

INDEPENDENCE BY REBECCA HINSON

(HISTORY/NONFICTION)

Questions for *Independence* by Rebecca Hinson

LEVEL 1: What does it say?

General Understanding

- Quote accurately from the text when explaining how the slaves of Haiti fought and won their freedom from their colonial masters.

Key Details

- As the blacks rebelled, British and Spanish armies invaded, fighting for control of the French colony. Toussaint Louverture, the highest ranking general in the French colony, switched sides to fight with the Spanish. What caused him to switch sides again and help the French, inspiring others to join him?
- Slavery in the French colonies was abolished by the French Convention dominated by the Jacobins in 1794. However, Napoleon reinstated it in 1802. How did the rise of Napoleon in France lead to the defeat of the French in Haiti?
- Explain the roles that European and African religions played in the story of Haiti.

LEVEL 2: How does it work?

Vocabulary

- Determine the meanings of caciques, submissive, pillage, suppress, lucrative, accumulate, conspiracy, oath, mulattoes, prevail, abolish, maroon, stronghold, and perilous.

Structure

- Compare and contrast the chronology of major events which led to the Declaration of Independence in the United States of America in *Liberty*, and the Act of Independence of Haiti in *Independence*.

Author's Craft

- Analyze the following account of emancipation, noting important similarities and differences in the point of view represented here and in *Independence*.

In *Avengers of the New World*, Laurent Dubois writes, "Ultimately, while emancipation had been won through an alliance with the French Republic in 1794, it was preserved by the defeat of the French army in 1804. The people of the new nation of Haiti avoided the tragic fate of those on another French island, Guadeloupe, where most of the population was reenslaved in 1803."

LEVEL 3: What does it mean?

Author's Purpose

- The story of *Independence* is the story of triumph over unspeakable oppression. How does the author use reasons and evidence to support this theme?

Intertextual Connections

- Draw on information from *Independence* and the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History (below) to explain the revocation of the rights of the indigenous peoples of the New World.

The Papal Bull "Inter Caetera," issued by Pope Alexander VI on May 4, 1493, played a central role in the Spanish conquest of the New World. The document supported Spain's strategy to ensure its exclusive right to the lands discovered by Columbus the previous year. It established a demarcation line one hundred leagues west of the Azores and Cape Verde Islands and assigned Spain the exclusive right to acquire territorial possessions and to trade in all lands west of that line. All others were forbidden to approach the lands west of the line without special license from the rulers of Spain. This effectively gave Spain a monopoly on the lands in the New World.

The Bull stated that any land not inhabited by Christians was available to be "discovered," claimed, and exploited by Christian rulers and declared that "the Catholic faith and the Christian religion be exalted and be everywhere increased and spread, that the health of souls be cared for and that barbarous nations be overthrown and brought to the faith itself." This "Doctrine of Discovery" became the basis of all European claims in the Americas as well as the foundation for the United States' western expansion. In the US Supreme Court in the 1823 case *Johnson v. McIntosh*, Chief Justice John Marshall's opinion in the unanimous decision held "that the principle of discovery gave European nations an absolute right to New World lands." In essence, American Indians had only a right of occupancy, which could be abolished.

- *Independence* and *Avengers of the New World* (below), explain the extreme measures taken by Leclerc and Rochambeau to reinstate slavery on the island. According to the two texts, how did people on the island respond?

Leclerc ordered the immediate arrest of all the remaining colonial troops in Le Cap and had 1,000 of them loaded on ships in the harbor. Weighted down with sacks of flour tied to their necks, they were all pushed overboard.

"Here is my opinion on this country," he (Leclerc) wrote to Bonaparte. "We must destroy all the blacks of the mountains—men and women—and spare only children under twelve years of age. We must destroy half of those in the plains and must not leave a single colored person in the colony who has worn an epaulette."

In early November one (French) officer fed up with the executions noted that within the past month the French had "drowned" nearly 4,000 colonial troops. "This is how we are fighting our war," he lamented, and concluded; "The French will never be masters of this country."

Rochambeau had ordered this new weapon (man-eating dogs) to help in the floundering campaign against the insurgents. . . . Although some principled individuals refused to attend the event, a huge crowd gathered to watch as a black prisoner—the domestic of a French officer—was placed at the mercy of the dogs. . . . his master intervened, slicing open the domestic's stomach to draw them into devouring him.

Rochambeau's actions alienated the most steadfast supporters of the French; portions of the communities of color in the west and south who powerfully resented Louverture and who initially viewed the French as saviors. Witnessing and suffering from the racial violence of Rochambeau, most of these supporters realized that their only hope for survival was to join the revolution.

LEVEL 4: What does it inspire you to do?

Opinion with Evidence or Argument

- Integrate information from *Independence, Haiti* (below), and *Revolutionary Freedoms* (below) to write or speak about how a society of slaves fought against the restoration of slavery.

Haiti:

French troops in that colony launched a disarmament campaign, the sole goal of which, the black population whispered, could only be to pave the way for a restoration of slavery. Equally worrisome were mass executions of black colonial troops. By the fall of 1802, a general insurrection was once again under way as Dessalines, Christophe, and other black and mulatto generals—who had fought for France, then against it, then for it—switched sides one last time in response to French atrocities and rumors of a possible restoration of slavery.

Revolutionary Freedoms:

I have often heard the argument that Dessalines was cruel and harsh compared to Toussaint, Christophe, or Pétion. Some have called him a savage. An illiterate ex-slave, he

was meticulous in his battle plans and in his "street smart" ways of outdoing the French. He never hid his hatred for the French, under whom he had suffered decades of humiliation and indignity. He worked well with Pétion, the mulatto who joined him when he could no longer tolerate Leclerc's politics toward the mulattoes. The two men shared the goal of a free and independent country. Moreover, Dessalines trained many great leaders, such as Capois, Christophe, and Geffrard. His methods were bloody, to say the least, if only out of fear that the French might someday try to return to rule Haiti. As Louis Mercier, Haitian educator, notes, "Whatever the means he employed to accomplish his ends, Dessalines remains the most powerful spirit in our history. . . .One cannot be a real Haitian unless one is a Dessalinian."

Sources

Cécile Accilien, Jessica Adams, Elvide Méléance, *Revolutionary Freedoms*

Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*

Philippe Girard, *Haiti*

Rebecca Hinson, *Liberty*

<https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/imperial-rivalries/resources/doctrine-discovery-1493>