



REVOLUTION, REPRESSION AND RESISTANCE IN HAITI: CORRECTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

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On this 208th anniversary of the triumph of the Haitian Revolution and the Declaration of Independence January 1, 1804, it is good to pause and reflect on its awesome meaning and measure, for it is, like African history as a whole, a sacred narrative, replete with lessons of life and struggle unsurpassed and second to none, if read and remembered rightly. Even in the so-called “age of revolution” which, in habitual self-congratulation, the Europeans in Europe and the U.S. had essentially declared for themselves, the Haitian Revolution emerged and established itself as a unique and extraordinary achievement in the long history of human struggles for liberation and the radical reconstruction of social life. Indeed, it is this small and great nation which stood up first, freed itself from enslavement and marked and opened the way forward for other enslaved, oppressed and struggling peoples in the Americas and the world.

It is Haiti who opened its doors and gave sanctuary and vital support in weapons and soldiers to the Latin American liberator, Simón Bolívar, asking him only that the freedom he envisioned and achieved include all, especially the enslaved Africans. And it is Haiti that lifted up the light of hope and possibility for African American people and leaders of revolt and resistance like Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey, Harriet Tubman, Maria Stewart, Martin Delaney, and Frederick Douglass.

The self-praising propaganda produced and promoted as world history by Europeans and their students assert that the U.S. was the first free country in the Americas. But it is a claim to an achievement that is clearly not theirs and an attempt to hide a history that rightly belongs to Haiti. For the U.S. established only a *white-faced freedom* which

constitutionally defined Africans as only a fraction of a human being and legalized and savagely imposed and enforced the enslavement of Africans as a normal, even necessary, way of life. Moreover, genocidal suppression and reservational roundups of Native Americans were standard government policy and social practice of this white-faced freedom.

Also, it is Haiti, not England, which first abolished enslavement, abolishing it and outlawing it in its first Constitution. And it is Haiti’s defeat of the British invasion that reenergized and strengthened the British abolitionist movement, shattered the myths about the mind, will, capacity and commitment to freedom of Black people and opened the way to the British suspension of that economic aspect of the Holocaust of enslavement called the “slave trade.”

Never before (or ever since) had an enslaved people raised up and overthrown the ruling class or ruling people and established a government of their own. And for these people to have been African and enslaved and to have achieved such an awesome feat, created fear and loathing in the oppressor, and inspiration and hope in the oppressed and struggling peoples of the world. It was a decisive victory over evil, unfreedom and injustice that freedom-loving people of the world would never forget and old and new oppressors would never forgive.

Deciding to break the back of enslavement and to live liberated lives, they met at Bois Caiman, August 14, 1791, under the spiritual guidance of Papaloi Boukman and Mambo Cécile Fatima, and committed themselves to unending and uncompromising fight for freedom. Determined to be free, they literally broke their own chains and transformed themselves into soldiers and

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guerillas of the highest quality. And their generals and other officers and leaders proved themselves worthy of the respect and admiration the people and enemy had for them: Toussaint L'Ouverture, way-opener, who opened the way to freedom and found openings where there were none; Jean-Jacques Dessalines, unyielding whirlwind, who hunted the forests and fields until the beasts of oppression begged for relief; and Henri Christophe, living fortress, who was an unbreachable wall in the defense of the people.

L'Ouverture, Dessalines and Christophe had not read Sun Tzu's *Art of War* or Mao Ze Dong's later text *On Guerrilla War* that drew heavily from it. But they developed masterful military strategies and tactics and waged conventional and guerilla campaigns of consummate skill and repeated victory that would have won praise and study from Sun Tzu, himself. It is Mao who made famous the phrase "a people united can never be defeated," but the Haitian people had, in classical guerilla strategy, proved it in practice. Also, the revolutionary leaders and people of Haiti had used the forest and fields as shields and shelter, free space and training ground for themselves and traps and sources of tragic ends for the enemy. And they organized the people in broad united fronts, and made them both personally and collectively responsible for the success of the revolution under the stringent ethic and motto of liberation struggle: freedom or death. Or as Harriet Tubman would later declare, "go free or die."

Here again, they marked the way and opened the door for those who came after them, the liberation struggles that would raise the names of Mao in China, Frantz Fanon in

Algeria, Fidel Castro in Cuba, Amilcar Cabral in Guinea-Bissau, Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam, Pedro Albizo Campos in Puerto Rico, Benito Juarez in Mexico and Harriet Tubman, Nat Turner and Malcolm X in America (U.S.), among others. And yet in Haiti and everywhere else in the world, the struggle for a deep-rooted and enduring liberation is unfinished and ongoing.

Haiti suffers now, not simply from recent catastrophic natural disasters, but from a long history of imperial imposition, especially from its nemesis in the north, the USA. It is the U.S., along with France, which has from the beginning acted to reverse the Haitian revolution and erase both its memory and its meaning in the ongoing struggle for human freedom in the world. It has invaded Haiti; rewritten its Constitution to open it to corporate and foreign exploitation; stolen its gold reserves; overthrown the legitimate democratically-elected government of President Jean Bertrand Aristide; outlawed its largest party, Lavalas; undermined its agriculture; and now occupies the country under the guise of U.N. peace-keeping.

Haiti must be free from the heavy hand of the imperial north, and African Americans and all freedom-loving people have a special responsibility to stand in solidarity with the Haitian people in their struggle to end this brutal occupation, exercise their right to choose their own leaders and way forward, and live lives of dignity, decency and promise. Then, they will again find within themselves and through mutually-respectful alliances, the capacity to rebuild their infrastructure, re-seed their fields and forests, restore a self-sufficient agriculture based on Haitian models, and make their waters run clean and clear again.

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