

Latin American Independence and Napoleon: A Chronology

- 1776 U.S. Declaration of Independence from England.
Viceroyalty of LaPlata established under Spanish colonial rule.
- 1799 Napoleon comes to power in France.
- 1803 England and France go to war with each other.
- 1804 Napoleon crowns himself emperor. Simon Bolivar was in attendance.
- 1805 Napoleon assumed Italy's crown.
Austria, Prussia, and Russia form an alliance against France.
In Rome, Simon Bolivar dedicated himself to the Emancipation of South America.
- 1806 Napoleon's brother Louis becomes king of Holland.
Napoleon defeated Prussians.
Continental System created to destroy English trade monopoly.
English Navy invaded Buenas Aires with 400 soldiers.
- 1807 Simon Bolivar visited the United States.
- 1808 Napoleon invaded Spain and Portugal.
Napoleon made Imperial Decree "liberating" Spain from monarchy.
Joseph Bonaparte, Napoleon's brother, suppressed Spanish revolt.
- 1809 Napoleon defeated the Austrians.
- 1810 Napoleon declared Rome the Second City of the Empire. (Next to Paris)
Inhabitants of Buenas Aires declare political autonomy from Spain.
City Council of Caracas, Venezuela deposed Spanish Viceroy and appointed Simon Bolivar the ruler of Caracas.
- 1812 Napoleon invaded Russia and was defeated.
Constitution of 1812 established in Spain--limited royal authority and created legislative system.
Spain still at war with France--War for Independence or Peninsular War.
- 1813 Bolivar declared "El Libertador" of Caracas.
- 1814 Ferdinand VII ruler of Spain: Rejects Constitution of 1812.
Napoleon Exiled to Elba.
Llaneros (horsemen from the plains) attack Caracas and Bolivar lost control.

The Haitian Revolution

Introduction

"The Haitian Revolution represents the most thorough case study of revolutionary change anywhere in the history of the modern world."
– Franklin Knight

"...the Haitian Revolution—a revolution small numbers and geography. Nevertheless, it had enormous ramifications for the study of world history."
– Howard Spodek

Economic

In 1789, the French colony of Saint Domingue was among the richest European colonies in the Americas. Its plantations produced sugar, cotton, indigo, and coffee. In fact, the colony produced 2/3 of French tropical imports and generated nearly 1/3 of all French foreign trade. The wealth rested on a brutal slave regime. St. Domingue's harsh punishments and poor living conditions were notorious in the Caribbean. Because of high mortality rates and expanding demands for labor, the majority of the colony's 500,000 slaves were African born.
– Richard W. Bulliet

St. Domingue produced close to 1/2 of all the sugar and coffee consumed in Europe and the Americas, as well as a substantial amount of cotton and indigo.
– David Geggus

Social Structure

40,000 white settlers, 30,000 *gens de couleur*, and 500,000 slaves

Whites were divided into two groups: *grand blancs* ("big whites") who were planters (resident or absentee), merchants, lawyers, etc. and the *petit blancs* who were estate managers, artisans, shop clerks, inn keepers, sailors, etc.

Gens de couleur were free men of color. They outnumbered whites in 2 of the 3 colonial provinces. Most lived in the country, where they made up rural police force and militia. Some *gens de couleur* were wealthy, educated in France, and owned slaves (approximately 25% of all slaves in Haiti). However, anyone in St. Domingue with a black ancestor was subject to legal restrictions. The *gens de couleur* were banned from holding public office and certain occupations (lawyer, doctor, etc.), forbidden to wear fine clothing, and were not allowed to sit with whites in church or when eating.

Slaves—St. Domingue had the most slaves in the Caribbean. From 1785-1790, Haiti imported over 30,000 slaves from Africa annually. As a result, young men around twenty years-old comprised a significant portion of the black population. Bantu slaves known as "Congoes" were the largest African group and formed 1/3 of the population. Despised by *gens de couleur* for their African origins and customs. Run away slaves living in mountain communities were called maroons.

Influence of the American and French Revolutions

A special regiment of approximately 750 *gens de couleur* fought with the French and colonial soldiers at the Siege of Savannah on October 9, 1779. Among the Haitian soldiers was Henri Christophe who eventually became the first president of independent Haiti.

"No one doubts that the French Revolution of 1789 precipitated the colony's destruction. If St. Domingue was a dormant volcano, as contemporaries liked to say, it needed only the shockwaves of the political earthquake in Paris to provoke its eruption."
– David Geggus

Leaders of the Haitian Revolution

Vincent Ogé

Ogé was a light-skinned mulatto and leader of the Society of the Friends of the Blacks. Ogé lobbied the French National Assembly to give the *gens de couleur* political representation and voting rights. Ogé claimed he did not intend to weaken slavery. Instead, he argued that making free men of color equal to whites in political rights would strengthen their devotion to France and reinforce the system of slavery. White colonists were determined to keep the *gens de couleur* out of politics. In 1790, Vincent Ogé raised an army of 300 *gens de couleur* and demanded an end to racial discrimination. The uprising was crushed; he was captured by the French and suffered excruciating punishment by being broken on the wheel. His martyrdom made him a symbol for the cause of the *gens de couleur*.

Francois Dominique Toussaint L'Ouverture

L'Ouverture was a self-educated former domestic slave. He offered to fight for the French if they would agree to free all of the slaves. With his help, the French army restored French control of St. Domingue after invasions by England and Spain. Many Africans joined his army. As a commander, he was brilliant at organization and diplomacy. His troops were well-trained and outlawed the slaughter of enemy troops. L'Ouverture eventually gained autonomous control of St. Domingue. In 1801, he issued a constitution for St. Domingue and declared himself governor for life. Napoleon in response sent forces to St. Domingue. Many of L'Ouverture's allies defected to the French side. In 1802, he was captured, sent to France where he died in prison.

Jean Jacques Dessalines

Dessalines served as L'Ouverture's inspector of agriculture. A menial slave, he disliked white society and spoke only *Creole*. He was a ruthless commander whose armies committed well-publicized atrocities against the French and their Haitian allies. His battle cry was "burn houses, cut off heads!" He achieved independence in 1804 for Haiti. He tried to expel all remaining Europeans and proclaimed himself emperor. He banned whites from owning land, as well as the cultivation of certain crops such as sugar.

Timeline of the Haitian Revolution

- 1789 Wealthy planters (*grand blancs*) seek local autonomy while *gens de couleur* demand equal rights with whites. Vincent Ogé goes to France to speak to the National Assembly.
- 1790 Whites fight whites for control of colonial assemblies. Ogé returns from France, organizes a military force, and demands an end to racial discrimination. He is captured, tortured, and executed by planter forces.
- 1791 National Assembly grants *gens de couleur* born of free parents equal rights to whites (including suffrage) Whites announce they will not honor the decree. Government power collapses. August Uprising. On August 14, slaves motivated by Boukman and armed with machetes march from plantation to plantation killing, looting, and burning the fields. 100,000 join the cause in the next two weeks. By the end of 1791, slaves killed 4,000 whites, burned 180 sugar plantations, and took control of 1/3 of the island.
- 1792 In March, the National Assembly grants equal rights to all free persons Jacobins send 7,000 troops to St. Domingue to stop the revolt; believe all whites are royalists or separatists French agents deport the governor and dissolve the colonial assembly; *gens de couleur* promoted to public office in an alliance with the Republic under the control of the Jacobins.
- 1793 At request of white planters, Great Britain invades St. Domingue August 1793, a Jacobin commissioner abolished slavery in Haiti in order to gain black allies High point of power by *gens de couleur*; now revolution is between the *gens de couleur* and black slaves
- 1794+ National Convention under the Jacobins abolishes slavery and grants equal rights to all black men Years of constant warfare (Whites supported by England vs. French supported by *gens de couleur* and slaves) French, with help from Toussaint L'Ouverture, finally defeats British in 1798. Revolution and war for independence now led by Toussaint L'Ouverture L'Ouverture overcomes his rivals to rule St. Domingue autonomously
- 1800 L'Ouverture rules supreme in St. Domingue; he tries to rebuild the colony and repair its shattered economy by restoring the plantation system. Ex-slaves are obligated to work on the plantations in return of the produce
- 1801 L'Ouverture issues a constitution for the island and named himself governor for life; he also annexed Santo Domingo, a French territory, and abolished slavery there as well Napoleon, angered by L'Ouverture's actions, invades. French lose 40,000 men to wounds and yellow fever.
- 1803-04 L'Ouverture captured, deported, and died in a French prison in 1803. Leadership falls to Jean Jacques Dessalines. When Napoleon tries to reinstitute slavery, the island erupts in revolt. French wage a war of genocide against the black population but to no avail. Napoleon eventually admits defeat and turns attention to fighting the British. Haiti gains its independence in 1804.

The Mexican Revolution

Latin American political independence was achieved as part of the general Atlantic revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries. They were influenced by four major events outside of Latin America:

- American Revolution 1776-1789
- French Revolution 1789-1815
- Haitian Revolution 1791 on the island of St. Dominique, a French colony
 - Whites and free people of color tried to break away from French rule.
 - Then, the slave population revolted under the leadership of Toussaint L'Overture. In 1804, he established a free republic of Haiti.
 - This revolution was a threat to ruling elites all over the Caribbean. Slaves taking over masters? Scary!
- French Invasion of Portugal and Spain in 1808 led to chaotic politics in Spain.

By 1830, the former Spanish and Portuguese colonies had become independent nations. Many of the leaders had shared ideals: representative government, careers open to talent, freedom of commerce and trade, the right to private property, and a belief in the individual as the basis of society. There was a general belief that the new nations should be sovereign and independent states and that they should be large enough to be economically competitive.

By 1854, slavery had been abolished everywhere except Brazil and Cuba and Puerto Rico (and the United States). Early promises to end Indian tribute and taxes on mestizos were not successful because the new nations needed the money.

Four major theaters of operation:

1) In **Mexico**, the revolution was essentially conservative.

The potential revolutionary groups were the creoles (Europeans born in Americas) and the Indians and mestizos (mixed heritage.) Since the revolution in France and Haiti both came from the people, Mexican creole leaders wanted to avoid losing their status and power. Under the leadership of Augustin de *Iturbide*, a Creole official at the head of the army, established Mexico as an independent country with an emperor (Iturbide) in **1821**.

This happened after a revolt led by Father Miguel de *Hidalgo* who was a priest that led a group of Indians and mestizos in a series of skirmishes against the government. Hidalgo was captured and executed, but there was still support among Indians and mestizos for establishing a new government. When Iturbide led the army against these insurgents in 1820, he was able and willing to compromise with them if they would follow him as the

emperor. This meant that Mexico was now independent of Spain, but it was not democratic, it was a monarchy.

2. **Northern South America** a movement centered in Caracas began in 1810, two years after Napoleon invaded Spain. Simon Bolivar emerged as the leader.

Bolivar was successful because:

- He was passionate and inspired by Napoleon. He attended Napoleon's coronation in 1804.
- He was smart enough to see an opportunity when it arose—Spain was in chaos, so it would not be able to stifle a revolt.
- He was an excellent military leader, winning battles in Venezuela, Colombia, and Ecuador between 1817 and 1822. This area was called Gran Colombia until 1830.
- He received aid from Haiti and promised to abolish slavery.

Political differences and regional identities led to the break up of Gran Colombia. Bolivar became disillusioned with the fragmentation that reflected nationalism and regional identity, but he did not allow anyone to crown him emperor as Napoleon had. This may have been a mistake. As Bolivar lost credibility, Gran Colombia disintegrated. It ended when Bolivar died in 1830.

3) **Southern South America** in the region of Rio de la Plata which is in Argentina now, broke away in 1810 and finally in 1816, the year Bolivar began his campaigns in the north. The independence leader was Jose de San Martin.

Buenos Aires was a very busy port town with active trade. People who live there are called "portenos" to this day. The resentment in Buenos Aires was more about trade restrictions than about political domination. The United Provinces of Rio de la Plata was proclaimed in 1816, though there were many regional differences. Upper Peru (Bolivia) remained under Spanish control, Paraguay declared independence in 1813 and Uruguay, known as the Banda Oriental resisted central authority of B.A. too.

4) **Brazil** If the independence in Mexico was conservative, the Brazilian case was ultra conservative because the monarchy of Portugal was involved more directly.

Brazil was an important colony for coffee, sugar, cacao, slaves. Although there were movements for independence in Bahia 1788 and Minas Gerais in 1798, most Brazilians feared an insurrection like France's or Haiti's.

When Napoleon invaded Portugal in 1807, the monarchy of Portugal fled to Brazil. They picked up their whole court and sailed to Rio de Janeiro which became the capital of the Portuguese Empire. Brazil was raised in status to Portugal and the ports were opened to the world. This very much satisfied the ruling elites. The colonial relationship b/w Portugal and Brazil was strengthened during this era. Until 1820, Dom Joao VI, the Portuguese king ruled from Rio. The city gained a public library, botanical gardens, printing presses, schools, commerce, especially from England.

After Napoleon's decline, the king moved back to Portugal and the parliament began to meet again. Dom Jao VI appointed his weak son Pedro as the regent, warning him that if independence should become necessary, he should lead it. It was better to have a revolution from above, than one from below like in France or Haiti. By 1822, Pedro had to declare independence in order to avoid losing control of his government. Brazil became an independent monarchy, but under the Portuguese crown.

Mexico as a case study

Two years after Mexican Independence, in 1823, Mexico became a republic, but the government remained unstable because of conflicts internally about who should vote, who should rule and how industrialization should proceed. Between military coups, financial failures and foreign intervention (this is the era of the Monroe Doctrine in US policy), Mexico struggled to find its identity.

Who wanted change?

Liberals! Intellectuals, lawyers, and some rural leaders.

The Constitution of 1824 was a federalist document that guaranteed civil rights. It did not, however, address the main problems Mexico faced

- Maldistribution of land
- Status of the Indians
- Problems of education
- Situation of vast numbers of poor people.

Politics became a struggle between the 1) conservatives who wanted to preserve the status quo of a monarchy and 2) liberal federalists who wanted to increase industrialization and competition in business and expand the vote. They tended to be anti-Catholic which did not help them gain power and influence. The situation was made more complex by 3) foreigners, especially Great Britain and the US who wanted to open Mexico for trade in ways that would benefit them.

1829 Spanish invasion (tried but failed to bring back New Spain)

1836 Santa Anna (leader after the failed republic) fought with Texans who were living on Mexican land and ignoring Mexican laws.

1838 French expedition landed in Mexico to try to collect debts

1845-46 War with the United States

1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo-lost one half of territory to US but less than 5% of population. This loss produced a strong sense of nationalism and a desire to confront Mexico's economic and political problems.

This war in 1848 was different in Mexico than the revolutions of 1848 in Europe, but in some ways it had the same consequences as the 1848 revolutions in Europe: It inspired nationalism.

Struggles to define Mexico's identity continued after the Mexican American War. Santa Anna remained in power briefly, but he had his detractors.

Benito Juarez emerged as an important leader (1806-1872). He was an Indian who had received a legal education and he became the leader of his state. He had a *liberal* vision

- Secular society
- Rule of law
- Old privileges of the church and army should be eliminated
- Promote economic change and growth.

1854 La Reforma—the liberal revolt- triumphed.

1857 New Constitution Goal= create a nation of small independent farmers

- Military and clerical privileges limited
- Indian communal lands restricted
- Government forced the sale of land to individuals—hoping to sell to Indians. This did not, in fact, happen. Wealthy *hacendados* bought up the land instead and most peasants and Indians ended up poorer than they had been before.

The liberal program provoked a conservative reaction and civil war erupted.

Juarez pressed for even more radical measures

1862 The conservatives asked Napoleon III of France to get involved. He did. Why? Catholic, shared "Latin" heritage and possible economic advantage, dream of empire.

1862 Maximilian von Habsburg took the throne of Mexico from the liberals. (remember Spain's link to the Habsburgs of Europe?) (US was in the Civil War- no more enforcing the Monroe Doctrine)

Maximilian tried to establish ties with Juarez and the liberals, but the conservatives hated him for that.

Juarez rejected the idea of a foreign prince.

1867 French troops withdrew and Maximilian and his loyal generals were captured and executed.

1868 Juarez returned to office but he was increasingly autocratic. He thought it was necessary because there were so many conflicting interests.

He became the symbol of Mexico and nationalism

- Concern for the poor
- No foreign intervention
- Liberalism and nationalism go together.
 - Economic freedoms, open market, limited government intervention
 - This was the ideology of large land owners, miners, export merchants, middle class folks. Different from Europe that way.

1872 Juarez died and **Porfirio Diaz** took over and reigned for 35 years. Diaz was an authoritarian modernizer.

- Economic growth: RR grew rapidly
- Trade increased about 50% between 1870-1890.

Exports doubled between 1877 and 1900.

- Foreign capital
 - US investment increased from 30 million pesos 1883 to 1 billion in 1911.
- Expansion of large landed estates
- Diaz suppressed regional rebellions
- Strong Centralized Government
 - *Cientificos* (like Realpolitik leaders in Europe) promote a scientific way of thinking about politics. This means do what works to promote wealth and power in the upper levels.

Growth occurred at the expense of the large rural peasantry and its growing urban and working classes. Most of the workers were Indians. They participated very little in the export growth.

Strikes and labor unrest increased, particularly among RR workers, miners, textile workers. The Rurales—national police force in the rural areas, maintained order.

Political opponents were arrested or sent into exile.

1907-08 World Banking Crisis made Mexico's economy tumble.

Over 20% of land in Mexico was owned by foreigners

Half of Mexico's rural population did not own land.

1910-Civil War began. Different groups opposed to Diaz rose up to overthrow him, but they were not unified in what they wanted instead.

- Francisco Madero—promoted moderate political reforms. Diaz threw him in jail. When he got out, he called for a revolt and a general rebellion developed. He gradually lost control of his subordinates.
- Pancho Villa—in the north, small farmers, railroaders, cowboys coalesced under the colorful former bandit, Pancho Villa.
- Emiliano Zapata—In the southern province of Morelos, old conflicts between Indian communities and large sugar estates led to a peasant based guerilla movement. Zapata wanted *Tierra y Libertad*—land and liberty—land reform.

1913 Madero was captured, assassinated and replaced by General Victoriano Huerta. He wanted to have a Diaz-style dictatorship supported by large land owners, the army and foreign companies but Villa and Zapata rose up again.

1914 Huerta was forced from power but the victorious leaders began to fight amongst themselves.

WWI complicated all this because the US wanted to stifle rebellion. Remember the Zimmerman Note? With a revolutionary Mexico, they were a potential pawn that Germany might use to attack the US. The US kept trying, unsuccessfully to intervene in the Mexican affairs to prevent European countries from infiltrating. Villa(north) and Zapata(south) remained in control of their home territories but could not expand their control.

1915, Alvaro Obregon who had machine gun technology he learned in WWI beat Villa's cavalry.

1917 Mexican Constitution of 1917

- Land reform (did not really deliver until 1934 under Cardenas-40 million acres redeistributed in communal holdings (like in Russia's mir system).
- Limited foreign ownership of key resources
- Guaranteed the rights of workers, placed restrictions on clerical education and church ownership of property
- Educational reform
- Workers were given a voice in government

1920 Obregon elected president. He was followed by a series of presidents from the new revolutionary elite.

- 1.5 million had died
- major industries were destroyed
- ranching and farming were disrupted

The revolution was the beginning of more difficulty in finding an identity. Indianization of the culture became a government priority-big murals were commissioned to emphasize the Aztec past and to outline a social program that included technology, industrialization.

Diego Rivera

Jose Clemente Orozco

Tended to simplify images of romanticized indians with Christian symbols and communist ideology.

The PRI—Party of the Institutionalized Revolution was supposed to carry out the revolutionary goals after 1920. It did. Although Mexico became a multi-party system, the PRI in fact controlled politics and maintained its hold on political power. The president's power was limited to 6 years.



Home

Research Search

Journal Search

People

Literature

Timeline Events

Current Results

Research Search

Help

Search Tips

Dictionary

Collection

Reference

Reference

Database Information

Print Date Name

Essay 6 of 6

Mark

The Spread of Revolution to Latin America, 1790 - 1911

Source Database: DIScovering World History

Table of Contents

[Further Readings](#) | [Source Citation](#)

By the middle of the eighteenth century, most of Latin American had been conquered and settled by Europeans. The native peoples of Latin America lived for nearly three hundred years under the repressive control of their conquerors and by the end of the eighteenth century were longing for freedom and independence. Many factors combined to cause the Latin American Wars of Independence: the powerful examples of the North American (1776) and French (1789) revolutions, the influence of the European Enlightenment, the unhappiness of the Spanish creoles (American-born people of European descent) with restrictions on their activities, and the influence of European wars. Once the long struggle for independence had been won for the people of Latin America, many of these newly formed countries replaced their European monarchs with homegrown dictators that were equally corrupt and oppressive. In some cases, it would take over a century for these dictatorships to give way to stable, democratic governments.

Revolutions for Independence

Saint-Domingue

The spirit of the revolutionary movement in Latin America was sparked by one of the earliest revolts, which occurred in the French Caribbean colony of Saint-Domingue. The **Revolution** in France had left some uncertainty about the leadership of the colony, which occupied the western side of the island of Hispaniola. Saint-Domingue was France's most important possession in terms of revenue, but its class structure was miserably proportioned: at the top were a few thousand whites--French planters and officials--and at the bottom were 500,000 wretched, exploited black slaves. It did not take long for these slaves to revolt; in 1791 Toussaint L'Ouverture, a slave and the grandson of an African king, led them in a prolonged struggle against their masters, eventually issuing a constitution and assuming the role of dictator of the colony.

The struggle in post-revolutionary France was eventually resolved when Napoleon Bonaparte declared himself emperor. Napoleon resolved to put an end to the reign of L'Ouverture, and sent his brother-in-law to overthrow Saint-Domingue's revolutionary government. L'Ouverture was eventually captured, fitted with chains, and shipped to France, where he died in prison. This angered L'Ouverture's followers so greatly that they rose up violently, with new and equally capable leaders, finally forcing the French to abandon Saint-Domingue for good in 1803. The leaders of the new kingdom named it Haiti, the native term for the island.

Spanish America

The revolutions of Spanish America had much in common with the North American **Revolution**, but there is a primary difference. Unlike the American **Revolution**, the Spanish American struggle for independence did not have a unified direction or strategy; in fact, infighting between classes of colonists often slowed or endangered the process of liberation from Spanish rule. For example, the creole aristocrats were anxious to rebel against a class structure that gave privilege only to European-born Spaniards, but these same creoles were unwilling to free their own black and native slaves in the name of independence. Such stubborn and short-sighted squabbles among the colonists help explain why they had to struggle for so long against a Spain that had weakened considerably under the inept rule of Charles IV.

The Liberation of Spanish South America

Simón Bolívar is the symbol and hero of the struggle for the liberation of northern South America. He was born in Caracas, Venezuela, into an aristocratic creole family who owned much land, many slaves, and mines. Before the **revolution** he traveled extensively in Europe and was exposed to the concepts of free trade and independence from royal dictators. When he returned to Caracas Bolívar became involved in a conspiracy to overthrow the Spanish regime.

This overthrow had several false starts, which began in 1808, the year Napoleon seized the Spanish throne from Ferdinand VII and named his own brother, Joseph, King of Spain. Bolívar and the other conspirators saw their chance to free themselves from any kind of royal control; they proclaimed themselves loyal to "the beloved Ferdinand VII," and forced the removal of allegedly unreliable royal officials in the colonies. Officials all over South America were replaced by *juntas*, or local governing committees, who really had no loyalty to Ferdinand at all, but used his capture as an excuse to overthrow their existing local leaders. The revolutionary Francisco de Miranda led the first armed movement to dislodge the Spanish forces from northern South America, but after winning some small victories he was captured and imprisoned, after which Bolívar took command of the colonial troops. He captured his hometown of Caracas briefly from the Spaniards before being thrown out by a mass of Venezuelan *llaneros* (cowboys) who did not like the new government any better than the old one. Soon Spain had regained control of Caracas. Bolívar retired to the British island of Jamaica for a while, gathering his strength for another revolt, and making deals with any ally who might help his cause.

In 1816 Bolívar left for the Orinoco River valley with the support of several factions, including English troops who had become bored after defeating Napoleon in Europe, English merchants who provided loans in exchange for the promise of trade with the independent colonies, and even the bargained support of José Antonio Páez, chieftain of the *llaneros*. The troops commanded by Bolívar and Páez marched into Bogotá, capital of New Granada, and surprised the Spanish forces, who were easily defeated. Bolívar's troops rolled over all Spanish opposition, until the last important royal force in the northern continent was crushed at the Venezuelan city of Carabobo, in 1821. The provinces composing the former viceroyalty of New Granada--the future republics of Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, and Panama--were now free from Spanish control, and were temporarily united into a large state called Gran Colombia. The time had come for Bolívar's liberation movement to join with that flowing northward from Argentina.

The liberation of the southern continent, the La Plata viceroyalty, was even messier than Bolívar's campaign. British invaders had briefly taken control of Buenos Aires in 1806-1807. Since then, the city had been ruled by creole party members who, like their northern counterparts, were actually a junta professing false loyalty to the Spanish crown. This junta was trying to put together a declaration of independence for the provinces of La Plata, but there was much internal arguing going on--the creoles of other provinces, such as Uruguay and Paraguay, did not trust the Buenos Aires junta and the inland *gauchos*, or cowboys, did not trust the *porte-os*, citizens of the coastal cities.

In 1816 José de San Martín, an Argentine-born colonel in the Spanish army,

decided to aid the cause of **revolution** and break the long-standing stalemate in La Plata. He sailed for La Plata, offered his sword to the patriot junta, and soon helped unite the squabbling La Plata factions into a region with one single purpose--to rid the continent of Spanish soldiers in the remaining western provinces of Chile and Peru. San Mart'n spent two years recruiting, training, and equipping his army. Like Bol'var, he promised freedom in order to gain black and mulatto slave volunteers--he later claimed that they were his best soldiers--and was also aided by Chilean refugees fleeing the Spanish. San Mart'n knew that a frontal attack on the Spanish soldiers would surely be defeated, so he and his army marched from the east, high over the Andes mountains, surprising the troops and eventually conquering the capital city of Santiago. From there San Mart'n turned his attention to Lima, Peru's capital, but soon discovered he didn't even need to attack. The Lima aristocracy was afraid of an armed struggle that might cause a native and slave revolt, and when city officials heard of San Mart'n's campaign they abandoned Lima, retreating to the Andes. Here, in Lima, San Mart'n's troops met with the army of Bol'var, and the two met to discuss the future government of the independent Spanish colonies. But their struggle, it was later to be made clear, was far from over.

The Liberation of Mexico

Unlike the revolts in Spanish South America, the **revolution** in Mexico was begun by a man who wanted equality for all of Mexico's citizens; slaves, natives, merchants, and officials alike. This man, Miguel Hidalgo, was a creole priest, the son of a poor farmer. His rebellion began not with the creole class of aristocrats, against the Spanish crown, but with the natives he had served in the Mexican missions, against the ruling class of creole officials. Hidalgo and his followers, about eighty thousand men, captured the cities of Guanajuato and Guadalajara. From these cities he issued decrees abolishing slavery and native tribute, and gave ownership of the communal native lands back to their rightful owners. From there Father Hidalgo advanced toward Mexico City, an ambitious goal that was not to be realized; he was captured, condemned by the Inquisition, and shot. One of his followers, Jos* Morelos, continued the **revolution** for four more years, and attempted to set up an independent government, but like Hidalgo, he was eventually captured by forces loyal to the Spanish crown and executed.

The royalist soldier who captured and killed Morelos, Agust'n de Iturbide, was a shrewd opportunist. He could see that Mexican independence was inevitable, and devised a plan to secure power for himself by joining with the patriots who were now without a leader. He claimed he was no longer a servant of the Spanish crown, but a champion of independence and racial equality. He attracted the support of the masses who had been devoted to Hidalgo and Morelos, and entered Mexico City in 1821, the same year that Bol'var won victory at Carabobo. The Spanish forces were quickly defeated, and Iturbide proclaimed himself emperor of a Mexican empire. Mexico was now an independent state, but since Iturbide (now emperor Agust'n I) had no intention of solving the economic and social problems that had caused the movement for **revolution**, his empire was doomed to failure.

Brazil

Portugal's South American colony achieved its independence in a way that was, compared to the Spanish American revolutions, relatively nonviolent. Though Brazil did not proclaim its independence until 1822, the movement began around the year 1789. The Marquis de Pombal, Portugal's powerful secretary of state for foreign affairs, had succeeded in forming a trade empire based in Lisbon, the Portuguese capital, and allowed Brazilians to trade only with Portugal. But this royal monopoly on trade had also created a powerful class of planters and merchants in many parts of Brazil--many of whom wanted to be free of Portugal's trade restrictions.

As in the Spanish colonies, Napoleon Bonaparte was quite helpful to the Brazilian cause of independence: the French emperor invaded Lisbon in 1807, from where King Jo \circ and the royal family fled to Brazil, where they set up court in Rio de Janeiro. Now that Rio, not Lisbon, was the seat of the empire, Brazil's ports were opened to all international commerce.

The Brazilian royal court was short-lived. Napoleon's reach soon exceeded his

grasp, and Portugal regained its independence in 1820. King João returned to rule the Portuguese empire from Lisbon, leaving behind his son, Pedro, to rule the colony.

But Brazil had tasted a few years of independence and free trade, and the colony didn't want to return to the old ways. Pedro, influenced by members of the mercantile class, saw that independence was inevitable, and King João, learning of the colonists' increasing authority over his son, ordered Pedro to come home and "complete his political education." But the Brazilians begged him to stay on as their leader, and in 1822 Pedro declared the colony an independent state. With overwhelming support from the Brazilians, all Portuguese forces were driven out within the year. Pedro, now emperor Pedro I of Brazil, would later have his own problems running the new country, but for now the Brazilians happily accepted him as their leader.

The Nineteenth Century: Dictators and Revolutions

Another important difference between the Latin American revolutions and the North American **Revolution** was the type of governments that were established after liberation. In no Latin American state was the royal dictatorship replaced by a stable, working democracy. In fact, the Latin revolutions did little for the colonists but establish their countries as independent states. At the top of each former colony's government, a new dictator was installed who may or may not have proven to be any better than the regencies appointed by a European king--and most of these dictators were hardly interested in solving the overwhelming problems that had caused the colonists to revolt in the first place. Often these rulers, many of whom were military generals who found civilian life boring, spent their first months in office trying to conquer other newly independent states. Nineteenth-century Latin America was plagued by seemingly countless wars. Within its separate countries, the struggle for political stability usually took the form of one dictator overthrowing another in order to impose his own will upon the people. The nineteenth century saw a long succession of these kinds of revolts--and to this day several Latin American countries still suffer from unstable government.

South America

Gran Colombia

Bolívar's new republic proved difficult to hold together. The country eventually defaulted on the loans granted by England before and after the **revolution**, and the dissolution of the former viceroyalty into the countries of Ecuador, Colombia, and Venezuela became final with Bolívar's death in 1830. Political power in each of these nations changed hands constantly over the next century.

Peru and Bolivia

Under Spanish control Peru and Bolivia had existed as Upper and Lower Peru, and for a while it was unclear whether they would exist as separate countries or be combined into a single state. Peru, conscious of its once-glorious imperial standing, tried to extend its influence into both Ecuador and Bolivia. It became involved in a war with Chile over the desert lands of southern Peru and Bolivia--lands rich in guano (bat droppings) that could be traded as fertilizer. As a result of this war Peru and Bolivia became separate states, but Bolivia lost its coastline to Chile.

Chile

The geography of Chile (a long, compact country), along with its population of countryside farmers and ranchers who had little interest in politics, made its government more stable than some Latin American nations. In its first years, Chile was ruled by Bernardo O'Higgins, who had helped San Martín in his revolutionary campaign. A brief civil war, followed by border disputes with Argentina and Bolivia, eventually ended in an extended period in which Chile was ruled by a democratic parliament, the country's first, however brief, flirtation with democratic government.

Argentina

In 1816 the leaders of the United Provinces of La Plata wanted to include Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Uruguay in its new nation. This was not to be. The history of nineteenth-century Argentina was to become a series of revolts, civil wars, and border disputes, and by the time the twentieth century had arrived, the region was no more stable than at its declaration of independence. The primary political conflict in early Argentina was that the country's economics were based on the pastoral culture of ranchers and gauchos, but was ruled politically by *caudillos* (military leaders).

Paraguay

This small province threw out its Spanish governor in 1811 and struggled for many years with Brazil for its sovereignty. In 1862 president Francisco Solano López, determined to make his country a major economic power in the region, launched an attack on Brazil. The result was the ruin of his country--ninety percent of Paraguay's male population, including López, was killed in the war and the country was occupied by foreigners until 1876, when it began a long, slow period of recovery.

Uruguay

After the United Provinces of La Plata were rid of Spanish officials, Brazil and Argentina fought over control of Uruguay. A peace was eventually brokered by English diplomats, and Uruguay's status as an independent nation became final in 1828. For about three years the major political parties in Uruguay--the Colorados and the Blancos--struggled for political control of the country. The Colorados eventually won out, and controlled Uruguay into the twentieth century.

Brazil

Brazil's post-independence got off to a rocky start, but became remarkably stable compared to the rest of South America. Pedro I, who had been persuaded by the Brazilians to become their ruler, was unpopular from the outset. He proved to be as unskilled a politician as his father, King João, had feared; in 1824 he adopted a constitution for the country without consulting the powerful members of the merchant class who had supported him. He assumed all of Portugal's colonial debts, and invited an influential English presence into his court, which angered Brazilians. In 1831 the Brazilian army forced Pedro to step down and abdicate power to his six-year-old son, also named Pedro. A regency of Brazilian military officials and politicians ruled until Pedro II assumed leadership in 1840, at the age of fifteen. Pedro II was a sensitive, capable leader and his reign lasted until 1889, when he enacted a measure that freed all Brazilian slaves. The merchant class, dependent on slavery, overthrew Pedro II, and a provisional republican government, begun by the general that had seized power, lasted until 1937.

Mexico

Mexico's struggle for independence wavered between democracy and dictatorship for much of the nineteenth century, and was one of the few Latin American movements in which mestizos (people of mixed white and native blood) and natives played an active role. Agustín I, Mexico's first ruler, was a mestizo. His motives for power were suspect, however, and he was forced out in little more than a year. In 1824 a republic was established, with a constitution that was similar to that of the United States.

The most notorious president to serve under this constitution was Antonio López de Santa Anna, who held the title of president for more than twenty years, but ruled as a vicious dictator. He was cruel, treacherous, and greedy for power, and eventually his downfall was achieved by a coalition of radicals led by two full-blooded natives, Juan Álvarez and Benito Juárez, and a creole, Ignacio Comonfort. The coalition, fiercely democratic, immediately reduced the power that the church and military had held under Santa Anna, but they overtook a country that had been run into the ground by mounting foreign debt. The sale of church lands to private owners, enacted by the new coalition, was not enough to cure the poverty of the Mexican government.

It was during 1862 that emperor Napoleon III of France (Bonaparte's nephew), viewing Mexico's economic weakness as an opportunity for domination, sent an army to land at Vera Cruz. These French troops fought their way to Mexico City, seized control of the government, and installed Maximilian, Archduke of Austria, as a puppet ruler. Maximilian was a miserably inept leader who drew hatred from all quarters of Mexico, and when Napoleon III withdrew French troops from Mexico to help him fight the Austro-Prussian war in Europe, Juárez and his followers stormed the capital. Maximilian was quickly captured and shot. Juárez was made president of Mexico, and immediately began a series of reforms: the size of the army was decreased, the waste and extravagance of government bureaucracy was reduced, and a wide extension of public education was created. Tragically, Juárez died within a year of his becoming president; his reforms had hardly begun.

Not long after Juárez's death, a new dictator, Porfirio D'az, emerged in Mexico City and overthrew the democratic successor. D'az, the son of a creole father and a native mother, would rule Mexico for more than thirty years. He was, for the most part, not a violent ruler, but his concern was primarily directed toward ways to extend or maintain his own power. He brought relief from economic hardship to Mexico, but his remedies were appalling to many Mexican citizens--he invited foreign investors to take control of much of Mexico's land, and sold these lands, including all of the mineral rights, to these investors for ridiculously low prices. Prosperity at this price was not what Mexicans wanted. D'az was also an underhanded politician who rigged elections through blackmail, bribery, and outright threats. For these and many other reasons he was finally forced from power in 1911. The aged dictator sailed for France, leaving behind a troubled country that was, after more than thirty years of abuse, once again ripe for revolution.

FURTHER READINGS

- Braudel, Fernand. *A History of Civilizations* . Viking Penguin, 1994.
- Burns, Edward McNall. *World Civilizations* . Norton, 1982.
- Collier, Simon. *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Latin America and the Caribbean* . Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Langer, William L., ed. *An Encyclopedia of World History* . Houghton Mifflin, 1968.
- Keen, Benjamin, ed. *Latin Civilization : History and Society, 1492 to Present* . Westview Press, 1986.
- Keen, Benjamin; Mark Wasserman. *A Short History of Latin America* . 2nd. Houghton Mifflin, 1984.

Source Citation: "The Spread of Revolution to Latin America, 1790 - 1911." *DISCovering World History* . Gale Research, 1997. Reproduced in Student Resource Center. Farmington Hills, Mich.: Gale Group. December, 2000.
<http://www.galenet.com/servlet/SRC/>

Document Number: CD2105230050

[Top of the Page](#)

[Subject](#) | [Keyword](#) | [Custom](#) | [People](#) | [Literature](#) | [Timeline](#)
[Results](#) | [Revise Search](#)
[Help](#) | [Search Tips](#) | [Merriam Websters Collegiate Dictionary](#) | [Merriam Websters Biographical Dictionary](#) | [Merriam Websters Geographical Dictionary](#) | [Format for Printing](#) | [Email Data Home](#)

Student Resource Center



Primary source document 1 of 1

SEARCH

KEYWORD SEARCH

QUICK SEARCH

PEOPLE

LITERATURE

TIMELINE EVENTS

CURRENT RESULTS

RECORD SEARCH

HELP

SEARCH TIPS

DICTIONARY

COLLEGE

BOOKS

PERIODICALS

SUBSCRIPTIONS

EMAIL DATA NAME



Toussaint L'Ouverture and the Haitian Revolutions

About this Document

Document Type: Speech

Source Database: American Journey Online: The African American Experience

Table of Contents

[RELATED ITEMS](#) | [SOURCE CITATION](#)

Toussaint L'Ouverture and the Haytian Revolutions, by James McCune Smith

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Whilst the orgies of the French revolution thrust forward a being whose path was by rivers of blood, the horrors of Santo Domingo produced one who was pre-eminently a peacemaker--Toussaint L'Ouverture.

In estimating the character of Toussaint L'Ouverture, regard must be paid, not to the enlightened age in which he lived, but to the rank in society from which he sprang--a rank which must be classed with a remote and elementary age of mankind.

Born forty-seven years before the commencement of the revolt, he had reached the prime of manhood, a slave, with a soul uncontaminated by the degradation which surrounded him. Living in a state of society where worse than polygamy was actually urged, we find him at this period faithful to one wife--the wife of his youth--and the father of an interesting family. Linked with such tender ties, and enlightened with some degree of education, which his indulgent master, M. Bayou, had given him, he fulfilled, up to the moment of the revolt, the duties of a Christian man in slavery.

At the time of the insurrection--in which he took no part--he continued in the peaceable discharge of his duties as coachman; and when the insurgents approached the estate whereon he lived, he accomplished the flight of M. Bayou, whose kind treatment (part of this kindness was teaching this slave to read and write) he repaid by forwarding to him produce for his maintenance while in exile in these United States.

Having thus faithfully acquitted himself as a slave, he turned towards the higher destinies which awaited him as a freeman. With a mind stored with patient reflection upon the biographies of men, the most eminent in civil and military affairs; and deeply versed in the history of the most remarkable revolutions that had yet occurred amongst mankind, he entered the army of the insurgents under Jean Francois. This chief rapidly promoted him to the offices of physician to the forces, aid-de-camp, and colonel. Jean Francois, in alliance with the Spaniards, maintained war at this time for the cause of royalty.

Whilst serving under this chief, Toussaint beheld another civil war agitating the French colony. On one side, the French Commissioners, who had acknowledged the emancipation of the slaves, maintained war for the Republic; on the other side, the old noblesse, or planters, fought under the royal banner, having called in the aid of the British forces in order to re-establish slavery and the ancient

regime.

In this conflict, unmindful of their solemn oaths against the decree of the 15th of May, 1791, the whites of both parties, including the planters, hesitated not to fight in the same ranks, shoulder to shoulder, with the blacks. Caste was forgotten in the struggle for principles!

At this juncture Jean Francois, accompanied by his principal officers, and possessed of all the honors and emoluments of a captain-general in the service of his Catholic Majesty, retired to Spain, leaving Toussaint at liberty to choose his party. Almost immediately joining that standard which acknowledged and battled for equal rights to all men, he soon rendered signal service to the Commissioners, by driving the Spaniards from the northern, and by holding the British at bay in the eastern part of the island. For these services he was raised to the rank of general by the French commander at Porte aux Paix, General Laveaux, a promotion which he soon repaid by saving that veteran's life under the following circumstances: Villate, a mulatto general, envious of the honors bestowed on Toussaint, treacherously imprisoned General Laveaux in Cape Francois. Immediately upon hearing this fact, Toussaint hastened to the Cape at the head of 10,000 men and liberated his benefactor. And, at the very moment of his liberation, a commission arrived from France appointing General Laveaux Governor of the Colony; his first official act was to proclaim Toussaint his lieutenant. "This is the black," said Laveaux, "predicted by Raynal, and who is destined to avenge the outrages committed against his whole race." A remark soon verified, for on his attainment of the supreme power, Toussaint avenged those injuries--by forgiveness!

As an acknowledgment for his eminent services against the British, and against the mulattoes, who, inflamed with all the bitterness of caste, had maintained a sanguinary war under their great leader Rigaud, in the southern part of the colony, the Commissioners invested Toussaint with the office and dignity of general-in-chief of Santo Domingo.

From that moment began the full development of the vast and versatile genius of this extraordinary man. Standing amid the terrible, because hostile, fragments of two revolutions, harassed by the rapacious greed of commissioners upon commissioners, who, successively dispatched from France, hid beneath a republican exterior a longing after the spoils; with an army in the field accustomed by five years' experience to all the license of civil war, Toussaint, with a giant hand, seized the reins of government, reduced these conflicting elements to harmony and order, and raised the colony to nearly its former prosperity, his lofty intellect always delighting to effect its object rather by the tangled mazes of diplomacy than by the strong arm of physical force, yet maintaining a steadfast and unimpeached adherence to truth, his word, and his honor.

General Maitland, commander of the British forces, finding the reduction of the island to be utterly hopeless, signed a treaty with Toussaint for the evacuation of all the posts which he held. "Toussaint then paid him a visit, and was received with military honors. After partaking of a grand entertainment, he was presented by General Maitland, in the name of His Majesty, with a splendid service of plate, and put in possession of the government-house which had been built and furnished by the English."

Buonaparte, on becoming First Consul, sent out the confirmation of Toussaint as commander-in-chief, who, with views infinitely beyond the short-sighted and selfish vision of the Commissioners, proclaimed a general amnesty to the planters who had fled during the revolutions, earnestly invited their return to the possession of their estates, and, with a delicate regard to their feelings, decreed that the epithet "emigrant" should not be applied to them. Many of the planters accepted the invitation, and returned to the peaceful possession of their estates.

In regard to the army of Toussaint, General Lacroix, one of the planters who returned, affirms "that never was a European army subjected to a more rigid discipline than that which was observed by the troops of Toussaint." Yet this army was converted by the commander-in-chief into industrious laborers, by the simple expedient of paying them for their labor. "When he restored many of the planters to their estates, there was no restoration of their former property in human beings. No human being was to be bought or sold. Severe tasks, flagellations,

and scanty food were no longer to be endured. The planters were obliged to employ their laborers on the footing of hired servants." "And under this system," says Lacroix, "the colony advanced, as if by enchantment towards its ancient splendor; cultivation was extended with such rapidity that every day made its progress more perceptible. All appeared to be happy, and regarded Toussaint as their guardian angel. In making a tour of the island, he was hailed by the blacks with universal joy, nor was he less a favorite of the whites."

Toussaint, having effected a bloodless conquest of the Spanish territory, had now become commander of the entire island. Performing all the executive duties, he made laws to suit the exigency of the times. His Egeria was temperance accompanied with a constant activity of body and mind.

The best proof of the entire success of his government is contained in the comparative views of the exports of the island, before the revolutions, and during the administration of Toussaint. Bear in mind that, "before the revolution there were 450,000 slave laborers working with a capital in the shape of buildings, mills, fixtures, and implements, which had been accumulating during a century. Under Toussaint there were 290,000 free laborers, many of them just from the army or the mountains, working on plantations that had undergone the devastation of insurrection and a seven years' war."

In consequence of the almost entire cessation of official communication with France, and for other reasons equally good, Toussaint thought it necessary for the public welfare to frame a new constitution for the government of the island. With the aid of M. Pascal, Abbe Moliere, and Marinit, he drew up a constitution, and submitted the same to a General Assembly convened from every district, and by that assembly the constitution was adopted. It was subsequently promulgated in the name of the people. And, on the 1st of July, 1801, the island was declared to be an independent State, in which all men, without regard to complexion or creed, possessed equal rights.

This proceeding was subsequently sanctioned by Napoleon Buonaparte, whilst First Consul. In a letter to Toussaint, he says, "We have conceived for you esteem, and we wish to recognize and proclaim the great services you have rendered the French people. If their colors fly on Santo Domingo, it is to you and your brave blacks that we owe it. Called by your talents and the force of circumstances to the chief command, you have terminated the civil war, put a stop to the persecutions of some ferocious men, and restored to honor the religion and the worship of God, from whom all things come. The situation in which you were placed, surrounded on all sides by enemies, and without the mother country being able to succor or sustain you, has rendered legitimate the articles of that constitution."

Although Toussaint enforced the duties of religion, he entirely severed the connection between Church and State. He rigidly enforced all the duties of morality, and would not suffer in his presence even the approach to indecency of dress or manner. "Modesty," said he, "is the defense of woman."

The chief, nay the idol of an army of 100,000 well-trained and acclimated troops ready to march or sail where he wist, Toussaint refrained from raising the standard of liberty in any one of the neighboring island, at a time when, had he been fired with what men term ambition, he could easily have revolutionized the entire archipelago of the west. But his thoughts were bent on conquest of another kind; he was determined to overthrow an error which designing and interested men had craftily instilled into the civilized world,--a belief in the natural inferiority of the Negro race. It was the glory and the warrantable boast of Toussaint that he had been the instrument of demonstrating that, even with the worst odds against them, this race is entirely capable of achieving liberty and of self-government. He did more: by abolishing caste he proved the artificial nature of such distinctions, and further demonstrated that even slavery cannot unfit men for the full exercise of all the functions which belong to free citizens.

"Some situations of trust were filled by free Negroes and mulattoes, who had been in respectable circumstances under the old Government; but others were occupied by Negroes, and even by Africans, who had recently emerged from the lowest condition of slavery."

But the bright and happy state of things which the genius of Toussaint had almost

created out of elements the most discordant was doomed to be of short duration. For the dark spirit of Napoleon, glutted, but not satiated with the glory banquet afforded at the expense of Europe and Africa, seized upon this, the most beautiful and happy of the Hesperides, as the next victim of its remorseless rapacity.

With the double intention of getting rid of the republican army, and reducing back to slavery the island of Hayti, he sent out his brother-in-law, General Leclerc, with 26 ships of war and 25,000 men.

Like Leonidas at Thermopylae, or the Bruce at Bannockburn, Toussaint determined to defend from thralldom his sea-girt isle, made sacred to liberty by the baptism of blood.

On the 28th of January, 1802, Leclerc arrived off the bay of Samana, from the promontory of which Toussaint, in anxious alarm, beheld for the first time in his life so large an armament. "We must all perish," said he, "all France has come to Santo Domingo!" But this despondency passed away in a moment, and then this man, who had been a kindly-treated slave, prepared to oppose to the last that system which he now considered worse than death.

It is impossible, after so long a tax on your patience, to enter on a detailed narration of the conflict which ensued. The hour of trial served only to develop and ennoble the character of Toussaint, who rose, with misfortune, above the allurements of rank and wealth which were offered as the price of his submission; and the very ties of parental love he yielded to the loftier sentiment of patriotism.

On the 2d of February, a division of Leclerc's army, commanded by General Rochambeau, an old planter, landed at Fort Dauphin, and ruthlessly murdered many of the inhabitants (freedmen) who, unarmed, had been led by curiosity to the beach, in order to witness the disembarkation of the troops.

Christophe, one of the generals of Toussaint, commanding at Cape Francois, having resisted the menaces and the flattery of Leclerc, reduced that ill-fated town to ashes, and retired with his troops into the mountains, carrying with him 2,000 of the white inhabitants of the Cape, who were protected from injury during the fierce war which ensued.

Having full possession of the plain of the Cape, Leclerc, with a proclamation of liberty in his hand, in March following re-established slavery with all its former cruelties.

This treacherous movement thickened the ranks of Toussaint, who thenceforward so vigorously pressed his opponent, that as a last resort, Leclerc broke the shackles of the slave, and proclaimed "Liberty and equality to all the inhabitants of Santo Domingo."

This proclamation terminated the conflict for the time. Christophe and Dessalines, general officers, and at length Toussaint himself, capitulated, and, giving up the command of the island to Leclerc, he retired, at the suggestion of that officer, to enjoy rest and the sweet endearments of his family circle, on one of his estates near Gonaives. At this place he had remained about one month, when, without any adequate cause, Leclerc caused him to be seized, and to be placed on board of a ship of war, in which he was conveyed to France, where, without trial or condemnation, he was imprisoned in a loathsome and unhealthy dungeon. Unaccustomed to the chill and damp of this prison-house, the aged frame of Toussaint gave way, and he died.

In this meagre outline of his life I have presented simply facts, gleaned, for the most part, from the unwilling testimony of his foes, and therefore resting on good authority. The highest encomium on his character is contained in the fact that Napoleon believed that by capturing him he would be able to re-enslave Hayti; and even this encomium is, if possible, rendered higher by the circumstances which afterward transpired, which showed that his principles were so thoroughly disseminated among his brethren, that, without the presence of Toussaint, they achieved that liberty which he had taught them so rightly to estimate.

The capture of Toussaint spread like wild-fire through the island, and his principal

officers again took the field. A fierce and sanguinary war ensued, in which the French gratuitously inflicted the most awful cruelties on their prisoners, many of whom having been hunted with bloodhounds, were carried in ships to some distance from the shore, murdered in cold blood, and cast into the sea; their corpses were thrown by the waves back upon the beach, and filled the air with pestilence, by which the French troops perished in large numbers. Leclerc having perished by pestilence, his successor, Rochambeau, when the conquest of the island was beyond possibility, became the cruel perpetrator of these bloody deeds.

Thus it will be perceived that treachery and massacre were begun on the side of the French. I place emphasis on these facts in order to endeavor to disabuse the public mind of an attempt to attribute to emancipation the acts of retaliation resorted to by the Haytians in imitation of what the enlightened French had taught them. In two daily papers of this city there were published, a year since, a series of articles entitled the "Massacres of Santo Domingo."

The "massacres" are not attributable to emancipation, for we have proved otherwise in regard to the first of them. The other occurred in 1804, twelve years after the slaves had disenthralled themselves. Fearful as the latter may have been, it did not equal the atrocities previously committed on the Haytians by the French. And the massacre was restricted to the white French inhabitants, whom Dessalines, the Robespierre of the island, suspected of an attempt to bring back slavery, with the aid of a French force yet hovering in the neighborhood:

And if we search for the cause of this massacre, we may trace it to the following source: Nations which are pleased to term themselves civilized have one sort of faith which they hold to one another, and another sort which they entertain towards people less advanced in refinement. The faith which they entertain towards the latter is, very often, treachery, in the vocabulary of the civilized. It was treachery towards Toussaint that caused the massacre of Santo Domingo; it was treachery towards Osceola that brought bloodhounds into Florida!

General Rochambeau, with the remnant of the French army, having been reduced to the dread necessity of striving "to appease the calls of hunger by feeding on horses, mules, and the very dogs that had been employed in hunting down and devouring the Negroes," evacuated the island in the autumn of 1803, and Hayti thenceforward became an independent State.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have now laid before you a concise view of the revolutions of Hayti in the relation of cause and effect; and I trust you will now think, that, so far from being scenes of indiscriminate massacre from which we should turn our eyes in horror, these revolutions constitute an epoch worthy of the anxious study of every American citizen.

Among the many lessons that may be drawn from this portion of history is one not unconnected with the present occasion. From causes to which I need not give a name, there is gradually creeping into our otherwise prosperous state the incongruous and undermining influence of caste. One of the local manifestations of this unrepugnant sentiment is, that while 800 children, chiefly of foreign parents, are educated and taught trades at the expense of all the citizens, colored children are excluded from these privileges.

With the view to obviate the evils of such an unreasonable proscription, a few ladies of this city, by their untiring exertions, have organized an "Asylum for Colored Orphans." Their zeal in this cause is infinitely beyond all praise of mine, for their deeds of mercy are smiled on by Him who has declared, that "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water, shall in no wise lose her reward." Were any further argument needed to urge them on in their blessed work, I would point out to them the revolutions of Hayti, where, in the midst of the orgies and incantations of civil war, there appeared, as a spirit of peace, the patriot, the father, the benefactor of mankind--Toussaint L'Ouverture, a freedman, who had been taught to read while in slavery!

Related Items

[African-American Education \(Key Topic\)](#)

<http://www.galenet.com/servlet/SRC/hits?c=1&secondary=false&bConts=7&bucket=psm&Sidebars=Yes&origSearch=true&t=RK&s=1&r=>

[On the Fourteenth Query of Thomas Jefferson's Notes on Virginia \(Document\)](#)

[An Open Letter to the Educational League of Georgia \(Document\)](#)

[The People of Haiti \(Hayti\) and a Plan for Emigration \(Document\)](#)

[Reconstruction and Jim Crow \(Key Topic\)](#)

[Santo Domingo revolt \(Overview\)](#)

[Slavery in the United States \(Key Topic\)](#)

Source Citation: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the Haitian Revolutions. From *American Journey Online: The African American Experience*. Woodbridge, Conn.: Primary Source Media, 1999. Reproduced in Student Resource Center, Farmington Hills, Mich.: Gale Group. December, 2000. <http://www.galenet.com/servlet/SRC/>

Document Number: CD2152000342

[Top of the Page](#)

[Subject](#) | [Keyword](#) | [Custom](#) | [People](#) | [Literature](#) | [Timeline](#)

[Results](#) | [Revise Search](#)

[Help](#) | [Search Tips](#) | [Merriam Websters Collegiate Dictionary](#) | [Merriam Websters](#)

[Biographical Dictionary](#) | [Merriam Websters Geographical Dictionary](#) | [Format for Printing](#) | [Email Data Home](#)



GALE GROUP Copyright © 2001 by Gale Group. All rights reserved.
Gale Group is a Thomson Corporation Company.

Student Resource Center



Primary source document 1 of 1

Keyword Search

Advanced Search

People

Literature

Timeline Events

Current Results

Recent Searches

Help

Search Tips

Dictionary

Colleges

Encyclopedia

Encyclopedia

Advanced Features

Email Data Name



Mark

Commentary on Toussaint L'Ouverture and the Haitian Revolutions

[See this Document](#)

Source Database: American Journey Online: The African American Experience

Table of Contents

[RELATED ITEMS](#) | [SOURCE CITATION](#)

Born in 1811 in New York City, James McCune Smith studied at the African Free School and later at the University of Glasgow in Scotland, where he received his bachelor's, master's, and medical degrees, the first African-American to be granted an M.D. He conducted his medical practice in New York, where he also participated in the abolitionist cause.

On the fiftieth anniversary of the beginning of the Haitian Revolution, Smith delivered the following oration on Toussaint L'Ouverture, the extraordinary man who had risen from slavery to become the military leader and defender of the beleaguered island, and whose life ended in one of Napoleon's Paris dungeons. Toussaint had long been a hero to African Americans, who found in this man of the people an inspiring example of courage, kindness, and untutored brilliance.

The speech was delivered at the Stuyvesant Institute in New York, on February 26, 1841, before a group gathered to raise funds for the Colored Orphan Asylum. For Smith, the example of Toussaint--who had learned to read while a slave--stood against the "incongruous and undermining influence of *caste* " that excluded African-American children from the benefits of public-financed education and training.

Related Items

[African-American Education \(Key Topic\)](#)

[On the Fourteenth Query of Thomas Jefferson's Notes on Virginia \(Document\)](#)

[An Open Letter to the Educational League of Georgia \(Document\)](#)

[The People of Haiti \(Hayti\) and a Plan for Emigration \(Document\)](#)

[Reconstruction and Jim Crow \(Key Topic\)](#)

[Santo Domingo revolt \(Overview\)](#)

[Slavery in the United States \(Key Topic\)](#)

Source Citation: Commentary on Toussaint L'Ouverture and the Haitian Revolutions. From *American Journey Online: The African American Experience*. Woodbridge, Conn.: Primary Source Media, 1999. Reproduced in Student Resource Center. Farmington Hills, Mich.: Gale Group. December, 2000. <http://www.galenet.com/servlet/SRC/>

<http://www.galenet.com/servlet/SRC/hits?c=1&secondary=false&bConts=7&bucket=psm&Sidebars=Yes&origSearch=true&t=RK&s=1&r=>



GALE GROUP

Copyright © 2001 by Gale Group. All rights reserved.
Gale Group is a Thomson Corporation Company.

Vol. 34, No. 1

November 2000

Journals

Search

Partners

Information

The History Teacher

[Table of contents](#)[E Search Builder](#)[List journal issues](#)[Home](#)[How to cite this
electronic article](#)

The Haitian Revolution and the Forging of America

Jim Thomson

Breck School, Minneapolis, Minnesota

*Junior Division Historical Paper, National History Day
Competition*

DURING THE NIGHT of August 22, 1791, a wave of fire engulfed the French West Indies colony of St. Domingue (present-day Haiti), as hundreds of thousands of slaves set fire to plantations, torched cities, and massacred a terrified white population. The slave rebellion that started that night--the most successful slave rebellion in history--lasted 12 long years. It culminated in the founding of the second independent nation in the Western Hemisphere and its first black-governed republic. But more than this, the Haitian Revolution was a turning point in history, the repercussions of which extended far beyond the small island nation. Perhaps nowhere was its impact greater than in the United States, where Haiti's slave revolt figured directly in two of the most significant events in United States history: the Louisiana Purchase and the American Civil War.

In 1789, on the eve of the French Revolution, St. Domingue was the world's most prosperous colony. It was "an integral part of the economic life of the age, the greatest colony in the world, the pride of France, and the envy of every other imperialist nation."¹ Its plantation economy produced an abundance of crops, of which sugar was by far the most important. At its peak, St. Domingue produced more sugar than all the British Caribbean islands put together and was responsible for forty percent of the overseas trade of France.²

The entire economic structure of St. Domingue rested on the backs of a population denied any participation in the colony's prosperity³--the more than one-half million black slaves who were raided from their homelands in Africa and brought in slave ships to the New World to fill an ever-expanding demand for labor and profits. Black slavery in St. Domingue, as in the rest of the Western Hemisphere, was brutal and dehumanizing. The Code Noir enacted by the French government in 1685, ostensibly to ensure humane treatment for slaves, was ignored from the start by the plantation owners in St. Domingue.⁴ The Catholic Church, although a political force in the colony, was itself a slaveholding institution and, accordingly, both unwilling and unable to exercise its moral authority on the issue of slavery.⁵ Therefore, the upper class, or *grands blancs*, who owned slaves were left to treat them in any way they chose.

Two factors--fear and greed--virtually dictated the mistreatment of the slaves. In St. Domingue, where slaves outnumbered slaveholders by fifteen to one,⁶ slaveholders sought through unspeakably cruel and punishing conditions to keep the slaves subservient and to deter thoughts of rebellion. Purely economic considerations also worked against the slaves. For planters, it was cheaper to work slaves to death and acquire replacements than to care for them into old age. Consequently, slave mortality on St. Domingue was unusually high.⁷ As sugar prices rose in the years leading up to the French Revolution, St. Domingue's slaves were driven harder than ever.⁸

Given the brutality to which St. Domingue's slaves were subjected, it is not surprising that resentment of the white population smoldered within the slave population. In 1789, the French Revolution unleashed demands for sweeping social and governmental change which quickly spread from the mother country to the colonies. Planters and merchants demanded greater freedom from colonial ministers; free-coloreds and mulattoes demanded social equality. A virtual civil war erupted, with all factions raising troops and fighting for control of the colonial government.⁹ For two years, St. Domingue's slaves sat on the sidelines of this fighting. But by 1791 a number of factors had converged to ignite the flames of open revolt within this population. During the period from 1788 to 1791 the slave population burgeoned--growing by more than 100,000--as a result of soaring demand for sugar and the other exports of St. Domingue. These newly imported Africans, "insufficiently acculturated" to ensure docility, would provide the "mass base of the insurrection."¹⁰ Additionally, "mushrooming prices of colonial products in revolutionary France" translated into increased slave exploitation, further fanning slave unrest.¹¹ Finally, the white planters, preoccupied with their own grievances, loosened their grip on the slaves, allowing repressed hatred finally to explode, fueled by the cries of liberty and equality that reverberated throughout the French Revolution.¹²

The course of the slave rebellion begun in fire on the night of August 22, 1791, was long and tortuous. In the process of achieving independence, the slaves fought and defeated, in turn, the local white planters and troops of the French monarchy, a Spanish invasion, a British expeditionary force, and, in the end, the supposedly invincible army of Napoleon Bonaparte. Instrumental in

the Revolution's success was one man--Toussaint Louverture, a former Creole slave, regarded by some as a savior and by others as a calculating dictator.¹³ In 1793, he took charge of the poorly-organized slaves and molded them into an efficient, disciplined fighting unit known for its guerrilla attacks. It was Toussaint's leadership that steered the revolution through years of savage fighting in a three way racial war between whites, blacks, and mulattos. In 1796, he became St. Domingue's governor general. Through a shrewd mixture of statecraft and diplomacy, he began to rebuild his battered, war-ravaged country, eventually negotiating trade alliances with the British and the United States.

Feared by monarchies and slaveowners, Toussaint became known as the Black Napoleon. Meanwhile, the real Napoleon had set his sights on retaking St. Domingue as part of his re-establishment of a French empire in the Western Hemisphere. To defend St. Domingue and the other Sugar Islands of the West Indies, Napoleon intended to create a North American military base located in the vast Louisiana territory, newly re-acquired from Spain. The agricultural output of the Louisiana territory would feed the sugar colonies--which, while prosperous, had never been self-sufficient--and its wealth in furs and raw materials would be used to finance Napoleon's military ventures. Before he could take control of Louisiana, however, Napoleon needed to regain control of St. Domingue, which was to serve as a rest stop and supply center for ships headed for the North American continent. Toussaint was an obstacle to Napoleon's ambitions; in particular, to his plan to restore slavery to the French Caribbean.¹⁴ Therefore, Napoleon dispatched a massive amphibious force to destroy him and reclaim St. Domingue. In retrospect, Napoleon would call this decision the greatest folly of his life.¹⁵

Although the French troops, commanded by Napoleon's brother-in-law General Charles Leclerc, arrived under the guise of protecting St. Domingue, Toussaint was not fooled. When the French army landed on St. Domingue, it found a barren wasteland of charred plantations, slaughtered livestock, and mutilated white corpses. Dessalines, one of Toussaint's commanding officers, emphasized the tactic of destruction employed by the rebels: "The whites from France cannot hold out against us in St. Domingue. They will fight well at first, but soon they will fall sick and die like flies.... We will harass them and beat them, we will burn the harvests and then take to the hills."¹⁶ Dessalines was right. Over the next twenty-two months, Napoleon's army was devastated by guerrilla warfare, insurrections and yellow fever.¹⁷ In June 1802, the French, exasperated and exhausted, resorted to deception to defeat Toussaint, luring him to a meeting ostensibly to discuss peace. Once there, Toussaint was captured and transported to France, where he died a prisoner ten months later.

Toussaint's capture, however, did not end St. Domingue's fight for freedom; instead, it incited his followers to fight even harder. In October 1802, Leclerc sent a desperate message to Napoleon requesting more men and advising: "If you cannot send the troops I demand...[the colony] will be forever lost to France."¹⁸ Napoleon responded to this plea by sending 20,000 additional troops under a new commander in January 1803, but these reinforcements arrived too late to turn the tide. By November, having lost more than 40,000 troops in battle or from disease, France surrendered and was forced to leave

the island.¹⁹ Napoleon's legendary army had been defeated by former slaves with no formal military training.

The historical impact of the Haitian Revolution would extend far beyond the small Caribbean island. Without control of the crown jewel of its planned empire, France saw the Louisiana territory as a useless drain on its resources. Needing money for his renewed war with England, Napoleon sold the vast Louisiana territory to the United States on April 30, 1803, for about four cents an acre.²⁰ With this abrupt act, France removed itself as a power in the Western Hemisphere.

For the United States, the Louisiana Purchase was a turning point the historical importance of which has been ranked "next to the Declaration of Independence and the adoption of the Constitution."²¹ This single acquisition doubled the nation's size, making it formidable enough to withstand almost any outside threat. It gave the country its heartland, as well as control of the Mississippi River and the important port city of New Orleans on the Gulf of Mexico.

By acquiring New Orleans, the United States removed the trade barrier which the French had imposed against Americans wishing to ship goods through New Orleans. So important was this port to the commerce of the young United States that, in April 1803, President Thomas Jefferson wrote:

There is on the globe one spot the possessor of which is our natural and habitual enemy. It is New Orleans, through which the produce of three-eighths of our territory must pass to market. The day that France takes possession of New Orleans...we must marry ourselves to the British fleet and nation.²²

The opening of New Orleans also resolved a deeply divisive political problem. The French closing of the Mississippi River to American traffic violated the 1783 Treaty of Paris. Westerners, dependent on the Mississippi River and the port of New Orleans to get their products to eastern markets, wondered why they should pay taxes to a country that would not stand up for them, and they threatened to become French citizens or secede from the United States unless the government invaded Louisiana. The Louisiana Purchase ended this threat.²³

In a broader sense, the Purchase fundamentally transformed the way Americans thought about themselves. The vast open spaces of the Louisiana territory drew immigrants from all over Europe, changing the character of the nation by increasing its social diversity.²⁴ The push to settle this new territory shifted the eyes of the country westward,²⁵ making further expansion almost inevitable and giving birth, if not to the term, at least to the forces behind "manifest destiny"--the idea that the United States had both a right and a duty to own and settle the entire continent. Before the Louisiana annexation, Americans "in many ways still had a colonial attitude; they still looked to England and to France."²⁶ With the acquisition the Louisiana territory, their focus shifted to their own continent. "[F]or the first time, Americans became Americans as we know them, people with a continental view."²⁷

The Haitian Revolution initiated all of this change. But its impact did not stop there. The revolt of the Haitian slaves also influenced forces that helped foment what many have called the defining moment in American history: the

Civil War. The push to create new states out of the vast Louisiana territory led to dissension between North and South over whether the new states would be admitted as slave or free. New England Federalists threatened to secede rather than permit the delicate balance that had been worked out between the mercantile states of the North and the slave-holding states of the agrarian South to be upset.²⁸ For the South, the stakes in this debate were raised by a boom in the demand for cotton that coincided with the acquisition of the Louisiana territory.²⁹ The plantation economy, dependent on slave labor, quickly spread to the southern regions of the Louisiana territory. For these new planters, the debate over slavery was an economic as well as a philosophical issue. The tensions over the treatment of the slavery question in the states carved out of the Louisiana territory would ultimately trigger guerrilla warfare in Bleeding Kansas, which in turn was a factor leading to the Civil War.³⁰

The impact of the Haitian Revolution on the United States was not confined, however, to the slave-versus-free-state debate. In the ante-bellum South, "No issue having to do with slavery and the role of blacks in American society was discussed at so many different times, in so many different ways, for so many different reasons as the lessons of the Haitian Revolution."³¹ Reports of the fury vented by the Haitian slaves on their white oppressors reached the United States, transmitted by refugees fleeing St. Domingue. One eyewitness reported seeing "young children transfixed upon the points of bayonets"³² Others described slaves dragging white planters from their homes and tearing off their limbs one by one or strapping them to wooden racks and sawing them in half.³³ "Whites had always been aware of slaves as 'troublesome property,' but only after St. Domingue did they react to the threat as a real one and not just a potential one."³⁴ Alarmed, they worried that once slaves "get a taste for freedom...they will not easily be made to abandon the enterprise."³⁵

Southern fears were not entirely unfounded. Slave uprisings in the United States greatly increased after 1791, and evidence of a direct connection between this growing slave unrest and the Haitian revolt exists. In the case of one major slave revolt, the Denmark Vesey plot in 1802 to burn Charleston, South Carolina, for example, evidence established that Vesey had communicated with Haitian blacks and even expected a Haitian invasion to support his rebellion in South Carolina.³⁶ Reacting to the Haitian Revolution, southern slaveholders increased the repression of their own slaves to prevent a similar revolt.³⁷ Repressive measures were also directed at the large number of freed blacks, feared by whites as a potential source of insurrection. Laws were passed "to make it harder for masters to free their slaves, regulation after regulation attempted to control the movements of Blacks and to prohibit the assembly of, or indeed any contact between, free Blacks and slaves."³⁸

This repression impassioned the northern Abolitionist movement and further polarized the North and South in the years preceding the Civil War. The increased brutality directed toward the slaves by fearful slaveholders became a central focus of the Abolitionists' crusade to end slavery. They seized upon the example of Toussaint as proof that blacks were not inferior to whites but were instead quite capable of freedom.³⁹ Moreover, measures undertaken in the South to discourage slave uprisings, including the employment of the Army for

slave control activities and attacks on the right of assembly and petition, produced a counter-reaction in the North, helping to broaden the anti-slavery struggle "into a battle for the security of the democratic rights of white people."⁴⁰ This development has been called "probably the most important force strengthening the entire Abolitionist movement."⁴¹ In 1861, the tensions between North and South--exacerbated by events that happened directly or indirectly because of Haiti--finally exploded into the Civil War.

For the former slaves of St. Domingue, the freedom for which they fought would prove ephemeral, largely erased by a succession of dictators. But the impact of the Haitian Revolution would be indelible in the United States, where a slave revolt on foreign soil must, today, be recognized as a major turning point in American history.

Appendix

EXAMPLES OF LAWS AND REGULATIONS ENACTED IN SUBSTANTIAL PART IN REACTION TO THE HAITIAN SLAVE REVOLT

- In 1794 and 1800, the federal government passed anti-slave trade laws to prevent the possible spread of the Haitian slave revolt to the U.S. The first prohibited citizens from equipping ships engaged in slave trade commerce, and the second prohibited Americans from serving aboard such ships or from having any interest in their voyages. (Aptheker, 45).
- Beginning in 1792, southern states, including South Carolina, Kentucky, North Carolina, Georgia, and Maryland, passed laws restricting slave trade as a means of preventing the possible infection of the U.S. by the Haitian rebellion. South Carolina's statute prohibited the importation by any one person of more than two slaves, and required that the slaves imported be for personal use only. This law was subsequently modified to retain a total ban only with respect to slaves from the West Indies or South America. However, all imported slaves had to be accompanied by a statement signed by two magistrates attesting that the slaves had not been involved in any insurrection or revolt. (Ibid., 73-74).

- In 1797, Baltimore, Maryland passed an ordinance declaring all slaves imported from the West Indies between 1792 and 1797 to be "dangerous to the peace and welfare of the city" and ordering their masters to banish them. (Ibid., 74).
- Many southern states enacted measures restricting the civil liberties of blacks, including laws forbidding meetings of slaves without the presence of whites, prohibiting the assembly of blacks on city streets after dark, requiring slaves to have passes when off plantation, forbidding slaves to possess weapons, and providing severe penalties for sedition. (Ibid., 73-74).
- A South Carolina regulation made it necessary for a magistrate and five freeholders to approve a document of manumission, freeing slaves from bondage. One of the stated reasons for this regulation was a concern that slaveholders would release slaves "of bad or depraved character" who might incite rebellion once freed. (Ibid. 75)
- Freed blacks were restricted in their right to hold certain jobs or learn certain trades that might make it easier for them to organize a rebellion. They were also restricted in their freedom of movement from state to state or county to county. (Ibid., 77-78).
- In some states, blacks were prevented from testifying in court against white persons; this restriction had the effect of preventing blacks from defending themselves against charges that they were part of a slave conspiracy. (Aptheker,77).
- Shortly after the Vesey Plot to burn Charleston was aborted, white Carolinians took measures to ensure that free blacks were given even less freedom. As part of this effort, in December 1832, the South Carolina legislature enacted the Free-Colored Seamen's Act, requiring that all free blacks employed on incoming vessels be detained in jail while their ship was in port. (Hunt, 120).

Annotated Bibliography

PRIMARY SOURCES