



The Memoir of Toussaint Louverture

Philippe R. Girard

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Here is an annotated, scholarly, multilingual edition of the only lengthy text personally written by Haitian revolutionary Toussaint Louverture: the memoirs he wrote shortly before his death in the French prison of Fort de Joux. The translation is based on an original copy in Louverture's hand never before published.

Historian Philippe Girard begins with an introductory essay that retraces Louverture's career as a slave, rebel, and governor. Girard provides a detailed narrative of the last year of Louverture's life, and analyzes the significance of the memoirs and letters from a historical and linguistic perspective. The book includes a full transcript, in the original French, of Louverture's handwritten memoirs. The English translation appears side by side with the original. The memoirs contain idiosyncrasies and stylistic variations of interest to linguists.

Scholarly interest in the Haitian Revolution and the life of Toussaint Louverture has increased over the past decade. Louverture is arguably the most notable man of African descent in history, and the Haitian Revolution was the most radical of the three great revolutions of its time. Haiti's proud revolutionary past and its more recent upheavals indicate that interest in Haiti's history goes far beyond academia; many regard Louverture as a personal hero. Despite this interest, there is a lack of accessible primary sources on Toussaint Louverture. An edited translation of Louverture's memoirs makes his writings accessible to a larger public. Louverture's memoirs provide a vivid alternative perspective to anonymous plantation records, quantitative analyses of slave trading ventures, or slave narratives mediated by white authors. Louverture kept a stoic facade and rarely expressed his innermost thoughts and fears in writing, but his memoirs are unusually emotional. Louverture questioned whether he was targeted due to the color of his skin, bringing racism an issue that Louverture rarely addressed head on with his white interlocutors, to the fore.

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