January 1, 1804

Haiti officially becomes the second independent nation in the Americas

Inspired by the events of the French Revolution and the stresses of relying on a large enslaved population (approximately 90% of the total), war broke out in what was called St. Domingue in 1791. Eventually, the former slave Toussaint L’Ouverture succeeded in overcoming all internal opposition, but also attempts by the Spanish and British to seize control of the colony. However, dissent within St. Domingue and the desire of Napoleon Bonaparte to regain total control of the colony led to L’Ouverture’s capture and imprisonment in France, where he died in 1803. Two of his officers, Jean-Jacques Dessalines and Henry Christophe, who later became rivals for power in Haiti, took up the fight, and the strength of their opposition and the renewal of the war in Europe led to the French withdrawal and the formal declaration of independence. Despite this success and their support of later wars of independence in South America, Haiti has continued to struggle both politically and economically, in part because of the fear such a successful slave revolt inspired in nearby nation- The United States, for example, did not recognize the Haitian government until 1862, when Frederick Douglass became the first ambassador to the island nation.

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1 https://www.britannica.com/topic/Haitian-Revolution