

6.12 Toussaint L'Ouverture Addresses the French Directory (1797)

Source: C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, 2d ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), 195-197.

Instructions: In this letter, Toussaint L'Ouverture warned the Directory (the executive committee which ran the government between the Reign of Terror and Napoleon Bonaparte's coup in 1799) against any attempt to re-establish slavery in St. Domingue (Haiti). After reading the passages, answer questions 1 – 2 and be prepared to discuss whether, in your opinion, the Haitian Revolution as historically important as the American and French Revolutions of the same time period.



Questions

1. Why did Toussaint L'Ouverture write this letter to the French Directory?
2. What does Toussaint L'Ouverture believe will happen if France does not follow his advice?

A. My attachment to France, my knowledge of the blacks, make it my duty not to leave you ignorant either of the crimes which they [anti-Revolutionary White colonists] meditate or the oath that we [formerly enslaved Africans] renew, to bury ourselves under the ruins of a country revived by liberty rather than suffer the return of slavery. It is for you, Citizens Directors, to turn from over our heads the storm which the eternal enemies of our liberty are preparing in the shades of silence. It is for you to enlighten the legislature, it is for you to prevent the enemies of the present system from spreading themselves on our unfortunate shores to sully it with new crimes. Do not allow our brothers, our friends, to be sacrificed to men who wish to reign over the ruins of the human species.

B. Do they think that men who have been able to enjoy the blessing of liberty will calmly see it snatched away? They supported their chains only so long as they did not know any condition of life more happy than that of slavery. But to-day when they have left it, if they had a thousand lives they would sacrifice them all rather than be forced into slavery again . . . France will not revoke her principles, she will not withdraw from us the greatest of her benefits . . . But if, to re-establish slavery in San Domingo, this was done, then I declare to you it would be to attempt the impossible: we have known how to face dangers to obtain our liberty, we shall know how to brave death to maintain it.

Napoleon and L'Overture

Compare the two images. The painting on the left is *Napoleon Crossing the Alps* by Jacques-Louis David in 1801. The engraving on the right is from a series of portraits of generals during the French Revolution.

Questions

1. How are Napoleon and Toussaint L'Ouverture portrayed in these images?
2. What does this similarity suggest about the way Toussaint L'Ouverture was viewed, at least when the book was published?



Napoleon Bonaparte



Toussaint L'Ouverture