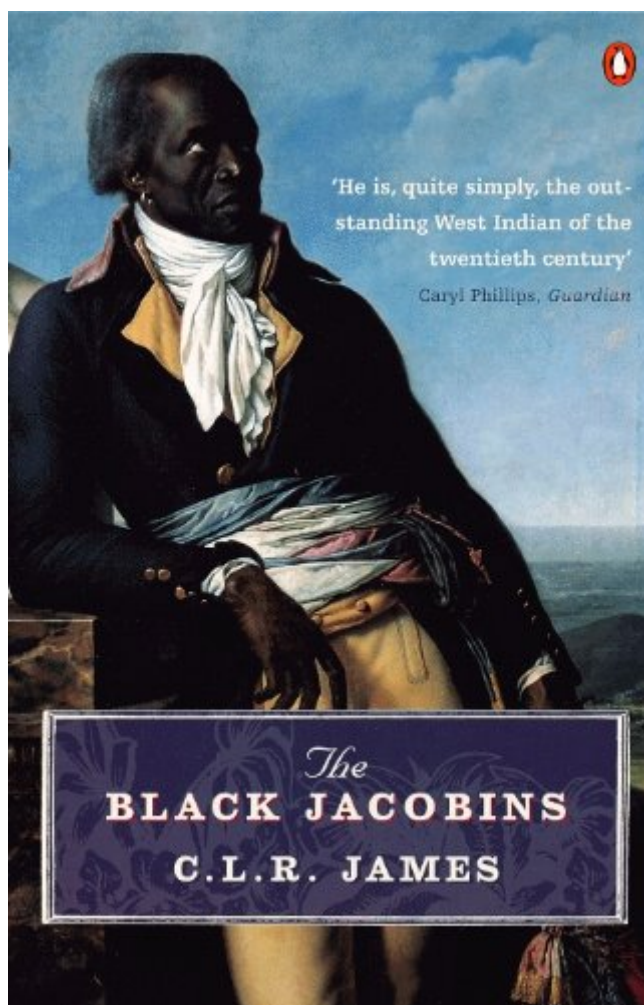


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The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture And The San Domingo Revolution (Penguin History)



Synopsis

In 1789 the West Indian colony of San Domingo supplied two-thirds of the overseas trade of France. The entire structure of what was arguably the most profitable colony in the world rested on the labour of half a million slaves. In 1791 the waves of unrest inspired by the French Revolution reached across the Atlantic dividing the loyalties of the white population of the island. The brutally treated slaves of Saint Domingo seized at this confusion and rose up in rebellion against masters. In this classic work, CLR James chronicles the only successful slave revolt in history and provides a critical portrait of their leader, Toussaint L'Ouverture, 'one of the most remarkable men of a period rich in remarkable men'.

Book Information

File Size: 1478 KB

Print Length: 383 pages

Publisher: Penguin; New Ed edition (May 31, 2001)

Publication Date: May 31, 2001

Sold by: Amazon Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B002RI9LAI

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Not Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #700,438 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #35

in Books > History > Americas > Caribbean & West Indies > Dominican Republic #113 in Books > History > Americas > Caribbean & West Indies > Haiti #223 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > History > Modern (16th-21st Centuries) > 18th Century

Customer Reviews

James delivers an exquisitely descriptive account of the only slave revolt that ultimately led to the founding of a black republic in the heart of the Caribbean. This well written book reads like prose making it an easy read. James does an excellent job of letting the reader know who the players in San Domingo were before and during the revolution including - the big whites (planters); small whites (artisans and professionals); mulattoes and blacks. The psychological make up and desires

of each class is fully explained so that the reader instantly understands why alliances between the groups were formed and dissolved over time and their effect on colonial government. The character of Toussaint L'Ouverture, the black general who led the slave revolt and administered the colonial government, is discussed throughout the book and insights into his thinking and perspective are gained through his written correspondence and his governmental orders. This allows the reader to gain an in-depth understanding of L'Ouverture as a 3 dimensional persona. The book contains an excellent bibliography for reference. Black Jacobins however is not without some minor flaws. First, although James gives a good account of the desires of various sectors of French society, he fails to give as rich an account of the motivations and perspectives of the French statesmen operating in France. Second, James discussion of Dessaline, L'Ouverture's general who persecuted the revolt to its end, is not dealt with in the same depth as the other major personas. Other writers have undoubtedly covered Dessaline but it would have been nice to gain James' perspective. Critics of James have gone as far as to suggest that he subverts racial dynamics for class dynamics.

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