

THE AMERICAS LEVEL 1



INTRODUCTION TO THE HAITIAN REVOLUTION

WHO WAS JEAN-JACQUES DESSALINES?

WELCOME TO THE INTRODUCTION TO THE HAITIAN REVOLUTION LESSON 3: WHO WAS JEAN-JACQUES DESSALINES?

IN THIS LESSON, YOU WILL LEARN ABOUT:

- THE LIFE OF JEAN-JACQUES DESSALINES
- ADBARAYA "MAMA" TOYA
- THE FINAL BATTLE AGAINST THE FRENCH
- THE AFTERMATH OF THE REVOLUTION

OBJECTIVES

BY THE END OF THIS LESSON, YOU WILL UNDERSTAND:

1. WHO JEAN-JACQUES DESSALINES WAS
2. WHO ADBARAYA "MAMA" TOYA WAS
3. NAPOLEON BONAPARTE'S PLANS FOR HAITI
4. THE DATE OF HAITIAN INDEPENDENCE
5. WHERE THE NAME HAITI COMES FROM
6. THE MAJOR POINTS OF THE HAITIAN CONSTITUTION
7. THE EFFECT OF THE REVOLUTION ON THE TRANS-ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

Jean-Jacques Dessalines was the final leader of the Haitian Revolution and led the nation into independence.

He was a creole, born into enslavement in the French colony.



As a young captive, a woman named **Adbaraya “Mama” Toya** watched over him. She was originally one of the fabled Amazons of Dahomey and taught Dessalines the ways of an African warrior. Dessalines carried these teachings with him until the end of his life, using the skills he learnt from Mama Toya to become an incredible military general. However, despite being a master of African fighting styles, Dessalines wasn't afforded any educational privileges. He remained unable to read or write until his late 30s.



Dessalines joined the uprising early on in the northern part of Saint-Domingue. He quickly became a lieutenant in the revolutionary army, utilising his military abilities. Already in his 30s and covered with scars from the enslavers whips, Dessalines' fighting skills and bravery earned him the nickname the "**Tiger.**" He then met Toussaint L'Ouverture, the main general of the revolution, and became one of his chief officers.



Once Toussaint had become the political leader of the insurgents, Dessalines became the **General of Division**, acting as a military commander of the army. It was said that Dessalines' military skills may have even surpassed those of Toussaint. Under Toussaint's command, Dessalines led campaigns against the French and the Spanish, capturing areas throughout the island from the colonists.



Eventually however, the relationship between Toussaint and Dessalines soured, with Dessalines becoming disillusioned with his leader. Once Napoleon sent his brother-in-law Leclerc to the island, Dessalines accused Toussaint of cosying up to the French.



Toussaint even surrendered to Leclerc at one point, forcing Dessalines and another general, **Henri Christophe**, to do the same. This was the final straw for Dessalines, who then began to formulate a plan for independence on his own. Finding Toussaint's methods too compromising, he helped persuade the French that getting rid of Toussaint would hinder the revolution. Toussaint was quickly captured and deported to France.



Dessalines then filled the position previously occupied by Toussaint in 1802. Napoleon however had a sinister plan. He instructed Leclerc to commit an **island-wide genocide** to prevent the revolution from progressing any further. Once this was completed, Napoleon planned to import more captive Africans onto the island and to resume slavery.



The French at this point dealt out the harshest of tortures to the insurgents, drowning and mutilating many. They were **the first nation to use gas chambers** during war, murdering hundreds in Saint-Domingue with sulphur. But all of this horrific brutality could not stop the revolution.



Dessalines masterminded another defeat of the French. He forced their army to Le Cap in the north of the island and overwhelmed them with his soldiers. No longer fearing death, the Africans of Saint-Domingue were completely obsessed with freedom and liberty. This made them ruthless warriors.



The final battle, known as the “**Battle of Vertières**”, took place at the end of 1803. Vertières was the last major fort held by the French and Dessalines’ army tore it apart. This led to the surrender of the French and to the birth of the first Black Republic in the Americas.



On the 1st of January 1804, Haiti was born. This name was chosen by Dessalines to honour the Indigenous Taíno people who were genocided, as their name for the island was “Ayiti”. This ended over 13 years of war and made Haiti the first nation to completely abolish slavery.



This was also the only time in history that enslaved people had been successful in revolution and in establishing an independent nation. Jean-Jacques Dessalines then declared himself Emperor of Haiti and Governor-General for Life, exclaiming the words
“I have avenged America.”



Desselaines then gave the order to execute all of the remaining French colonists on the island. However, he spared those from other nations - mainly Poland and Germany - that had defected from the French army to the side of the revolutionaries. He then wrote the **Haitian Constitution in 1805** which, among other things, declared that:

- Slavery is forever abolished.
- All citizens shall be classed as Black.
- Whites cannot own property or gain citizenship.
- Any citizen is free to practice any religion.

Dessalines did his best to redistribute the wealth of the island to the masses, although he himself acquired several plantations. He also declared that anyone Black who set foot on the island, upon arrival, became free. However, tensions arose within the government and in 1806, **Dessalines was assassinated** by the very people he had fought alongside.



Although murdered, Dessalines' actions during the final months of the revolution were massive. Prior to the revolution, France owned a huge portion of what today is the USA. Known as **French Louisiana**, Napoleon planned to create a new French Empire throughout the Americas once he had reconquered Haiti. Dessalines' victory however forced Napoleon to abandon his imperialist dreams, and he sold French Louisiana to the newly-independent 13 United States colonies. Effectively, the Haitian Revolution created the USA of today.



However, the USA was not appreciative, and the racist country refused to recognise Haiti as a nation for 60 years. In the two centuries that have followed, the USA has become the primary tormentor of Haiti.



The revolution was also a huge reason why the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade ended. As Haiti was so profitable, their independence caused the European slave economy to massively falter, as many nations lost their major source of sugar, tobacco and coffee.



Perhaps more importantly, enslavers in other colonies, as well as the governments of Europe, began to fear another Black revolution. Dessalines continued to strike fear into the hearts and minds of racist enslavers long after he was gone.

