



# **Citadelle La Ferrière**

***Art of Haiti***

**Rebecca Hinson**

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Dedicated to Jamesley Coupet & Corbin Jordonne

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**Built to withstand the threat of French invasion that would bring slavery back to Haiti, the Citadelle La Ferrière sits at 2600 feet on Bonnet-à-L'Évêque mountain. Overlooking northern Haiti and the Atlantic Ocean, the fortress is a monument to the black slaves of Haiti who seized their freedom, inspiring every black slave around the world.**



The story of the Citadelle began with the birth of a child. Some say Henry Christophe was born to two black slaves in Saint-Domingue in 1767. When he turned seven, he was apprenticed to a mason, for whom he carried stones and mixed mortar. At twelve, he ran away, but was sold to a French naval officer on his way to aid the American colonies.



When the officer returned to Le Cap, he sold the boy to a black innkeeper, from whom Christophe would later purchase his freedom. In 1789 he saw two black freemen tortured and killed for demanding voting rights. A slave, Jean-Jacques Dessalines and a free black, Toussaint Louverture, also witnessed this brutality.



**Slave leaders gathered August 14, 1791, at Bois Caïman with Vodou priest Dutty Boukman and priestess Cécile Fatiman. Louverture, Dessalines, and others took a blood oath to revolt and break the bonds of slavery. Boukman promised that the Vodou warrior god Ogou would give them strength to seize their freedom.**



Rebels burned down 600 coffee plantations and 200 sugar refineries. Soon after, France went to war with Spain and England.



Toussaint Louverture and other rebels crossed over to the Spanish side of the island and joined their army. When the French Commissioner issued a decree abolishing slavery Louverture switched sides declaring to the blacks, “I want liberty and equality to reign in Saint-Domingue. Unite yourselves to us, brothers, and fight with us.”





Christophe, now 27, heard Louverture's call and joined the cause. The black army became an unstoppable force against the Spanish and British armies. The Spanish were defeated in 1795 and the British in 1798. By the time the British left Saint-Domingue, Louverture had made General Christophe the Commander of Le Cap.



Louverture declared himself Governor General of the entire island of Hispaniola. He adopted a new constitution in 1801, which stated that people born in the colony were to be “equal, free, and citizens of France,” but he also required freed slaves to continue working on plantations, receiving a share of the crops they produced.



French Consul Napoleon instructed General Leclerc to remove Louverture and his generals from the island, disarm all blacks and mulattoes, and force them back onto plantations. When Leclerc arrived with eighty-six warships and 22,000 soldiers, Christophe refused to receive them unless he received orders from Louverture. Otherwise, he would



burn Le Cap to the ground. True to his word, Christophe lifted the first torch to his own fine home before riding off into the hills with his soldiers to join Louverture. After rejecting a demand to surrender, Louverture fought Leclerc's massive army and fleet for three months. During a ceasefire, Louverture was tricked and imprisoned.



When Leclerc ordered black soldiers and their families massacred, black laborers, mulattoes, maroons, and soldiers united to rid the island of the French once and for all. The rebels, led by General Jean-Jacques Dessalines, captured one town after another, finally taking control of Le Cap, where the French surrendered in 1803.