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Avengers Of The New World: The Story Of The Haitian Revolution



Synopsis

The first and only successful slave revolution in the Americas began in 1791 when thousands of brutally exploited slaves rose up against their masters on Saint-Domingue, the most profitable colony in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world. Within a few years, the slave insurgents forced the French administrators of the colony to emancipate them, a decision ratified by revolutionary Paris in 1794. This victory was a stunning challenge to the order of master/slave relations throughout the Americas, including the southern United States, reinforcing the most fervent hopes of slaves and the worst fears of masters. But, peace eluded Saint-Domingue as British and Spanish forces attacked the colony. A charismatic ex-slave named Toussaint Louverture came to France's aid, raising armies of others like himself and defeating the invaders. Ultimately Napoleon, fearing the enormous political power of Toussaint, sent a massive mission to crush him and subjugate the ex-slaves. After many battles, a decisive victory over the French secured the birth of Haiti and the permanent abolition of slavery from the land. The independence of Haiti reshaped the Atlantic world by leading to the French sale of Louisiana to the United States and the expansion of the Cuban sugar economy. Laurent Dubois weaves the stories of slaves, free people of African descent, wealthy whites, and French administrators into an unforgettable tale of insurrection, war, heroism, and victory. He establishes the Haitian Revolution as a foundational moment in the history of democracy and human rights.

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Customer Reviews

A very well written narrative of the Haitian Revolution. As Dubois points out, this was the only

successful slave revolt in human history, with its success brought about by a unique convergence of turmoil in Haiti and the collapse of the French government associated with French Revolution. While Dubois focuses on events in Haiti, he does very well in relating the relevant developments in French politics crucial to understanding events in Haiti. Dubois starts by describing the complex situation in Haiti on the eve of the revolution. The most productive colony of the French empire, the population of Haiti was dominated by slaves, most recently or relatively recently arrived from Africa. In addition to the small white planter class, Haiti also contained small but significant populations of free blacks, mixed raced people of color, some of them affluent plantation owners and merchants, and landless whites. In the second half of the 18th century, increasing hardening of social and racial barriers and efforts of the French government to extend control produced significant strains in Haiti. At the same time, the penetration of Enlightenment ideas of rights provided an intellectual framework for alternative ways to organize society. The collapse of the French government and the French Revolution with its attachment to relatively radical ideas of human rights and equality produced an opportunity for groups within Haiti to take control of the colony. White planters struggled to impose their own oligarchy on the island, free people of color struggled to achieve social and political equality, and the slaves would seize the opportunity to overturn any form of the existing order.

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