

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 "Liberte" and "Egalite" 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,

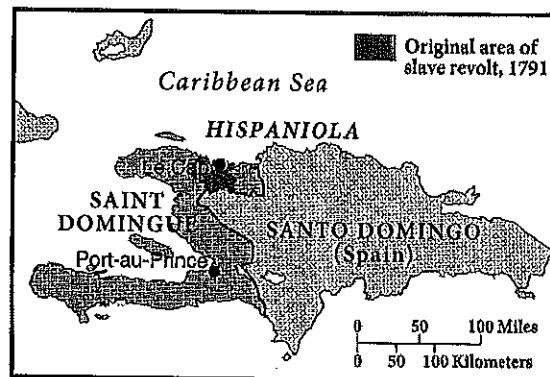
Toussaint quickly pledged allegiance to France and was appointed commander-in-chief of the army in Saint Domingue. He was at this point the most powerful person on the island.

But then an unexpected change. 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?*



EV

Document A

Source: Created from various sources.

Note: In 1789, the total slave population in Saint Domingue was 500,000. The white population was 32,000, and the mixed-race population was 25,000.

Timeline of Abolition in Saint Domingue

- 1789:** The French Revolution begins.
- 1790:** Free men of color in Saint Domingue proclaim themselves French citizens; the French National Assembly grants full civic rights to free men of color
- 1791:** A slave revolt begins in the north of Saint Domingue, Toussaint joins the revolution and serves as doctor to the troops; he also commands a small detachment of slave soldiers.
- 1792:** As a military commander, Toussaint gains a reputation for running an orderly camp and for training his men in both guerilla tactics and the European shoulder to shoulder style of war.
- 1794:** The revolutionary government in France under Robespierre abolishes slavery in France and all its colonies; Toussaint and his troops stop their revolt and now support the French.
- 1796:** Toussaint, General Dessalines, and General Christophe organize an army against the British, who are nervous about abolition spreading to their colony of Jamaica.
- 1798:** Toussaint defeats the British; becomes ruler of Saint Domingue.
- 1801:** Toussaint conquers Santo Domingo, the Spanish portion of the island.
- 1802:** Napoleon sends 21,000 soldiers to Saint Domingue to reinstate slavery. Toussaint is tricked into a negotiation meeting, is captured and sent by ship to France.
- 1803:** Napoleon withdraws from Saint Domingue but Toussaint dies in a French jail.
- 1804:** Victorious over the French, a free Haiti declares independence.

Document Analysis

1. What events in 1789 in France triggered the later slave revolution in Saint Domingue?
2. What role did Toussaint Louverture play in the 1791 slave revolt that started the Haitian Revolution?
3. Toussaint trained his soldiers in both guerilla tactics and "European style" fighting. What's the difference?
4. In 1794, why did Toussaint stop his revolt against French colonial troops on the island?
5. In what year did Toussaint become ruler of Saint Domingue? In what year did he gain control of the Spanish side of the island?
6. According to this document, what two things are most important to remember about Toussaint?

Document B

Source: Toussaint Louverture, "Letter to the French Directory, November 1797."

Note: The French Directory was the government that ruled France between 1795 and 1799. It replaced the government that had abolished slavery in France and its colonies. Back in Saint Domingue it was feared that this new conservative French government was about to reinstate slavery. Toussaint responds in this letter.

Could men who have once enjoyed the benefits of liberty look on calmly while it is taken from them! They bore their chains when they knew no condition of life better than that of slavery. But today when they have left it, if they had a thousand lives, they would sacrifice them all rather than be subjected again to slavery. . . . But if . . . this were to be done, I declare to you that this would be to attempt the impossible: We have known how to confront danger to our liberty, and we will know how to confront death to preserve it.

Greetings and respect

Toussaint Louverture

Document Analysis

1. To whom is this letter written? Why did Toussaint write it?
2. In Toussaint's opinion, why would it be impossible to restore slavery to Saint Domingue?
3. Is there a threat in this letter? If so, what is the threat?
4. According to this document, how should we remember Toussaint Louverture? Was his work as a liberator of slaves more important than his role as a military leader?

Document C

Source: The Saint Domingue Constitution of 1801. Signed by Toussaint Louverture in July 1801.

Note: Toussaint Louverture assembled and headed the commission that created Saint Domingue's Constitution of 1801. While its citizens were now all free, Saint Domingue still remained a colony of France.

Title II: Of the Inhabitants

Article 3 There cannot exist slaves in this territory, servitude is therein forever abolished. All men are born, live and die free and French.

Title VI: Of Culture and Commerce

Article 14 The colony being essentially agricultural cannot suffer the least disruption in the works of its cultivation.

Article 15 Each plantation . . . shall represent the quiet haven of an active and constant family, of which the owner of the land . . . shall be the father.

Article 16 Each cultivator and each worker is a member of the family and is entitled to a share in the revenues.

Title VIII: Of the Government

Article 28 The Constitution nominate citizen Toussaint-Louverture, Chief General of the army of Saint-Domingue and . . . he is entrusted the direction thereof for the remainder of his glorious life.

After having taken knowledge of the Constitution, I give it my approval. . . . I shall pass it to the French government in order to obtain its sanction.

The General in Chief

Signed: Toussaint-Louverture

Document Analysis

1. What does Article 3 promise all inhabitants of Saint Domingue?
2. What sort of work does the Constitution encourage? Why?
3. According to the Constitution, who has the power to run the plantations? Who has the right to share in the plantations' profits?
4. Article 28 makes Toussaint Louverture Governor of Saint Domingue for life. What are the advantages and disadvantages of such a policy?
5. According to this document, how should we remember Toussaint Louverture? Was his role as a prime mover behind the Constitution more important than his work as an abolitionist?

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Latin American Independence: Why Did the Creoles Lead the Fight?

"We came to serve God and to get rich." So said the conquistador, Bernal Diaz del Castillo, about the Spanish conquest of the Americas. In their search for gold and souls to save, Spain created an empire that extended as far north as Colorado and as far south as Patagonia in Southern Chile. This empire lasted for over 300 years. Then, between the years 1811 and 1830 one Spanish **colony** after another – Uruguay, Paraguay, Chile, Mexico, Ecuador, the United Provinces of Central America, Peru, Bolivia, Columbia, and Venezuela – declared their independence from Spain.

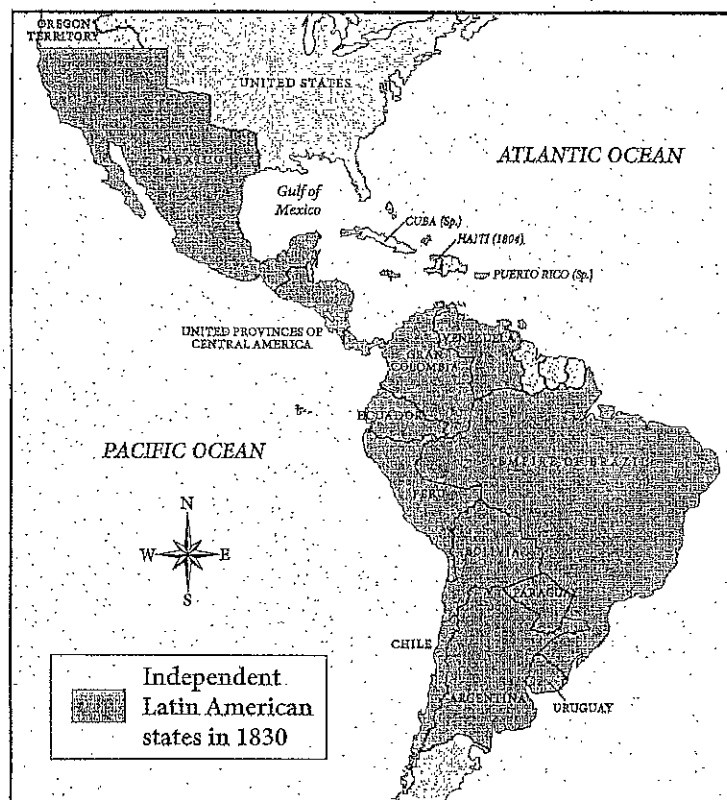
Why did Latin Americans become unhappy with Spanish rule? One major complaint was that the Spanish were unwilling to share political power. The Spanish crown appointed **viceroy**s, or governors, who ruled the Spanish colonies. Even after several generations of colonial rule, viceroys and other government officials always came from Spain and rarely consulted with **Americanos** leaders who had always lived in the Americas.

Another annoyance was Spain's economic policies. Spain believed the purpose of the colonies was to build the wealth of the mother country. Under the economic system called **mercantilism**, the Spanish officials took the majority of the profits from resources they found in the Americas. More of this story will be told by the documents.

Despite these political and economic grievances, we know from the historical record that as late as 1800 there was little revolutionary activity in Latin America. Then, however, something happened. In 1808, Napoleon Bonaparte's French army invaded Spain, removed the Spanish king from the throne, and replaced him with Napoleon's brother. Because Spain was up to its elbows in trouble, it could not pay proper attention to its colonies across the Atlantic Ocean.

This created an opening for **Americanos** like Simon Bolivar, Juan de San Martin, and Agustin de Urubide. Wasn't this the perfect time for Latin American colonies to remove Spanish authority and declare their independence?

A big question was what this independence would look like. Bolivar, San Martine, and Urubide were all **Creoles**, born in America but of pure Spanish blood. As much as they wanted



to be rid of the Spanish they were always uneasy about the racial mix of people who made up the rest of the Latin American population – slaves, free blacks, **mulattos**, **mestizos**, not to mention the Spanish-born pure-blooded **peninsulares**. With this mixed population, creating a new country with a stable government, a strong economy, and a sense of nationhood was a real challenge.

This Mini-Q dives into the excitement and the complexity of revolutionary Latin America. Examine the six documents that follow and answer the question before us: *Latin American independence: Why did the Creoles lead the fight?*

EV

Document A

Source: Simón Bolívar, *An Address of Bolívar at the Congress of Angostura*, February 15, 1819.

Note: Simon Bolivar was one of the most influential revolutionary leaders. He was a Creole born in 1783 in what is now Caracas, Venezuela. The Congress of Angostura took place during the wars of independence of Colombia and Venezuela. This short excerpt was taken from Bolivar's opening speech.

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We are not Europeans; we are not Indians; we are but a mixed species of aborigines and Spaniards. Americans by birth and Europeans by law, we find ourselves engaged in a dual conflict: We are disputing with the natives for titles of ownership, and at the same time we are struggling to maintain ourselves in the country that gave us birth against the opposition of the invaders. Thus our position is most extraordinary and complicated.

Document Analysis

1. Using the Background Essay as a reminder, which social class or classes would be "Americans by birth and Europeans by law" in Latin America in 1819? Which social class or classes could not fit into that category?
2. What is the "dual conflict" Bolivar describes?
3. Focusing on the word "we," which social class do you think Bolivar means when he says "We are disputing with the natives for titles of ownership"?
4. To whom is Bolivar referring when he speaks of "invaders"?
5. Simon Bolivar uses the words "us" and "we" repeatedly in this short passage. Why do you think he does that?
6. How could you use this document to explain why Creoles led the fight in the revolution against Spain?

Document C

Source: Juan Pablo Viscardo, *An Open Letter to America*, written in 1791 and published in Latin America in 1801.

Note: Juan Pablo Viscardo was a Creole born in Peru. He wrote this letter in Europe but it was later distributed in the Americas. *Americanos* was a term he and others used to refer to Latin Americans. Generally, this term referred to Creoles; sometimes it included mestizos and mulattos. Viscardo was a firm supporter of independence.

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Spanish restrictions on travel and commerce sealed America off from the rest of the world [limiting] our basic personal and property rights.... We in America are perhaps the first to be forced by our own government to sell our products at artificially low prices and buy what we need at artificially high prices. This is the result of the Spanish commercial monopoly system, combined with taxes and official fees. And because the official monopoly on transatlantic trade would naturally lead us to produce more in America, the government has been careful to place limitations on what we can legally produce....

... Spain could have left us the administration of our own affairs, one would think. *Americanos*, being those most concerned by affairs of America, logically ought to fill the public offices of their own country for the benefit of all concerned. But that has been far from the case.

Document Analysis

1. Which country is restricting the *Americanos*' property rights?
2. Identify two economic policies that are making Creoles like Juan Pablo Viscardo angry.
3. Who does Viscardo think should be in charge of the American economy?
4. How could you use this document to respond to the question, why did the Creoles take the lead in the fight for independence?

Document F

Source: Leslie Bethell, *The Independence of Latin America*, 1987.

Note: In 1808, Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Spain, overthrew the Spanish monarchy and placed his brother on the throne.

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[I]f the Creoles had one eye on their masters, they kept the other on their servants. The Creoles were intensely aware of social pressure from below, and they strove to keep the coloured people at a distance... white superiority was not unchallenged; beyond its defenses swarmed Indians, mestizos, free blacks, mulattos and slaves...

Traditionally the elite looked to Spain to defend them [But] when the monarchy collapsed in 1808, the Creoles could not allow the political vacuum to remain unfilled, their lives and property unprotected. They had to move quickly to anticipate popular rebellion, convinced that if they did not seize the opportunity, more dangerous forces would do so.

Document Analysis

1. What does Bethell mean when he writes, "If the Creoles had one eye on their masters, they kept the other on their servants"?
2. Which social classes were challenging the idea of "white superiority"?
3. What did Creoles think about "coloured people" or people of Native, African or mixed ancestry?
4. Father Hidalgo led the revolt in Mexico that is featured in Document E. What does document F suggest about how most Creoles reacted to that revolt?
5. Why could the Creoles no longer count on the Spanish government to control social unrest after 1808?
6. How could you use this document to answer the question, why did the Creoles take the lead in the fight for independence?