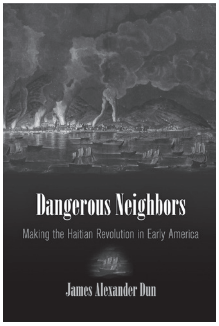
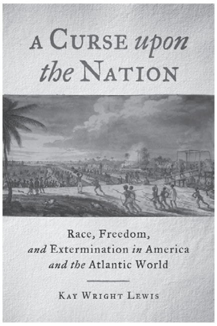
Review Essay

Freedom and Extermination: Violence, Culture, and Politics in the Era of Haitian and U.S. Emancipation

Justin Rogers-Cooper


Dangerous Neighbors
Making the Haitian Revolution in Early America
James Alexander Dun

The Haitian Revolution and the Early United States
Edited by Elizabeth Maddock Dillon and Michael Drexler


A Curse upon the Nation
Race, Freedom, and Extermination in America and the Atlantic World
Kay Wright Lewis

DANGEROUS NEIGHBORS: Making the Haitian Revolution in Early America. By James Alexander Dun. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 2016.
THE HAITIAN REVOLUTION AND THE EARLY UNITED STATES: Histories, Textualities, Geographies. Edited by Elizabeth Maddock Dillion and Michael Drexler. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 2016.
A CURSE UPON THE NATION: Race, Freedom, and Extermination in America and the Atlantic World. By Kay Wright Lewis. Atlanta, GA: University of Georgia Press. 2017.

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In "Harlem," Langston Hughes famously asks whether "a dream deferred" festers or sags, but also questions, "*Or does it explode*?" Speculating on the poem's famous conclusion in the wake of the slave rebellions of 1791 in the French colony of Saint Domingue, and considering the serial events that led to the creation of Haiti in 1804 and later the U.S. Civil War, might offer us another kind of question: what happens to the dream *after* it explodes? In different ways, the books reviewed here provide comprehensive valences on the catastrophic violence that defined the emancipation of Saint Domingue, but also on the hopes and fears stirred by what became the Haitian Revolution for a network of U.S. and Haitian constituencies: presidents, politicians, abolitionists, doctors, artists, novelists, essayists, journalists, voters, and especially black intellectuals.

Two of the three texts under review, James Alexander Dun's *Dangerous Neighbors: Making the Haitian Revolution in Early America* and Elizabeth Maddock Dillon and Michael Drexler's edited collection, *The Haitian Revolution and the Early United States*, build upon a now formative and expanding base of scholarship on the Haitian Revolution to explore its political, cultural, and historical trajectories in early American public life. The third text, Kay Wright Lewis' *A Curse Upon the Nation: Race, Freedom, and Extermination in America and the Atlantic World*, provides a broader Atlantic context for considering the ways "racial extermination was not 'unthinkable'" for white and black Americans living in the long nineteenth century (2). Taken together, the three texts convincingly assert that the cultural and political fabric of the post-revolutionary United States smoked from the fires set on the plantations of Saint Domingue. Moreover, they suggest that the threads of antebellum U.S. culture and politics, perhaps contrary to the national imaginaries of the next century, remained twisted despite being pulled in opposite directions. In the tangled knot at the center lay for some the inspirational 1804 Constitution proclaiming the end of slavery, and yet others could only see a hemispheric apocalypse to be contained at all costs.

The archives and texts in the three books under review point to the apocalyptic potential of slave economies, and to the capacities of the enslaved to create new realities within the constraints of historical forces. This makes Lewis' reference to the "unthinkable," which comes from Michel-Rolph Trouillot's influential work *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History,* a notable touchstone for all three texts. In his famous account, Trouillot writes the Haitian Revolution "entered history with the peculiar characteristic of being unthinkable even as it happened," by which he partly meant that ruling classes could not understand the revolution as it unfolded, but instead placed it into "ready-made categories" (73). In *Dangerous Neighbors*, Dun emphasizes how Touillot's reflections express the ways historical "narrative production…tends to flatten a history out," yet Dun and the other authors here would very likely agree that such flattening did not happen all at once, but came later (in the U.S., for example, powerful legacies of black emancipation succumbed to the sentimental whitewashing of Civil War memories following the dismantling of Reconstruction, as scholars such as David Blight detail). As such, these texts challenge us to consider new heuristics for understanding the hemispheric collapse of Atlantic slavery and the rise of transnational movements for emancipation. More importantly, they provide new archives and genealogies for imagining the emergence of racialized modernity, and revise perspectives on figures such as Thomas Jefferson, Frederick Douglass, and Toussaint L'Ouverture, and events like the Louisiana Purchase, Nat Turner's rebellion, and John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry.

In *Dangerous Neighbors*, Dun tracks how the constantly shifting fortunes of the Saint Domingue rebellion was narrated in newspapers and periodicals in Philadelphia, then the nation's commercial and political capital, and how editors, readers, and politicians reacted to (often distorted) news from the colony as competing interests and parties tried to manipulate and interpret events to their political and commercial advantage. As Dun notes, between 1791 and 1804 a "host of sensational developments unfolded," and "American interest was driven by the sense that these events were globally important and locally relevant" (3, 4). This interest climaxed in Philadelphia, which, aside from its political and economic importance, was also the newspaper capital of the United States. As events in Saint Domingue escalated, one of the key stakes for Americans were the revolutionary ideas in play and what they meant. "Stories from the French colony raised questions about slavery and rebellion," he relays, "but they also gave rise to more fundamental queries about revolution—whether or not its principles operated universally, about the boundaries it established between race and citizenship, and over its anticolonial implications" (17). As Dun successfully establishes across his chapters, the United States in the 1790s contained a multitude of attitudes and expectations about whether slavery would survive the age of revolutions.

The drama emanating out of Saint Domingue thus spelled a kind of forecast about the fate of the United States. One of Dun's lessons is that the lasting American narrative of Saint Domingue's emancipation—that of black atrocities against white colonists—only later became conflated with the independence of Haiti (although not necessarily for all Americans, as Dillon and Drexler's volume documents). It appears that the Haitian revolution was, in fact, at first quite 'thinkable,' and gradually became 'unthinkable' less because of events in Saint Domingue than due to domestic and national tensions in and between the United States, France, and England. True, for Dun the "conceptual limitations" of white Americans meant they did not always "comprehend the truly radical changes going on" (21). One of Dun's most striking arguments explains how it was the emergent Republican party that branded the violence in Saint Domingue as a catastrophe of black power, and exploited the idea of American whiteness as a political tool to consolidate electoral power domestically. This effectively simplified the narrative of what became the Haitian revolution, but also foreclosed the horizon of meaning for the American one.

Dun's first chapter examines the first reactions of U.S. readers to civil unrest in Cap-Français in 1791, and demonstrates his fine attention to the ways news arrived by ship (William Davis, captain of the brig *Hetty*) and became propelled by particular editors (Benjamin Franklin Bache) and newspapers (*General Advertiser, and Political, Commercial, and Literary Journal*) before reappearing elsewhere in and beyond Philadelphia. In this case, white colonists were revolting against a French decree that free blacks and persons of color ("mulattoes") had equal rights in the colony (27). The revolt was only the latest indication that violence in Saint Domingue was spreading and politically meaningful; Dun references the recent death of Colonel Thomas-Antoine, a veteran of the Continental Army murdered by his troops at Port-au-Prince, to situate the ways Americans framed the nascent violence through figures and characters of their own recent revolution and through the ideas of those including Thomas Paine. He explains how the subsequent brutal execution of Vincent Ogé, a free man of color who amassed a small force to win him the colony's recognition as an equal, led Philadelphia readers to associate violence in Cap Français with the "egalitarian ethos" of the concurrent French Revolution (39). Was Ogé's death an example of anarchy, or a dimension of a new world order?

Dun argues that Americans first saw events in Saint Domingue as "French," yet also believed they pointed to a promise of universal equality. By late 1791, the slave uprising on the Plaine du Nord sent refugees into Philadelphia, along with stories of atrocities that were difficult to verify. Americans "recognized" the actions of the enslaved through existing prisms about slave insurrections and did not believe them to be "simply campaigns for extermination" (57). Dun's second chapter traces such reactions to two "interpretive frameworks"—royalists were promoting rebellion, or maroon bands were at work—that guided those recognitions (61). Such interpretations morphed as it became clear black insurgents were fighting for freedom, liberty, and control over their labor. Those like newspaper editor Abraham Bishop began claiming the insurrections were expressive of a "universal pattern of struggle" common to the American and French revolutions (74). Others countered that those responsible were "French negroes," or brigands imitating revolutionaries threatening to be "volatile exemplars to slaves everywhere" (82, 83).

By 1793, increasing numbers of colonial refugees found Philadelphia upset by outbreak of yellow fever. In his third chapter, Dun narrates how events related to France dominated American views of the dynamics in Saint Domingue: the declaration of the French Republic, the outbreak of European war, the offer of freedom to black insurgents fighting for the republic, the burning of Le Cap, and the emancipation of slaves. As the British invaded the colony and Washington briefly placed an embargo on U.S. shipping there in 1794, Americans had to grapple with the implications of a "universal movement that pitted republicanism against tyranny everywhere," and one irrespective to race (92). It was a notion promoted through a new French minister in Philadelphia, Edmond Charles Genet (92). As the administration of George Washington resisted Genet's efforts to win support for France, cabinet members like Alexander Hamilton found Genet's ideas and methods not just distasteful, but dangerous: he believed them un-American. Reports of violence from the colony now became increasingly racialized. Thomas

Jefferson, for his part, believed the increasingly successful slave revolts intimated a new world "segregated by race," not one of universal equality (117).

The French National Decree of February 4, 1794 abolishing slavery in the colonies, however, also set off a period of "antislavery promise" in Pennsylvania (125). The Abolition Society and politicians like John Shoemaker made plans to revise the 1780 abolition act and rethink the import of the state's constitution. Their hopes coincided with a resurgent activism in Philadelphia's black community, which centered on a newly developing African Church. Black leaders acknowledged the structure signified "black separation" and implied that "fundamental human rights intended for universal application" in the American Revolution had "gone awry" (127). It was a moment complicated by events in San Domingue and the yellow fever outbreak. Racist narratives about the fever by Matthew Carey, who oversaw relief efforts as part of a citizen committee, blamed black citizens for extorting dying and dead patients. In refuting Carey's baseless claims, black church leaders Richard Allen and Absalom Jones explained how stereotypes of black Americans as barbaric were an effect of slave culture, not blackness. Dun aptly contextualizes this debate in chapter four, and how the opening for antislavery thought and activism became compounded by perceptions of revolutionary instability in France and Saint Domingue. The 1793 Fugitive Slave Act in the U.S. and its defenders in Congress linked national security to the necessity of enslavement: "White lives, not black (or universal) rights, were the entity under threat. The protection of the one was linked to the destruction of the other" (140). The eclipse of possibilities for black freedom in the United States, in part inspired by the successes of self-emancipated workers in Saint Domingue, would from here become more and more unthinkable.

Dun's fifth chapter details the entanglement of Saint Domingue in French-U.S. relations and domestic politics through American politics and from the perspective of Toussaint L'Ouverture. By the late 1790s, rumors of mixed race refugees arriving by ship near Philadelphia triggered emergent partisan anxieties between the Federalists and Democratic-Republican (or Republican) party. In a political climate of paranoia and accusations of treason, each side charged conspiracy—Republicans saw the specter of English perfidy, while Federalists countered the ships were merely of French royalists. The incident was one of many partisan battles occurring alongside the rise of L'Ouverture. With the Federalist administration of John Adams in power, the U.S. at first supported L'Ouverture and independence for the colony, consistent with the Quasi-War against France. Searching for political advantage as the election of 1800 approached, Republicans linked L'Ouverture with despotism, and, by extension, smeared the Federalists as "betrayers of American honor" (147). The path to electoral success—one that would become iterative for both parties in the coming centuries—pivoted upon a rejection of transnational "universal rights," and instead they defined revolutionary "equality through whiteness" (148). Intensifying Federalist antagonisms with France, which aligned their interests with Saint Domingue's independence, opened them to attacks about why a slave republic would support "an independent nation of ex-slaves" (162). The sixth chapter brings this narrative to climax in Jefferson's victory in the election of 1800 and after, and treats L'Ouverture's consolidation of power, Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion, and Haitin independence though American reactions to Gabriel's rebellion and Jefferson's embargo between 1805-1807—a moment when Haitian voices became "increasingly silenced" (212).

As readers might suspect given Dun's copious reading of primary sources, *Dangerous Neighbors* should become a potent history for those interested in recovering the nuances and contingencies in how the Haitian Revolution changed the form of ruling class politics in the United States. Dun's history provides helpful context, too, for those seeking frameworks for the emergence of white power and transnational histories of abolition in early America. For readers interested in additional philosophical, political, and cultural perspectives along these lines, though, they would do well to examine the substantial selections in the volume of essays edited by Dillon and Drexler, *The Haitian Revolution and the Early United States*. Divided into three parts of five chapters each—*Histories, Geographies,* and *Textualities*—the collection features some well-established authors on the Haitian Revolution, as well as some significant figures in fields of nineteenth century American Studies, literary studies, and history, many of whom have books addressing the Haitian Revolution and early American culture (including Dun, whose chapter in the volume refreshes the ways Philadelphia newspapers in the early 1790s read and misread early revolutionary events in Saint Domingue).

In an introduction that addresses many of the historical intersections and ironies in play for the text as a whole, Dillon and Drexler situate the volume as an exploration of the "mutually entwined relations between Haiti and the United States," but also aim readers to consider the ways both the U.S. and Haiti contained a contradictory "tension between the revolutionary politics of republicanism and an economy fueled by slave labor" (1, 5). Citing the arguments of those who posit the Haitian Revolution as central to the development of modernity, such as Joan (Colin) Dayan, Susan Buck-Morss, David Scott, and Nick Nesbitt, the editors conclude their introductory remarks through their own gloss on Trouillot's "unthinkable" revolution, arguing that "the silencing to which Trouillot refers is not an erasure and it would be a mistake to understand it as such" (15). Indeed, Dillon and Drexler contend that the scholars in their volume help to "redress the silencing" through the "evocation of new ontologies, new narratives, and new geographies" (15). The volume certainly succeeds in this respect.

In part one, *Histories*, Fick examines Toussaint L'Ouverture's relations with the U.S., Great Britain, and France in the period from 1797 to 1801. In an useful account of how economic conditions in Saint Domingue shaped the character of L'Ouverture's political choices, Fick provides readers with a generous background of the colonial intrigues in play, as well as the rather incredible demands made on L'Ouverture: defending emancipation, restoring export commodities to fund that defense, and contending with imperial markets to keep such trade open. Fick's essay contains a range of reflections that will interest those with questions about

L’Ouverture’s revival of the plantation system so soon after insurrections by the enslaved, and in the process lays bare how the Haitian “revolutionary paradigm exposed the many hidden faces of modernity” with which he contended (41). Her essay is one of several in the collection that examine the Haitian Revolution in the larger context of Atlantic political economy. In part two, for example, David Geggus dialogues with the contention of scholars such as Fick and others about the reasons for Napoleon Bonaparte’s decision to sell the Louisiana territory to the United States after the failed French invasion to reclaim the colony. After a thorough review of historical actors and factors, he ultimately decides it is “open to question,” but that, given France lost every colony by 1811, its ultimate ability to keep Louisiana was “not strong” regardless of the trigger for the sale (129). The two chapters renew general attention to the ways Haitian independence is inseparable from Atlantic geopolitics, and vice versa.

Ivy G. Wilson’s contention that the nineteenth century iconography of Toussaint L’Ouverture constitutes an important part of the “counterarchives about Haiti” in the U.S. imaginary, especially those created by African American “intellectuals and cultural producers,” is a provocative and profound contribution to the collection (81). The claim represents the complimentary inverse of the racist “silencing” of Trouillot’s “unthinkable,” in part by decolonizing archival silences with readings of new texts that reveal the rich textures and dimensions of the ways L’Ouverture came to embody sustaining forms of knowledge and affect about the Haitian Revolution throughout the long nineteenth century. Embedding his argument first in an 1864 portrait of L’Ouverture that appeared in the *New Orleans Tribune*, Wilson proceeds to map the iconography of L’Ouverture as an “aesthetic practice” that allowed black artists and writers to “enter into debates about the diaspora and Pan-Africanism, black independence and sovereignty, and chattel slavery in the United States and elsewhere” (82). Turning to authors such as Frederick Douglass, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Frank J. Webb, and William Wells Brown, among other notable authors, Wilson traces a new genealogy of the ways Haiti persisted in U.S. cultural memory through the Civil War. His approach is a crucial accompaniment to the vigorous new interpretations of extant primary sources we see in work like Dun’s *Dangerous Neighbors*.

In a similar sense, Laurent Dubois’s contribution to the volume charts new paths by examining the life of Anténor Firmin, “one of Haiti’s greatest intellectuals and statesmen” (100). Grounding his essay in the larger currents of Haitian and U.S. political movements of the nineteenth century, Dubois in part focuses on exchanges between Firmin and Frederick Douglass in the early 1890s, when the latter was President Benjamin Harrison’s minister to Haiti. While under instructions to negotiate docking privileges for the U.S. navy at Môle-Saint-Nicolas, Douglass met Firmin in Haiti and agreed the arrogant posture of the Harrison administration was an impediment to the deal. When the U.S. sent warships as intimidation, Firmin ended the negotiations. In subsequent years—after a failed presidential run—Firmin remained a potent political writer, and died exiled in 1911 predicting the possibility of Haiti falling “under foreign control” (110). In his focus on Firmin, Dubois reminds scholars that the story of Haitian politics continues long after the revolution, and deserves close study. In part three, Marelen L. Daut's chapter on the prolific writings of Baron de Vastey, a respected author of literature and anti-colonialism in the early nineteenth century, also makes a strong case for returning to the extant print archive for Haitian authors who necessitate closer attention. Noting that the "silencing of Vastey's work indicates a serious disciplinary problem for early American studies," Daut offers an especially compelling reading of Vastey's political writing, as well as the ways U.S. newspapers promoted Vastey's ideas to promote the formal recognition of Haiti (292). In addition to finding new methodologies and counterarchives for understanding the Haitian Revolution in the early United States, Daut and Dubois's attention to Vastey and Firmin suggest there's a need for significant projects simply reading major Haitian intellectuals of the nineteenth century.

Duncan Faherty covers similar territory to Dun's *Dangerous Neighbors* in the collection's third chapter, examining "ill-founded reports of a rumored invasion" in the *Washington Federalist* of "French Negroes" off the coast of South Carolina in late 1802 (60). "As long as the indeterminacy raised by Caribbean revolutionary violence remained quarantined offshore," Faherty writes, "the United States remained able to at least tangentially imagine itself as free from the vexing issues of racially inflected conceptions of equality and liberty" (78). This analysis is consistent with the subsequent embargo Jefferson placed on newly independent Haiti two years later, and compliments Cristobal Silva's chapter in part two of the collection, *Geographies*, which treats the yellow fever and other disease outbreaks in the late eighteenth century in terms of "how categories like citizenship and community constituted themselves (130). Along somewhat similar thematic lines, Kieran M. Murphy's chapter traces how colonial authorities in Saint Domingue perceived Mesmer's doctrine of animal magnetism, a discourse that began circulating in the 1780s, to be a "major source of civil unrest" among the enslaved prior to the outbreak of revolution (145). In a compelling sequence of claims, Murphy provocatively links the implications of Mesmer's theory to political pamphlets about human rights in the period, and ultimately to Joan (Colin) Dayan's cultural analysis of Vodou and zombi possession as practices of revolutionary agency.

Edlie Wong's contribution to the volume deepens the themes of contagion and emergence that resonate though these chapters. Her essay connects Haitian President Jean-Pierre Boyer's successful conquest of Spanish Santo Domingo in the 1820s to southern "racialized discourse of disease emergence" in the United States following the 1822 Denmark Vesey conspiracy (163). The Negro Seaman Acts passed in South Carolina and other southern states targeted black sailors "as a menace to slaveholding localisms," implying a continuing threat between Haitian independence and achievement and the status of black enslaved people in the U.S. (165). Wong's expansive chapter further details how Boyer countered such counter-revolutionary currents by trying to encourage black emigration to Haiti, and connects his initiative to sympathetic literary sentiments among contemporary black intellectuals and authors, including Prince Saunders, the likely author of a notable short story on the Haitian Revolution, as well as William Wells Brown, who drew upon representations of L'Ouverture and revolutionary Saint Domingue in his novel *Clotel* and a lecture on the revolution.

Likewise, in a relevant investigation of Prince Saunders's *Haytian Papers* and its idealistic promotion of black labor ideology, Colleen C. O'Brien's chapter deepens the volume's attention to the idea of black emigration, as well as how ideas of land ownership, wage labor, and education developed in black thought of the antebellum period, and specifically in the work of James McCune Smith. O'Brien's attention to McCune's advocacy for "land reform and an alternative to free labor ideology" in the 1840s should be meaningful for making transbellum linkages between this period and the experimentations and repression of such reforms during and after the Civil War, not to mention on the rise of southern sharecropping during and after Reconstruction (203).

Three of the chapters in the volume's third part, *Textualities*, address cultural, performative, and literary interpretations of the Haitian Revolution in early America. Siân Silyn Roberts reads Leonara Sansay's epistolary novel *Secret History; Or, the Horrors of St. Domingo* (1808) for how the novel's "model of social relations" of freely circulating people, commodities, and news interrupts nationalized boundaries of being and feeling, and how in turn the novel's representation of such "cosmopolitan sociability" depends on how characters access such circulations of culture and information (251). In his chapter on the 1795 performance of John Murdock's sentimental comedy *The Triumphs of Love; or, Happy Reconciliation* at Philadelphia's Chesnut Street Theater, Peter P. Reed argues that Murdock's "rebellious black characters provided audiences with a safe way of encountering Haiti's [sic] unthinkable violence," and to imagine their relationship to its actual refugees then arriving to the city (266). Drawing on the work of Sibylle Fischer, Reed cogently reads the play's choices as a case study in the "slow-moving process of repression and substitution" that Trouillot associates with the "'general silencing'" of the Haitian Revolution (269). Expanding this idea in a different direction, in her chapter Gretchen J. Woertendyke's makes a thrilling wager that the revolution remaps the emergence of the American romance and gothic novel as genres for imagining "blackness" as a "specter of possibility and horror across the Atlantic world" (232). Casting her claims about authors such as William Cobbett and Charles Brockden Brown in a romantic print culture of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in which "tropes of blackness and foreign invasion" circulated widely, Woertendyke distinguishes the American from the British gothic not just for its preoccupation with race, but for the transnational ways race arrived via the Caribbean (234).

The long influence of the Haitian Revolution on black American thought in the nineteenth century also defines Drexler and Ed White's essay. For them, L'Ouverture's 1801 Constitution "joins, if not inaugurates, a tradition in African American letters of holding white social and political morality to account for its more abstract and universalizing strands" (214). Their reading of the Constitution, and especially how they situate it within U.S. politics at the turn of the eighteenth century, is instructive; rather than follow the thrust of their contention about its effects on black literature, the essay deftly reads the ways various aspects of both the Constitution and L'Ouverture emerge in partisan newspapers, with modification and appropriation, to reflect U.S. anxieties about race and slavery. Republicans and Federalists each created their own "political fantasy" about L'Ouverture: for the latter, he represented "authoritarian narcissism," while for Republicans he signified "paranoid race war" (230).

In fact, Drexler and White's focus on "race war" echoes Woertendyke's citation of Jefferson's fears, expressed in a 1797 letter, that the "revolutionary storm sweeping the globe" might inspire the enslaved of the U.S. to rebel, a fear she links to a Bryan Edwards pamphlet of the same year warning that "slave revolution would become infectious and both whites and blacks would be 'exterminated'" (235, 233). Jefferson and Edward's fears make for an ironic transition to the final text reviewed here, Kay Wright Lewis's *A Curse Upon This Nation*. In an exceptionally well-documented argument that spans several centuries, Lewis argues that the threat of genocide against black Americans, supported by multiple examples of colonial and post-revolutionary acts of white Americans, became a cultural structure that enabled acts of horrific barbarism against enslaved and emancipated black people. While Lewis first focuses less on the Haitian Revolution than on the African, European, and colonial American antecedents for subsequent exterminatory violence both real and imagined, she carefully traces how one of its stereotyped and prolific legacies—the inextricability of race war and black freedom—transformed the practices of oceanic enslavement and continental genocides into a crucial cultural logic undergirding the maintenance of southern slavery and racial segregation during and after the Civil War.

Lewis's arguments on the specter of racial extermination explains why women, children, and others who posed no obvious threat to white Americans so often became the targets of demonic violence by white communities both before and after emancipation, a history she illustrates with the vicious burning and annihilation of Mary Turner of Lowndes County, Georgia in 1918, who was eight-months pregnant at the time, and whose child was cut from her and crushed after her death. Lewis traces Turner's savage murder, and so many like it, to "roots in the historical legacy of slavery," and, more importantly, to the ways "extermination was part of a racialized ideology used to sustain the institution of enslavement" (2). Moreover, Lewis contends that such ideology "exposes the probability that white southerners did not develop a new emotional state after the Civil War but were rather perpetuating an inherited set of ideas about black bodies and, indeed, black humanity" (2, 3). It's an alarming and yet perfectly reasonable argument, and one Lewis handles with courage and skill. In her introduction, Lewis wields her thesis within existing histories of slavery and racial violence, and offers the threat of extermination as a "palpable reason why slaves did not rebel more frequently," and why the frequent "killing of black women, children, and the elderly" reinforced that threat for many in the African diaspora (8). Indeed, Lewis makes clear that survival itself was the central form of African and black resistance to slavery.

Her first chapter returns to the deep history of genocidal violence against Africans and indigenous people in North America. She contextualizes racial violence in the centuries of colonialism and enslavement within early European theories of total warfare and the complete annihilation of enemy combatants, including the "extermination of children," in a philosophy crudely described by its practitioners as "Nits will be Lice" (14). Threading the genealogy of such thinking through to Jefferson, she then transitions in her second chapter to considering how the African slave trade contributed a new dynamic to such violence, and even how the "war tactics of Africans on the Gold Coast paralleled the brutal theories behind English warfare," and which in turn propelled the participation of African slave-trading nations in trafficking black people across the Atlantic.

Meanwhile, Lewis depicts American colonists as increasingly afraid of their enslaved plantation laborers even as they grew more dependent on them, relating that what "white colonists feared most was their total annihilation in internecine warfare" (47). Her third chapter details, in turn, how Africans in the diaspora used their vast knowledge of military tactics to plan and execute revolts. She thus shows how "fears of a black revolution eventually occurred in Saint-Domingue and resonated throughout the African diaspora into the nineteenth century" (60). Scholars of the Haitian Revolution will find much of interest in her account of it, which she situates in a longer Atlantic timeline, and which she uses as a relief for Denmark Vesey's attempt at insurrection in 1822.

In a powerful reading of Nat Turner's revolt and the widespread violence that accompanied white reaction, Lewis argues that the insurrection "was the moment whites always feared, and they did what they warned they would do in response" (83). Many in the southern white community, in fact, warned that another such revolt would lead to genocide, and such warnings occurred as the number of race riots against black Americans surged even in the North. Even more, she provides a litany of examples from the testimony of enslaved Americans, including Henry Box Brown, who explained that after Turner many African Americans took seriously that the impunity of violence against black lives could conceivably escalate beyond the fierce reprisals already occurring. In her next chapter, Lewis exposes the role that ideas of black extermination played in the 1832 Virginia debates about whether the "solution" to the danger slaves posed to white people would be "colonization, enslavement, or extermination" (109). Her sixth chapter follows the thread into debates about re-opening the African slave trade in the 1850s, when southerners defended their ability to control additional new African slaves through the strength of their repressive violence; in reply, black writers like James McCune Smith taunted that doing so would set off a "Haitian model of resistance" in Africa (139).

At the same time, her stunning seventh chapter on John Brown's failed raid on Harper's Ferry contends that Brown's assumption that black slaves would rally to his cause was based on faulty republican premises of white masculinity and violence, and grounded in romantic racialism and the "ethnic chauvinism of northern humanitarians" (147). By contrast, black male ideas about "manhood… did not sanction exposing the black community, particularly black women and children, to violent retribution" (143). For the enslaved, the legacies of white retaliations after the Turner revolt, and the continuing threat of mass murders against black people as a whole, were still decisive on the eve of the Civil War. Poignantly, she details a wave of murders against African Americans in Virginia, Alabama, and Texas after Harper's Ferry. Her eighth chapter notes that such massacres continued during the Civil War, as in the Battle of Marks Mills, Arkansas in 1864, when rebel soldiers admitted killing 80 unarmed black people, including women and children, or during wartime northern race riots in Detroit, Chicago, Cincinnati, and, of course, New York. Such incidents were set against the fears of those such as Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, who wondered whether emancipation might lead to exterminatory warfare against black Americans. Immediately after the war, Lewis argues for seeing the slaughter of black communities in cities like 1866 Memphis, which included women and children, through the prism of total warfare. In the rest of the chapter, she elucidates the framework of extermination as a window into the dozens of urban white riots of the Jim Crow era, and, in her conclusion, convincingly traces the influence of such apocalyptic violence into the thinking of civil rights era intellectuals and leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X.

Given her scope, argument, and evidence, Lewis's paradigm-shifting book should be treated as a stark touchstone for future scholarship in African American history and American studies, but also scholars of slavery, genocide, and civil rights. It also leaves open projects that might seek to link her claims and texts more extensively to the Haitian Revolution and its aftershocks in the nineteenth century United States. Indeed, *A Curse Upon This Nation*— like much of the history of Haiti and early America that emerges in the texts reviewed here—should force readers to consider not whether or not the kinds of holocausts imagined in the United States were unthinkable in the moments when they occurred or almost did, but also whether they remain unthinkable now, and, if so, how the past might teach us to think again.