



Caribbean Studies

ISSN: 0008-6533

iec.ics@upr.edu

Instituto de Estudios del Caribe

Puerto Rico

Woodson, Drexel G.; Williams, Brackette F.
In Memoriam Dr. Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1949-2012)
Caribbean Studies, vol. 40, núm. 1, enero-junio, 2012, pp. 153-162
Instituto de Estudios del Caribe
San Juan, Puerto Rico

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IN MEMORIAM DR. MICHEL-ROLPH TROUILLOT (1949-2012)

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Michel-Rolph Trouillot—Rolph to relatives, friends, colleagues, and students—died unexpectedly in his sleep on the morning of July 5, 2012 at the Chicago, Illinois apartment that he and wife Anne-Carine Trouillot called home since 1998. One of four children born to Ernst Trouillot (1922-1987) and Anne-Marie Morisset (deceased 1999), Rolph entered this world on November 26, 1949, joining a Port-au-Prince family of accomplished and politically active Black intellectuals. The Black-Mulatto distinction remains salient in Haiti, although, as Rolph tirelessly repeated, myopic oversimplification makes color the stand-alone criterion for gauging Haitian socioeconomic and political issues, when class, region, and urban versus rural residence also count (Trouillot 1994).

Ernst Trouillot earned a living as an attorney but deftly practiced the historian's craft and journalism as avocations. Rolph's paternal uncle Hénock Trouillot (1923-1988), a professor, prolific writer, and director

of the Archives Nationales d'Haïti, was the most analytically astute and influential *Noiriste* historian of his generation. Rolph and his siblings grew up amidst discerning arguments about how the past shapes the present yet leaves openings for new ideas and constructive actions in the arts, the humanities, the social sciences, and politics (Woodson 2008). In 2011, he and Jocelyne Trouillot Lévy, Evelyne Trouillot Ménard, and Lyonel Trouillot—winners of numerous literary awards for novels, poetry, and children's stories—co-founded Le Centre Culturel Anne-Marie Morisset to serve the disadvantaged Township of Delmas, Haiti.

Rolph was a precocious five-year old when his parents enrolled him in Port-au-Prince's Petit Séminaire Collège Saint-Martial to learn from the Pères du Saint-Esprit, a pedagogically and politically progressive Roman Catholic order. There Rolph completed primary school and, in 1968, passed the rigorous Baccalaureate II (Philosophy) Examination. He had begun coursework at L'École Normale Supérieure in 1968, when the Duvalier dictatorship targeted high school and college students as enemies of the regime. Facing escalating harassment and threats of violence, hundreds of young Haitian students sought refuge in New York City, then host to the Haitian Diaspora's largest population. Rolph was among them. Settling down (though temporarily) in a new country, Rolph pursued higher education, wrote poetry and journalistic pieces, composed music (including lyrics for the widely performed song "Aliyen Kat" ["Alien Card"]), and supported his family by driving cabs and doing odd jobs. In 1978, he graduated summa cum laude from Brooklyn College, City University of New York (CUNY), with a Bachelor of Arts in Caribbean history and culture. Reading, Haitian Diaspora politics, poetry, journalism, and music consumed Rolph's spare time (not *free* time, we remember him pointedly saying). He completed his first book, *Ti difè boulé sou istoua Ayiti*, (1977). This incisive Marxist analysis of the Haitian Revolution and politico-ideological developments immediately after Haitian independence remains the only work of its kind written in Haiti's national language and seamlessly reducing to text the contrapuntal oral style of face-to-face Haitian Creole conversations. During these years, Rolph also began research for two papers on coffee production in Saint-Domingue/Haiti that would, by the mid-1980s, alter Caribbeanists' thinking about the sociology, economics, and politics of slavery, the cultivation of "secondary crops," and the ambient conditions of freedom from the 17th to the 19th century (Trouillot 1981 and 1982).

In 1978, soon after migrating to Baltimore from Yale University, anthropologists Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price recruited Rolph for the fourth cohort of anthropology graduate students in the Johns Hopkins University Program in Atlantic History and Culture. After fieldwork and documentary research in and on Dominica, Rolph completed his

Ph.D. in 1985. By then he was an assistant professor of anthropology at Duke University (1983-1988), where he worked closely with colleagues in other departments to establish the University's Caribbean Studies Program, while revising his dissertation. *Peasants and Capital: Dominica in the World Economy* (1988), Rolph's second book, is a detailed ethnographic and historical study of how Dominica's peasantry copes with the global banana industry. Rolph subsequently returned to Johns Hopkins as an associate professor, but in short order he was appointed Krieger/Eisenhower Professor of Anthropology and became the founding director of the Institute for Global Studies in Culture, History, and Power. In 1998, Rolph moved to The University of Chicago, where he was professor of anthropology until his death.

Born, raised, and initially educated in Haiti but trained professionally in the United States of America, Rolph was an anthropologist whose intellectual homes were history and philosophy. Already an accomplished philosopher and historian, Rolph entered anthropology gleefully hunting for peripheral pulses in units of production that world-system theory (and its dependency theory offshoot) had made unduly unidirectional. As a second-year student required to present a paper in the Atlantic History and Culture Program seminar, Rolph took the opportunity to engage critically the periphery/center dichotomy in the dynamics of eighteenth-century Saint-Domingue coffee production. His work on this dichotomy, he claimed, only "softened" it. Taking concepts and their oppositions as power-sharpened stakes and defining theory as the movement of concepts in history, the periphery/center dichotomy was but a rat's tail. Rolph was in search of the serpent's mouth. For sixteen years, he embedded that search in a graduate course he entitled, "Concept and Categories."

Students who took the course helped Rolph find and prop open the serpent's mouth. Over these years, his exploration of the movement of concepts in history arrived at a view of the power of mentions and silences in the production of history. This arrival was made possible by his progressively standing in dialectical tension slave versus peasant, peasant versus capital, local versus global, savage versus innocent, culture versus race, and fieldwork versus ethnography. In the socio-moral space between pulsing movement of concept formations and category deployments, against the odds of archival silences and historicities unmentioned in academic history, Rolph located the serpent's powerful jaws and gaped teeth as thinkable and unthinkable history.

From 1977 to 2002, he became one of his generation's most articulate and innovative researchers, influential teachers, and meticulous editors. While making distinctive contributions to theory and method in political-economy and historiography as well as ethnography, Rolph relentlessly probed the intellectual-political contexts of knowledge production and

the material moorings of symbol-laden sociocultural orders. His work focused on Dominica, Haiti, and the Caribbean Region, but ranged beyond them to illuminate structures and processes in the Atlantic World, the Third World, and the Global South.

Debilitating aneurysms in January 2002 brought Rolph's multifaceted research projects to an abrupt halt. Although he remained mentally alert and curious about worldly affairs for most of the following decade, he could not complete his most ambitious project, "The West." The project, ranging from the Renaissance to the present, intended to combine a trenchant critique of European colonialism and Euro-American capitalism with a thorough investigation of possibilities for cultural creativity and constructive political-economic development for peoples too often considered the objects of world history or marginal to its main cross-currents. An untimely death halted the restless movement of Rolph's mind, silenced his voice, and stilled his pen. Yet his life and career will stand as models for genuinely multidisciplinary social inquiry as well as politically engaged scholarship for generations to come. On behalf of a grateful discipline, we say *mèsi anpil* and farewell to Professor Trouillot, understanding why he insisted that "The most lasting product of . . . [my intellectual and political] choices is my first book, *Ti dife boule sou istoua Ayiti*, a history of the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1804" (Trouillot 1996).

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Drexel G. Woodson and Brackette F. Williams

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