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## Duration

One class period of approximately 40 minutes in length

## Resources

### 1. Student handout



### 2. Multiple-choice questions



## Objectives of Lesson

- To read a primary source about the Haitian Revolution
- To practice sample multiple-choice questions based on a primary source

## College Board Objectives from the 2019-20 CED

- **Topic 5.5:** The French Revolution's Effects (p. 118)
- **Learning Objective 5.E:** "Explain how the events and developments of the French Revolution influenced political and social ideas from 1648 to 1815."
- **Key Concept 2.1.IV.F:** "Revolutionary ideals inspired a slave revolt led by Toussaint L'Ouverture in the French colony of Saint-Domingue, which became the independent nation of Haiti in 1804."

## Student Activities

- Close analysis of a primary source document
- Multiple-choice questions based on a textual source

## How to Use This Lesson

This lesson is based on a primary source written by Toussaint L'Ouverture in c. 1797. The text is in the form of a dialogue, which he sent to the Directory in Paris from the island of Saint-Domingue. The conversation reported in the dialogue is unusual and rhetorically ambiguous because it accuses the Civil Commissioner, Léger-Félicité Sonthonax, of wanting to start a race war on the island of Saint-Domingue. Was this an attempt to deflect criticisms from himself to Sonthonax? Did Sonthonax want to "kill all the whites" in order to gain political power? This source raises more questions than it answers. After providing some historical context (see below), guide the students through the source and ask them to consider these questions.

You can conclude by having the students complete the multiple-choice questions. The answers are 1 (A), 2 (C), 3 (C).

## Historical Background

The Haitian Revolution began in 1791 as a slave insurrection and ended in 1804 when Saint-Domingue became the independent nation we now know as Haiti. Along with the American Revolution of the 1770s, the French Revolution of the 1780s and 90s and the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, the Haitian Revolution marked a major turning point in colonialism in North America. The remarkable success and the enduring independence of the Afro-Caribbean population of Saint-Domingue remain a story of inspiration, even as Haiti struggles as one of the poorest nations in the world. This contradictory story of triumph and failure endures as a major problem of post-colonial history.

Toussaint L'Ouverture (1743–1803) was a leader of the first slave rebellion in Haiti (Saint-Domingue) in 1791. During his life he wrote a variety of sources including the dialogue included with this lesson plan. L'Ouverture helped advocate for a constitution in 1801 but was forced to resign after Napoleon sent forces to Saint-Domingue. He was exiled in France and died there in 1803 before Jean-Jacques Dessalines helped lead Saint-Domingue to independence on 1 January 1804. Known variously as the *Napoléon Noir* and *Black Spartacus*, L'Ouverture would come to influence many abolitionists, activists, and artists in the centuries since his death.

Léger-Félicité Sonthonax (1763–1813) was a French politician who played a critical role in Saint-Domingue during the French Revolution. Officially, he was the Civil Commissioner and effectively ruled over the island from 1792 to 1795. His legacy remains controversial, and his critics (including L'Ouverture) accused him of seeking total control over the island. Eventually, L'Ouverture exiled him back to France, where he would remain until his death in 1813.



*Toussaint Louverture Chef des Noirs Insurgés de Saint Domingue, 1802.*

### Dialogue between Léger Felicité Sonthonax and Toussaint L'Ouverture, c. 1797.

*Introduction: This dialogue was composed by Toussaint L'Ouverture and sent to the Directory in France in 1797. At the time, L'Ouverture was the chief general of the French forces in Saint-Domingue (Haiti) and Sonthonax was the head of the French commission to the island. Sonthonax banned slavery and supported black and mulatto troops and was eventually expelled from the island by L'Ouverture in August 1797.*

Commissioner Sonthonax: "Do you know what we are going to do first? The blacks are worried for their freedom. We have here colonists of whom they are suspicious. They must all be slaughtered. Everything is ready. You only have to be in agreement with me."

General Toussaint: "What? You want to slaughter all the whites? Aren't you white yourself?"

Commissioner Sonthonax: "Yes, but not all of them. Only those who are enemies of freedom."

General Toussaint: (With an impatience he can no longer hide) "Let's talk of other things. We'll talk about this tomorrow."

Commissioner Sonthonax: "Alright. That's enough."

*Sonthonax then wanted to bring the conversation back to the events in the south. As I feared that this affair would make him return to the horrible proposals he'd just made me I said I had a headache and left. The next morning I went to the commissioner's house before going to the parade with the commission. After the parade I gave orders to have my horse saddled without the commissioner's knowledge. Sonthonax, having taken me back to his house, led me to his office, where after having congratulated me he had me sit next to him.*

Commissioner Sonthonax: "Let's talk about the affair."

General Toussaint: "What affair?"

Commissioner Sonthonax: "That which we broached yesterday evening. I am very happy to see you head of the armed forces of the colony. We are in a perfect position to do all we want. You have much influence over the inhabitants. We must carry off our project; it is the perfect moment. The circumstances have never been more favorable, and there's no one better than you to act together with me."

General Toussaint: "You mean, commissioner, that you want to ruin me... Kill the whites? Take our independence? Did you not promise me that you'd never again talk of these projects?"

Commissioner Sonthonax: "Yes, but you see it's absolutely indispensable."

General Toussaint: "You complain of the Cayes Affair, and you want to carry out the same thing."

Commissioner Sonthonax: "No, it's to chase them out. We won't kill them."

General Toussaint: "Today you say you want to chase them out, but yesterday and just now you said they had to be killed. But if a white was killed here it is I who would be held responsible." (With impatience) "I'm leaving, commissioner."

*I took my hat and left. Sonthonax ran after me. He reached me just as I opened the door and asked me to return. I went back to his office, saying to him: "Commissioner, I am very angry with you."*

Commissioner Sonthonax: "Well, if you are angry, let's talk about anything."

General Toussaint: "You have already given me your word of honor not to talk any more about this, yet you still bother me, you persecute me. I am angry. Very angry."

Commissioner Sonthonax: "It is over. I thought you would have joined me, but since you take this ill I'll no longer speak to you about anything. Do you promise not to tell anyone about this?"

General Toussaint: "I have often promised this, but this time I can't promise you anything."

Commissioner Sonthonax: "I swear to you that I won't ever talk about this ever again. Promise me you'll say nothing."

General Toussaint: “No, because of the promise you made to me but didn’t keep, one can’t count on your word. I’m leaving. My thought was to gather my officers and make known to them your projects, so that if I were to die they could be on their guard against you and my memory wouldn’t be dishonored.”

Commissioner Sonthonax: “I give you my word of honor. I swear to you never to speak of this again. But promise me that you’ll keep this secret. This isn’t something your officers should know about. Give me your word of honor that you won’t speak of this to anyone.”

General Toussaint: (With ill-humor) “Alright then. I give you my word. Farewell.”

*I abruptly left and mounted my horse to go to Gonaïves.*

Source: *Extrait du rapport adressé au Directoire exécutif par le citoyen Toussaint Louverture, général en chef des Forces de la République française à Saint-Domingue.* Chez P. Roux, imprimeur. Cap-français, c. 1797.

Questions 1-3 refer to the passage below.

“Citizens, a constitution that wasn’t able to sustain itself against multiple violations has been replaced by a new pact destined to solidify freedom. Article 91 states that French colonies will be ruled by special laws. This disposition derives from the nature of things and the differences in climate. The inhabitants of French colonies located in America, Asia, and Africa cannot be governed by the same laws. The differences in habits, in mores, in interests; the diversity of soil, crops, and goods produced demands diverse modifications. Far from being a subject of alarm for you, you will recognize here the wisdom and profundity of vision that animate the legislators of France. The Consuls of the Republic, in announcing to you the new social pact, declare to you that the *SACRED principles of the freedom and equality of blacks will NEVER SUFFER among you the least attack or modification*. If there are ill-intentioned men in the colony, if there are those who still have relations with enemy powers, *remember BRAVE BLACKS, that the French people alone recognize your freedom and the equality of your rights.*”

Napoleon Bonaparte’s decree to the people of Saint-Domingue, 1799.

1. Which of the following best describes the main claim made by Napoleon in the passage?
  - (A) French ideals of freedom and equality can best protect residents of Saint-Domingue.
  - (B) Napoleon’s Empire had expanded too quickly to ensure equal protection under the law.
  - (C) The people of Saint-Domingue must remain enslaved under Napoleon’s rule.
  - (D) The Catholic Church presents an existential threat to the governments of France and Saint-Domingue.
2. Which of the following conclusions about the social structure of Saint-Domingue is best supported by the passage?
  - (A) The challenges faced by climate undermined the development of stable family units.
  - (B) The threat of French invasion undermined freedom of Saint-Domingue’s military.
  - (C) Residents of Saint-Domingue were interested in protecting their own freedom.
  - (D) Industrialization impacted the development of the economy.
3. The struggle for control of Saint-Domingue would most directly lead to which outcome in the early nineteenth century?
  - (A) The defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo
  - (B) The establishment of new political parties in France
  - (C) The creation of the nation of Haiti
  - (D) The resurgence of the Catholic Church in France