

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE
TO THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE AMERICAN
REPUBLICS, 1776-1826

INTRODUCTION

WHEN HAROLD PALMER DAVIS published his *Black Democracy* in 1928, after twelve years of study and of residence in Haiti, he wrote of Toussaint L'Ouverture that it would be impossible to form any true estimate of Toussaint's character, because of the great mass of material that had been written about him from widely divergent and conflicting viewpoints.

This attitude is significant. After the slave insurrection of 1791, Toussaint L'Ouverture drove the Spanish, British and French armies successively and successfully from the island of Saint Domingue. The three greatest European powers of the late eighteenth century had failed signally in their efforts to secure for themselves the economic benefits of what was then the richest colony in the world. Since then, the history of Haiti has been written by Haitian, French, British and Spanish historians. The variance in point of view between a Haitian and an Englishman writing a history of the island finds an excellent analogy in the divergencies between a history of the United States Revolution penned by an Englishman and one written by a United States historian. An even better analogy is exemplified in much of the nineteenth-century "American" history which proceeded on the premise that "America" and "United States" are synonymous and that only the Anglo-Saxon heritage is significant in a study of United States history, as contrasted with the more objective twentieth-century history, which is based on the assumption that "American" history is concerned with a territory bounded on the north by Alaska and on the south by Tierra de Fuego.

European historians who wrote the history of Haiti in the nineteenth century cannot be said to have been impartial and unprejudiced. The result is the confusion so well described by Mr. Davis. It is the task of the twentieth-century historian to sift the truth, wherever possible, from the mass of not only misinterpretation but actual falsehood. It is to the credit of modern historians that they are accomplishing this task, though much is still to be done. One example will suffice to illustrate what is being done in objective interpretation of Haitian history.

In a work published fifty years ago, titled *Where Black Rules White*, Mr. H. V. H. Pritchard proposed that Haitians were incapable of ruling themselves. His very prejudiced arguments were based fundamentally on the assumption that Haitians lacked the moral character requisite for successful self-government. Chief among the charges was the fact that the Haitians had chosen the "monstrous butcher" Dessalines as their national hero, rather than Toussaint L'Ouverture. Pritchard's picture of the liberator Dessalines was not an unusual one. It was a caricature which had steadily developed for a hundred years under the too generous pens of French and British historians. But the caricature failed to change even in a small degree the Haitians' conception of their hero, which had been handed down to them by unbroken tradition. Nineteen years ago an American historian, rather than fall into Pritchard's blunder of condemning an entire race and tradition in the production of a singularly undocumented work, set about the task of separating the true character of Dessalines from the numerous historical impostures. Not until 1936 did we have the result of that study, Richard Pattee's *Jean Jacques Dessalines, Fundador de Haiti*.

Pattee's book is the first thoroughly informed and documented study of Dessalines. The liberator of the Haitians emerges, not as a monster, but as the George Washington of the Antilles. Pattee produces evidence of misinterpretation on the part of such critics as Stoddard, Decourtiz, Lacroix, Laujon and even Davis and Vandercook. The book is a vindication of the judgment of the Haitians.

Toussaint L'Ouverture, however, does not present so difficult a problem as Dessalines. Modern historians may be baffled, as Davis was, in attempting to draw a complete picture of Toussaint's character, but no one, not even his bitterest detractors, has questioned his genius. That Toussaint L'Ouverture contributed much to the independence of the American republics is unquestioned. It remains to us to analyze as objectively as possible just what those contributions were.

TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE, THE MAN

Toussaint L'Ouverture was born a slave. The fundamental basis of economic life in eighteenth-century Saint Domingue was the degenerating institution which provided less consideration for men than for plantation animals. Toussaint had no formal education; he had no military or political training for the first fifty years of his life; and yet he rose by a seeming miracle to the position of Governor General

of Saint Domingue and Commander-in-chief of the Haitian Army which drove the Spanish, British and French troops from Haitian soil and secured the island for freedom from slavery and imperialistic domination. Even his enemies testified that his character, ability, achievement, political sagacity and military leadership were unparalleled in the annals of his race. He was a man of whom not only the Haitian people but all Negroes may be proud.

For over one hundred and fifty years writers have created a legend around the figure of this extraordinary man.¹ General Pamphile de Lacroix, who fought against Toussaint and defamed him in his memoirs, nevertheless declared him to be a man of perfect integrity. Haiti's best known detractor, Sir Spencer St. John, saw Toussaint as "the one grand figure of a cruel war." Marcus Rainsford, British officer arrested by the Haitians as a spy, testified to L'Ouverture's greatness of character. To Napoleon's biographer, de Norvin, Toussaint was a "man of genius"; Beauchamp declared him a most extraordinary man among extraordinary men; August Comte placed him with Washington, Plato and Buddha among the greatest men of all time. Lamartine composed a poetical drama about him, Wordsworth a sonnet, and Harriet Martineau a novel. Chateaubriand even charged Napoleon with having imitated him. Probably the most extravagant praise of all is found in Wendell Phillips burst of extravagant oratory:

I would call him Napoleon, but Napoleon made his way to empire over broken oaths and through a sea of blood. This man never broke his word. I would call him Cromwell, but Cromwell was only a soldier, and the state he founded went down with him into his grave. I would call him Washington, but the great Virginian held slaves. This man risked his empire rather than permit the slave-trade in the humblest village of his dominions. You think me a fanatic, for you read history, not with your eyes but with your prejudices. But fifty years hence, when Truth gets a hearing, the Muse of history will put Phocion for the Greek, Brutus for the Roman, Hampden for the English, LaFayette for France, choose Washington as the bright consummate power of our earlier civilization, then, dipping her pen in the sunlight, will write in the clear blue, above them all, the name of the soldier, the statesman, the martyr, Toussaint Louverture.²

¹ See Percy Waxman, *The Black Napoleon* (New York, 1931), pp. 6-8. See also Marcus Rainsford, *St. Domingo, or an Historical, Political and Military Sketch of the Black Republic* (London, 1802); Sir Spencer St. John, *Haiti, or the Black Republic* (London, 1884); and Harriet Martineau, *The Hour and the Man* (New York, 1873).

² Quoted in Jacques Nicolas Léger, *Haiti, Her History and Her Detractors* (New York, 1907), pp. 73-74.

Historians like Spencer St. John and Jonathan Brown, on the other hand, have presented a less admirable picture of Toussaint's character. He has been accused of duplicity and mendacity, as well as Napoleonic ambition. One of his biographers has excused him from the first charge on the ground that "verbal misleading" is in conformity with good ethics when a just cause (in this case abolition of slavery) is present. Mr. Ralph Korngold sees more justification for such "misleading" in a man who was a slave for forty-seven years out of the fifty-nine years of his life than for the "shameless mendacity" of Queen Elizabeth or the unequalled "perfidy" of Napoleon Bonaparte.³ Though Mr. Korngold reasons well, one wonders whether the actions of Toussaint L'Ouverture need such justification. The major charge of duplicity lay in Toussaint's switch from Spanish to French allegiance in February, 1794. Yet the Spanish court's sanction of slavery at a time when the French Directory confirmed the freedom of slaves in Saint Domingue was Toussaint's frank reason for deserting Spain. He himself was the first to admit his error in ever having adopted the Spanish colors. There is ample evidence that L'Ouverture's only goal was abolition of slavery, and that he would have supported any European power which sincerely guaranteed freedom to the Haitians.

The charges of ambition lodged against Toussaint are difficult for the modern reader to comprehend. The biographers who merely assume that Toussaint dreamed of being Emperor of the Western Archipelago present no evidence for their charges. Convincing proof exists, on the other hand, that L'Ouverture was as altruistic as one might hope the first champion of abolition in the New World would be. Unlike Jean-Jeannot, Biassou and Christophe, Toussaint never chose a high-sounding title for himself, and there was documentary evidence that he refused to become king of Haiti.⁴ After he had driven the Spanish, British and French from the island, moreover, Toussaint could easily have revolutionized and ruled the West Indies.⁵ All historians will admit this. Yet, though he was the idol of 100,000 well-trained and acclimated troops, he refrained from raising the standard of liberty in any one of the islands except Haiti. Obviously, Toussaint was determined on a conquest of inhuman slavery, not on a conquest of territory with a view to personal aggrandizement.

³ Ralph Korngold, *Citizen Toussaint* (Boston, 1944), p. xiv.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁵ James McCune Smith, *A Lecture on the Haytien Revolution* (New York, 1841), p. 24.

Further, had he chosen to co-operate with Napoleon after the latter's meteoric rise to power, he could have secured for himself everything short of sovereignty in Saint Domingue, while resistance was sure to bring upon him condemnation as an outlaw, and probably death in lingering torments; yet he never compromised or sought to compromise the freedom of his race.⁶ Nothing could change his purpose—not even the blazing batteries of fifty-four ships manned with 25,000 of France's finest troops.

This unusual man was believed by his Haitian countrymen to be the fulfillment of the prophecy of the famous Abbé Raynal that a great Negro leader would "raise the standard of liberty" and "re-establish the rights of the human species."⁷ Perhaps Toussaint himself believed it. His writings indicate that he believed himself destined for no ordinary role in the great drama of the fight against slavery.

Toussaint was born, presumably in 1744, on the Bréda plantation in the North Province of Saint Domingue, which was worked by more than a thousand slaves. His father was an extraordinary Negro freedman of wide reputation, Pierre Baptiste Simon. At one time in the service of the Jesuit fathers, who had freed him, Pierre had learned from them how to read and write, and was even reputed to know Latin. He was a devout Catholic. On the Bréda plantation he married a slave woman named Pauline, by whom he had eight children, the eldest of whom was Toussaint. Pierre was never able to earn sufficient money to buy the freedom of his children, but he was able to teach Toussaint to speak, read and write French, in addition to the Creole language in which he expressed himself best. The boy did considerable reading, becoming acquainted with Roman history and developing a great admiration for the noble Stoic slave, Epictetus.

During his teens, Toussaint was put to guarding cattle, an occupation which gave him some time for study and reflection. His patience, amiability and industry attracted the attention of the manager of the plantation, Bayou de Libertas, who promoted him to be his coachman. Compared with the labors of the blacks in the cane fields, this position was one of great dignity for a slave. Toussaint made the most of his opportunity. He borrowed books from the parish priest and educated himself with painstaking persistence. Soon everyone

⁶ Benjamin C. Clark, *A Plea for Hayti* (Boston, 1853), p. 27.

⁷ Abbé Raynal, *Histoire Philosophique des deux Indes*. Quoted in Waxman, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

knew that the coachman at Bréda was no ordinary man. His gentleness, alert mind, keen judgment and native insight caught the imagination of his fellow slaves and helped to develop his complete ascendancy among them. He himself was becoming more and more acutely aware of the misery of slavery. He could not square the crime of slavery with the true teaching of the Christian religion which he had embraced with great fervor. At last he resolved to dedicate himself to the freedom of the blacks—and from that moment he regarded himself as one who had received a divine mandate with which nothing should be permitted to interfere.

Meanwhile he had contracted, at about the age of forty,⁸ a very happy marriage with Suzanne Simon, a relative of his father. Toussaint himself described his marriage as a perfect idyl⁹—until the day that Napoleon Bonaparte separated Toussaint from his wife forever. At the time of his marriage, L'Ouverture was described as a rather homely man “of medium height, powerful, wiry, with an ungraceful but dignified figure.” He possessed a forbidding jaw.

His voice was high pitched, nasal, and none too pleasant. His most commanding feature was his eyes. They were black, piercing, and vitally alert. . . . He had his hair brushed back from his forehead in a queue, while as a head-covering he always wore a madras handkerchief. . . . His quiet, serious manner made him seem much older than he really was. . . .¹⁰

In common with most of the Negroes, Toussaint looked to the king of France to improve the condition of the slaves of Saint Domingue. Edicts for their protection had come from the king and his ministers. But the edicts were not obeyed. Toussaint hoped that some day the king would send an army strong enough to compel the planters to obey the law and to bring about drastic reforms. But the years went by and the lot of the slaves remained unbearable. L'Ouverture was fifty before he was catapulted to the position of power destined for him.

THE LIBERATOR

Probably the outstanding contribution of Toussaint L'Ouverture to the independence of the American republics was his lifelong fight

⁸ See Korngold, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

⁹ Toussaint's account of his own life, edited by M. Saint-Remy, may be found in John R. Beard, *Toussaint L'Ouverture; a Biography and Autobiography* (Boston, 1863).

¹⁰ Waxman, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

against slavery, which found glorious success under the leadership of Dessalines shortly after Toussaint's death in a French prison. To understand the nature of the struggle, one must recall that in 1789 Saint Domingue was the richest colony in the world, and France derived more profit from it than other European nations secured from their combined colonies in Asia, Africa and America. The basis of the riches of Saint Domingue was the slavery of African Negroes. By 1789 nearly 7,000,000 Negroes had been imported, over 40,000 having been brought in 1787 alone, not counting the hundreds smuggled into the island (of which there are no records) to avoid the head tax. Under the supervision of white overseers and urged by whips, the Negroes did a prodigious amount of work. Villages, towns and cities sprang up. Roads, bridges, aqueducts and irrigation works were built. Nearly a quarter of a million acres were cultivated with sugar, cotton, coffee, citron and limes. By the time of the slave insurrection, two-thirds of all French import and export trade was with Saint Domingue. "The combined imports and exports of the colony reached the astounding total of 716,000,000 livres; 1,000 merchant vessels, employing 80,000 sailors, were required to carry the tonnage to and from the mother country."¹¹ There were nearly eight hundred sugar plantations on this tiny island no bigger than Ireland, about four hundred cotton and indigo plantations, and three thousand coffee plantations. Cattle and pigs were bred on land unfit for cultivation. "In 1789 St. Domingo had attained a height of prosperity not surpassed in the history of European colonies. It supplied half of Europe with sugar, coffee, and cotton."¹²

The manner in which Saint Domingue's white planters developed it into the most splendid colony in the world can be ascertained by a few brief statistics¹³ concerning slavery on the island in the years preceding the insurrection of 1791. The following figures apply only to the French section of the island. Between 1678 and 1774, 800,000 slaves were imported. Of these, there remained only 290,000 in 1774. Of these last, only 140,000 were Creoles, or natives of the island. In other words, of 650,000 slaves the whole posterity were only 140,000. In the sixteen years between 1774 and 1790, the slave popu-

¹¹ Korngold, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

¹² Herbert E. Mills, *The Early Years of the French Revolution in San Domingo* (New York, 1892).

¹³ See Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 4. These figures are confirmed by Moreau de St. Méry, *Description Topographique et Historique de la Partie Française de Saint-Domingue* (Philadelphia, 1797).

lation was nearly doubled, not by any favorable change in the treatment of slaves, but by an increased importation from Africa. Bryan Edwards states that in the year 1788 alone, 29,506 were imported. The slave system in the French portion of the island, therefore, destroyed about 5,000 human beings per annum! One recalls the axiom of political economy that the social condition of any people may be estimated by the ratio of its increase in population. Here is a statement of a Saint Domingue slave penned after he became free and learned to write:

We were plunged in the most complete ignorance; we had no notion of human society, no idea of happiness, no powerful feeling; our faculties, both physical and moral, were so overwhelmed under the load of slavery, that I myself who am writing this, I thought the world finished at the spot which bounded my sight, . . . and all my countrymen were as ignorant. . . .¹⁴

If on this island where the death rate exceeded the birth rate by two and a half per cent, the slave traffic had been abolished and slavery maintained, the Negroes would have disappeared in fifty years as completely as the Indians before them. Apologists of the slave owners assert that the planters preferred buying slaves to breeding them, as pregnancy interfered with the work. They suggest also that by some fundamental law of nature "slavery hinders man's reproductive capacity, as captivity does that of wild animals."¹⁵ In Saint Domingue, however, the reason for the amazing population figures quoted above was *not* the low birth rate but the appallingly high death rate. In his report to the French National Assembly, Jean Philippe Garran-Coulon gave the annual death rate among the slaves of Saint Domingue as eleven per cent—"higher than the death rate during many a bloody battle." Every year one-ninth of the slaves in Saint Domingue died. In the forty years following the abolition of slavery, on the other hand, the population trebled, although the importation of Negroes had entirely ceased.

Economic results supply the clue to the reasons for inhuman treatment of slaves. Plantation managers testified before the French Select Committee that experience had shown it to be profitable to amortize a slave in seven years and during that period to drive him to the

¹⁴ Baron de Vastey, *Quarterly Review*, XXI (1819), 458.

¹⁵ See T. Lothrop Stoddard, *The French Revolution in San Domingo* (New York, 1914).

limit of his endurance. One expert testified that in his opinion even better results could be obtained by exhausting the slave in four years!¹⁶

When the slave traffic was at its height, three hundred vessels were necessary to keep pace with the demand.¹⁷ In one year, 100,000 men, women and children were dragged from their African homes, loaded with chains, and flung like so much inanimate cargo into the stifling holds of slave ships. Then they were removed to "factories" where they were stowed to await the arrival of the "floating hells" which carried them to the West Indies. They were fastened together two by two with handcuffs on their wrists and irons riveted on their legs. Thousands of them perished on the journey through suffocation. In case of accident, shipwreck or epidemic, the slaves were instantly abandoned by the white members of the crew. It has been conservatively estimated that in one year at least 15,000 black corpses were scattered over the ocean passage between the west coast of Africa and the Antilles. Slaves brought the highest prices at Saint Domingue. Once on the island, the Negroes continued to live an unbearable life. They commenced work at daybreak and often labored far into the night. The weekly rations were two and a half pounds of manioc or three cassavas, weighing each two and a half pounds, and two pounds of salt beef or three pounds of fish. The most common form of punishment was flogging. Other punishments considered legitimate were branding the slave upon the cheek, putting him in irons or in the stocks, forcing him to wear an iron collar, and cutting off one or both ears. Notwithstanding premeditated destruction of court records in Saint Domingue, the list of well-authenticated punishments is unbelievable. And, no matter how barbarous a planter's conduct toward his slaves, he had no reason to fear ostracism. In fact, cruel treatment of slaves seems to have heightened a man's repute.¹⁸ Little can be said in the planters' defense. Though they did not come in direct contact with the field slaves, they could not plead ignorance of the inhuman conditions.

This, then, was the unbearable life to which Toussaint referred when he wrote:

I was born in slavery, but I received from nature the soul of a freeman. Every day I raised up my hands to God to implore Him

¹⁶ See Korngold, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-34.

¹⁷ For an excellent description of the evils of the slave traffic, see Waxman, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-52.

¹⁸ Korngold, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

to come to the aid of my brethren and to shed the light of His mercy upon them.¹⁹

Toussaint himself was free from race hatred. At first he sought only reasonable reforms. Naturally conservative, he believed freedom to be an ideal which would be realized only after many years. His hopes were in the king of France, who, he hoped, would one day force the planters to obey his unheeded edicts for the protection of slaves. He took no part in minor insurrections which were quickly and effectively suppressed by the planters. But when the propitious moment arrived, Toussaint was ready to lead the slaves successfully in defending their liberty against the planters, against the British, against the Spaniards, and against the armies of Napoleon.

That opportunity came with the astounding news that on July 14, 1789, a mob in Paris had captured the Bastille. When the new National Assembly, on the wave of sympathy which followed the ruthless martyrdom of the hero Vincent Ogé, passed the measure granting civil rights to the mulattoes, the white colonists openly rebelled. Blood flowed in Port-au-Prince and the situation in Le Cap was equally alarming. The government decided that the best way to cure the white colonists of their hankering for independence was to stage a planned slave rebellion. Ironically, the governor of the colony did not realize that he was setting a match to a powder keg—that in a few short years Saint Domingue would be lost to France forever. Toussaint L'Ouverture was chosen to organize the insurrection. From this point until the end of his life, he labored with almost superhuman energy for abolition of slavery; yet he always insisted on a policy of non-retaliation toward all those who had persecuted the slaves. His attitude on slavery, manifested in the major events of the wars of Saint Domingue in which he took part, will illustrate best the humanitarian nature of his contributions to the anti-slavery movement.

The first significant fact to note is that Toussaint quietly and unobtrusively joined the rebel forces after the first hectic days of the revolution—which he had planned behind the scenes—were over. He agreed to occupy himself with the menial work of the “sanitary service” so as in no way to usurp the authority of the black leaders, Jean-François and Biassou. It was not long, however, until the born leader, Toussaint, was in command of a part of the army. The

¹⁹ Beard, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

first important action he initiated was typical of him: he implemented the court-martial and execution of the self-appointed leader of the blacks, Jeannot, whose fault was that he insisted on being as cruel to the whites as the whites were to the slaves. Toussaint did not believe that freedom could be established by wholesale massacre. The principle of "an eye for an eye" was opposed to his Christianity. At three different times during his career he ordered the execution of a subordinate guilty of atrocities toward the whites.²⁰

Shortly after Jeannot's execution, Toussaint and the other Negro generals sent two emissaries to the Colonial Assembly with very conservative demands: liberty for four hundred of the principal leaders, an additional free day a week for the slaves, and prohibition of the use of the whip. When the representatives of the Negroes were dismissed contemptuously by the Assembly, General Biassou ordered that white prisoners should be shot. Here again was a natural retaliative measure against tyranny, but Toussaint again showed his humanity. He intervened and managed to have the order recalled.

The next major event which revealed Toussaint's devotion to the ideal of freedom for the slaves occurred when the French Commissioners, Sonthonax and Polverel, discovered that they could no longer rely upon either the whites or the mulattoes to defend the colony for them against the British and Spanish. They turned in desperation to the Negroes. Their plan was to issue an emancipation proclamation. But Toussaint's vision and insight saved him from any cheap compromise. Previous negotiations with French Commissioners had convinced him that the authority of such officers was doubtful. He had no guarantee that the French National Assembly would approve the promises of Sonthonax. The latter had been known to remark that the National Assembly had no intention of freeing the slaves. Moreover, Toussaint felt that the Republican French government would be unable to withstand the assault of the European coalition. He was assured by British officers that the allies were already overrunning France. Therefore, it seemed wise to come to an understanding with the Spaniards who would undoubtedly fall heir to Saint Domingue. These were Toussaint's reasons for refusing to deal with the French Commissioners, who insisted that they were intent on freeing the slaves.²¹ Four days before

²⁰ Korngold, *op. cit.*, pp. 79, 82.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

Sonthonax issued the proclamation of emancipation, Toussaint issued a proclamation of his own, begging the people to join him against the French, promising them that they would enjoy the rights of free men by following him sooner than by any other way. "It is to the Supreme Being alone," he said, "that I owe my inspiration." The very day of Sonthonax's proclamation, Toussaint sent out his more famous appeal from his army headquarters:

Brothers and Friends:

I am Toussaint l'Ouverture; my name is perhaps known to you. I have undertaken to avenge your wrongs. It is my desire that liberty and equality shall reign in St.-Domingue. I am striving to this end. Come and unite with us, brothers, and combat with us for the same cause.

Your very humble and obedient servant,
Toussaint l'Ouverture
General for the Public Welfare²²

These appeals revealed two things: first, Toussaint's resolution to achieve real freedom, and not to follow a mirage; second, his determination not to allow a white man to claim the honor of having freed the slaves. He knew only too well that their eventual freedom in Saint Domingue would come only through their own efforts.

Within six months l'Ouverture quite suddenly changed his allegiance from the Spanish back to the French. This defection was in itself a revolution. For this act he was accused of the meanest sort of treachery and duplicity. Let us examine the facts.²³ In February, 1794, the French National Assembly, to Toussaint's surprise, confirmed Sonthonax's emancipation proclamation. The general freedom granted to the slaves, the political rights which blacks and mulattoes were to enjoy under the French, were still denied them by the Spaniards. The British, moreover, who were allies of the Spanish, had restored slavery in all the territory they had occupied.²⁴ Furthermore, the Spanish themselves had shown a lack of confidence in Toussaint by giving ear to the French emigrants at Fort Dauphin who denounced him as a murderer and traitor. Don Cabrera, Spanish Commander-in-chief of the South and West, had gone so far as to arrest Toussaint's family, including his nephew Moise.²⁵ British

²² Quoted in Harold P. Davis, *Black Democracy* (New York, 1928), p. 49.

²³ Dana Gardner Munro, *The Latin American Republics, A History* (New York, 1942), p. 541.

²⁴ Léger, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

historians like St. John do not mention these circumstances when they accuse Toussaint of treachery. When he deserted the Spanish army, he was in the position of a man who at any moment might be dismissed, imprisoned or put to death by the army he served. That Toussaint did not join the French for any personal aggrandizement is patent: it was actually a risk for him to ally himself with France, for the French army was unable to give him either military aid or supplies. When Toussaint joined Laveaux, the first thing he did was to frankly acknowledge his error in believing that a Spanish alliance would further his one objective: the freedom of the slaves in Saint Domingue.

Fighting under the French standard, Toussaint continued his resistance to any sort of ruthless retaliation. "I will never cease to use what influence I possess," he wrote to General Hédouville, "and every means at my disposal, to see to it that the blacks do not show themselves unworthy of liberty."²⁶ He would not permit his black army, who idolized him, to imitate their former masters in acts of cruelty. When the mulatto leader Rigaud massacred two hundred whites after an uprising, Toussaint at once condemned his policy of vengeance.²⁷ Members of L'Ouverture's own race criticized him for his attempt to build up confidence and good will among the white population. The truth of the matter seems to be that Toussaint pursued his policy not only because of his humanitarianism, but because the co-operation of the white colonists enabled him to maintain the island on a secure economic and military basis. On the other hand, there is much to be said to justify the policy of men like Rigaud and Dessalines. There were times when the Negro army of Haiti was fighting not only for freedom but for its very existence. At such times certain retributive measures would seem to be justified.²⁸ Whether or not Rigaud's retaliation showed the diplomacy of Toussaint's policy is another question.

Whatever his policy, Toussaint maintained his anti-slavery fight unflinchingly. When, in 1797, he learned that the wave of reaction sweeping over France following his expulsion of Sonthonax made it appear probable that the French attitude toward slavery might change radically, Toussaint wrote to the Directory:

²⁶ Beard, *op. cit.*, p. 284.

²⁷ Korngold, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

²⁸ Richard Pattee, *Jean Jacques Dessalines, Fundador de Haiti* (Habana, 1936), p. 4.

My attachment to France, the gratitude of the blacks, make it incumbent upon me to inform you that we are fully aware of what is being plotted and of the oath we have taken (which we hereby renew) to be buried under the ruins of a country revived by liberty rather than to suffer a return to slavery.²⁹

Nor did the ascendancy of Napoleon in any way affect Toussaint's single-minded aim. When the dissimulating First Consul sent a Commission of three, headed by the white General Vincent, to Saint Domingue, ostensibly to confirm the freedom of the slaves, Toussaint was not deceived. He knew from his own representatives in Paris that Napoleon's avowed intention was to restore slavery. Without hesitation, the black leader told Vincent that what he sought was a recognition of the principle that whether a man be red, black or white, he cannot be the property of any other man. Napoleon maintained slavery on Martinique, and only the strength of the blacks prevented him from maintaining it in Saint Domingue.

Shortly thereafter, when Toussaint found it necessary to expel the mulatto leader, Rigaud, from Saint Domingue after the famous siege of Jacmel, L'Ouverture issued his usual proclamation of amnesty to Rigaud's partisans. That he failed to enforce this injunction has been considered by some historians a serious blot on his career. Dessalines's purge in the Department of the South has been laid to Toussaint's charge. He himself was said to have lamented the massacre saying that he told Dessalines to "prune the tree, not to uproot it." He had, in fact, written a letter to Dessalines, telling him to exercise moderation. It has also been suggested—in Dessalines's favor—that his hand was forced.³⁰ The enemy had not really been subdued. When one reads of the unspeakable atrocities committed by Rochambeau against the Negroes of Saint Domingue, to say nothing of the earlier atrocities of slavery on the island, one wonders that the Negroes of Saint Domingue were as humane as they were in their treatment of their enemies.

Toussaint himself hoped that all racial barriers would eventually be eliminated—that the whites would become an integral part of the Haitian nation. In this attitude toward the race question Toussaint was far ahead of his time. He would have been surprised if he had known that even in 1953 race barriers still exist, though fortunately they are gradually breaking down.

²⁹ Quoted in Korngold, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

Toussaint's complete devotion to the cause of freedom impressed even his French enemies of Napoleon's armies while they were at death grips with the army of Saint Domingue.³¹ Captain Gabriel Véret left the ranks of Napoleon's army to renounce France and range himself with the Negroes for the cause of "human freedom." General Leclerc, famous leader of Napoleon's armies in Saint Domingue, while dying of yellow fever, remarked that men who loved liberty as did the Negroes of Saint Domingue and men as valiant as the French soldiers deserved a better fate than that to which the First Consul had doomed them. General DeLacroix freely admitted his sense of shame for his part in the attempt to restore slavery in Saint Domingue. Even Napoleon reproached himself for his attack upon the blacks. A few days before his death he remarked to his secretary, LasCases, "I should have been satisfied to govern the colony through Toussaint L'Ouverture."³² When all was said and done, Napoleon's effort to re-establish slavery in this free island produced one of the most abominable expeditions and one of the most shameful failures in all history. One has only to read the last letters of General Leclerc to Napoleon³³ to realize that the utter futility of the French effort was due as much to its inhuman purpose as to the valor of the Negroes, the torrid climate and the yellow fever. Napoleon feared that, unless Toussaint were overthrown, power in the New World would sooner or later pass into the hands of the blacks. If he had known Toussaint as the people of Saint Domingue knew him, Napoleon need not have feared. For Toussaint never envisioned a New World in which blacks would rule whites. His vision was of a world in which race barriers would become obliterated. That, he thought, would be the natural outcome of the abolition of slavery, which he desired not only for Saint Domingue but for the whole world.

ECONOMIST AND SOCIAL PLANNER

Speculation on the "if's" of history has always been a magnet for minds devoted to the study of past events. Twenty years ago, a historian of Haiti wrote:

On assuming government of the entire island he [Toussaint] promptly promulgated a constitution which was a model of justice and modera-

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

³² Waxman, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

³³ Charles Victor Emmanuel Leclerc, *Lettres du Général Leclerc* (Paris, 1937).

tion, and so effectively administered affairs that it is interesting to speculate what the possible development of the Haitian people might have been had Toussaint been left unmolested, or even if France had been willing to confirm him as governor of the colony.³⁴

L'Ouverture had demonstrated his genius as a social and economic administrator even before the promulgation of the constitution. From that fateful April 1, 1796, when General Laveaux had appointed him Lieutenant Governor of Saint Domingue, Toussaint had been the voice of authority, calling the Negroes to work, to order, to submission. "He changed the habits of the Negroes by his will alone."³⁵ The manner in which the black troops had restored order on the island and then returned quietly to their labor on the plantations was a marvel to the French. There had been no pillage, and the members of the army had merited the highest respect by refusing even compensation for favors without special solicitation.³⁶ Restraint of discipline was one of Toussaint's greatest triumphs. Moreover, his power was also felt through his influence with the whites, since he exhorted the little remnant of proprietors to attach themselves to him for protection.

Toussaint had told the planters that slavery was an economic fallacy, and he proposed to prove it to them. He was fully conversant with the situation and the national wealth of Saint Domingue. He knew how his race could endure labor and realized that, if he could wring sufficient wealth from these two factors, he would be able to hold the loyalty of his people. To build a powerful state, he knew that he must have weapons of warfare. Throughout all the years of his power—even while war was actually being waged—Toussaint never allowed the cultivation of the land to be neglected. With money raised from the products of the soil, he was able to buy arms and ammunition from the United States.

Toussaint's economic acumen was shown in his meeting with the British General Maitland at Pointe-Bourgeoisie, August 31, 1798. The British offered to evacuate the two ports they still occupied, to recognize L'Ouverture as king of Haiti, and to protect him against attack by the French. In return, Toussaint was to sign a commercial

³⁴ Davis, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-56.

³⁵ General Lacroix, quoted in Korngold, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

³⁶ Jonathan Brown, *History and Present Condition of St. Domingo* (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1837), I, 304.

treaty with Great Britain. Toussaint was indifferent to the title of king, but the idea of a commercial treaty appealed strongly to him. The British blockade had brought Haitian trade and industry almost to a standstill. Besides securing the economic advantages of a lifting of the blockade, Toussaint planned to obtain large quantities of arms and supplies in preparation for an invasion of Saint Domingue by the French. A secret treaty was just the thing to carry out his designs.³⁷ The agreement which Toussaint made with the British proved very satisfactory until the British cabinet violated the secrecy of the treaty. By the subsequent tripartite treaty of June 13, 1799, the United States was granted equal privileges with Britain. Ports of call for British and American ships were specified. Toussaint agreed to indulge in no expedition against English possessions in the Caribbean or against United States territory. All this was bad international policy, since Britain was at war with France, and an undeclared war, at least, existed between France and the United States. And Toussaint was nominally a French general. But as actual ruler of the Negro State of Saint Domingue, he was proving to be an excellent economic administrator.

The French Directory, meanwhile, had sent to the island during the previous year a "special agent," General Hédouville, with the express purpose of exciting ill will between the Negroes and the mulattoes. Ostensibly, he at first accepted the policies of Toussaint. But when Hédouville interfered with the administration of internal affairs, trouble arose. The problem of keeping the Negro cultivators at hard labor had become a bone of contention. The Negroes had objected to the military force used by Toussaint to implement agricultural production. Hédouville interfered by issuing an edict, known as "the edict of the 6th of Thermidor," obliging the cultivators to make three-year work contracts. Toussaint at once sent a complaint to the French Directory:

The dissatisfaction of the cultivators has greatly increased as a result of the compulsion imposed upon them by the edict of the 6th of Thermidor to contract their services for three years. They see in this a partial return to slavery. Far from encouraging them to work, the edict fills them with misgivings.³⁸

Shortly thereafter Toussaint drove Hédouville successfully from Saint Domingue.

³⁷ Korngold, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

Less than two years after the departure of Hédouville, and a few months after he had packed the troublesome Commissioner Roume off to France, Toussaint occupied Santo Domingo, the Spanish part of the island, almost without resistance. There he continued the social and economic policies he had initiated in the French section. First he proclaimed the abolition of slavery. He ordered that the cultivators should remain at work, that they should be given one-fourth of the revenue of the plantations, and that no one should treat them unjustly with impunity. Korngold describes Toussaint's immediate reforms in the Spanish section thus:

He reorganized the administrative and judicial systems, injecting new life into both. He decreed that landowners must plant export crops—sugar, coffee, cotton, cocoa, ginger, indigo—and organized a rural police to enforce the decree. He offered land concessions and government subsidies to those planting such crops and to new settlers. He promoted the creation of new industries. He abolished the custom barrier between the French and Spanish colonies and threw the ports open to British and American commerce. He undertook an extensive road-building campaign, with the result that for the first time in centuries travel and transport by means of four-wheeled vehicles became possible. He cleared the coast of pirates and the mountains of brigands. He made a journey through the Spanish territory and preached the gospel of work to the inhabitants. To quiet their fears lest a purge would follow after his departure, he assumed personal responsibility for the security of life and property and appointed his brother commander of the most important part of the territory. . . . ³⁹

After Toussaint had united the whole island under his rule, he turned all his extraordinary energy to reconstruction. He did not, of course, anticipate a protracted peace. He knew that the French would eventually contest his usurpation of power in Saint Domingue. And so, to insure preparedness, he adopted a policy which many of his countrymen considered too severe. Ten years of war had already assembled the strong men of the Negro race in his army, and this army was devotedly subservient to him. Now the entire country was scoured by Toussaint's troops, and the Negroes were forced to hard labor. In spite of their emancipation, the cultivators now found themselves slaves of a military state. The colony was divided into districts, each under a general, who patrolled his territory, punishing all shirkers. Toussaint also consistently maintained his policy of

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 196-197.

encouraging the return of the whites who had been expelled during the revolution, despite the protests of some of his countrymen. In this he displayed vision and administrative sagacity. His hope of perpetuating his power and maintaining freedom lay in the rebuilding of the productive agricultural system, which had been greatly destroyed. In addition to the rehabilitation of the plantations which he hoped for, Toussaint could also count on the potential value of the whites as hostages in case the French tried to regain the colony. The estates of many former proprietors were returned to them, and they were provided with laborers, who toiled under a system whereby the cultivators worked the plantations for a share of the crops.

The social and economic progress which Toussaint's administration produced in Haiti was a continual marvel to French, Spanish and American observers. Opinion is practically unanimous that Toussaint knew how to make the colony pay as well as the French—and without terror and slavery. He did not desire economic gains for their own sake, but rather as a protection for the freedom of his countrymen. Under his rule tranquillity was restored to the island. Agriculture, commerce, civil administrations were well organized. In Le Cap and throughout the North, buildings “sprang up like toadstools after a rain.” Toussaint was busy with the construction of fortifications, the stocking of arsenals, the acquisition of supplies, the instruction and discipline of the army. He restored and improved the cities and built bridges. He administered justice, kept an eye on the exercise of religion, visited schools and distributed prizes to the best students. Also, he often visited hospitals and barracks. His frequent tours of inspection kept the government employees, planters and cultivators all in line. Toussaint was a man who slept only a few hours a night.⁴⁰

Bickerings among the castes were gradually lessened, too. Mulattoes received equal consideration with Negroes and whites, and all could go wherever they liked. Political executions ceased. Vagabondage was suppressed. The children of the poor were reared at the expense of the state, were taught a trade, reading, writing and the principles of religion.⁴¹

All these improved conditions, certified as true even by Toussaint's enemies, suggest an almost ideal State. Toussaint's exercise of

⁴⁰ Colonel Poyen, quoted in Korngold, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

absolute power, however, brought him a certain amount of ill will. Work was obligatory for the cultivators, and the whites still remained the leaders of colonial society. A brief analysis of Toussaint's economic policy will reveal why he risked his popularity among his fellow Negroes rather than adopt the small-farm system which they preferred. In the early days of his administration, L'Ouvverture had experimented with the small-farm system by allowing individual Negroes to acquire land at very low cost. The experiment had not been very successful. Two-thirds of the Haitian Negroes were African-born. They were not trained in farm management. Also, the excesses of the slave drivers had given them a loathing for the sustained labor which was not a part of their ancestral habits. Toussaint knew, on the other hand, that export crops had to be produced in abundance if the colony was to be able to purchase war supplies. So, on February 7, 1801, he issued a decree forbidding the sale or purchase of land without a special permit. The latter could not be obtained for the acquisition of less than fifty acres, and then only if the prospective purchaser was able to prove that he was financially able to develop the land.⁴² About one-third of the land was operated by white planters; the other two-thirds by the State, under the supervision of the military leaders appointed by Toussaint. Of course there were abuses, and many of the military commanders became very wealthy. Though the cultivators had better food than formerly, greater incentive to labor and better working conditions, nevertheless their work was very difficult. Often they moved from plantation to plantation, or stopped working completely. Then Toussaint instituted a drastic measure to force the cultivators to remain at work. He issued a decree (which recalled Hédouville's "edict of the 6th of Thermidor") demanding that managers, foremen and cultivators all conduct themselves as if they were officers, noncommissioned officers and soldiers. The cultivators were forbidden to leave their plantations and go elsewhere without a legal permit.⁴³

Toussaint was charged with the desire to restore slavery in the form of peonage. He justified himself on the grounds that the measure was a necessity in a crisis. The island had to be prepared for attack by the French troops. And preparedness depended on economic independence. To prove his good will, Toussaint issued a proclamation involving fines and prison terms for all plantation

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 205.

⁴³ Léger, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

managers who misrepresented his decree as a return to slavery. The decree was in reality a proclamation of martial law.

Meanwhile, Toussaint continued his reform measures, which followed one another in rapid succession. He adopted a system of financial settlement which prevented the cultivators from being cheated of their share of plantation revenues. He made regulations concerning the collection by the treasury of the income yielded by lands of absentee owners. He set up regulations for the postal service. In order to increase his resources, he repealed by an act of December 12, 1800, the taxes on the plantations which were hitherto payable in natural products of the soil, and ordered that all commodities and merchandise exported from or imported into the colony be subjected to a duty of twenty per cent. A tax of twenty per cent was also levied on the renting value of all houses and on the value of all articles for home consumption. Custom houses were established. However, at the request of the Consul-General of the United States, Mr. Edward Stevens, whose assistance had been most valuable to him during the campaign against Rigaud, Toussaint reduced the import duties to ten per cent. By decree of December 12, 1800, all merchandise, without exception, had to pay the import tax. French goods were therefore to be treated as foreign products. In January, 1801, Toussaint decreed stamp and registry dues and established license taxes. In February, he instituted a company of gendarmery for every one of the communes of the colony. By a decree of May 8, he reduced to six per cent the duties on biscuits, flour, salt, provisions and building timber. He adopted a uniform tariff for the custom houses. By an act of May 9, he prohibited gambling. Civil or military officials found in a gambling house were to be dismissed and sentenced to an imprisonment of one month; private citizens could be imprisoned for four months.⁴⁴

Strong measures were taken, also, to prevent any disturbance of public order. Toussaint knew by experience how to stir up the people; by means of nocturnal dances and ceremonies, which the colonists called "vaudou." In these secret meetings conspiracies were plotted. The slave insurrection of 1791 had been planned at the famous night meeting in the Bois Caiman.

To influence the uncultured slaves, the leaders had to resort to the supernatural, even going so far as to make them believe they were in-

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 103-109.

vulnerable. What is designated as a "vaudou" might be considered as a kind of politico-mystical association which the most enlightened among the blacks very cleverly used to attain their ends.⁴⁵

Toussaint was better aware than anyone else of how easy a matter it was to disturb the peace through the practice of such an institution. And so he issued a decree prohibiting, under severe penalty, all kinds of nocturnal dances and meetings, "especially the dance designated as vaudoux."

The adoption of the Constitution of Saint Domingue by the Central Committee, on May 9, 1801, was the climax of Toussaint's reform measures. In order to prevent Napoleon from being informed of the events which were taking place in the colony, Toussaint decreed that any persons who left the island without his permission forfeited their properties. He was indeed absolute ruler, but an absolute ruler who served only the good of his countrymen.

The best proof of the complete economic success of Toussaint's government is contained in comparative views of the exports of the island, before the revolution, and during the administration of Toussaint. In studying the following tables,⁴⁶ we should remember that before the revolution there were 450,000 slave laborers working with a capital in the shape of buildings, mills, fixtures and implements which had been accumulating during a century. Under Toussaint, on the other hand, there were 290,000 free laborers, many of them just arrived from the mountains, working the plantations that had undergone the devastation of insurrection and a seven years' war.

Average Exports from the French Part of Hayti before the Revolution
(Table Drawn up by Bryan Edwards)

Sugar	145,192,043	pounds
Coffee	71,663,183	do.
Cotton	6,698,858	do.
Indigo	951,607	do.
Molasses	23,061	hhds.
Rum	2,600	do.

Exports in One Year under Toussaint Louverture

Sugar	53,400,000	pounds
Coffee	34,370,000	do.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁴⁶ These tables may be found in Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

Cotton	4,050,000 do.
Indigo	37,600 do.
Molasses	9,128 hhds.
Rum	None!

The social effects of Toussaint's policies were evident in the happier home life of the people of Saint Domingue. Toussaint tried to make life on his own plantations the model for others to follow. He was a kind but strict employer. His relations with his workmen and their families were patriarchal.⁴⁷ He interested himself in everything that went on in the laborers' quarters, and would not tolerate the cultivator who ill-treated his family or showed an inclination toward "vaudou." He often attended the religious devotions of the workmen. He also frequently attended their recreations and joined with them in their dancing of the "chica." Many of the plantation owners used the life of Toussaint's plantations as the model of their own.

Beneficial consequences were visible in the new state of the population. While in Jamaica and the other West Indian islands, in the midst of peace and plenty, there was a constant diminution of the numbers of the Negroes, and the merchants and planters were confidently asserting the impossibility of keeping up their numbers without annual importations from Africa, yet in Saint Domingue the population considerably increased. Such was the result of the more moderate labors of the men, and the reasonable rest enjoyed by the women. Such was the result of the social policy of Toussaint which supplanted slavery.

Is it any wonder, then, that General Vincent, L'Ouverture's envoy to Napoleon, pleaded with the First Consul not to send an expeditionary force to conquer Saint Domingue and restore the slave trade? The former slave of the Bréda plantation had literally transformed the island. Not a trace remained of the great conflagration of 1793.⁴⁸ In Le Cap, the houses of hewn stone suggested solidity and prosperity. Streets were crowded. Fountains played in the squares. Handsome public buildings had sprung up. Port-au-Prince had been transformed from a small colony of 8,000 inhabitants to a flourishing city of 30,000. Toussaint's success was phenomenal. Concerning Saint Domingue, Vincent could only write, in all sincerity, to Napoleon:

⁴⁷ Korngold, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 251.

"Sir, leave it alone! It is the happiest spot in your dominions. God meant this man to govern."

MILITARY GENIUS

Toussaint L'Ouverture was one of the most capable military leaders who ever lived. Only genius can account for the stupendous success of the Commander-in-chief who spent the first fifty years of his life as a slave.

The Negro leader, suddenly finding himself in a position of power after he had planned the slave insurrection of 1791, did not take active part in the rebellion. While the cultivators were marching on the plain Fort Dauphin and the Plaine-du-Nord, he spent his time and energy in training and equipping an army of a few hundred men. He continued that training with such evident success that in eight years his army of 30,000 disciplined soldiers and militia of 15,000 were considered capable of invading the American continent. Since Toussaint at first knew nothing about military training, he enlisted the services of two French prisoners, a retired officer and a former militiaman, to instruct him.⁴⁹ He soon learned that the military exercises used by the French were not well adapted to the character of the Negroes and to the circumstances under which they had to wage war. He modified the training, emphasizing guerrilla tactics. The exercises for mass attack which he later developed are described thus by the British Captain Marcus Rainsford:

Each general officer had a demi-brigade, which went through the normal exercises with a degree of expertness I had seldom before witnessed. They performed, excellently well, several manoeuvres applicable to their method of fighting. At a whistle a whole brigade ran three or four hundred yards, and then, separating, threw themselves flat on the ground, changing to their backs and sides, and all the time keeping up a strong fire; after this they formed in an instant again in their wonted regularity. This single manoeuvre is executed with such facility and precision, as totally prevents cavalry from charging them in bushy or hilly country. Indeed, such complete subordination prevailed—such promptitude and dexterity as must astonish any European soldier who had the smallest idea of their previous situation.⁵⁰

Toussaint attributed all his success in training his army to the two military virtues of strictest obedience and discipline. General Pam-

⁴⁹ Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Korngold, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

phile de Lacroix, Chief of Staff of Napoleon's expedition to Saint Domingue, was amazed at the Negro's enforcement of self-control among a people unused to such military measures. He wrote:

Never was a European army subjected to severer discipline than Toussaint's. Officers commanded pistol in hand and had the power of life and death over their subordinates. It was remarkable to see these Africans, the upper part of their bodies bare and equipped only with an ammunition bag, a sword and a musket, give the example of strictest self-control. Returning from a campaign during which they had lived on a few ears of corn, they would, when quartered in a town, not touch any of the provisions exposed in the shops or brought in by the cultivators. They trembled before their officers and were respectful to the inhabitants. The manner in which he succeeded in disciplining these men was the supreme triumph of Toussaint Louverture.⁵¹

Toussaint's power to capture the imagination and the devotion of his soldiers revealed itself early in his campaign against the army of the French Commissioners. The Negroes and mulattoes of the French army surrendered to him almost without resistance. By the spring of 1794, he was the independent commander of 5,000 troops. He had begun the campaign with an army of 600! He had, through his prestige among the blacks, attracted to his command the most influential of the Negro chiefs. Also, he had been able to secure as drillmasters many of the French regulars who had deserted to the Spanish when Cap Français was destroyed.⁵² Like Napoleon, Toussaint knew how to make himself popular with his men. He shared their labors and hardships. He was satisfied with their ration. He often worked among them as an equal. His physical courage, bordering on recklessness, made the soldiers regard him as an extraordinary being. Moreover, his reputation for humanity increased his popular appeal. He was admired because he did not permit looting, did not interfere with the civil population, and treated all prisoners decently.

When Toussaint decided to throw in his lot with the French, his immediate military success was due in large measure to his rapidity of movement, a characteristic quality in which he again resembled Napoleon. His guerrilla tactics were the despair of the Spanish, the British, and their Negro allies. In a few months he engaged in more than two hundred encounters, supplying his soldiers mainly by raids

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁵² Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

on his enemies. He had a way of appearing and disappearing that took his foes off guard and gained him the reputation for being ubiquitous. Though his enemies seldom knew where he was, Toussaint always seemed to be aware of every movement of his foes. He had already developed a successful spy system.

Toussaint's habit of striking quickly also proved successful against the subtle machinations of Sonthonax. When the French Commissioner tried to undermine Toussaint's power by deliberately inciting mutiny among his troops, L'Ouverture was ready to handle the situation. At the precisely opportune moment he arrested sixty-seven officers and suppressed the mutiny with one stroke. Shortly thereafter he succeeded in expelling Sonthonax from Saint Domingue. With characteristic diplomacy, Toussaint pretended that Sonthonax was leaving the island willingly, because he felt the discipline of the army might suffer if his subordinates knew that he was removing a Commissioner, a higher officer than himself, by force.

Another of L'Ouverture's most frequent tactics was to prevent force by making a formidable display of force. He used this measure to secure the freedom of Governor Laveaux with the least possible bloodshed. At the same time that he sent his army against Villate's mulatto forces, he ordered thousands of armed cultivators from the Plaine-du-Nord to enter the city of Le Cap. These were kept firmly in hand by Toussaint's agents. As soon as Laveaux was released, the cultivators returned quietly to their plantations. Even the mulattoes who opposed Toussaint could not help admiring the manner in which he controlled these thousands of irregulars, to say nothing of the discipline of the regular army. He seemed to rule by a mere nod of the head.⁵⁸

The military operation used by Toussaint to drive the British army from Saint Domingue in February, 1798, was, for him, an unusual one. The British had strung out their forces in a long, tenuous line along the entire west coast. The Negro leader attacked with his complete strength only a part of the British line. Thus he exposed himself to a flanking movement, relying on his mobility to cut the enemy from his base if necessary. The British failed to make the maneuver. Trusting in their own defensive position, they underestimated Toussaint's power. They believed him an excellent guerilla leader, but doubted his ability to bring such a major military opera-

⁵⁸ Korngold, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

tion to a successful conclusion. When the British realized their mistake, it was too late to rectify it. Within a month Port-au-Prince, Croix-des-Boquets, L'Arcahaye and Saint Marc fell to the hands of the Negroes. The "fruits of five years' effort, of the sacrifice of 40,000 men and the expenditure of 20,000,000 pounds, were snatched from the British" within a few weeks.⁵⁴

A display of force was used by Toussaint once again to expel the wily Hédouville from Saint Domingue. General Hédouville had been sent to the island by the French Directory with instructions to re-establish the authority of France. He decided that the best way to achieve his purpose was to play the mulatto leader, Rigaud, against the more powerful black leader. He invited both Rigaud and Toussaint to Cap Français for a conference, which proved to be unsatisfactory for all concerned. But Hédouville had underestimated his man. Toussaint shrewdly initiated a general uprising among the blacks of the Plaine-du-Nord. The Negroes insisted that Hédouville was planning to restore slavery. Cap Français was in utter disorder, and the situation grew daily more acute. Then Toussaint suddenly appeared and advanced upon Cap Français with the black army. Hédouville was forced to flee to France. As soon as he departed the "ferocious and uncontrollable" blacks returned at once in silent submission to their plantations. Toussaint had scored again.⁵⁵

But the military strategy of the black leader was probably displayed most dramatically at the famous siege of Jacmel, which spelled the ultimate defeat of Rigaud. Toussaint's biographer, Korngold, sensed the romantic tragedy of the incident when he wrote:

Unless a siege has a Homer to sing it, it derives its fame from its historical importance. Had Haiti preserved the rank among nations it possessed in the days of Toussaint, the Siege of Jacmel would be famed as one of the memorable sieges of history. It lasted five months and was replete with deeds of valor and with dramatic incidents.⁵⁶

It seemed an almost impossible task for the Negro army to capture the natural stronghold of Jacmel which was held by Rigaud's forces. It was protected by mountains on the land side. Capture by assault was impossible because of blockhouses, redoubts and hidden batteries.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 142-143.

⁵⁵ Brown, *op. cit.*, II, 7.

⁵⁶ Korngold, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

The only alternative was to starve out the defenders. To isolate the town and the Department from the sea, Toussaint invoked the aid of the United States by writing to President John Adams. His request was supported by Edward Stevens, Consul General of the United States to Saint Domingue.

Soon Toussaint was successful in blocking the harbor, and the terrors of famine were added to the troubles of the besieged army. The Negro general had managed to have siege guns dragged across the mountain barrier, and constant bombardment was added to the dread of starvation and the ravages of disease. "Even the cavalry horses were killed and eaten. Every green thing that could be secured was devoured. Later rats and lizards became luxuries."⁵⁷ Finally General Pétion, one of Rigaud's ablest lieutenants, seeing that defense was impossible, decided to cut his way through the Negroes rather than surrender. Toussaint's army poured through the gates of Jacmel on March 11, 1800.

L'Ouverture was at the height of his military power and he knew it. He could boldly challenge the supremacy of the three greatest nations in Europe. Albert Delattre reports him to have said at this time:

Hédouville has spread the rumor that he was going to France to raise an army and that he will return. He thinks he can frighten me. I've been making war for a long time, and if it is necessary for me to go on, I'm ready. I've been at grips with three nations and have got the best of all three. I'm at ease. My soldiers will always be ready to defend their hard-won liberty. France had better keep her soldiers to fight the English; she has none too many for that. She has already lost 22,000 men in our country and those whom she sends over now might meet the same fate. I don't want to fight France. Until now I've preserved this country for her; but if she attacks me I'll defend myself.⁵⁸

After Toussaint had conquered Rigaud, it did not require military genius to expel Commissioner Roume from Saint Domingue and to conquer the Spanish part of the island. It required only tact and decision—qualities which Toussaint possessed in abundance. But the real test of his military sagacity was yet to come, and he knew it. At the very beginning of Napoleon's political career the First Consul had decided that the colonial system which produced the best fi-

⁵⁷ Waxman, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Korngold, p. 168.

nancial results for France must be established in Saint Domingue. That system was based on slavery. Napoleon's promises of continued liberty for the Negroes never for a moment deceived Toussaint. His own secret agents in Paris kept him informed of all the Little Corporal's plans. From the time of his final encounter with Rigaud until Napoleon's expeditionary force landed in Saint Domingue, Toussaint spent all his energies on two objectives: the social and economic reconstruction of his country, and preparation for war to the death with France. The stake was freedom from slavery, the ultimate objective of his years of strife.

Both the British and French military leaders who opposed Toussaint underestimated his power before they encountered his armies. After suffering defeat at his hands, they usually placed great responsibility for their failures upon the climate of Saint Domingue and the yellow fever. A few, however, were more honest. General Leclerc was less than a year on the island when he wrote to Napoleon: "There prevails in Europe an entirely false notion of the kind of men we have to combat." Leclerc's successor, Rochambeau, insisted that "a superior race of blacks inhabits Saint Domingue." And Colonel Lemmonier-Delafosse exclaimed in sheerest admiration: "All strategical combinations, all military science are unavailing against that Negro."⁵⁹

Toussaint had 20,000 troops of the line, in addition to his guerrilla bands, to oppose the French expedition. Never in the history of France or any European country had so large an overseas expedition been fitted out. The first contingent consisted of 20,000 men, to be followed immediately by a second contingent of equal numbers. After that reinforcements were to be sent monthly. Spain and Holland agreed to co-operate in transporting the army. England promised to send supplies from Jamaica, and Spain was to do the same from Cuba. And the United States, having received from Napoleon assurance of the protection of the interests of Americans in Saint Domingue, had promised that the moment the French army set foot on the island all necessary measures would be taken to starve out the Negro army.⁶⁰ Toussaint was not in an enviable position.

Far from being discouraged, L'Ouverture laid his plans carefully. If he were to defend the coast, he would have to scatter his army

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 141-142.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 241, 246.

over a vast territory. Even then, landings could not be prevented, since the French were so superior numerically. Toussaint decided, therefore, to leave only a small garrison in each of the principal coast cities and to retire with his army into the interior. When a town was attacked, the garrison could set fire to it and fall back at once, burning everything along the way and arousing the people. When the French landing forces arrived in the interior Toussaint could then attack them one by one and route them.

But L'Ouverture's generals and counselors seem to have disagreed with his plans.⁶¹ Christophe at Cap Français in the north, Maurepas at Port-de-Paix, Dessalines in the south and west, and Clervaux in Spanish Santo Domingo, all wished to keep their forces under their own command and oppose landings in their own territories. Toussaint reluctantly consented. The strength of union was lost. The French General de Lacroix and the Haitian Christophe were later to agree that, if Toussaint's military tactics had been carried out, his armies would have defeated the French.

General Rochambeau had the honor of striking the first blow for Napoleon. He took possession of Fort Dauphin with ease. Christophe set fire to Cap Français rather than surrender to Leclerc, and then retired to the hills to join Toussaint. On the same day General Boudet captured Port-au-Prince. This success was followed immediately by the surrender of La Plume in the south to the French. A few days later the Spanish area had surrendered. Thus, within ten days, the French had gained possession of all the important coast towns and commercial centers, and of the principal agricultural districts.

Toussaint was now hemmed in by armies totaling 25,000 men. The French were converging on Gonaïves, where he had his temporary headquarters. Gonaïves not being fortified, Toussaint decided not to defend the town. He ordered the mulatto general, Vernet, to fight a delaying action with the French General Hardy. Toussaint himself rushed to the Ravin-à-Couleuvre, a mountain pass through which Rochambeau was advancing. The French were decisively defeated. Meanwhile the Haitian leader Maurepas had thrown back the enemy at Port-de-Paix, with heavy losses to the French.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

At this point in the contest Toussaint effected one of his finest strokes of military genius.⁶² He evolved a plan to keep the French occupied until the season of summer rains and yellow fever would cripple the invaders and permit him to take the offensive. He decided that a strong garrison stationed at Crête-à-Pierrot, in the mountains east of Saint Marc, could block the way into the interior of the island, as well as afford a constant menace to Leclerc's communications. The French would be obliged to reduce the fort at any cost, and meanwhile many strategic points would be poorly guarded by the French. This would permit the Haitians to operate behind the enemy lines, cut communications, capture supplies and threaten the coast cities.

The plan was magnificently successful. Leclerc lost 2,000 men before Crête-à-Pierrot. The news was very distressing to the First Consul. In rapid succession the Haitians recaptured San Michel, Marmelade, San Raphael, Dondon and Limbé. Leclerc's position became alarming. In two months he had lost 5,000 men in battle; 8,000 were ill or injured.

Then a surprising thing happened. Just when his star seemed to be rising gloriously, Toussaint suddenly decided to come to terms with the French. Historians disagree on the reasons for this action, which was, on the surface at least, inexplicable. It has been pointed out that Toussaint submitted because of defection among his own generals. Maurepas had opened negotiations with the French at Port-de-Paix. He had been granted very favorable terms of surrender and taken into the French service with his 2,000 troops. Then Christophe, believing the situation hopeless, secured the promise of a pardon and military rank in the French service, and surrendered with 1,200 regular troops. Finally Dessalines joined the French with the rank of general.⁶³ Why the sudden change of allegiance among such valiant generals? It has been suggested that Toussaint lost the good will of the Haitians by harsh treatment of the Negro cultivators during the days of preparation for war with France.⁶⁴ But this explanation does not tally with the intense loyalty of the Negroes from the earliest days of the invasion. A more plausible reason is suggested by Korngold, who insists that Toussaint's surrender, on

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 277.

⁶³ Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

⁶⁴ Léger, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

May 1, 1802, was merely an *apparent* surrender.⁶⁵ The astute Negro leader retired to his estate at Ennery, planning to attack again in the fall, after the yellow fever of the summer season had taken its toll. The fact that Toussaint never criticized his trusted generals, Christophe and Dessalines, for their defection would tend to confirm the judgment that the surrender was merely one of Toussaint's brilliant military tactics. An even stronger confirmation is found in the fact that both Christophe and Dessalines abandoned the French at the first opportunity and revolted to secure the freedom of Haiti, even though they had lost their great leader Toussaint. L'Ouverture had not the same opportunity to prove his real intentions before the world. For General Brunet had accomplished his arrest in what all historians agree was an act of the most abominable treachery. After his deportation to France, Toussaint was imprisoned by Napoleon in the fortress of Joux until his death in April, 1803. The work which he had begun was ably completed by his generals, and France was driven forever from the island of Saint Domingue.

Leclerc had failed in the Napoleonic expedition to the West Indies because of the military genius of Toussaint L'Ouverture, displayed not only during his stubborn resistance to the invaders but in the previous ten years. Because of his foresight, virtually the entire Negro and mulatto population of Saint Domingue had been aroused long before Leclerc reached the island. Toussaint had a disciplined army of 30,000 men, as well as a militia of 25,000, well prepared to meet the invader. Washington's army had never excelled 20,000. In the struggle of most intense dramatic interest, the armies built by the black man, aided by disease, had reduced 43,000 French soldiers (not including French troops already on the island at the time of Leclerc's arrival) to a mere 8,000. Even the survivors who sailed for France were captured by the British fleet. The youthful Leclerc, brother-in-law of Napoleon, who hoped to rule the Antilles, was dead of yellow fever. Toussaint L'Ouverture had destroyed all hope of French dominion in the Western Hemisphere.

STATESMAN

Toussaint L'Ouverture, the liberator, the social and economic planner, the military genius, was also an outstanding statesman on the political stage of his time. Beauchamp may have been carried

⁶⁵ Korngold, *op. cit.*, pp. 283, 284.

away by enthusiasm when he wrote of Toussaint: "His political performance was such that in a wider sphere, Napoleon appears to have imitated him." Yet Toussaint did not abuse his power as the First Consul did. The French statesman who came in closest contact with the Negro leader echoed the judgment which Commissioner Roume addressed to Special Agent Hédouville:

General Toussaint Louverture is a man possessing extraordinary qualities. He has self-control, prudence, clarity of vision, but the enormous power he has been allowed to acquire might easily be abused were he not the most virtuous of men.⁶⁶

Even when L'Ouverture was most severe with the cultivators, they preferred his rule to that of the French, Spanish or English, because they knew that he was an administrator who placed the good of his people first. He used dissimulation in dealing with Europe's cleverest diplomats only when some kind of verbal misleading was necessary to secure the rights of the Haitians. Sometimes he found it imperative to fight fire with fire. There were occasions when he found the wisdom of the serpent more effective than the simplicity of the dove. Toussaint could not meet men like Napoleon and Sonthonax on the same honest plane as he met the Negro cultivators of Saint Domingue.

The prudence and diplomacy of L'Ouverture were evident even in the earliest days of his rise to power. When some energetic young slave would suggest to him that the time had come to revolt, Toussaint would reply in Creole: "Patience bat la force." But when the time for rebellion *did* arrive, he knew how to instigate insurrection with political sagacity. The white Colonial Assembly had met at Cap Français, had refused to send an official account of the insurrection to France, had striven to drag the governor into the same policy, and, through their president, had opened a correspondence with the governor of Jamaica, from whom, in preference to the mother country, they sought succor. This was, on the part of the Assembly, a virtual declaration of independence; and, taking advantage of this circumstance, Toussaint and the insurgent slaves declared themselves in arms to support the cause of Louis XVI.⁶⁷ L'Ouverture's career of diplomacy had begun.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁶⁷ Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

Though he never compromised his principles, Toussaint managed to co-operate successfully with men of varied ideas and varied temperaments. He remained an ally of Jean-François and Biassou, for example, when these two generals compromised with the Commissioners on the question of slavery, even though he had made up his mind concerning the necessity of abolishing slavery altogether. In order to achieve his purpose, moreover, Toussaint recognized Biassou as his chief and gave him an account of all his operations, though in reality he held his own counsel. This diplomacy on the part of L'Ouverture convinced Jean-François and Biassou to side with him in rejecting the emancipation proclamation of Sonthonax. His dealings with Governor Laveaux likewise indicate political discernment. Not only did Toussaint manage to govern Saint Domingue under the very eyes of this man who was governor in name only, but he actually banished him from the island while still retaining his friendship! The forced election of both Laveaux and Sonthonax to the French Chamber of Deputies was not very democratic, but it did give the Negro leader a free reign in Saint Domingue, at least for a time. Sonthonax had to be got rid of, for his policies were all repulsive to L'Ouverture. The French Commissioner was cruel toward the whites, he insisted on arming the Negroes prematurely in order to secure his own popularity, and he proposed eventually to rule a completely black population in Saint Domingue. Toussaint was not deceived by Sonthonax's proposal that they should jointly establish and rule a Negro republic. But perhaps Toussaint showed his greatest diplomacy in dealing with Rigaud, for the black leader did not blame the mulatto leader for dissensions between the two groups nearly so much as he blamed the French Commissioners who deliberately sewed discord between blacks and mulattoes. Toussaint's policy was to tolerate Rigaud until peace demanded his defeat and banishment.

L'Ouverture's moderation in his internal policy gained him power as an administrator. As if above the settled political procedure of the age in which he ruled, he saw the folly and imprudence of those who persisted in making political opinions the standard by which alone to dispense protection and favor.⁶⁸ He refused to persecute the emigrants. He conciliated the whites. He protected the planters. His policy of granting a general amnesty after every victory was a source of amazement and admiration to his enemies. His appoint-

⁶⁸ Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 305.

ment of the white General Agé as his chief of staff was, for Toussaint, a typical political appointment. Agé never determined L'Ouverture's course of operations, but the black leader found it wise to have the white general in a position of importance. A less able administrator than Toussaint, with his position of power, would have stirred up unspeakable caste hatreds. But Toussaint hated violence, and he knew how to maintain order by diplomacy as well as by force.

Countless examples of L'Ouverture's political sagacity might be cited, for they appear on every page of this extraordinary man's biography—for example, his sending his own two sons to France to attend school in order to reassure the French Directory of his loyalty after the banishment of Sonthonax; his use of a simulated revolt of the blacks in order to secure from Commissioner Roume permission to conquer Spanish-held Santo Domingo and abolish slavery there; his conciliatory action toward the Marquis d'Espinville after the fall of Mirebalais; his finesse in insisting that Governor García voluntarily offer him the keys of the city of Santo Domingo after the Spanish territory was conquered; his repeated refusals to accept personal honors and titles which might intimidate his relations with the Negroes.

Perhaps Toussaint's political wisdom in dealing with his enemies was displayed best in his refusal to fall into the trap most cleverly planned against him by Hédouville and the French Directory. That body had decided that they might rid themselves of the troublesome Negro leader by persuading him to seek military glory away from Saint Domingue. An officer was dispatched from France with the proposal that Toussaint should invade Jamaica and the Southern States of the United States of America. He was to be promised the aid of the French fleet, and all foreign ships in Haitian ports were to be seized to transport his men. Toussaint realized at once that the whole plan was an effort to restore slavery in Saint Domingue in his own absence. He at first ignored the proposal, but when it was renewed he notified the American Consul-General Edward Stevens and asked him to communicate it to General Thomas Maitland of the British Expeditionary Force. Stevens also informed the American Secretary of State, Timothy Pickering, and the result was a secret treaty, signed June 13, 1799, in which Toussaint promised that he would send no expedition out against the possessions of his

Britannic Majesty and of the United States. In return, Toussaint was granted favorable trade agreements.

The Negro leader was not in the least interested in extending his personal glory through foreign conquest. Saint Domingue was a French colony only nominally. It was in reality an independent state, which not only negotiated its own foreign treaties, but made its own laws and maintained its own army. And Toussaint was already planning a Constitution for his independent state. When Bonaparte announced that the laws of France no longer applied to Haiti, and that the island would be ruled by a special decree, Toussaint decided that it was time to proclaim a Constitution. By a proclamation of February 5, 1801, he ordered the meeting at Port-au-Prince of a Central Assembly consisting of ten members. These men were to be elected from each of the five departments of the island. Their business was to draw up a Constitution and a code of laws.

After the ten members were elected, Toussaint arrived in Port-au-Prince where he was given a flattering ovation. The streets were strewn with flowers, bells were rung, and cannon fired in his honor. He conferred with the representatives of the people and then withdrew to Cap Français in order not to be accused of influencing their decisions.

The Assembly met March 22, 1801, and elected Bernard Borgella of the Department of the West as its chairman. The Constitution, a most satisfactory document, seems to have been chiefly the work of Toussaint, Borgella, and the Negro leader's friend, Father Molière. It was adopted May 9, 1801. Toussaint L'Ouverture was appointed governor-general for life with the right to choose his successor. He was empowered to fill all vacancies in civil and military offices, and held chief command in the army. He was also authorized to submit to the Assembly the drafts of laws pertaining to the colony. His salary was to be 300,000 francs. After Toussaint's death the term of office for the governors was to be five years. In case of death or resignation of a governor, the general highest in rank was to exercise the power until the election of a new governor.

In reality the Constitution was a declaration of independence.⁶⁹ The governor of Saint Domingue no longer owed his authority to France, but to the people of the colony. France had also lost the

⁶⁹ Léger, *op. cit.*, pp. 108-109.

right of appointing to public offices and of enacting laws for the island. She was granted no privilege not enjoyed by all countries.

Slavery, of course, was abolished forever. The cultivators, however, were prohibited from leaving their plantations. Immigration of laborers from Africa was to be encouraged to restore and promote agriculture.

Civil and criminal courts and a Supreme Court were organized. Courts-martial were authorized to act in all cases of robbery, murder, incendiarism and conspiracies. The Roman Catholic religion was proclaimed the religion of the state, and divorce was prohibited. Finally, the Assembly authorized the governor to put the Constitution in execution without awaiting the approval of the French government. The solemn proclamation of the Constitution, July 7, 1801, marked both the high point of Toussaint's statesmanship and the beginning of his downfall. Though the proclamation was tantamount to an admission of open enmity with France and meant only imprisonment and death for Toussaint, for the island of Saint Domingue it meant independence and freedom from slavery forever after.

CONCLUSION

The contributions of Toussaint L'Ouverture to the independence of Haiti, and consequently to the independence of all American republics, have been outlined in his phenomenal achievements as liberator, as social and economic planner, as military genius and as statesman. But it must not be forgotten that in winning independence for Haiti, L'Ouverture literally changed the map of the American continent and helped to determine its pattern of republican states. Not only did Toussaint directly aid South American republics in establishing their independence by supplying them with both arms and a place of refuge, but he was indirectly responsible for the Louisiana Purchase.

By defeating the Napoleonic expedition under Leclerc, the Negro leader saved the United States from what would have been a worldwide and an age-long catastrophe, a war with France.⁷⁰ He also flung the domain of American democracy across a continent. In 1800 it was common knowledge that Napoleon's ambition was to build a huge colonial empire. His first step was to negotiate the retrocession of the Louisiana Territory from Spain. But he knew

⁷⁰ Carl Kelsey, *The Republic of Haiti Today* (Washington, 1922), p. 12.

that his gateway to that territory was the incomparable colony of Saint Domingue, France's richest possession before the Negro insurrection. The two colonies, Napoleon reasoned, should be mutually dependent: he could not hope to hold Louisiana without power in Haiti, and at the same time Haiti should be made dependent for her supplies on Louisiana, not on the United States, an eminently dangerous neighbor. And so Napoleon invaded Saint Domingue with the most powerful army that had ever crossed the Atlantic.

Leclerc's defeat by Toussaint's army was, in its results, one of the most decisive defeats in history. When Napoleon lost Saint Domingue, he lost interest in the Louisiana Territory. Napoleon's failure was Jefferson's opportunity. By the Louisiana Purchase the United States secured all of the Indian Territory, all of Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Wyoming, Montana, Washington, Oregon—and most of Colorado and Minnesota. Toussaint L'Ouverture was indirectly responsible for doubling the area of the United States and spreading the greatest democracy in the world from ocean to ocean. Who can say what the present condition of the American continent might be if the slave of Bréda plantation had not been the first to free the slaves in the New World and to establish the first independent Negro republic in the world?

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