught. The violence of white supremacy is also bound up in forgetting. That Black revolutionary victories have been marginalized and forgotten is not accidental. The French did not just want to eliminate Black leadership; they sought to erase Black history because history often serves as a road map to a possible future. In marginalizing the past, white people were attempting to make Black people beholden to an identity stuck in subordination. These revolutionary leaders became footnotes because of their attempts to maintain freedom. But not all revolutions end in failure or suppression. Where Guadeloupe failed, Haiti succeeded, in the most powerful example of revolution ideals the Western world has ever seen. And even in failure, white supremacy is weakened, its fallibility exposed. The Black men and women of Guadeloupe were not afraid of failure; they feared the inability to live free. There is honor in failure; integrity, too. The story of Solitude is a powerful portrait of revolution.

In 1848, France abolished slavery in Guadeloupe, Martinique, and their other enslaved colonies. The efforts were led by Victor Schoelcher, a writer and staunch abolitionist. It could be argued that Schoelcher was a revolutionary. He understood that revolution requires sacrifice and forfeiture. He sold his father's business and his inheritance to dedicate himself to the abolition of slavery. After Haiti won its independence, Schoelcher was the first white abolitionist to visit the island. He was vehemently against the heinous debt France collected from Haiti to compensate former slaveholders. He also adamantly believed that any form of gradual emancipation was unwise. He feared slave rebellion was imminent in France's colonies without immediate emancipation. He

was right. Before abolition, on May 20, 1848, enslaved people in Martinique began to rise up, motivated by the French Revolution of 1848. Claude Rostoland, Martinique's interim governor, knew he could not control the ensuing rebellion among the enslaved. He quickly moved to declare immediate emancipation throughout the island. Knowing word and violence would spread, Guadeloupe's governor followed suit.[53] Slavery in France was finished. On June 3, the French government abolished slavery legally, but the work had been accomplished on the ground by the enslaved, who forced their hands.

Revolutions do not require violence, but violence can ensure certain guarantees. For Black people in the French Antilles, violence and even the threat of violence guaranteed that liberation could not be ignored or delayed. A long-lived man or woman from Guadeloupe might have, over the course of their life, experienced slavery, then freedom followed by enslavement for another fifty years, and then finally liberation. All the while, Black people refused to give up. They were certain that, while revolution can be delayed, it cannot be denied.

In America, revolutions and violence belong to powerful white men alone. To be clear, there is a social contract between poor white men and wealthy white men in support of white supremacy. White women are also included in this social contract. Despite misogyny and distinct socioeconomic standings, white men and women are united in their racial identity. Together, these categories share varying forms of domination and an unrepentant sense of pride. Since the beginning of this country, riots and violent rhetoric have been markers of patriotism and whiteness. When the Founding Fathers fought for independence, violence was the clarion call. Phrases

such as "Live free or die," "Give me liberty or give me death," and "Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God" echoed throughout the American colonies and in many ways continue today. Force and violence have always been used as weapons to defend liberty because—as John Adams once said in reference to the colonists' treatment by the British—"we won't be their Negroes."[54]

In the Founding Fathers' minds, revolution was never intended to benefit the general public or to extend rights to all people. While not all Founding Fathers thought similarly about slavery, they all maintained a belief in Black inferiority. Among the prominent Founding Fathers, fourteen out of twenty-one owned Black people. Washington enslaved over three hundred people by the end of his life. Thomas Jefferson enslaved over six hundred men, women, and children. It should surprise no one that four out of the first five presidents (George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and James Monroe) owned Black people. Hypocrisy was not a hidden agenda. And yet, the Founding Fathers and the Enlightenment thinkers they quoted are credited with creating the most comprehensive and noteworthy ideas about liberty and equal humanity.

During the Revolutionary Era, Black Americans sought revolution as well, to create new terms for full humanity. Throughout the colonial period, Black essayists, some known as the Sons of Africa, were writing formal petitions demanding their freedom and the abolition of slavery, using the Revolutionary rhetoric favored by white political thinkers to point out the hypocrisy of these men calling themselves slaves to England while still enslaving Black people. Caesar Sarter was one of the earliest African American leaders to speak out on the evils of slavery before the American Revolution. Born in Africa, he was kidnapped, sent to the New World, and lived for over twenty years in bondage

before becoming emancipated, after which he lived as a free man in Newburyport, Massachusetts. In a 1774 essay, Sarter asked, "If you are sensible, that slavery is in itself, and in its consequents a great evil, why will you not pity and relieve the poor distressed enslaved Africans?"[55] When Patrick Henry wrote that he could not do without his slaves' labor, Sarter disproved this idea by clarifying that patriots could not do without "the profits of their labor."[56] The ideals of the revolutionary moment were, in fact, not liberty and equality but greed and self-preservation, which prevented white Americans from believing the ideals of liberty and equality should extend to everyone. Western enlightenment was always rooted in the subjugation and enslavement of African and Native peoples. Sarter concluded that patriots' first step should be to liberate the enslaved. He warned that, should slaveholders continue in their oppression of Black people, the Bible was clear: "And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him . . . shall surely be put to death."[57] In this sense, revolution only belonged to the enslaved.

Another "Son of Africa," name unknown, wrote, "Are your hearts not also hard, when you hold them in slavery who are entitled to liberty, by the law of nature, equal as yourselves?"[58] The Sons of Africa called on scripture, specifically the book of Matthew, chapter seven, which discusses calling out the sins of another without addressing one's own. The Bible verse describes hypocrites who tell their brother to "remove the mote [sin] from his eye" without first removing the sin from their own eye. The Sons of Africa charged the colonists with this hypocrisy. The anonymous author wrote, "Pull the beam out thine own eyes." Not only is the author referring to the gross imbalance of scale (beams and motes), but he saw the weaponization of Christianity as a "cloak to fill their masters' coffers and to screen their

villainy."[59] Both writers believed that slavery violated the laws of God, and they cautioned the colonists of God's retribution.[60] The patriots were not God's chosen people of Israel. No, they were Egyptians, and the Founding Fathers were pharaohs. For Black people in what would become the United States, revolution was not freedom from England; it was freedom from bondage.

However, in America, Black people who believed in freedom and used violence to achieve it were killed. The first Black Revolutionary hero credited in the American Revolution was also its first casualty: Crispus Attucks. Born into slavery, Attucks lived in Framingham, Massachusetts, before fleeing for his freedom on September 30, 1750. His enslaver, a white man named William Brown, quickly published an ad for his return. Brown described him as a "Molatto Fellow, about 27 Years of Age, named Crispas, 6 feet two inches high, short curled hair, his Knees closer together than common." Ten pounds was the reward for his return.[61] No one was ever able to claim this prize because Attucks was never caught. While he was legally a fugitive, he lived another twenty years as a free man. Attucks represented the contested nature of slavery in colonial New England. He was enslaved but also "acted as free."[62] So many in Boston at the time were people like him—African, Native, and living in some category of unfreedom.[63]

Attucks worked as a sailor and ropemaker in Boston. About 20 percent of the sailors employed on American ships during the colonial period were Black Americans. The whaling ships sailing in and out of Boston Harbor gave Attucks something he had never had as an enslaved person: mobility. Attucks did not just flee; he traveled the world. On the night of the Boston Massacre, he had recently returned from the Bahamas. Had he not been killed, his next trip would have taken him to North Carolina.[64] Attucks had obtained a living that was full of possibility.

The context for the Boston Massacre is worth noting. First, for over a year, the British Crown ordered that soldiers be housed in the homes of Boston citizens. Impressment or quartering of troops drew intense resentment from those citizens. Second, because British soldiers were paid poorly, many of them sought to supplement their income with additional jobs when they were off duty. They often took up the jobs of the propertyless, those who could not vote or participate in town meetings, such as sailors, ropemakers, and tavern workers, or any role that involved menial labor. Sailors and ropemakers, like Attucks, despised competing with British soldiers for economic opportunities. The labor grievances against the soldiers caused riots throughout the Eastern Seaboard, including New York and Newport, Rhode Island, where after weeks of impressment from British soldiers, over five hundred seamen, many of them Black, rioted because they were unable to earn a living.[65] All these years after fleeing slavery, Attucks was not going to relinquish his livelihood and ability to live freely.

On the evening of March 5, 1770, Attucks was with other seamen drinking at a pub in Boston. When a British soldier walked into the tavern to inquire about a part-time job, Attucks and his fellow seamen were incensed. They began to curse at the soldier and threatened him until he left the pub. Historians have argued that Attucks was not thinking about revolution in the ideological sense that night, but I disagree. If we rethink revolution as I have here, as a response to oppression and an attempt to establish an equitable and new social and political order, then his decision to confront the soldier was indeed a revolutionary act.

Attucks had zero interest in maintaining a system where British soldiers could upend his livelihood. He, along with the other seamen, had good reason to be defiant and even hostile. They allegedly chased the soldier into the street, where the skirmish

began to turn violent. Witnesses claimed Attucks was the leader of the mob that confronted the British soldier. Historian Douglas Egerton reasoned, "The prudent thing to do for a man like Attucks was to back away from that confrontation, but he did not."[66] According to trial testimony, Attucks brandished two wooden sticks. At once, several other British soldiers arrived, formed a semicircle, and pointed their cutlasses and bayonets at the growing crowd. One enslaved man named Andrew was a witness to events. He recalled that Attucks was a "stout man" who tried to punch one of the officers. Andrew claimed Attucks snatched the soldier's bayonet from his hand and then yelled for the crowd to "kill the dogs, knock them over."[67] In that moment, the soldier regained control of his firearm and shot Attucks in the chest.

Interestingly, the deaths of Attucks and four other men who also were killed by the British that night were met with a wave of solidarity. Samuel Adams, member of the Sons of Liberty and an eventual Founding Father, took it upon himself to organize the procession to move the five bodies to Faneuil Hall, where they lay in state for three days before their funerals. An estimated ten thousand to twelve thousand people attended the procession. At the time, that was more than half of Boston's population. His Black and Indigenous ancestry would have kept Attucks from being buried in the same plot as the white colonists, but for Attucks the city made an exception. He was buried along with the four other victims at the Granary Burying Ground.[68]

The public may have embraced Attucks, but the elite did not. The trial for the British soldiers involved in the massacre is telling. The lawyer tasked with defending the soldiers was none other than John Adams. When presenting his case, Adams described the men the soldiers killed as "a motley rabble of saucy boys, negroes and molattoes [*sic*], Irish teagues and outlandish jack tarrs."[69] Race

and class are the essential factors for each group: Adams pointed to racial and class categories to emphasize that they were men of no consequence. Black men, teagues (a slur referring to Irishmen), and "jack tarrs"—seamen—were all expendable, probably criminal. These men were "saucy," or irreverent, and could not be assumed to be up to any good.[70] That Attucks was forty-seven years old, not some adolescent rabble-rouser, did not matter. His ancestry, skin color, and perhaps his height were enough to make him the lead culprit.

Adams built his defense of the British soldiers on the charge that Attucks struck the first blow and led the "dreadful carnage." Adams concluded that Attucks's "mad behavior" provoked the soldiers' response, saying that Attucks's group was "under the command of a stout molatto [*sic*] fellow, whose very looks, was enough to terrify any person."[71] Adams used Attucks's race, and specifically his Blackness, to arouse sympathy for the terrified British soldiers. He argued that these soldiers were rightfully (and racially) afraid. Essentially, Adams argued that Black people cannot employ violence, revolutionary or not. However, it was acceptable for white people to use lethal force to "defend themselves,"[72] particularly when threatened by Black people.

When the trial concluded, six of the eight soldiers involved were acquitted after two and a half hours of jury deliberation. The remaining two soldiers were found guilty of manslaughter for firing into the crowd. But both sentences were eventually reduced from death to the branding of their thumb in court, a proverbial slap on the wrist. Adams's anti-Blackness was counterrevolutionary; it served to support the institution of slavery and the violent subjection of all Black people in the United States.[73] The work of revolution could never be complete if it did not extend to include African Americans. Seminal moments in US history that historians have

defined as patriotic were also moments that denied patriotism to Black people. Crowds in Boston considered Attucks a symbol of the revolution, but the irony was that the "revolution" was only to benefit white men.

Interestingly, not only is Attucks known for being the first casualty of the American Revolution, but in the telling of the Boston Massacre, he is the only casualty known by name. Who readily recalls the names of Samuel Gray, James Caldwell, Samuel Maverick, and Patrick Carr? Most people cannot even remember how many people were killed. While Attucks might show up in history as a mere reference point for the Boston Massacre, he has become a hero for Black Americans. According to author Eric Hinderaker, Attucks became a symbol in the 1840s for Black abolitionists.[74] African American leaders and activists promoted him as an example of a Black patriot. In the spring of 1858, nearly one hundred years after the Boston Massacre, Black abolitionists gathered in Boston to honor Attucks with the first-ever Crispus Attucks Day. Black efforts and activism are why we remember Attucks to this day. Black leaders such as Lewis Hayden and William C. Nell were in attendance for a festival at the famed Faneuil Hall. White abolitionist Wendell Phillips was in attendance as well and gave a speech acknowledging Black people as pioneers against British tyranny. Phillips declared, "Who set the example of guns? Who taught the British Soldiers that he might be defeated? Who first dared look into his eyes? Those five men!" He claimed, "The 5th of March was the baptism of blood. . . . I place, therefore this Crispus Attucks in the foremost rank of the men dared. When we talk of courage, he rises, with his dark face, in the clothes of a laborer, his head uncovered, his arm raised above him defying bayonets. . . . When the proper symbols are placed around the base of the statue of Washington,

one corner will be filled by the colored man defying the British muskets."[75]

Black and white abolitionists attempted to reorient the genesis of the American Revolution from Lexington and Concord to the streets of Boston. They were attempting to make a Black man the true face of the rebellion that culminated into a revolution, reminding all that it was Attucks's defiance and death that rallied colonists. In the twentieth century Attucks remained a model of Black resistance. In 1964, civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. wrote to Black schoolchildren, "Know that the first American to shed blood in the revolution that freed his country from British oppression was a Black seaman named Crispus Attucks."[76] But radical leaders like Black Power spokesman Stokely Carmichael took Attucks's example even further. In 1966, Carmichael praised participants in racial social unrest and argued that the "[Black] man who goes out and throws a brick at a white cop is taking part in an uprising as Crispus Attucks, another Black man, was when he threw rocks in the American Revolution at Boston."[77] Enslaved, free, and fugitive Black people were the true revolutionaries of the Revolutionary Era because they believed in abolishing slavery and establishing a society that worked for everyone.

Attucks was courageous. In the face of armed authority, he risked everything by physically engaging with British soldiers. Though he had lived as a free man for more than twenty years, capture was always a possibility. He was not content to simply flee. He traveled, he labored, and he fought to preserve his freedom. He had no control of how history would use his memory or interpret his intentions, but that is not the point. He was unwilling to live a life in subordination to anyone. Author Mitch Kachun contends, "It does not matter whether or not he was a leader, or a friend of Revere and Hancock, or well-read in political philosophy,

or a good Christian, or active in the Sons of Liberty, or merely a drunken dockworker." His presence and actions on March 5, 1770, "embodied the diversity of colonial America and the active participation of workers and people of color in the public life of the Revolutionary era."[78] When the Revolution came, Attucks may have been the first casualty, but he was far from alone in his stance for life and liberty unmarred by slavery and tyranny. And as a former slave, he had more claim to these ideals than the Founding Fathers.

When America's war for independence commenced, some Black men and women contributed to patriotic efforts. In many cases, the role of Black soldiers was transformative in shifting the victory of war both on the ground and strategically. Black soldiers enlisted because they hoped for or were promised freedom. Achieving the goals of the Revolution had to include them. While some white leaders might have been reluctant to arm Black men, enslaved labor was a mainstay in the military: enslaved people served as cooks, porters, skilled tradesmen, sailors, spies, and valets. But George Washington was appalled to find the large numbers of enslaved Black men besieging British troops in the battles of 1775. He condemned their service and outlawed additional recruitment of Black troops. He feared that permitting the enslaved to bear arms might threaten the institution of slavery itself. Indeed, a democracy is antithetical to slavery. But Washington was not fighting for revolution; he was fighting for independence from Britain.

Black soldiers never acted in the way the Founding Fathers predicted or desired. Despite planter paranoia, there were no rampant slave rebellions and insurrections. Only after a brutal winter at Valley Forge did Washington change course on the enlistment of

enslaved men. He was desperate. He and the Continental Congress allowed Rhode Island to recruit enslaved men. The First Rhode Island Regiment was made up entirely of Black soldiers, and Washington chose this all-Black company to lead the Continental army in the final battle at Yorktown. However, fighting in exchange for freedom was a precarious deal, and being placed on the front lines of a battle only signaled that one was disposable. In 1778, Rhode Island recruited the enslaved with the promise of freedom only to later rescind the promise.[79] For Black Americans, this was not a revolution; it was a charade. The government made it clear that Black men were merely slaves in service of the military, not free men fighting for a cause. Liberty was touted to entice their participation but never materialized as a reward.

At the conclusion of the American Revolution, nothing had changed for the marginalized or those without power. For the oppressed, the Revolution was not revolutionary. Some might argue that the Revolution inspired gradual emancipation in the North. For example, the enslaved woman Elizabeth Freeman of Massachusetts (also known as Mumbet) was able to sue for her freedom after hearing the Massachusetts Constitution read aloud. Her successful case served as a legal precedent and eventually led to the abolition of slavery in Massachusetts, the first state to abolish slavery. But the liberation of most enslaved people in all of the southern states was not complete. And in places like New York and New Jersey, slavery continued until the threat of revolution in Haiti pushed them toward gradual emancipation.

Revolution involves the total transformation of society and the liberation of all people, not a few. Thus, the American Revolution did not radically transform colonial society in a way that lived up to the principle fought for: that all men are created equal and have unalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. In

the aftermath of the Revolution, the overwhelming majority of Black Americans were still enslaved, Native Americans had no protection for their western lands, white farmers who had been given cheap incentives to fight were still largely cut out of the economy by the planter class, and women, who made major contributions to war efforts, saw no changes in their social or political status despite their overwhelming support of white supremacy in the new nation. Americans had merely supplied the rhetoric of Black freedom efforts, but they never intended to extend freedom to the masses. For Black Americans, the Revolution replaced a distant white supremacist tyrant supportive of Black enslavement with local and electable white supremacist tyrants empowered to preserve the existing social, political, and economic order, which was grounded in slavery and anti-Blackness. The Revolution was not merely imperfect; it was not true.

Former slave turned abolitionist Frederick Douglass offered the most famous speech regarding America's incomplete revolution. "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" is a scathing critique of American hypocrisy as the land of liberty. Douglass asks,

> What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciations of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy.[80]

He referred to the war as a "thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages." America's revolution was guilty of violence and bloodshed; it was not a legitimate response to oppression. As Douglass argued, "There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices more shocking and bloody, than are the people of these United States, at this very hour." For Douglass, a delayed revolution such as Guadeloupe's was better than a farce. Throughout the Black Diaspora and in the Western world, successful revolutions were the Haitian Revolution and Simón Bolívar's war for South American independence because they abolished slavery and were fought for better lives for all people. Douglass added, "The brave stand taken by the black sons [and daughters] of Haiti" was transformative. "Striking for their freedom, they struck for the freedom of every black man [and woman] in the world."[81] Because of Haiti's influence, South America was not just free from Spain; it was free from slavery. America accomplished nothing of the sort.

Like Solitude, Delgrès, Louverture, Attucks, and others, Black people have continued to die for the cause of freedom. And like Solitude, Delgrès, Louverture, and Attucks, few have died without first putting up a fight. When it comes to slavery and white supremacy, Douglass was right about this too: "It is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake. The feeling of the nation must be quickened; the conscience of the nation must be roused; the propriety of the nation must be startled; the hypocrisy of the nation must be exposed; and its crimes against God and man must be proclaimed and denounced."[82] Black people mobilized to fight against their oppression. Black people strove to be the fire and the thunder, the storm and the earthquake. In revolutions, whether we consider the success of Haiti, the delayed liberation of Guadeloupe, or the incompleteness of the United States, one thing

remains: revolutions require transformational change to improve the lives of all people.

It can be argued that America's revolution began not in 1776 but in 1863. The true American revolution did not start with the Civil War. It began when the demise of slavery was chosen as the determinant for winning the war. The Emancipation Proclamation sanctioned what enslaved and free Black Americans were already doing, freeing themselves. Hundreds of thousands of enslaved people abandoned plantations, and over 250,000 Black soldiers fought valiantly against a slaveholding South. When the war ended, slavery was over. The real work of revolution in America was Reconstruction. Three new amendments known as the Reconstruction Amendments were added to the US Constitution between 1865 and 1870. The Thirteenth Amendment (abolishing slavery), the Fourteenth Amendment (establishing citizenship for all), and the Fifteenth Amendment (prohibiting discrimination in voting rights) were revolutionary. For the first time in the nation's history Black men were free, were citizens, and had guaranteed suffrage. The revolutionary work of Reconstruction went further than any other country in the Western Hemisphere. And yet this revolution still did not extend to women.

In less than a generation, just several years, Black men went from being enslaved to being elected officials. Robert Smalls was born into slavery in Beaufort, South Carolina. During the Civil War, he managed to steal a Confederate ship with his family on board and sail it undetected to Union strongholds. His contributions helped convince Lincoln that Black men should be enlisted as soldiers to help win the war. When the war was over, Smalls returned home and invested in his communities. He entered politics

and won an election as a Republican to the South Carolina legislature. He then ran for the United States House of Representatives and won. In 1861, Smalls was still enslaved. By 1868, he was serving in his first elected office. He was not alone. Over 1,500 men served in elected offices during Reconstruction, from local municipal roles to United States senators.

Political revolution was taking place. Black people did not have tremendous power, but they had influence, and they used it to benefit all Americans. The first universal public schools were established during Reconstruction. Education had been a privilege primarily for the elite. Now, for the first time, poor white children and Black children could obtain literacy and a formal education. The first public health departments were created to combat tropical diseases such as smallpox and typhoid, which had taken so many lives during the war. Schools, sanitation departments, roads, and infrastructure were implemented to reconstruct the entire country, not just the South. And in 1875, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act. The bill, which was sometimes, and interestingly, referred to as the Enforcement Act or the Force Act, was in response to white violence and terrorism occurring against Native Americans and thus was designed to "protect all citizens in their civil and legal rights."[83] The act aimed to provide for equal treatment in public accommodations and public transportation, and to prohibit exclusion from jury service. It was passed in honor of radical Republican senator Charles Sumner, who had drafted the bill in 1870 but died before its passage. Nearing the end of Reconstruction, Black South Carolina congressman Thomas Miller summed up the contributions of Black leadership: "We were eight years in power. We had built schoolhouses, established charitable institutions, built and maintained the penitentiary system, provided for the education of the deaf and dumb, rebuilt the ferries. In short, we had

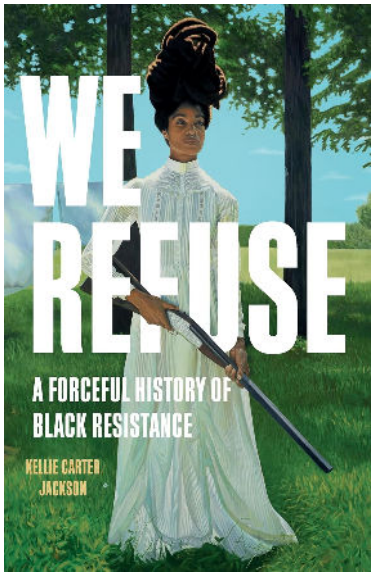
reconstructed the State and placed it upon the road to prosperity."[84] Finally, the work of revolution was beginning to take shape. But Reconstruction was not permanent, and it was not protected. If Haiti, Guadeloupe, and the United States have taught us anything about revolutions, it is that the hardest part of revolution is not winning; it's protecting and sustaining what was won.

I learned this lesson with my brother, William, who was cured of sickle cell anemia. From age sixteen to twenty-seven, he lived a full life. He graduated from high school and went on to college. He joined the Reserve Officers' Training Corps and graduated from his university as a commissioned officer in the United States Army. He fell in love and got married. He traveled the world. He was deployed to the Middle East and served his country with honor. He returned home with big plans for his life and with his wife. But when he was twenty-seven years old, he suddenly became ill. He told his wife he was having trouble breathing. He was admitted to the hospital, and doctors quickly determined that he had an infection of pneumococcus bacteria, which bone marrow transplant recipients like him are more susceptible to. They gave him a 50 percent chance of survival. After four days of battling and medical intervention, William died. He had lived over ten years sickle cell–free.

My brother's loss was devastating. In some ways, I felt like Guadeloupe, having experienced a short-lived freedom that was taken away. But the work of revolution is never dependent on one person. When Toussaint was captured and left to die in a French dungeon, he proclaimed that the fight would continue. I hate that I lost my brother, but I am grateful that research on sickle cell anemia did not stop with his death. In fact, researchers and doctors have come up with new ways to treat and cure sickle cell disease. It is possible that with time, resources, and work, sickle cell anemia

can be eradicated. Cures are not about individuals; cures are about the community. Similarly, revolution is never intended to help one life but to help all lives. Many people have been cured of sickle cell anemia and gone on to live long, full lives. All oppressed people are in a constant struggle to reclaim what has been lost, protect what has been gained, and work to perfect equitable change.

Revolutions are the beginning of something new and just. Socially, politically, economically, we need revolutions. With revolution we are set up to walk down a better path, but the journey is long and hard and ongoing. If revolution were all that was needed, Black people would have won years ago, but as we'll see in the following chapters, revolutions must be protected and enforced.

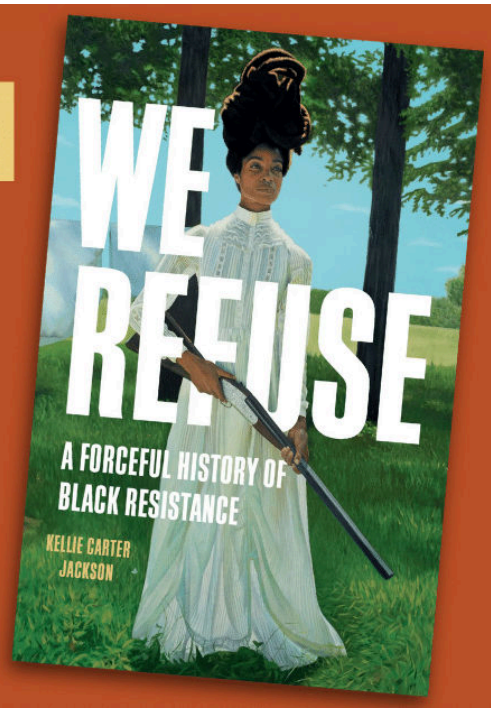


DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For *We Refuse: A Forceful History of Black Resistance* by Kellie Carter Jackson

ZINN EDUCATION PROJECT
TEACHING PEOPLE'S HISTORY

Coordinated by Teaching for Change and Rethinking Schools



BY MIMI EISEN

Here are discussion questions to accompany the chapter on revolutions in We Refuse: A Forceful History of Black Resistance *by Kellie Carter Jackson.*

In Chapter One: Revolution, Jackson writes,

Revolutions are complicated. Americans venerate the American Revolution and the French Revolution, but other revolutions, particularly ones that involve violence committed by people of color, are rejected and feared. . . . But when I think of revolutions, I think of new beginnings.

1. Before reading the chapter, make your own definition of "revolution." What things determine whether something is revolutionary? After reading Kellie Carter Jackson's description of revolution, consider how it compares to yours. Would you revise your definition based on what you read? Explain.

2. In a 1969 speech, Civil Rights Movement leader Ella Baker said, "How much have we got to do to find out who we are, where we have come from and where we are going[?] . . . In order to see where we are going, we not only must remember where we have been, but we must understand where we have been." What do you see as the distinction between remembering and understanding? Respond with an example from history or your own experience.

3. The actions of enslaved populations in Haiti and on Guadeloupe "gave life and legitimacy to the rhetoric the American Founding Fathers and European colonizers merely performed," writes Kellie Carter Jackson. What does she mean?

4. *We Refuse* argues that "the victory of the American Revolution appears sustaining, but only if we examine white power structures. . . It did not protect Indigenous peoples. It did not free the enslaved. It did not replace an exploitative system with an equitable one." Consider whether or not the "American Revolution" is an accurate title for the era. If not, what would be a better title?

5. How did enslaved people in Haiti emancipate themselves and inspire Black resistance movements hundreds of miles away? How did white supremacists move to quell their freedom?

6. This chapter quotes the Creole phrase, "Tout moun. Se moun" — loosely translating to "Every person is a person." Would this have been a revolutionary statement in the United States in the late 18th century? Explain.

7. What were the goals of the French Revolution? Why did they resonate with enslaved populations of Saint-Domingue?

8. The American Revolution and Haitian Revolution were both violent — but "the West" deemed some acts of violence to be acceptable, and others unacceptable. Who and what has determined the "legitimacy" of violence, then and now?

9. According to historian Alfred Hunt, "No issue having to do with slavery and the role of [Black people] in American society was discussed at so many different times, in so many different ways, for so many different reasons, as the lessons of the Haitian Revolution." List some examples of Haiti's influence on the United States in the early 19th century. Which of these "lessons" do you agree with, and which do you disagree with? Say why.

10. Louis Delgrès, a leader of the movement to resist French reoccupation of Guadeloupe, declared in an appeal for racial equality addressed to the entire universe that "resistance to oppression is a natural right." The original copy of his 1802 proclamation (aptly called "To the Entire Universe") is gone, though other rebels and later historians carried on his message. Make a list of voices and documents of the American Revolution that are carefully preserved and widely available to learn about. What perspectives are left out, or harder to find? Why do you think that is?

11. In a discussion of monuments and memory, Kellie Carter Jackson explains, "The violence of white supremacy is also bound up in forgetting. That Black revolutionary victories have been marginalized and forgotten is not accidental. [European colonizers] sought to erase Black history because history often serves as a road map to a possible future." Give examples from this chapter, and the world today, that support this quote. For example, how does current legislation banning truthful history from the classroom relate to the concept of forgetting?

12. *We Refuse* outlines a social contract of white supremacy that transcends class and gender. What is meant by a social contract, and how did this social contract shape the founding of the United States?

13. Kellie Carter Jackson cites a 1774 essay by formerly enslaved African American Caesar Sarter to illustrate that the ideals of the Founding Fathers were "not liberty and equality but greed and self-preservation." Compare and contrast this framing with a description of the Founders in a

typical U.S. history textbook. What does the textbook tell you to think of the Founders, and why? For example,

Prentice Hall's textbook *Out of Many: A History of the American People* says,

"[The Founders] realized that the coming struggle for independence would require the steady support of ordinary people, so they asserted this great principle of equality and the right of revolution. . . Surely no statement would reverberate more through American history; the idea of equality inspired the poor as well as the wealthy, women as well as men, blacks as well as whites."

Cengage Learning's textbook *HIST. Vol. 1*: *U.S. History Through 1877* argues,

"[The Founders intended] not just to seek nationhood, but to do so in the belief that all men were created equal and that all people possessed certain rights that nobody could deny. . . In promising the 'natural rights' of life, liberty, and property, the American Revolution served as an ideological model for later revolutions in France and in Central and South America, among others. But the Revolution was a bellwether of not only liberty but also republican democracy. The American revolutionaries hoped their struggles would curb the system of Old World aristocracy. They no longer wanted to be ruled by a few powerful people with long-entrenched methods of perpetuating their wealth and status. . . No one was sure what would arise in the place of Old World aristocracy, but they knew that, after the Revolution, the old system was dead."

14. Crispus Attucks is widely known as the first person killed in the Boston Massacre, and the first casualty of the American Revolution. But he was also embraced by Antebellum-era abolitionists and Civil Rights Movement leaders as a model of Black resistance. According to this chapter, Attucks "embodied the diversity of colonial America and the active participation of workers and people of color in the public life of the Revolutionary era." How does this account of Attucks and his legacy compare to what you've learned about him previously in school, at a museum, or somewhere else?

15. Why did George Washington outlaw Black men from fighting in the Continental Army? Why did he eventually change this policy?

16. Kellie Carter Jackson writes that, for Black people in the American Revolution, "fighting in exchange for freedom was a precarious deal." Explain what this statement means.

17. This chapter shows that the American Revolution did not live up to principles of equality, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for most people. "The Revolution was not merely imperfect," Kellie Carter Jackson observes. "It was not true." How does this account compare to your U.S. history textbook's narrative, or other stories you've been told about the American Revolution?

18. What is Frederick Douglass's message in his 1852 speech, "The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro"? How would you suggest commemorating the Fourth of July in your community? What activities should be held, and why?

19. What made Reconstruction the “real work of revolution?” What were its limitations?

20. “The hardest part of revolution is not winning; it’s protecting and sustaining what was won,” writes Kellie Carter Jackson. Historical progress is not linear; rights and freedoms need to be defended and carried forward by each new generation. Note examples from this chapter or other moments in the past that demonstrate this lesson. How might we apply this lesson to the era of history we’re living through?