

AT: Welcome to the Infinite Women podcast. I'm your host, Allison Tyra, and today I'm joined by Marlene Daut, professor of French and African American studies at Yale University and author of the new book, *Awakening the Ashes: An Intellectual History of the Haitian Revolution*, as well as *The First and Last King of Haiti: The Rise and Fall of Henri Christophe*. Dr. Daut is here to tell us about Marie-Louise, who was queen of Haiti from 1811 to 1820. So first, can you give us a bit of background on Marie-Louise herself?

MD: So, Marie-Louise, unlike her husband, Henri Christophe, was born on the island of Saint-Domingue, which is today Haiti, on the western third of the island of Hispaniola that Haiti shares with the Dominican Republic. She was born in May 1778, we think in the city of Cap-Français, which is today Cap-Haïtien, which is a coastal city in northern Haiti, and it was the principal port in the 18th century, in the era of French colonialism and French slavery. And one very important thing to note is, as far as we can tell, Queen Marie-Louise was never enslaved herself. She was born into a prominent free Black family, and if her mother had been enslaved, which is quite possible, at some point she gains her freedom and marries a Black infantry captain by the name of Coidavid, and in that circle, in his circle of friends, they really hang out with some of the most prominent members of Saint-Dominguean society, in terms of the free people of color. For example, a man named Belley, who was the only Black deputy to go to France and take part in the national convention where slavery was eventually abolished in 1794, a family called Grandjean, another one called Bunel, that were really the who's who of Saint-Domingue, so by marrying this infantry captain, her mother kind of paves the way for her to have a really very different life from the enslaved population on the island.

AT: That's really interesting because one of the things that's come up before in different conversations is this idea that the well-to-do Black people, usually we're talking about America, but I feel like this probably also applies to Haiti, you don't really get those narratives when you see media or even I would guess non-fiction works about this time period. It's either Black people just mysteriously aren't there, like an episode of *Friends*, there's just no Black people in New York kind of thing, or the only Black people there are, in the case of Haiti, the ones staging rebellions or the ones being oppressed in the fields.

MD: Yes, and it's really interesting that you should point that out because also in the specific case of Saint-Domingue and Haiti, when we get Black people who are not enslaved, there's this idea that they must be people of mixed race, the "mulattoes," which in American English, that means you have one Black parent and one white parent. But in Saint-Domingue, it's a kind of catch-all term, sometimes used interchangeably with free people of color, but it's very clear from looking at the case of Marie-Louise and all these people around them that they were from a family that was listed in the civil records, since they were free, as *nègres* and *négresses libres*, so free Black people, where it definitely would say *mulâtre* or *mulâtresse* if they were "recognized" as people of mixed race. It doesn't mean there was no admixture, it just means that in terms of how they looked and presented to people, they were considered to be pure Black people in the colony's parlance. Yes, you had, yes, lighter-skinned Black people in the colony and being free and operating as free people to a certain extent, but you also, alongside enslaved Black people, also have a not insignificant number of free Black families that identified as Black.

AT: And one of the complexities of this society at the time is that you may have free Black people who owned enslaved people, which feels I mean, all of slavery is problematic, but it does create this weird cognitive dissonance, I think, for a lot of people in the modern era to think about Black people owning other Black people.

MD: Yes, and even though we have no evidence of that in Marie-Louise's family, her stepfather, the man who I make this strong case in my book that, although other Christophe chroniclers have written that Coidavid was

her father, it seems pretty clear from her birth record and from the marriage certificate, which is long after that of her mother and Coidavid, that he was likely her stepfather. And she also went by a different name at the time that she married only Christophe as well. So this is all kind of strong evidence that it was a family that kind of was put together after her birth. And Coidavid, because he was in the military, has more records than maybe someone else who wasn't as prominent and didn't come into the French frame of reference where they're going to be recording what you're doing. And so I really don't see any, they didn't own a plantation, for example. So I don't see any evidence that that family in particular enslaved people, but plenty of free Black families did, people where you have people of mixed race and the ones where people were identifying as "nègres" or "négresses" or "noir." There are a lot of complicated social dynamics happening as well, because also people tended to remember who was freed and who was free. And that often entered into the discourse when there were disputes about whether somebody had these ties to slavery that were immediate and traceable, which was seen of lesser social standing in that case.

AT: It was like a gradation of a caste system.

MD: Yeah. In a certain sense, yes. Because even later when the free people of color start to agitate, because I'm trying to be very careful with my words because they were not really considered citizens. So they were free, but they didn't have the rights of citizenship, I should say. And so when French republicanism comes into the fray, the disputes between the free people and the white French colonists is about those rights of citizenship, which would do things like give you rights of representation. Because as France is sort of moving away from a monarchy after the French revolution, not quite there yet, but moving towards something where you would have a representative, not democracy, but a representative government of some sort. The white French colonists are saying, "oh, we don't want to recognize any of the free people of color in this." They have no representation. And the free people of color do something very interesting. Some of them are like, "well, what if it's, if your family was free for a certain amount of generations and you own property and you have plantations?" They start to make all of these, so the distinctions in the caste system, I guess if you will, gets more hardened as time goes on, that they try to solidify even further to break the ties or the association, and they stress that they are also enslavers, which is kind of mind boggling to think about, that's their argument is that "we're enslavers like you, so we should have the same rights."

AT: Well, it sounds ridiculous when you think about it like that, but it actually makes a lot of sense because the way that a privileged minority stays in power is always by pitting the oppressed minorities against each other. Like we see this all the time, even today, where, whether it's race, whether it's class, pitting working class white folks, "oh, blame the immigrants that you don't have a job" instead of blaming the people in power and like the awful corporate overlords and the politicians who aren't doing enough. "Oh, no, no, it's the immigrants' fault." So it does make a lot of sense that they would try to impose this hierarchy and divisions to keep control over the population.

MD: Yeah, absolutely. Because especially when they see the arguments that the white French colonists are making, which are saying, "we can't do away with these distinctions," because the next step would be like, if we said that free Black people had the same rights as white people, then what would be the reason for slavery? Like, what would be the justification for slavery? So they definitely get there in their mind. And the free people of color want to make everything hinge on free or enslaved status, but which they also know is, I don't want to say a fiction to a certain extent, because it's a reality that and it has real material consequences. But at the same time, every free Black person or free person of color in Saint-Domingue at one point had an ancestor enslaved there. That is the only reason any Black person was ever forcibly transported to that colony. And so even though they're saying, "my family's been here since the late 17th century," which may in fact be true, but

your mother would have been enslaved, or your grandmother or great-grandmother would have been enslaved by a white man. Because in the late 17th century, what we called the Code Noir, it wasn't called that at the time, it was issued in 1685. But it later became known as the Code Noir. At that time, it was this edict and it governed how enslaved people could be treated in the colony, and the relationship between the enslaved and the freed.

And it said that white men could, if they converted a Black African woman, whom they were enslaving, to Catholicism, she would be freed and all of her children would be therefore free. It also spelled out what would happen if a white man had a child with a Black woman he did not free, that he did not convert to Catholicism, and set up the case where that child would follow the condition of the mother. It also made provisions for, for example, if you are a white man and you wanted to marry an enslaved woman from another plantation and legally free her and make her Catholic, then how much money you would have to pay her "owner." So the society was set up in a way to make it so that such distinctions would come into play later. Although, of course, people don't know that at the time that this is unfolding.

And they didn't really think about what the consequences would be of having a relatively large class of free Black people existing in the colony alongside the white French people. Because by the time the Haitian Revolution breaks out in 1791, the numbers of white French colonists and free Black people are about the same. What's not the same, so it's between 28 and 30,000 or so, what's not the same is the enslaved African population is at 450,000 if not more. And so they're vastly, vastly outnumbered. So you see, there's all kinds of problems of representation and the white French colonists are doing this calculation in their head. Well, what's the next step, right? Because by that time, the United States has had a constitution in which they declared that enslaved people are 3/5 of a person. So they are definitely doing all of these calculations and trying to figure out what's the language we should use, who gets to be a citizen, who gets to have rights of representation.

AT: I will point out though, obviously this is well before the US Civil War. So while they're saying, "oh, they've set up a democracy," slavery is still going strong in the US at this point. And so by the time the Haitian revolution happens, which I got to say, this was not a topic that my Midwestern history classes really covered. But I'm aware that there had been uprisings in the past sort of leading up to this. So can you give us the brief introduction to the Haitian revolution for folks who maybe grew up in the Indiana education system?

MD: Absolutely. It's a shame the Haitian Revolution isn't taught more. And every time I think that's changing, I teach a whole class on the Haitian Revolution and I say, "who's heard of the Haitian Revolution?" One hand goes up. So I think, "we've got to work it out for us," but that's why we're here in part. So the Haitian Revolution is a catchall term for a collection of slave revolts and military strikes that formally begins in August 1791 and lasts technically until January 1804, which is the moment that the Haitian revolutionaries declare independence from France, change the name of the island from Saint-Domingue to Haiti. But in between that time, that relative 13 years or so, many, many momentous things are happening. So when the enslaved rise up in rebellion, what do you know, one of the things that becomes a negotiating tactic on the part of the French is whether or not, if the enslaved freedom fighters, that's what I like to call them, not insurgents, I call them freedom fighters, decide to put down their arms, what will the French give them? And so they enter into a long series of complex negotiations in which some of those enslaved freedom fighters who declared themselves leaders are saying, one of their points of negotiation, along with the dissolution of whipping, this is a big deal, no more whipping. Yes, that's one can understand brutal terror tactic. They say, we want a dissolution of the distinction between the freed and the free, because by that time, that had been codified into law. That was the concession that the French in the métropole, because colonists never accept this, give to the free people of color to get them to stop agitating. Because even before the rebellion breaks out, there's agitation happening. And enslaved people did rise up. It was just that it wasn't en masse. And so it was easier to quench. But by 1791, moving in through 1792, 1793, it is very clear, this is a revolution. It's not going away. And the French are

forced to formally recognize, I always say what the enslaved had kind of already manifested into reality. And so after they killed their king, they declared a republic, in February of 1794, the French declare slavery over, ended, emancipation in all of their overseas territories, not just Saint-Domingue. So it's this very dramatic, unprecedented moment that creates consternation for the colonists, many of whom have fled, but for all the other, for the United States, for Great Britain, with its colonies across the Caribbean, for Spain, for Portugal, it's really, the world is in shock. And when Napoleon Bonaparte came to power in 1799, France is going through government after government. He has to overthrow the directory, they set up a consulate with him as first consul. And he does not think that this was a good idea at all, abolishing slavery, and essentially makes it his mission to bring it back. And he had a rival to contend with. I know, it's such a Napoleon story. Toussaint Louverture, who has by 1801, risen to being governor-general of the colony, he's got a constitution for the colony. And in that constitution, he's declared that slavery is forever abolished. No forms of servitude can exist on this island. And so not only is this a formidable military opponent for Napoleon, who thinks he's the ultimate military man, but this is a person who's made laws for this French colony, because in the constitution of 1801, the provision is, "we will die free and French."

So they don't declare independence. They think, "we are going to be French Republicans who are free," like the French revolutionaries wanted when they abolished slavery, and Napoleon had other ideas. He sends his brother-in-law, a man named Charles Victoire Emmanuel Leclerc, a general to the island. He's married to Napoleon's sister. He sends him there with 30,000 French troops and they're carrying all these proclamations that are written in French and in Creole, the Creole of the 18th century Saint-Domingue. They're told to post it everywhere and they say things like, "we're never going to bring back slavery. We would never do that." But Napoleon's letters at the time, he tells his brother-in-law, get rid of Toussaint Louverture, Henri Christophe, husband of the queen, we will discuss in a bit, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, founder of independent Haiti, who becomes the island's first independent ruler as Emperor Jacques I. Later, he says, get rid of Moyse, that's Toussaint Louverture's nephew, get rid of all of them, deport them, arrest them, kill them, whatever. And sadly, Leclerc is going to succeed in arresting the all-too-trusting Toussaint Louverture. He deports him, sends him to France. He ends up dying a horrible death in a French prison called Le Fort de Joux in April 1803.

But his arrest and news of his horrible treatment really only encourages the revolutionaries to want to continue. All of the factions that I've been describing, think about it, they don't go away when, even when the French first arrived, they're still there. The free people of color, the Black people born on the island, the Black people recently forcibly transported from Africa, but they all unite together. They change their motto from "liberty or death" to "independence or death." And they get rid of the French army that had declared genocidal intentions. One of Leclerc's final letters to Napoleon, Leclerc dies in November 1802 of yellow fever. He says, "we need to kill everyone over the age of 12 who's ever worn an epaulette." Those are his instructions. His successor is even worse. He says, "I must decimate them." General Rochambeau, Americans know that name Rochambeau because his father fought in the American Revolutionary War. So people always ask - no, this one's the son. But yes, that family nonetheless, he brings dogs over imported from Cuba, tells them to eat the Blacks. It's a gruesome, gruesome time. But the Haitian revolutionaries are victorious and they declare independence from France formally on January 1st, 1804.

AT: I'm just a little confused as to the plan here, because like you said, they only sent, I think you said, like 30,000 - 40,000 troops. But you've also said that there were 400,000 formerly enslaved people, as we were saying at the time, plus the tens of thousands of free/freed folks. So they didn't have the benefits that other genocidal men have had in the past where, like Christopher Columbus, for example, of bringing previously foreign diseases that the people had no defense against, the element of surprise in terms of showing up, pretending to be friends and then slaughtering folks. So were they just so arrogant that they thought that that number of French troops would be successful in genocide?

MD: These are all very good questions and very, very layered. So if I get too into the weeds, feel free to stop me. But so the disease question, it's the opposite there, because they have no immunity, a lot of these French soldiers to yellow fever. So yes, they have many disadvantages. They're also very young. France has been fighting so many wars before Napoleon, up since the Seven Years War. They fight Britain all the time. They were fighting Martinique and Spain. I mean, they were fighting Austria. They were fighting everyone. They were at war with the world at this exact time. They send a bunch of 18- and 19- and 20-year-olds over, who have no immunity to yellow fever. The Haitian revolutionaries obviously don't have as good of weapons, although Toussaint Louverture is a mastermind and does get some from the United States, just saying. Anyway, John Adams was no Jefferson. He had a secret arrangement that's not so secret now with Toussaint Louverture. The British also, because they're all at war. There's things happening there. But they send more than 30,000. 30,000 is the initial. What's astonishing about that is, that's the largest fleet to ever set sail from France at the time. So even though it seems comparatively not like a lot compared to the population of the island, it is, for the era, 30,000 troops all at once. It goes up to, we think, about 80,000, at *least* 60,000 to 70,000. But we think as high as 80,000. After Leclerc's death, Rochambeau asks for more troops repeatedly. Leclerc, up until the time of his death, he kept writing the Minister of the Marine, the Navy basically, saying, "if you send me 10,000 to 12,000 more, I can get it done. If you just send me more, I'll get it." Rochambeau takes the same tactic. "I just need more." And in some measure of folly, Napoleon does keep sending more, is the issue.

But the French can't really support them. Their plan for provisions is, steal from the people on the island. But you have to win the city to win the store where they have all the flour and all the things. At some point, his troops don't have shoes. They start deserting. The Haitian revolutionaries in their journals that they kept, because they believe themselves to be French military men at the time that this expedition come. So they're keeping their journals like good military officers. They have their secretaries with them. They're writing everything down because they don't want to be court-martialed. They think that Louverture initially has been sent to France so that he can go on trial, that he's going to have his say, that he's going to defend himself. Louverture writes what we call his memoirs, four different versions, while he's in prison in France because he thinks he's going to have a trial and he's going to defend himself and his honor. So there's a lot of layers as to what's happening in terms of the minds of the revolutionaries and why they don't go all out on the French at first. So that is what the French have on their side is at first, the revolutionaries try to negotiate with them. They believe to a certain extent, although it's not clear why I say, to what extent they believe that the French are really not going to bring back slavery. They're not sure. When they figure out that the French have returned slavery to the island of Guadeloupe with more troops, with a fleet, a separate fleet, that's when they really understand how much trouble they're in. So the French do that in July 1802.

The revolutionaries figure it out around the end of August, early September, and they know they're in a lot of trouble. There's like 60,000 French soldiers on the island, but they decide to wait for the rainy season and for yellow fever to do its work. They retreat to go to the mountains. And so even though later chroniclers of the revolution, in order to discount the importance of the revolution will say, "oh, they didn't really win. It was just yellow fever," but they knew that it was coming. They knew the French had no immunity to it. And Napoleon has conquered Poland and has sent Polish troops to the island. What did these Polish troops do when they get there? Defect. Why would they want to go and kill a bunch of people on behalf of the person who conquered them? It really is an insane story, which is why I say your questions that you have are all very valid because I say this is the biggest evidence of colonial hubris ever. What did you think was going to happen? That 400,000 people, even though some of them are very young, the life expectancy rate on the island was 15 or 16 if you were born there. If you were forcibly transported there, it was two or three years. But 60% of the people on the island had been forcibly transported recently, in the last two or three years at the time of the revolution. But now by this time, 1801, 1802, 1803, they're older. So the population is trending upwards again. But still, when you look at the raw numbers on paper, it is complete and utter folly that the French thought that they would

succeed there, except that they had succeeded on Guadeloupe. So they had sort of encouragement along the way. But even when it's looking so dire, that's when they start really ramping up their genocidal intentions and use words like "terror." "Spread terror," they say. "Be vicious. Do whatever you have to do to win."

AT: I mean, you mentioned colonialist hubris, which I think obviously there is part of that. But I do also think it was very specifically Napoleon just constantly doubling down because this always seems to be his downfall, whether he's like, "I'm gonna go invade Russia in winter" or this. It does seem like a lot of that was just specifically Napoleon.

MD: Yes, but I would say the big difference here is, he refuses to show up on the battlefield. He doesn't go with them. He never sets foot ever on this island. And he sends all these young Frenchmen to their deaths. And what I always say is when people want to exalt Napoleon and say all the institutions he built in France, this is a person responsible for hundreds of thousands, if not more, of people's deaths. Estimates vary, but this is massive. And in this specific case, this great supposed military man doesn't show up. Does he show up to meet Toussaint Louverture when he has him imprisoned in France? He says no. And in fact, the reason that Louverture is never put on trial in France is because Napoleon is corresponding with Leclerc and Leclerc is saying, "if you were to put him on trial and the French newspapers start to report what's happening, this entire colony will go up in flames." In fact, one of his most resonant phrases that he says when he's reporting, Leclerc says, "I got rid of Toussaint Louverture, but there's 10,000 more Louvertures. I have to deal with 10,000 more because there's so many levers," he's saying. There's so many people willing to continue this freedom struggle. So "I got rid of one, it's like whack-a-mole. And still, send me more. Send me more." It wasn't despair. It was, "send me more. Send me more money, send me provisions, send me more troops."

AT: That's a lot of context, which I think we needed. But to bring it back to Marie-Louise, because we definitely drifted away from her specific story. Can you tell us, obviously Henri Christophe is a major player in the Haitian revolution, but how did Marie-Louise and Henri Christophe meet? And what was she doing during this time? Was she just home with the kids or was she an active participant?

MD: No, she's not just home with the kids. So they get married in July 1793. That's important because one month earlier, the enslaved, or the formerly, almost formerly enslaved freedom fighters, free by their own volition, but not necessarily in law, have helped to set fire to the city of Cap-Français. Christophe participates in these events. They live in Cap-Français, so they also have to flee. And eyewitness travelers of varying levels of credibility say that she told them she had their child, during the revolution, strapped to her back. They had one child in 1794, a boy, and that as her husband is fleeing to different locales and then stationed in different locales once emancipation is declared, she's going along with him. How they met is a more difficult question. So she lived in Cap-Français. He worked in a hotel there. And so even though he was initially from the island of Grenada and actually fought in the American Revolutionary War, he was in some of the circles of those free Black families. So that's probably how they met. In fact, one of those free Black families, Joseph Bunel. He himself was white, but his wife was a free woman of color. That ended up being one of Christophe's very, very good friends later on. And so that's probably how they met somehow within the social circles. Throughout the rest of the revolution, their fortunes are rising and falling with the times.

So after emancipation, after 1794, Christophe, who is in the military, but that's not his primary vocation, becomes a really prominent businessman. He starts leasing all these plantations. The French set up this leasing system where it's like, you're not a slave. They're calling you a "citizen cultivator." That's your name, citizen cultivator. But you can't really leave and you have to work the plantation. You can't be whipped. You can't be mistreated. You have to have certain hours, and you have to be paid. You have to be paid, one-fourth of the profits of the plantation are supposed to be split among all the cultivators. So you have to be paid, but you can't really leave. It was sort of like an early version, cross between sharecropping and feudalism, I would

say, except that, even the farmer, so that's what Christophe's status was. He's the person who leases the farm, right? He has to give all this revenue. For example, on one of the plantations he leases, the Saint-Michel plantation, he initially, in his first lease, has to provide the government with 70,000 colonial livres, colonial pounds, in raw sugar. So if he doesn't meet that obligation, how is he also going to pay the citizen cultivators? And a lot of the plantations are burned down, the equipment's broken, and then also there's inventory. So you had to go find the citizen cultivators and tell them to come back. So there's a lot of problems in this system in terms of whether it's actually working to be anything resembling freedom.

AT: So when you say that they were paid, I don't want to sound like someone from Fox News who's like, "well, the slaves had housing and food provided to them." But I'm just wondering where the boundary was there, because I know there's a lot of situations where you had, say, a company town where you are getting paid, obviously, but you have to pay the company for your housing. They own the only grocery store in town, and they set the prices for everything. And so you're basically giving them all of their money back because they determine your cost of living. So where did the emancipated folks who were still not allowed to leave, where did they fall on that spectrum?

MD: So these laws shift and change. The system is called *affermage*, but it's this very specific leasing system, which is why it is a useful word, because they did have a language for it. It's just not one that's in our common lexicon, or even in French today. So one-fourth is supposed to go to the cultivators. One-fourth is for what's called the *faisons valoir*, which is the equipment and the subsistence of the people working there. So it technically doesn't come out of their one-fourth. There also has to be a hospital, that people have to be cared for. The farmer is supposed to get to keep one-fourth. That would be, in this case, Christophe and his wife, because women could hold leases in their name as well. And she did hold deeds to property in her name. I haven't found any plantations that were in her name. Toussaint Louverture's wife, Suzanne, did hold plantations in her name. Jean-Jacques Dessalines's wife, Marie Claire Heureuse, did as well. And other women, for example, Joseph Bunel's wife, the free woman of color I mentioned before. But I haven't found any in her name, but she did hold titles to property in her name in the city. And then that other fourth is supposed to go to the government. But think about the massive amount of sugar that you have to produce in order to meet all of these obligations. And so what I found looking through the leasing records for this *affermage* system is there's a lot of negotiation going on between the "farmer" and the government. As soon as they figure out, "well, I had to buy all this equipment" and this is how much it cost him, then also some of the plantations were designated as plantations for *vivre*, which are everyday foodstuffs. So they are supposed to plant things for subsistence. And then those are very specific, so then the price is kind of less.

But what I haven't been able to determine yet is how much the citizen cultivators actually got paid from this system. What I do know is that in some of their petitions that they would submit when things would go wrong, they say, "we don't want to have to stay on the plantation." That's their biggest complaint. "We want to be able to move to a different plantation if we want." They don't say, "we don't want to farm anymore." I mean, some of them very well may have, but the ones submitting these petitions, they don't say that. They say, "we don't want to have to stay here and be engaged." So when some of the reforms happen, they create a system called *engagements*, which is even worse than the initial system, because it says you have to stay there for a certain amount of years. It's like an indentureship. And at this point, the formerly enslaved population, the citizen cultivators, are saying, "no, we don't really want to have to stay here for any indeterminate amount of time." And they say things like, "we don't need to be engaged to farm. We will farm as long as it's something that we can do or not do, but we're not going to just do it here only by law."

So there's some very complex negotiations going on in there. And Christophe and his wife are intimately involved in that because Christophe is also what's called an inspector. And so he has to go around and make sure that the number of formerly enslaved, the citizen cultivators that are supposed to be there are there. So

this can lead to some complicated social situations as well, especially later, once he gets into more of a leadership role. When he is really involved in the fighting in the military in 1798, fighting against the British 1799, and then when starting to fight against the French again in 1802, 1803, she's hiding out with the other wives and they have their children. By that time, the Christophes have three children. Suzanne Louverture is gone. She's been deported, but Dessalines's wife, other wives, that's where they are. They're hiding out together. And this was dangerous because if they got caught, they would be executed as a rebel. A man named Charles Bélair, his wife, Suzanne Sanité Bélair, is very famous in Haitian revolutionary history. She was with him all the time. Some say she fought in combat or provided subsistence. There's different stories about her involvement, but they capture her first. When her husband comes to try to liberate her, he gets captured. They're both put on trial and they're both sentenced to execution. So it was a dangerous business to "stand by your man." And yet, that's what Marie-Louise did. And that's what many of the other wives of the prominent generals did.

AT: And so I know one of the issues, particularly with the earlier uprisings is the broader issue that we see in a lot of marginalized histories of the lack of documentation. And so the only documentation that we do have often is the colonizing military and whatever they had to say about this situation. So you mentioned that the military men were keeping journals, but do we have much in the way of documentation for what the women were experiencing at the time?

MD: Yeah, we really do not have much. The woman I keep bringing up, Françoise Mouton, but she went by Marie Bunel, married to one of Christophe's later really close friends and associates, came from a prominent free Black family that were for sure enslavers because we have records and she herself had been an enslaver. And so she has letters and we have different documents from her, but we don't have a Harriet Jacobs for the enslaved side. We don't have something that resembles a slave narrative, but even the free women of color, we are left mostly to piece together their lives from documentation. For example, if they owned a plantation, sold a plantation. Interestingly from their marriage contracts, marriage contracts in Saint-Domingue were incredibly complex. And what's fascinating to me is women, free women of color, but women in general, colonial women, white colonial women, often kept their last names and their properties, holding them in their names when they married someone.

So as the female population grows of white women and free women of color, all these white men from France want to come and marry them, who don't have fortunes. Some of these women are heirs to plantation-owning families where they would inherit seven, eight plantations, but even one or two could be extremely lucrative. And in their marriage contracts, it would spell out what was hers, what was his. And they would often, as I mentioned, keep their last names. And sometimes they would be named in lawsuits or they can bring lawsuits against other people. So that's mostly how we find out their lives and what they were doing. Not so much as diaries and journals that have yet to come to light. And so that's why Haitian Revolutionary history, as it is written, is a very masculine story, even though, as we're getting here, there's of course, a ton of women involved doing various things. Marie Bunel, for example, who ends up being very good friends with Queen Marie-Louise. Their husbands are good friends, but the women are also very good friends. And when Marie Bunel is arrested during the Rochambeau period of time, when Leclerc has died, she's arrested in connection with the revolution. She's jailed. Her husband is also jailed, but like Toussaint Louverture, he is sent to France to the same city, but he's given the city for a prison. So he doesn't stay in the actual prison. He can't leave the boundaries of the city and he's under constant surveillance.

But she wrote to Rochambeau, we have a very famous letter of hers. She writes to Rochambeau pleading her innocence. She says, "I didn't aid my husband." Her husband, incidentally, gave all the treasury. He was treasurer general. And when Leclerc landed with this massive fleet and Christophe knew what was happening. So he said, "give me all the money." And Bunel did. And so then when Leclerc asked him for the money, he



was like, "oh, I already gave it to Christophe," who technically was commander of the city in the French army, technically. "So I gave it to him." "Oh, you're going to jail. You're getting deported." And so then his wife as well, as I mentioned in connection with him, she's there in prison, but she writes to Rochambeau and she pleads her case. And how she leaves Saint-Domingue is she says, someone came to her house. She wouldn't say who and said, "your life is in danger. You need to flee." And so she went on the next trip and she left to go to Philadelphia. And that's how she escaped from the colony. But she keeps up her correspondence with Marie-Louise. She's very good, Marie Bunel, at making compote like jams and things. She asks Marie-Louise for fruit, dried fruits. She asks her for all kinds of things. Marie-Louise in turn asks Marie Bunel for skirts, for fabric, to make dresses, for all kinds of things. So there's a lot going on if we take away the part where we just want to know about the troops and the military strikes and who's killing who. And there are all these other stories there that we could uncover. But we don't have the traditional sources maybe, but we have sources. We don't need powers of invention to find the women in the story.

AT: So following the revolution, we see the formation of the Kingdom of Haiti and Henri Christophe basically declares himself king. And so Marie-Louise is his queen consort. So what happened there?

MD: Well, lots of things. So the revolutionaries declare independence and initially a man named Jean-Jacques Dessalines becomes emperor. So he makes an empire where he's emperor Jacques I. And I should mention that Napoleon has also made himself an emperor at the time. So that Republican France he loves is now the empire of France. But there are problems. So I talked about the factions and things in earlier comments. Those kind of actions don't just evaporate just because now everybody's independent. And so Dessalines has trouble consolidating his power. He makes Christophe general in chief of the Haitian army because Christophe is this very astute military man. So Marie-Louise and Dessalines's wife, Marie Claire Hèreuse are very good friends. They're constantly together. Their children have the same nanny actually. And their children stay with the Christophes sometimes because Dessalines will write and say, or Christophe will say, "the children are doing well." And Marc-Homer Hélène, that's the nanny. She's bringing up the children all very nicely. And he reports on it. But Dessalines is assassinated in October 1806. And by rival generals in the southern section of the now free and independent Haiti, most of whom had been formerly free people of color, whereas Dessalines had been enslaved.

So there's a lot going on there. But the biggest thing is they don't want a monarchy. They want to do a republic. And so immediately after Dessalines's death, they named Christophe interim head, they don't use the word president yet, interim head of the government. And then they deliberate for a few months and create a constitution for the now Republic of Haiti. This constitution, unlike all the other constitutions, Toussaint Louverture's, Dessalines's, does not name Christophe as president because they want to have an election. But it's not like an election like we have now. It sort of is except the people aren't voting. They have electors, delegates are the ones who are supposed to vote. And they represent the people except the people don't vote at all. This is how it was done in France as well at the time. So they say they want to be like the United States, but it's really actually more like Republican France.

And actually Christophe gets elected as president. But by this time it's late December, he is highly suspicious. First of all, he knows they've killed Dessalines. They keep saying, come to Port-au-Prince and he lives way up in the north, in Cap-Haïtien, renamed now. They say, "come to Port-au-Prince so you can be sworn in." He is convinced, rightly or wrongly, we don't know because he doesn't show up there, that they want to kill him. He refuses to be sworn into office. But if he doesn't get sworn into office, their argument is he can't be the president. So he leads a strike on the city on January 1st, which is the anniversary of Haitian independence. And they fight him and they keep him from entering the city. And this starts a 13-year civil war. It's 1807 now. It starts a 13-year civil war between the north and the south. So initially Christophe flees to go back to the north. He declares himself president of the earth and the seas of the state of Haiti. Yes, very modest title. Pétion is

declared president of the Republic of Haiti. So you've got a state in the north, a republic in the south. Many, many things happen. There's differences in governance. There's different constitutions. There's lots of fighting, constant infighting. But in March 1811, Christophe, contrary to popular belief, has a council of state. These are his advisors. He had told them, "come together to create a new constitution." His entire thing was, "we need to get rid of every remnant of the French." At one point, he even says, "we need to change the language to English." Like he doesn't go so far as to say, "let's speak Haitian Creole." He's like, "we need to get rid of all their laws. Everything that reminds us of them, we need to get rid of eventually so that future generations don't even remember them anymore." He hates them in part because that little child I told you about, his firstborn, the French killed him. He sent his son to France to be educated. And when, in revenge for his father's actions, they throw him into the streets, essentially, and he dies this penniless orphan.

So it's safe to say Christophe hates them with a passion that knows no bounds. In fact, at one point once he's king, he bans French goods. He says, "first they try to talk to us in treaties and now they want to talk to us in paintings." Like he bans pictures of the Bourbons from circulating in Haiti. Like no one's allowed to even have any pictures of them or any French kings or any French paraphernalia. And so this council of state that he wants to get rid of all vestiges of French laws and everything makes a Code Henri, which is also baffling because there's a Code Noir and a Code Napoleon. And he told them to get rid of everything French and they made a Code Henri. But they say, we want you to be king. And in June of 1811, he and Queen Marie-Louise are officially crowned king and queen of Haiti. Their other son, the remaining son was born in 1804, Prince Victor Henri is the heir to the throne. They have two daughters, Améthyste and Athénaïre and they are the princesses. And they create this entire system of nobility. They live in the gorgeous, magnificent palace called Sans-Souci, which means without worry in French. Christophe builds a massive fortress on top of one of the highest mountain peaks in Haiti. It's called the Citadel Henri because of course, we're just going to name, he also renames the city of Cap-Haïtien Cap-Henri in case you're sensing a theme here, as kings are wont to do. And life on that part of the island continues as now the kingdom of Haiti, but still with that republic in the south. So an ongoing civil war, skirmishes happening to varying degrees and every period in that time.

AT: And so what is Marie-Louise doing as queen?

MD: Well, when she takes her oath, she says what a queen would say. She says, "I'm going to be a good mother. I'm going to educate the children, especially my son so he will be a good heir to the throne." She throws parties, not dissimilar to what Marie Claire Heureuse had done as Empress, when she was Empress of Haiti. She throws parties. She has magnificent dresses made for her and her daughters. She rides around in carriages that are remarked upon by foreigners as some of the most elaborate, magnificent carriages they've ever seen. It's reported on in England. They report the dresses and the carriages, the diamonds. Yes, they have all kinds of jewels. Their crowns are evidently these very ornate expensive. There's wild reports. "Oh, they cost a million dollars." I mean, think about it. It's the 19th century. If it really is a million dollars' worth of jewels and diamonds and things. But of course, there's some element of exaggeration and there was also some element of parody. But what I always say is Marie-Louise largely escapes the kind of derision her husband gets. He's treated in the foreign press as either like "this is a marvel," which can be a good thing or a bad thing, depending on the writer, or "this is absolutely ridiculous. It's absurd." It's treated as just this gigantic farce. He's caricatured. But she's written about as this sort of doe-eyed lovely woman who's kind to the poor.

When Christophe gives speeches, he says things like, "I'm going to donate this amount of money to this almshouse or to this orphanage because I know my wife will like it." He says, "I'm going to let some political prisoners out of prison because I know Marie-Louise will like it," when it's her feast today, for example. So she has this reputation of trying to encourage him to have clemency, to be kind, to be pacific, to end war. And we don't know to what extent this is, because he's very good, her husband, at creating persona. And he has all these writers writing on his behalf. And he corresponds with Thomas Clarkson and William Wilberforce and all

these famous abolitionists, Prince Saunders in the United States and all this clergy. And he's very good at creating the sense that the kingdom of Haiti is just so prosperous. Everyone in the world needs to recognize Haitian independence because of course they know what no other nation had at that point.

AT: So I wonder how much of this was political strategy in the sense that he is a military man. I'm getting a lot of strong man vibes in the political sense of the term. And how much of what they were putting out there in terms of he's saying, "oh well I'll do this nice thing because my wife wants me to." And how much of that was about giving him a way to do things without seeming weak, like what he would have seen as weak, like showing mercy.

MD: Oh, that's so interesting. It's actually, I think in his case, maybe the opposite. He does this so that he seems strong. Okay, let me give you an example. So he has a royal bodyguards/police force. They're called the Royal Dahomet, like Dahomey back in Africa. But Queen Marie-Louise also has a force and it's women. It's a corps of female "warriors." So they're not in combat. And what are hers called? The Amazone, after the Black force of women in Africa. So they're doing a lot of creolization, but also he's doing it in a way where it's not like, "oh, women are these delicate little flowers that have to be protected," that women can also be warriors. They're in his nobility. And of course there's distinctions between a woman who's going to be in that corps and somebody's wife or somebody's daughter. But at the same time, there isn't this idea of, we're going to make it so that women seem like this really protected, frail class. And in fact, his school system that he sets up, he tries to set up a national school system and he wants women to be educated and he's corresponding with Wilberforce and Clarkson. And they're encouraging this. They're like, "if you want to be a really free, liberal society, you have to educate the women and they have to have female teachers." And so he's trying to recruit female teachers, but he really can't get any women to come over to the island. And so right before his death, he's saying, "I really want to get this system off the ground, but I can't find enough female teachers. Can you help me? Can you send me some?" Because the British were really good at sending all these teachers over. They sent mathematicians and chemists and people that instruct people how to administer a vaccine for smallpox and all of these. He's really ramping up music and art. He's got a painting academy and he's really trying to create something very different from what the world had ever seen with these British elements and French elements and African elements there together. And part of that involved not necessarily propping women up as just solely this delicate people who have no rights and can't do anything for themselves.

AT: I find the idea that she had her own not-quite-army of ladies awesome, but I do feel like we need to point out that the Dahomey never referred to their group of fighting women as Amazons. That was very much like the European term applied to this African army of women. And so it is sort of fascinating how we're looking at the ways colonialism shapes people's attitudes. So even as this guy was like, "we are going to reject all anything French," but you can't get away from the idea that, well, everyone knows them as the Dahomey Amazons. So that's what we're going to call our group in reference to them, even though they never called themselves that. Like it's just so entrenched.

MD: Right and he probably doesn't know that necessary, right? Because they get their information about Africa from the European writings. And we know that because Christophe's most prominent minister, a man named Baron de Vastey, references Mungo Park. He references all the Spanish Conquistadors. They get all their information about what happened during the Spanish conquest of the island in the 16th century, or starting with Columbus actually in the 15th century, 16th century, all that from the Spanish sources. They recognize that it is a problem, but they don't have a way to, they don't recognize necessarily that that naming is a problem, if that makes sense. They may have very well known, this is the name the Europeans are calling them by, but what the people there actually, that for sure, they wouldn't know because the Europeans are writing everything down

from their own perspective. And it really comes to the fore when after the fact, other Haitian writers who write about the Amazone, because some of this cultural knowledge is now being lost, think they're named after this mythical force that we think never existed from South America. And they say, "oh, he named them after that." And it's like, well, no, he definitely named them after the Dahomey "Amazon," but the later Haitian writers, again, after that cultural knowledge is getting filtered through and filtered down and watered down are now saying, "oh, it's the South American forest." So that's how I know they really don't have the understanding and awareness to be able to say, let's come up with a different name or call them what they called themselves. They're not quite there.

AT: I'm also contemplating here the fact that, as you have said, there is no Black person on that island who was not forcibly transported themselves or descended from people who came over being enslaved. So we are only a few generations removed at most from Africa. So the fact that all of that cultural knowledge was lost even by the people themselves who were there is, I would say one of the most devastating aspects of slavery is that indoctrination out of people's own culture, which we see with indigenous people as well. But it's just tragic.

MD: It really is. And I mean, just to add to, not that we need to add to the tragedy, but something I think about all the time is, so enslaved people in Saint-Domingue were branded like enslaved people in many places, but they could have multiple brands on them because every time they changed owners, they'd get a new stamp. They called it a stamp. And so when you see fugitive slave notices, which really is what sets them apart, I think, in my mind from the North American context, from what's now the United States, is they could have four stamps on their body. But they had those stamps, they would stay on them their whole lives. And so as they're free people now in independent Haiti, first of all, they have all these stamps, right? Which are acting kind of like a history. They were owned by this person, they were owned by that person, they were owned by this person. But because the people now in charge are named after their enslavers, for example, Dessalines is the name of his enslaver. There's people with this stamp of Dessalines on their body. And I just think, how do you relate to someone? He himself was formerly enslaved. So it's not him, the one who's done it, but they are hearing this name, seeing this name on them every day. And like, how do you forget? How would you move forward and forget? Or how does the trauma become less and less?

And then the other issue is, so cultural knowledge is being lost, languages are being lost, histories are being lost, except the ones that are stamped and ingrained on someone's body, the very history that you might want to be lost, can't ever be lost. And then there's still ongoing slavery in the world, which is important because the slave trade is still going on. And Christophe had a policy that if those slaving ships entered Haitian waters, he directed the Haitian military to capture them, confiscate them. That's how they got a lot of their ships and set the enslaved people in the hold free. And they would detail in their newspapers, "145 victims of the odious traffic in human flesh" - that's a direct quote - "were set free." But he would also describe what would happen afterwards. He said, some of them, they're dancing and crying in the street. He had two children, he said, were speaking Hausa, and that they heard Hausa being spoken in the port and ran towards those people as if they were their countrymen, they said, their fellow countrymen. They were just so happy to hear their native language being spoken there. So even though there is, there's cultural knowledge being lost, there's also a lot of, as you said, there's people around who remember, who have different languages, religions, traditions, and now they're all figuring out, how is it all going to work together, essentially.

AT: I just have to wonder with all of those brands, because as we've discussed, there were Black people who owned Black people, which I'm assuming means that some of those brands came from other Black people that they are now living side by side with ostensibly as equals, and that must have been rough.

MD: And I'm so glad that you brought that up, because what made me think of this actually was not the

Dessalines case. When I saw the notices for the people with the Dessalines stamps, because I thought to myself, "oh, wow, that must be weird," but Dessalines, they know he wasn't their enslaver right? That he wasn't an enslaver, that he himself had been enslaved. But one of his most prominent secretaries, a man named Juste Chanlatte, a free man of color from a very prominent family of free people of color. They were huge enslavers, and there are lots of people with his name, Chanlatte, stamped on them. And his mother's name, she had a different last name, but her name. And he is a prominent member of the government of Dessalines and then of Christophe. He's the editor of the national newspaper, the Gazette Officielle, the official gazette of the state of Haiti, and then the Royal Gazette of the Kingdom of Haiti for some time. And so as he's standing up there with Dessalines, who's reading the Declaration of Independence, which he had a hand in writing, Chanlatte did, as he's there undersigning Dessalines proclamations with his name, Chanlatte, writing abolitionist pamphlets. Yes, he's born into the family, but it's his family nonetheless. And they see and would hear this name and know this name. And so I think about it all the time of, it's asking a lot to have people try to live together in harmony after this. And I think that this is an under-examined element of Haiti's civil war is, yes, there was a contest between monarchy and republicanism and who wants power and there's power contest and there's issues of color there. But there's also issues, just the much more sort of stark issue of who was free and who was enslaved, but also who was an enslaver and who enslaved whom and cultural memory around that. Which again, it just, it's not going to evaporate within one generation within just a few years, because if we go to 1811 or 18, or even 1804, the moment of independence, it's just not even a generation yet. It's people who still remember that. They remember who somebody was during the colonial era and what their family did.

AT: Now, if anyone remembers at the start of this conversation, I mentioned that Marie-Louise was queen of Haiti from 1811 to 1820, so less than a decade that this kingdom even existed. So spoiler, it's not like she died or anything, more drama happened. So obviously this was a very turbulent time in a lot of ways. So could you tell us what led to the ousting of the "royal family?"

MD: Yes. So you also asked me what Marie-Louise does. Well, she celebrates her feast today in August every year with parties that last 10, 11, 12 days that have hundreds of people in attendance. They have fireworks and light shows that rival anything that we've seen represented to us on *Bridgerton*. They have lanterns, they have balloons, they have fireworks, they have amazing things. And on one of those feast days in August, 1820, they decide to go to a church in Limonade. So they would sort of travel around to different cities also and celebrate with different regions as well as in the capital. And they're in the church and the priest is saying the Mass and Christophe keels over and has a massive stroke. And they don't know that it's a stroke. He hits his head on the ground. That's how violent the fall is. And he's got all these doctors with him, foreign doctors. So the one who's with him at the moment is a Scottish doctor named Duncan Stewart. Christophe loses consciousness. He revives him and they transport him to a nearby palace of theirs and try to save his life. And they do, but it's clear that Christophe is partially paralyzed after this.

And now they're trying to figure out the royal family, the doctors, what they're going to do, what they're going to tell the Haitian people. And it's not like news today. It's not like they report in the paper, "oh, the King had a stroke." No, this has got to be hush-hush. But of course people know, there's other nobles around. There was a church full of people.

And in Christophe's absence from the Capitol and from his palace in Milot, Haiti, and the capital of Cap-Haïtien, the nobles form a kind of conspiracy against him. They start imagining life without him and they're imagining, because they aren't getting news, that he's going to die or has perhaps already died. They are not sure. And his son, who's a teenager, they're thinking, "we're going to let this 16-year-old ascend to the throne?" So they're trying to think about what they're going to do. But in the meantime, by September, as anyone who's known somebody who's had a stroke could tell you, that sometimes they just start to get better and they start to

recover. And it seems kind of miraculous. Sometimes they don't and sometimes they do and he gets better. And he starts being able to walk around and he starts being able to give direction and he's talking. And so he's preparing to return to a city where people he believes are in his inner circle have formed a conspiracy against him. And he's, by this time, also a bit agitated because he knows he's not quite all there. He sends Marie-Louise away. He sends the children away. He keeps the Baron de Vastey and the doctor with him. When he returns to the palace, the nobles who formed this conspiracy against him are stunned. They can't believe he's back, but they're not deterred. They're not deterred because they've been putting out their feelers. They've been saying, "don't you think he's really harsh? And don't you think the labor used to build the citadel, wasn't that kind of like slavery? Don't you think we might not be better off? Don't you think we could have a different system if he were gone?"

And at the same time, there's a conflict. Something happens in the city of Saint-Marc, which is the largest city that's on the border between the republic and the kingdom, on the western side of Haiti. And there's two military officers who get into a squabble. And the quickest way to defame someone, your enemy, in the kingdom was to say, "oh, they're colluding with the republic." Because Christophe is already paranoid about this. So that's what happened. Both accuse each other. And I don't know if it's the effect of the stroke or he wasn't in his right mind, or perhaps this was just part of his personality at this point. But when the two men appear before him, he just decides one is guilty and that the other one is not and passes summary judgment, which is execution. And the other one goes back home and turns on him, turns everyone. And the military there had been partial to the executed man as well. They were on his side and they rebel and join the republic. And from that city north, it spreads. And the nobles who turned against him already sense this opening. On October 8th, 1820, sometime between 7:30 and 10:30 at night, there's different reports, Christophe summons the doctor to him. He supposedly asks him, "where's my heart?" He says, "your heart's here." He says, "okay, leave me, bring my wife and my kids in." He kisses Marie-Louise. He tells the children he loves them. He tells them to go away. And he shoots himself in the heart.

The guards rush in, everybody rushes in. And there's just this frenzy. And they tell Marie-Louise, "you have to take his body and bury his body somewhere far away immediately." Because after Dessalines was assassinated and shot off his horse, his men didn't, who were on his side, didn't take his body. And it was dragged through the streets of Port-au-Prince. And he never had a formal burial because of that. And this is an infamous episode in Haitian history, there's different strands of telling that story. But so they tell his wife, "you need to do this." So different elements of this story exist as well, but supposedly they carry the body up to the citadel, which winds up in a dangerous 35-degree angle. Barefoot in some of the stories, they take his body, they bury it in a battery there, and then they pour limestone over it. When they return down, they go back down the mountain, they go to their home in Sans-Souci at the palace there. It's being plundered. People are shooting at things, stealing the jewels, stealing the crowns, stealing everything, stealing the money. They're taking everything.

Queen Marie-Louise and her children are arrested. They're taken initially to Cap-Haïtien. And in a very tragic turn of events, when a man named President Boyer, who's president of the Republic at the time, he says he sends a directive saying, "don't harm the royal family." He claims the directive got there too late. The conspiring nobles, not the military from Saint-Marc, the conspiring nobles execute Prince Victor reportedly below the window of his mother, who's screaming. And he's only 16. And this is just seen by those who are there. There's a lot of foreigners who lived in the kingdom, not just the Scottish doctor, his teacher, a man who's not much older than him, he's 19 or 20, named William Wilson is present and says it was so horrific because they didn't see why, onlookers said, why they had to kill Prince Victor. He's only 16. Prince Victor reportedly, according to a Swedish artillery officer who was there, who witnessed the execution, pled for his life. And General Richard, who was the head of this conspiracy said, "yeah, but you could be the rival to the throne. You could claim rightfully that the throne is yours. So we have to get rid of you." They kill him. They kill Christophe's son from a previous relationship, an older child he had. They don't harm Marie-Louise or the two daughters, but they take

them to Port-au-Prince. So she's from the north. Their entire life is in the north. All the people who know and love them are in the north. They take them to Port-au-Prince. And I just think, what would their life have been like around people who hate them? People who don't believe in monarchies, who've been told since 1807 that monarchs, Christophe's called Caligula there. Like they literally called him Caligula. So people who've been raised there, who've been living there in these generations, what's happening? But she petitions. She stays there for a while, probably as long as she could bear. She petitions the president. She says, "I'd like to leave." The Clarkson's are willing to help her. And she takes her daughter since she goes to England.

AT: So I have to say, when you were describing the vibe she gave off as queen, like obviously there is that degree of philanthropy and everything. But I'm also honestly getting Marie Antoinette vibes in the sense of, Marie Antoinette was highly vilified for the level of opulence that she was demonstrating, which I don't think that's deserved, but we're not here to talk about her. But given that that would have been fairly recent in memory, because that was obviously, one of the things that contributed to the French Revolution was this perception of the queen as, "you are dripping in jewels and wasting all of this opulent food and having extravagant parties." Like when you were describing Marie-Louise's feast day, that's sort of what it sounded like. And her over-the-top carriage and all of her diamonds. Was this the sense with her as well? Like, did the public have that perception or am I drawing a similarity where there is none?

MD: It's so interesting. It's hard to know because the way that the press works is not like a regular person can just write an op-ed in it and like say, "you're wasting all this money." And then the journalists work on behalf of the state. So they're not going to like report that. So they say when Marie-Louise, she had her own carriage, her son has his own carriage. The daughters have their own carriage. The nobles usually all have their own carriages pulled by eight horses. So you can imagine the heaviness of the carriage that needs to be pulled by eight horses. So yes, it's definitely gilded, when you see that it's painted, crowns painted, there's gold in the paint. And at one point, Christophe says that he wants to tile a room in gold, not doubloons, like quads, four. So four layers of gold. He wants to tile the whole thing floor to ceiling in that. Like, it's ridiculous. But there's several things. The people are not super poor under his rule. The people who are laboring, the laborers, that's a different story, but they have no power and voice to tell us and to protest and hardly anyone to record their sorrows, if you will, right, until after the fact. And even then, it's for political aims. So that's not really the focus. And it's interesting that even his enemies don't necessarily say like, you and your family are dripping with jewels and she's giving off Marie Antoinette vibes, or even like Josephine vibes. Like they don't go after her.

But when she's in England, one person publicly goes after her. So the Clarksons are very good friends with William Wordsworth and his wife and his sister. And they're like, "oh, we have this queen of Haiti. Would you like to meet her?" So they meet her and things. But then after that, William Wordsworth's sister writes to Catherine Clarkson, Thomas Clarkson's wife, and says, "oh, after you all left, we were just playing around and we decided to make a poem after Ben Jonson's Huntress Queen and Fair or something like that, this very famous poem of Ben Jonson. And it's making fun of, it's a parody of Queen Marie-Louise. Princess Ebon Bright, Ebony, it's making fun of her. And then at the end, Dorothy writes, "oh, isn't that so funny Willy?" Willy, that's what she called him. And Sarah Hutchinson, which was his sister-in-law, they put this, just off the top of their heads. And "we like to make fun of royalty here" basically, which is so funny because they live with royalty. And for a time, the Clarksons stopped talking to the Wordsworths until Dorothy apologized. But it's a bad apology. I would describe the letter as, "I'm so sorry if this offended you, it was not my intention to offend you. If this was something that one could take as an offense, I'm very sorry." It was that kind of apology.

So people mostly made fun of them for thinking they were royalty more than for their opulent lifestyle. And in fact, Marie-Louise effectively auctioned off many of her jewels when she lived in England so that she could move to Italy. The climate in England did not suit her as one might imagine. She and her daughters were very

ill there and they were constantly seeing doctors and going to Bath and doing all the things one does when they're trying to revive their health in England. And they sell all kinds of things like crowns and robes and jewels. And the jewels are described in the papers, sapphires and diamonds and rubies. And they leave and they go to Italy and they eventually settle in the city of Pisa and where several tragedies end up befalling them. The first daughter, she dies very tragically, not long after they get there. And then the second daughter later. And the first one had complications from an enlarged heart, which of course they wouldn't have known about and been able to treat. And the second one hit her head in a violent fall and ended up dying in this very tragic way. Marie-Louise after this, this can give you some sense of what we can read into the situation. After this, Marie-Louise writes to President Boyer after her second daughter's death and says, "I want to come back to Haiti. I want to be around people who know me, who don't think it's strange to have a Black woman walking around." Because in Pisa they're hounded. Journalists, people are constantly writing stories. Oh, there's tons of these, "I saw her eating, she looked like a miserable, fat Black woman eating her macaroni." It's terrible, the stuff they write about her. "She's a fat, greasy wench." It's horrible. And people who claim to like have known her and reviewed her like, "oh, she's so sweet and nice," but their descriptions are like laden with all this racism.

So she writes to President Bouyer, she said, "I'm alone. I have had this terrible tragedies befall me. I implore your grace, please just let me come back. Please send my sister over here," who's married to a man who would eventually become the president of Haiti. "Please send my sister over here to get me." He says, "nope, you can't come back, but I'll send your sister." And she ends up staying there and she dies in Italy, but they both stay there. And they're buried in Italy. Marie-Louise donated money for a church to be built in Pisa called the Santo Nino Chapel. Her daughters are buried there in a dedicated sacristy, which is big and amazing because she paid for it, under marble headstones. She's there. Her daughters are there. Not really anymore because the church was bombed during World War II, but in principle, that's where they were. Her sister, Genevieve Coidavid, in contrast, is buried in Pisa and has a headstone there. Marie-Louise's waiting maid, a Black woman named Zifferina, also has a headstone there, died in Pisa. Tragically, however, before her death, Marie-Louise likely had diabetes-induced gangrene. She had her foot amputated and the doctor in Pisa who amputated her foot donated it to the medical society to be studied. And so for a while, they had this Black woman's foot that they're studying. And when Zifferina died, her body, because she was just this waiting maid, not a woman of noble means, was donated to the hospital and was on display at some point in the museum. So it was this very tragic history of just how Black people and Black women in general were treated in Europe at the time as scientific specimens.

AT: I do wonder if the opulence and extravagance of the years of the reign, how much of that was also political. And this could just be me wanting to ascribe political strategy to everything, but you mentioned that Henri Christophe really was adamant about presenting this image of the kingdom of Haiti as strong and rich and powerful and therefore to be taken seriously. And so I would imagine part of it was that presentation of, "see, we're just like other royals."

MD: Yes, 100%. It was, "we are just like other royals, except we don't have slavery. We don't believe in colonialism. And we've outlawed conquest and empire" because in their constitutions, they say "we can never engage." They have like different clauses saying "no conquest. We cannot extend the boundaries of the country." Even when Dessalines is an emperor, in his version of the constitution, it says that conquest is banned, that the island is limited to the bounds of Hispaniola. But they do think that the east is in their realm. So this causes some problems because they consistently say the realm of the natural boundaries, that's what they call it. So they do these very novel things in terms of, because sadly banning slavery and colonialism was extremely novel. But then they also do things like "we're just like you, we have carriages and palaces," multiple! Christophe had many, many palaces all over the North. Forts, he amassed, to this day, they're still there up at



the Citadel, massive amounts of cannons and bullets. And so they have a lot going on because they want to be strong. They want to display their wealth, but they also want to seem, they use the word of the 19th century, "civilized." "We have schools and we have hospitals" and even though they knew how to inoculate against smallpox, like naturally, and medical healers, enslaved medicine women, essentially, and then in the free, they had that knowledge. But it's like, "oh, the vaccine is coming over to us from Europe." They wanted to do things, "oh, we aren't going to change the language of the island, Hausa, even though we have Hausa speakers here, we're going to change it to English." So there is a lot of posturing to the extent it's such strong posturing that some of the onlookers say later, not the ones who were there, because they obviously knew that it was true that they were living in this opulence and wealth, say, "oh, I don't even think any of that existed." So you started to get all these narratives 10, 20, 30 years out, because when travelers would go to Haiti after the king's downfall in 1820, the palace, as I mentioned, had been pillaged. It's a wreck. And then a massive earthquake strikes in May 1842. It's estimated to have been an 8.1 magnitude. It's epicenter is essentially Cap-Haïtien. Milot is like four or five miles from there. So really close. A huge tsunami sweeps through. 10,000 people die. It destroys the palace, essentially irreparable. The citadel is up high enough, so it's not really affected by it. But so anyone who would come to Haiti after 1842 could use their powers of imagination, but could never imagine what it was fully at the time as someone who had seen it, lived in it, experienced it. And they tended to treat Haitian testimony, those who would say what happened, as delusional, if not outright lies or exaggerations. And so you started to get a lot of those, "oh, it didn't really exist. It wasn't really like that." And in fact, the people who lived there compared the palace to the Louvre, to Tuileries. They couldn't believe their eyes. They thought it was the most magnificent thing that they'd ever seen. And when you go to the Citadel today, you go all the way, you can tell. Just even looking at images of it. It's awe-inspiring. It's considered the eighth wonder of the world. That's how it was written about in cruise pamphlets when they used to take people to cruises there in the early 20th century. So it is a place of awe and wonder, like most places of awe and wonder, filled with massive contradictions and deep history, drama to extent we probably can never recreate or conceive of. And also a tragic tale wrapped in there.

AT: And so I guess this raises the question of, someone who spent less than a decade as queen consort of a kingdom that was dissolved. And as you've said, so much of the physical legacy that otherwise would have existed was gone and people don't even believe the eyewitness firsthand accounts. So what do you consider her legacy? Like, did her actions actually have any lasting impact in the long run?

MD: I think it's hard to think about her legacy since so much of it, we're piecing together after the fact, if that makes sense, that she appears in the frame of the kingdom in the writings of that era as this dutiful wife and mother and queen and very sweet and the letters. But we don't know how much of her influence was, "yes, I also want us to be educating women." She's clearly literate. She writes letters in her own hand. And she has a very shaky hand, which is important because that's the mark of someone who gained literacy later in life. We can see the difference between those who were actually formally educated and grew up writing and those who, including the men also, when when that case applies, she writes in a very shaky hand. But she clearly is able to correspond and have her own keep up her own correspondence. She has this corps of Amazons, which have, their lives were written about a lot in plays of the early 20th century, especially in the era of the Harlem Renaissance, depending on the writer. People want that story about the royal Dahomey and the Amazone to be kind of more radical than it is. Because they want to see in that this strong connection to Africa and a strong insistence on a connection with Africa. And so I would say in terms of her legacy is to me, what her story teaches us about. The absence of our real ability to know her thus far, other issues might come to light, but I think also in her treatment, I think more than having a legacy, we learn things and there are things we sort of already know, but no amount of opulence and wealth can buy security and freedom unequivocally that she was rich and went to Europe and had more money than most of the people who encountered her in the street is an

object of derision. That in her death, she can still be degraded and insulted. And that her strong support and ties to her husband really prevented her from being treated with the kind of reverence that other widows had. Suzanne Louverture, for example, is considered a tragic figure. Dessalines's widow, Marie-Claire, she lives her entire rest of her life in Haiti under various government pensions, first under Christophe and then under Boyer. She stays there and she lives there and her children live there. And Marie-Louise was treated differently. And maybe this goes back to your earlier point about this opulence and wealth, and maybe that treatment should tell us something that we can't verify, or intimate something to us because it's very different from the wives of even the other nobles. Baron de Vastey is killed the same night as Marie-Louise's son, Prince Victor. Eugène, that's Christophe's older son from a previous relationship I mentioned, he also has a wife. He's killed the same night. Their wives stay there. They live the rest of their days there. We can trace their families. We can do the genealogies. We know their genealogies. They live, they stay there. So it's not as if anyone connected to Christophe. But if you're the queen, you have a different level of responsibility to that connection. There's a different level of blame. Whereas maybe just being a noble's wife, I don't know, how involved were you in things? But she's there. She is the sovereign. She takes an oath as not just a wife, as a sovereign of the nation. And so in that sense, is she responsible also for everything her husband does? It's a question that we really don't ask, haven't asked that much. And in the face of her treatment, we might begin to ask it anew.

AT: *Awakening the Ashes: An Intellectual History of the Haitian Revolution* is available now from the University of North Carolina Press and I'll include a link in the description (<https://uncpress.org/book/9781469676845/awakening-the-ashes/>). Join us next time on the Infinite Women podcast, and remember: well-behaved women rarely make history.