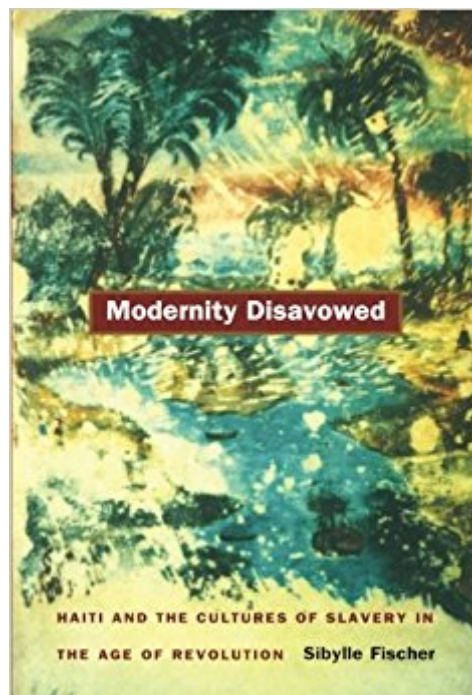




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Modernity Disavowed: Haiti And The Cultures Of Slavery In The Age Of Revolution (John Hope Franklin Center Books)



Synopsis

Modernity Disavowed is a pathbreaking study of the cultural, political, and philosophical significance of the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804). Revealing how the radical antislavery politics of this seminal event have been suppressed and ignored in historical and cultural records over the past two hundred years, Sibylle Fischer contends that revolutionary antislavery and its subsequent disavowal are central to the formation and understanding of Western modernity. She develops a powerful argument that the denial of revolutionary antislavery eventually became a crucial ingredient in a range of hegemonic thought, including Creole nationalism in the Caribbean and G. W. F. Hegel's master-slave dialectic. Fischer draws on history, literary scholarship, political theory, philosophy, and psychoanalytic theory to examine a range of material, including Haitian political and legal documents and nineteenth-century Cuban and Dominican literature and art. She demonstrates that at a time when racial taxonomies were beginning to mutate into scientific racism and racist biology, the Haitian revolutionaries recognized the question of race as political. Yet, as the cultural records of neighboring Cuba and the Dominican Republic show, the story of the Haitian Revolution has been told as one outside politics and beyond human language, as a tale of barbarism and unspeakable violence. From the time of the revolution onward, the story has been confined to the margins of history: to rumors, oral histories, and confidential letters. Fischer maintains that without accounting for revolutionary antislavery and its subsequent disavowal, Western modernity—including its hierarchy of values, depoliticization of social goals having to do with racial differences, and privileging of claims of national sovereignty—cannot be fully understood.

Book Information

Series: John Hope Franklin Center Books

Paperback: 384 pages

Publisher: Duke University Press Books; First Printing edition (April 30, 2004)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0822332906

ISBN-13: 978-0822332909

Product Dimensions: 6.5 x 1 x 9.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.5 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 3 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #324,404 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #17 in Books > History >

Americas > Caribbean & West Indies > Dominican Republic #28 in Books > History > Americas >

Customer Reviews

“Modernity Disavowed is a superior work. It is not only important but also needed.” —Alicia Ríos, coeditor of *The Latin American Cultural Studies Reader* “Modernity Disavowed is a tour de force. This magnificent work is the best book on its subject and at the forefront of a new wave of scholarship that is already transforming both the study of the Caribbean and the study of modernity. I fully expect it to become a classic in its field.” —Lewis R. Gordon, author of *Existential Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought*

“‘Modernity Disavowed’ is a superior work. It is not only important but also needed.” —Alicia Ríos, coeditor of *The Latin American Cultural Studies Reader*

Excellent intellectual history with particularly satisfying critical engagement with the icky Susan Buck-Morss’ neouniversalist racist and cutesy Hegel/Haiti conceit. What we call “The French Revolution” really began in the French Caribbean sugar colonies in the mid 18th century.

I must say that this book is a very good read. It’s one of those books that captivate me mostly because it has another view than most on the subject of colonialism. This doesn’t mean that it is an unbiased review. The Cuban section was done very good. That section was as unbiased as a book can get (pretty hard as most people interpret things differently). On the Dominican and Haitian section, you start to notice how differently those countries are treated. He depicts Dominicans as ignorant racists almost exclusively (as far as I can remember all mention of them is as self-hating racists), while Haitians are depicted as liberators, modernizers, an overall benign people that were victims of smear. He paints this tolerant picture that Haiti was a civilized country and downplays the fact that the whites of the colony were literally wiped out (either massacred or fled). This book fails to mention the last Haitian incursion on Dominican soil by ‘Emperor’ Faustin the first (following the steps of ‘Emperor’ Dessalines, the country’s first statesman). You cannot get the full reason why anti-haitianismo was/is so widespread without reading from original sources. From independence from Haiti to the reverting back to a colony, all of Haiti’s statesmen save for one tried to reconquer the Dominicans, in the process committing horrible war crimes. In particular, Faustin the first was the key needed (as his long reign was dedicated to torment the Hispanics). After that monster, there was a mulatto (who like Boyer, was much less a savage than the others) that tried to reach out to

the reach out to the racist white Dominican president (i.e Dictator) was by now fully convinced that in ordered to be saved by those savages, they needed outside help, and who else than Spain (what a tremendous disservice). To conclude, to me the Author is sincerely a Haitian apologist in the same way that there are Nazi apologist. while the desire was not extermination, it was a deliberate ideology to deprive a people of their land, language, and in short culture. Good book but read other (original sources) to get the full picture.

This extraordinary book won the Frantz Fanon Prize of the Caribbean Philosophical Association in 2004 and then went on to win the Modern Language Association's prize in Latin American Studies and the Latin American Studies Association prize in 2005 for outstanding book. It is all well deserved. This work challenges many of the contemporary approaches to the study of race by offering a rich interplay of the complexities of Latin American conceptions of whiteness and those in the U.S. as they converge in a unified denial of the existence---and more, the HUMANITY---of the first Black Republic in the New World. Dr. Fischer's array of specializations, which range from comparative literature, philosophy, and history to linguistic skills that include French, Spanish, German, and some of the indigenous languages of South America, brings out the nuance and challenges of the Haitian revolution as understood in Haiti and as feared, cheered on, or simply denied from without. This work is a must-read for anyone working in Africana thought, especially in Caribbean studies, and theories of modernity.

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