The decision to curate this exhibition grew out of a set of circumstances, which in many ways are unique to Brown University. The John Carter Brown Library located at Brown University has one of the world’s largest collections of documents and materials about the colonial period of Haiti. It has been extensively used by scholars and the material has been the basis of various exhibitions and books. What has not happened is that an artist has worked through the collection and then produced art inspired by the findings. Edouard Duval-Carré, as the first artist-in-residence at the Library decided to do just that. In our discussions while he was at Brown, a recurring note was about the many images of Toussaint L’Ouverture, located in the library within books, documents, and various engravings. It was out of these discussions that this exhibition, The Many Faces of Toussaint L’Ouverture and the Haitian Revolution was born.

Toussaint L’Ouverture is an enigmatic world historic figure. Born as a slave, he became the revolutionary leader of the slave army, which overthrew racial slavery in the then French colony of St. Domingue. He has been called all sorts of names from a “Black Jacobin” to the figure who destroyed “French Civilization” in the Caribbean. Both during and after the struggles that ended slavery he deliberately cultivated a personality, which was shrouded in mystery. In part it was a political calculation that would throw off balance the various colonial powers at the time as he navigated between the British, French, and Spanish to fight for slave freedom. After the successful slave revolution and his subsequent arrest and then painful death in a French prison, various legends grew up around him. Accompanying these legends were countless images of his face. But who was the real Toussaint L’Ouverture? Although there has been a recent claim that there exists an authentic image of him in a painting by Girardin at Nantes, this authenticity has not been verified. Here is a moment when history, myth, and legend all seem to work not in opposition but in a peculiar type of relationship.

It is the kind of situation that lends itself to experimentation by an artist. For many years Edouard Duval-Carré has been intrigued by the figure of Toussaint L’Ouverture. The Haitian Revolution was a seminal event in world history. The only known successful slave revolution in human history, it shattered the political and social world of plantation racial slavery in the Americas and colonialism in Europe. The revolution had two parts: The ending of slavery and the struggle for political independence. The figure of Toussaint L’Ouverture was central to this revolution. In Haiti, there is an artistic tradition that paints all the heroes of the revolution. Yet we do not have what is considered to be an authentic image of Toussaint. Thus, there are many images of him each offering us a different view of this remarkable historical personality. This exhibition puts together three elements of these images. First, there are the paintings of Edouard Duval-Carré, the renowned Haitian artist; then there is a sampling of the many hundreds of historical images of him; and finally there are images of paintings from the series of Jacob Lawrence, the African American artist who created 41 paintings of Toussaint L’Ouverture. This is an exhibition about myth, legend, history and representation, and the power of the image as both a way of seeing and of knowing.
and embedded frames in which Duval-Carrié’s hope for Haiti is kept alive. Of course there are exceptions to this, particularly his six-panel work, Memoire sans Histoire, in which Toussaint seems to be engaged in a futile battle. In the paintings done for this exhibition there is a different Toussaint perhaps best exemplified by the painting Maroon Republicaine. Playing off the idea that Toussaint was a “black Jacobin,” Duval-Carrié returns to one major source of the Haitian revolution—the various Maroon groups who, before Toussaint united them into a single revolutionary army, harried the planters and the French. This is a new Toussaint and one wants to ponder that if in the many faces of Toussaint, Duval-Carrié is not pointing us to another source by which we need to understand Haitian history and this extraordinary revolution, is the figure of the Maroon Republican the hope for Haiti? And what does it mean to be a Maroon Republican? I point this out because there is another figure in this exhibition who is not Toussaint— but that of a female revolutionary, attired and adorned with weapons and seems to be leaving the scene of a plantation burning down. This painting titled by the artist, Creole Republicaine evokes the revolution in all its complexity. Thus what is now interesting is that the artist has posited two forms of republicanism as distinct from the radical French Republicanism of the period. It seems that working through the Haitian archives has produced for the artist possible new ways to conjure the Haitian revolution. Of course in these matters one is never certain but I cannot help but be struck by this innovation on Toussaint by the artist. This exhibition could not have happened without the curatorial and design help of the artist himself, Edouard Duval-Carrié; the co-curator and project manager of the project, Shana Weinberg, and the elegant design talent of Erin Wells, and numerous spatial drawings of Mark Foster. Give thanks to them all and we hope you will become engaged with this small exhibition.

—ANTHONY BOUGES

It is a very special honor for the John Carter Brown Library (JCB) to participate alongside the Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice in supporting Edouard Duval-Carrié’s dazzling exhibition on the faces of Toussaint L’Ouverture. For the JCB, this kind of collaboration is the first of its kind. It emerged in the wake of Edouard’s artistic residency at the Library this past February and resulted in a cross-disciplinary visual dialogue with items from our Haitian collection, one of the richest in the world for the colonial period. Edouard’s presence at the JCB in February was stimulating and catalytic for both our curatorial staff and fellows-in-residence, and his colorful interpretations offer us a new lens through which to view one of the most fascinating—and inspiring—episodes in the revolutionary history of the modern era. The Library congratulates the CSSJ and Edouard on a magnificent and deeply important exhibition—and we feel privileged to have played a modest role in its elaboration.

—NEIL SAFTER, DIRECTOR AND LIBRARIAN, THE JOHN CARTER BROWN LIBRARY

THE JOHN CARTER BROWN LIBRARY
Artistic Residency
Revolutions are volcanic events, disrupting the old while oftentimes struggling to create the new. They are extraordinary events which pose new political questions. When Columbus encountered the New World in 1492, he inaugurated a historic phase of European colonial expansion. One of the islands on which he landed—and then renamed Hispaniola—quickly became the gateway for European colonized empires in the Americas. By 1667, the island was divided between two powerful colonial powers: France and Spain. The colony of Saint Domingue, born out of intra-colonial war, would within a hundred years become in popular imagery the “Pearl of the Antilles.” Saint Domingue was the exemplary colony within the network of 18th century European colonial territories. It was a slave colony in which coerced and enslaved African labor would become the foundation of French wealth and in which Africans were treated as disposable bodies and non–humans. Saint Domingue was every colonial planter’s fantasy and every African slave’s nightmare.

But enslaved Africans were not ghosts who did forced labor. From the various nations of West Africa and the central African Kongo Kingdom, they had brought with them across the dreaded Middle Passage ways of life, religions, and ideas about what it meant to live freely. However, in the fantasy of the planters and colonial powers, the African body had no other capacities other than to work, and about what it meant to live freely. However, in the fantasy of the planters and colonial powers, the African body had no other capacities other than to work, and work and work from sunup to sundown. For the colonial planters, the enslaved African body needed nothing but the bare minimum to keep it alive. For planter and colonial power, this body was a dead one. But as the Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén wrote, this corpse lived and so it was a “living corpse,” and thus like all living humans created forms of life that would mark this humanness. From marronage (running away) to committing suicide, from poisoning planters to burning down plantations—the visible source of their dehumanization and slavery—the African slave worked with whatever intellectual, religious, and political tools he or she had to challenge plantation slavery. There is a seduction of power that blinds, and both the planters and French colonial power were blind to the capacities of the African slave. On the island, the planters formed militias to hunt down slaves; they recognized poison and suicide and even infanticide, but it never occurred to them that all these things could be the precursor to revolution. Revolt, yes. Large-scale rebellion, perhaps. But revolution? Impossible. That is until that fateful August night in 1791 when slaves in the northern section of Saint Domingue, lead by the Muslim/ voodoo priest Boukman, organized the first act of insurgency in what we now know as the Haitian Revolution.

The Haitian Revolution followed on the heels of the French Revolution of 1789, and it forced the parties of that revolution to face the central political and social issue of that period in the Atlantic world—slavery. For the American Revolution, liberty would come to mean political liberty aligned with a conception of freedom in which the African slave was considered property. Anti-colonial freedom did not mean slave freedom for the American Republic. The French Revolution, propelled by the social questions facing the French countryside and the sans-culottes, proclaimed citizenship, rights, and equality. But in its initial fervor, the colonies were not part of the French Nation. It was the revolutionary war of the slaves under the leadership of the ex-slave Toussaint L’Ouverture that forced Jacobin France to abolish slavery in 1794. But as volcanic as revolutions are, their sustainability can be uncertain, and so when the Jacobin revolutionary temper receded and became something else, France moved to reinstate slavery in her colonies. For the revolutionary ex-slaves of Saint Domingue, the promise of a return to slavery was one worse than a thousand deaths; they would die by the thousands not to be thrown back. And so they did. In one of the most brutal wars of national liberation ever recorded, the revolutionary army of ex-slaves defeated the French colonial army and in 1801 established the free black republic of Haiti.

At that moment Haiti became a source of two ideas: for the slaves in the Atlantic world it was a space of freedom; for the planters it was a place that had to be made to suffer—it had to be turned into a place of horrors to bolster racist ideas about Black incapacity. By the beginning of the 20th century, within the Western imagination Haiti had become a strange unfathomable land, the home of zombies. These two frames have shaped how we think about Haiti today. Haiti stands historically as the most far-reaching revolution of the 18th and early 19th centuries. It was the one that posed the most fundamental issue of the day. Its echoes still shape our present. Why? Because in all its complexities, it posed that most profound of human questions—what is freedom?

—Anthony Bogues
Toussaint L’Ouverture AND THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM

If one recalled world historic figures who over the past 250 years made indelible marks in various struggles for human freedom, the name Toussaint L’Ouverture would be noted. We are uncertain about the precise date of his birth, but know that he was born sometime between 1743-1746 as a slave on the Breda plantation in Cap-Haitian. Following the usual convention of a slave’s surname being that of the slave master he was first known as Toussaint Breda. Later in 1793 as a revolutionary leader of the slave army, he took the name L’Ouverture which means “the opening.” Toussaint L’Ouverture was the political and military leader of the slave revolution, which destroyed the system of racial slavery in St. Domingue. That struggle against racial slavery was part of the revolution, which today we call the Haitian Revolution. That revolution had two aspects: the struggle against slavery and for freedom and a national liberation war against French colonialism for political Independence. After the successful waging of that war the former French colony of St. Domingue was renamed, Haiti, the original indigenous name of the island.

The slave revolution began on the night of August 14th, 1791 when in the Northern part of the colony a group of slaves after a ceremony in a place called, Bois Caiman, led by the vodou priest Boukman Dutty, began insurrectionary activities against the planters and the French colonial state. Drawing upon the previous years of Maroon guerilla warfare, the slaves fought a bitter struggle against the planters. It was a complex struggle and in the midst of it Toussaint L’Ouverture emerged as the central military figure and political personality. Described by some of his contemporaries as “ taciturn and disciplined as well as gifted,” he became a coachman while still a slave and then over time a free black. A careful and self-contained individual, he did not immediately join the revolutionary slave army then under the command of Jean Francois and Biassou, but when he did he was to emerge as its single most important leader.

What political and social ideas, did Toussaint L’Ouverture embrace? On August 29th, 1793, he issued a proclamation. It said:

Brothers and Friends

I am Toussaint L’Ouverture; perhaps my name had made itself known to you. I have undertaken vengeance. I want Liberty and Equality to reign in Saint Domingue. I am working to make that happen. Unite yourselves to us, brothers, and fight with us for the same cause ... Equality cannot exist with Liberty. And for that liberty to exist, we must have unity.

Toussaint L’Ouverture wrote this proclamation while fighting with the Spanish against the French colonial army. At that time in 1793 he had made an alliance with Spanish colonial power to fight the French, attempting to take advantage of differences between the two colonial powers. His call for unity was meant to unite the slave population in an implacable struggle against slavery and for liberty and equality. Two social and political ideas drove Toussaint L’Ouverture—liberty and equality. Toussaint’s ideas about equality and liberty were more radical than the political and social ideas of all the revolutions of the period: the 1776 American Revolution and the 1789 French Revolution. As a French colony, St. Domingue was influenced by the French Revolution with its declaration of the “Rights of Man and Citizen.” The French revolution did not abolish slavery and colonialism and so in 1793, Toussaint L’Ouverture was still engaged in the struggle against slavery. A 1792 joint letter written to the French by him and other leaders of the revolutionary slave army noted that:

Under the blows of your barbarous whip we have accumulated for you the treasures you enjoy in this colony; the human race has suffered to see with what barbarity you have treated men like yourself. -Yes men –over whom you have no other right except that you are stronger ...we are black it is true. But tell us what is the law that says that the black man must belong to and be the property of the white man? ...We are your equals then, by natural right ... it is not a crime to be born black nor an advantage to be white.

This statement is a clear renunciation of slavery and any idea of inequality based upon race. For Toussaint L’Ouverture, the French revolution did not abolish what he called the “ aristocracy of skin” and it took him and his revolutionary army to accomplish that task. When forced by the activities of the revolutionary slaves in the colony to abolish slavery in 1794, the French National Convention announced that, “Since 1789, the great transformation remained incomplete ... an aristocracy of the skin still ruled.” To end this rule the convention declared that “slavery of the negroes is abolished ...it decrees that all men living in the colonies, without distinction of color, are French citizens and enjoy the rights guaranteed by the constitution.” While the National Convention abolished slavery, Toussaint L’Ouverture continued to secure the conditions for the liberty of black slave. By January 1801 he defeated Spanish colonial power in the adjacent colony of Santo Domingo and united the two colonies on the island of Hispaniola. In May 1801 he promulgated the first constitution in the New World, which proclaimed the permanent ending of slavery. Article three of that constitution declared:

There cannot exist slaves in this territory, servitude is therein forever abolished.

But the course of history and of revolutions does not operate in straight lines. The French Revolution became mired in a series of political retreats and by the time...
Napoleon emerged as the major political figure, he had taken the decision to reinstate slavery in the French colonies. Napoleon’s objective to reinstate slavery clashed with the slaves desire to maintain their freedom. He sent a massive colonial army to return the ex-slaves to slavery. They met strong resistance from the revolutionary slaves who, once again under the leadership of Toussaint L'Ouverture, fought with courage and fortitude. By 1802, this war had reached a stalemate with neither side gaining the upper hand. Within this context, the French general Le Clerc carried out a plan in which Toussaint L'Ouverture was lured into a camp to negotiate only to be arrested and then shipped to France where without trial he was imprisoned in Fort de Joux in France, where he died on April 7, 1803. When he was arrested, and before being shipped to France, he was reported to have said:

“It was the struggle against the French colonial army in St. Domingue that continued after his arrest. Led by Henry Christophe and Jean Jacques Dessalines, the revolutionary army of ex-slaves defeated the French and in 1804, proclaimed the colony of St. Domingue, the Republic of Haiti.

The story of these struggles against slavery and against French colonialism is the story of a desire for human freedom. In that struggle the personality of Toussaint L'Ouverture becomes central if we are to understand both the revolution and the political and social issues of that period. Toussaint L'Ouverture was a complex political figure. During his rule of the colony of St Domingue he instituted labor systems, which did not find favor with the ex-slaves. The historian, CLR James tells us that at the core of Toussaint’s political mistakes were that he “explained nothing, and allowed the masses to think that their old enemies were being favored at their expense.” Yet James tells us that “Toussaint was attempting the impossible.” Perhaps what was impossible for Toussaint was that he thought French colonial power would continue to support the abolishment of slavery. It was not impossible for the slaves to fight for their freedom.

Given the centrality of Toussaint L’Ouverture to the Haitian story and of that story to different struggles for freedom it is not surprising that there is many images of Toussaint. Two hundred years after the revolution we may still have no accurate representative drawing of this man. What we do know however was that his struggles, his political and military talents lead to the first and perhaps single most important breach against the system of racial slavery in the New World. For that reason he is a world historic figure and walks tall in the annals of the history of freedom and equality.

—Anthony Bogues
Growing up in Depression-era Harlem provided Jacob Lawrence with access to the creativity of Harlem Renaissance artists, musicians, and poets who served as inspiration for his work. Though Lawrence dropped out of high school to help support his family, he benefited from artist training programs at the Harlem Art Workshops sponsored by the Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration. Early in his career, this same New Deal program would fund him as an artist.

Lawrence’s *Toussaint L’Ouverture* forty-one panel series, completed in 1938 at age twenty-one, marks the first of his historical narrative art; he would later complete series on Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and the Great Migration. He conducted extensive research at his local library branch, now the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, to expand on the stories of these “heroic” Black leaders he had first learned about in his community. The *Toussaint L’Ouverture* series seeks to give the viewer a broad understanding of the events which contributed to the Haitian Revolution and the ideological consciousness of Toussaint as a leader. This story of contested land, the quest for domination, and struggles by the enslaved for freedom begins with the arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1492, the death of the native queen Anacanca eleven years later and the start of the African slave trade, all centuries before Toussaint’s birth. Painting number six shows Toussaint’s birth to parents both enslaved. Subsequent pieces show the growth of Toussaint as a leader from early experiences with this violent institution and formative antislavery readings to his ascent to power, and later, the end of his regime.

The Toussaint *L’Ouverture* series was well received and provided the young artist with opportunities to exhibit his work at institutions such as the De Porres Interracial Council and later the Baltimore Museum of Art, and 1940 Chicago Negro Exposition. Lawrence’s commitment to chronicling African American history to the public as his strong commitment to promoting civil rights would continue and be expanded upon throughout his career.

—Shana Weinberg

"As children of the Harlem community, we grew up being told about these great black heroes and heroines-- Toussaint L’Ouverture, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and so forth. I guess this was happening in black communities all over the country. We would hear these stories from black school teachers and black librarians. We would also hear these stories from what I call street-corner orators. Well, these heroes and heroines were so impressive that I naturally wanted to tell their stories. You can do that in a mural, maybe. But at that age, I wasn’t getting big mural commissions. I couldn’t tell the story in one painting, so I decided to do a number of paintings of each individuals. That’s how that came about.”

—Xavier Nicholas, “Interview with Jacob Lawrence.” Callaloo, Volume 36, Number 2, Spring 2013, pp. 260-267 (Article). Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press.

**TOUSSAINT L’OUVERTURE SERIES**

As a child, Toussaint heard the twang of the planter’s whip and saw the blood stream from the bodies of slaves.

The birth of Toussaint L’Ouverture, May 20, 1743.

General Toussaint L’Ouverture defeats the English at Saline.

General Toussaint L’Ouverture, Statesman and military genius, esteemed by the Spaniards, feared by the English, dreaded by the French, hated by the planters, and reverenced by the Blacks.

General Toussaint L’Ouverture defeats the English at Saline.
To Toussaint L’Ouverture

TOUSSAINT, the most unhappy man of men!
Whether the whistling Rustic tend his plough
Within thy hearing, or thy head be now
Pillowed in some deep dungeon’s earless den;
O miserable Chieftain! where and when
Wilt thou find patience? Yet die not; do thou
Wear rather in thy bonds a cheerful brow:
Though fallen thyself, never to rise again,
Live, and take comfort. Thou hast behind
Powers that will work for thee; air, earth, and skies;
There’s not a breathing of the common wind
That will forget thee; thou hast great allies;
Thy friends are exultations, agonies,
And love, and man’s unconquerable mind.

—WILLIAMS WORDSWORTH
Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the many individuals who helped make this exhibition possible, including student researchers Marie Larose, Karen Normil and Josette Souza; staff of the Granoff Center including Prof. Richard Fishman, Chira DeBesto, Kristin Kwasniewski, Sophia LaCava-Bohanan, and Ben Pilgrim; the staff at the John Carter Brown Library including Prof. Neil Safer, Margot Nishimura, Kimberly Nusco, Leslie Tobias-Olser, John Minichiello, Maureen O’Donnell, Valerie Andrews, and Leah Milan; Ruth Clark at the Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice; and exhibition designers Erin Wells and Mark Foster. Special thanks to all who loaned artwork to make this exhibition possible.

Most of all we would like to thank Edouard Duval-Carrié for his time and generosity, and give him our deepest respect for his artistic work.

Selected Resources

The Other Revolution: Haiti, 1789–1804
Exhibition website: jcbl.org/haitian

Remember Haiti website with introduction to historic materials from and about Haiti in the collection of the John Carter Brown Library; includes links to digital facsimiles on the Internet Archive: http://www.brown.edu/Facilities/John_Carter_Brown_Library/remember_haiti/

JCB Haiti Collection on the Internet Archive (949 items in full digital facsimile to access online or download for free): https://archive.org/details/jcbhaiti


The MANY FACES of TOUSSAINT L’Ouverture and the HAITIAN REVOLUTION

featuring new works by renowned artist
Edouard Duval-Carrié

MAY 22–JUNE 15, 2014