

How Should We Remember Toussaint Louverture?

It helps to begin the story of Toussaint Louverture with a little geography. In 1492 Christopher Columbus landed on the large Caribbean island of **Hispaniola**. Two centuries later, in 1697, the French officially took control of the western half of the island and renamed it **Saint Domingue**. Saint Domingue changed its name to **Haiti** in 1804 and remains so today.

Behind the name changes, of course, is a much deeper history. Under French control, Saint Domingue became one of the richest colonies in the world. By the 1780s, its 8,000 plantations were producing 40 percent of the world's sugar and more than half of the world's coffee. The work was done by 500,000 slaves owned by several thousand rich white **planters**.

It was into this world that Toussaint Louverture was born, sometime in the 1740s. As a young slave, he served as a herder, then a coachman and, later, an overseer of fellow slaves in the field. Records suggest that during these years he was taught to read and write by his godfather. Granted freedom by his owner, Toussaint rented a small coffee plantation and acquired a dozen slaves of his own.

In the summer of 1789 news of the French Revolution swept across the island. Words like "Liberté" and "Egalité" were in the air. After white refusal to end slavery in Saint Domingue, thousands of plantations were burned and hundreds of whites and mixed-raced people were killed. In the midst of this struggle, Toussaint Louverture emerged as a leader. Though he was no longer a slave when the rebellion broke out, Toussaint worked behind the scenes to encourage slaves to fight for their freedom. By 1793, Toussaint commanded a rebel army of 4,000 troops against French forces on the island. When in 1794 the revolutionary government in France abolished all slavery in the French colonies,

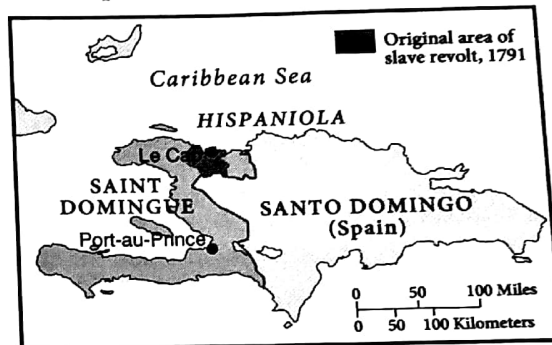
Toussaint quickly pledged allegiance to France and was appointed commander-in-chief of the army in Saint Domingue. He was at this point the most powerful person on the island.

But then an unexpected change came about. Napoleon Bonaparte had risen to power in France and it was feared he was planning to **reinstate** slavery in Saint Domingue. Indeed, in 1802, Napoleon launched an invasion of 21,000 French troops. Toussaint and his fellow generals put up an impressive fight, but Toussaint was captured and taken to France. Surprisingly, at

this point Napoleon pulled his suffering troops out of Saint Domingue, giving up the fight. Ironically, just as Saint Domingue was celebrating victory, Toussaint was dying from pneumonia in a French jail. He never knew that Haiti, on January 1, 1804, would

become an independent nation.

The Task: You are working on a public radio documentary series *Revolutionary Leaders in World History*. Your producer calls you into her office and hands you six documents describing Toussaint Louverture's leadership during the Haitian Revolution. The documents fall into three categories: liberator of slaves, ruler of Saint Domingue, and military commander. Your job is to read the documents and write a short proposal on how to present the material. Your producer reminds you that you must follow the 30-20-10 program format. This means you must decide which of Toussaint's leadership qualities will get the most airtime. The most important role will get 30 minutes and the other two roles will get 20 minutes and 10 minutes, respectively. The goal is to make the radio program both interesting and balanced. The working title for the one-hour show is: *How Should We Remember Toussaint Louverture?*



Background Essay Questions

1. What is the difference between Hispaniola and Saint Domingue?
2. What is the difference between Saint Domingue and Haiti?
3. What evidence shows that Saint Domingue was an economically valuable colony?
4. The entire slave population of the United States in 1800 was about one million. What was the slave population of Saint Domingue in 1789?
5. In 1789, three major groups inhabited Haiti: whites, free people of color, and black slaves. About 32,000 were white and 25,000 were free people of color. Given these numbers, what percentage of Haiti's population was slave?
6. What explains why Toussaint fought against the French as a slave rebel leader in 1793, was made commander-in-chief of the French colonial army in Saint Domingue after 1794, and then fought again against the French in 1802?
7. Why wasn't Toussaint able to celebrate the independence of Haiti?
8. Define these terms:

Hispaniola

Saint Domingue

Haiti

planters

reinstate

Timeline

- 1697** – Saint Domingue becomes a colony of France.
- 1743** – Likely birth year of Toussaint Louverture
- 1776** – American independence; Toussaint Louverture released from slavery
- 1789** – The French Revolution begins.
- 1797** – Toussaint is named commander-in-chief of the French army in Saint Domingue.
- 1804** – Haiti declares independence from France and joins US as the second independent country in the Americas.
- 1821** – Mexican independence
- 1962** – Jamaica gains full independence.