

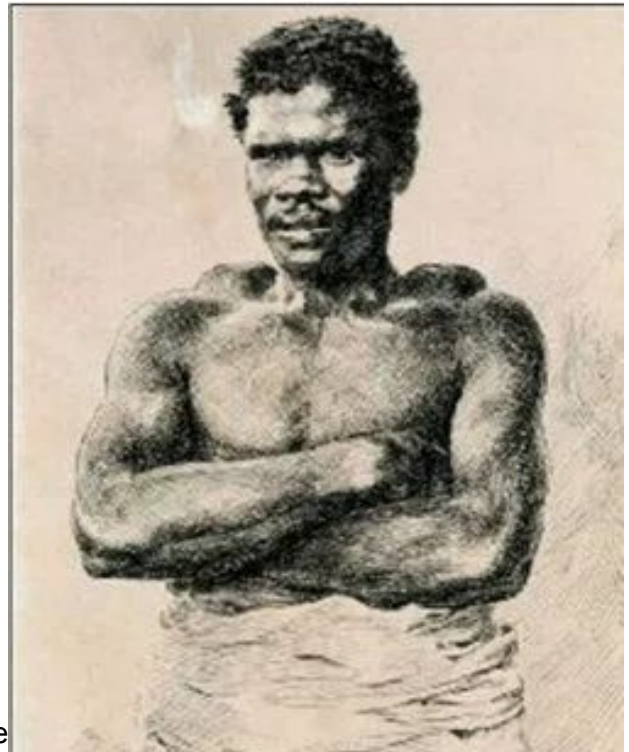
Art Connections: Haiti & Louisiana

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Stories of the Haitian Revolution

The image depicted on the right is that of Francois Makandal, whose death precedes the Haitian Revolution by 30 years. He may thus seem irrelevant in a paper about the Haitian Revolution, but his story had a great effect on the enslaved people of Haiti, and that's why I wanted to include it here. Makandal escaped slavery at a young age and joined a Maroon society. Maroons were people of African descent who formed their own societies in the New World. Makandal had an in-depth knowledge of poisons, and after becoming a Maroon leader, he used that knowledge to distribute



or drinks and give them to their masters. He would also lead raids on plantation, and he created a network of secret organizations among slaves. He was a charismatic guerilla leader, and because of his knowledge of poisons, people thought of him as a vodou priest adept at black magic, and when he was eventually caught and burned at the stake, legend said that his spirit rose with the flames and flew away.



This depiction of Makandal, sculpted by Albert Mangonès, shows him blowing into a conch shell, which symbolizes a call to action, and it's why I believe his story is important when discussing people of the Haitian Revolution. The legacy that he left behind with slaves gave them spirit and motivation to revolt and fight for their freedom.



This painting is one of the earlier ones in Jacob Lawrence's 41 painting series on Toussaint L'Ouverture. While Toussaint was born into slavery, he was eventually freed and had access to education. In this painting, entitled *The Coachman*, Toussaint is depicted in nice clothing, directing a coach with horses, while other Haitians toil in the background on a plantation. It emphasizes the contrast in background between Toussaint and typical Haitian slaves, and it is an important part of the evolution of Toussaint's character, which the viewer can witness through Jacob Lawrence's series.



This piece, entitled *Strategy*, shows Toussaint after he joined the revolution as an Aide-de-camp. On one side of the table, three Haitian generals, Toussaint's superiors, listen as Toussaint strategizes and makes battle plans. The painting illustrates Toussaint's military insight even as an Aide-de-camp, and foreshadows his upcoming position as general of the Haitian forces and leader of Haiti.



In this painting, Toussaint has just captured the city of Dondon, hence the title, *Dondon*. Toussaint majestically takes a victory lap on his horse as Haitian women, one holding a child, cheer and wave in the background. This piece shows Toussaint gaining fame through his military prowess; the people of Haiti show their support for Toussaint as he gains esteem, and more and more he becomes the face of the Haitian Revolution.



This piece, simply titled *Toussaint L'Ouverture*, comes later in the series, after many of his military conquests. It shows him in fancy, decorated attire, befitting that of royalty, as he looks nobly into the distance. This is an important part in the evolution of Toussaint's character; far has he come from the times since he was a coachman, and even farther from when he was a slave. He is now a decorated general and leader of the Haitian people.



Toussaint was more than just a military mind, as illustrated in the painting *Contemplation*. Toussaint wanted to make peace with France, and, controversially, make Haiti a colony of France led by him as the lifelong governor. In this piece, Jacob Lawrence places as behind Toussaint, as he pores over a book presumably into late hours of the night as hinted by the candle. Despite the controversy when it comes to Toussaint's political stances, he was dedicated to Haiti.



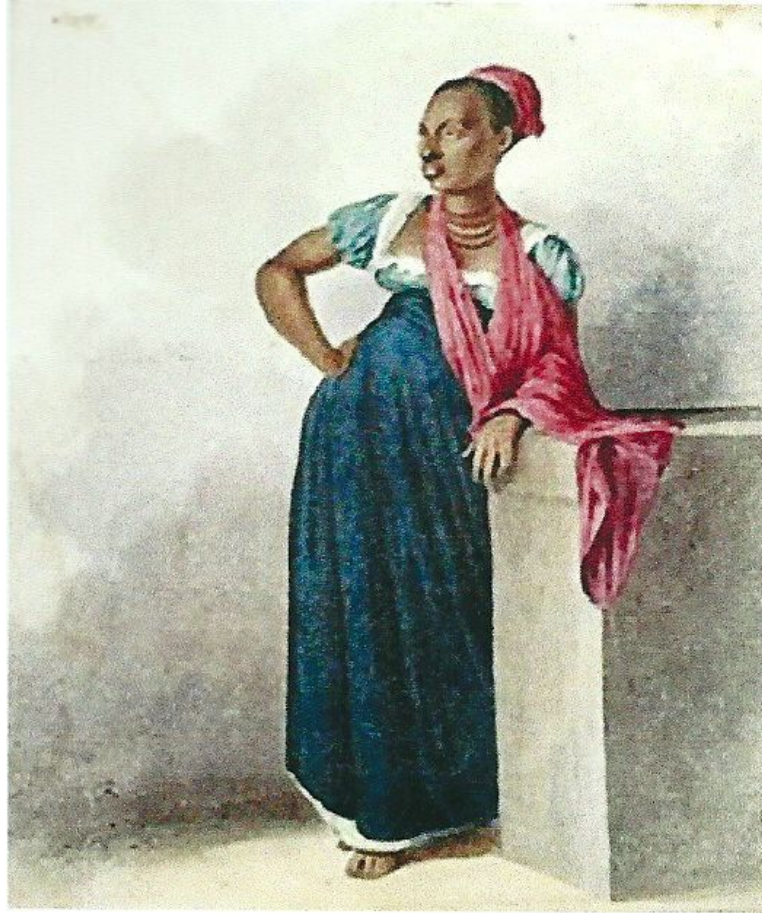
This final piece is called *Deception*, and it shows Toussaint severely outnumbered, attempting to fight back in his final moments of freedom. The French believed that the revolution would die with Toussaint, but the opposite happened. Toussaint wanted simply to reign over Haiti as a colony of France, whereas Dessalines, who would follow Toussaint as Haiti's leader, would settle for no less than independence. As Toussaint famously warned his captors upon his arrest, "In overthrowing me you have cut down in Saint Domingue only the trunk of the tree of liberty; it will spring up again from the roots, for they are numerous and they are deep."



This is a depiction of Dessalines by Manuel Lodibo. Dessalines was a leader during the Haitian Revolution and the first leader of Haiti as an independent nation. He was less open to negotiation and diplomacy than Toussaint, and after becoming Emperor of Haiti, he ordered the mass execution of the French people on the island. Because of his violent tendencies, he has become a fairly controversial figure, and often in artistic depictions such as the one above, he is shown on a battlefield or holding a weapon. In some, he looks heroic and charismatic, but in this one by Lodibo, he looks more like a ruthless warrior. However, not all depictions of Dessalines highlight his violent actions.



The context of this painting is manifest by the title, *Dessalines Ripping the White from the Flag*. To Dessalines, the white stripe of the French flag represented the oppression towards the Haitian people, so in creating the Haitian flag, he quite literally ripped the white out. In the painting, he is shown standing in front of his soldiers with contrasting clothes and a larger figure, emphasizing his role as a leader of the Haitian people. Additionally, the artist, Madsen Mompremier, includes angels aiding Dessalines with his task, as if Dessalines was guided by divinity. In fact, there are more than just angels; there are also loa, or spirits of the Haitian Vodou religion, watching over Dessalines and his army, and one even helps the woman who is sewing the new flag. This blending of Christianity and Vodou is done because of how important and significant both of these religions were to Haitians and their culture and traditions.



The next people whose stories I want to talk about are all women who also have important stories of the revolution, but unfortunately, these stories do not seem to be told nearly as often as others. This woman is Victoria "Toya" Montou. She was a slave alongside Dessalines, and became close to him. Once the Haitian Revolution began, she served in his army, even commanding some of his forces on at least one occasion. Dessalines referred to her as his aunt, but historians find it unclear whether or not Toya was his biological aunt, or if he only used it as a term of endearment. When Haiti won its independence and Dessalines became its emperor, Toya was very ill, and Dessaline ordered his physicians to treat her as they would him, declaring that she had shared his political sentiments since the time when they were both slaves, and when she died, the state of Haiti organized her funeral with a procession of eight sergeants and the empress, Marie-Claire Heureuse.



Marie-Claire Heureuse was another important woman in the revolution. She was married to Dessalines, and during the siege of Jacmel, a Haitian port town, she led a cavalcade of other women distributing food, supplies, and medication to the wounded. She even convinced Dessalines, who was besieging the city, to open up some of the roads so that the wounded could receive attention. She heavily opposed Dessalines policy towards the French people during the massacres of the French people after Haiti gained its independence, and even saved many of them, reportedly hiding one Frenchman under her bed. When her husband was assassinated, she became Empress of Haiti for two years, until her husband's property was confiscated, and from thereon she lived in poverty. Later down the line, when Faustin I became emperor of Haiti, he offered Marie-Claire a pension out of admiration as he had great respect for Dessalines, but Marie-Claire, who disagreed with his politics, refused the money, and continued to live out her life in poverty. In this depiction, her personality is illustrated the the calm, serene background that she inhabits.



This painting, by Ulrick Jean-Pierre, shows Dedee Bazille, also known as Défilée, or The Mad Woman. Her madness may have resulted from being consistently raped by her master, but one day, she killed him and ran off to join the revolution, where she fought in Dessalines army. She was a staunch admirer of Dessalines. When he was killed, his body was chopped into pieces and displayed on the streets, which attracted a mob of nearby people. Dedee, upon learning of what was happening, found a sack nearby, and walked up to Dessalines body with weapons drawn. The crowd went silent, and watched as she gathered his body parts into the sack and carried it off to a cemetery, as illustrated in Jean-Pierre's painting. Additionally, in the painting, Dedee drops her

sword to carry Dessalines' body off, symbolizing the putting down of arms momentarily to respect the fallen.



Finally, this is lieutenant Sanite Belair, whose story is quite sad. She served in Toussaint's army and commanded his forces on several occasions, until one day she was captured. Her husband, who managed to evade capture, turned himself in to die with his wife, and they were sentenced to die by firing squad. It was custom for the executioners to blindfold women during these executions, but Sanite would not allow it, refusing to be treated differently based on her gender. She nobly watched as her husband died, and without a word or betrayal of emotion, she offered herself up to receive the same fate. Unfortunately, information about all of these women is excessively hard to find, as those who have told the stories of history often fail to recount the stories of the women

who were just as present as the men, which is why I thought it was important to include a few of their stories here.

Sources

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