

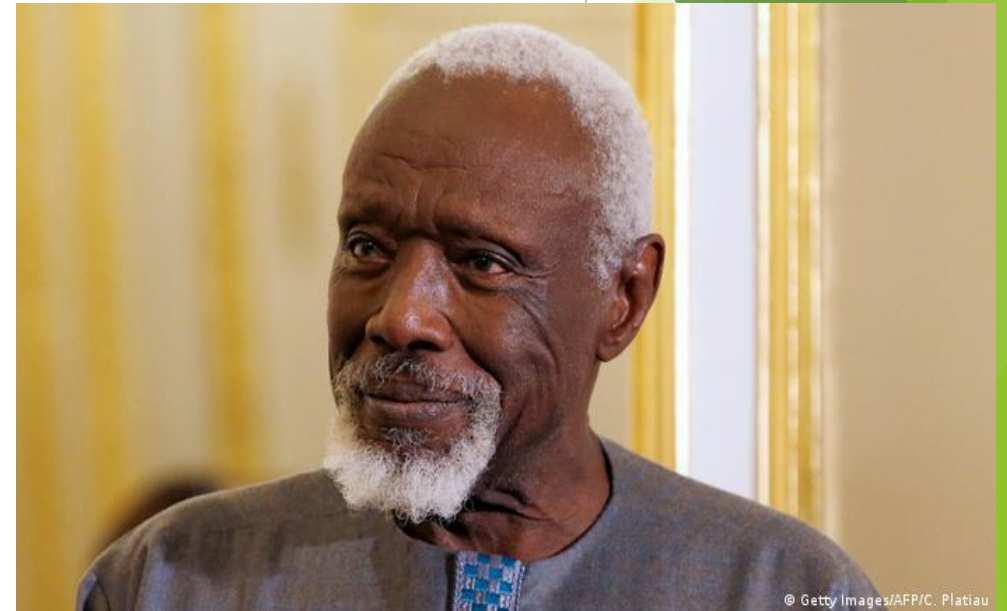
ANCAR GORDON

The Colonial Project and the Humanities
(HPHP4004)

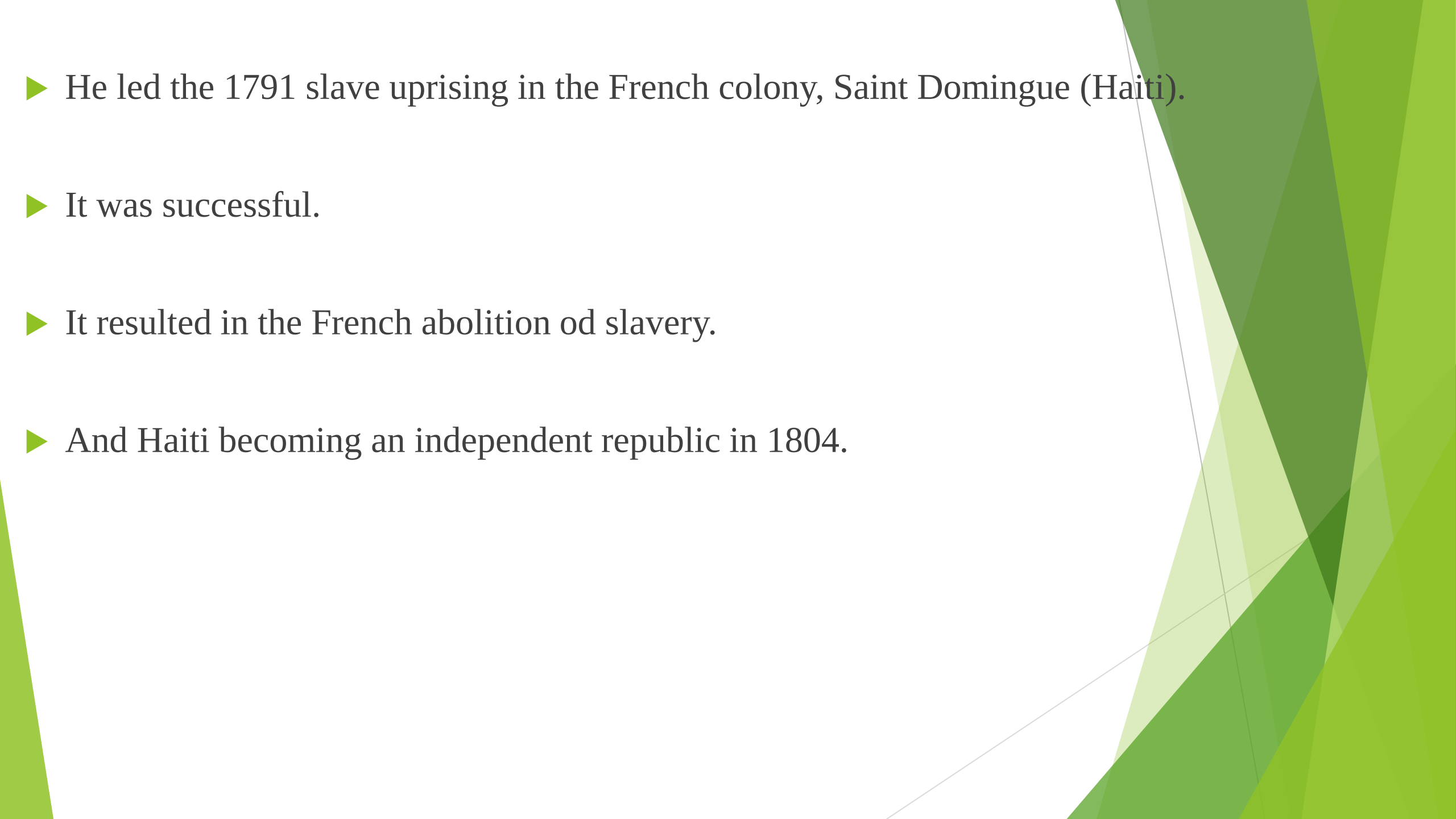
The Statue of Toussaint Louverture



- ▶ In memory of Toussaint Louverture (1743-1803), a statue was inaugurated in La Rochelle, France on 20th May 2015.
- ▶ Former slave and governor of Haiti.
- ▶ Colour: Bronze
- ▶ Measurement: 2.80m
- ▶ Weight: 683kg
- ▶ Sculpted by: Ousmane Sow



Picture by Getty Images/AFP/C. plateau of the renowned Senegalese sculptor Ousmane Sow (1935-2016)

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- The background of the slide features abstract, overlapping green geometric shapes, primarily triangles and polygons, in various shades of green, creating a modern, layered effect on the right side of the frame.
- ▶ He led the 1791 slave uprising in the French colony, Saint Domingue (Haiti).
 - ▶ It was successful.
 - ▶ It resulted in the French abolition of slavery.
 - ▶ And Haiti becoming an independent republic in 1804.

- ▶ Location: courtyard of the Museum of the New World in La Rochelle, France.
- ▶ N.B.: This location is symbolic since the Museum of the New World was formerly the Hotel Fleuriau, named after the naturalist Louis-Benjamin Fleuriau, whose family made a fortune from the slave trade.
- ▶ Commemorate: Haiti, Memories of slavery, Reconciliation and Social justice



Picture from wikidata of Louis-Benjamin Fleuriau (1761-1852)

Toussaint Louverture

- ▶ Born: 20th May 1743
- ▶ Nationality: French, Haitian
- ▶ He was well educated
- ▶ During 1791, France became distracted by the French Revolution.
- ▶ Resulted in a slave rebellion in Haiti.

Why Rebel?

- ▶ In 1685, Louis XIV enacted the Code Noir.
- ▶ A passage from Henri Christophe's personal secretary, who lived more than half his life as a slave, describes the crimes perpetrated against the slaves of Saint Domingue by their French masters:
 - ▶ “Have they not hung up men with heads downward, drowned them in sacks, crucified them on planks, buried them alive, crushed them in mortars? Have they not forced them to eat excrement? And, having flayed them with the lash, have they not cast them alive to be devoured by worms, or onto anthills, or lashed them to stakes in the swamp to be devoured by mosquitoes? Have they not thrown them into boiling cauldrons of cane syrup? Have they not put men and women inside barrels studded with spikes and rolled them down mountainsides into the abyss? Have they not consigned these miserable blacks to man-eating dogs until the latter, sated by human flesh, left the mangled victims to be finished off with bayonet and poniard?”

► "Brothers and Friends,

I am Toussaint Louverture; perhaps my name has made itself known to you. I have undertaken vengeance. I want Liberty and Equality to reign in Saint Domingue. I am working to make that happen. Unite yourselves to us, brothers, and fight with us for the same cause.

Your very humble and obedient servant,

(Signed)

Toussaint Louverture.

General of the armies of the king, for the public good."



The Significance of the Statue

- ▶ Jean-François Fontaine, Mayor of La Rochelle, described this positioning of the statue as:
- ▶ *“The slave standing in the house of the masters is not revenge but reconciliation of the city with its history.”*
- ▶ In my opinion...The fact that the statue was placed in France, it is like the French saying Toussaint was more French than Haitian. Also there was a point in time during the rebellion where he was actively trying to save his former French master and his family. I believe this is why it was placed in a former slave port.

- ▶ According to Dawn Hopkin (2015) in an article.
- ▶ “Ousmane Sow’s statue shows Louverture reading the constitution of Santo Domingo, a document that ultimately led to his arrest and imprisonment. In this moment of concentrated reading, the pose betrays some unexpected, emotive nuances, encouraging viewers to reflect on Louverture’s possible mixed hopes and expectations for this document.”



Reading the constitution for Saint-Domingue © Xavier Léoty

References

- ▶ Heintz, Robert. (1996) *Written in Blood: The Story of the Haitian People, 1492–1995*. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America. (Accessed: 2nd February 2022).
- ▶ James, CLR. *The Black Jacobins*. p. 55
- ▶ Magazine, S. and Edwards, O., 2022. *A Larger-Than-Life Toussaint Louverture*. [online] Smithsonian Magazine. Available at: <<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/a-larger-than-life-toussaint-louverture-1651712/>> [Accessed 3 February 2022].
- ▶ Hoskin, D., 2015. *In Memory of Toussaint Louverture • V&A Blog*. [online] V&A Blog. Available at: <<https://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/creating-new-europe-1600-1800-galleries/in-memory-of-toussaint-louverture>> [Accessed 3 February 2022].