

THE GLOBAL IMPACT OF HAITI'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE ABOLITION OF THE TRANS-ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE AND TO THE EMANCIPATION PROCESS

Dessalines



On January 1st 1804, President Jean Jacques Dessalines declared the new Republic of Haiti to be free and independent, thereby completing the process which began on August 22nd 1791. At that point in time Haiti became the second free republic in the Western Hemisphere and the very first Black Republic in the Western Hemisphere to be governed by Africans who

were previously subjected to the inhumane system of chattel slavery and who were able to successfully liberate themselves from those shackles and declare themselves independent.

Not only did the new Republic declare itself independent, but even more importantly, the institution of chattel slavery was abolished never to be instituted there again. Such a development went counter to the existing order of the day where the institution of chattel slavery served as the basis of economic activity and provided the main source of wealth which was being generated and as such was used to advance the civilization of the slave holding countries of Europe.



Toussaint L'Ouverture

From the very beginning of their declaration of a free and independent Haiti on January 1st 1804, therefore, the institution of chattel slavery was completely abolished, never to rare its ugly head there again. This simple historical truth formed the basis of establishing the very fundamental role and significance to the process of emancipation throughout

the entire nineteenth (19th) century upon which the Haitian Revolution impacted directly. The contribution of the Haitian people to the process of emancipation worldwide is an issue which must re-occupy the discussions and debates on the factors which led to the abolition of the trans-atlantic slave trade as well as the abolition of chattel slavery itself.

At the time of its coming into being, the Haitian revolution represented the antithesis of the principal forms of exploitation that characterized the modern world. The Haitian Revolution brought about an extraordinary force as an example and a powerful trend of generosity to the struggle for emancipation of other human communities at the time and later as well. In fact, long before the actual triumph of 1804, the Haitian revolution served as a reference for numerous tentative insurrections against slavery and colonial domination.

The great insurrection of August 22nd 1791, led by Boukman in the then French dominated colony called Saint

Domingue, opened a period of rebellion en masse which culminated in the proclamation of independence on January 1st 1804. Already as a revolutionary cycle, the example of Haiti inspired several revolts against slavery in the Antilles, the Caribbean, Central and South America, Mexico, as well as in certain regions of the United States of America. Saint-Domingue as it was then called, the most beautiful, the richest of the French colonies, became the first Black Republic in the Western Hemisphere. From Guadeloupe to Martinique, from Jamaica to Puerto Rico and Saint Thomas, from Cuba up to the North in Philadelphia the news of this unthinkable, unimaginable but victorious rebellion arrived like a tsunami. This inspired the events which were to unfold in Mexico, in South America, which would eventually lead to the liberation of South America from Spanish domination.

On August 1st 1834, chattel slavery was abolished throughout the then existing British Empire upon which the sun could never set, as was the common phrase used in those times to describe the vast expanse of that empire. The rest of the French slave holding territories would soon crumble in 1848. This would be followed by the Dutch slave holding territories on July 1st 1863. The outbreak of the Civil War in the United States of America (1861-1865) which was fought as a result of the issue of slavery, eventually led to its abolition on January 1st 1863. Spain followed in 1878 and finally the Portuguese in 1888 were the last Europeans to finally relinquish their hold on the system of chattel slavery and therefore join the rest of the world in following the example set by Haiti in 1804 to abolish once and for all the institution of chattel slavery through and through.

The enslaved African and the European colonizer saw in the Haitian Revolution the turning point that would bring for one group, the hope of a total change in their life conditions and for the other the signal that the institution of slavery was vulnerable and threatened. More than forty years after the insurrection in Saint-Domingue in 1791, the revolts of Africans in the English, Spanish, Dutch as well as the United States of America cannot be discounted anymore.

For example, there was the revolt in Curacao in 1795. Charles Delondes in Louisiana in 1811, of Jose Antonio Aponte in Havana in 1812, of Denmark Vessey in the United States in 1882, to name a few. It is important to mention that in the case of Jose Antonio Aponte in Havana and Denmark Vessey in the United States of America, the two leaders could motivate their troops by telling them that they will receive assistance from Haiti.

The son of a slave and an Amerindian woman triggered the first revolt of importance in Venezuela. Jose Leonardo Chirinos, who, with his master, had the opportunity to visit several times the French colony of Saint-Domingue during the revolution, would bring back information about the struggle in progress by former slaves there in 1795. Eventually, he initiated an armed movement against the colonial system in place, anticipating the future liberation of his country.

Besides, so many combatants from Saint Domingue decided, either voluntarily or encouraged by their superior to go to other territories in the region to light up the flame of a collective struggle against slavery. We find them in Guadeloupe, Martinique, Jamaica, in Venezuela in 1799 and in Trinidad. When apprentices sieged Port of Spain in 1834, there were most probably some Haitians among them.



Petion

After the establishment of the nation state of Haiti, the leaders of the new nation, on numerous occasions, lent their direct support to the combatants of several countries in their struggle for liberation. In its first years of existence, the Haitian State offered refuge to the captains of vessels of all Black fugitives of slavery

brought to Haiti, which became the land of asylum for all the persecuted. From the black Americans during the good portion of the 19th century to the Jews who escaped Nazism during the Second World War.

There were also quite a few people who found protection in Haiti considered by Simon Bolivar (El Libertador of South America) as “THE ASYLUM FOR ALL REPUBLICANS” of the American continent. In February-March 1806, Francisco Miranda, the precursor of the struggle for liberation in the Hispanic America, arrived in Jacmel (Haiti) with some 200 combatants on his way to Venezuela. They were the first Latin American combatants to visit Haiti. They received the necessary aid in arms, men and munitions to pursue their enterprise. They stayed more than a month in Haitian waters. During their stay the flag of the Grand Columbia was created, which became later the flag for Columbia, Ecuador and Venezuela. The three blue, red and yellow fabrics were offered by the state at the order of President Petion. The very symbolic moment took place on March 12th 1806.

Henri Christophe



Francisco Miranda's visit inaugurates years of active Haitian solidarity with the political and social struggle against colonialisation and the oppression in America. Among the significant events of these heroic years, one must mention the support provided respectively by President Alexandre Petion and President Henry Christophe to the Hispanic Dominicans Juan Sanchez Ramirez and Ciriaco Ramirez

in their struggle against the rest of French colonialisation, but this time in the Eastern part of the island under the command of General Ferrand.

In 1812 President Petion sent more than one hundred (100) Haitian soldiers to participate in the battle carried by the United States troops against the British during the second war of Independence of the United States. During the years of 1815-1816, the Haitian State provided support to the Mexican combatants such as Pedro Girard, J. Cadenas, Javier Mina and of course the very famous Venezuelan Simon Bolivar, 'El Libertador' of South America. Although isolated and harassed in the international scene, the Republic of Haiti continued relentlessly its support of the noble causes for the liberation of slaves worldwide and against the colonial domination.

The official solidarity of the Haitian State continued throughout the 19th century with Greece opposed to the domination of Turkey, with the Dominicans in their struggle

against the annexation with Spain and for the restoration of the independent Republic of the United States of America during the civil war from 1861 to 1865, with the Cubans in their double war of liberation in 1868 to 1878 and of 1895 to 1898 against the domination of Spain.

The Republic of Haiti has given to humanity a substantial and invaluable contribution for the promotion of the principles of liberty as well as solidarity among the nations.

The contribution of Haiti to the emancipation process is very real, even if it would renew itself long after 1804. The world geopolitics would have been forever disturbed thanks to the Haitian revolution. In putting an end to the colonial ambition of Napoleon Bonaparte in America when he decided to sell Louisiana to the Americans in 1803, the Haitian revolution provoked a new course in international politics. In America, it contributed to the progress of equality between the European powers and the United States of America.

At the same time, the Haitian revolution from 1791-1804, in its worldwide impact, provoked a sentiment of hostility, a policy of contention and ostracism as well as a persistent occultation of its profound reality. For all the beneficiaries and the defenders of colonialism, of chattel slavery and racism, it existed for a long time as a “Haitian Threat”, “a Haitian Menace” that must be eliminated or avoided at all cost. Could it be a legacy of the ostracism that Haiti had to endure after gaining its independence in 1804? Haiti was totally isolated from the rest of the world after winning the battle against the Napoleon Army. It was

not until 1852, for example, that the United States officially recognized Haiti as a nation (48 years after its independence in 1804).

Not many people are aware of the brutal fact that Haiti was forced to pay to France an indemnity of Independence. The historic debt was initially one hundred and fifty million (150,000,000) French Francs and was later reduced to sixty million (60,000,000) French Francs. This debt was paid by the various governments of Haiti with coffee and precious wood. It took Haiti some 85 years to pay off the debt from 1825 to 1910. The payment of this infamous debt crippled the economy of this very young nation and contributed to the depletion of the forest reserves of Haiti.

These historical facts are not well known and it is not surprising that there are very few publications about the global impact of Haiti's contribution to the emancipation process. It is instructive to note that the Haitian historian, Mr. Michel Rolph Trouillot, calls the Haitian Revolution the "Forgotten Revolution of the World".

According to the famous writer from Martinique Aimee Cesaire: "We should not forget that Haiti is not enjoying a liberty that was given, remember that the liberty of Haiti was conquered. The Haitians conquered their liberty after 12 years of a bloody battle. They conquered it for all people of color of the whole world and first of all for us. I am convinced that if there was no Toussaint Louverture, if there was no Dessalines, if the Haitian independence did not take place, the abolitionist ideas which triumphed in France in 1848, would not have succeeded. Haiti did not conquer liberty for herself alone, she conquered liberty for all men of color and maybe for the whole continent."