

**LAWS 4102 B – The Haitian Revolution and Rights**  
**Department of Law and Legal Studies**

**Course description**

This course will offer a detailed examination of the Haitian Revolution of 1791–1804 and its significance for rights discourse. The Haitian Revolution broke out on the French colony of Saint Domingue on the night of August 22, 1791, when black slaves rose up and attacked plantations in the colony’s richest sugar-growing district. Some thirteen years later, the events set in motion that night culminated on January 1, 1804, with the Haitian Declaration of Independence by a former slave, Jean-Jacques Dessalines. Achieving the overthrow of colonialism, slavery, and racial inequality, the Haitian Revolution reshaped western political thinking at the end of the eighteenth century. Of the three great world revolutions of the period – the American, French, and Haitian – the Haitian case was the most profound. Each was animated by the rhetoric and ideals of liberty and freedom, but only in Haiti were the implications of those ideals pursued unconditionally. However, the Haitian Revolution’s relevance for law, rights discourse, and other related fields is far from universally accepted. Indeed, to pose the question is to adopt a minority perspective. This course will therefore critically examine the Haitian Revolution from the vantage point of rights theory, posing questions of human rights historiography and the production of global intellectual history. We will draw on a range of historical materials, C.L.R. James’ classic account of the revolution, *The Black Jacobins*, and a range of scholarship generated by the recent boom in Haitian Revolutionary Studies.

**Note on readings:**

**This is a reading-intensive course.** The course will be taught by way of discussion-based seminars. Therefore, it is essential that you come to class having read the assigned texts and ready to discuss them. Readings are classified as either “required” or “further”: required readings are mandatory; further readings are suggestions should you wish to explore a topic and deepen your knowledge. The further readings are also suggested starting points for researching your final essay.

**Schedule**

**Week 1, *The Making of Haiti: Egalité for All***

No required reading this week but begin reading the Popkin texts:

Jeremy Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

Jeremy Popkin, *A Short History of the French Revolution* (6<sup>th</sup> Edition, Routledge, 2016).

In class viewing:

Sujewa Ekanayake (dir.) *Egalité for All: Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian Revolution* (PBS, 2009)  
Also available online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3R4DQ4DIP4I>

Suggested further reading:

Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Harvard UP, 2004)

Carolyn Fick, *Making Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution From Below* (University of Tennessee

Press, 1991)

### **Week 2, *The French Revolution and Rights***

Required reading:

“The ‘Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen,’ 1789 in: Jeremy Waldron, *Nonsense Upon Stilts: Bentham, Burke and Marx on the Rights of Man* (Routledge, 1987): 22–28. [Read the introduction on pp. 22–25 and the actual text on pp. 26–28]

Lynn Hunt, “Introduction: The Revolutionary Origins of Human Rights,” in *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History*. Edited, translated and introduced by Lynn Hunt, (Bedford St. Martin’s Press, 1996): 1–32.

### **Week 3, *The Haitian Revolution and Rights***

Required reading:

Nick Nesbitt, “The Idea of 1804,” *Yale French Studies*, No. 107, (2005): 6–38.

Franklin W. Knight, “The Haitian Revolution and the Notion of Human Rights,” *Journal of the Historical Society*, Vol. 5 No. 3 (2005): 391–416.

### **Week 4, *The Unthinkable Haitian Revolution***

Required reading:

Susan Buck-Morss, “Hegel and Haiti” in *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009): 21–75.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot, “An Unthinkable History: the Haitian Revolution as a Non-event,” *Silencing the Past* (Beacon Press, 1995): 70–107

Suggested further reading:

Sibylle Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, (Duke UP, 2004): ‘Introduction: Truncations of Modernity’: 1–38.

### **Week 5, *Haitian Revolutionary Constitutionalism***

Required Reading:

“Haitian Constitution of 1801,” in: *Toussaint L’Ouverture: The Haitian Revolution*, edited by Nick Nesbitt, (London: Verso, 2008): 45–61.

“The 1805 Imperial Constitution of Haiti.” In: *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789–1804: A Brief History with Documents* edited by Laurent Dubois & John D. Garrigus, (Boston & New York: Bedford-St. Martin’s, 2006): 191–96.

Sibylle Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed*, chapter 11: “Foundational Fictions: Postrevolutionary Constitutions I”: 227–244 & Chapter 13: “Liberty and Reason of State: Postrevolutionary Constitutions II”: 260–271.

Suggested further reading:

Philip Kaisary, “Hercules, the Hydra, and the 1801 Constitution of Toussaint Louverture.” *Atlantic Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (2014): 393–411.

Philip Kaisary, “‘To break our chains and form a free people’: Race, Nation, and Haiti’s Imperial Constitution of 1805,” in *Race and Nation in the Age of Emancipations*, edited by Whitney Stewart and John Garrison Marks, University of Georgia Press, (2018): 71–88.

“The 1804 Haitian Declaration of Independence.” In: *The Haitian Declaration of Independence: Creation, Context, and Legacy* edited by Julia Gaffield, (Charlottesville & London: University of Virginia Press, 2016): 239–47.

David Geggus, “Haiti’s Declaration of Independence,” in *The Haitian Declaration of Independence: Creation, Context, and Legacy* edited by Julia Gaffield, (University of Virginia Press, 2016): 25–41.

### **Week 6, *The Black Jacobins I***

Required reading:

C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. rev. Vintage, 1963) chapters 1–5 (pp. 3–144)

### **Week 7, *The Black Jacobins II***

Required reading:

C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins* chapters 6–12 (pp. 145–288)

### **Week 8, *The Black Jacobins III***

Required reading:

C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins* chapter 13, “The War of Independence” (pp. 289–377)

### **Week 9, Lectures on *The Black Jacobins***

Required reading:

C.L.R. James, “Lectures on *The Black Jacobins*,” [1971] rpt. *Small Axe*, (Vol. 4, No. 2, 2000): 65–112.

**Week 10, *The Unfinished Haitian Revolution***

Required reading:

Laurent Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2012): 52–68, 84–88, 104–118.

Robert Fatton, Jr., *The Roots of Haitian Despotism* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2007): 1–12.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Haiti: State Against Nation* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990): 35–58.

**Week 11, *Conclusions***

No assigned reading this week