In November of 2016, Laurent Dubois discussed the importance of Haiti in writing the history of slavery, freedom, and human rights in the Atlantic World during the Age of Revolutions for *Aeon*. He explained that histories of modern political thought and culture underestimated the Haitian Revolution due to the lack of written sources by the enslaved actors. Consequently, European histories—based upon written records—provide the dominant perspective, and historians have likewise used European epistemologies and approaches to write about the Haitian Revolution. Yet the enslaved population brought with it rich political traditions from a wide range of African societies, accessible through unwritten sources and varied methodologies.\(^1\) Moving beyond the Atlantic, I found myself wondering what bearing Dubois’s perspective has on how we write about the Haitian Revolution in world history. While historians such as John K. Thornton have emphasized how the African origins of enslaved peoples influenced the Haitian Revolution in scholarly articles and monographs, college textbooks for world history largely ignore contributions of non-whites in discussions of the Haitian Revolution.\(^2\) As a professor at a public liberal arts university, I also began to think about how we teach the
Haitian Revolution in world history classes, particularly surveys. As we broaden our understanding of the Haitian Revolution in our scholarship, we must also ask what else is missing from how we teach this event. While Dubois called on scholars to write better histories of the Haitian Revolution and incorporate the event into broader historiographies, I argue that we also need to reposition how we teach the event in our world history courses. This means including all the ways the world influenced the Haitian Revolution, as well as recognizing how the Haitian Revolution shaped world history.

My analysis of how to teach the Haitian Revolution builds upon efforts of other scholars within the last twenty years. For instance, Valentina Peguero published a piece about teaching the Haitian Revolution in world history for *The History Teacher* in 1998. As this was prior to the increase in scholarly research after the bicentenary of the Haitian Revolution in 2004, and her audience included educators at all levels, much of the brief article explained the event itself. Though it serves as a short explanatory introduction, the article’s section on teaching the event’s global impact is unfortunately only one paragraph, and coverage discusses the Atlantic World and the French colonial system, excluding the now well-worn research paths, like slavery, race, and economic modalities. Peguero proposed potential classroom discussion topics, including the ethnic and religious components of the revolution, mentioning the syncretism of Vodou. Yet she noted the challenges in teaching the subject with Western civilization and world history textbooks, as only six of the twenty-one she reviewed even included the Haitian Revolution.³

A few years later, John Garrigus published an article in *French Historical Studies*, suggesting ways to teach the French and Haitian Revolutions together. Even though he wrote this piece for an audience of French historians, he made a compelling argument for the importance of the Haitian Revolution for world history. He wrote, “As the first successful attempt by a non-European population to reject colonial rule, Haiti pioneered what nationalism might mean for the rest of the world.” This emphasis on the concept of nationalism would work particularly well for those who teach world history topically, instead of chronologically. Similar to Peguero, Garrigus also suggested several approaches to teaching about syncretism, both religious and linguistic. His thorough discussion of how to teach the Haitian Revolution pulled from numerous primary and secondary
sources, but not textbooks. While such extensive readings would be appropriate for a focused upper-division course, it would not be plausible for most world history survey courses.

More recently, Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall wrote about teaching Haitian history, not just the Haitian Revolution, in world history for *World History Connected*. In part promoting her own Haitian history textbook, she focused heavily on the Haitian Revolution while discussing how to teach Haitian history more broadly. Writing fifteen years after Peguero, she noted that “world history textbooks increasingly mention the revolution and the former slave who became its leader, Toussaint Louverture.” Sepinwall’s *Haitian History: New Perspectives* (2012) explores important questions for world history, such as the relationships between the various Atlantic Revolutions. In her article, she explained how three world history textbooks associated the Haitian Revolution with the French Revolution, suggesting they are not “autonomous.” This denies the African elements of the Revolution, as Dubois suggested many scholars have done in their writings on the Haitian Revolution. However, comparing the Haitian Revolution with other Atlantic Revolutions does not go far enough, because it often denies the complexity and context of the Haitian Revolution as Europe becomes the model and reference.

### Globalizing the Haitian Revolution

There has been substantial research in recent years on the interactions between Atlantic Revolutions. While much of the research traces influences of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution on the Haitian Revolution, the most compelling research demonstrates how the Haitian Revolution influenced other parts of history. For instance, various authors have written about the connections between Saint-Domingue and the United States, most often emphasizing the roles Caribbean immigrants had in shaping American culture. While Nathalie Dessens highlights the Saint-Dominguan imprint on New Orleans’ agriculture, religion, diet, and language, authors such as Ashli White and James Alexander Dun analyze the ways Philadelphians perceived the Haitian Revolution. While White examines how Americans struggled to reconcile the United States as a slaveholding republic in light of the revolution
Global/World History Textbooks Selected for Review


Figure 1: Global/World History Textbooks Selected for Review. Selected samples were published between 2011 and 2016.
in Saint-Domingue, Dun emphasizes how Americans interpreted the meaning of the Haitian Revolution from the perspective of their own domestic politics. Although this new research provides further evidence of the importance of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World, it is not appearing in textbooks. Furthermore, it does not fully speak to the Haitian Revolution as a world historical event.

Scholars writing about the European hinterlands and the Ottoman Empire have revealed the importance of the Haitian Revolution beyond the (traditional) Atlantic World. For instance, Middle East historian Ariel Salzmann discussed Toussaint Louverture in the Ottoman Empire at a conference in 2009. She recounted her shocking experience in finding a document sent from Paris to Istanbul about the French expedition to Saint-Domingue that specifically mentioned Louverture. She explained she was not sure at first who the figure mentioned in the document was, because she had never expected to come across mention of him in the Ottoman archives.9 Like Salzmann and likely many other scholars, I had never thought of the connection either, because of my narrow view of the importance of this world historical event. Yet, this document suggests the Haitian Revolution may have helped to shape world history through interhemispheric exchanges of knowledge. Similarly, in a recent volume on continental European hinterlands and transatlantic slavery, three chapters detailed the influence of the Haitian Revolution on Swiss and German states’ commerce and abolitionist thought.10 While these scholars rely mostly on primary sources, they cite secondary sources from the last twenty-five years that traced analogous connections.11 In other words, this work has barely begun. Without scholars reaching across specialties (and language barriers), this work will scarcely make it into world history textbooks or classrooms.12

**Global/World History Textbooks Review**

After reviewing these select scholarly contributions, I decided to conduct an updated review of a sampling of world history textbooks to determine if there had been any changes since Peguero and Sepinwall published their articles (1998 and 2013). With the help of scholars on social media—Twitter and Facebook—I was able to gather information on fifteen print textbooks with editions published between 2011 and 2016 (Figure 1).13 Only one of those
books, Penguin’s *The History of the World*, contains no mention of the Haitian Revolution, while three others provide less than a page of content on the event. In contrast, four of the textbooks include four or more pages of content related to the Haitian Revolution. Overall, the remaining textbooks reflect an increase in space devoted to the event since Peguero’s review.

In reviewing this selection of fifteen sources, I noticed some significant trends in authorship, which may have influenced how the Haitian Revolution was presented in these world history textbooks. Admittedly, I had several assumptions going into this part of my analysis, and most of them were incorrect. Having taught Latin American history for several years, I anticipated more discussions connecting the Haitian Revolution to the nineteenth-century independence movements in the region. However, this was not the case with the textbooks I reviewed. This is likely because only three of the fifteen textbooks had authors who specialize in any aspect of Latin American history. With the heavy continued emphasis on connections between the French and Haitian Revolutions, as Sepinwall also observed in her article, I expected to find numerous scholars of French or early modern European history among the authors. Again, this was scarcely the case. The one assumption that was correct was about the number of Africanists contributing to world history textbooks. Only five books had authors whose own research concentrates on African history. Overall, the greatest numbers of authors contributing to this selection of world history textbooks specialize in Asian history.

It is likely that discussions of the Haitian Revolution in world history textbooks would change if there was more diversity in those willing and able to contribute to such projects, which is of course dependent upon a number of factors, including a scholar’s type of institution and career stage. Without exhaustively listing all the authors and their credentials, overall, I observed that many of the authors came from elite institutions, such as Princeton and Yale, and several were late in their careers, even emeritus or deceased since the textbook’s first edition. For the most part, early career scholars at teaching-focused institutions are not authoring world history textbooks, likely because of their teaching loads and growing publishing and service expectations. The diversity of authorship could include interdisciplinarity, following Dubois’s emphasis on
the need to move beyond written sources and Western approaches to writing the history of the Haitian Revolution. Historians should work with scholars in other disciplines to incorporate information from non-traditional sources, obtained through varied methodologies, into world history textbooks.

As far as where the authors place the Haitian Revolution within world history, there are some recurring themes within this selection of textbooks. The first theme centers on nations. Three of the textbooks, McGraw Hill’s *Traditions & Encounters* among them, include the Haitian Revolution in discussions of nation-states and nationalism.\(^{19}\) The other two themes tend to be interconnected; the majority of the authors placed the Haitian Revolution geographically in the Atlantic World and temporally in the Age of Revolutions. Cengage’s *World History* places the Haitian Revolution with other Latin American independence movements, separate from the American and French Revolutions.\(^ {20}\) However, these textbooks rarely, if at all, discuss African contributions to the Atlantic Revolutions.

Some of the books discuss African culture in earlier chapters devoted to slavery in the Americas, but do not make connections between those cultures and the revolutions, as suggested by Peguero and Garrigus. *Traditions & Encounters* is one exception. This book makes specific reference to Saint-Domingue’s revolt when discussing slavery and slave culture in Chapter 25, and provides more details about the Haitian Revolution in Chapter 28.\(^ {21}\) In addition, McGraw-Hill’s *Panorama* and Bedford/St. Martin’s *A History of World Societies* make reference to the military experience of enslaved men from the Kongo and their contributions to fighting in the Haitian Revolution.\(^ {22}\) Similar to Sepinwall, I observed one consistency across each of the textbooks that include the Haitian Revolution: Toussaint Louverture. In each textbook, the authors mention Louverture, and some even include images of him. Several omit noteworthy parts of his biography, most importantly that he was freed years before the Haitian Revolution and owned slaves himself.\(^ {23}\) However, *A History of World Societies* addresses Louverture’s complexities in a multi-paragraph biographical sketch with analysis questions.\(^ {24}\) A few of the textbooks also mention other revolutionary figures, such as Boukman Dutty, Vincent Ogé, and Jean-Jacques Dessalines.\(^ {25}\) It is striking to see men of African descent featured, yet Africa absent from many discussions of the Haitian Revolution in textbooks.
Beyond the omission of significant information, some of the textbooks contain misrepresented information, misused terminology, or factual/typographical errors. Pearson’s *The World’s History* refers to Boukman Dutty as a “poet” who delivered a call to revolution in “Haitian-French patois.”\(^{26}\) It would be more appropriate to explain that Dutty was a Vodou priest who likely spoke Haitian Creole. Further, *The World’s History* and Oxford’s *Patterns of World History* use the term “mulattoes” to refer to Saint-Domingue’s *gens de couleur*, or free people of color.\(^{27}\) While mulattoes, peoples with one parent of European lineage and one parent of African lineage, were among the free people of color, they did not make up the entire social group. This misuse does not reflect the current scholarship and can be problematic in classrooms in the United States. Oxford’s *Frameworks of History* claims the number of enslaved in Saint-Domingue, claiming there were “nearly one million slaves,” when there were closer to 500,000 at the start of the revolution.\(^{28}\) Meanwhile, an earlier text outside the sample selection, Wiley-Blackwell’s *Birth of Modern of the Modern World, 1780-1914* (2003) claims Napoleon Bonaparte attempted to reinstitute slavery in Saint-Domingue in 1800, yet the expedition he sent did not land until 1802 and lost to the revolutionaries in 1803.\(^{29}\) Issues such as these in the textbooks are troublesome to say the least, but counterproductive when trying to emphasize the significance of the Haitian Revolution in world history.

**Compromises and Conclusions**

While some educators may steer away from using print textbooks, I emphasize them here as a way to compromise between concerns over reading load, course material costs, course preparation time, and subject choices in such a broad survey.\(^{30}\) I attempted to approach this from the perspective of a non-specialist, and I concluded that textbook selection is crucial for several reasons. First, it is difficult in any course to get students to do outside readings, so quality is favorable over quantity.\(^{31}\) There is just no way to cover all of the content in a world history survey without relying on readings outside of the classroom. Students are much more likely to read an accessible and concise—yet thorough—selection in a textbook than multiple supplemental readings. Second, world history textbooks can be
relatively expensive, averaging around seventy dollars. However, if you choose one carefully, you can minimize the need to purchase other costly materials. For instance, some textbooks include primary sources, focused vignettes, or comparative essays that students can analyze for classroom discussions or in written assignments. Not only can this lessen costs for students, it can decrease course preparation time, since you can screen the assignments and supplemental materials for adoption into your own classroom lesson. Lastly, a judiciously selected textbook can help with subject choices. For example, as a specialist in the Haitian Revolution, I dedicate an entire lecture and assign readings specific to the event. However, I understand that non-specialists will want to focus more time on their own areas of expertise. Assigning a textbook that covers the Haitian Revolution in world history as thoroughly as possible can ensure the subject is still covered, though perhaps not in a full lecture.

As scholars and educators work to find a time and place for the Haitian Revolution in world history, I cannot help but think of Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s *Silencing the Past* (1995)—“history is messy for the people who must live it.” In turn, I would argue history should be messy for those studying it and teaching it as well. As the American Historical Association’s Tuning Project explains, “as an inquiry into human experience, history demands that we consider the diversity of human experience across time and place.” Indeed, numerous historical actors took part in Haitian Revolution, and they had varied experiences. According the Tuning Project, the final learning outcome for history students should be to “use historical perspective as central to active citizenship.” Students should be able to “apply historical knowledge and historical thinking to contemporary issues,” as well as “develop positions that reflect deliberation, cooperation, and diverse perspectives.” We teach students to cultivate empathy, especially in world history courses. Research on historical teaching and learning indicates that students understand historical significance based upon the current relevance of a past person, place, or event. Bedford/St. Martin’s *Ways of the World* does this by connecting the Haitian Revolution to the earthquake in Haiti in 2010. Overall, educators can communicate the relevance of history to a heterogeneous student audience by teaching a heterogeneous history. Relevance comes in teaching a diverse student body about the diversity of human experiences in
the past. This is why it is so important that we teach the Haitian Revolution not just as an extension of the French Revolution or a part of the revolutionary Atlantic World, but as a world historical event.

Notes


Finding a Time and Place for the Haitian Revolution


13. Thank you to the following scholars for sharing textbook information for this project: Bryan Banks (Columbus State University), Jason Bruner (Arizona State University), Julia Gaffield (Georgia State University), Victoria Hightower (University of North Georgia), Jessie Hewitt (University of Redlands), Gregory Kosc (Tarrant County College), Eric Limbauch (Rochester Institute of Technology), Tamara Spike (University of North Georgia), Lucius Wedge (The University of Akron), Franklin Williamson (Gordon State College), and Alexander Wisnoski (University of North Georgia).


27. Ibid.; von Sivers et al., *Patterns of World History*, 660, 670.


30. I attempted to locate available open educational resources for world history survey courses, but they are limited at this time. Those that are available do not even include the Haitian Revolution. This is an area for significant development.


36. Ibid., 6(a) and 6(b).


Discover Asia

The Dream of East Asia
The Rise of China, Nationalism, Popular Memory, and Regional Dynamics in Northeast Asia

John Lie

NEW! 2018 Book Release
available now at: bit.ly/AASPubs

Presenting a framework for understanding contemporary Northeast Asia, focusing on the countries that comprise our conventional understanding of what we call East Asia

Modern Short Fiction of Southeast Asia: A Literary History
by Ben Law

An introduction to Chinese Literature from oracle bones to the internet
by Xiaoyin Wang

Japanese Literature: From Old to New
by Mieko Kawakami

Zen Past and Present
by Eric Cunningham

Surveys the historical and cultural significance of modern short fiction in Southeast Asian nations

An introduction to Chinese Literature from oracle bones to the internet

An introduction to the literature of Japan that traces its origins in the seventh century and explores a literary legacy

A concise but comprehensive survey of the history of Zen Buddhism

Teaching Japanese Popular Culture
Edited by Sarah Hommen and Kim D. Meredith

A theoretical engagement with pedagogy of Japanese popular culture

Innovative, unique teaching resource journal published three times a year

ORDER NOW
bit.ly/AASPubs

Up to 20% discount for AAS Members

Association for Asian Studies
PUBLICATIONS