

KS3 History

Lesson 1 of an enquiry of 4 lessons

The Haitian Revolution

Reactions to the French Revolution

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Slave colonies

The French Revolution did not only affect France. The consequences of the French Revolution could immediately be felt across Europe and the Americas. Like Britain, France had colonies in the Americas in the eighteenth century. Both Britain and France made huge amounts of money from colonies in the Caribbean. These colonies made money because they included enslaved people who were forced to work for free. One of these French colonies was called St Domingue.



Plantations

St Domingue was full of large farms called plantations. On these plantations sugar was grown and **processed** so that it could be sold in Europe. Growing and processing sugar in the Caribbean heat was difficult and dangerous work. The plantation owners imported enslaved people from West Africa and forced them to work on the plantations. As the work was dangerous, thousands of enslaved people died and so plantation owners constantly had to import more enslaved people. Enslaved people often **rebelled** against the conditions and their lack of freedom. In order to keep control, plantation owners used harsh punishments to scare enslaved people from rebelling. These harsh punishments included whipping, amputation of limbs and slow executions. Under the **Ancien Regime**, this cruel treatment of enslaved people was accepted because St Domingue's sugar helped keep France wealthy.



Revolution

The people of St Domingue were excited when they heard the French Revolutionary slogan of 'Liberty, equality, fraternity' in 1789. However, different groups understood the slogan in different ways. White plantation owners thought they might be free to make more money. There was a group of free people who were mixed race who hoped they might receive equal political rights with the white plantation owners. The enslaved people hoped they would be given their liberty. At first little changed.

In 1791, a slave rebellion began. The rebellion started as a 'burning' where sugarcane was intentionally destroyed. But the rebellion quickly turned into a guerrilla war where enslaved people carried out hit and run attacks. The slave-owners were losing control. The war then became complicated because Britain became involved. Britain was scared the revolutionary idea of freeing enslaved people might spread to its slave colonies like Jamaica. So Britain supported the white plantation owners against the enslaved people.



A former enslaved man called Toussaint L'Ouverture emerged as a talented military leader. He led the slave armies to defeat the plantation owners and British troops. L'Ouverture however was not only a good soldier. He was also very intelligent and was interested in Enlightenment ideas. His leadership and success in St Domingue helped to convince the Revolutionaries in France to make slavery illegal in all French colonies in 1793. L'Ouverture however went even further and wrote a new constitution for the French colony. This constitution said:

3. - There cannot exist slaves on this territory, servitude is therein forever abolished. All men are born, live and die free and French.

4. – All men, regardless of colour, are eligible to all employment.



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4. – *All men, regardless of colour, are eligible to all employment.*

These two points took Enlightenment thinking further than any other document at the time. They made it clear that 'liberty' meant slavery was always wrong and that 'equality' meant humans of every ethnicity should be treated equally. This exciting and radical document scared European powers. The British and French governments were both worried these ideas would weaken their power in the Caribbean colonies. A new war broke out and this time the people of St Domingue fought for independence from France. In 1804 France was defeated and a new country was created called Haiti.



Glossary

Ancien Regime: France before the 1789 Revolution.

Guerilla warfare: a type of fighting where a less well equipped army can weaken a larger army by carrying out lots of small attacks and then disappearing.

Processed: the conversion of sugarcane into the sugar we eat.

Rebellion: an event where a group of people rise up against those who are in charge and refuse to obey orders. (Rebellions can often lead to revolutions.)



Comprehension Questions

1. Which country owned the colony of St Domingue?

Sentence starter: The colony of St Domingue was owned by....

2. How did plantation owners try and keep control of the enslaved people on St Domingue?
3. How did the slave rebellion begin in 1791?
4. Why did Britain involve itself in the conflict between St Domingue's enslaved people and plantation owners?
5. Challenge question: In what ways was Toussaint L'Ouverture a good leader?



Extension Question

6. What can we learn from Britain's reaction to the Haitian Revolution?

Use the sentence starters and key words below to answer this question

Sentence starters options:	Examples
<i>The British government might have feared revolution because....</i> <i>-The British government might have seen the revolution as an opportunity because....</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Rebellion-Slavery-Plantation-Liberty, Equality, Fraternity- Constitution-Independence-Fear-Revolution-Colony

