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EXPANSION NOW!: HAITI, “SANTO DOMINGO,” AND FREDERICK DOUGLASS AT THE INTERSECTION OF U.S. AND CARIBBEAN PAN-AMERICANISM¹

Millery Polyné

ABSTRACT

This article seeks to analyze Frederick Douglass' responses to U.S. empire formation in Santo Domingo, between 1870-1872, and in Haiti, between 1889-1891. As U.S. Minister to Haiti and as Assistant Secretary of U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant's commission to annex the Dominican Republic, Douglass fully supported the virtues of U.S. expansion and U.S. Pan-Americanism as long as it promoted effective and egalitarian development in Caribbean and Latin American nations. However, Douglass opposed U.S. empire if it perpetuated U.S. notions of racial domination. His ideas on these subjects shifted over time, and, as I argue, proved to be linked to the progress and hardships of African American life in the U.S. South. Inevitably, this research highlights the political challenges and contradictions of Frederick Douglass, a committed abolitionist, intellectual and diplomat, who fought to remain loyal to race and nation.

Keywords: Frederick Douglass, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Pan-Americanism, annexation, race

RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza las reacciones de Frederick Douglass a la formación del imperio de Estados Unidos en Santo Domingo, entre 1870-1872, y en Haití, entre 1889-1891. Como Ministro de Estados Unidos en Haití y como Secretario Auxiliar de la comisión del Presidente Ulysses S. Grant para anexar la República Dominicana, Douglass apoyó totalmente las virtudes de la expansión y Pan-americanismo de Estados Unidos siempre y cuando promovieran el desarrollo eficaz e igualitario de las

naciones del Caribe y Latinoamérica. Sin embargo, Douglass se opuso al imperio estadounidense si éste perpetuaría las nociones de dominación racial. Sus ideas sobre estos temas cambiaron con el tiempo, y como discutiré, probaron estar ligadas al progreso y las dificultades que vivían los afro-americanos en el sur de la nación estadounidense. Inevitablemente, esta investigación destaca los desafíos políticos y contradicciones de Frederick Douglass, un abolicionista confiado, un intelectual y diplomático, que luchó para permanecer leal a la raza y a la nación.

Palabras clave: Frederick Douglass, Haïti, República Dominicana, Pan-americanismo, anexión, raza

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article vise à analyser les réponses de Frederick Douglass eu égard à la construction de l'empire des États-Unis à Saint-Domingue, entre 1870-1872, et en Haïti, entre 1889-1891. En tant que ministre des États-Unis en Haïti et secrétaire auxiliaire de la commission du Président Ulysse S. Grant des États-Unis pour l'annexion de la République dominicaine, Douglass a pleinement approuvé les mérites de l'expansion des États-Unis et du Pan-Américanisme à condition qu'il favorise le développement efficace et égalitaire dans les Caraïbes et les nations Latino-américaines. Cependant, Douglass s'est opposé à l'empire des États-Unis s'il promouvait les notions de domination raciale. Ses pensées à ces propos ont changé au fil du temps et, nous avançons qu'elles s'avèrent être liées au progrès et aux difficultés de la vie des Noirs Américains aux Sud des États-Unis. Cette recherche met l'accent sur les défis politiques, et les contradictions de Frederick Douglass, cet abolitionniste déterminé, intellectuel et diplomate, qui s'est battu pour rester fidèle à la défense des races et des nations.

Mots-clés: Frederick Douglass, Haïti, République dominicaine, Pan-Américanisme, annexion, race

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On December 30, 1871, the *Chicago Tribune* reported that Frederick Douglass, noted African American abolitionist and public intellectual, lectured the previous evening, “with characteristic force and eloquence,” in support of the United States annexation of Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic). Addressing a predominantly white crowd at Union Park Congregational Church in Chicago, Illinois, Douglass asserted that the annexation debate must be understood from a more humane and “more poetic side,” where an individual viewed the nations of the world as her homeland and the world’s citizens her compatriots. Indeed, during the 1860s and 1870s U.S. expansion of telegraph lines, shipping routes, trade markets and territorial boundaries not only incorporated a myriad of domestic economies, but, in fact, “the national economy itself became more thoroughly integrated into a world economic system” (Jacobson 2000:17). The technological and industrial advances, including the emerging sense of hope, and in some cases, nationalism, for newly freed African Americans within the post-U.S. Civil War era complemented Douglass’ *weltanschauung* of interconnectivity and egalitarianism among nation-states within the global arena.

At the same time, Douglass made a distinction between an intervention based upon compassion and native consent and an annexation that was “rapacious...that dream[t] only of wealth and power...of national domain...in the name of manifest destiny, which [was] but another name for manifest piracy...” (“Frederick Douglass” *Chicago Tribune* 1871:2). As a staunch abolitionist Douglass created a universally moral and cultural world where the brutality (physical, psychological, material) of slavery and racism could not be justified by proslavery and polygenetic racial arguments, and/or vicious imperialists (Moses 1998:120-121). Douglass’ “moral absolutism rejected the greed and aggressive exploits demonstrated in racial slavery, the violent expansion into sovereign Mexican territory during the 1840s, and the atrocious policies of displacement toward the United State’s Amerindian population.”² Douglass adamantly believed in the potential for

development (industrial, technological, cultural, etc.) of this new republic, yet, concurrently, he argued for a cooperative effort by the U.S. and Santo Domingo governments that would dissolve the latter's independent status. In a statement that presaged U.S. President John F. Kennedy's inaugural address on January 1961, Frederick Douglass proclaimed: "It may, indeed, be important to know what Santo Domingo can do for us, but it is vastly more important to know what we can do for Santo Domingo" ("Frederick Douglass" *Chicago Tribune* 1871:2).

How does one reconcile Douglass' support for the annexation of Santo Domingo alongside his clear protests against "rapacious" U.S. empire building? Was he an idealist, uncritical of the impact of non-violent colonialism? Why did he advocate U.S. intervention in Santo Domingo, when in 1891, as U.S. Minister to Haiti, he opposed the United States' efforts to lease a coaling station—Môle St. Nicolas—from Santo Domingo's neighbor, the Republic of Haiti? In July of 1891, Douglass resigned from his post as U.S. Minister when it became unmistakably evident that the U.S. State Department wanted to obtain the coaling station against the will of the Haitian government—thus challenging the sovereignty of the first black Republic in the Western Hemisphere.

This article analyzes Frederick Douglass' responses to U.S. empire building in Santo Domingo, between 1870-1872, and in Haiti, between 1889-1891. Douglass' opinions on U.S. expansion and U.S. Pan-Americanism shifted over time. U.S. Pan-Americanism was a North American centered foreign policy designed to complement U.S. financial, military and political goals in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Sheinin 2000; Aguilar 1965; Gilderhus 1986; Inman 1965). Douglass' ideas on the intensification of U.S. interests in the Caribbean demonstrated complicity with the U.S. Pan-American project. Yet, this research also highlights the political challenges and contradictions of African American emissaries, who fought to remain loyal to race and nation. As African American rights strengthened in the U.S. South during the late 1860s and early 1870s, his support of U.S. policies in the

region remained unflinching. However, as Washington's aggression against Haitian political autonomy deepened during the early 1890s, Douglass' allegiance to U.S. Pan-Americanism waned. Thus, Douglass' support of U.S. foreign policy initiatives proved to be momentary and influenced by several factors: the protection and advancement of black American rights in the United States; the security of sovereign governments to rule without unsolicited U.S. intervention; and the modernization of nations that have been devastated by racial slavery and European colonialism.

Frederick Douglass' unique positions as Assistant Secretary to Ulysses S. Grant's commission to annex the Dominican Republic and as U.S. Minister to Haiti, allows for a distinct perspective on U.S. and Caribbean foreign policy from an African American envoy.³ In addition, one is able to map Caribbean reactions to Washington's ever-expanding political and economic reach during the late nineteenth century. The views of African American reformers like Douglass, who believed that a just U.S. foreign policy possessed profound implications for race relations at home, need to be further explored. The development of U.S. empire in the nineteenth century colluded with the culture and language of racial domination. According to historian Matthew F. Jacobson, as early as the eighteenth century, "the language of technological supremacy (as against primitive 'backwardness') joined the languages of Christian and racial supremacy in the Euro-American lexicon of human hierarchy" (2000:53). Douglass, a central voice on integrationist strategies on U.S. race relations, maintained an unparalleled station as an African American emissary who frequently proved his loyalty and competency to the U.S. government in spite of the continuous antiblack prejudices and violence in the United States (Stuckey 1987:223). Specifically, during the middle of the 1860s, racial inequality in the U.S. South exemplified by black disfranchisement; an update of the black codes; the restoration of notorious Confederate politicians, such as Alexander Stephens, to office and the emergence of white supremacist paramilitary groups like the Ku Klux Klan. From the

late 1860s through the early 1870s, Douglass observed a new society unfolding with the ratification of key legislation—the Fifteenth Amendment (1869), the Enforcement Act (1870), the Ku Klux Klan Act (1871)—by Radical Republicans like Charles Sumner. Furthermore, the dispatch of federal troops to protect Black American rights demonstrated, if only for a short time, that U.S. Radical Republican rule proved critical to black advancement (Foner 1990:105-108, 180-198). Thus, the realities of domestic racial politics in the U.S., at this critical moment between 1869 and 1871, shaped Douglass' opinions on the benefits of collaboration among non-white nation-states and the U.S.

The zeal that U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant and U.S. businessmen exhibited towards annexation of Santo Domingo exemplified a broader movement of Washington seeking to usurp European economic control within the region. As early as the 1820s, entrepreneurs, fortune-hunters and commercial agents from the United States, often encouraged by the U.S. government, sought their riches in Mexican and Central American territory such as Nicaragua and Panama. Largely in search of isthmian canal projects and prospective routes, U.S. representatives and independent U.S. American capitalists carved out an economic and political presence within the continental sphere.⁴ Under the guise of Pan-Americanism, a movement that promoted a policy of non-intervention and egalitarian commercial and political cooperation with the U.S., the Caribbean and Latin America, U.S. Pan-Americanism proved to be a paradox because it situated the United States at the nucleus of hemispheric relations. Rooted in the tenets of the Monroe Doctrine (1823), the aims of U.S. Pan-Americanism cared less about American egalitarianism but more so about acquiring the “\$400,000,000 annually...” in trade profits from the Caribbean and Latin America. According to James G. Blaine, U.S. Secretary of State and a key architect of the movement, those profits made its way “to England, France, Germany and other countries” (Jacobson 2000:41).

For many Caribbean and Latin American political leaders

such as Anténor Firmin (Haiti), José Martí (Cuba), and Ramón Emeterio Betances (Puerto Rico), Pan-Americanism was not a creation of the United States but reflected a poly-centered commercial and political cooperation within the Caribbean and the Americas based upon a collective history of racial slavery and colonial oppression (Betances 1975; Firmin 1905; Plummer 1998; Lewis 1983:271-320). For these Caribbean intellectuals and statesmen, their drive to create a national and Pan-Caribbean unity proved overwhelmingly challenging and often compromised by national particularities—vulnerability to foreign economic control in the form of reciprocal treaties, custom duties and import tariffs, and also the frequency of civil and political unrest (Blanchard 2000:15). In spite of these factors, Ramón Emeterio Betances, a Puerto Rican leader who fought for independence, challenged the apparent differences and struggles in the Caribbean and argued during a speech in Port-au-Prince, Haiti:

...our past is so interwoven that I cannot paint a historical sketch of Cuba without finding traits already written in the history of Haiti. We are not allowed anymore to separate our respective lives. I repeat it; from one point to another of the large islands of the Caribbean Sea, every mind is agitated by the same question; it is the future of the Antilles. Who will be so blind as not to see it? We carry on the same fight; we struggle for the same cause, therefore we must live the same life. (Betances quoted in Zacaïr 2005:51)

Douglass' ideas on inter-American relations forged a middle ground between U.S. and Caribbean Pan-Americanism. As an African American leader he, not unlike many African American intellectuals of his time, privileged the U.S. as being at the vanguard of modern development and civilization. Historian Wilson J. Moses (2004:35) has argued that Douglass and "his contemporaries (even black nationalists) emulated the military values of Anglo-Saxon masculinity, accepted bourgeois perfectionist Christianity, and manifested their relish for standards of civilization as they understood them to exist in American society." During the years 1870 and 1871, Douglass recognized the United States

and its federal troops, northern occupiers of the U.S. South, as protectors of African American rights. Concurrently, Douglass' experiences as a slave and the historical legacy of bondage within African America created formidable bonds with Caribbean and Latin American nations and their leadership.⁵ Inevitably for Douglass, the language of white dominance inherent in U.S. Pan-Americanism, as was the case with U.S./Haiti relations in the early 1890s, limited his full endorsement of U.S. Pan-American initiatives.

Little has been written on African Americans' and/or black peoples' contributions to the development of Pan-Americanism in inter-American affairs (Dash 2004; Plummer 1998; "Effect" 1916; Polyné Forthcoming). Typically, Pan-American scholarship tends to ignore the concept of race. Also, it often privileges South and Central American politics and the work of elite representatives within the government (typically white or lighter skinned Latin American peoples). Furthermore, the historical scholarship that examines transnational organizing of African-descended leadership in the United States, the Caribbean and the African continent emphasizes Pan-African, Black Nationalist and/or Afrocentric frameworks and activists (Dixon 2000; Howe 1999; Stuckey 1987). In many ways, if this is the sole way of understanding "black internationalist initiatives"—to borrow a phrase from scholar Brent H. Edwards (Edwards 2003)—then this proves to be misleading when local racial, economic, and hemispheric political particularities come into play. I am specifically interested in how black leaders such as Douglass, who opposed African American emigration to Liberia, Haiti and the Dominican Republic and wrote relatively little about African affairs, utilized the language of Pan-Americanism (i.e. mutual cooperation, cordial relations) in order to promote U.S. foreign policy. Yet, Douglass also challenged U.S. Pan-American objectives that tolerated rapacity and racial dominance in U.S./Dominican Republic and U.S./Haiti relations.

Haiti, Santo Domingo and the United States: Historical Context to a Caribbean/U.S. Political Entanglement

Along with the issuing of the Emancipation Proclamation and a Union defeat of the Confederacy, a mosaic of “isms” saturated the socio-political canvas of the United States, providing some semblance of identity and order to the ruptured nation and its foreign policy. Nationalism, Social Darwinism, industrial capitalism, paternalism, American exceptionalism, and spiritualism pervaded U.S. cultural spaces after the Civil War and, as a result, a new and transformative jingoism informed U.S. relations and perceptions of its southern neighbors (Hunt 1987; Jacobson 2000; Paterson 2005). Although Congress and most U.S. citizens focused their attention on westward expansion, domestic policymaking and mending their homeland—and European states intensified their hegemonic track in Africa, Asia and Latin America—there were clearly defined moves by the U.S. government to strengthen its import/export trade and to develop its telegraphic communication systems in the Americas. During the post-Civil War period U.S. consul bureaucrats “prepared reports on commercial prospects, and naval officers scouted markets and protected merchants” in the Caribbean and Latin America (Paterson 2005:169).

As the United States sought to expand their markets, the Dominican Republic and Haiti were embroiled in regional border conflicts and political confrontations against autonomous rule in Santo Domingo, which maintained grave implications for U.S. and European strategic maneuvers in the Caribbean.⁶ Haitian and Dominican territorial disputes were rooted in the early Haitian Revolutionary period. Santo Domingo was a Spanish colony until it was turned over to the French in the Treaty of Basilea (1795). And, in his revolutionary quest to abolish racial slavery on the island of Hispaniola, Toussaint L'Ouverture, Haitian rebel leader, declared in the constitution of 1801 the abolition of slavery and, himself, governor-general for life. In order to protect the ban on slavery and the island from a reimplementation of European

colonialism, the re-unification of the island under Toussaint, and later in 1822 by Haitian President Jean Pierre Boyer, proved to be pivotal moments in the Haitian political imagination regarding its inalienable right to Santo Domingo land. There are ample historical distinctions that separated the eastern part of the island from the Haitian western sphere such as a vastly smaller population density, a swelling of multiracial inhabitants of Santo Domingo, a waning gold economy, and pre-1795 border disputes between the Spanish and the French. To discuss these specific points are beyond the scope of my article. What remains critical in understanding the evolution of nineteenth century Haitian/Dominican relations was that these variations, along with a deeply rooted anti-Haitian sentiment that sought to erase blackness from the Dominican cultural imagination, produced what scholar Pedro San Miguel (2005:77) argued as a profound “psychological drama” along racial and territorial lines.⁷ During Boyer’s rule the deterioration of political and economic institutions and the failure of the Haitian president to recognize the particularities of Dominican society contributed to the independence of Santo Domingo by Dominican rebels like Juan Pablo Duarte and Ramón Mella in 1844 (Fischer 2004:151; San Miguel 2005:79).

From the middle of the 1840s through the 1860s, Dominican presidents like Pedro Santana and Buenaventura Báez encouraged not only free trade with the U.S. and other foreign governments (i.e. Britain and France), but they also maintained a fixation with annexing the Dominican Republic with either Spain or the United States. Santo Domingo’s search for a foreign protectorate did not sit well with its neighbor to the west, who believed that because of its radical antislavery and anticolonial past Haiti was the natural protectors of racial equality and, ironically, the guardians against European political and economic aggression towards the Dominican Republic.

Similar to the United States, Haiti maintained its own version of the Monroe Doctrine and Pan-Americanism. Under Haitian Emperor Faustin Soulouque (1849-1859), Haiti invaded Santo

Domingo in 1849-1850 and again in 1855 in order to re-unite the island and to insure that British and U.S. advances through “friendly commercial relations” and the attempts to purchase potential coaling stations would not compromise Dominican political autonomy. Scholars such as William Javier Nelson (1988:227-235) project a tone that Haitian “meddling” in Dominican affairs was due to a Haitian paranoia of European re-conquests and possible reimplementation of slavery. Perhaps this was the case. However, Haitian officials from the 1850s through the 1860s responded to very real strategic maneuvering by established colonial powers and their businessmen within the Caribbean and Mexico. For example, the Haitian government was threatened: by British and French intimidation to blockade Haitian ports because of Haitian/Dominican border battles (1849-1850). A proposed U.S./Dominican treaty from William L. Cazneau, a U.S. soldier, politician and special agent to the Dominican Republic under the administration of Franklin Pierce and James Buchanan, to grant the U.S. a coaling station at Samaná Bay; Spain’s re-annexation of Santo Domingo (1861-1865); French occupation of Mexico in the early 1860s; and the continuation of slavery in Spanish Cuba also threatened Haiti.⁸ In November of 1867, after the withdrawal of French troops from Mexico and the reestablishment of Dominican independence in 1865, Demesvar Delorme, Haitian Minister of Foreign Affairs, warned key Haitians political figures that the United States proved to be a formidable threat to Haitian national security and that Haiti ought to enter into negotiations with the Dominican Republic to prevent an annexation of any part of the island (ANH, *Papiers Diplomatique*, 1850-1925; Vidas 1971:220-221).

Haiti was unsuccessful in preventing Spanish re-colonization of Santo Domingo in 1861. Nevertheless, the Black Republic remained a factor in the eventual Spanish overthrow. On the same borders where Dominicans and Haitians fought and traded goods, where the state boundaries symbolized Dominican independence and Haitian efforts to protect “Hispaniola from falling prey to

‘imperialists in disguise,’” many Haitians in the border commercial towns of Las Matas, San Juan and Neyba surreptitiously supplied gunpowder to Dominican rebels in exchange for livestock in the War for Restoration (Leger [1907]1970:208; Paulino 2001:43-49; San Miguel 2005:72).⁹ The U.S. did not directly respond to Spain’s annexation in 1861. More than likely, national concerns over issues of slavery and maintaining the Union during the American Civil War delayed a response. According to historian Charles C. Hauch, Washington sought to maintain neutrality so that Spain would not recognize the Confederacy (Hauch 1947:264). Nevertheless, until the U.S. settled their domestic turmoil, the government proved to be ineffective in upholding the tenets of the Monroe Doctrine. Furthermore, Douglass did not offer any critiques of Dominican/Haitian affairs during the 1840s through the middle of the 1860s because his attention focused on the U.S. Civil War. By 1865, Spain’s control of the Dominican Republic succumbed to the pressures of Dominican rebel forces, disease, Spain’s concentration on the overthrow of Benito Pablo Juárez in Mexico, and U.S. informal threats to Spain’s “erring policy of 1861” (William Seward quoted in Hauch 1947:268).

**“...Why Should Not Some Day All the Nations on the American Continent Come Together in an Annexation:”
Frederick Douglass and the Annexation of Santo Domingo**

By the late 1860s, President Ulysses S. Grant and several influential Wall Street investors, indifferent to Dominican oppositional forces during Spain’s reoccupation, set their sights on annexing Santo Domingo, because of its natural resources, proximity and budding potential for American capitalists. Again, Dominican President Buenaventura Báez, a non-consecutive five term president, with the support of some high-ranking senators such as Jacinto de la Concha, offered direct control of the republic to the U.S. On November 29, 1869, General Orville Babcock, personal secretary to President Grant, and Báez signed two accords that stated that the U.S. agreed to annex Santo Domingo and the U.S.

assumed the responsibility of its national debt of \$1.5 million. The second accord confirmed that if the U.S. Senate rejected the treaty then the U.S. government could purchase Samaná Bay, a potential naval coaling station for \$2 million (Atkins 1998; Hildago 1997; Nelson 1988; Paterson 2005; Tansill 1938). Yet, Grant and Báez received intense political resistance from respected and authoritative figures in the U.S. Congress such as Charles Sumner, Massachusetts senator and chair of the Foreign Relations Committee. Sumner opposed annexation because it disenfranchised Dominicans and, in some ways, it violated international law. Instead, he called for a U.S. protectorate status for free Caribbean nations, allowing the “black race [to] predominate” in its own administration (Donald 1970:443).

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee rejected the treaty in March 1870 by a 5 to 2 vote, but eventually conceded to Grant’s proposal for a fact finding mission to the Dominican Republic. The Haitian government was quite pleased with the Committee’s vote that they issued Sumner a gold medal and a portrait of the senator hung in the Haitian Chamber of Deputies (Leger [1907]1970:220).¹⁰ Sumner seemed to possess the upper hand on Grant’s relentless pursuit to acquire Santo Domingo, at least temporarily. In a rare moment for Frederick Douglass, a long admirer of Sumner’s support of black racial politics, he challenged some of the senator’s critical comments about Grant’s proposal of annexation. In January 1871, Douglass’ dissatisfaction with Sumner’s comments also revealed much about his full support of Republican politics:

I may be wrong, but I do not at present see any good reason for degrading Grant in the eyes of the American people. Personally, he is nothing to me, but as the President, the Republican president of the country, I am anxious if it can be done to hold him in all honor... (Foner 1975:240)

Douglass’ loyalty to the Republican Party and the improvements made to Black American life in the U.S. South because of Radical Republicanism remain critical to understanding Douglass’

position on annexation. With the ratification of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendment between 1865 and 1870, Congressional support of the political rights of freedmen and women, and the establishment of the Freedmen's Bureau came a hopeful, although brief, political and social climate for African Americans in the U.S. South. This changing tide of protecting black rights and the unification of U.S. states offered a new perspective for Douglass' views on annexation. In his speech titled "Santo Domingo" Douglass proclaimed: "Unification is the inspiring ideas of today...The attempt to set up a little nation to the South of us with slavery for its cornerstone has failed and failed because of the spirit and enlightenment of the age" (SRCBC, FDP, Speech, Article, and Book File, 1846-1894, n.d. reel 18). In addition to the radical changes in the U.S. South due to Congressional Reconstruction, Douglass believed that his support of Republican President Grant during an important election year of 1872 was essential to the continuation of black American advancement (Foner 1975:72). Grant prevailed to the presidency in 1872 and it seemed that Douglass' vigorous political backing earned him a position as assistant secretary on Grant's presidential commission to study the prospect of Dominican annexation.

The commission included politicians such as Benjamin Wade of Ohio, a Radical Republican, Samuel G. Howe, and Andrew D. White.¹¹ In addition, several U.S. chemists, geologists, botanists, journalists, and businessmen also sailed with the commission from New York City on January 18, 1871. They arrived a week later at Samaná Bay, Dominican Republic, a strategic seaport on the northeastern part of the island. Douglass' responsibility was to "examine and report to the commission regarding the condition of the English speaking immigrants on Samaná Bay." Overall, the goal of the group was to study critical elements of Dominican society and land such as politics, education, soil potential, mineral resources, frequency of civil insurrection, and public opinion regarding U.S. annexation (U.S. Senate 1871:4-285).

It is within the commission's report (April 1871) that one

reads Douglass' line of questioning (provided by the lead commissioners) and answers from U.S. American colonists at Samaná Bay.¹² It is unclear what racial background Douglass' interviewees stemmed from, although his first question to one of the unknown colonists alluded to the emigration movement of African Americans to the Samaná peninsula and Haiti during the 1820s.¹³ Nevertheless, the assistant secretary received a favorable response concerning annexation to the United States, which complemented Douglass' current leanings on the subject. The unidentified colonist emphasized that Dominicans

...are tired of war, and they think that under the Government of the United States they will have peace and prosperity. The people have no heart for exertion under their present uncertain government, for as soon as they earn a little property, some great man puts himself at the head of a revolution, and brings on war, and one side or the other plunders the people of their property...The people feel that they want a strong government to lean against for protection, and they believe that the United States would give them protection" (U.S. Senate 1871:232).

The criticisms and frustrations of Douglass' interviewee echoed many of the aggravations of Dominican citizens who voted unanimously in favor of U.S. annexation on February 19, 1870. Yet, before the February ballot vote, Buenaventura Báez utilized intimidation tactics against many Dominican citizens in order to coerce them to vote in favor of annexation. Moreover, Báez orchestrated an intense pro-annexation propaganda within Dominican government publications such as the *Boletín Oficial*, which gave the impression that the Dominican Republic would function as an independent, self-governing body like a U.S. state—"except when in affairs in which all the states are interested, the National Congress may take action" (Báez quoted in Welles 1972:385). The Dominican Republic was in a unique position as a Caribbean nation to be aligned with the United States, reported the *Boletín Oficial*. The newspaper also conveyed to Dominican citizens that "annexation mean[t] salvation because it will oblige Haiti to respect Dominican rights and to maintain

a decent conduct and because it will persuade all Dominicans to renounce political disputes.”¹⁴

Báez’s propaganda, which capitalized on the image of Haiti as the “primitive dangerous predator that threaten[ed] to ‘denationalize’ Dominican civilization...,” was largely perpetuated by a vibrant anti-Haitian ethos among Dominican writers and intellectuals in the nineteenth century (Fischer 2004:147). In January 1870, Haitian threats of re-unification could be perceived as real by Báez because of the assassination of U.S. supported Haitian President and Báez advocate, Sylvain Salnave, by followers of Nissage Saget, the leader of a northern insurrectionist faction. In September 1873, Ebenezer Don Carlos Bassett, the first African American U.S. Minister to Haiti and also a friend of Douglass, reported to Hamilton Fish, U.S. Secretary of State, that a Haitian war steamer, *L’Union*, sailed along the northeastern coast of the island in order to aid Báez’s opponents and anti-annexationists.¹⁵ Bassett also warned Haitian officials such as Darius Denis, Minister of Foreign Affairs, about the consequences from the U.S. if Haitians continued to aid Dominican rebels (anti-annexationists). The Haitian government continued to deny any involvement, but given its previous history in providing support for Dominican rebels against Spanish re-occupation and their mission to preserve a Monroe Doctrine of their own despite any significant military/economic power, it is more than likely that the Haitian government under the presidency of Nissage Saget, offered help to Dominican anti-annexationists.

Bassett’s reports on Haitian/Dominican relations with the U.S. provide a window into the work of black American diplomats who loyally protected the interests of the United States. In fact, in a memo dated March 9, 1871 Bassett, writing from Port-au-Prince, Haiti to Douglass and other members of the commission, noted that Stanislas Goutier, a U.S. Consul at Cap Haitien, was instructed by the U.S. “to thwart a hostile movement designed to be put on foot by the insurrectionists in St. Domingo during the presence of our Commissioners there.”¹⁶ On some level U.S.

officials were intimately involved in suppressing Dominican resistance during this critical moment of a U.S. led fact-finding commission.

If Douglass was aware of an anti-annexationist movement in the Dominican Republic and possibly the bullying tactics of President Báez, he made no mention of it in his writings. Douglass' silence on the anti-annexation movement in the Dominican Republic demonstrated, at least, an uncritical view of Dominican public opinion and his allegiance to Grant's initiative. It remains difficult to ascertain the true feelings of Dominican citizens who were interviewed for the report. Dominican opinions on annexation were a mixed bag of pro-U.S. annexation and pro-Dominican independence. By 1871, Dominican anti-annexionists seemed irrelevant to Douglass, who strongly believed that U.S. annexation, during this time of political and social change in the U.S., was a march toward "knowledge" and national progress (SRCBC, FDP, Speech, Article, and Book File, 1846-1894, "Santo Domingo" n.d. reel 18).

Douglass opposed U.S. annexation during the period of U.S. slavery because he believed it further empowered the plantocracy of the slaveholders. He argued that before the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment, U.S. expansion "meant more slavery, more ignorance and more barbarism, but that time has now gone by." Furthermore, Douglass believed that the Dominican Republic's small population and government could not survive independently in a rapidly growing world. Also, he believed that racism proved to be at the root of Congress' lack of support of annexation. "Why if this nation in the past annexed with no objection Louisiana, Florida, [and] Texas..." Douglass argued at a Baltimore AME Church, does the nation "...den[y] an opportunity to Santo Domingo" (Douglass quoted in Novas 2001:70). Douglass' ideas were clearly aligned with a U.S. Pan-American project of expansion, at the same time, he understood the Dominican government's plight as "to become a part of a large, strong and growing nation—only obey[ing] the grand organizing impulse

of the age” (SRCBC, FDP, Speech, Article, and Book File, 1846-1894, “Santo Domingo” reel 18).

In March of 1871, after Douglass returned from the Dominican Republic, he embarked upon a speaking tour promoting the benefits of annexation. His remarks at these events, often in church venues, were clearly intricate and complicated, interlacing ideas that were unmistakably challenging Western imperialism and advocating an egalitarian Pan-American program. Yet, at other times, he promoted, although indirectly, a U.S. exceptionalism by continuing to paint a dichotomous picture of the strong, orderly and democratic U.S. government in comparison to the “easily excited...revolutionary movements [of the Dominican Republic and independent Latin American governments] wholly unfavorable to industry and to the acquisition of wealth” (“Frederick Douglass *Chicago Tribune* 1871:2). His lecture in December of 1871 at Union Park Congregation Church in Chicago, Illinois, mentioned in this article’s introduction, was reprinted in a number of newspapers in major cities from Boston to Missouri. And, at the Congressional Church in Washington, D.C., Douglass asserted the centrality of the U.S. in Caribbean development and also the prospect of one day unifying all nations of the Americas. “I don’t see any reason why the United States should withhold needed help to another country that claims for it,” Douglas asserted, “neither can I see good reason why should not some day all the nations on the American continent come together in an annexation” (Novas 2001:71). His vision of an American continent unified the peoples of North and South America through a commitment to reason, order, moral absolutism, and Western industrial and technological development. At the same time, American peoples would be able to maintain “racial and religious differences” as long as these cultural and ethnic peculiarities were not emphasized or utilized to contradict the ideals of integration and egalitarianism – major tenets of Pan-Americanism (Moses 1998:127-129).

By the late 1870s, it was clear that Douglass’ conception of the Americas was irreconcilable with President Grant. Douglass

remained steadfast about African Americans maintaining the U.S. as their homeland. On the other hand, in an 1878 interview with President Grant, the *Chicago Tribune* reported that Grant strongly supported African American emigration to the Dominican Republic. Grant remarked:

I think now, looking over the whole subject, that it would have a great gain to the United States to have annexed St. Domingo...It would have a given a new home for the blacks, who were and as I hear are still oppressed in the South. If two or three hundred thousand blacks were to emigrate to St. Domingo under our Republic the Southern people would learn the crime of Ku-Kluxism, because they would see how necessary the black is to their own prosperity. We should have grown our own coffee and sugar, our own hardwoods and spices...We should have made of St. Domingo a new Texas or a New California. If St. Domingo had come we should have had Hayti. A Power like ours in St. Domingo makes us masters of the Gulf of Mexico. ("Gen. Grant..." *Chicago Tribune* 1878:5)

Grant clearly believed in a territorial and economic supremacy that would put to rest the "Negro problem" or more appropriately, the white Southerner problem for African Americans during Reconstruction. Douglass, however, explicitly opposed Black American emigration movements to Liberia and Haiti and would have objected to Grant's notion of making the U.S. imperial "'masters' of the Gulf of Mexico."¹⁷ In February 1861, Douglass argued that "we are not in favor of wholesale and indiscriminate emigration to Hayti, or elsewhere...the things for which men should emigrate are food, clothing, property, education, manhood, and material prosperity, and he who has these where he is, had better stay where he is and exert the power which they give him to overcome whatever of social or political oppression which may surround him" (Foner 1975:471 v.5).

In the case of non-white nation-states, Douglass also understood annexation as a tool for racial uplift, a moral obligation for egalitarian inclusion that addressed historical and material inequities rooted in Western slavery. The weaving of countries into the

fabric of the U.S., a nation believed to be best suited to assist in the project of national development, was believed by Washington to be threads of a larger, international unification process that included the merging of some European states and also the Confederate U.S. South with northern Union states. Douglass noted that “the English and German tongues are surrounding the Globe...The Teuton now shouts over a united Germany. The long separated members of Italy have come together” (SRCBC, FDP, Speech, Article, and Book File, 1846-1894, “Santo Domingo” reel 18).

Douglass did not embrace imperial conquest. However, it seems clear that Douglass proved to be woefully uninformed to the subtle effects of an informal imperialism embedded within U.S. structural programs, reciprocal treaties and commercial accords. Caribbean and Latin American states customarily fell susceptible to the economic control of U.S. and European investors and merchants during the nineteenth and early twentieth century because of their evolution into a monocrop export culture (i.e. sugar or coffee) and the proliferation of an elite consumer/import culture that mimicked European and U.S. material tastes (Plummer 1988; Trouillot 1990). Also, many Caribbean nation-states were forced into inequitable contracts that penalized multilateral trade agreements.¹⁸ The realities of capitalism and corporatism and its relationship to notions of progress challenged Douglass’ universal morality. He seemed to be out of his element while discussing “banking and commerce.” These industries expected “a person of moral and intellectual flexibility, [however,] his background imposed severe limitations on [his] ability to formulate a practical ethic for industrial capitalists of his day” (Moses 1998:127).

At ease writing about race, the abolition of slavery and social and gender inequities, Douglass advanced profoundly anticolonialist positions regarding freedom struggles in Ireland, Cuba and Mexico in the nineteenth century. As slavery still persisted in Cuba during the 1870s and Cuban rebels intensified their resistance against imperialist Spain, Douglass, a staunch abolitionist, “ignore[ed] the official neutrality of the United States” and

encouraged African Americans of military age and experience to “join their fortunes with those of their suffering brethren in this hour.”¹⁹ And finally, Douglass’ thoughts on Benito Pablo Juárez’s “improved state of affairs” in Mexico revealed his contempt for erroneous judgments made by European-Americans regarding the advancement of non-white territories. In an August 1871 essay in *The New National Era* Douglass urged the nation to not “judg[e] them [Mexicans] from our own standpoint, making ourselves the standard, without duly taking into account the disadvantages and drawbacks under which they are laboring” (Foner 1975:259). The “disadvantages and drawbacks” that he referred to in the essay clearly addressed the violent and deleterious effects of Spanish colonialism, but also Douglass was concerned with what he perceived as the arrested development of republicanism in Latin America. According to Douglass, the United States possessed an “instinctive” understanding of republicanism amongst the majority of the people, “hence [their] respect for the Constitution and laws...this respect for the laws is one of our distinctive features, and is in fact the chief guarantee for the duration of the republic” (Foner 1975:259).

At the same time Douglass believed that many of the South American and Caribbean countries were deficient in their management of republican institutions. “...Perhaps [there exists] a deficiency inherent to the Latin races,” Douglass conjectured in a bourgeois and chauvinistic tone, that impeded the development of republicanism. Yet, Douglass also associated illiteracy, lack of protection of liberties, graft and lawlessness as other possible factors that contributed to the failure of creating a democratic state.

Douglass’ inconsistencies and contradictions on the question of annexation demonstrated a man wrestling with ideas of progress for non-white peoples within a paradox of U.S. hemispheric expansion and Latin American nation building. Douglass resolved those inconsistencies by “manipulat[ing] the rhetoric of American perfectionism” in order to advance the notion of racial inclusion and egalitarianism within the Pan-American project (Moses

2004:2). In other words, Douglass believed that his support of U.S. American values coupled with his public objections to state-sponsored racial domination allowed for a more just and egalitarian participation of non-white states in inter-American affairs. Douglass chose to work within the mechanism of U.S. foreign policy and he remained loyal to the Republican government that made significant strides for Black Americans. Inevitably, Douglass believed it was impossible for the Dominican Republic to thrive on its own because “it was too small and too weak to maintain a respectable national government.” And, at this particular historical moment of racial progress in the United States, he believed that there was room for any nation under the flag of the U.S. as long as it was their true will and it afforded the country an opportunity for substantial industrial and technological development.

As Wilson J. Moses (2004:26-27) asserted, it remains critical that scholars take “black thinkers...seriously enough to see how they have struggled with the problems of human understanding and attempted to reconcile life’s contradictions.” The reformer’s staunch patriotism distorted the lines between “love of patria... and love of justice,” and challenged the United States’ Anglo-citizenry to be aware of patriotism’s most important components during this post-U.S. slavery era—the need for atonement and structural transformations that perpetuated white supremacy and the effects of racial slavery (Goldstein 1975:475).

U.S. annexation of the Dominican Republic never occurred. President Grant’s campaign lost its momentum after the rejection from the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee. By 1872, Douglass rarely lectured on the topic. However, Douglass’ speaking engagements did influence other African Americans and religious groups to endorse annexation.²⁰ By the middle and late 1870s, with the end of U.S. Reconstruction and the election of Republican President Rutherford B. Hayes, race relations in the U.S. South worsened. In 1876, President Hayes removed federal troops from the U.S. South and failed to reconcile the federal enforcement of the Constitution with a Washington policy of good

will and good faith that Southern states would protect the rights of freedmen and women (Logan 1965:23-47).

During the early to middle 1880s, domestic and international aggression against peoples of African descent intensified. In 1883, the United States Supreme Court repealed the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which allowed for the institutionalization of racial segregation in northern and southern states. And, in 1884-1885, the conference in Berlin, Germany outlined European imperial ventures and its violent division of the African continent. Frederick Douglass recommended John H. Smyth to President Hayes for the position of U.S. Minister to Liberia in 1878. Smyth, a strong believer of African American emigration to Africa, became a fervent campaigner against European colonial designs on the African continent. Conversely, Douglass' opinions on the imminent European imperial enterprise in Africa proved to be minimal and understated (Skinner 1992:90).

**“...To Conserve and Promote...Cordial Relations:”
Frederick Douglass at the center of U.S/Haiti Relations,
1888-1891**

On June 25, 1889 Douglass accepted the position as U.S. Minister to Haiti. His appointment occurred within the midst of a major political scandal involving Haitian rebel forces and U.S. businessmen and government officials. In November of 1888, Haitian minister to the United States, Stephen Preston, reported to recently elected President François Légitime that William P. Clyde, an unscrupulous American steamship proprietor, surreptitiously supplied General Florvil Hyppolite's uprising with illegal contraband, including weapons, provisions and ammunition. Compelled by a stew of political maneuvers and rumors regarding European economic and political privileges and concessions for recognizing Légitime's presidency, Clyde and U.S. Secretary of State James G. Blaine scrambled to impede further European infiltration to sovereign Caribbean and Latin American markets—thus protecting the spirit of the Monroe Doctrine. By March

1889, in a bold move to protect his business interests, Clyde, with the aid of U.S. Navy Rear Admiral Bancroft Gherardi, dispatched and protected steamers transporting over a thousand cases of cartridges, "...75 cases of rifles and bayonets, 1,000 pounds of powder and 17 Gatling guns for Hyppolite" (Logan 1941:420). Although there is no evidence of President Benjamin Harrison authorizing the use of a U.S. naval officer for Hyppolite's campaign, it seems clear that Washington and U.S. businessmen played a significant role in Hyppolite's eventual removal of *Légitime*.

Hyppolite's election on October 7, 1889 seemed to be smooth sailing for Clyde's schemes to obtain a Haitian subsidy and exclusive rights to ship goods and services to seven Haitian ports. U.S. merchants, alongside with French and German businessmen, according to Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1990:69), played a "leading role in dictat[ing] economic policy, inasmuch as the state complied with their most important demands."²¹ For example, Douglass would be a strategic ally in Clyde's plans, fervently persuading the Haitian government to accept the terms of Clyde's proposal. However, Douglass, despite his accord with promoting Haitian trade and U.S. interests, believed it to be unconscionable to advocate solely on Clyde's behalf—to turn a blind eye to other U.S. American business requests in Haiti, and to indirectly undercut Haitian economic decision making. Douglass rebuffed Clyde's demands and was deemed an "unworthy ally" by Clyde and his representatives, which contributed to an escalating skepticism within Washington circles and U.S. print media concerning Douglass' ability to serve effectively as a U.S. diplomat, ensuring and protecting U.S. interests in the area.²² In an unedited version of his essay assessing Haiti/U.S. affairs Douglass revealed his diplomatic struggle of serving "two masters"—the U.S. and Clyde's agent, E.C. Reed. "...I could not see what I had said or done to make it possible for any man to make to me a proposal so plainly dishonest and scandalous" Douglass wrote. "Here was my first offense and it stamped me at once as an unprofitable servant" (SRCBC, FDP, Speech, Article, and Book File, 1846-1894, n.d. reel 17).

Thus, the Clyde concession proved to be a significant episode in Haiti/U.S. relations because it illustrated the growth and significance of the U.S. navy and maritime trade on U.S. strategies of empire. The Clyde incident also demonstrated the jostling for supremacy between European and Anglo-American merchants in the Caribbean and Latin America, thus amplifying foreign threats (i.e. economic, military) of imperialism in the Americas. Although U.S. foreign policy in the aftermath of the U.S. Civil War typically supported invasion and/or the appropriation of land contiguous to the United States (except for Alaska and Hawaii), Washington embarked upon an informal imperialism where inter-American affairs centered on U.S. interests and the welfare of U.S. businessmen. In some cases Haitian leadership sought to challenge U.S. hegemony by fostering alliances based upon a shared history of tyranny. For example, President Boyer encouraged African American emigration to the republic in 1820.²³ Furthermore, some Haitian diplomats such as Anténor Firmin and N. Deslandes campaigned against a policy of non-intervention and strived to limit the terms of U.S. expansionism (in favor of a Haitian multilateralism). In December of 1888, Deslandes, Haitian Consul General in the U.S., wrote a scathing article denouncing U.S. involvement in François Légitime's coup. "Is it not monstrous?" Deslandes exclaimed, [that] the great people [U.S. patriots] who in 177[6], shook off the yoke of England, who in 1864, abolished slavery; who at the head of all nations has proclaimed the reign of law—comes with men of war[,] threatening and arrogant[,] to enforce her claim by the means of bullets against a young Republic that has on its side nothing [except] its right."²⁴

Deslandes' remarks directly challenged Benjamin Harrison's vision for U.S./Latin American relations. On September 11, 1888, Harrison accepted the Republican nomination for U.S. president. At the Republican convention, Harrison encouraged military and material strength in the U.S. and he sought to cultivate an amicable and respectful environment with Latin American/Caribbean states and other foreign powers without demonstrating timidity or

arrogance. "Vacillation and inconsistency are as incompatible with successful diplomacy," Harrison contended, "as they are with the national dignity." In order to make evident the administration's commitment to nurturing harmonious relations, the future president proposed fostering "our diplomatic and commercial relations with the Central and South American states..." and supporting resolutions to the "rebuilding of the Navy, to coast defenses, and to public lands..." (Harrison 1893:7).

Riding the wave of popular thought in the 1880s that necessitated the manufacturing of a fearless and proficient navy, and also anticipating Mahanian theories that correlated naval dominance to national supremacy, Harrison's ideas were deeply rooted to U.S. Pan-Americanism and its ideological antecedent, the Monroe Doctrine (Mahan 2003). The President's ideas on inter-American affairs were reinforced by U.S. Secretary of State James G. Blaine, who organized an International American Conference in Washington on October 2, 1889, one week prior to Douglass' arrival in Haiti as Minister Resident and Consul General. Blaine's opening speech articulated his vision for Pan-Americanism. He argued:

...friendship and not force, the spirit of just law and not the violence of the mob should be the recognized rule of administration between American nations and in American nations...It will be a greater gain when we shall be able to draw the people of all American nations into closer acquaintance with each other, an end to be facilitated by more frequent and rapid intercommunication. It will be the greatest gain when the personal and commercial relations of the American states...shall be so developed and so regulated that each shall acquire the highest possible advantage from the enlightened and enlarged intercourse of all. (Blaine quoted in Tyler 1927:178)

In a November 1889 letter to Haitian President Florvil Hypolite, Douglass' thoughts on Pan-Americanism mirrored Blaine's Pan-Americanist rhetoric. The Minister noted that in an effort to "conserve and promote the cordial relations which have so long and so happily subsisted between the United States and Haiti..." it proved critical to discuss the ways in which modernization

(industrial, technological, cultural development) advanced inter-American cooperation, interdependence, and racial equality.

Happily, too, the spirit of the age powerfully assists in establishing a sentiment of universal brotherhood. Art, science, discovery and invention have gone forward with such speed as almost to transcend our ability to keep pace with them. Steam, electricity and enterprise are linking together all the oceans, islands, capes and continents, disclosing more and more the common interests and interdependence of nations (Brown 1977:41-42).

Douglass' dedication and loyalty to the Republican Harrison and U.S. foreign policy, as revealed in his support of Dominican annexation, made him an acceptable diplomat—one who espoused U.S. Pan-Americanism. He stressed the significance of promoting U.S./Haiti commercial affairs, praised non-violent U.S. expansionism, and attempted to ease the suspicious and critical minds of Haitian officials wary of U.S imperialism. In spite of Douglass' views on annexation, many Haitians did not have a problem with Douglass' appointment to U.S. Minister. Alonzo Holly, physician and son of James T. Holly, African American emigrationist, noted that "...Haytians hail the nomination of so lofty-minded and liberal a man as the Hon. Frederick Douglass...In him we see not an 'annexationist'...but a gentleman who, remembering the depths of disgrace and injustice...will be better able to appreciate the heroic efforts of a nation whose past history influenced to no mean degree, his own career."²⁵

Undoubtedly, Douglass possessed a tremendous amount of respect for the Haitian Revolution and its most famous leader, Toussaint L'Ouverture. Douglass maintained that Toussaint was a "standing reply to [the] assertion of Negro inferiority" (Douglass 1903:491). Yet, the Minister did not believe there to be any inconsistency in promoting U.S. interests in Haiti. For Douglass, encouraging friendly commercial relations was one way to break down racial barriers and structural patterns of maldevelopment. Douglass contended: "the growing commerce and intercommunication of various nationalities, so important to the dissemina-

tion of knowledge, to the enlargement of human sympathies, and to the extinction of hurtful prejudices import no menace to the autonomy of nations, but develop opportunities for the exercise of a generous spirit of forbearance and concession, favorable to peace and fraternal relations..." (Brown 1977:41-42).

President Hyppolite's response to Douglass' aforementioned missive situated African American leadership within the aims of Caribbean Pan-Americanism. Admiringly, Hyppolite stated that Douglass' "reputation [was] known in the two hemispheres" and that he symbolized "the incarnation of the idea which Haiti is following—the moral and intellectual development of men of the African race by personal effort and national culture" (Brown 1977:255). The President's acknowledgement of Douglass' accomplishments as a former slave to an unwavering activist/intellectual underscored the political context of Caribbean self-determination and individuality. "Every nation has therefore the right to be proud of its autonomy," Hyppolite asserted, while thanking Harrison's administration "for [its] desire...to see Haiti participate fully in this tendency of the age" (Brown 1977:255).

Hyppolite's declaration for a peoples' right to sovereignty spoke volumes as the U.S. set its sights on Môle St. Nicolas, a potential site for a U.S. naval station located in the northwestern part of Haiti. Hyppolite's assertion that Haiti possessed the right to be political and economic peers with American states proved to be an important statement during an era where U.S. dominance in the region was founded on racist paternalism (Jacobson 2000; Weston 1972). At the same time, his statement may have also reflected fears and suspicions of U.S. encroachment on Môle St. Nicolas.

During November of 1889 an unauthorized U.S. naval warship, the *Yantic*, arrived at Môle "to determine differences of longitude of the points touched by the cable of the French company which starts from Santiago de Cuba" (Logan 1941:431). As part of U.S. expansionist goals within the realm of technology, Washington encouraged the extension of telegraph cables and modern

warships. Moreover, Harrison communicated in his inaugural address in March 1889 "...the necessities of our navy require convenient coaling stations and dock and harbor privileges" (Harrison 1893:31). Ideally, U.S. naval coaling stations would be situated in strategic locations throughout the Caribbean and Latin America in order to protect U.S. interests and to fend off European penetration. According to U.S. Navy Rear Admiral Bancroft Gherardi, "the strategical value of this Island from a naval point of view is invaluable, and this increases in direct proportion to the millions which American citizens are investing in the Nicaragua Canal." Gherardi further stated that "It should also be made clear to them that the United States has no desire to annex it. It would not, at the present moment, be advisable to make any effort to get possession of Môle Saint Nicolas, but I have no doubt that in the near future it can be done" (Gherardi quoted in Logan 1941:433). The State Department clearly had its eyes on acquiring, if not exclusively leasing Môle. In addition, the increase in unauthorized U.S. warships off of Haiti's coast strongly communicated ideas that violated the spirit of mutual respect and cooperation outlined in Blaine's International American Conference. Newly inaugurated and appointed Haitian executive officials balked at the idea of sale or lease of Môle to the U.S. because it indirectly threatened Haitian sovereignty, and it could be used as fodder for hungry opposition groups seeking to dethrone Hyppolite's administration.

Douglass, whose role in and support of the acquisition of Môle St. Nicolas has been well-documented, believed it to be in both Haiti's and the United States' interest to cede Môle to the U.S., but warned Secretary of State Blaine in December 1889 that "the presence of the 'Yankee' [Yantic] and of our naval officers at the Môle" justified Haitian suspicion and threats, and would certainly "occasion some comment in Haitian circles" (Brown 1977:58).²⁶ The continued presence of two U.S. naval squadrons in Haiti's harbor made the most "unfortunate impression on the entire country," according to Anténor Firmin (1905:499), Haiti's

Minister of Foreign Relations. In April 1891, during the height of lease negotiations for the potential U.S. naval station, Firmin expressed that the sale or lease of the bay of Môle to any entity would be, “to the eyes of the Haitian Government, an outrage to the national sovereignty of the Republic and a flagrant violation of the first article of our Constitution (1905:499).” In spite of the Haitian Constitution, Firmin also remarked that Haiti refused, under “the present circumstances[,]...[to] compromise...our existence as an independent people” (1905:500). Tactfully, Haiti’s Foreign Minister stated that the administration held no ill-will toward the U.S. and their refusal was not a result of Haitian mistrust of Washington’s intentions, but it clearly demonstrated the government’s unease about transferring power to the U.S.²⁷

During Douglass’ tenure as U.S. Minister to Haiti (1889-1891), he played a marginal role in political dialogues regarding the acquisition of Môle St. Nicolas. The ruling from the State Department complemented by newspaper reports that a white man was best suited for intense negotiations relegated him to a minor and insignificant role. Conversely, the dialogue propelled Admiral Gherardi to the driver’s seat. Even after Douglass resigned in late July 1891, due to his declining health and the controversies over the Môle affair, Secretary Blaine remained unswerving on the subject of appointing another black man, John Durham, to the diplomatic post. “What is needed is a white man of reputation and nerve,” Blaine insisted to an undecided Harrison (Volwiler 1940:177). Eventually, Blaine reluctantly backed Durham for the post, in an effort to placate African American leadership, which further illuminated a racist tokenism that existed in U.S. politics. Blaine stated: “It will save you [Harrison] the annoyance of a half hundred colored men, who will quarrel over it until each is enraged as far as he can be...I had hoped that a white man might be taken, but as you seem to think you are bound to appoint a colored man...” (Volwiler 1940:181).

Douglass’ duties in Haiti were inextricably linked to the U.S. Pan-American movement that sought to cultivate U.S./Carib-

bean and U.S./Latin American relations in the image and to the advantage of U.S. expansionism in the nineteenth century. As a Pan-Americanist and principled ambassador, in favor of advancing U.S. trade and also the modernization of the Caribbean, Douglass believed Haiti was committing a grave “error” by objecting to U.S. acquisition of Môle St. Nicolas. However, convinced that an overwhelming dissent existed among Haitians and then forced to defer to the instructions of Gherardi, Douglass admittedly refused to compromise Haitian decision-makers and recoiled during Môle negotiations, playing a self-described “humble, secondary, and subordinate” role. Douglass’ value to the State Department’s inter-American goals did not yield any significant revenue (outside of handling uncomplicated requests of U.S. citizens in or pertaining to Haiti) and, thus, he proved to be expendable. What is equally important was that the conditions, terms and lack of support by the Harrison administration undermined Douglass’ authority and effectiveness in implementing U.S. Pan-American objectives.

As Minister, Douglass remained a loyal and “good soldier,” probably to a fault. He recognized the all too familiar position of being a “representative black man,” to borrow a phrase from Wilson Moses, whose singularity and privileged station was tenuous and impacted all blacks who journeyed after him. But, in a move that was perhaps too late for condemnations but consistent with his assessments of racial inequality in the U.S., Douglass became more harshly critical of U.S. intentions in Haiti after he resigned. “White men professed to speak in the interest of black Haïti...” Douglass exclaimed, “...and I could have applauded their alacrity in upholding her dignity if I could have respected their sincerity” (Douglass 1891:338-339). The reformer, who long admired the independence struggles of the Haitian Revolution and its post-emancipation efforts to build a functional government, called on the U.S. to deal with Haiti and Haitians as equals and to honorably live up to the ideals of Pan-Americanism.

Is the weakness of a nation a reason for our robbing it? Are we

to take advantage, not only of its weakness, but of its fears? Are we to wring from it by dread of our power what we cannot obtain by appeals to its justice and reason? If this is the policy of this great nation, I own that my assailants were right when they said that I was not the man to represent the United States in Haiti. I am charged with sympathy for Haiti. I am not ashamed of that charge... (Douglass 1891:339-340)

Douglass' blunt inquiries on U.S. ambitions in Haiti, and probably more broadly on Caribbean and Latin American affairs, exemplified the complex and unremitting concessions African American diplomats made in order to affect change in non-white nation-states in the Caribbean and the African continent. Douglass' interpolation of blackness and racism within a decidedly Pan-American movement that masked the centrality of race and privileged "local governments...that complied most completely with the U.S. agenda of market growth, strategic dominance, and racial chauvinism," exemplified the efforts of Caribbean Pan-Americanists. Haitian and Cuban leaders such as Anténor Firmin and José Martí, respectively, sought to challenge racism and an expanding colonial empire with a plan of developing an egalitarian intra-Caribbean system of cooperation (Plummer 1998:213-214). His unashamed sympathy towards Haiti's development demonstrated a stronger connection to a developing Caribbean Pan-Americanism. Yet, the conflicts over the implementation of U.S. Pan-American initiatives in Haiti rendered Douglass' ideals of inter-American affairs unsuccessful.

Conclusion

As an African American emissary and diplomat for the U.S. government, Frederick Douglass sought to represent the interests of Washington and the virtues of marginalized blacks in the United States and the Caribbean. During the early 1870s he supported U.S. annexation of the Dominican Republic because he believed it to be the will of the Dominican people and a firm step towards modern development, fashioned largely from a U.S. model of

diverse export trade, democratic politics and industrial and technological advancement. Also, Douglass believed that the Radical Republican politics of the late 1860s and early 1870s was a watershed moment in African American social and political progress, and it possessed promising implications for non-white peoples of the Caribbean and Latin America. In Haiti, Douglass continued to support U.S. expansion until Washington's aggression compromised Haitian sovereignty. By 1889, Haitians lived more than eight decades as a sovereign people and Douglass recognized that Haitian leaders made it quite clear that they would not cede any land to the United States. Furthermore, the lives of African and African American people profoundly changed because of the European partitioning of Africa and a return to white domination in the post-Reconstruction U.S. South. In July 1890, Douglass, who returned to the U.S. from Haiti for a few months, observed a deterioration of black life in the U.S. In August 1890, Douglass discussed his disappointment with *The Boston Daily Globe*. He asserted that "It was the idea of Mr. Hayes in 1877 that the time had come when the nation could safely trust the loyalty and the honor of the States lately in rebellion to submit to the requirements of the Constitution of the United States. Time has shown the contrary."²⁸

Douglass' criticisms and support of U.S. expansion in the Caribbean provide an insightful voice for African American responses to U.S. empire building in the nineteenth century. Within a few years of Douglass' retirement as U.S. Minister to Haiti and his death in 1895, the United States entered into a more intensive jingoism with Latin American and Caribbean states. In 1895, the U.S. was at the brink of war with Great Britain due to conflicts over the Venezuelan and British Guiana border. And, by April 1898, Spain and the United States declared war on each other over the fate of Cuba. The Spanish-American War of 1898 brought about U.S. intervention in Cuban affairs (1898-1902, 1909-1912, 1917-1922). In addition, the Spanish colony of Puerto Rico and the Philippines came under U.S. rule (Pérez 1998; Ewell 1996; Linn 2002). The

Venezuelan calamity and the Spanish-American War proved to be further evidence of Washington asserting its control in the Western Hemisphere. Douglass' denouncement of U.S. hostilities in Haiti anticipated the defining moment in nineteenth century U.S. foreign policy—the War of 1898. Douglass' views open a window to a better understanding of African American responses to U.S. foreign policy in the Americas. This opening may help us better understand the convergence/divergence of African American and Caribbean/Latin American relations during the late nineteenth century. In the end Douglass' vision of U.S./Caribbean relations attempted to connect competing articulations of Pan-Americanism. It was non-violent, non-interventionist and at times U.S. centered, but his ideas challenged the voracious manner and mode in which U.S. empire-building took shape in the 1890s.

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Notes

- ¹ Millery Polyné is an Assistant Professor affiliated with New York University, The Gallatin School of Individualized Study. He is writing a history of African Americans and Haitians and the role of race in the development of Pan-Americanism. I would like to extend many thanks to the Frederick Douglass Institute at the University of Rochester, Jesse Moore, Jon Michael, Jenny Stoever, Karen Miller, Prudence Cumberbatch and the reviewers for *Caribbean Studies* for their insightful comments along the way.
- ² For more on Washington's, particularly the Executive office's policy on the invasion and annexation of Mexican land see President James K. Polk's message to the U.S. Congress. "President's Message." (1845:4-11); U.S. Congress (1846).
- ³ There is a particular need for more research on African American diplomats and their views on U.S. and international foreign policy. See Skinner (1992); Jacobs (1981); Krenn (1998). Ebenezer Don Carlos Bassett was the first black American diplomat to Haiti. He served under Ulysses S. Grant from 1869-1877. John Mercer Langston, George Washington Williams (1885) and John E.W. Thompson (1885-1889) were predecessors to Frederick Douglass.
- ⁴ See "Nicaraguan Canal Proposal," SRCBC, FDP, Subject File, 1845-1939, microfilm reel 12; Langley (2002:49-51); Jacobson (2000); Gobat (2005).
- ⁵ Anténor Firmin, Haitian intellectual and statesman, noted the significance of Frederick Douglass' life as a slave to become "one of the

most remarkable men of color and the most engaging individual of his race in the United States.” See Anténor Firmin (2002:208-209, 331).

- ⁶ For more on 19th c. Haitian and Dominican conflicts see Logan (1968); Pons (1998); Michel (1968); Fischer (2004:131-200).
- ⁷ See also Fischer (2004:146-147).
- ⁸ For more on Spanish, British, French, Dominican and Haitian relations during Haitian invasion of Dominican Republic see Logan (1968:36-41); Leger ([1907] 1970:202-208). For more on William L. Cazneau see Welles (1972:146-149, 152-156).
- ⁹ Jacques N. Leger, Haitian historian, asserted that after the overthrow of Spain “the Dominican Republic forgot the help that [Haiti] had given to them.” For more on 19th century Haiti/Dominican border conflicts and Spain re-annexation see Gándara (1975:384-385); Paulino (2001).
- ¹⁰ See also Max Manigat (2005:50).
- ¹¹ See Hamilton Fish, U.S. Secretary of State, to Manuel Gautier, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Dominican Republic, January 14, 1871, SRCBC, FDP, General Correspondence 1868-1877, microfilm reel 2.
- ¹² During the 1820s, African American emigration to Haiti included settlements on the Samaná peninsula. Historian Chris Dixon argued that despite “early enthusiasm” from black emigrants in Haiti, they soon experienced major problems and adjustments in their new home. For more on African American emigration to Haiti see Dixon (2000).
- ¹³ Douglass asked the American colonist “What is the present number on the colony that settled in the vicinity of Samaná Bay in 1824?—Answer. From five to six hundred.” See U.S. Senate (1871:231). Also, see Dixon (2000:40-41, 99).
- ¹⁴ Welles (1972:385-386).
- ¹⁵ Ebenezer Bassett to Hamilton Fish, September 1873, *Despatches from United States Ministers to Haiti, 1862-1906* (1955, reel 23); See also Vidas (1971:232).

- 16 Ebenezer Don Carlos Bassett to Frederick Douglass, Judge Burton and Benjamin Wade, March 9, 1871, SRCBC, FDP, General Correspondence 1868-1877, microfilm reel 2.
- 17 Wilson J. Moses argued that Douglass briefly “flirted” with African American emigration to Haiti and Florida on the eve of the Civil War (2004:40,107,109).
- 18 Historian Matthew Jacobson discussed the provisions James G. Blaine and President Harrison made for the McKinley-Tariff where the president could “punish any country that discriminated against the United States in favor of European goods by tacking prohibitive duties on that country’s key exports...” See Jacobson (2000:41).
- 19 Quoted in Quarles (1974:285). Antonio Maceo, Cuban rebel leader, made a significant trip to Haiti in 1879 during the *Guerra Chiquita* or Little War in Cuba. While in Haiti he calls for Haitians, particularly General Joseph Lamothe, in the spirit of Pan-Caribbeanness to aid Cuban rebels against Spain. See Antonio Maceo to General Joseph Lamothe, September 23, 1879, Joseph Borome papers, Box 1, folder Antonio Maceo, SRCBC; Zacaïr (2005:47-78).
- 20 See C.H. Howard, Western Secretary of American Missionary Association to Frederick Douglass, January 9, 1872, SRCBC, FDP, General Correspondence, 1868-1877, microfilm reel 2; Philip Foner noted that The National Conventions of Colored Men in St. Louis and in Columbia, South Carolina supported annexation. See Foner (1975:71).
- 21 See Plummer (1988:40-41).
- 22 In the FDP there are a number of newspaper articles from the *Philadelphia Enquirer*, *The Washington Post* and *Atlanta Journal* that discuss Haitian and U.S. accusations that Douglass was unfit for the job of U.S. diplomat. See SRCBC, FDP, Subject File, 1845-1939, microfilm reel 11; Pamphile (2001:84-85).
- 23 See *Niles Weekly Register* (1820); *Columbian Sentinel* (1824).
- 24 N. Deslandes, “Une Infamie” *Le Progres: Journal Franco-Haitien*, December 22, 1888, *Despatches from United States Ministers to Haiti, 1862-1906* (1955, reel 23).
- 25 A.P. Holly, “What Hayti has Done” *New York Age*, July 27, 1889 in SRCBC, FDP, Subject File, 1845-1939, microfilm reel 11.

- ²⁶ Other works documenting Frederick Douglass' involvement with Haiti's Môle St. Nicolas affair include Sears (1941:222-238); Himehloch (1971:161-180); Brantley (1984:197-209).
- ²⁷ In subsequent years, one sees the evolution of Anténor Firmin's philosophy on inter-American affairs. In his *Lettres de St. Thomas* (Paris, 1910), he encouraged an Antillean federation, foreign investment and increased relations with the United States. See also Firmin (1905); Plummer (1988); Dash (2004:44-53).
- ²⁸ Robert T. Teamoh, "Hayti Getting Better" *The Boston Daily Globe*, August 19, 1890 in SRCBC, FDP, microfilm reel 11.