

REVOLUTIONS IN EUROPE AND LATIN AMERICA

Biography

Toussaint L'Ouverture was born into slavery. He was not formally educated, but taught himself to read and write. As an adult, Toussaint became an effective general and skillful politician. In 1791, he helped lead a revolt against French plantation owners on Haiti. Toussaint was fiercely dedicated to ending slavery on the island nation. ♦ *As you read, consider the aspects of Toussaint's personality that made him such an effective leader. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

François Dominique Toussaint L'Ouverture (1744–1803)

François Dominique Toussaint was born a slave in Saint Domingue, a French colony on the island of Hispaniola (present-day Haiti). As a youth, he worked his way up from live-stock handler to household steward on a plantation, and he was granted his freedom in 1777.

In 1791, a slave revolt broke out on the island, triggered in part by the French Revolution and its promises of freedom and equality. Toussaint joined the rebellion. When he saw how unprepared the leaders were, he formed his own army.

When France and Spain entered into war in 1793, Toussaint fought on the side of the Spanish. For his service, he was promoted to general. Because of his lightning-fast strikes against the French, he became known as "L'Ouverture," which means "the opening." Toussaint officially adopted the name.

Meanwhile, France declared an end to slavery in all its colonies in 1794. When Spain refused to do the same, Toussaint switched sides and began fighting for France. Eventually, Toussaint helped France defeat the Spanish forces.

Toussaint then took control of Saint Domingue. He encouraged reconciliation between landowners and former slaves. He also worked to restore the island's economy.



Toussaint L'Ouverture

Newly freed slaves returned to work in the fields, but with the promise of sharing in the plantations' profits.

Although Toussaint swore allegiance to France and its revolutionary leader, Napoleon Bonaparte, his priority was his own people.

Saint Domingue was still officially a French colony, but Toussaint often acted independently of the ruling government. He ignored commands by his superiors and even Napoleon. In 1801, Toussaint invaded the eastern part of Hispaniola, which was under British rule and where slavery was still legal. He intended to free all the slaves on the island. When he finally achieved control over all of

Hispaniola, Toussaint named himself governor general for life.

Napoleon saw Toussaint as an obstacle to returning Saint Domingue to French control. The French emperor ordered an invasion in January 1802, and his troops defeated Toussaint's forces. Toussaint surrendered on the condition that the government would not re-establish slavery on the island. At first, Toussaint was treated with honor. Later however, he was tricked, captured, and taken to a prison in the mountains of France where he died.

Questions to Think About

1. How did Toussaint rise to power in Saint Domingue?
2. How did Toussaint get the name *L'Ouverture*?
3. **Recognizing Cause and Effect** Why did Napoleon view Toussaint as an obstacle to returning Saint Domingue to French control?