

Haiti-A Call For Global Action
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Part I
January 1, 1804 - January 1, 2004:
This day is sacred.

It is the 200th anniversary of the Haitian Revolution.

Fought by Haitians.

Won for us all.

Between 1791 and 1804, hundreds of thousands of Africans enslaved in Haiti ignored the rivers, forests, precipices, swamps, mountains, gorges, bloodhounds, rifles, cannon, and whips that separated them and united to launch a massive, brilliantly executed, spectacular war of liberation that the armies of Spain, England, and France (with the help of the United States) all fought desperately - and failed absolutely - to crush.

The Haitian Revolution was no "lucky break" involving "a few unruly slaves."

This was no "plantation uprising."

St. Domingue (as Haiti was then called by the French) was at that time the most prosperous colonial possession of any European power. It created far greater wealth for France than the thirteen American colonies combined. Its massive wealth-generating capacity caused it to be known far and wide as "The Pearl of the Antilles" and its French owners had a clear and proven management strategy for profit maximization: push the slaves to their absolute physical limit, work them literally to death, and then quickly import replacement slaves from Africa who would, in turn, be worked to death. This, St. Domingue's plantocracy had discovered, controlled operating costs, kept the pace of economic activity at a highly efficient and productive pace, minimized slack and wastage, and produced massive, stupendous profits.

Two hundred years ago today, however, after a 13-year war of liberation, the slaves of St. Domingue celebrated their victory over France and other European powers by establishing the Republic of Haiti. They had wrested from Napoleon the engine of France's economic expansion, banished slavery from the land, and ended European domination of 10,000 square miles of fertile land and hundreds of thousands of slaves to work it.

They had shattered the myth of European invincibility.

"Most have assumed that (Haiti's) slaves had no military experience prior to the revolution," John K. Thornton explains in *African Soldiers in the Haitian Revolution*.

"Many assume that they rose from agricultural labour to military prowess in an amazingly short time.... However, it is probably a mistake to see the slaves of St. Domingue as simply agricultural workers, like the peasants of Europe... ...A majority of St. Domingue's slaves, especially those who fought steadily in the revolution, were born in Africa... ...In fact, a great many... ...had served in African armies prior to their enslavement and arrival in Haiti... ...Sixty to seventy per cent of the adult slaves listed on (St. Domingue's) inventories in the late 1780's and 1790's were African born...(coming) overwhelmingly from just two areas of Africa: the Lower Guinea coast region of modern Benin, Togo and Nigeria (also known as the "Slave Coast"), and the Angola coast area....