

Timeline of key events in the French and Haitian Revolutions, and American Politics

Key:

Red entries: events in the French Revolution

Blue entries: events in the Haitian Revolution

Black entries: events in US politics

1789

April—George Washington inaugurated president of the United States.

June—In France, the Third Estate proclaims itself "The National Assembly." A few liberal nobles and many clergy join the movement of the Third Estate. Tennis Court Oath: After being locked out of their meeting room, deputies of the Third Estate assembled on a tennis court and swore not to separate until a constitutional regime was established.¹

July 14-- The storming and fall of the Bastille.

August-- The Declaration of the Rights of Man was issued by The National Assembly.

September—Thomas Jefferson leaves his post as minister to France and returns to the United States

October 5-- The women of Paris invaded Versailles. Parisians, led by a large number of women, march upon Versailles and force the royal family back to Paris, where they take up residence at the Tuileries. Louis XVI is considered by many a "Prisoner" in Paris. The Assembly, still in Versailles, declares, in the spirit of constitutional monarchy, its inseparability from the king.

1790

Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton proposes funding the national debt

Jefferson becomes Secretary of State

Federal Government Assumes State Debts—The federal government agreed to redeem the debts of individual states. Debt assumption was supported by Hamilton, but opposed by Madison, who said it rewarded speculators. It was also opposed by a number of key states, such as Virginia, who had repaid all their debts.

¹ French Revolution Timeline, <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/articles/france/french-revolution-timeline/1061>. Accessed August 6, 2012

In Saint-Domingue, the *gens de couleur* (free men of color) demand equal rights with free whites based on The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen.

1791

Nat'l Assembly Establishes Constitutional Monarchy - In 1791 the French National Assembly passed a new constitution. Under its terms France was to become a limited monarchy. There was to be a Legislative Assembly that was made up of 745 representatives.

Louis XVI and his family were arrested while trying to flee from France but were arrested.

The French National Assembly granted free Blacks full French rights in Saint Domingue. The White colonist refused to implement the decision and the blacks revolted. Within a short period 2,000 whites and 10,000 blacks and mulattos are dead.

Ten to fifteen thousand slaves in Haiti rise in armed rebellion seeking freedom for their leaders (not necessarily themselves), additional free days during the week, and abolition of the whip as punishment. However, colonists refuse to negotiate at all. Meanwhile the slave forces continue to grow, reaching nearly 40,000 by the end of July.

The entire political structure of Saint-Domingue begins to collapse. The ruling plantation-owning whites divide into royalists and supporters of the new republic in France, and the free people of color continue militantly demanding equal rights. Meanwhile, in July slaves organize separately to demand their own emancipation.

Hamilton urged the founding of the Bank of the United States. Jefferson opposed the idea. The Bank was to be a depository of federal funds and a means of regulating the currency. Its establishment, in February 1791, strengthened the federal government.

In September, the National Assembly in Paris revoked its decree granting free blacks equal rights, and sends commissioners to re-establish control over the colony. The gens de couleur join forces with the slaves and begin open rebellion, seizing Port-au-Prince, the capital, which later burned to the ground.

Thousands of white planters flee Saint-Domingue to the United States, many bringing their slaves with them.

1792

France declares war on Austria.

Louis XVI affirms the Jacobin decree, granting equal political rights to free blacks and mulattoes in Saint-Domingue. A second commission is assembled, led by Léger Félicité Sonthonax, to enforce the ruling.

On September 21, 1792 the French National Convention met for the first time. The convention was made up of 749 members. The convention was comprised entirely of republicans who abolished the monarchy and declared France a Republic.

Threatened on all sides, French colonists realize that they need the slaves' support to keep control of Saint-Domingue. Civil commissioners issue a proclamation guaranteeing freedom and the full rights of French citizenship to all slaves who join them to defend France from foreign and domestic enemies. Though some leaders refuse, allying instead with the Spanish, a group of marooned slaves answers the call, descending upon the capital "like an avalanche," and forces the invaders to retreat. Chaos reigns, as nearly the entire city burns down and white colonists fight each other.²

Spain and Great Britain compete to take advantage of the chaos in Saint-Domingue, and launch military campaigns to capture the lucrative colony.

1793

Louis XVI was accused of treason. A chest of letters that indicated court intrigue and communications with other European powers were found. On December 26, 1792 Louis XVI went on trial for treason, on January 15, 1793 the National Convention found him guilty of treason by a near unanimous vote. It then went on to vote the death penalty by a vote of 387 to 334. On January 21, 1793 the death sentence was carried out when the king was guillotined.

Citizen Genet was sent by France to be its new ambassador to the United States. Genet's instructions were to use the United States as a base to equip privateers against the British. He was also determined to do his utmost to embroil the US in the war with the British. He then attempted to bring about change in the American government. The US government unanimously requested his recall.

Toussaint L'Ouverture, commander of emancipated slave armies, temporarily joins Spain to defeat French attempts to re-capture the colony and re-establish slavery.

Maxmilien Robespierre the leader of the Jacobins, the most radical faction of the National Convention began the Reign of Terror. The Reign of Terror court sentenced 20,000 to 40,000 people to death. In Europe the war was initially going badly for France, so the National Assembly authorized the creation of the Committee for Public Safety. That committee declared on August 23, 1793 for the universal mobilization of all men. The result was that France was able to field an army of 1,169,000 men, the largest in European history. The large French army was able to stem the tide of French defeats and take the offensive.

August—In a bid to re-establish French control over Saint-Domingue, French Commission Sonthonax issues a General Emancipation decree abolishing slavery in the North. More slaves in the colony have their freedom than ever before. Monsieur Artaud, one of the colony's wealthiest

² "History of Haiti, 1492-1905, <http://library.brown.edu/haitihistory/9.html>. Accessed August 6 2012.

planters with more than 1,000 slaves, tells Sonthonax that “only universal freedom could spare the whites from being totally annihilated.”

US Proclamation of Neutrality-- As war broke out between France and England, President Washington announced that the United States would be "friendly and impartial towards the belligerent powers."

1794

Jefferson resigns as secretary of state

France officially abolishes slavery in France and all of its colonial possessions.

Whiskey Rebellion

Toussaint L'Ouverture joins French forces under the banner of emancipation and equal rights for all blacks.

Robespierre arrested and beheaded.

1795

Jay's Treaty

Britain and Spain sign a treaty recognizing Saint-Domingue as a French possession

New French Constitution established.

1796

French commissioners proclaim Toussaint L'Ouverture governor of the colony, recognizing that he has consolidated the support of blacks on the island. In October, he becomes commander-in-chief of the army. Meanwhile, class and race-based power struggles continue to simmer throughout Saint-Domingue.

1797

John Adams inaugurated president, Thomas Jefferson vice president.

XYZ Affair inflames Franco-American relations

1798

Quasi-War with France-- An undeclared war between the United States and France, the Quasi-War was the result of disagreements over treaties and America's status as a neutral in the Wars of

the French Revolution. Fought entirely at sea, French naval forces captured dozens of American merchant ships while the United States authorized privateers and public vessels to attack French ships found competing with American commerce. Between 1798 and 1800 the U.S. Navy captured more than 80 French ships, although neither country officially declared war.

Congress passes the Alien and Sedition Acts

French leaders fear the growing power of L'Ouverture and his black army. They try to disempower L'Ouverture by dividing him and his fellow black general Rigaud. Though unsuccessful, they manage to force L'Ouverture's resignation from the ruling Directory, insulting him in France and arranging to replace him with three European generals. In addition, they fill the Saint-Domingue army with white soldiers, sending the black troops back to plantations. Slaves view these actions as an attempt to reinstate slavery and a new wave of insurrection breaks out.

1799

On November 9th Napoleon Bonaparte overthrew the failing French Directory ending the democratic republic and its anti-slavery principles. This event marks the end of the French Revolution. Napoleon then becomes First Consul and consolidated power under his control.

Congress passes "Toussaint's Clause," establishing trade with Toussaint L'Ouverture's Saint-Domingue.

Napoleon Bonaparte is under increasing pressure from French merchants to re-capture Saint-Domingue and re-establish slavery there.

1800

In April, L'Ouverture sends a military expedition into Spanish Santo Domingo to bring the territory under his rule.

In July, L'Ouverture finally defeats political rivals within Saint-Domingue, firmly establishing his authority. In August he is proclaimed the colony's Supreme Commander-in-Chief. He and his revolutionary army of ex-slaves are "the uncontested dominant forces in Saint-Domingue" and he begins to impose what is essentially a military dictatorship.

Jefferson and James Madison write the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions to prevent the enforcement of Alien and Sedition Acts

1801

To make his achievements permanent, L'Ouverture forms a central assembly to write a new constitution for all of Hispaniola that abolishes slavery on the entire island. L'Ouverture's achievements during his years in power include social reforms, structuring and organizing a new government, establishing courts of justice and building public schools.

Thomas Jefferson becomes president of the United States.

L'Ouverture proclaims the new constitution in Saint-Domingue and is declared Governor General for life. It also abolishes slavery forever. The constitution attempts to establish Saint-Domingue as equal to France, asserting the colony's autonomy while still trying to receive benefits from France. Though the constitution is not a formal declaration of independence, Bonaparte immediately recognizes it as a threat and rejects it.

In the United States, President Thomas Jefferson reassures the French that he opposes independence in Saint-Domingue and pledges to support Napoleon's agenda.

1802

Napoleon Bonaparte sends General Charles Leclerc in command of the largest expeditionary army ever with 20,000 European troops, who are called "the elite of the French army." Napoleon expects Leclerc to re-establish French power on the island in 3 months.

After several military defeats and defection of much of his army to French forces, L'Ouverture accepts an offer which would allow him to retire with his staff, retain his army ranks and functions, and retire to a place of his choosing.

Leclerc lures L'Ouverture into a conference, arrests him, binds him "as a common criminal," and ships him to France with his family and manservant. He is incarcerated and left "tragically, to die of consumption in an isolated prison cell high in the French Alps."

Napoleon issues decree that slavery will be re-established in Saint-Domingue. Slaves organize mass resistance against French forces, and their efforts, combined with the ravages of disease, decimated Leclerc's army.

1803

Napoleon Bonaparte sells Louisiana to the United States.

In November, French forces admit defeat to the slave armies and evacuate their forces. France had lost 50,000 men in their military effort.

1804

In Gonaïves, Jean-Jacques Dessalines proclaims Haiti's independence, signaling the formation of the world's first black republic. He publishes a Declaration of Independence, signed by himself and Christophe, and the colony "Saint-Domingue" is abolished forever. The original Taino name of Hayti is officially restored.

1806

The United States Congress passes the Haitian Embargo Act.