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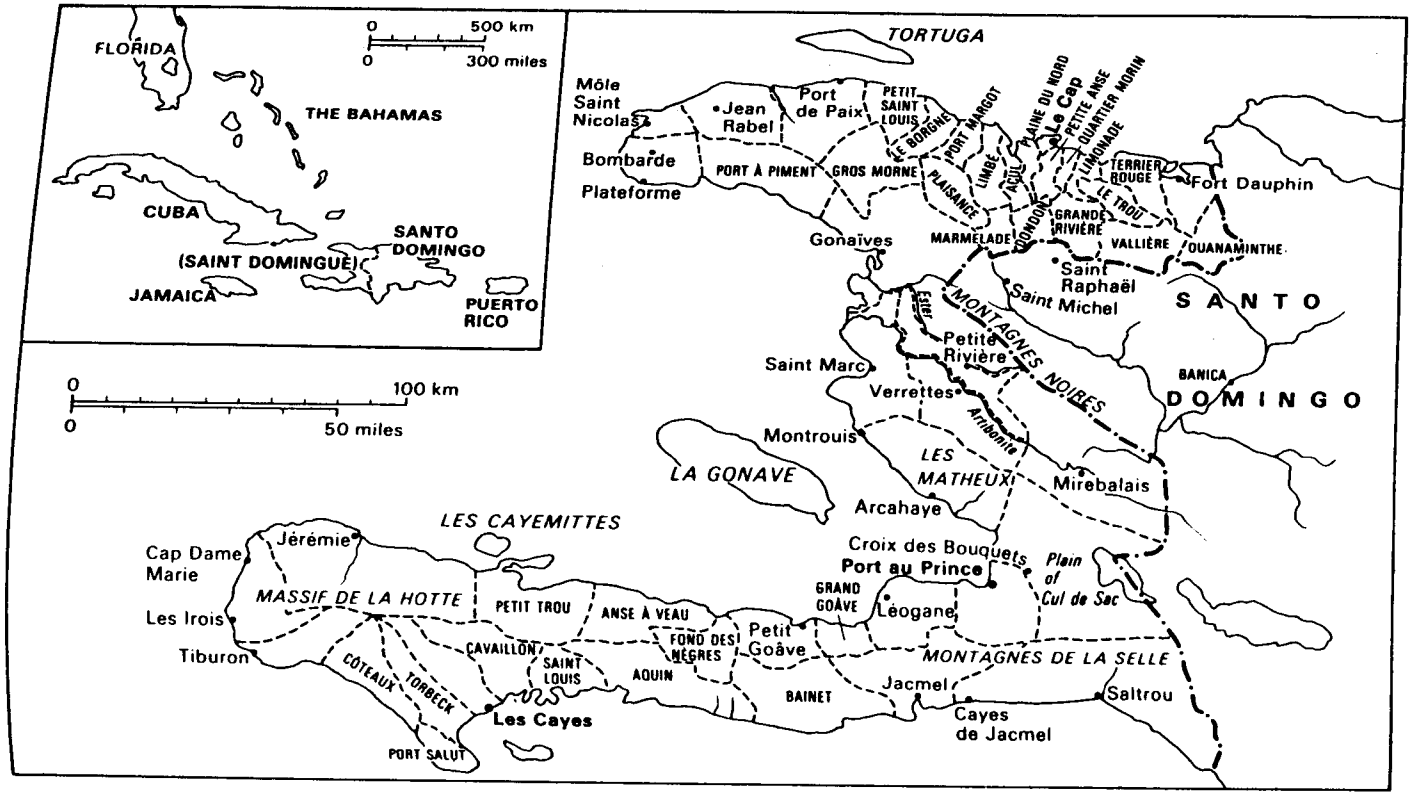

Map 1. Saint Domingue: parish boundaries and towns

1 The Haitian Revolution

Racial equality, the abolition of slavery, decolonization, and nationhood first came to the Caribbean with the Haitian Revolution.[1] Between 1791 and 1803, the opulent French colony of Saint Domingue was transformed by the largest and most successful of all slave revolts. After twelve years of desolating warfare, Haiti emerged in 1804 as the first modern independent state in the Americas after the United States. For slaves and slave-owners throughout the New World, the Haitian Revolution was an inspiration and a warning. The most productive colony of the day had been destroyed, its economy ruined, its ruling class eliminated. Few revolutions in world history have had such profound consequences.

Saint Domingue in the 1780s

In the period between the American and French revolutions, Saint Domingue produced close to one-half of all the sugar and coffee consumed in Europe and the Americas as well as substantial amounts of cotton, indigo, and ground provisions. Though scarcely larger than Maryland and little more than twice the size of Jamaica, it had long been the wealthiest colony in the Caribbean and was hailed by publicists as the "Pearl of the Antilles" or the "Eden of the Western World." Moreover, it was still expanding. In the long-settled coastal plains, the number of sugar plantations grew only slowly, but the mountainous interior was the scene of bustling pioneer activity where new coffee estates were being cut out of the mountain forests to meet a rising demand in Europe and North America.

By 1789, Saint Domingue had about 8,000 plantations producing crops for export. They generated some two-fifths of France's overseas trade, a proportion rarely equaled in any colonial empire. Saint Domingue's importance to France was not just economic but fiscal (in customs revenue) and strategic too, since the colonial trade provided both seamen for the national navy in wartime and foreign exchange to purchase vital naval stores from northern Europe (hemp, mast trees, saltpeter). In the Môle Saint Nicolas, the colony also contained the most secure naval base in the West Indies.

Although colonial statistics are not very reliable, Saint Domingue's population on the eve of the French Revolution consisted of approximately 500,000 slaves, 40,000 whites (including troops and transient seamen), and 30,000 free people of color, who constituted a sort of middle class. In broad outline, Saint Domingue society thus conformed to the three-tier structure common to all sugar colonies. However, there were some significant differences.

The tiny white community was united by racial solidarity but also divided to an unusual degree along class lines. The resulting tensions pitted sugar and coffee planters against each other as well as against merchants and lawyers and separated all of these groups from the turbulent *petits blancs,* or poor whites, an amorphous group that included plantation managers, artisans, clerks, shopkeepers, seamen, and peddlers. Such tensions reflected the wealth and diversity of Saint Domingue's economy. Also, because France was a much more populous country than Great Britain or Spain and possessed fewer colonies, Saint Domingue inevitably attracted uncommonly large numbers of indigent young men seeking employment. The richest planters, on the other hand, were able to reside in Europe and live off their revenues. This was typical of West Indian sugar colonies. At the same time, however, the extent of less profitable secondary economic enterprises such as coffee, indigo, and cotton meant that Saint Domingue also possessed a sizable resident planter class, like the southern United States or Cuba. Residence in the colony, the colony's competitive position in the world market, and its ability to produce much of its own food were factors that encouraged some planters to envisage Saint Domingue's eventual independence.

Saint Domingue's free nonwhite population was unusual for its size and, more particularly, its wealth. Except in the Iberian colonies, free people of color were generally a very small minority. Very rarely did they rise above the position of prosperous artisan. In Saint Domingue, however, the *gens de couleur libres* outnumbered the whites in two of the colony's three provinces, and they included in their number rich and cultivated planters who had been educated in France. In Saint Domingue, anyone with a black ancestor, no matter how remote, was subject to the humiliating legal discrimination typical of all slave colonies in the eighteenth century. Nonwhites were banned from public office and the professions and were forbidden to wear fine clothing, to carry weapons in town, or sit with whites in church, at the theatre, or when eating. They were not only unequal before the law but also suffered extralegal harassment, especially from poor whites with whom they competed for jobs.

The *gens de couleur* thus covered an extremely broad social range, from recently freed African slaves to rich landowners and tradesmen who were almost indistinguishable in appearance or culture from their white counterparts. They constituted merely a legal category (those who were neither slave nor white) rather than a class. Probably a majority of the men were artisans or smallholders. The women were usually petty traders or white men's mistresses. As most were of mixed racial descent, the term "mulatto" was sometimes applied to the entire free nonwhite community. Some had both whites and slaves for relatives. Their position in Saint Domingue society was therefore highly ambiguous. Many were slave-owners or hunted down fugitive slaves in the militia and rural police force. All were held in subjection by the whites.

Despite the spread of liberal ideas in Europe, the laws governing free nonwhites in France, as well as Saint Domingue, grew increasingly severe in the late eighteenth century—a paradox of the French Enlightenment. At the same time, the free coloreds grew rapidly in number and in wealth as they profited from the

coffee boom. By the 1780s, they not only dominated the rural police force but in addition formed the backbone of the colonial militia.

Saint Domingue's slave population was easily the largest in the Caribbean. It was nearly twice the size of that of Jamaica, its closest rival. The imbalance between slave and free, black and white was not unusually extreme, but for most of the 1780s, the number of slaves grew at a faster rate than probably anywhere else. During the period 1785–1790, an average of more than 30,000 manacled Africans were imported each year. Despite the influx of white immigrants and the growing community of free coloreds, Saint Domingue was becoming increasingly African. Young men around 20 years old comprised a substantial proportion of the black population.

The slave community was not at all homogeneous; it was even more segmented than the white and free colored groups. Split up into small units, tied six days a week to plantation labor, the slaves constituted a random agglomeration of individuals from diverse cultures; they spoke different languages and were at different stages of assimilation into colonial society. On a typical sugar estate of 200 slaves there could be Africans from twenty or more different linguistic groups. Mountain plantations were much smaller and even more isolated. Everywhere in Saint Domingue, however, Bantu slaves known as "Congos" constituted the largest of the African groups; they formed a third of the African population in the plains and well over half in the mountains.

On the lowland sugar plantations about half the adults were Creoles—that is, individuals born locally and raised in slavery; they made up perhaps one-third of the total slave population. Accustomed to producing their own food and marketing the surplus, they tended to be better off than the Africans. Fluent in the local Creole tongue, superficially Christianized, and united by at least limited family ties, they constituted the slave upper class. From their ranks were chosen the domestics, artisans, and slave-drivers who formed the slave elite. Elite slaves would have some familiarity with French, the language of the master class, and a few could read and write.

Little is known about how these groups interrelated. Plantation labor, social interaction, and the common experience of slavery inevitably imposed some sort of solidarity, which was symbolized in songs of call and response, networks of fictive kin, and a strong sense of locality. Moreover, slaves from different estates could meet at weekly markets, at Saturday night dances, and in more secret assemblies associated with the religious practices colonists called *vaudou*. Vodou (the preferred modern spelling) apparently served to integrate different religious traditions—West African, West Central African, and Christian—and doubtless helped release anomic tensions. Nevertheless, the diversity of the slave community must be accounted as one reason why, in a comparative context, Saint Domingue's slaves seem to have been remarkably unrebellious. It is true that in the twenty years before the American Revolution, poisoning scares swept the colony, but these had as much to do with white paranoia as with real resistance; in the 1780s, little was said about poison. Compared to the British or Dutch colonies, organized, violent resistance in Saint Domingue was relatively slight.

This paradox underlying the greatest of all slave revolts has received little scholarly attention. The planters themselves tended to attribute the absence of slave revolts to Saint Domingue's military-style government, which precluded the democratic dissensions of the self-governing British colonies and which placed far more stress on militia training. Certainly the slaves there seem to have been no better treated than in any other sugar colony. Perhaps most important, the colony's size and low population density meant that slave discontent was most easily channeled into fleeing to the mountains and forests. Other slaves fled over the frontier into the even more sparsely populated Spanish colony of Santo Domingo as well as to towns such as Port-au-Prince and Cap Français. While some runaways formed armed bands which attacked travelers or isolated plantations, they were never very numerous, and the 1780s saw a definite downturn in such activities. Although this is a controversial area, it seems clear that desertions were usually short-term and offered little threat to the system. Moreover, in 1777, an extradition treaty was signed with Santo Domingo. As new settlements spread into the remaining frontier regions and as the colony's forests were felled, it was becoming increasingly hard to be a successful maroon. It may be, therefore, that by the 1780s, slave dissidents were coming to see revolt as a more viable alternative.

The Influence of the American Revolution

Vulnerability to slave rebellion and foreign invasion made all West Indian colonies especially dependent on their mother countries for military and naval protection. Nevertheless, the desire for self-government had a long history in Saint Domingue, and among a minority of radical planters it was notably strengthened after the North American colonists won their independence from England. Apart from its ideological impact, the American Revolution gave Saint Domingue a tempting taste of free trade. When France intervened in the conflict, it opened the colony's ports to Yankee traders, who supplied its needs more cheaply than could French merchants. These commercial contacts were sustained after the war through a new system of free ports, but the trade was heavily taxed and subject to frustrating prohibitions. Moreover, smuggling was severely curtailed by new measures reminiscent of British action in North America twenty years before. Such conflicts of interest encouraged planters to think of themselves as "Americans" rather than Frenchmen.

The War of Independence had perhaps its greatest impact on the free community of African descent. A special regiment of free coloreds was raised and sent to Georgia to fight alongside the rebel colonists. It included André Rigaud, Jean-Baptiste Chavannes, J.-B. Villatte, Henry Christophe, Jean-Pierre Lambert, and Louis-Jacques Bauvais; its muster roll read like a roll call of future revolutionaries. These men returned to Saint Domingue with military experience and a new sense of their own importance. Prominent free coloreds secretly drew up a report attacking the caste system and in 1784 sent a representative to France.

The government, however, for fear of offending the whites or exciting the slaves, dared not yield an inch.

The abolition of slavery in Massachusetts and other northern states in the 1780s must have been discussed in Saint Domingue by American seamen and local whites, but it is not known how this affected the slaves. By the end of the decade, news was arriving from France itself of a French antislavery society, the Amis des Noirs. At the same time, government reforms aimed at limiting abuses on the plantations outraged the planter class. Hitherto, whites had presented a solid front on the question of slavery. Now cracks were starting to appear in what had been a monolithic white power structure.

The Impact of the French Revolution, 1789–1792

Historians do not agree on just how close Saint Domingue came to having a revolution in the 1780s. Whether the whites' desires for autonomy, the free coloreds' desire for equality, or the slaves' desire for liberty would of themselves have led to violent conflict must remain a matter for speculation. No one doubts, however, that the French Revolution of 1789 precipitated the colony's destruction. If Saint Domingue was a dormant volcano, as contemporaries liked to say, it needed only the shock waves of the political earthquake in Paris to provoke its eruption.

The ideological impact of the French Revolution is not easy to distinguish from its political impact. The ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity proclaimed by the revolutionaries in Paris were peculiarly dangerous for Caribbean societies, which represented their complete negation. But at the same time, the overthrow of the ancien régime in France also directly undermined the traditional sources of authority in France's colonies—governor, intendant, law courts, garrison, militia, police. The French Revolution thus enflamed social and political aspirations while weakening the institutions that held them in check.

The influence of the French Revolution was felt first at the peak of the social pyramid and thereafter worked its way downward. Although colonists were not invited when the States-General was summoned in 1788 to recommend sweeping changes in French government, wealthy planters in both Paris and Saint Domingue met in secret committees to elect deputies and ensure their representation. Their activities in fact merged with movements already underway to protest against recent government reforms in the colonies. It was the fall of the Bastille, however, and the creation of a National Assembly in the summer of 1789 that overturned the ancien régime in Saint Domingue as well as in France. While mobs of poor whites adopted the tricolor cockade and riotously celebrated the news from Paris, planters, merchants, and lawyers became politicians and elected assemblies in each of the colony's three provinces. In many parishes and towns, elected committees and municipalities emerged alongside or replaced local military commanders. The militia was converted into a National Guard dominated by the plantocracy. The intendant, former strongman of the

administration, was driven out of the colony, and the governor, uncertain of support from France, was forced to accept what he could not prevent.

From April to August 1790, a Colonial Assembly met in the town of Saint Marc. It declared itself sovereign and boldly drew up a constitution severely restricting French control even over matters of trade. Its most radical deputies openly discussed the idea of independence. The extremism of these *Patriotes* (a.k.a. Côté ouest party, or Pompons Rouges) brought about a backlash which temporarily united the Assembly of the North with the governor and military. In 1789, the elegant northern capital of Cap Français (or Le Cap) had been in the forefront of the revolution. Thereafter its prominent merchants and establishment lawyers became a moderating influence, and sprawling and shabby Port-au-Prince took over as the center of colonial radicalism. Lower-class whites came to exercise increasing control over its politics, notably after its garrison mutinied in March 1791 and caused the governor to flee to Le Cap.

Colonial politics was an affair of factions and demagogues. Without previous political experience, Saint Domingue's whites threw up local leaders of ephemeral fame who maintained the Creoles' reputation for turbulence and impulsive egotism. Divided by regional, class, and political loyalties, colonists disagreed about what degree of autonomy Saint Domingue should seek, how much militancy they should employ, what classes of whites should vote and serve together in the militia, and whether the colony should be represented in the National Assembly or cooperate directly with the king's ministers. But the great majority agreed on two things—that no one should tamper with the institution of slavery, and that the system of white supremacy should be rigorously maintained. Increasingly, however, the revolution in France came to be seen as a threat to both these pillars of colonial society.

In 1789, the Société des Amis des Noirs gained new prominence as the revolution provided a platform for its leading members (Mirabeau, Brissot, Condorcet). It campaigned only for the abolition of the slave trade and for equal rights for free coloreds and disclaimed any desire to interfere with slavery. However, to the colonial mind, which saw racial discrimination as an essential bulwark of slavery, such action endangered white lives in the West Indies. Encouraged by the Amis des Noirs, free coloreds in Paris demanded that the National Assembly live up to its Declaration of the Rights of Man. Were they not men, too, and landowners and taxpayers? At the same time, the autumn of 1789, free colored property-owners in Saint Domingue also gathered to demand equal rights with whites. Some also seem to have called for the freeing of mixed-race slaves, and those in Paris spoke of an eventual, though distant, abolition of slavery. In general, however, free people of color acted like the slave-owners they usually were and were careful not to have their cause confused with that of the black masses.

In a few parts of the colony, the early days of the French Revolution saw people of African descent and whites attending meetings together and sitting on the same committees, but this was rare. The free coloreds' request to adopt the tricolor cockade created great unease among whites. Before long they and their few white allies became the victims of intimidatory acts of violence, including mur-

der. Fears for the stability of the slave regime reinforced deep-seated prejudice, so that by 1790 it was clear that the colonists were determined to maintain the status quo and keep nonwhites out of politics. The Assembly of the West even demanded from them a humiliating oath of obedience. Faced by mounting persecution, some now fortified their plantations, but a small armed gathering in the spring in the Artibonite plain was easily dispersed. The free colored militia joined the governor's forces, which suppressed the Colonial Assembly, but the administration proved no more willing than the colonists to grant concessions.

Meanwhile, the men of color were acquiring leaders from among wealthy nonwhites now returning from France, men who had been accustomed to equal treatment. These included Villatte, J.-B. Lapointe, and Pierre Pinchinat, but it was the light-skinned Vincent Ogé (an unsuccessful small merchant) who decided to force the whites' hand. He had been a prominent spokesman of the free colored activists in Paris, where he had tried and failed to gain the cooperation of the absentee colonists. One of his brothers was killed in the skirmish in the Artibonite. In October, Ogé secretly returned to his home in the mountains of the north province. With Jean-Baptiste Chavannes, he rapidly raised an army of over 300 free coloreds and demanded that the governor put an end to racial discrimination. Despite the urging of Chavannes, Ogé refused to recruit any slaves. Free coloreds were not numerous in the north, and although they initially created great panic among the whites, Ogé's men were soon routed. Mass arrests and a lengthy trial followed. Twenty rebels were executed, Ogé and Chavannes suffering the excruciating punishment of being broken on the wheel. In the west and south, free coloreds had also taken up arms, but there they were peaceably persuaded to disperse by royalist officers. Military men were often more sympathetic to the mulattoes' cause, if only because they saw them as a counterweight to the colonial radicals. In the north, free coloreds were forcibly disarmed except for a few fugitives from Ogé's band who remained in hiding in the forests.

The National Assembly in Paris had maintained an ambiguous silence on the color question. France's revolutionary politicians were extremely embarrassed by events in the Caribbean and the issues that they raised. Colonial self-government, racial equality, and freedom for the slaves all posed serious threats to France's prosperity. The news of the barbarous execution of Ogé and Chavannes, however, shocked the National Assembly into making a compromise gesture. On May 15, 1791, free coloreds born of free parents were declared equal to whites in their political rights.[2] Although the measure concerned a very small proportion of free coloreds, news of the assembly's vote created a violent backlash in Saint Domingue. Whites, who were meeting to elect a second Colonial Assembly, seemed determined to resist the decree with force. Some talked of secession. When the governor announced he would not promulgate the decree, the patience of the free coloreds was exhausted. In August, those of the west and south began to gather in armed bands in the parishes where they were strongest. At the same time, news arrived from France that King Louis XVI had revealed his hostility to the revolution by attempting to flee from Paris.

It was in this rather complicated political situation, with civil war brewing

between whites and free coloreds, with tensions rising between conservatives and radicals, with rumors circulating of secession and counterrevolution and a new assembly gathering in Cap Français, that the slaves took everyone by surprise. At the end of August 1791, an enormous revolt erupted in the plain around Le Cap. Beating drums, chanting, and yelling, slaves armed with machetes marched from plantation to plantation, killing, looting, and burning the cane fields. From the night it began, the uprising was the largest and bloodiest yet seen in an American slave society. Spreading swiftly across the plain and into the surrounding mountains, the revolt snowballed to overwhelming proportions. Whites fled pell-mell from the plain, and military sorties from Cap Français proved ineffective against the rebels' guerrilla tactics. By the end of September, over 1,000 plantations had been burned and hundreds of whites killed. The number of slaves slaughtered in indiscriminate reprisals was apparently much greater, but this only served to swell the ranks of the insurgents. Nevertheless, a cordon of military camps managed to confine the revolt to the central section of the north province.

Most slave conspiracies in the Americas were probably betrayed before reaching fruition, and most rebellions were quashed within a few days. The circumstances surrounding the August uprising are therefore of great interest. The divided and distracted state of the whites and the alienation of the free coloreds doubtless explain much of the rebels' success, both in gathering support and in overcoming opposition. Their aims, however, are less clear. The insurgents spoke with several voices, and many appear to have believed they were fighting to gain a freedom already granted them by the king of France but which the colonists were withholding. They tended to present themselves as defenders of church and king rather than demanding the rights of man. How far this was a deliberate ploy (perhaps designed to win aid from their conservative Spanish neighbors) is hard to say, but the influence of French revolutionary ideology on the revolt would seem slight. Since 1789, slaves had called the tricolor cockade the symbol of the whites' emancipation, but in revolt they adopted the white cockade of the royalists. Rumors of a royal emancipation decree had circulated in Saint Domingue in the autumn of 1789, along with news of an insurrection in Martinique, which was itself prompted by similar rumors that may have their roots in late ancien régime reforms. The Saint Domingue uprising was one of the first of a new type of slave revolt, soon to become typical, in which the insurgents claimed to be already officially emancipated. Apparently beginning with the Martinique rebellion of August 1789, this development probably owed more to the antislavery movement than to French revolutionary ideals.

Contemporary interrogations of captives revealed that the slave revolt was organized by elite slaves from some 100 sugar estates. Later sources connect their meetings with the vodou religion. Yet the colonists refused to believe that the slaves acted alone. Royalist counterrevolutionaries, the Amis des Noirs, secessionist planters, the remnants of Ogé's band, and the free coloreds in general were all accused by one group or another in the devastating aftermath of the rebellion. However, if any outside elements were involved, they soon found that

the slaves were determined to decide their own fate. Their early leaders, Jean-François and Georges Biassou, imposed an iron discipline on the disparate groups they formed into armies. Yet when they attempted, fearing famine and defeat, to negotiate a sellout peace with the planters in December, their followers forced them back onto the offensive.

Free people of color from the parishes of Ogé and Chavannes certainly did join the slave rebels when the northern mountains were overrun, but in this they had little option. Elsewhere in the north, men of color fought against the slaves until they learned that the May 15 decree had been withdrawn. This was a fatal move by the wavering National Assembly. Although civil war between the whites and free coloreds had broken out in the western and southern provinces, the whites had been swiftly compelled to accept the latter's demands in these regions where free people of color predominated and showed exceptional military skill. Now, however, fighting began all over again. The towns of Port-au-Prince and Jacmel were burned and, as in the north, fearful atrocities were committed by all sides, making future reconciliation the more difficult. In parts of the west, white and colored planters combined to fight urban white radicals. In the south, they divided along color rather than class lines, while in the north many free coloreds joined the slave rebels. All sides began to arm slaves to fight for them, and plantation discipline slackened. Slave revolts broke out intermittently in the west and south, but the rebels were usually bought off with limited concessions, so that in general the slave regime remained intact, though shaken.

Beginning in December 1791, troop reinforcements started to arrive in small numbers from strife-torn France. The soldiers died rapidly from tropical diseases, and, needed everywhere in the colony, they had little impact on an enemy that avoided pitched battles. Not until France finally granted full citizenship to all free persons by the law of April 4, 1792 did the situation begin to stabilize. Prejudice and resentment remained strong, but in most areas outside the main towns, white and mulatto property-owners now grudgingly came to terms and turned their attention to the slaves. However, the civil commissioners who arrived in September to enforce the decree rapidly alienated most sections of the white population. Léger-Félicité Sonthonax and Étienne Polverel were dynamic and zealous radicals who scorned colonial opinion and who immediately adopted the cause of the Republic on learning that the French monarchy had been overthrown. After deporting the governor, they dissolved the Colonial Assembly, all municipalities, and political clubs. Royalist officers, autonomist planters, and racist poor whites were imprisoned and deported in large numbers, and free coloreds were promoted to public office in their stead.

Once separated from the race war, the slave rebellion assumed more manageable proportions. The 6,000 troops and national guards who came out with the civil commissioners were left inactive for months, but the northern plain was nonetheless easily retaken in November 1792. When a full offensive was eventually mounted in January 1793, Jean-François and Biassou were driven from one after another of their mountain camps, and thousands of slaves surrendered. By this time, however, the new French Republic was being propelled by

its leaders into a world war that would leave Europe and Saint Domingue irrevocably changed.

War and the Rise of Toussaint Louverture, 1793–1798

By refuting the ideology of white supremacy and destroying the governmental structure that imposed it, the French Revolution thus brought the free coloreds to power in most parts of Saint Domingue in alliance with the republican officials from France. This transfer of power to the free coloreds also gained impetus from the outbreak of war with England and Spain in the spring of 1793. The colonists looked to foreign invasion to free them from the civil commissioners, who in turn grew intolerant of any white in a position of power. Port-au-Prince was bombarded into submission by Sonthonax, and its jails were filled with recalcitrant colonists. The southern coast was already a free colored stronghold, but, following a massacre of whites in Les Cayes in July, it became effectively autonomous under the mulatto goldsmith André Rigaud. In the plain of Arcahaye, the ruthless J.-B. Lapointe established himself as a local dictator, while in the plain of Cul de Sac behind Port-au-Prince, Pinchinat, Lambert, and Bauvais became the dominant influences. At Cap Français, Villatte would achieve a similar local dominance after the burning of the town in June and the flight of some 10,000 whites to North America.

With the white colonists eclipsed and the slave revolt close to suppression, the spring of 1793 represents the high point of mulatto control in Saint Domingue. The rest of the colony's history, indeed that of independent Haiti, may be viewed as a struggle between the emergent power of the black masses and the predominantly brown-skinned middle class. Whether the slave revolt in the north could actually have been suppressed and whether slavery on the plantations of the south and west would have continued as before, of course no one can say. However, the onset of war quite clearly transformed the situation not only of the veteran fighters in the northern mountains but also of all the blacks in Saint Domingue.

As soon as war was declared, both the republican French and the Spanish, preparing to invade from Santo Domingo, began competing to win over the black rebels. They offered them employment as mercenaries and personal freedom for themselves. Both in Europe and Saint Domingue, the fortunes of the new Republic were at their lowest ebb. Half of the soldiers sent to the colony in 1792 were already dead, and no more could be expected from a France racked by civil war and itself facing invasion. The civil commissioners' rhetoric about republican virtues therefore had little impact on Jean-François, Biassou, and the other black leaders. They preferred to take guns, uniforms, and money from the Spanish and continued to attack Frenchmen and free coloreds in the name of the king. Increasingly, Sonthonax and Polverel were compelled to turn to the masses in general to shore up republican rule. First they liberalized the plantation regime, then freed and formed into legions slaves who had fought in the civil wars. To forestall a counterrevolution by the new governor, they offered

rebel bands the sack of Cap Français, and when an English invasion was imminent, they abolished slavery completely on August 29, 1793.

The decree of general emancipation was felt in the colony like an electric shock. It was greeted with hostility by white and colored planters and with some skepticism by the blacks; Sonthonax had acted unilaterally and might yet be overruled by the French government. Sonthonax's intention was to convert the slaves into profit-sharing serfs who were to be tied to their estates and subject to compulsory but remunerated labor. Almost nothing is known about how this system of forced labor functioned, either in 1793 or later years, but a disruption of plantation discipline and an increasing assertiveness on the part of the blacks were among the decree's initial effects. The hitherto powerless began to fully appreciate their latent power.

British and Spanish troops, sent from the surrounding colonies and welcomed by the planters, were to preserve slavery in most of the west and part of the south, but in some of the districts they occupied, their arrival itself provoked uprisings and the burning of plantations. Even without such militant action, a social revolution was quietly proceeding, for where planters abandoned the countryside, work in the fields ceased and the blacks adopted a peasant lifestyle centered on their provision grounds. Moreover, to supplement their scanty forces, the British, like the Spanish, were to recruit thousands of blacks as soldiers, further weakening the plantation regime. Above all, to repel the invaders, the republican forces would also, during five years of warfare, arm thousands of former slaves who until then had not left their plantations. As to the psychological effects of participating in a war of liberation, one can only guess, but in military terms the results were obvious. The civil commissioners in the north and west, André Rigaud in the south, the Spanish, and eventually the British all came to rely on armies predominantly made up of blacks.

One may argue, therefore, that although the Spanish and British occupations were intended to save the slave regime and the plantation economy, they had precisely the opposite effect. The outbreak of the European war greatly extended the effects of the slave revolt, breaking down the mental and physical shackles of slavery and plantation habit and enabling the ex-slaves to develop the military skills with which to defend their freedom. At the same time, it made the former free coloreds increasingly dependent on the martial ability of the blacks. More than this, foreign intervention completely divided the *anciens libres* (the "formerly free," as free nonwhites were now called) and isolated the large communities of the west from their cousins in the north and south. Slave emancipation was a fatal dilemma for the members of this classically unstable class. The Republic guaranteed their civil rights but then took away their property and offended their prejudices. Many, therefore, opted to support the Spanish and British, although a large number soon changed their minds. Rigaud and Villatte remained committed to the Republic, but friction between them and Sonthonax and the French general Laveaux mounted as the latter looked more and more to the blacks for support.

While this gradual shift in the internal balance of power lay in the logic of

the political situation, it also came to acquire enormous impetus from the meteoric career of a single black general, Toussaint Bréda, who in August 1793 adopted the name Louverture.[3] A few months before, he had joined the Spaniards independently of Jean-François and Biassou, under whose command he had served. During the next ten years, he was to emerge as a military commander, diplomat, and political leader of consummate ability. He would achieve international renown and be acknowledged in some quarters as one of the great men of his day. Of the previous fifty years of his life little can be said with certainty.

Like the majority of slave leaders who achieved prominence, Toussaint was a Creole who had belonged to the slave elite. He had been a coachman and in charge of the livestock on the Bréda estate just outside of Cap Français, whose manager appears to have favored him. At some point he had become a pious Christian. Though his command of French would always remain fairly basic, he had learned to read and, late in life (between 1779 and 1791), to write his name. Despite his degree of acculturation, Toussaint did not lose touch with his African roots. He is said to have spoken fluently the language of his "Arada" (Ewe-Fon) father, who apparently was the son of a chief, and to have enjoyed speaking it with other slaves of his father's ethnic group. He seems also to have become skilled in the medicinal use of plants and herbs. Such slaves who lived at the interface between white and black society needed to know the ways of both worlds. To maintain their standing in both communities, they had to be shrewd observers of human nature and skilled performers of a number of roles. It is not so surprising, then, that among Toussaint's dominant characteristics in later life were his ability to manipulate and his virtuoso use of deception. In this respect, the plantation house was a good school.

This is perhaps one reason why it has only recently been discovered that Toussaint was no longer a slave at the time of the French Revolution. He had actually been freed around the age of 30. While he maintained a close connection with the Bréda estate and its manager, he also owned and rented both slaves and small properties at different times. He thus belonged to the class of free colored slaveholders, into whose lower ranks he and his children married. One gets a picture, then, of a man of diverse experience who was at home in various social milieus: among the white colonists, who thought well of him; among Creole slaves and free blacks; and among *bossales* newly arrived from Africa.

Two versions exist of Toussaint's behavior during the August 1791 insurrection, both shakily supported by contemporary documentation. Most historians suppose that Toussaint had nothing to do with the uprising and at first protected the Bréda plantation for several months until he threw in his lot with the rebels. Others suggest that Toussaint himself secretly organized the rebellion. They claim he acted as an intermediary for counterrevolutionary whites, using his contacts among leaders of the slave community but remaining shrewdly in the background. Similar puzzles exist with regard to many other events in his life. It is certain, however, that within three months of the August uprising he had

achieved prominence among the rebel blacks and was apparently one of Biassou's advisers. He interceded successfully for the lives of white prisoners, and, as one of the free colored negotiators used by the slave leaders, he transmitted their offer to the whites to help suppress the rebellion in return for the freedom of a few score leaders. Despite the amnesty France offered to free coloreds in rebellion, Toussaint stayed with the slave rebels through the dark days of 1792. His relations with Jean-François, who called himself the "grand admiral," and with Biassou, the self-styled "generalissimo," seem to have been stormy, but he remained as one of their leading subordinates commanding a small force of his own with the rank of brigadier (*maréchal de camp*).

After he joined the Spanish around June 1793, Toussaint's star rose rapidly. In the great jumble of mountains of the north province, he immediately won a series of startling military victories against the French and free coloreds. These early campaigns reveal a leader of acute intelligence who was adept both at ambush and at totally confusing his opponents. They also reveal a man both ruthless and humane, capable of making barbarous threats but of sparing even those who had double-crossed him. This policy reaped rewards. White and mulatto property-owners surrendered to him, knowing his reputation for mercy. As arms and ammunition fell into his hands, so his tiny army grew. Lances and machetes were exchanged for muskets. Free colored and even French soldiers joined its ranks and helped train its levies. If the essence of things Creole is creative adaptation, this was a truly Creole army. In nine months, it grew from a few hundred to several thousand men.

Meanwhile, the Spanish troops stayed cautiously on the Santo Domingo frontier, paralyzed by a series of epidemics. The forces of Jean-François and Biassou, for their part, gave up campaigning for quarreling among themselves and for living it up outrageously at the expense of the king of Spain. The Spaniards soon realized that they had bitten off far more than they could chew. Such successes as they had they owed almost entirely to Toussaint. They found the handsome Jean-François vain and fickle and the impetuous Biassou gross and overbearing. But in Toussaint, Spanish officers recognized a military commander of ability and a man of honor and personal dignity. They were also much impressed by his piety and the hours he spent in church. Nonetheless, however much the Spanish might respect piety, honor, and military ability, they found themselves stuck with Jean-François and Biassou and compelled to recognize them as principal commanders.

This raises the difficult question of Toussaint's volte-face—his sudden desertion of the Spanish in the spring of 1794 and his rallying to the French Republic. According to one interpretation, it was frustrated ambition and increasing friction with Biassou that lead Toussaint to leave the Spanish and seek promotion under the French. Others attribute the changeover to a desire to win freedom for all the blacks in Saint Domingue. Specifically, they link his change of direction to the decree of February 4, 1794, by which the French government ratified Sonthonax's actions and abolished slavery in all France's colonies. However, al-

though it would seem logical that these two great events were connected, the decree was not in fact known in the colony until long after Toussaint had turned on his Spanish allies and begun negotiating with the French general Laveaux.

Even so, Toussaint's volte-face was not simply a self-interested affair. His concern for the liberty of the blacks was genuine. Although in 1791 and 1792, he was prominent among the chiefs who offered to force their followers back into slavery on the plantations, this was at moments when defeat seemed certain. Unlike Jean-François and Biassou, Toussaint never rounded up plantation blacks for sale to the Spanish, and by mid-1793, he had become associated with the idea of general emancipation. His refusal to join the French thereafter was probably attributable to the Republic's precarious position. Anyway, having joined the Spanish, Toussaint played a double game, fighting to preserve the plantation regime but at the same time speaking to the blacks of liberty and equality. This doubtless helps explain why his army grew so rapidly. It was also at this time that he adopted the name Louverture ("the opening") with its cryptic connotation of a new beginning.

Matters came to a head early in 1794. After Spanish troops arrived from Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela, hundreds of French refugees began returning to the occupied districts. Only now, after almost a year of inaction, could the Spanish seriously contemplate restoring slavery on the plantations and launching an attack on Cap Français. Resistance came from various quarters: from plantation blacks who had not taken up arms but who refused to be coerced back into the fields, from free coloreds disenchanted with their treatment by the Spanish, and from some of the black mercenary troops as well. It was behind this movement that Toussaint decided to fling his weight as of the beginning of May 1794. For several months, nevertheless, he kept up his astonishing double game while he assessed the political situation. Although he told the French general Laveaux he was fighting hard for the Republic, he remained largely on the defensive, assuring the Spanish that such hostilities as occurred should be blamed on his disobedient subordinates. At the same time, he tried to allay the suspicions of Jean-François, and he also promised his allegiance to the British forces who were threatening him from the south. In the meantime, news trickled through from Europe of republican victories and of the abolition of slavery, while in Saint Domingue the spring rains brought fevers that decimated the Spanish and British troops. Cunningly choosing his moment, Toussaint then fell on each of his opponents in turn with devastating effect.

Whether motivated by idealism or ambition, Toussaint's volte-face was therefore tortuous, cautious, and protracted, and it was not a single-handed initiative. It was nonetheless the turning point of the Haitian Revolution. Now associated with the ideology of the French Revolution, black militancy became unequivocally directed toward the complete overthrow of slavery for perhaps the first time in the Americas. The balance of power tipped against the alliance of slaveowners and foreign invaders, and French rule in Saint Domingue would be saved for another decade, but after gaining a leader of genius, the movement for black self-liberation henceforth held center stage.

The next four years was a period of almost constant warfare. For much of this time, Toussaint's ragged soldiers, "as naked as earthworms," as he graphically described them, were perpetually short of food, clothing, and ammunition. They died by the hundred in their attacks on the well-entrenched positions of the British and Spanish, but in the process was forged a formidable army. The development should not be taken for granted. Unlike the freemen of color, who had a reputation as horsemen and sharpshooters, few slaves can have had much experience of firearms or artillery, even if they had been warriors in Africa. Since 1791, they had shown themselves skillful in their use of surprise and in exploiting terrain; they were capable of great endurance and difficult to pin down. To these qualities Toussaint added the ability to maneuver in large numbers, heightened esprit de corps, and a tactical brilliance few could equal. He gathered around him an experienced officer corps which was mainly black and (in its lower echelons) ex-slave but included many mulattoes and a few whites as well. Already prominent by the end of 1794 were the youthful Moïse, whom Toussaint called his nephew, and the vigorous and stern Jean-Jacques Dessalines.

By then, the Spanish and their black auxiliaries were almost a spent force in Saint Domingue. They had lost half of their conquests and even their own frontier towns of San Rafael and San Miguel on the grassy central savanna, which had been stormed by Toussaint in October. They held the strategic northeastern seaport of Fort Dauphin, but the massacre there of some 700 French colonists by Jean-François's soldiers, who were smarting from defeat, had ended all hopes of reviving the plantation regime. Instead, Spanish and black officers cooperated in stripping the sugar estates and sending their slaves and equipment to Cuba. Defeated in Europe and the Caribbean, Spain withdrew from the war in July 1795 and became an ally of the French Republic the following year. Santo Domingo, Spain's oldest colony, had become untenable and was surrendered to France, which for the time was too weak to occupy it. Jean-François and Biassou with 800 of their followers went into pensioned exile in different parts of the Spanish Empire. In the mountains of the northeast, however, many of their soldiers fought on in the name of the king until 1797.

Toussaint's forces occupied a cordon of some thirty camps stretching from the central mountains of the north province along the fringe of the Artibonite plain to the port of Gonaïves. He thus controlled access from the north to the west. Most of the northern littoral, however, was in the hands of Villatte and other semi-independent mulatto leaders. Laveaux, now governor, was confined with his few surviving white troops to the northwestern port of Port de Paix. The broad floodplain of the Artibonite became something of a no-man's-land, but the whole of the west province to the south of it eventually fell to the British and their planter allies, although independent bands of blacks continued to harry them from various mountain strongholds. The British also held the naval base of the Môle Saint Nicolas and, at the tip of the southern peninsula, the prosperous coffee-growing region of the Grand Anse. The rest of the southern peninsula was a mulatto fief ruled from Les Cayes by André Rigaud. Launching successive attacks against the Grand Anse and Port-au-Prince, Rigaud, like

Toussaint, built up an army mainly consisting of ex-slaves. By 1798, he commanded some 10,000 soldiers and Toussaint around 20,000.

Up to 1796, the British government had hoped to conquer Saint Domingue and add it to its tropical empire. Thereafter, it became resigned to failure but dared not withdraw for fear the black revolution would be exported to its own colonies. During their first two years in Saint Domingue (the only time they had any prospect of success), the British forces averaged barely 2,000 men. Although they were massively reinforced in 1796, British commanders continued with a mainly defensive strategy that condemned most of their troops to die of epidemic diseases in the seaports. Throughout these years of war, yellow fever flourished in the Caribbean, fueled by the huge influx of non-immune European troops and their concentration in the region's ports. During the 5-year occupation of Saint Domingue, the British lost 15,000 of the 25,000 soldiers they sent there. The British also gravely blundered early on by alienating the free coloreds, many of whom deserted them. Even so, the most valuable part of the occupied zone was the plain of Arcahaye, where the local commander, the *ancien libre* Lapointe, kept the plantations in full production. By 1798, the costs of occupation were found to be prohibitive, and under mounting pressure from Toussaint and Rigaud, the British staged a gradual evacuation. Only then did slavery come to an end for some 60,000 to 70,000 blacks.

During these years, Toussaint's position within the republican zone grew steadily more dominant. Early in 1796, Villatte and the *anciens libres* of the north province attempted to overthrow Governor Laveaux in an apparent bid for independence, which seems to have been secretly supported by André Rigaud in the south. According to some sources, Toussaint knew of the planned coup and with supreme cunning actually encouraged its instigators. But once it had broken out, he intervened in force and crushed it. The French government was left in no doubt on whom it depended for keeping Saint Domingue in French hands. Toussaint, the ex-slave, was proclaimed deputy-governor, and the following year he was named commander-in-chief.

For the time being, however, the republican position remained precarious. Not only were the British now pouring troops into the colony but also dissension was rife in the republican zone. Having fled to France in 1794, Sonthonax returned to Saint Domingue in May 1796 with four other civil commissioners and 900 white soldiers. Their attempts to centralize control of both the war effort and the economy of the republican parishes quickly made enemies. As Laveaux had found, mulatto leaders who had become accustomed to complete local autonomy resented attempts to take over abandoned property they themselves were exploiting. Efforts to raise the productivity of the surviving plantations also spread fears among the ex-slaves (now called "cultivators") of a restoration of slavery. This was especially true of the northwestern peninsula, where the plantations had suffered relatively little, and whose coffee was sold to American traders for food and munitions, as in the mulatto south. From the failure of Villatte's coup to the end of 1796, the northwest witnessed a succession of uprisings by black cultivators, in which were killed most of the few remaining

white colonists in the region. Local *anciens libres* were probably behind at least some of these revolts. The revolts show, nevertheless, that even in these districts least affected by the slave revolution, a complete break with the past had by now occurred in the minds of the rural blacks. This did not mean, however, that such blacks were willing to defend their freedom by leaving their homes and becoming soldiers in Toussaint's army. Sonthonax had distributed guns to plantation workers, but when in a moment of crisis he tried to conscript all young males for military service, the extent of rebellion increased. At the same time, the mulatto south broke away from French rule, when the tactless commissioners sent to Les Cayes were expelled by André Rigaud and more whites were massacred.

The Republic was to weather these crises but only at the cost of seeing more and more power pass into the hands of Toussaint Louverture. It was his homespun diplomacy that finally pacified the blacks of the northwest. The African general Pierre Michel, hero of the northeastern campaigns and a favorite of Sonthonax, was then arrested. Earlier rivals of Toussaint had already disappeared. Toussaint had formed a remarkably close friendship with the aristocratic Governor Laveaux, referring to him in his correspondence as "Papa," although the two men were about the same age. Even so, by the autumn of 1796 Toussaint was intimating that Laveaux could best serve Saint Domingue if he were in Paris, where angry planters were demanding the restoration of Caribbean slavery; Laveaux was promptly elected a deputy for Saint Domingue and returned home to France. Next it was the turn of Commissioner Sonthonax. In the summer of 1797, Toussaint suddenly accused him of plotting to make Saint Domingue independent. Although still popular with the blacks, he also was forced to depart.

Smitten with life in the West Indies and threatened by political reaction in Paris, Sonthonax may indeed have wished to see Saint Domingue sever ties with France. Nevertheless, Toussaint's accusation suggests a neat sense of irony. While continuing to play the role of a loyal servant of the French Republic, he eliminated all his rivals within the colony one by one. The French government was becoming alarmed and in 1798 dispatched a new representative, General Hédouville. In six months, he, too, was deftly outmaneuvered, although with all due courtesy, and driven out of Saint Domingue by a supposedly spontaneous uprising. Whether or not Toussaint was aiming for independence, or even supreme power, at this time, historians will probably never agree. However, the growth of Toussaint's power was inexorable.

The Ascendancy of Toussaint Louverture, 1798–1802

Toussaint's expulsion of Sonthonax facilitated a rapprochement with Rigaud which enabled the two men to cooperate in driving out the British. Thereafter, only Rigaud himself stood between Toussaint and complete domination of Saint Domingue. Rigaud now controlled all the southern peninsula; Toussaint, all the north and west. Once their common enemy had been eliminated, relations between them rapidly deteriorated. Even today, the conflict be-

tween Toussaint and Rigaud is regarded by Haitians as one of the most sensitive topics in their history. It has become known as the War of Knives. Although it was in essence a regional power struggle, it tended to divide the light-skinned *anciens libres* from the new class of black military officers, although most of the troops on both sides were black ex-slaves. Many of Toussaint's light-skinned officers, although they had been with him for years, sided with Rigaud, and when Toussaint invaded the south, they staged rebellions against him. The fighting was desperate, and Toussaint's reprisals were brutal, although prudently delegated to subordinates. The details are disputed, but the black general Dessalines has been accused of waging something like a war of genocide against the southern mulattoes. Toussaint later reproved him: "I ordered you to prune the tree not to uproot it." Rigaud and most of the leaders fled to France.

By the middle of 1800, Toussaint ruled supreme in Saint Domingue and of necessity was recognized as its governor. A small, wiry man, very black, with mobile, penetrating eyes, he greatly impressed most who met him, even those who thought him ugly. He had lost his upper set of front teeth in battle and his ears were deformed by wearing heavy gold earrings, but his presence was commanding and suggested enormous self-control. Whether socializing with white planters or pacifying angry plantation workers, his manner was reserved but dignified. In private, the whites might mock his rusticity (his headscarf, his limited French) or his "pretensions" (his huge watch chains, his moralizing piety), but in his presence no one laughed. Though Toussaint maintained the external pomp of previous colonial governors and acquired much landed property, his private life was frugal. Wary of being poisoned, he ate little, and he slept only a few hours each night, invariably working late with his secretaries. His prodigious activity astonished people, as did the air of mystery he deliberately cultivated. He supposedly rode over 100 miles a day on horseback, making frequent changes of direction so that no one could be sure where he would appear next.

After the war ended in the south, Toussaint could set about rebuilding the colony and restoring its shattered economy. Although fiercely committed to the liberty of the blacks, he believed it essential that the plantation regime be revived in order to restore Saint Domingue's prosperity. With no export economy, there would be no revenue to maintain his army of 20,000 to 40,000 men. And without the army, the gains of the revolution would be at the mercy of France's unstable politics. Toussaint therefore continued with the schemes of Commissioner Sonthonax, whereby the ex-slaves were compelled to work on the plantations in return for a share of the produce. It was a difficult policy to implement, for increasingly the blacks preferred to establish smallholdings of their own and had little desire to work for wages. This was especially true of the sugar estates, which depended on regimented gang labor and where the working day was long and arduous. Already accustomed to marketing their own food crops, most blacks preferred to concentrate on extending their family provision grounds, cheerfully letting the fields of cane and coffee choke with weeds. Toussaint, however, refused to break up the great estates. He used the army to impose the regime of forced labor and sanctioned the use of corporal punishment; he even

supported the reintroduction of the slave trade to make up the loss of manpower. As most estates had been abandoned by their owners, they were leased out, usually to army officers and other privileged figures in the new regime. In addition, Toussaint also encouraged the return from exile of the white planters to take charge of their properties and work toward the creation of a new Saint Domingue.

The return of the planters, of course, raised grave suspicions among the plantation blacks and among some of Toussaint's officers. They resented the white advisers he appointed and the pleasure he evidently took in inviting planters and merchants to his social gatherings. A naturally taciturn man, he seemed to be becoming increasingly remote. These tensions were given violent expression when the very popular General Moïse staged a revolt in the northern plain which caused the deaths of many of the returned planters. When Toussaint had him executed, many thought his policies were going awry. It is usually argued that Toussaint thought that the technical expertise of the whites and their social polish were necessary to the rebuilding of the colony and that he therefore was committed to a multiracial Saint Domingue. Recent work, however, has stressed that although Toussaint encouraged the whites to return, he rarely gave them back their estates. They tended to remain in the hands of his army officers, who constituted a new black landholding class. The return of the planters served to camouflage this development; it also provided hostages.

It is by no means clear how successful Toussaint was in reviving the plantation economy. Export figures for the twelve months following the war against Rigaud (1800–1801) show coffee production at two-thirds the 1789 level, raw sugar down by four-fifths, and semi-refined sugar, the most valuable item, almost nonexistent. On the other hand, it is likely that trade figures were deliberately understated to allow the amassing of secret funds and the stockpiling of munitions. The administrative confusion and the autonomy of local army commanders, of which white officials complained, probably fulfilled the same function. According to his critics, Toussaint kept his generals' loyalty by allowing them to amass personal fortunes. Their troops went unpaid, but the soldiers were allowed to exercise a petty tyranny over the cultivators, whose provision grounds were subject to army requisitions. Only on the generals' plantations were the labor laws effectively applied. Other commentators painted a more enthusiastic picture of the regime, insisting that a new spirit was abroad in the colony. Race prejudice was diminishing fast. Towns were being rebuilt. Justice was administered impartially. Even some schools were established (although this was a French initiative). All one can say with certainty is that the new regime was given very little time to prove itself.

Late in 1799, France, like Saint Domingue, acquired a military strongman for a ruler. Napoleon Bonaparte and Toussaint Louverture had much in common. Both were seen as defenders of basic revolutionary gains of the previous decade, particularly of new land settlements. Both were autocrats who extinguished all political liberty in their respective countries. Both were destroyed by their own ambition. In July 1801, shortly before Napoleon proclaimed himself consul for

life, Toussaint promulgated a constitution for Saint Domingue which flagrantly concentrated all power in his hands and made him governor for life with the right to choose his successor. Drawn up by planters with a secessionist background, the document came within a hairsbreadth of a declaration of independence. Toussaint had anticipated by 160 years the concept of associated statehood. Napoleon was infuriated. Yet the first consul had already determined that French rule should be restored in what had been France's most valuable possession.

But there was nothing inevitable about the epic clash between Toussaint and Napoleon. Although he was constantly under pressure from vengeful planters, merchants, and colonial officials, Bonaparte had resisted for well over a year their clamor for a military expedition. His original policy was to leave Toussaint in control of Saint Domingue and to use the colony as a springboard for expanding French power in the Americas. Black troops would be sent to conquer the slave colonies of France's rivals. As part of the plan, Louisiana was purchased from Spain. However, by the spring of 1801 it was apparent that, under its black governor, Saint Domingue would be of little use to France; it was de facto already an independent state. Although France was at war with Great Britain and was unofficially at war with the United States (the Quasi-War of 1798–1800), Toussaint had made a secret commercial treaty and nonaggression pact with both these powers. This involved expelling French privateers from the colony. His purpose was to preserve the trade on which Saint Domingue, and his army, depended. The United States supplied vital foodstuffs, livestock, and munitions; the British navy controlled the sea-lanes, and would otherwise have blockaded Saint Domingue. This is why, when the French and *anciens libres* tried to foment a slave rebellion in Jamaica and sent agents there from Saint Domingue, Toussaint betrayed the plot to the Jamaican administration. Whatever his interest in black liberation, he needed to keep on good terms with his neighbors in order to preserve his autonomy.

In spite of Toussaint's independent foreign policy and his ambiguous behavior toward the planters, until March 1801, Napoleon's intention remained to work with the black leader, not against him. However, the last straw for Napoleon came when Toussaint suddenly annexed without reference to France the adjoining colony of Santo Domingo, which was then French territory. The ex-slave thereby became master of the entire island of Hispaniola. It was the high point of his career. Suspicious of French intentions, Toussaint aimed to deny a potential invasion force use of Santo Domingo's harbors. But it was precisely this event that persuaded Napoleon that an invasion was necessary. Toussaint's new constitution merely enraged him further. Nevertheless, the fatal decision to attempt to restore slavery in Saint Domingue was not taken for another year, long after the invasion force had landed. Although usually presented as an act of vicious megalomania, the Napoleonic invasion of Saint Domingue was more like a last-ditch attempt to keep the plantation regime in French hands.

Toussaint had grossly miscalculated. If he was willing to antagonize Napoleon to this degree, some say, he should have gone all out and declared complete

independence, rallying the black masses behind him. Instead, he kept up the fiction of loyalty to France, sending envoys to Napoleon to explain each act of defiance. He continued to assure local whites of his goodwill and to admonish the blacks about the necessity of hard work. The ambivalence of his double game was to critically weaken black resistance to the coming invasion. Toussaint's failure to declare independence was doubtless due to a number of factors. Caution, the need for white administrative personnel, and the fear of alienating the slave-holding Americans and British were probably the most important. By stopping short of de jure independence, Toussaint evidently thought that Napoleon would negotiate rather than fight. Perhaps he overrated the military lessons he had taught the Spanish and British. Or perhaps he believed that the British navy would prevent a French fleet from crossing the Atlantic.

The British, however, would support the black governor's rule only so long as it weakened France's war effort, and the Anglo-French war was now drawing to a temporary close. The British government feared both Toussaint and Napoleon but regarded the latter as the lesser of two evils. To see the two embroiled in internecine conflict would be a perfect compromise solution to a threatening situation. In October 1801, as soon as peace preliminaries were signed, the British gave their assent to an invasion of Saint Domingue.

The War of Independence, 1802–1803

Napoleon's brother-in-law, General Leclerc, landed in Saint Domingue at the beginning of February 1802 with some 10,000 soldiers. By sending out a large force in the healthy winter months and deploying it rapidly, Napoleon avoided the worst mistakes of the British and Spanish. His troops were also far superior to those previously sent there, and their numbers were doubled within two months. Leclerc's orders were nevertheless to seize the colony by ruse, winning over the black generals where possible. Only later, once he had allayed their suspicions, was he to disarm their soldiers and deport all the black officers. The plantations would be returned to their owners. Slavery would be restored in Santo Domingo, where it had never been officially abolished, but in Saint Domingue the forced labor regime would be retained. Leclerc both said and thought he was reestablishing French rule but not slavery.

Uncertain of French intentions, the blacks failed to offer any concerted resistance, and Leclerc quickly occupied all the colony's ports. Cap Français, under the eye of Toussaint, was burned by its commander, Henry Christophe, as was Saint Marc by Dessalines, but several of the generals surrendered without a fight. They were now planters themselves and had property to protect. Toussaint, Christophe, and Dessalines, however, took to the mountains, fighting heroic rearguard actions and destroying all they left behind. Battle casualties were heavy, and from the beginning the war was marked by frightful atrocities on both sides. Fearing the return of slavery, the rural population rallied to the black army and produced guerrilla leaders of their own. However, as successive generals surrendered, their troops were turned against those who still held out.

Through the month of April, Toussaint kept up a vigorous guerrilla campaign with great persistence but dwindling resources. He surrendered early in May and retired to private life on one of his plantations. Christophe, Dessalines, and the other generals were maintained in their posts and used by the French to mop up remaining guerrilla resistance.

It may be that all three leaders were biding their time. Leclerc's army was already severely weakened, and the blacks well knew that during the summer it would be decimated by disease. Nevertheless, when within a month Toussaint was accused of plotting rebellion, it was Dessalines and Christophe who helped denounce him. The old leader was kidnapped and hastily deported; he died in a French dungeon in April 1803. Despite this devious maneuvering by the military leaders, small bands of insurgents fought on in the mountains in the tradition of the maroons. As Toussaint declared on leaving the colony, the French had felled only the trunk of the tree of liberty; it had strong roots and would grow again.

The situation changed dramatically in July 1802, when it was learned (by the blacks and Leclerc almost simultaneously) that the French government had decided to restore slavery in all French colonies. Attempts to disarm the rural population now met with massive resistance, just when hundreds of French soldiers each week were dying of yellow fever. The campaign of terror launched by Leclerc proved counterproductive. As thousands of black prisoners, men and women, went stoically to their deaths, a new sense of unity was forged based on racial solidarity. By the autumn, the French were fighting most of the nonwhite population of Saint Domingue. Even the *anciens libres* who had fled the south in 1800 and returned in Leclerc's army now combined with their former opponents. Led by Rigaud's protégé, Alexandre Pétion, they accepted the overall leadership of Jean-Jacques Dessalines, who finally deserted the French in late September. As Toussaint's inspector of agriculture, the conqueror of the mulatto south, and then Leclerc's chief collaborator, Dessalines had been responsible for the deaths of many blacks and *anciens libres.* However, he was the ideal person to lead the struggle to expel the French, and not only because he was the senior general. A menial slave under the old regime, he had none of the liking for the white society which Toussaint, and the former domestic Christophe, shared with the *anciens libres.* He spoke only *kreyol,* the language of the cultivators. And he was possessed of demonic energy; his battle cry was "Burn houses, cut off heads!"

After Leclerc himself died of yellow fever, the repugnant General Rochambeau openly waged a war of genocide against the black population, but to no avail. No one can say how far Napoleon would have gone in this hopeless venture, but once war was resumed with Great Britain in May 1803, he had to admit defeat. He had already sent 44,000 troops to Saint Domingue. Thereafter the British navy prevented any reinforcements from crossing the Atlantic. Napoleon's western design was at an end. Louisiana was sold to the United States. With British ships blockading the coast of Saint Domingue and Dessalines's forces besieging the coastal towns, the remains of the French army evacuated

the colony in November. Since 1791, more than 70,000 European soldiers and seaman had died in the attempt to maintain slavery. Of the few thousand whites who optimistically stayed behind, most died in a series of massacres in the following months.

International Repercussions

On January 1, 1804, Dessalines declared Saint Domingue independent and gave it the aboriginal Amerindian name of "Haïti." "I have given the French cannibals blood for blood," he proclaimed. "I have avenged America."[4] During the war of independence, some of the blacks referred to themselves as "Incas," and some European writers also fancifully depicted the ex-slaves as avenging the Arawaks exterminated in the sixteenth century. While anchoring the new state to the American past, the country's new name meant above all a symbolic break with Europe. All whites were henceforth forbidden to own land in Haiti.

Having destroyed the wealthiest planter class in the New World and defeated the armies of France, Spain, and England, the former slaves and free coloreds now went about making laws for themselves and erecting a state apparatus. In a world dominated by Europeans and where slavery and the slave trade were at their height, the new state was a symbol of black freedom and a demonstration of black accomplishments. For both abolitionists and the proslavery lobby, Haiti was a great experiment, a crucial test case for ideas about race, slavery, and the future of the Caribbean. In Haiti itself, publicists and statesman spoke out against racism, colonialism, and enslavement.

Nevertheless, all the early Haitian statesmen took pains to disclaim any intention of intervening in neighboring colonies. Like Toussaint, they did not wish to provoke a maritime blockade or an invasion by the slave-holding powers. The exception to this policy was the annexation of Santo Domingo, which Dessalines attempted in 1805 and which was finally accomplished in 1822. As in the 1790s, rumors about the activity of Haitian "agents" continued to circulate; these rumors are given credence by some historians, but official involvement in any of the slave conspiracies or rebellions of the post-1804 period has yet to be proven. The only clear case we have of subversive proselytizing is by agents of the French Republic during the 1790s, most particularly by Victor Hugues, who from Guadeloupe helped foment rebellions among the French-speaking inhabitants of Grenada and Saint Vincent. Haiti nonetheless did make a major contribution to the abolition of slavery (and to decolonization) in the New World. In 1815, when Alexandre Pétion gave vital assistance to Simón Bolívar that enabled him to relaunch his campaign for South American independence, Pétion demanded as payment that the planter-aristocrat declare slavery in his homeland abolished, which he did on his return to South America.

From 1792 onward, laws were passed all around the Caribbean and in North America restricting immigration from strife-torn Saint Domingue. Even when the likelihood of direct interference was not considered strong, slave-owners feared the revolution's inflammatory example. Within a month of the August

1791 revolt, slaves in Jamaica were singing songs about the uprising, and before long whites in the West Indies and North America were complaining uneasily of a new "insolence" on the part of their slaves. Several plots and insurrections were partly inspired by events in Saint Domingue. Most notable of these were the conspiracies organized by free blacks in Venezuela (1795), Havana (1812), and Charleston (1822). However, many factors were at work in the slave rebellions of the period, and to suppose that mere inspiration from abroad was critical in provoking resistance would be to underestimate the difficulties confronting dissidents in this age of strong colonial garrisons.

Controversy remains about the extent to which the Haitian Revolution encouraged or delayed the progress of antislavery movements elsewhere. Some saw Haiti's example as a dire warning of what might happen if slavery was, or was not, abolished; others claimed it was irrelevant to circumstances in other places. One clearly paradoxical result of the revolution was the stimulation of slave-based agriculture elsewhere. By driving up the price of tropical products and creating a diaspora of skilled refugees, the destruction of Saint Domingue encouraged the spread of plantations along new frontiers in Louisiana, eastern Cuba, and Jamaica and increased production in already established export zones. Similarly, if Haitian assistance made a material contribution to the achievement of Venezuelan independence, its example proved to be an obstacle to decolonization in Cuba, and Haitian intervention in 1822 extinguished independence (as well as slavery) in the Dominican Republic.

France did not abandon its claims to its former colony until 1825, when the Haitian government agreed to pay a large indemnity to the expelled colonists. The debt the country thereby incurred was among the factors retarding its growth in the nineteenth century, and the concessions then given to French merchants further shifted the export economy into foreign hands. Britain and the United States had early established trade relations with the new state (which were briefly interrupted by Jefferson as a favor to Napoleon), but full diplomatic recognition was withheld by these countries until they had abolished slavery and no longer considered Haiti a threat.

The Legacy of Revolution

Created from a unique experience of slavery, war, and revolution, Haiti was to be like no other state. The fledgling black republic began life with its towns and plantations in ruins and under constant threat of another French invasion. Its population had been decimated; it was severely lacking in technical skills, and it was almost totally without experience in administration or government.

Despite the attempts to maintain production on the plantations, the ex-slaves had for a decade been building new lives for themselves as either soldiers or peasant cultivators. Fear of invasion and institutional self-interest were to burden Haiti with an exceptionally large army for the rest of the century. The earliest governments, particularly that of Henry Christophe (1806–1820), contin-

ued the struggle to revive the sugar plantations with forced labor. However, the desire of the masses for land and their hatred of estate work, together with falling sugar prices, forced the abandonment of the project by the 1830s. Haiti became a country of peasant smallholders who grew food crops and a little coffee on land distributed by the government or on which they squatted. The postwar population was presumably young and mainly female and therefore grew rapidly. The relative abundance of land meant that the peasants probably lived reasonably well in the nineteenth century. The vodou religion, although persecuted by all the early leaders as subversive to authority, became entrenched in the countryside.

Government revenues came primarily from taxing coffee exports. As in colonial times and during the revolution, the government remained military and authoritarian in character, although constitutional forms were to vary widely and regimes changed rapidly. After declaring himself emperor, Dessalines was assassinated in 1806, and for the next fourteen years Haiti was divided between a mulatto republic in the south and west and a northern state, ruled by Henry Christophe, which became a monarchy in 1811. Dessalines had made great efforts to preserve the fragile wartime alliance between blacks and *anciens libres,* but tensions continued to run deep, even after the reunification of the country in 1820. Haitian politics developed as a struggle between the uneducated black officer corps that controlled the army and the brown-skinned professional and business class which made up most of the country's elite.

This conflict was mirrored more broadly in the elaboration of two competing ideologies, one "black," the other "mulatto." In Haitian society, the color line was not at all absolute, but these two opposing camps, fronted by the Liberal and National Parties, tended to be divided by phenotype as well as by culture, religion, and attitude toward national development and toward the country's revolutionary past.