

Global Connections & Disconnections

INSPIRATIONS FOR SLAVE REBELLION ON HAITI

As the ideals of the French Revolution spread through Europe and overseas, they had a tumultuous effect on the island of Saint Domingue (renamed Haiti after it acquired independence). By the 1780s Saint Domingue was France's richest colony, whose wealth came from sugar plantations that used a vast, highly coerced slave population. About 40,000 whites ruthlessly exploited 500,000 enslaved Africans. The slaves' lives were short and brutal, lasting on average only fifteen years; hence the wealthy planter class had to replenish their labor supplies from Africa at frequent intervals.

White planters on the island had the reputation of great wealth. But they knew their privileges were vulnerable, so they were eager to amass quick fortunes so that they could sell out and return to France. These men and women were vastly outnumbered by the enslaved, who were seething with resentment, at a time when abolitionist sentiments were gaining ground in Europe and even circulating among slaves in the Americas.

Yet, the planters greeted the onset of the French Revolution in 1789 with enthusiasm. They saw an opportunity to assert their independence from France and to engage in wider trading contacts with North America and the rest of the world. They ignored the fact that the ideals of the French Revolution—especially its slogan of liberty, equality, and fraternity—could inspire the island's free blacks, free mulattoes, and slaves. Indeed, no sooner had the white planters thrown in their lot with the Third Estate in France than a slave rebellion broke out in Saint Domingue. From its beginnings in 1791, it led, after great loss of life to African slaves and French soldiers, to the proclamation of an independent state in Haiti in 1804, ruled by African Americans. Haiti became the Americas' second independent republican government.

The revolution had many sources of inspiration. It was both French and African. According to a later West Indian scholar, a group of black Jacobins, determined to carry the ideals of the French Revolution to their logical end point—the abolition of slavery—made up the revolutionary cadre. Their undisputed leader was Toussaint L'Ouverture, a freed black who had learned about French abolitionist writings. But given that most of the slaves had arrived from Africa very recently, African cultural and political ideals also fueled slave resistance.

At a secret meeting in 1791, the persons who were to lead the initial stage of the revolution gathered to affirm their commitment to one another at a voodoo ritual, presided over by a tall, black priestess "with strange eyes and bristly hair." Voodoo was a mixture of African and New World religious beliefs that existed among slave communities in many parts of the Americas (see Chapter 14). One



Toussaint L'Ouverture. In the 1790s, Toussaint L'Ouverture led the slaves of the French colony of Saint Domingue in the world's largest and most successful slave insurrection. Toussaint embraced the principles of the French Revolution and demanded that universal rights be applied to people of African descent.

description of the ceremony relates that after performing a ritual dance accompanied by an African song, the priestess sacrificed a pig and served its blood to each participant. Then, "at a signal from the priestess, everyone threw themselves on their knees and swore blindly to obey the orders of Boukman, who had been proclaimed supreme chief of the rebellion." Boukman, a voodoo chief himself, initiated the revolution against the planters, though Toussaint L'Ouverture later assumed leadership of the revolt.

Inspired by both voodoo and the French Revolution, the rebellion in Saint Domingue caused the deaths or maiming of hundreds of thousands of African slaves and French soldiers. Thereafter, as white planters yielded to a black political elite, the old sugar economy collapsed. Slave shipments no longer arrived, and sugar was no longer exported.

ultimately surrendered and left. Toussaint L'Ouverture died in a French jail, having been captured while negotiating a settlement. Nonetheless, in 1804 General Jean-Jacques Dessalines declared "Haiti" independent.

The revolt had serious environmental consequences. Not only did sugarcane fields become scorched battlefields, but freed slaves rushed to stake out independent plots on the old plantations and in wooded areas. In both places, the new peasant class energetically cleared the land. The small country soon became deforested, and intensive cultivation caused erosion and soil depletion. Haiti fell into a vicious cycle of environmental degradation and poverty.

Moreover, independence did not bring international recognition from fellow revolutionaries. France's commitment to empire ultimately overrode its commitment to the ideals of republican citizenship. Indeed, Toussaint and the slaves of Saint Domingue had been more loyal to the ideals of liberty than the French themselves were. Even Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence and U.S. president at the time, refused to recognize Haiti. Like other American slave owners, he worried that the example of a successful slave uprising might inspire similar revolts in the United States.

BRAZIL AND CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY Brazil was a prized Portuguese colony whose path to independence saw little political turmoil and no social revolution. In 1807, French troops stormed Lisbon, the capital of Portugal, but not before the royals and their associates fled to Rio de Janeiro, then the capital of Brazil. There they made reforms in administration, agriculture, and manufacturing, and they established schools, hospitals, and a library. In fact, the royals' migration prevented the need for colonial claims for autonomy, because with their presence Brazil was now the center of the Portuguese empire. Furthermore, the royal family willingly shared power with the local planter aristocracy, so the economy prospered and slavery expanded.

In 1821, the exiled Portuguese king returned to Lisbon, instructing his son Pedro to preserve the family lineage in Rio de Janeiro. Soon, however, Brazilian elites rejected Portugal altogether. Fearing that colonists might topple the dynasty in Rio de Janeiro and spark regional disputes, in 1822 Pedro declared Brazil an independent empire. Shortly thereafter he established a constitutional monarchy, which would last until the late nineteenth century.

Now Brazilian business elites and bureaucrats cooperated to minimize conflicts, lest a slave revolt erupt. They crushed regional uprisings, like the fledgling Republic of the Equator, and a campaign seeking a decentralized federation of southern provinces free from the Rio de Janeiro rulers. Even the largest urban slave revolt in the Americas, led by African Muslims in the state of Bahia, was quashed in a matter of days. By the 1840s, Brazil had achieved a political stability unmatched in the Americas. Its socially controlled transition from colony to nation was unique in Latin America.



Revolution in Saint Domingue. In 1791, slaves and people of color rose up against white planters. This engraving was based on a German report on the uprising and depicts white fears of slave rebellion as much as the actual events themselves.

As the Brazilian state and its ruling elite expanded the agrarian frontier, here, too, occurred the same kind of terrible environmental degradation that had taken place in Haiti. Landowners oversaw the clearing of ancient hardwood forests so that slaves and squatters could plant coffee trees. The clearing process had begun with sugarcane in the coastal regions, but it accelerated with coffee plantings in the hilly regions of São Paulo. In fact, coffee was a worse threat to Brazil's forests than any other invader in the previous 300 years. Consider that coffee trees thrive on soils that are neither soggy nor overly dry. Therefore planters razed the "virgin" forest, which contained a balanced variety of trees and undergrowth, and Brazil's once-fertile soil suffered rapid depletion by the single-crop industry. Within one generation the clear-cutting led to infertile soils and extensive erosion, which drove planters further into the frontier to destroy even more old forest and plant more coffee groves. The environmental impact was monumental: between 1788 and 1888, when slavery was abolished, Brazil produced about 10 million tons of coffee at the expense of 300 million tons of ancient forest biomass (the accumulated biological material from living organisms).

MEXICO'S INDEPENDENCE When Napoleon occupied Spain, he sparked a crisis in the Spanish empire. Because the ruling Spanish Bourbons fell captive to Napoleon in 1807 and then spent many years under comfortable house

➤ *What major changes in government and society grew out of the Atlantic revolutions?*



Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla. At the center of this mural by Juan O'Gorman is the revolutionary Mexican priest Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, who led the first uprising against Spanish rulers. This painting suggests the rebellion was a multiclass and multiethnic movement.

arrest, colonial elites in Buenos Aires (Argentina), Caracas (Venezuela), and Mexico City (Mexico) enjoyed self-rule without an emperor. Once the Bourbons returned to power in 1814 after Napoleon was crushed, creoles (American-born Spaniards) resented it when Spain reinstated peninsulars (colonial officials born in Spain). Inspired by Enlightenment thinkers and chafing at the efforts to restore Iberian authority, the creoles wanted to keep their elite privileges and get rid of the peninsulars.

In Mexico, the royal army prevailed as long as there was any hope that the emperor in Madrid could maintain political authority. But from 1810 to 1813 two rural priests, Father Miguel Hidalgo and Father José María Morelos, galvanized an insurrection of peasants, Indians, and artisans. They sought an end to abuses by the elite, denounced bad government, and called for redistribution of wealth, return of land to the Indians, and respect for the Virgin of Guadalupe (who later became Mexico's patron saint). The rebellion nearly choked off Mexico City, the colony's capital, which horrified peninsulars and creoles alike. In response, they overcame their own disputes to plead with Spanish armies to rescue them from the rebels. Years later, the royal armies eventually crushed the uprising.

Despite the military victory, Spain's hold on its colony weakened. After all, during the years of conflict the colonists had enjoyed some autonomy and had begun electing representatives to local assemblies. Moreover, like the creoles of

South America, those of Mexico were identifying themselves more as Mexicans and less as Spanish Americans. So when the Spanish king appeared unable to govern effectively abroad and even within Spain, the colonists considered home rule. A critical factor was the army, which remained faithful to the crown. However, when anarchy seemed to spread through Spain in 1820, Mexican generals (with support of the creoles) proclaimed Mexican independence in 1821. In many ways, as with Brazil, independence from Spain was a way to curb further turmoil within Mexico. But unlike in Brazil, Mexican secession did not lead to stability.

OTHER SOUTH AMERICAN REVOLUTIONS The loosening of Spain's grip on its colonies was more prolonged and militarized than Britain's separation from its American colonies. Indeed, the struggle for independence from Spain transformed the nature of political leadership in South America. Venezuela's **Simón Bolívar** (1783–1830), the son of a merchant-planter family who was educated on Enlightenment texts, dreamed of a land governed by reason. He revered Napoleonic France as a model state built on military heroism and constitutional proclamations. So did the Argentine leader General **José de San Martín** (1778–1850). Men like Bolívar, San Martín, and their many generals waged extended wars of independence against Spanish armies and their allies between 1810 and 1824. In some areas, like present-day Uruguay and Venezuela, the wars left entire provinces depopulated.



Simón Bolívar. Bolívar fought Spanish armies from Venezuela to Bolivia, securing the independence of five countries. He wanted to transform the former colonies into modern republics and used many of the icons of revolution from the rest of the Atlantic world—among his favorite models were George Washington and Napoleon Bonaparte. This image portrays Bolívar in a quintessential Napoleonic pose on horseback.

What started in South America as a political revolution against Spanish colonial authority escalated into a social struggle among Indians, mestizos, slaves, and whites. The militarized populace threatened the planters and merchants; rural folk battled against aristocratic creoles; Andean Indians fled the mines and occupied great estates. Provinces fought their neighbors. Popular armies, having defeated Spanish forces by the 1820s, fought civil wars over the new postcolonial order.

New states and collective identities of nationhood now emerged. However, a narrow elite led these political communities, and their guiding principles were contradictory. Simón Bolívar, for instance, urged his followers to become “American,” to overcome their local identities. He wanted the liberated countries to form a Latin American confederation, urging Peru and Bolivia to join Venezuela, Ecuador, and Colombia in the “Gran Colombia.” But local identities prevailed, giving way to unstable national republics. Bolívar died surrounded by enemies; San Martín died in exile. The real heirs to independence were local military chieftains, who often

forged alliances with landowners. Thus the legacy of the Spanish American revolutions was contradictory: the triumph of wealthy elites under a banner of liberty, yet often at the expense of poorer, ethnic, and mixed populations.

CHANGE AND TRADE IN AFRICA

➤ *How did abolition of the slave trade affect African society?*

Africa also was swept up in revolutionary tides, as increased domestic and world trade—including the selling of African slaves—shifted the terms of state building across the continent. Around Lake Victoria, in the highlands of present-day Rwanda and Burundi, and in southern Africa, the early nineteenth century saw new, more powerful kingdoms emerge. Other regimes shattered from internal rivalries. The main catalyst for Africa’s political shake-up was the rapid growth and then the demise of the Atlantic slave trade.

ABOLITION OF THE SLAVE TRADE

Even as it enriched and empowered some Africans and many Europeans, the slave trade became a subject of fierce debate in the late eighteenth century. Some European and American revolutionaries argued that slave labor was inherently less productive than free wage labor and ought to be abolished. At the same time, another group favoring abolition of the slave trade insisted that traffic in slaves was immoral. In London they created committees, often led by Quakers, to lobby Parliament for an end to the slave trade. Quakers in Philadelphia did likewise. Pamphlets, reports, and personal narratives denounced the traffic in people. (See Primary Source: Frederick Douglass Asks, “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?”)

In response to abolitionist efforts, North Atlantic powers moved to prohibit the slave trade. Denmark acted first in 1803, Great Britain followed in 1807, and the United States joined the campaign in 1808. Over time, the British persuaded the French and other European governments to do likewise. To enforce the ban, Britain posted a naval squadron off the coast of West Africa to prevent any slave trade above the equator and compelled Brazil’s emperor to end slave imports. After 1850, Atlantic slave-shipping dropped sharply.

But until the 1860s, slavers continued to buy and ship captives illegally. British squadrons that stopped these smugglers took the freed captives to the British base at Sierra Leone and resettled them there. Liberia, too, became a refuge for freed captives and for former slaves returning from the Americas.