

# The Haitian Revolution



THE  
**CHOICES**  
**PROGRAM**  
BROWN UNIVERSITY



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## Introduction: A Free Haiti

On April 28, 1804 Jean-Jacques Dessalines proclaimed the creation of Haiti, a new nation born from the ashes of the French colony Saint-Domingue. In thirteen years of nearly constant conflict, the formerly enslaved people of Saint-Domingue had fought two wars. First, led by Toussaint Louverture, they had fought to abolish slavery. Then they had risen up against colonial rulers, declared independence, and taken control of the island. These conflicts—known collectively as the Haitian Revolution—were fierce and brutal struggles among enslaved people, French colonists, and other groups in the colony.

***“Never again will a European colonist set foot on the territory of Haiti as a master or proprietor.”***

—Jean-Jacques Dessalines, April 28, 1804

Upon declaring independence, Haiti claimed a unique place in history. It became the first fully free society in the Atlantic world by abolishing slavery. It also became the second independent nation (after the United States) and the first independent black nation in the Americas.

For the people of Haiti, life had changed tremendously. Haiti's revolution marked a complete political, social, and economic transformation of pre-revolutionary society. In just over a decade, the enslaved population of Haiti overthrew colonial society and established themselves as free and independent citizens of a new state. They also claimed land that had previously been theirs only to work for others.

***Why is it important to understand the Haitian Revolution today?***

The events in Haiti from 1791 to 1804 were closely tied to other events in world history. The struggles of the people of Saint-Domingue were intertwined with the events of the French Revolution, Europe's conquest of the Caribbean, the growth of the young United States, and the struggles of oppressed groups in nearby colonies.

In addition, the Revolution had far-reaching consequences across both time and place. Haiti be-

### Introduction Definition

**State**—A country with a government that is recognized by its citizens and other countries and has sole control over its territory and military power.

came the only black state in a region dominated by European powers, slavery, and the trade in enslaved people. The success of the Revolution gave hope and inspiration to enslaved people throughout the region and the world. It fueled debates about slavery and abolition in the United States and across Europe. Haiti's triumph would also help spark a movement against European colonialism across the Americas, Asia, and Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Understanding the Revolution is also key to understanding the country of Haiti today. Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. Since the Revolution ended over two hundred years ago, Haiti has struggled with external and internal challenges. The Revolution destroyed nearly all of the country's infrastructure and production capabilities. In the 1800s, European and U.S. leaders ostracized the young nation politically and economically, contributing to Haiti's decline from one of the world's wealthiest colonies to one of its most impoverished countries. Many scholars relate Haiti's current poverty to legacies of French colonialism and the aftermath of the Revolution.

In the coming days, you will read about the history of the island of Hispaniola, where Haiti is located. You will learn about the colony of Saint-Domingue and consider how local and international factors contributed to the successful revolt of Saint-Domingue's enslaved people. You will also explore the events of the Revolution and the role that various groups on and off the island played in the conflict. You will then be asked to consider perspectives on the future of Saint-Domingue in 1801, at a point when slavery had been abolished but Saint-Domingue was still a French colony. Finally, you will examine the results of the Revolution, both for Haiti and the world.



# The Haitian Revolution

## Teacher Resource Book



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# Mapping European Colonization of the Americas

## Objectives:

**Students will:** Practice general map reading skills.

Identify the European powers competing for land in the Americas.

Connect geography and historical events.

Understand how the changing political geography of the Americas affected events on the island of Hispaniola.

## Required Reading:

Before beginning the lesson, students should have read the Introduction and Part I and completed “Study Guide—Part I” (TRB 3-4) or “Advanced Study Guide—Part I” (TRB-5).

## Note:

This simple exercise is designed to acquaint students with the basic political geography covered in the reading.

Teachers may want students to refer to their maps as they continue reading. Some students may find it helpful to record the dates of significant events where they took place on the map.

## Handouts:

“European Colonization of the Americas” (TRB 8-9)

“Maps” (TRB 10-12)

(A slideshow of these maps is available at <[www.choices.edu/haitianrevolution](http://www.choices.edu/haitianrevolution)>.)

## In the Classroom:

**1. Focus Question**—Write the question “How does geography affect history?” on the board.

**2. Forming Small Groups**—Divide the class into groups of three or four. Distribute the maps to each group. Each group should carefully read the instructions and complete the questions.

**3. Sharing Conclusions**—After about fifteen minutes, call on students to share their findings. Ask students to make connections to Part I of the reading when they can. Did Hispaniola’s location affect its history? How? Ask students to provide examples to support their claims.

## Homework:

Students should read Part II and complete “Study Guide—Part II” (TRB 13-14) or “Advanced Study Guide—Part II” (TRB-15).



## European Colonization of the Americas

*Instructions:* Use the maps in the handout to answer the questions below with your group members.

1. Which countries had possessions in the Americas in:  
1650?  
  
1763?  
  
1804?
2. Which countries had possessions in the Caribbean? (The Caribbean is detailed in the box in the lower left corner of each map. Be sure to look at the shaded territories as well as the names.)  
1650:  
  
1763:  
  
1804:
3. Which country or countries claimed the largest amounts of land in the Americas in:  
1650?  
  
1763?  
  
1804?
4.
  - a. In the map of 1650, what do you notice about the location of European possessions? What geographical features are they located near?
  - b. Why do you think this is the case?
5. What does it mean if a territory is shaded white on the maps?
6. Estimate how much of North America is possessed by Europe in each map. (For example, is it one-half? One-third?)  
1650:  
  
1763:  
  
1804:



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

7. Estimate how much of South America is possessed by Europe in each map. (For example, is it one-half? One-third?)

1650:

1763:

1804:

8. Estimate how much of the Caribbean is possessed by Europe in each map. (For example, is it one-half? One-third?)

1650:

1763:

1804:

9. Find two territories that change possession at least once in the three maps. List the territory name or region, the European countries that controlled it, and the dates corresponding to when each European country controlled it.

**Territory One**—Name or region:

European countries and dates:

**Territory Two**—Name or region:

European countries and dates:

10. How did European control over the island of Hispaniola change in each map?

1650:

1763:

1804:

11. Using the reading and your knowledge of European colonization in the Americas, list three reasons why European countries wanted possessions in the Americas.

a.

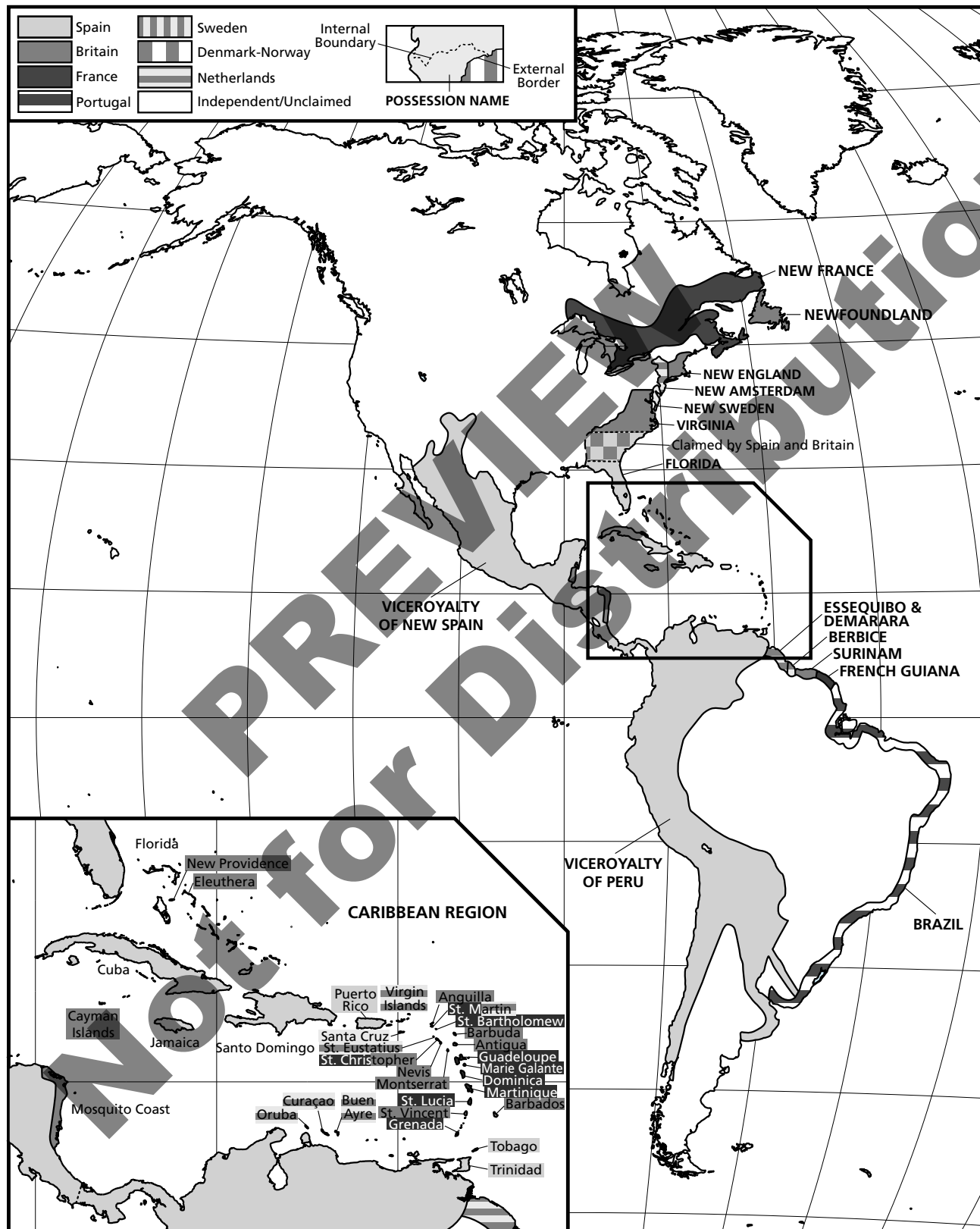
b.

c.

**Bonus Question:** How do the maps support some of the reasons you listed in question 11?



## European Possessions in the Americas, 1650





## European Possessions in the Americas, 1763





## European Possessions in the Americas, 1804

