

Brief Historical Guide for *Valentine Toya LeGrand*



Background information on film and writer

Short Film logline

An uncle gets feedback and inspiration for his comic book project from his nieces. He weaves aspects of them into the little-known story about Valentine Toya LeGrand, a Haitian Amazon Warrior who helped end the race & culture wars of 2030 and is a symbol of empowerment for girls and women.

Artist statement

This short film comes from a longer feature film that I am working towards producing soon. In these two works I present an alternative reality of Haiti and try to extend the types of stories that are often told when Haiti is the focus. This project is also a celebration of women heroes/warriors and in this case, Haitian Amazons. My goal is to add a different cultural context so that a variety of black and brown girls may see themselves in this storyline too. It is also for girls in general (and women, like me) who loved the *Wonder Woman* comics, shows and movies, who loved what we saw in the Black Panther movies and Woman King and want to see even more diverse and dynamic images of women in mainstream film and media.

Wilna Julmiste Taylor is an actor, writer, producer and arts administrator. Her interests and work include investigating the intersections of art and culture, social justice and highlighting her Haitian heritage. She is an alumna of the Negro Ensemble Company in New York. She also studied acting at Rutgers University, The Wilma Theater and the Walnut Street Theater in Philadelphia. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology at Rutgers University, a Master of Science in Arts Administration from Drexel University and a Certificate in Diversity and Inclusion from Cornell University. She was a MOSAIC 2022 Changemaker Fellow. She has received funding for her creative and cultural work from the National Endowment for the Arts, the LeeWay Foundation and the Hays Foundation. Her work has been presented and recognized nationally and internationally. Ms. Taylor is currently the Associate Director at the UCLA Art & Global Health Center and Lecturer in the World Arts and Cultures/Dance Department at UCLA.

Brief historical information

- 1) **Haiti:** [HAY-tee](#); [French: Haïti \[a.iti\]](#); [Haitian Creole: Ayiti \[ajiti\]](#)), officially the **Republic of Haiti** (French: *République d'Haïti*; Haitian Creole: *Repiblik d Ayiti*), and formerly known as **Hayti**, is a country located on the island of [Hispaniola](#) in the [Greater Antilles](#) archipelago of the [Caribbean Sea](#), east of [Cuba](#) and [Jamaica](#), and south of [The Bahamas](#) and the [Turks and Caicos Islands](#). It occupies the western three-eighths of the island which it shares with the [Dominican Republic](#). To its south-west lies the small [Navassa Island](#), which is claimed by Haiti but is disputed as a [United States territory](#) under federal administration. Haiti is 27,750 km² (10,714 sq mi) in size, the third largest country in the [Caribbean](#) by area, and has an estimated population of 11.4 million, making it the most populous country in the Caribbean. The capital is [Port-au-Prince](#).

The island was originally inhabited by the indigenous [Taíno](#) people, who originated in South America. The first Europeans arrived on 5 December 1492 during the [first voyage](#) of [Christopher Columbus](#). Columbus subsequently founded the first European settlement in the Americas, [La Navidad](#), on what is now the northeastern coast of Haiti. The island was claimed by [Spain](#) and named *La Española*, forming part of the [Spanish Empire](#) until the early 17th century. However, competing claims and settlements by the French led to the western portion of the island being [ceded to France](#) in 1697, which was subsequently named *Saint-Domingue*. French colonists established lucrative [sugarcane plantations](#), worked by vast numbers of slaves brought from Africa, which made the colony one of the richest in the world.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haiti>

- 2) **The Haitian Revolution:** In August of 1791 an organized slave rebellion broke out, marking the start of a twelve-year resistance to obtain human rights. The Haitian Revolution is the only successful slave revolt in history, and resulted in the establishment of Haiti, the first independent black state in the New World.

At the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789, the colony of St. Domingue, now Haiti, furnished two-thirds of France's overseas trade, employed one thousand ships and fifteen thousand French sailors. The colony became France's richest, the envy of every other European nation. This plantation system, which provided such a pivotal role in the French economy, was also the greatest individual market for the African slave trade. Yet, conflict and resentment permeated the society of San Domingo, and slave resistance began to take an organized form in the late 18th century. The French Revolution did inspire many in 1789, but black resistance had existed for years. In August of 1791 an organized slave rebellion broke out, marking the start of a twelve-year resistance to obtain human rights. The Haitian Revolution is the only successful slave revolt in history, and resulted in the establishment of Haiti, the first independent black state in the New World.

https://scholar.library.miami.edu/slaves/san_domingo_revolution/revolution.html#:~:text=In%20August%20of%201791%20an,state%20in%20the%20New%20World.

3) **Jean-Jacques Dessalines:** ([Haitian Creole](#): *Jan-Jak Desalin*; French pronunciation: [[ʒɑ̃ ʒak dɛsalin](#)]; 20 September 1758 – 17 October 1806) was a Haitian [revolutionary](#), the leader of the [Haitian Revolution](#), and the first ruler of an independent [Haiti](#) under the [1805 constitution](#). Initially regarded as governor-general, Dessalines was later named [Emperor of Haiti](#) as **Jacques I** (1804–1806) by generals of the Haitian Revolution Army and ruled in that capacity until being assassinated in 1806. He has been referred to as the [father of the nation](#) of Haiti.

Dessalines was directly responsible for the country and under his rule, Haiti became the first country in the Americas to permanently abolish slavery. Dessalines served as an officer in the [French army](#) when the colony was fending off [Spanish](#) and [British](#) incursions. Later he rose to become a commander in the revolt against France. As [Toussaint Louverture](#)'s principal lieutenant, he led many successful engagements, including the [Battle of Crête-à-Pierrot](#).

Working in the [sugarcane](#) fields as a laborer, Dessalines rose to the rank of *commandeur*, or foreman. He worked on Duclos's plantation until he was about 30 years old. Still enslaved, Jean-Jacques was bought by a man with the last name of Dessalines, an *affranchi* or [free man of color](#), who assigned his own surname to Jean-Jacques. From then on he was called Jean-Jacques

Dessalines. Dessalines kept this name after he gained his freedom. He worked for that master for about three years.

When the slave uprising of 1791 began, it spread across the [Plaine-du-Nord](#). This was an area of very large sugar cane plantations, where the mass of enslaved Africans lived and worked. Mortality was so high that French colonial planters continued to import more captured people from Africa during the eighteenth century.

Dessalines received his early military training from a woman whose name was either [Victoria Montou](#) or Akbaraya Tòya. And sometimes also spelled as Abdaraya Toya.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Jacques_Dessalines

- 4) **Victoria "Abdaraya Toya" Montou:** (Circa 1739–1805) was a Dahomey warrior and [freedom fighter](#) in the army of [Jean-Jacques Dessalines](#) during the [Haitian Revolution](#).

Before the Revolution she and Dessalines had been enslaved on the same estate, and the two remained close throughout her life (Dessalines called her his aunt). Montou is believed to have been born in the [Kingdom of Dahomey](#), in present-day Benin. Some sources indicate that she was a soldier there. It is unclear precisely when she was abducted and enslaved, or when she arrived in Haiti. Before the revolution, Montou worked alongside Dessalines as a slave on the estate of Henry Duclos. She was described as intelligent and energetic, and shared a close relationship with Dessalines and the same hatred toward slavery. Dessalines called her his aunt, which may have reflected their closeness as expressed within the traditions of African diasporic kinship, rather than a direct biological link. Montou was reportedly a skilled warrior, midwife and healer, who organised several rebellions before the momentous [meeting at Bois Caiman](#) in 1791.

After Tante Abadaraya or Tante Toya's death, Emperor Janjak Desalin (Jean Jacques Dessalines) held a state funeral with a procession of his generals and soldiers together with his empress, Marie Claire Félicité Guillaume Bonheur paying homage to the legendary warrior.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victoria_Montou

5) **Black Amazons/Dahomey Warriors:** aka the Agooji. During the 17th century, **the Agooji** were a battle-hardened, all-female warrior force that held a special place within the African kingdom of Dahomey. Most were former slaves, with only the bravest and toughest admitted into the fold. All of Dahomey's women warriors were considered *ahosi*, or wives of the king.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dahomey_Amazons

6) **The Amazons:** are an all-female society of superhumans, based on the Amazons of Greek mythology. In this mythology they are the race which produced [Wonder Woman](#).

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amazons>

7) **The United States, Haiti, and France:** The slaves, along with free *gens de couleur* and allies, continued their fight for independence, led by generals [Jean-Jacques Dessalines](#), [Alexandre Pétion](#) and [Henry Christophe](#). The rebels finally managed to decisively defeat the French troops at the [Battle of Vertières](#) on 18 November 1803, establishing the first nation ever to successfully gain independence through a slave revolt. Under the overall command of Dessalines, the Haitian armies avoided open battle, and instead conducted a successful guerrilla campaign against the Napoleonic forces, working with diseases such as yellow fever to reduce the numbers of French soldiers. Later that year France withdrew its remaining 7,000 troops from the island and Napoleon gave up his idea of re-establishing a [North American](#) empire, selling [Louisiana \(New France\)](#) to the [United States](#), in the [Louisiana Purchase](#).

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haiti>

8) **The Louisiana Purchase:** ([French](#): *Vente de la Louisiane*, [lit.](#) 'Sale of Louisiana') was the acquisition of the [territory of Louisiana](#) by the [United States](#) from the [French First Republic](#) in 1803. This consisted of most of the land in the [Mississippi River's drainage basin](#) west of the river. In return for fifteen million dollars, or approximately eighteen dollars per square mile, the United States nominally acquired a total of 828,000 sq mi (2,140,000 km²; 530,000,000 acres) in [Middle America](#). However, France only controlled a small fraction of this area, most of which was inhabited by [Native Americans](#); effectively, for the majority of the area, the United States bought the preemptive right to obtain Indian lands by treaty or by conquest, to the exclusion of other colonial powers. The [Kingdom of France](#) had controlled the Louisiana territory from 1682 until [it was ceded](#) to [Spain](#) in 1762. In 1800, [Napoleon](#), the First Consul of the [French Republic](#), [regained ownership](#) of Louisiana in exchange for [Tuscany](#) as part of a broader effort to re-establish a [French colonial empire](#) in North America. However, France's failure to suppress a [revolt in Saint-Domingue](#), coupled with the prospect of renewed warfare with the [United Kingdom](#), prompted Napoleon to consider selling Louisiana to the United States. Acquisition of Louisiana was a long-term goal of President [Thomas Jefferson](#), who was especially eager to gain control of the crucial [Mississippi River](#) port of [New Orleans](#).

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louisiana_Purchase

Some recommended literary resources:

Sheroes of the Haitian Revolution, Bayyinah Bello, (Thorobred Books, www.torobredbooks.com 2019)

The Black Republic: African Americans and the Fate of Haiti, Brandon R. Byrd (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 2020)

Avengers of the New World, Laurent Dubois, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2005)

The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution, James C.L.R., (Vintage Books, New York 1989).

