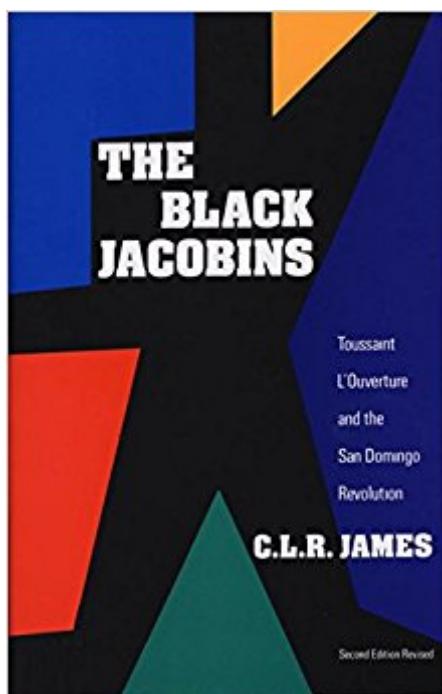


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# The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture And The San Domingo Revolution



## Synopsis

A classic and impassioned account of the first revolution in the Third World. This powerful, intensely dramatic book is the definitive account of the Haitian Revolution of 1794-1803, a revolution that began in the wake of the Bastille but became the model for the Third World liberation movements from Africa to Cuba. It is the story of the French colony of San Domingo, a place where the brutality of master toward slave was commonplace and ingeniously refined. And it is the story of a barely literate slave named Toussaint L'Ouverture, who led the black people of San Domingo in a successful struggle against successive invasions by overwhelming French, Spanish, and English forces and in the process helped form the first independent nation in the Caribbean.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In 1789 the French colony of Saint Domingue was the most profitable real estate in the world. These profits came at a price: while its sugar plantations supplied two-thirds of France's overseas trade, they also stimulated the greatest individual market for the slave trade. The slaves were brutally treated and died in great numbers, prompting a never-ending influx of new slaves. The French Revolution sent waves all the way across the Atlantic, dividing the colony's white population in 1791. The elites remained royalist, while the bourgeoisie embraced the revolutionary ideals. The slaves seized the moment and in the confusion rebelled en masse against their owners. The Haitian Slave Revolt had begun. When it ended in 1803, Saint Domingue had become Haiti, the first independent nation in the Caribbean. C.L.R. James tells the story of the revolt and the events leading up to it in

his masterpiece, *The Black Jacobins*. James's personal beliefs infuse his narrative: in his preface to a 1962 edition of the book, he asserts that, when written in 1938, it was "intended to stimulate the coming emancipation of Africa." James writes passionately about the horrific lives of the slaves and of the man who rose up and led them--a semiliterate slave named François-Dominique Toussaint L'Ouverture. As James notes, however, "Toussaint did not make the revolution. It was the revolution that made Toussaint." With its appendix, "From Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro," *The Black Jacobins* provides an excellent window into the Haitian Revolution and the worldwide repercussions it caused. --Sunny Delaney

"Brilliantly conceived and executed...The absorbing narrative never departs from its rigid faithfulness to method and documentation."-- Books"Mr. James is not afraid to touch his pen with the flame of ardent personal feeling -- a sense of justice, love of freedom, admiration for heroism, hatred for tyranny -- and his detailed, richly documented and dramatically written book holds a deep and lasting interest."-- The New York Times

This is an amazing gem of a book. Written in 1938 as Europe was trembling in the shadow of Fascism and the race-based policies of Hitler, James writes of a 1802 revolution against a major European power by blacks in Haiti. Trinidadian by birth, James is writing at a time when India and most of the world that had been colonized by Britain, France and Germany are still colonies (India won independence only in 1947, following the end of W.W.II). It is quite remarkable the Marxist analysis James brings to bear upon the ways slavery was maintained in Haiti, the effect of the French Revolution upon the island, the deep psychological hold it had on free blacks and bi-racials as they struggled with their respective nationalisms and colonial upbringing. Ought to be read alongside "The Wretched of the Earth." Indispensable for those interested in postcolonial studies.

I really like this book. I will reread this one over again several times. This is about the only time that slaves have ever successfully rebelled against their captors and formed a workable country of their own. Haiti is also one of the poorest countries in the West, but to see what these people came through and what they made of it it astounding.

Great work describing the most successful war against great powers ever fought and won. Spartacus gets the movie for a two year rebellion. The Haitians slaves defeated Napoleon's France, Great Britain and Spain. What a history eloquently documented by one of the great scholars of the

West Indies.

I enjoy reading history books, and it is always good to pick one up and read about the events that shaped mankind's development. But every once in a long while, one comes across a history book that is so well written and engaging, that it becomes far more than just a book recounting past events, far more than just a book one learns from, and instead becomes an experience, a book to enjoy! This is such a rare book. I purchased it simply to have something to teach me about Toussaint L'Ouverture and Haitian Independence, and instead got a book I could hardly put down. Besides the excellent writing, what makes this book especially wonderful and memorable to read, is that James doesn't just discuss the Haitian Revolt, but goes into details about the French Revolution, and its inner complexity and contradictions. He also touches often upon the more psychological dimensions of the struggle. Now, as others have pointed out, James' Marxism does tint his writing, but never to a degree as to give the impression that one is reading a dishonest or heavily biased account of events. One minor, or perhaps not so minor, limitation of the book is that it does not treat the successful post-L'Ouverture Haitian fight and independence with the same detail as the previous times. I suppose for that one needs to take a look at other books, but nevertheless aside from the final events, all the history is right here covered brilliantly and with great insight. Highly recommended, for anyone interested in Haitian history, as well as just good solid well-written non-fiction books.

Fast paced, intelligent, and passionate, this is a history we should all know from a perspective that is international and timeless.

This book is a difficult read but it explains a historical period that you don't find much info on this subject English. It is difficult for me to follow the situations mentioned. I am now very interested in finding more info on the author. This was considered a seminal work back in the 70's

Excellent reading. This book was brought to my attention after reading Black-White Binaries by Montayj who referenced Jacobins numerous times. Both pieces are powerful.

C.L.R. James was a black historian who emphasized his work on Afro-nationalism. James was an avid Marxist. In 1901 James was born in Trinidad, where he witnessed firsthand how racial segregation, popular resentment, and wealth inequality played a role in determining the fate of most

Caribbean blacks. In his twenties, James set out to become an author. He quickly became highly successful in Marxist circles throughout Europe and the Caribbean. He wrote numerous articles, pamphlets and books on the plight of the African diaspora, analysis on Marxist unity and division, and Western colonialism throughout Africa and the Americas. In 1983 the C.L.R. James Institute was founded.<sup>1</sup> James' most important work on Afro-nationalism is *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. In *The Black Jacobins*, James' thesis is that the Haitian revolution was the only victorious slave rebellion. James argues his thesis by outlining the underlying causes of why the slave rebellion was successful. The slave population on Hispaniola compared to the white population was significantly larger; and the slaves in Hispaniola were treated as expendable merchandise, because of the extremely high yielding cash-crops such as sugar and tobacco. There was also a large second class population in Hispaniola, which consisted of over one-hundred and twenty shades of race. This second class was known as mulattoes, a land owning and literate class of oppressed mixed race people. The white French government in San Domingo marginalized these mulattoes by denying the mulattoes rights and votes in the National Assembly. James argues that the fall of the Bastille played just as major of a role in the Haitian revolution as it did for the French Revolution. Afro-nationalism and the revolts which it inspired had been suppressed for over one-hundred and fifty years throughout Hispaniola. However, news of the success of overtaking the Bastille was the spark which ignited a general unity between mulattoes and slaves. This unity and over one-hundred and fifty years of resentment towards European whites in Hispaniola caused an unstoppable force which was the Haitian revolution, a revolution which was marked by bloodshed no less great than its contemporary in France. James' writing style flowed evenly throughout the book. James was chronological and did not fail to point out the significance of the experiences that Toussaint L'Ouverture had lived through. The style that James used was storytelling and at times journalistic. In the book, James repeatedly emphasized the nature of hostile resentment and raw anger that the slaves and mulattoes used to feed their revolutionary fervor. Many times this anger resulted in some of the most inhumane violence towards ethnic Europeans, whether or not they were innocent of encouraging slavery or general disfranchisement of the mulattoes. James organized this book chronologically, starting with the unchecked brutality of overseer and slave which lasted for no less than one-hundred years. The book's organization makes it simple for one to read sections and understand each section as a single piece within the story. The organization is perfect for flipping through the chapters and finding what one is looking for, rather than flipping back and forth throughout an unorganized book. James consulted a number of primary sources from French, British, and San Domingo archives. The sources from these

archives mainly consist of official correspondence between government officials and laws and proposed legislation. James also consulted primary sources from private collections from clubs and museums throughout the world. James set out to explain why the Haitian revolution, led by L'Ouverture and influenced by revenge and resentment, was the most successful of any slave rebellion. James also set out to explain how the wealth inequality served to frame the injustice of San Domingo society. On page 46, James states that "And yet it was this very prosperity which would lead to the revolution". In that quote, James is referring to the commoditization of the slaves and the immense wealth slaves produced. The more wealth that was produced, the less humane slaves were treated. James also set out to explain that the Haitian revolution set a precedent for other revolutions and revolts throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. James argues his thesis well by exemplifying numerous injustices and barbaric acts committed by the whites, which in turn caused an unforgettable and unforgivable sentiment in the slave and mulatto communities. Nothing I have read on the Haitian revolution compares to *The Black Jacobins*. James was one of the few leading Marxist scholars who intensely wrote about Afro-nationalism, with emphasis on the Caribbean black communities and native black Africans living in diaspora. *The Black Jacobins* is an essential historical work to understanding the Haitian revolution in comparison to the French Revolution and future slave revolutions. Students who have studied French Revolution may touch on its impact in Hispaniola, which makes *The Black Jacobins* all the more essential of a guide to understanding, in-depth, how the two revolutions relate. This book should be suggested to anyone interested in the foundation of Afro-nationalism or Caribbean revolutions.

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