

Writing the Haitian Revolution, Uplifting the Race: the Divergent Views of
William Wells Brown and Anna Julia Cooper

In 1863 to counter racist attitudes of whites and to uplift the spirits of blacks, Williams Wells Brown published *The Black Man--His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements*, a collection of fifty-four biographical sketches of African Americans, a text that proved immensely popular, going through ten editions in three years. In it Brown describes Toussaint L'Ouverture effusively, claiming that "His private virtues were many, and he had a deep and pervading sense of religion; and in the camp carried it even as far as Oliver Cromwell" (146). More than twenty years later Brown revisited this theme in *The Rising Son; or, the Antecedents and the Advancement of the Colored Race*, remarking on Toussaint's physical appearance with "strongly-marked African features" and on his "dignified, calm, and unaffected demeanor" which "would cause him to be selected in any company of men as one who was born for a leader" (146). Brown continues saying, Toussaint was a man who "by his superior knowledge of the character of his race, his humanity, generosity, and courage, had gained the confidence of all whom he had under his command" (150). With many "private virtues," Toussaint, according to Brown, rose quickly to power, when, through "masterly" maneuvers, he broke the mulattoes, took complete control of the island, and "exerted every nerve to make Hayti what it had formerly been" (156, 157).

In her 1925 doctoral dissertation, Anna Julia Cooper pictures Toussaint differently. Emphasizing his manipulative character, his deviousness, and his hypocrisy, she claims he "knew marvelously well what arguments to bring to bear on the black population, which looked upon him as an oracle, believing no one else"(145). Cooper

perceives Toussaint, in his rise to power, as a man who "first proceeded by some mass massacres of the mulatto population in the Province of the North, and by some frightful tortures, [before] finishing everything by a good sermon on the Christian obligation to forgive one's enemies" (145, 147).

Ex-slaves, intellectuals, historians--Brown and Cooper shared many commonalities. Both staunchly supported their race and worked tirelessly for its uplift, yet they diverged in their description of the Haitian Revolution and of Toussaint, an event and personage of monumental significance in the eyes of many African Americans. This difference likely speaks to the question of how the uplift of African Americans might best be accomplished--through words or deeds. While Brown framed Toussaint as a godlike descendant of African, a hero destined for leadership, and a man dedicated to Haiti and his people, Cooper's cynical remarks counter that version and reject his glorification strictly on the basis of race. Cooper recognizes Toussaint's penchant for violence as simply that, while Brown accepts it as justifiable, even necessary, within the context of revolutionary circumstances. What caused such contradictory images, and do these differences matter? I suggest that they matter greatly and that historical time, personal experiences, and gender influenced both Brown's and Cooper's purposes in recounting history and their perspectives of this historical event and person. Historical theorist John Ernest acknowledges the difficulty inherent in crafting any historical account objectively and suggests historical truth varies. He contends "the facts of history seem shaped and reshaped by the perspective of the historian" (89). This observation appears true of both Brown and Cooper. Both seem to shape and reshape Toussaint from their own

perspectives, yet both view their accounts as valid and as uplifting their race, albeit in opposing ways.

No doubt the time of their writings--Brown before and after the Civil War, Cooper in 1925--played a significant role as did the conventions of academic versus popular publishing. Born in 1815, Brown was the son of Elizabeth, a slave, and George Higgins, the half-brother of her white master. His relationship to his master's family afforded him house-servant status until the family experienced financial problems after a move to Missouri. There Brown was hired out to a printer where he developed some literacy skills; later he was sent to work on a steamship where he conceived the possibility of escape. A third position with a slave master followed and served as the catalyst for Brown's determination to escape. His role in preparing slaves for auction by dyeing their hair and forcing them to appear happy burdened his conscience. After his first abortive flight toward freedom, both Brown and his mother were sold. On his second escape attempt, Brown succeeded, but almost died. He was saved by a Quaker whose name he adopted. Settling permanently in the North, Brown became an abolitionist and temperance speaker, a writer of novels, histories, and plays, and an important link in the Underground Railroad. His experiences as a slave were traumatic and long-lasting; they fostered in him a fervent desire not simply to end slavery, but to seek the social regeneration of his people.

Although both Brown and Cooper were slaves, Cooper's slavery experience contrasted sharply with Brown's. Born in 1858, in Raleigh, North Carolina, Cooper--the daughter of Hannah Stanley, a slave, and, presumably, of George Washington Hayward, her white owner--was freed by the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. Her

understanding of slavery and its physical and emotional hardships was largely shaped by the narratives of older blacks, especially of her mother, and by the knowledge that her mother had been assaulted by Hayward. Cooper's 1892 book, *A Voice from the South by a Black Woman of the South*, offered a collection of essays, treatises, and reflections based principally on her personal experience and argued that racial uplift for African Americans would come only when black women were uplifted, that is, when they were able to assume their rightful role as a social force determining the fate of black society. Cooper contended both black men and white feminists viewed African American women with condescension. From her perspective, African Americans would not progress as a race until black women were allowed to demonstrate their intellect. For Cooper solidarity of the sexes and equal access to education were keys to racial progress.

As a black historian, one of Brown's missions was to establish black men displaced from their African homeland as men capable of contributing to the development of civilization, and, thus, his writings furthered a developing tradition of black history. Brown calculated the power of his published words as greater than that of his actions. In his biography of Brown, L. H. Welchel, Jr. stresses Brown's commitment to his race, identifying him as "one of the first black writers to use history to vindicate the character of the Negro from the popular belief of inherent inferiority" (72). Ever cognizant of the persecution he and other African Americans suffered as slaves and the discrimination they endured after the Civil War, Brown believed a history of blacks written by a black would illustrate to whites the Negro race's mental prowess while also encouraging blacks to resist slavery and to develop confidence in their race.

Teaching American Literature: A Journal of Theory and Practice
Fall 2007

Both *The Black Man--His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements* and *The Rising Son; or, the Antecedents and Advancements of the Colored Race* employ the traditional form of historical writing during his time by tracing the history of the black race through a series of narrative and biographical essays. *Rising Son*, the more expansive of the two texts, devotes the first eleven chapters to the origin of the Negro race and casts the slave trade as the greatest obstacle to the race's development. Chapters 12-25 concern the struggle in Santo Domingo, a struggle Brown found both instructional and inspiring, one he used to solidify his anti-slavery ideology. The final chapters, 26-29, summarize the black abolitionist movement in Jamaica, South American, Cuba, and Puerto Rico.

Toussaint, a figure of almost mythic proportions even today, entered the consciousness of diasporic Africans and their descendents almost as soon as he rose to prominence in Santo Domingo in the 1790s. Prior to and after the Civil War, a black man leading formerly enslaved blacks in successful battle against their white oppressors naturally provided inspiration for American slaves. The continuing autonomy of the Haitian state did likewise. Black abolitionists cited Haiti as a model, proof of blacks' courage and ability to self-govern; indeed, as Ernest notes, Haiti played a significant role in African Americans' "revision of destiny,. . . sometimes representing the promise of those of African heritage in the United States and sometimes serving as both the ideological and symbolic site for a rising black nation" (88). Black leaders recognized the symbolic potential of a successful slave rebellion and used this event to strengthen black racial pride.

Brown's rendition of Toussaint and the events in Haiti followed an established version. Works such as James T. Holly's 1857 tract, *A Vindication of the Capacity of the Negro Race for Self-Government and Civilized Progress*, described the Santo Domingo revolution as "one of the noblest, grandest, and most justifiable outbursts against tyrannical oppression that is recorded on the pages of the world's history" since in it, "a race of almost dehumanized men--made so by an oppressive slavery of three centuries--arose . . . and addressed their . . .unparalleled wrongs with a terrible hand in the name of God and humanity" (143). Justifying the violence, Holly refers to the "daring deeds of dreadless heroism performed by Toussaint. . . in the. . . terrible but necessary revolution" and names him a "voluntary compeer of the Revolutionary heroes of the United States" (147-48). Since "Toussaint, by his acute genius and daring prowess, made himself the most efficient instrument in accomplishing" the revolution, Holly perceives him as "another Washington [who] proved himself the regenerator and savior of his country" (155). Indeed, Toussaint is compared to Washington in many African American histories of Haiti including Brown's.

Holly argues that Toussaint's "rural code," his enforced labor performed by the former slaves who were in actually little more than serfs, was not a "horrible nightmare of despotism--worse than slavery" (157). Instead, evoking images of American mores, Holly characterizes it as "in fact, nothing more than a prudent government regulation of labor, . . . a regulation which made labor the first necessity of a people in a state of freedom, a regulation which struck a death blow at idleness" (157). Holly maintains that, as a "manifest proof of Negro capacity," Toussaint proved the ultimate statesman with a "fame more enduring than Pitt" (158). Holly enumerates and commends Toussaint's

accomplishments: establishing commercial relations with foreign countries, promulgating a free trade doctrine, and creating a constitution (156). For him, Toussaint is a "Negro genius" with a "plan that comprehended in its scope the well being of the masses of humanity" (158). Remarking on Toussaint's final words after his fall from power, Holly envisions a prophetic martyr who recognizes himself as a "trunk" of a tree that has been cut, but one with "roots [that] are many and [that] run deep" (161). For Holly and Brown, Toussaint's spirit inspires long after his death. Regardless of the means by which he gained and maintained power, whether continued oppression of ex-slaves or wholesale massacres of his enemies, Toussaint's status as black hero remains infallible.

Even though Brown acknowledges the impossibility of an accurate rendering of the revolution "so conflicting are the accounts" (*Rising Son* 140) and even though his visit to the island occurred thirty years prior to his writing, his version determinedly presents the black takeover of the island positively. He notes "the advantage of numbers and physical strength was on the side of the oppressed" and "right is the most dangerous of weapons" (*Rising Son* 142). Thus, Brown's narrative participates in the continuation of Toussaint's fame, depicting him as bold, courageous, justified in his massacres.

Brown's rendering of Toussaint's charismatic addresses to his soldiers conforms to his generation's generalized view of African American orators, one that stressed the connection of oratory and freedom. According to Ernest, William G. Allen in his 1952 essay "Orators and Oratory" explored "the historical and social conditions of oratorical authority and eloquence" and maintained that "orations worthy the name must have for their subject personal or political liberty; and orators worthy of the name must necessarily originate in the nation that is on the eve of passing from a state of slavery into freedom,

or from a state of freedom into slavery" (232). As an abolitionist speaker, Brown was indeed an orator working in a state struggling to pass from slavery into freedom, but his work proved doubly significant since, in speaking of Toussaint, he was illustrating another state that had endured similar turmoil and arguing, through this example, for the abolition of slavery. In an 1854 lecture entitled "St. Domingo: Its Revolution and Its Patriots," Brown articulates the image he created a decade later in *The Black Man*, characterizing Toussaint as a liberator and asserting that "the God of Justice will be on the side of the oppressed blacks...and the revolution that was commenced in 1776 [will] then be finished, and the glorious sentiments of the Declaration of Independence. . .[will] be realized" (qtd. in Ernest 246). If Brown's account of Toussaint is to prove the evils of slavery and the prowess of the black man, Toussaint must be a heroic liberator. Likely from Brown's view, Toussaint's value as an example increases greatly when intertwined with the American Revolution.

Although much of what Brown notes regarding the Haitian Revolution is factual, particularly names, dates, and places, his version falters when he attempts to interpret the events. A conspicuous example concerns the mulattoes' role in Haitian society and Toussaint's relationship with one of their primary leaders, Rigaud. Perhaps subconsciously because of his own mulatto status and perhaps also because he is reflecting attitudes peculiar to the United States, a country that enforces a one-drop rule determining race, Brown subscribes to a hierarchical ranking based on color. Although he notes that "the free colored men [that is, the mulattoes] joined the planters in a murderous crusade against the slaves" (*Rising Son* 147), he also insists that "the mulattoes were endowed with greater intelligence; they were more enterprising, and in all

respects their physical superiority was more decided than their rivals, the blacks" (*Rising Son* 155). Yet, Brown describes Toussaint in a kingly manner, descended from African royalty (The King of Ardra), maintains he was "held in high consideration" by both the white planters and their black slaves, and contends Toussaint aided his master's family to escape the revolution--a fact Brown uses to demonstrate Toussaint's humanity, even though it names an action often used to denigrate African Americans who helped their masters escape bloodshed (*Rising Son* 146). Brown seemed disconcerted by the complicated racial castes in Haiti, describing the mulattoes as becoming "the worst enemies of their fathers" because they were "white enough to . . . [be] hopeful and aspiring" and "ever on the watch to seize opportunities to better their social and political condition" (*Rising Son* 142). Although greatly outnumbered, the mulattoes expressed disdain for the blacks, and Brown shows Toussaint capable of instilling fear in them. Later in Brown's narrative, he seems to combine the mulattoes and the blacks into one group, the "Haytians."

Brown's description of Toussaint's overthrow evokes an image of a martyr suffering for his people, "pining away in the dark, damp, cold prison of Joux" where he was left to starve (*Rising Son* 168). Brown's picture of Toussaint's death emphasizes his natural qualities and, by transfer, the natural qualities of those who share his race, qualities reflective of those credited with making the American Revolution, even the United States, possible:

Thus . . . died Toussaint L'Ouverture, a grandson of an African king. He passed the greater number of his days in slavery, and rose to be a soldier, a general, a governor, and today lives in the hearts of people of his native isle. Endowed by

nature with high qualities of mind, he owed his elevation to his own energies and his devotion to the welfare and freedom of this race. His habits were thoughtful, and, like most men of energetic temperaments, he crowded much into what he said. (170)

While emphasizing Toussaint's leadership skills, Brown also focused on his humanity, his closeness to the common man, remarking that Toussaint "clad in a common dress, with a red Madras handkerchief tied around his head, would move amongst the people as though he were a laborer" (171). Without specifically naming a comparison, Toussaint became both Washington at Valley Forge, moving through his men, exhorting them to persevere, and Jesus moving among the people. In short, for Brown, Toussaint was "a remarkable man" whose "very name became a tower of strength to his friends and a terror to his foes" (172). Toussaint thus proved to whites that blacks could rise from the lower classes and develop skills in governance and warfare without formal training; to blacks, he offered hope of rising in a similar manner.

Writing several generations after Brown in an academic venue rather than a popular one, Cooper approached Toussaint's history differently, seeing in the objective account she produced evidence of her personal intelligence and, by transfer, the intellectual potential of other African Americans, particularly women, if they were afforded adequate education. Having repeatedly experienced the black man's bias toward black women especially when she attempted to enroll in the "gentlemen's" courses at Oberlin College, Cooper, unlike Brown, likely felt little need to bolster the image of the black man based strictly on race. She believed firmly in uplifting the black race, but she saw that as possible only through education of the black woman and solidarity of black

males and females. This attitude, combined with her struggles against white women, especially those in the white woman's club organizations who denied all black women a claim to "womanhood," likely destroyed any desire she might have entertained to gloss Toussaint's actions. Indeed, Toussaint's acts in Haiti's multi-layered racial society puzzled and disturbed her.

Thus, Cooper undertook writing her dissertation, *L' Attitude de La France a L' Êgard de L' Esclavage Pendant La Révolution*, translated as *Slavery and the French Revolutionists (1788-1805)*, as an intellectual exercise to validate both her personal intellectual capacity and the intellectual potential of African American women. She was, in essence, uplifting the race through her own scholarly activity. If she, a sixty-six year old African American woman, earned a doctorate, was this not uncontested refutation of any notion of black inferiority? Her dissertation was no public relations advocacy of an autonomous black state; rather it was a meticulously researched assertion that the French Revolution stemmed not merely from bourgeois dissatisfactions, but also from the French toleration of slavery, the misery of oppressed classes, urban and rural, including those in the French colonies in the Caribbean. As Frances Keller argues in the introductory essay to her translation of Cooper's work, Cooper centered her examination of the French Revolution on slavery. She firmly believed, however, that France's revolution, while "tragically incomplete," nonetheless had potential to alter the essence of civilization, "if the Constituent Assembly had faced the deep divergence of legal slavery from the principles implied in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen" (6, 7). Writing as "an historian seeking universal meaning," Cooper focused on the

Teaching American Literature: A Journal of Theory and Practice
Fall 2007

"economic and moral centrality of the struggle" over slave labor and situated the Haitian Revolution as part of "a movement of the western world toward democracy" (20, 8, 22).

Cooper conflicted not only with a white culture that failed to recognize her humanity but also with a black male contingent that denied her equal status. As a young scholar at Saint Augustine's Normal and Collegiate Institute in Raleigh, North Carolina, she encountered limitations black men placed on black women when she was discouraged from learning Greek. In *A Voice from the South by a Black Woman of the South*, Cooper describes her desire for learning as "a thumping from within unanswered by any beckoning from without" (76). That black men did not expect black women to be intellectual angered Cooper. At least partially on the grounds of the bias she had encountered as she struggled to complete her college education by working after school and teaching during the summer to earn enough to pay her tuition, she described females struggling for every educational opportunity, actually "fighting" against "positive discouragement to the higher education" (77), while males, "however meager [their] equipment and shallow [their] pretensions, had only to declare a floating intention to study. . . and they could get all the [needed] support, encouragement and stimulus" (77). She pleaded that women be accorded the "same flourish of trumpets and clapping of hands" that greeted a male's decision to attend college and that scholarships be established to help those in need. Cooper became, in Charles Lemert's words, "a woman who lived with heroic dignity while refusing all along to be exactly what others would have her be" (*Anna Julia Cooper*, 3).

Even after Cooper earned her bachelor's and master's degrees and was awarded the principalship at M Street School in Washington, D.C., she continued to encounter

"positive discouragement" from a male contingent of black society, including the Tuskegee Machine that orchestrated her ouster as principal because she refused to abandon a classical education curriculum. Even Du Bois, her intellectual equal, remarked on her ideas without acknowledging her by name. Yet she managed, according to Lemert, to center her life "deeply in the virtues of home, religion, and proper puglic conduct" (4). Given all of these circumstances, Cooper could hardly feel the compulsion Brown likely did, to glorify Toussaint simply because of his race.

Despite the educational obstacles Cooper encountered, she nonetheless mastered a style of argument unlike that of most of her female contemporaries, a style that she used in writing her dissertation. This style, according to social historian Todd Vogel, eschewed inductive reasoning that generally relied on "homey examples," the style most likely to characterize the writing of women (86). Instead, Cooper "built tight deductive arguments using the skills of classical rhetoric," rhetorical strategies generally taught only to men even in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Vogel 87).

Cooper had begun developing this style in her earlier works. As Elizabeth Alexander notes, the essays in Cooper's *Voice of the South* "move in and out of the first person, fusing a received notion of political theory of an African-American and female life" and therefore occupy a "new space between the first-person confessional of the slave narrative. . . and the third-person imperative of political essays" (62). Deductive arguments shaped Cooper's dissertation's argument, and, thus, she followed the classical tradition of their use by "orators and writers in a democracy to shape minds and change society" (Vogel 88). Her recourse to these skills reflects a usurpation of white rhetorical practices and follows in the tradition of African American male orators and writers (lilke

Brown) who also mastered white rhetorical practices used in oral and written communication. Vogel notes that blacks were "specifically excluded from the power of oratory and rhetoric...considered incapable of delivering useful information or shaping the public mind," expected to express "feeling" only and guilty of using words they did not understand (88). Indeed the charge of speaking "mannishly" was leveled at Cooper when she delivered her commencement address at Oberlin. Vogel argues that Cooper "escaped the traps that sought to silence her" and "embraced rhetorical practice [to] move away from the race- and gender-based understanding of who can write" (91). Although women generally adopted the inductive rhetorical style to divert attention from their challenge of the male order, Cooper disdained using a "personal tone" and "personal experience" in favor of an academic, authoritative, and aggressive style, a style especially suited for writing a dissertation (Vogel 92-93). Her devotion to this style presumably impacted her depiction of Toussaint.

In many of her works, Cooper managed to situate her deductive reasoning within the domestic sphere, a tactic that diverted criticism; in her dissertation, genre and subject made such camouflage impossible. In that text, she moved to the academic sphere of reading and interpreting primary sources and accepted the additional intellectual challenge of reading these documents in French. With the defense of her dissertation, she asserted her views of the Haitian Revolution as an inextricable part of the overall Revolutionary ferment in Europe and the Americas, specifically its causes, its errors, and its limitations, and these views were deemed credible. Earning her doctorate validated her stance, despite her text generally not being available to anyone other than a few scholars and despite the obstacles she faced when she attempted to make the document

more accessible to scholars in the United States by offering it to her alma mater, Oberlin College, to publish. And, surely, if the arguments of her dissertation were accepted by the rigorous standard bearers of the academic community, she demonstrated the intellectual prowess of African American women and was, thus, uplifting her race.

Rigorous academic research informed Cooper's understanding of the French Revolution. In contrast, Brown's claim to expertise is based on brief personal experience and knowledge obtained secondhand as evidenced by his acknowledgement that he "visited the Island [of Haiti] thirty years ago, and has read everything of importance given by the historians" (140). Thus, his work falls far short of Cooper's in terms of historical accuracy and appears, as previously noted, within the cultural context of his time and its goals for histories of the black race. Holly's account read alongside Brown's reveals multiple similarities of images, almost as though Brown is parroting Holly and as though both may well be replicating other accounts. Cooper, however, spent months in the French archives in Paris, reading primary sources such as letters and government documents, drawing connections, asserting cause / consequence relationships, and forming an original argument regarding the role of slavery in the French Revolution. That technique itself guaranteed a difference in their accounts.

Brown's account, for example, glosses over the racial conflicts between the mulattoes and the blacks, noting only that the mulattoes "eventually proved to be the worst enemies of their fathers" (142) and makes little distinction between the free blacks and the slaves--two distinct groups according to Cooper. Indeed Brown occasionally seems to superimpose the black/white binaries of the United States on a culture that acknowledged myriad racial groups. Granted Brown does chronicle numerous alliances

of leaders and does mention the bloody massacres, but he views these more in terms of political necessity for a group he labels "blacks."

Cooper, on the other hand, explores the complex nature of Haitian society, recognizing numerous classes--the white planters, the mulattoes, the free blacks, the petits blancs, and the slaves--and revealing a complex series of alliances, intrigue, and conflicts among the various groups and their supporters and detractors in France. She also examines the effect of other alliances, intrigues, and conflicts occurring separately and simultaneously in France. The events in Haiti and France's abject failure to forestall them demonstrate the failures of modern civilizations. They are more than the sum of their parts, certainly more than Toussaint as a potential African American idol.

And Cooper's assessment of the Europeans--particularly the French and Spanish--seems more evenhanded than Brown's. For example, she maintains the mulattoes "would find an excuse to arm themselves in order to make their just claims better understood" (95), but, if the Assembly had reached out to the Colored Men, they would have become the "most zealous defenders of the colony; otherwise it could only be expected that they would be terrible enemies" (93). Like Brown, Cooper agreed that the mulattoes did not wish to see slavery end and that they posed a danger to the slaves who were largely uneducated and who "lacked organization and discipline," but she also considers the mulattoes' desire for "social equality" with the whites as going "rather far" (141, 119). Brown contends the mulattoes had the "sympathy of all Europe" (142), but Cooper disagrees, just as they disagree on the cause of Toussaint's death--Brown citing starvation, Cooper consumption.

Cooper reveals the planters' deputation to the Constituent Assembly in Paris as playing "a detestable role" in the conflict and characterizes the French sent to control the island as inept at best, definitely unsuited for their posts and given to frequent unwise decisions (112). Of the petits blancs, Cooper says they "increasingly sought to imitate. . . the rabble mob of Paris" (114). Recognizing a racial schism beyond Brown's black / white binary, Cooper suggests that the mulattoes would have exerted a rule as oppressive as that currently in place when she asserts that the slaves' "fear of serving under the mulattoes kept [the Negroes who were revolting] in revolt more than any other thing" (122). She identifies faults in the blacks who assumed power, describing them as "promptly showing themselves very arrogant" (143). All classes and their roles in the bloody revolt come under her scrutiny. Their flaws appear manifold; their self-interest evident and despicable, with all of them being drawn into the maelstrom of violence. While Cooper can praise the revolutionary spirit that rose against slavery, she cannot condone, much less praise, the behavior of those involved in the violent destruction that ripped the country apart.

Cooper views Toussaint principally as a manipulator who "became aware of his own powers and of what he was capable of doing" (140) and used this for his advantage. She sees Toussaint's service to Spain primarily as a response to the English who, as friends of the whites, posed a danger and asserts that he "remained an excellent royalist with the Spanish, who showered him with praise" until he massacred the Spanish soldiers serving under him and re-allied himself with the French Republicans under Laveaux "who never realized Toussaint's purpose" (140). Brown characterizes this event as politically necessary. Cooper shows Haiti itself as turbulent, easily influenced by any

news from abroad, ready to ignite at the slightest provocation. In Cooper's thorough account, all of her criticisms are supported by references to letters and government communiqués that have been subjected to the most rigorous critical examination.

Both Brown's and Cooper's perspectives are products of their times, their experiences, and their genders. For Brown, an abolitionist reclaiming humanity for blacks, the significance of the Haitian Revolution lies in the righteous revolt against slavery and the subsequent establishment of a Western government controlled by blacks, regardless of the measures such a revolt necessitated. For Cooper, an academician, the significance is broader: a view of slavery in terms of the French Revolution and the Rights of Man. According to Vogel, Cooper uses "her powers of language--the cultural capital she amassed as a life-long student and teacher--to rework the very foundations of race and gender in the United States" (86).

In a 1925 essay entitled "The Negro Digs Up His Past," well-known black bibliophile Arthur A. Schomburg contends that the "American Negro must remake his past in order to make his future," but that accounts of African American history have heretofore been "on the whole pathetically over-corrective, ridiculously over-laudatory." Schomburg's comment corresponds with the observation of historian Wilson Jeremiah Moses who sees many writers exploring Afrocentrism as "less interested in scholarly investigations of African American cultures and historical traditions than in forwarding myriad self-serving political agendas" (9). Brown's historical accounts conform to this characterization, for his work appears in the context of a white-supremacy culture that blacks wished to supplant. Although he contends he has drawn from what Ernest aptly describes as "multiple texts . . . with an interpretative method grounded in the need to

address the condition of oppression that defined the African American community" (8), he has merely reiterated the prevailing image of Toussaint as a hero.

Cooper's text is different. She has systematically set about remaking the black past to make the future of African Americans, dissolving an "over-laudatory" portrait of Toussaint. She pictures all those involved in the Haitian Revolution as at fault and examines the event from what historical theorist Alex Callinicos has called "the transformation of philosophy of history into metahistory," race within a larger context of revolution. Cooper seeks to promote human understanding of the past; at the same time she dispels notions of black women's inferiority. In the final analysis, it's probably less a question of who was right than it is a question of perspective, less a question of whether Toussaint was a savior of his people or a self-serving manipulator no less evil than those he ousted. In recounting Toussaint's history Brown and Cooper interpret and reinterpret; their voices shape and reshape, making their own truth. Both Brown's and Cooper's accounts of Toussaint uplift their race in ways appropriate to their historical time, reflective of their personal experiences, and impacted by their genders.

Works Cited

Alexander, Elizabeth. "'We Must Be about Our Father's Business': Anna Julia Cooper and the In-Corporation of the Nineteenth-Century African-American Woman Intellectuals." *In Her Own Voice: Nineteenth-Century American Women Essayists*. Ed. Sherry lee Linken. New York: Garland, 1997.

Brown, William Wells. *The Black Man, His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements*. 1863. New York: Arno, 1969.

- - -. *The Rising Son; or, the Antecedents and the Advancement of the Colored Race*.

Cooper, Anna Julia. *A Voice from the South*. New York; Oxford UP, 1988.

- - -. *Slavery and the French Revolutionists (1788-1805)*. Trans. Frances Richardson Keller. *Studies in French Civilization*. Vol. 1. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1988.

Ernest, John. *Liberation Historiography: African American Writers and the Challenge of History, 1794-1861*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2004.

Holly, James T. *A Vindication of the Capacity of the Negro Race for Self-Government and Civilized Progress*. Ed. Howard Brotz. *Negro Social and Political Thought, 1850-1920, Representative Texts*. New York: Basic, 1966. 140-70

Lemert, Charles, and Esme Bhan, eds. *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998.

Moses, William Jeremiah. *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925*. Handen: Anchor, 1978.

Schomburg, Arthur A. "The Negro Digs Up His Past." January 17, 2008

www.africawithin.com/schomburg.

Teaching American Literature: A Journal of Theory and Practice
Fall 2007

Vogel, Todd. *ReWriting White: Race, Class, and Cultural Capital in Nineteenth-Century America*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2004.

Whelchel, L. H., Jr. *My Chains Fell Off: William Wells Brown, Fugitive Abolitionist*. Lanham: UP of American, 1985.

Gloria Shearin
Savannah State University