

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The history of Haiti goes beyond Haiti herself in many ways. When, in 1804, the Negroes of Saint-Domingue expelled the French Army from the colony, they became the first people in history to have realized a successful slave rebellion. Moreover, this rebellion (1791-1804) led to the birth of the first modern black state (in 1804) and to the second republic of the New World after the United States. (Haiti became a republic in 1806.) Quite understandably then, researchers all over the world have shown interest in the Haitian Revolution and the body of literature in English on the subject is still expanding.

The Haitian Revolution is, however, only the best-known part of a story that can be quite interesting in many other respects. Haiti also saw the first European settlement in the New World (La Navidad). From 1492 to the invasion of Mexico in 1519, Haiti (re-baptized Hispaniola) was the center of the Spanish colonial empire in the new continent. The first slaves to cross the Atlantic came from Haiti which also witnessed the first genocide* of modern times that led to the complete extermination of the Native-Haitians leaving no one to claim them as ancestors. (One can find, on the web, a page where descendants of Tainos claim that they are not extinct; but the Tainos of Haiti have been erased from the surface of the earth.)

This book, therefore, will be of interest to anyone interested in an easy introduction to the history of Haiti and not only to Haitians. I must confess, however, that it targets in a special way young Americans of Haitian descent who, more than anyone else, deserve to know their own history—hence the first plural person used in some passages (*our fathers, our land*) which, I hope, my non-Haitian readers will forgive. Most of the literature in English on the history of Haiti is highly academic and the lack of a strong background in French makes it virtually impossible for these young Haitian-Americans to have access to easier and more comprehensive works that are available back home.

I tried to write a book for all ages that could be appealing also to the parents. It requires no previous knowledge of the history of Haiti but it does assume that the reader is familiar with a number of world history events such as the so-called “Voyages of Discovery” and the 1789 French Revolution. That assumption, as well as the

language level used in the text, would require that the reader have reached at least a seventh grade level. High School and college-level students should find the book easy to read.

A glossary is offered in the back to make the book more accessible to young readers. The words that appear in the glossary are marked with an asterisk in the text. I also keep references to my sources to a minimum and, when quoting an author, I provide only his or her last name.

The book is divided into three parts (Books I, II, III). The first one covers the Native-Haitians from the days before the “discovery” to their last known actions. The second part begins with the French invasion until the battle of Vertières when the French Expeditionary Army was brought to its knees and forced to capitulate. Book III introduces the reader to Haiti’s first years as an independent Nation.

I chose to end the book with the assassination of Dessalines on October 17, 1806. My conclusions as well as my treatment of other issues and events (the Bélair Affair for instance) are likely to be disputed by some. But the book targets a relatively young audience and is no place to make a case for my choices; therefore, I treated the events as if there were no debate about them. Also, the book returns, in a way, to the “great men tradition of Haitian historiography”. (The expression is from M-R. Trouillot.) It will be enough here to say that it is deliberate.

Special Features and Conventions

Throughout the book, the reader will find a number of boxed texts, called “vignettes”, presenting a topic that is set apart from the main narrative. They are of two kinds. The ones signaled by an O (To Learn More) simply offer additional information. The others are flagged by a _ (To Understand Better) and go deeper into an issue relevant to the chapter. Excerpts from historians, Haitian or not, appear in both types; they are an invitation to the reader to read the work the excerpt is taken from. A “Suggested Readings” section is included for the more inquisitive minds and the book is supported by a web site (www.ayitihistory.com).

Haiti was a French colony and therefore many of the names and terms that appear in the narrative are French. As a rule, I use the English equivalent or translation and provide the French original term in parentheses the first time it is used. When, to my knowledge, an American English equivalent is not available, the French word is used in italics. Some purely Haitian Creole expressions have also found their way into the text.

Haitian children learn in school that their country, Haiti (The Republic of Haiti), shares the “*Island of Haiti*” with the Dominican Republic. Scholars in the

United States use the name "Hispaniola" for the island. In this book, we follow the Haitian schoolchildren's tradition.

~~So many both here and back home have helped me along the way that it would be impossible to name them all here. My brothers and sisters believed in that book more than I did and deserve more than my gratitude. I must also thank Renel, Thierry and Francois who read the manuscript, offered suggestions, and pointed to weaknesses; Paul Laraque who assisted selflessly with some permissions; Jean-Claude who let me borrow his copy of Beaubrun Ardouin's *Etudes Sur l'Histoire D'Haiti*; Marc who assisted with the proofreading and insisted that the book was useful; my daughter Jenny who helped with the research; Beby who lent a hand with some of the pictures; Lesly who, here and there, offered a word of advice or encouragement; Edouard who helped with the proofreading; Sunshine Jones who offered some last-minute suggestions; Barbara Dupont of Linivè Kreyol Publishing, and especially Master Jude who always had the right word of wisdom every time my patience was stretched beyond its limits. Should the reader find anything wrong with this book, it will be the consequence of my own stubbornness and shortcomings, and despite their help.~~

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~~Anthony Phelps who did not hesitate to grant me permission to use excerpts from his poem "Mon Pays Que Voici" as epigraphs.~~

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~~To Thierry without whom this book would never have gone beyond a useless dream, one word will say it all: *Mèsi!*~~