



The Enlightenment and the Haitian Revolution

The Age of Radical Ideas and Revolutions

- **American Revolution**/Amer. War of Independence (1765–1783) → influenced by the Enlightenment ideas of self-determination, separation of powers, the social contract, reason, equality, and the natural rights of man
- **French Revolution** (1789-1799) → beginning with the storming of the Bastille Prison. Influenced by Enlightenment ideas of equality, the social contract, and freedom of thought and expression
- **Haitian Revolution** (1791-1804) → influenced by political ideas coming from the French Revolution, including their *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* written by France's National Constituent Assembly in 1789. Were able to take advantage of French political instability to organize and revolt against their enslavement

The Haitian Revolution (1789-1804)

- Self-liberated slaves revolted against French Colonial rule in Saint-Domingue → now the sovereign state of Haiti
- Multi-racial revolution: black, biracial, Spanish, Polish, and British
- The ex-slave Toussaint L'Ouverture emerging as Haiti's most prominent general during this time
- Influenced by Enlightenment of ideals for men and representative government → these ideas travelled to the Caribbean and influenced revolutionary consciousness
- Inspires a rebellion where people sought these ideals for themselves



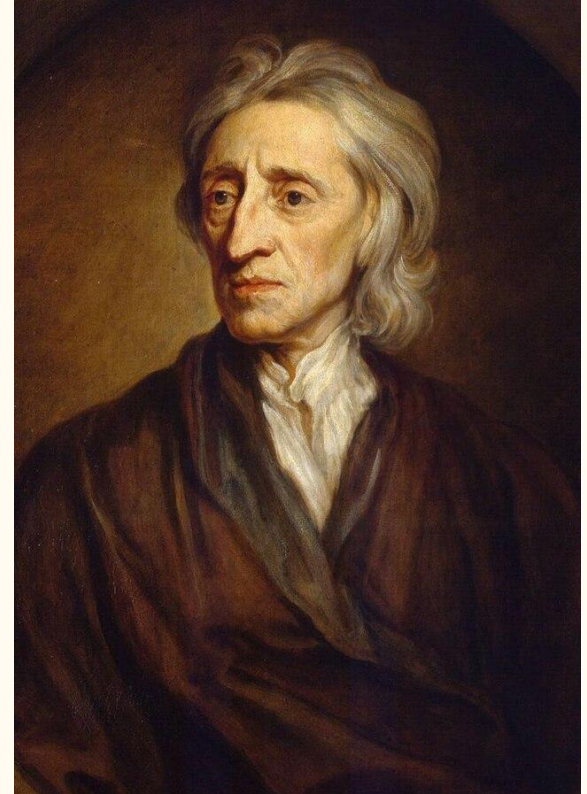
Why did enslaved people join the revolution?

- Inspired by the French Revolution → topic of discussion in Saint-Domingue
- The ideology of the French Revolution made its way to Saint-Domingue via pamphlets, etc.
- The Amis des Noirs group would pass out these pamphlets
- Overheard their enslavers/masters discussing France
- Abbé Grégoire, author of pamphlet that had been circulating among mixed-raced people and eventually filtered down to enslaved people → called for emancipation of all slaves in the French West Indies
- Maltreatment, exploitation, and disunity → but perhaps most important was French Revolution



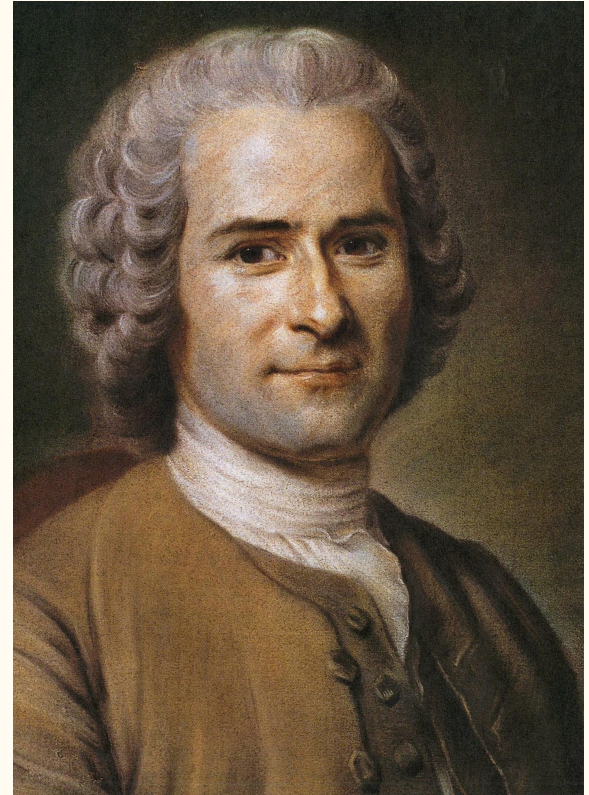
Influence: John Locke (1632-1704)

- Main idea that was influential: Education
- Education was the key to open doors to a better future
- Writings initially influenced wealthy upper-class merchants, but some working class/lower class people read his work
- At the time in Saint Domingue, everyone allowed education except for enslaved Africans → there were rich and poor whites, and mixed raced people who were allowed education



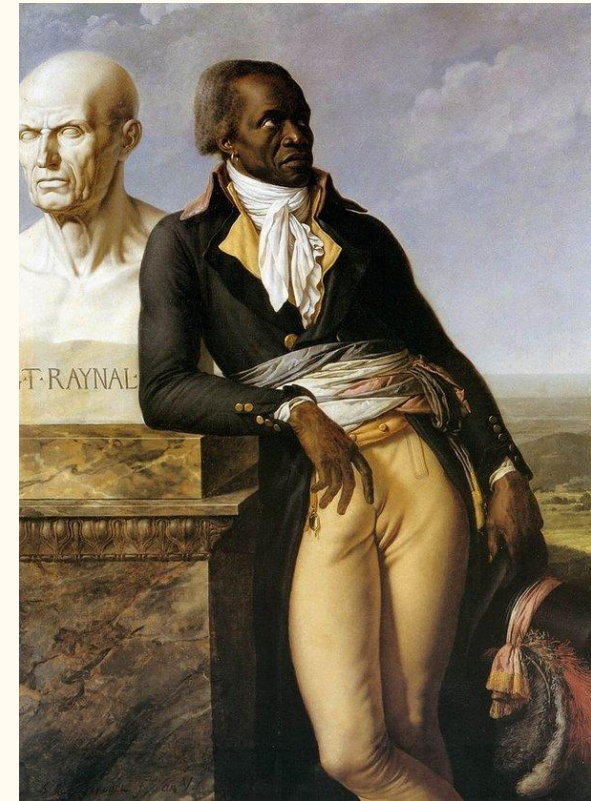
Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)

- Main idea that was influential: Human rights
- The Social Contract (1762): “Man is born free...but everywhere he is in chains.”
- Phrase taken up by the Haitian Revolution → revolutionaries were people held in bondage against their will
- Two types of liberty:
 - Natural liberty: duty of a person to provide for his own survival and flourishing
 - Civil liberty: freedoms that people have to give up so that others can govern and maintain order
- But what was the social contract to enslaved people?



Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies (1770)

- Guillaume Raynal: French Enlightenment man of letters
- Attacked slavery in the 1780 edition of his history of European colonization
- Predicted a general slave revolt in the colonies → signs of "the impending storm".
- Raynal was influence on L'Ouverture
- Important Enlightenment impact on abolition
- Raynal's book forced his exile in 1781
- Some speculate Denis Diderot wrote a third of collection
- The work contained three main ideas:
 - the invalidity of slavery
 - the freedom of will
 - sympathy towards a violent revolution



Portrait of Jean-Baptiste Belley by Girodet, 1797. Belley appears with a bust of the abolitionist Guillaume Raynal.

Coffeehouse culture in Saint Domingue

- Coffeehouses important for revolutionary France and Haiti → gathering places for exchange of ideas
- Latest essays were read by the literate and discussed
- People of the first caste, les blancs, the whites, discussed the French Revolution in the presences of their slaves
- Many of the grands blancs had received their education in France and they were exposed to radical writings of the philosophes
- Many gens de couleur received an education in France

Creation of a new philosophy

- The enslaved and who worked in service positions listened carefully to the whites
- Began to form their own philosophy
- Educated individuals, especially the gens de couleur, began writing pamphlets to the National Assembly shortly after the Fall of the Bastille
- Focused primarily on the inequality between the social castes in Saint Domingue
- Specifically the disunity between the different social castes: les blancs, the whites, and the gens de couleur, free mulattoes and blacks

Vincent Ogé (1757-1791)

- Creole revolutionary who left France to start revolution in Saint Domingue
- Wrote to the president of the Provincial Assembly in Saint Domingue: “GENTLEMEN: A prejudice, too long maintained, is about to fall.”
- Expresses Enlightenment philosophy that all men are created equal → Freedom is for all men (reflection of Rousseau)
- Ogé led an insurrection against the whites, but his plan failed
- Escaped to the Spanish side of the island → was betrayed and handed over to the French → was executed by the French
- Death was outrage for many in France, spurring a new round of publications → demanded emancipation of slaves and equal rights



Toussaint L'Ouverture (1743-1803)

- Literate slave Toussaint L'Ouverture read these ideas → received limited education in literacy
- Never attended school or became a scholar → gained knowledge through discussion with free black men and white men
- Became free himself, owned slaves himself
- 1796: became Lieutenant Governor of the island, he began to establish Saint Domingue as a prosperous colony for France → joined Spanish resistance against France
- Under L'Ouverture's direction, the former slaves began to view themselves as a community → began to take on Enlightenment ideas of nationalistic unity
- Enslaved people taken from different parts of Africa → enslavement made them community with common purpose

French attempt at regaining control fails

- Sense of community vital against the 1801 invasion of Napoleon → focused on Haiti after losing to the British in Africa and India
- Napoleon sent brother-in-law, Leclerc, to Haiti → Leclerc claimed that Toussaint was to give command to the Frenchman
- New community came together and saw through the façade of peace → took up arms against the French
- When Leclerc was ordered to forcibly take control of the island, he failed
- 1804: Africans maintained their freedom and became independent and the second republic in the Western Hemisphere