



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
2022 Volume II: The Long Fight for a Free Caribbean, 1700s-1959

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## **The Struggle for Abolition and Independence in Haiti and Cuba, 1790-1902**

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by Bob Osborne

### **Introduction**

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Before Columbus arrived on the islands of Hispaniola and Cuba the indigenous peoples were unaware of the diseases that would devastate their populations, the cruelty of the Europeans who exploited their labor to steal their wealth and the plantations that would grow sugar and coffee with the labor of African peoples brought to their islands across the Atlantic in chains. It would be the Europeans that ran the sugar plantations and conducted the lucrative sugar trade, but it would be the enslaved labor of the Africans who produced the sugar under inhuman conditions. The Africanization of these islands and the other Caribbean islands and the mixing of races and cultures that ensued over hundreds of years are the legacy of European colonialism and the slavery that it institutionalized to grow and harvest sugar to feed European and international markets.

This paper is about the struggles in Saint-Domingue and then Cuba to free the people enslaved in sugar production on the plantations and their efforts to end their colonization by winning independence. To better comprehend what happened it is important to understand the origins of the African peoples brought to these islands, the different imperial systems of the Spanish, the French and the English colonizers and the ever-evolving role of the newly independent neighbor close by, the United States. From the beginning of the European presence there were several common elements that developed on both islands. The Europeans would come in numbers sufficient to establish and maintain their control in the beginning and then as the island economies began to be dominated by the sugar industry and other plantation crops the numbers of Europeans born across the Atlantic would decline and the number of people of European descent born in the islands would grow and be named creoles. There were European indentured servants to provide labor as well but as time went on the relative absence of European women and the burgeoning number of enslaved Africans brought to the islands increased, the importance of indentured servants declined and the prospects for maintaining the creole population increased with the presence of women of African descent to produce children of mixed race. The percentage of Europeans declined as the percentages of mixed-race people grew and the number of slaves brought to work on the sugar plantations grew exponentially.

There was no balanced growth of the different segments of the population. The European or white percentage basically stayed static while the gens de couleur grew and the African presence became the dominant demographic presence.

But it was the Europeans that exercised the political, economic and legal power and for a time the overarching cultural institutions of their Catholic religion. For the people of mixed race, it seemed that the lighter the color of one's skin the more they were identified with Europeans and the darker the color of one's skin the more they were identified with Africans.

The Spanish were the first Europeans to arrive in both Hispaniola and Cuba and their cultural imprint is the primary European presence on the eastern end of Hispaniola in Santo Domingo, eventually the Dominican Republic and in Cuba. After 1697 when the French seized control of the western end of Hispaniola and established Saint-Domingue the dominant European presence was French. The French language was soon blended with different African dialects and the distinctive Kreyol language emerged over time and it's still spoken in Haiti today. Spanish is the lingua franca of the Dominican Republic and Cuba today. Roman Catholicism was the common European religion for both islands and the early Africanization of Haiti with its many cultures brought with it a blending of those religious and cultures in Vodoun, or Voodoo. The later Africanization of Cuba brought the practices and beliefs of Santeria and other African religions to Cuba.

The people sold into bondage in Africa primarily came from the western coast of Africa from the Guinea Coast down to the Bights of Biafra and Benin and farther south to the Congo and Angolan coasts. <sup>1</sup> The slaves were most often prisoners of war who were sold by the victorious rulers of neighboring societies in exchange for European goods including guns and gunpowder. The tribal groups and cultures that the enslaved prisoners came from were Yoruba, Angolans, Congolese, Mandinka, Ibo and many others. Each person on a slave ship started from Africa with a name, a family story and a culture and if they survived the Middle Passage across the Atlantic and were sold on the islands to work the plantations the individual's name and stories were the first things they lost while the presence of enough individuals from a culture, their beliefs, their language and their ways became what was still shared. Over time, the different cultures present in the enslaved populations would blend and new fusions from different cultures with input from the cultural and political traditions that had been created before them on a particular island would enrich each other. The horrors of slavery were shared by most all Africans first brought to these islands and the desire for freedom from that bottom rung of the society they toiled within, and their powerlessness were common denominators. For most people of mixed race who might be free and even own slaves it was much more nuanced, and they often had to balance their interests between those of the often darker, people below them on the social hierarchy and the whites who enjoyed the rights that they were denied.

By the mid 1750s Saint-Domingue had become one of the richest colonies in the world, producing much of the world's sugar and a little less than half of the world's coffee. <sup>2</sup> Both crops were raised to be exported and not to feed the people who suffered in slavery while producing them on agricultural factories called plantations. It was the very success of that French colony and the dangerous processes for producing large volumes of sugar that required greater and greater numbers of slaves to be brought to the island each year. As the African presence grew on the island so did the paranoia of the European population and the gens du couleur role of providing the troops that worked to contain order became more difficult. In Cuba at that same time, the Spanish government had been much less aggressive in promoting the production of sugar and the importation of slaves.

The production of sugar in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century was dangerous and difficult. Dangerous and difficult for the slaves and difficult for the plantation managers. The overarching time element was, there was only 24 hours for the sugar cane juice to be converted into a solid state from the moment the sugar cane was cut, and the juice exposed to the air, until granular sugar was produced. That was because the high caloric value of the sugar cane juice would start to ferment after 24 hours. The sugar cane needed to be cut, transported to the grinding

mill, ground down to produce the cane juice, and then the extracted juice had to be boiled down until only sugar remained, all within 24 hours from being cut down in the field. That was a narrow and fragile window for production to be successful and there were many variables that could complicate the process with the two most essential variables being the time it took to grind the sugar cane stalks and the maintaining of the boiling temperatures in the boiling vats. Both of those required constant slave labor, day and night, during the production process and they were fraught with the danger posed by grinding mills and huge pots or vats of boiling liquid. The high mortality rates required replacing expired slave labor, with new imported slave labor just to maintain the levels of production.

It would be the Haitian Revolution and the emancipation of its slaves that would create the opportunity for the accelerated growth of the sugar industry in Cuba and the accelerated numbers of African slaves that would be brought to the island. Cuba's experience would be different because the success of the slave revolution in Haiti engendered fear in the Spanish government and the plantation owners in Cuba and across Europe and the United States.

## II. The Haitian Revolution and the End of Slavery

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The French Revolution started in France in 1789. It was in 1790 that the Declaration of the Rights of Man was written and adopted. The political order in France was crumbling as the people of the Third Estate challenged the authority of the Catholic Church, the nobility and the monarchy. In Saint-Domingue the sugar trade continued to thrive as more and more African slaves were imported. The process of producing sugar from sugar cane is labor intensive, dangerous and time dependent. Many lives were lost over the year on the plantations and that required larger numbers of slaves to be brought to Saint-Domingue while the plantations strived to meet the growing demand for sugar in France and Europe. The population was tipping even more heavily towards people of African descent while the number of Europeans continued to remain static or decline. It is estimated that at the time that the Haitian Revolution began in 1791 that over seventy % of the enslaved population in Saint-Domingue was born in Africa. <sup>3</sup> The greatest fear of the enslavers was a slave rebellion or revolt. The violent oppression used to control the enraged resentment of people literally being worked to death allowed the plantations to continue to run. The plantation owners lived with the knowledge that when slaves rebelled that the violence that had been used to repress the slaves would be turned towards those that oppressed them.

News from France came to Cap-Français with every ship from Europe. The new government was well disposed towards expanding the rights of the people in France. Many of the free men and women of color in Saint-Domingue became hopeful that they could not receive the rights that had been denied them. In 1791 they formally asked the French to grant them rights that had been denied them. There was immediate opposition from the whites in Saint-Domingue because their power was protected by the free people of color who stood between them and the huge number of slaves on the island and they could expect to control the free people of color because of their inferior political and social status. The opposition by the local white establishment to their demands left them no choice but to seek the support of free blacks and prospective slave leaders. Under the leadership of Og,<sup>4</sup> they rose in their own rebellion but that was quickly crushed and that exacerbated the tensions with the whites in power. When the French government granted free people of color equal rights and full French citizenship they and their supporters were emboldened, and the white establishment became more

isolated in Saint-Domingue.

Dutty Bookman was a slave leader who had secretly forged a plan with other slave leaders in the North for the slaves on the plantations there to rise in a coordinated revolt designed to strike across a broad front and catch the plantation owners and the militia that protected them by surprise. In early September the plan was executed and slaves on multiple plantations rose as one to attack their enslavers and burn the plantations where they had been enslaved to the ground.<sup>5</sup> It soon became obvious that this was more than a small uprising, this was a rebellion and the surviving planters and their families and all who feared the anger of the rebelling slaves fled to Cap -Francais. The very existence of the port and its inhabitants was at risk. Bookman was killed in a battle but that did not slow the pace of the former slaves who attacked plantation after plantation. The North of the colony was the center of the sugar production and trade, and most of the sugar plantations and coffee farms were located there. Many of the former slaves in revolt were experienced fighters who had been involved in conflicts in Africa. They were a formidable force with many small fighting units, and they had succeeded in destroying many of the plantations that had been critical to Saint-Domingue's success as an exporter of sugar for European and American markets. The French troops and local militias had been surprised by the intensity and wide range of territory that was quickly engulfed in rebellion and burning of plantations. The former slaves now in rebellion were not going back to where they had been enslaved and both sides began countering the next anticipated move of their opponent. The Revolutionary government was stunned, and the Spanish and English began to see an opportunity for them to intercede and possibly take the French colony for themselves.

As time passed, infighting developed amidst the rebels and the French army allied itself with free people of color to deal with the threat. The stalemate continued throughout the rest of 1792 and then events in France changed everything. The French Revolution continued to radicalize, and the king was beheaded. The rest of Europe reacted and both the English and the Spanish invaded Saint-Domingue while the French government was distracted. Both Spain and Britain wanted to continue Saint-Domingue's economic juggernaut and they thought they could persuade the slaves who had freed themselves back to the plantations. Amid the chaos, in France an appointment was made that would change the situation. The Commissioner Sonthonax arrived in Saint-Domingue to determine the French colony's response to the dual invasions. Sonthonax was an idealist as well as a realist and he determined that the French forces in Saint-Domingue would not be able to meet the threat alone and that help was needed to support the French cause. <sup>6</sup> Sonthonax determined that the best source of fighting men was the former slaves that had risen in rebellion as well as free men of color who had relatively recently been made citizens of France with equal rights. To quickly counter the invasions, he made the decision to emancipate all the slaves in Haiti and offer them French citizenship. Later that year, new citizens of Saint-Domingue traveled to France and convinced the National Assembly to free all the slaves in the French empire. The prospect of fighting with the French against their common enemies convince many people who had been fighting against the French to basically become the largest contingent in the French Army in Saint-Domingue. Eventually, Toussaint Louverture, Dessalines and Henry Christophe among others joined the French fight against the English and the Spanish. The fighting went on for years before the English and the Spanish were driven out in 1798.

The Emancipation of the slaves on Saint Domingue was seen as a great victory for those that had risen in rebellion. Economically, it meant that the labor force that had made the plantations thrive and kept Saint-Domingue as the as the largest producer and supplier of sugar in the world was not available as it had been before. If the plantations didn't function, then the whole economy of Saint-Domingue was potentially crippled. That new economic reality was very much on the minds of all who came to power in Saint-Domingue and subsequently Haiti. There were efforts by Toussaint Louverture and others who followed him to try and keep

the plantations running with different approaches to getting the arduous work of sugar production done to insure Haiti's economic stability. The triumph of the former slaves winning their freedom through their own force of arms was a significant development in Haiti and to its neighbors.

Slavery was still legal in British colonies until 1834 after they ended their participation in the International Slave Trade in 1807. It was an institution in Spanish colonies as well, also in the United States of America. Slavery did not end in the United States until after the Civil War was over in 1865. The year of the Emancipation and abolition of slavery in Saint-Domingue in 1793 was perhaps not coincidentally the same year that the United States Congress passed its first of two Fugitive Slave Acts. None of them wanted to see what had happened in Saint-Domingue happen in their colonies or country. Their economies were dependent on slave labor, and they saw the abolition of slavery in France and the French Empire as a threat to their domestic economic stability and possibly an opportunity for them to take Saint-Domingue for themselves to restore its economic wealth or if that couldn't happen, perhaps one of their colonies or country could benefit from the eventual absence of Saint-Domingue as the dominant producer of sugar in the Caribbean. In 1791, Spain had relaxed its tight quota on the number of African captives who could be shipped to the Spanish colony of Cuba. Over the next twenty years it would be Cuba that would increasingly become the destination of slave ships and the eventual replacement for Haiti as the primary source of the world's sugar supply.<sup>7</sup>

In the struggle to drive out the British and the Spanish from Saint-Domingue one of the military leaders that had earlier fought for the Spanish rose to power. Toussaint Louverture, the man that you most often hear as the leader of the Haitian Revolution became the leader of the forces fighting to protect Saint-Domingue as a French colony. In Haitian history, the name Haiti was chosen after the successful fight for independence from France. However, what was to become known as the Haitian Revolution began with the slave rebellions in 1791 and ended after all the European powers were driven out with the French being the last to go before Dessalines declared Independence on January 1, 1804. Toussaint Louverture did not live to see Haiti become free from France.

Most historians agree that Toussaint Louverture was born into slavery he was educated by his godfather of mixed race, and he also owned a small number of slaves before he joined the rebellion. He was a skilled military and political leader and his success as a general in the French army helped propel him to a position of power as the leader of the black leader of a European Army. In 1800 he declared himself Governor for Life of the colony of Saint-Domingue. In doing so, he added two prominent names to those who opposed him as well as the former slaves who were resisting his efforts to get them back to working on the plantations as non-slave labor. Napoleon had seized power to end the Revolution in 1799 and he quickly looked to restore slavery and the economic that came with it on Saint-Domingue. In 1801, a large French Fleet arrived in Cap-Francais bringing troops to reassert French authority and restore slavery to the island. Napoleon's brother-in-law, General Leclerc was the commander of the French forces. Toussaint and other native generals fled to the mountains but eventually surrendered to the French. Napoleon had decided to move against Toussaint Louverture and while the other generals, including Dessalines, were granted amnesty Toussaint was chained and returned to France where he died in prison in 1802.<sup>8</sup> Later, Napoleon would regret punishing the more moderate Toussaint a because he thought he might have been able to forge an agreement with him. President Thomas Jefferson was also an enemy of Toussaint, perhaps because he was such a successful black leader in a country that had abolished slavery.

General Leclerc's orders were to restore slavery, return the plantation owners to their positions and end the rebel resistance.<sup>9</sup> He sought to do that by exploiting the existing tensions that existed within the armed forces that could challenge his efforts. Toussaint's leadership had engendered resistance and southern leader

Rigaud and his men had risen in rebellion against Louverture. Two of his lieutenants, from southern Haiti, Pation and Jean-Pierre Boyer from southern Haiti had joined the French in fighting the forces in the North that had formerly led by Louverture who was now imprisoned in France. There was more to Leclerc's mission that the colonists were not initially aware of, he was to destroy the leadership of the forces that opposed the French and punish the Haitians for daring to overthrow a "legitimate" white government. This was the beginning of what was the second bloody wave of violence in this long struggle. The initial intense warfare against a group of people took place when the slaves initially rebelled in 1791 and fought with their enslavers and their families and then there was equally bloody reprisals by the French forces supported by the landowners and some gens de couleur against the rebels. As the French forces, who were weakened by yellow fever at times, escalated the indiscriminate violence the resistance hardened against them, Haitians that had formerly assisted them for their own purposes switched sides, and the rebels responded with reciprocal intense violence. It had become an all-out war to drive the French out of their colony of Saint-Domingue forever. During the fighting, Leclerc died from disease and General Rochambeau, of American Revolution fame took up the mantle and continued the all-out assault on anyone who resisted the French and on black people who he believed needed to be intimidated. It was an ugly chapter of the Haitian Revolution. <sup>10</sup>

The leader of the rebel forces in the North were the flamboyant and controversial leader, General Dessalines. Over the course of the rebellion, he had switched sides, several times, and there were many Haitians that mistrusted him. However, he was an implacable military leader, and he did not hesitate to be as ruthless as the French in seeking to drive them out of the colony of Saint-Domingue that was soon to be renamed the independent nation of Haiti. Dessalines was victorious and the French forces that were left after they were defeated and decimated by disease returned to France on some of the ships that had brought them to Haiti in 1801. On January 1, 1804, Dessalines, declared that the former French colony of Saint-Domingue was free and independent and a sovereign nation amidst the world's other sovereign nations. The black republic of Haiti was born! After 13 years of struggle the people had been brought from Africa on slave ships and the free people of color that had been born in Saint-Domingue had defeated the Spanish, the British, and the French armies sent to end their revolution. They had also overcome the opposition of two historical giants, Napoleon, the Emperor of France and Thomas Jefferson, President of the United States. The powers that had opposed them withheld any recognition that the new sovereign nation of Haiti existed, and they continued to refer to it for years as the French colony of Saint-Domingue. That continuing effort to deny statehood only encouraged Haitian skepticism that at some point the forces they had defeated would return and force them back into slavery as a colony.

Facing the opposition of its neighbors on Hispaniola, the Spanish colony of Cuba to the west, the remaining French and British colonies all around them and the United States to the North, General Dessalines set out to write a new constitution for the new nation. There were many internal challenges as well. As a result of the purposeful denial of an education during slavery to all enslaved most of the population was illiterate. There were also myriad groups and often obscure delineations that separated them. The forces in the south of Haiti also mistrusted Dessalines as they had Toussaint Louverture. Facing all these obstacles to his leadership, Dessalines acted boldly. He ripped out the white panel of the French Tricolor flag and redesigned the new flag of Haiti from the remaining red and black panels. He also set out to destroy the white slaveholding families that had never hesitated to oppose the revolution. The third wave of violence commenced, and it was very bloody and brief. Dessalines believed that if any significant remnants of the slaveholding class existed in Haiti, they would be an invitation to Haiti's enemies to invade and attempt to reinstitute slavery. For people who had fought for so long to end slavery and win their independence the continuing presence of former slaveholders in their new nation would not be tolerated.



Dessalines efforts at writing the new constitution had some different aspects that unsettled many in Haiti. He declared himself Emperor for Life and he wrote into the constitution that henceforth no white person could own land that could cause the reduction of the rights of the Haitian people. His most significant move that has resonated across time since then was to declare that all residents were to be considered black regardless of their skin color.<sup>11</sup> In one move, he turned the tenets of racism created by the Europeans justifying white supremacy upside down. It no longer matters what your skin color was or what color your parents were, all Haitians were now considered to be blacks. There was no need to separate or delineate, in a larger sense, people of all colors, including whites were now characterized as black in Haiti. That was an idea that has seemingly been under reported since then because it so quickly cuts the chains that anchor the idea that the goal in any society born from European concepts of race, is to be as white as possible.

Dessalines enemies in the south of Haiti bided their time and waited for some of his excesses to cause a decline in his support. When that happened, General Pation hatched a plot to assassinate Dessalines when he responded to unrest outside Port au Prince. He even let General Henri Christophe know in the north, a sometime ally of Dessalines knew what was being planned and he did not warn Dessalines. In October 1806, Dessalines was murdered by army officers and his body was desecrated. His sudden and violent ending along with his dedication to the cause of the Haitian people made him an “Iwa” in voodoo and his life is celebrated to these days by those that believe in voodoo. He is seen as a pillar of strength who never compromised his principles to defend blackness and resist opposition from all who threatened that idea.

After the death of Dessalines, a long period of basically two governments existed in Haiti. General Christophe in the north emulated Dessalines efforts to prepare to resist the foreign invasion that he feared would come. He built the famous Citadel in the mountains that still stands today. He saw himself as a leader not to be questioned and he chose to have his title be that of a king. King Christophe sought to meet the dual challenges of educating the population and reinvigorating the economy much like Toussaint. He even wrote the long and detailed “Code Henry” that patterned itself in some ways after the “Code Noir” written by the French King in 1680 that sought to protect the right not to be abused for those enslaved. The Code Henry sought to protect the rights and interests of the formerly enslaved and dictated that they return to the `plantations.<sup>12</sup> Christophe was an authoritarian leader to say the least and he did not tolerate dissent. Pation’s rule in the south was more egalitarian and he successfully wrote an all -encompassing constitution for the nation of Haiti. He did not have the military and economic support that Christophe enjoyed in the north, but he was careful and a long-range planner and when he died in 1818, he was succeeded by Jean-Paul Boyer who would rule Haiti from 1820 when he consolidated his power after the death of Christophe until 1844. It was Boyer who connected eastern part of the island, the former Spanish colony of Santo Domingo, later the Dominican Republic, to Haiti. Haiti governed the Dominican Republic from 1822 until 1844 when it broke free of Haitian rule. To this day, the Dominican Republic looks to its Spanish roots and the Spanish language while in contrast Haiti looks to its African roots and the language of Haiti is Kreyol. Boyer is also the Haitian leader that agreed to make payments to the former slaveholders in France and Haiti that so severely damaged the economy of Haiti for the rest of the century. Those payments started in 1825 and were agreed to in return for France finally recognizing the Independence of Haiti.

### III. Cuba and the Growth of Slavery

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Now, we turn the focus to Cuba and its successful efforts to replicate the pattern of success established by the French colony of Saint-Domingue. Spain was prepared to commit to increasing and maintaining slavery in the sugar field while most of the former countries that supported slavery that began to turn against it, with the notable exceptions of the United States and Brazil. In 1825, Cuba and Puerto Rico were the only Spanish colonies remaining. Many newly independent Latin American nations had begun abolition (although some did not fully abolish slavery until the 1850s). There was a sense of the synchronicity of the timing of Spain's policy towards increasing their commitment to slavery. In 1791 the Spanish reduced their efforts to limit the slave trade and increasingly Cuba became the focus of the international slave trade after Britain sought to end the trade in 1807. Havana became a destination for the slave ships filled with Africans imprisoned below. Before 1790, Spain had brought a total of 100,000 slaves to Cuba in the hundreds of years since the first slaves were brought there. In the period from 1790 to 1820 Spain encouraged the importation of 300,000 Africans to Cuba.<sup>13</sup> That number is estimated to be only a 100,000 fewer than the number of Africans brought to the United States in its entire early history. The labor was there and so was the opportunity to quickly replace Haiti's steadily declining sugar production it was only a decade or two before Cuba became the largest producer of sugar in the world for the rest of the 19th century.

Although Haiti was faltering economically, its ideas of freedom for the enslaved and the empowerment of Africans and their children reached many of the peoples in the countries and colonies nearby. Haiti was not that far from Cuba and the Cuban people were aware of the struggles for abolition and independence there. Dessalines vision of being a sanctuary for the oppressed had a powerful resonance across the Caribbean and Patien met with Simone Bolivar in 1815, afterward he encouraged him to abolish slavery when he helped Spanish colonies win independence.<sup>14</sup> Christophe also maintained strong connections to the English abolitionists, William Wilberforce and Henry Clarkson. The retribution towards their oppressors conducted by the former slaves in Haiti haunted the dreams of the slaveholders in Cuba and in the United States. Although not the economic powerhouse it once had been the ideas expressed in the Haitian Revolution reached oppressed people at the time in all corners of the Americas. The fear that potential insurrection engendered could also be used as a motivating tool to harden resistance to those ideals on one hand while encouraging revolt on the other. The presence of the success of the Haitian Revolution hung like a cloud over all those that continued to enslave African peoples after 1804.

The Aponte Rebellion in Cuba in 1812 was a case in point. Aponte, a Cuban free black man, had planned a series of risings around Havana, and he had used the presence of former African Generals in the Haitian army to inspire. Aponte was betrayed and summarily hung by the Spanish authorities. But the reality of the possibility of slave revolts became more deeply ingrained in the thinking of the Spanish authorities and the Cuban plantation owners. You can learn more about Aponte in one of the accompanying study units.

The period between 1812 and 1868 in Cuba saw tremendous growth in the sugar industry with an accompanying tight reliance on slave labor. The United States was very interested in the possibility of adding Cuba as another territory or state as the number of slave states in America was capped by the addition of Texas in 1845. The United States was close to the plantation aristocracy in Cuba and they both were tolerant of a relatively weak but helpful Spain's presence when they needed the Spanish troops to insure order in Cuba.



In 1834 the British ended slavery in their colonies in the Caribbean and the international slave trade was ending. When the Civil War in the United States ended in 1865, slavery was ended there. Cuba was the last bastion of the use of slaves in North America. The stage was set for the abolition of slavery in Cuba and independence from Spain, but it would take almost 34 years for both to be accomplished. In Haiti it had taken 11 years with slavery very much alive all around it.

In 1868 a Cuban slaveowner in eastern Cuba, Cespedes, gathered his slaves one day and told them that he was setting them free, and that day was the beginning of the fight for liberty from Cuba's Spanish overseers. He envisioned a slow emancipation supported by the slaveholders who would be paid for releasing their slaves and granting them their freedom. That was his intent, but momentum soon built and the calls for independence from Spain for Cuba and the abolition of slavery were soon joined as rebellion spread across eastern Cuba. <sup>15</sup> The prospect of freedom for all from Spain and freedom for the enslaved attracted a broad base of support across all non-slaveholding interests of Cuban society. It was a multicolored revolutionary movement that engendered significant support in eastern Cuba. Antonio Maceo rose to be one of its leaders, he was a brilliant black military leader who would become a fixture in the struggle for years including a time when he was exiled to Jamaica.<sup>16</sup> The rebels even contemplated an invasion of western Cuba toward the more prosperous sugar plantations on the other side of Havana. There the plantation owners were much more powerful and the Spanish troops much more numerous. They did not invade and for ten years the rebels attacked the status quo in Cuba. Finally in 1878 the ten-year war came to end with the promise of pardons for all rebels and freedom for all rebels who were former slaves in return for autonomy under the guidance of Spain which was much less than the goals the rebels sought of independence and abolition. Many of the rebels accepted the terms but Maceo did not and the enslaved people who had not rebelled would continue in slavery. That was an unsatisfactory outcome for them, and they joined Maceo and others in the continuing fight in the Little War that lasted only two years. The Spanish authorities made every effort to paint the rebels during the little war as primarily black and not a coalition. It suited their purposes of scaring people with the threat of a Race War or return to Haiti. Tacitly, the Spanish authorities started to call for emancipation of slaves on existing plantations through an apprenticeship program and free womb law. That started in 1880 and by 1886 Spain had abolished slavery in Cuba. Abolition was won but independence was still 14 years away thanks to the Spanish General Weyler and another American President, William McKinley.

Once again, in 1895, the Cuban people rose as one to secure their independence from Spain after 400 years. Inspired by the ideas of Jose Marti and once again led by Generals Maceo and Gomez the Cuban rebels invaded western Cuba over Spanish attempts to keep them out. It should be noted that the axis of engagement in Haiti was between the North and the South and in Cuba it was between the West and the East. In late 1896 the rebels were about to drive the Spanish out of Cuba when the Spanish government named General Valeriano Weyler to lead the counterinsurgency. Weyler used the concept of reconcentration for the people away from the rebels by force and launched a scorched earth policy. Tragically, it is estimated that 170,000 Cubans died before Weyler was recalled and once again the rebels regrouped and marched against the teetering Spanish regime.<sup>17</sup> Fearing the threats to United States investments in Cuba the United States started to move to stabilize the situation by thwarting rebel success while forcing concessions from Spain. In 1898 the USS Maine was sent to Havana to protect the interests of the United States and threaten the Spanish forces there. Mysteriously, the Maine was blown up on February 15<sup>th</sup>, 1898, and the United States declared war on Spain. US troops moved into Cuba and the American presence stopped the Cuban rebels from driving the Spanish out forever. The United States would do that and seize the last remaining Spanish colonies of the Philippines, Guam, Puerto Rico and Cuba along the way. They also installed a US military government in Havana led by General Leonard Wood, and it was not until 1902 that the US granted a conditional

independence to Cuba. In 1902 Cuba became independent from its Spanish colonizer for 400 years. <sup>18</sup>

Abolition of slavery had come in 1793 to Haiti and Independence from France 11 years later in 1804. Abolition of slavery had come to Cuba in 1886, 93 years after abolition in Haiti. Independence from Spain had come to Cuba in 1902 almost a 100 years later than it had to Haiti.

## Teaching Strategies:

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The objective of this unit is to introduce high school students to the complexities of Caribbean History as exemplified by the struggles in Haiti and Cuba for the emancipation of the slaves imported to work the sugar plantations there while they were European Colonies and then the fight for Independence from those European Colonizers, the French and the Spanish, during the historical period of 1790-1902.

The primary text for this unit will be first part of this curricular unit that describes the historical events and significant historical figures that shaped this story.

After an introduction of the scope of what is to be covered including the African origins of the people forced on the Middle Passage to the Americas and the Aponte Rebellion which linked the two islands together in their struggles, the students will read the text provided.

After completing the reading each student will prepare an initial list of five questions that they would like to have answered. Then the students will divide up into groups and discuss what they have read and then formulating a new list of questions still unanswered for each group along with five things that they did not know before they started the unit.

The students will then read and research the two supplementary parts of the curriculum:

- I. African Origins and Caribbean Destinations (Maps and Charts)
- II. The Aponte Rebellion in 1812 (Reminders of the Haitian Revolution come to Cuba)

They will complete the two units in order using different historical methodologies in their research and individual work.

After the completion of the two supplementary units the students will gather in their groups and determine if their questions have been answered and then come up with a list with the remaining questions unanswered and suggestions for improvement of the unit and other related topics, they would like it to explore.

### Supplementary Unit I

African Origins and Caribbean Destinations

The purpose of this unit is for students to learn about the peoples of Africa before they were sold into slavery and taken to the Caribbean islands of Hispaniola and Cuba.

Part 1: Students will become familiarize and then study the geography of the west coast of Africa and the native peoples along the coast that may have been impacted by the Atlantic Slave Trade. (Maps)

Part 2. Each student will select or be assigned one of the four designated geographic areas where people were most likely to be captured and enslaved, Senegambia, The Bight of Benin, the Bight of Biafra and West Central Africa. Then the student will research to determine a group of people from that area and learn a bit about their culture, particularly their language and their religious beliefs. (Research)

Part III. Using chart, 7.1 from Africans and the Slave Trade each student can determine where people enslaved from their group might be shipped to in the Caribbean. Also, when the greatest number of them arrived when in the 200-year period from 1650 to 1850. (Charts)

Part IV. After the students have shared their information with the class then the teacher and students will discuss the acculturation of African languages and beliefs) including the development of Kreyol in Haiti and Voodoo Religions in Haiti and Santeria in Cuba.

### **Teacher References:**

*A Transatlantic History of Haitian Voodoo* by Hebblethwaite is a great source for origins of religious practices from Africa.

The best read on the provenance of Africans along the West Coast of Africa at this time in *Reversing the Sails* by Michael Douglas. The David Brion Davis Book is also helpful, and the David Eltis Book's Chapter 7 is filled with detailed charts and notes about Africans origins and destinations in the Caribbean.

### **Supplementary Unit II**

The Aponte Rebellion

The Aponte Rebellion in 1812, a Linking of Haitian Emancipation and Independence and Future Cuban Emancipation 74 Year Later and Cuban Independence 90 Years Later

After the ultimately successful uprising of the slave population that started in the North of Haiti in 1792 and then the emancipation of the slaves and eventually the military victory that brought independence to Haiti in 1804 there were many different reactions by its neighbors as well as the Europeans and Americans. The success of the Haitian Revolution was threatening to all slaveholders and doubly threatening the Spanish colony of Cuba and its growing ranks of slaveholders. Spain and the Cuban slave owning plantation owners were hoping to replace Haiti as the largest producers of sugar in the world at that time. To accomplish that, Spain was importing a greatly increased volume of slaves from Africa. The threat of revolt, posed by those African slaves, made the Spanish and Cuban plantation owners very wary.

Havana Cuba in 1812, had several small but violent insurrections on nearby plantations that erupted with the same suddenness of the slave insurrections in Haiti and the Spanish Governor moved quickly to end the threat and hang Luis Aponte, a free black along with 16 slaves. That may have ended the threat at that time, but the resonance of the successful slave revolt in Haiti would haunt Cuba, the remaining islands around it where slavery was still legal and the United States and slave holding plantation owners in the South until Cuba achieved full emancipation 74 years later.

Students are to write an essay about how the threat of a slave revolt would influence the policies of countries that still allowed slavery in the Caribbean and the United States? Your answer should consider the worldwide movement to abolish chattel slavery that finally started to become law early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## Teacher References:

Matt Childs book about the Aponte Rebellion has a detailed account and Chapter 7 of Ada Ferrer's book, *Freedom's Mirror* is shorter and excellent.

For evidence and perspective on the essay I would look to the books of David Brion Davis, Michael Gomez and David Eltis. They are all thoughtful and comprehensive.

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## End Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 31
- <sup>2</sup> Michael Gomez, *Reversing the Sail*, 103
- <sup>3</sup> Michael Gomez, *Reversing the Sail*, 105
- <sup>4</sup> Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 42
- <sup>5</sup> Philippe Girard, *Haiti, A Tumultuous History*, 311
- <sup>6</sup> Jeremy Popkin, *A Concise History of the Cuban Revolution*, 39
- <sup>7</sup> Jeremy Popkin, *A Concise History of the Cuban Revolution*, 90
- <sup>8</sup> David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, 107
- <sup>9</sup> Jeremy Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*, 103
- <sup>10</sup> Wim Klooster, *Revolutions in the Atlantic World*, 158
- <sup>11</sup> Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 203
- <sup>12</sup> David Brion Davis, *In human Bondage*, 169
- <sup>13</sup> Jeremy Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*, 121
- <sup>14</sup> Michael Gomez, *Reversing the Sail*, 107
- <sup>15</sup> Wim Klooster, *Revolutions in the Atlantic World*, 149
- <sup>16</sup> Ada Ferrer, *Cuba, An American History*, 133
- <sup>17</sup> Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*, 67
- <sup>18</sup> Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*, 152
- <sup>19</sup> Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*, 169



## Appendix on Implementing District Standards

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In Teaching this Curriculum Unit I will be addressing and utilizing the following Connecticut and New Haven Public Schools Standards Below:

INQ 9-12.5 Determine the kinds of sources that will be helpful in answering compelling and supporting questions, taking into consideration multiple points of view represented in the sources, the types of sources available, and the potential use of the sources.

INQ9-1`2.6 Gather relevant information from multiple sources representing a wide range of views while using the origin, authority, structure, context, a corroborative value of the sources to guide the selection.

GEO 9-12.2 Use maps, satellite images, photographs, and other representations to explain relationships between the locations of places and regions and their political, cultural and economic dynamics.

HIST 9-12.1 Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts.

HIST 9-12.16 Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past.

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