

The Untold History of Haitian Soldiers in the American Revolution
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Freedom's Vanguard, Empire's Secret: *Les Chasseurs-Volontaires de Saint-Domingue* and the Historiography of the Southern Campaign

Abstract: *This paper examines the military contributions of Les Chasseurs-Volontaires de Saint-Domingue during the Southern Campaign of the American Revolutionary War, specifically analyzing their roles at the Siege of Savannah (1779) and the subsequent Siege of Charleston (1780). It explores the socio-political mechanisms that led to the systematic erasure of these free Black soldiers from early American historiography and connects this historical amnesia to the modern sociopolitical marginalization of Haitian immigrants in the United States.*

Introduction

The foundational narrative of the American Revolutionary War has long prioritized a Eurocentric framework of alliance, emphasizing the contributions of white French and Spanish regular forces while minimizing the diverse demographic reality of the conflict. Among the most egregious omissions is the history of *Les Chasseurs-Volontaires de Saint-Domingue*, a regiment composed of over 500 free men of color (*gens de couleur libres*) recruited from the French Caribbean. By analyzing their tactical interventions at Savannah and Charleston, this paper demonstrates that Haitian blood was integral to American independence, and argues that their subsequent erasure was a deliberate political calculation designed to protect the institution of American chattel slavery.

The Tactical Reality: Savannah and Charleston

Contrary to popular historical misconceptions regarding European reluctance to engage in direct combat during the revolution, France and Spain actively mobilized global colonial assets. In the autumn of 1779, the geopolitical focus shifted to the American South.

During the Siege of Savannah (September–October 1779), a combined Franco-American army attempted to dislodge British forces. The assault on October 9 culminated in a disastrous tactical failure for the allies. As Continental troops and French regulars fell

into a disorganized retreat, British infantry launched a counter-offensive aimed at total annihilation.

The *Chasseurs-Volontaires* were deployed as a rear guard. Demonstrating rigid battlefield discipline and superior marksmanship, the regiment successfully checked the British advance. This critical intervention absorbed the brunt of the British counter-attack, preventing a total rout and securing the safe withdrawal of the remaining Continental forces.

MILITARY OPERATIONS IN THE SOUTHERN THEATER

(1779-1780)

[Siege of Savannah: Oct 1779] -----> [Siege of Charleston: May 1780]

* Allied assault fails.

* British surround Lincoln's

army.

* Chasseurs-Volontaires form rear guard.

* Haitian detachment captured.

* Safe retreat of American forces secured.
Black heroes

* White soldiers paroled;

enslaved by British forces.

The theater subsequently shifted to South Carolina. A detachment of the Haitian volunteers remained with the Southern Continental Army under Major General Benjamin Lincoln. During the Siege of Charleston (Spring 1780), British forces successfully surrounded and captured the garrison, dealing the United States its most devastating defeat of the war.

The aftermath of the surrender highlighted the racialized double standard of 18th-century warfare: while white American combatants were largely treated under standard European protocols of military parole, captured Black volunteers were stripped of their soldier status by the British and sold directly into the domestic slave trade, altering the trajectories of their lives.

Transnational Revolutionary Continuity

The battlefield of Savannah served as an ideological incubator for the *Chasseurs-Volontaires*. Troops returned to the colony of Saint-Domingue having demystified the concept of European military supremacy. They had witnessed standard European infantry tactics, siege craft, and defensive fortification engineering firsthand.

Among these soldiers was Henri Christophe, who served as a teenager during the Georgia campaign and would later emerge as a principal general in the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804).

When the enslaved population of Saint-Domingue revolted against French colonial rule, veterans of the American Revolution utilized their conventional military training to organize, drill, and command the revolutionary army. By blending European tactical discipline with guerrilla warfare, they systematically defeated the armies of three European empires: Britain, Spain, and France. The declaration of Haitian independence in 1804 established the world's first free Black republic, directly utilizing the martial skills acquired during the defense of American liberty.

Historiographical Erasure and Modern Implications

The subsequent omission of the *Chasseurs-Volontaires* from the canon of American history was a calculated strategy of archival suppression. For the expanding American slaveocracy of the 19th century, the Haitian Republic represented an existential threat. The concept of organized, literate, and militarily competent Black men successfully overthrowing white colonial structures was a narrative that could not be allowed to diffuse among domestic enslaved populations. Consequently, early American historiography actively expunged Black participation from the Revolutionary narrative to preserve the myth of white exceptionalism and maintain domestic social control.

CHRONOLOGY OF DIPLOMATIC ISOLATION

[1804] Haiti achieves independence; Jefferson administration refuses recognition.

[1806] United States enacts strict economic embargo against the Black republic.

[1825] France enforces a 150-million-franc indemnity, bankrupting the state.

[1915] United States military occupies Haiti, seizing financial infrastructure.

This deliberate historical amnesia directly underpins the systemic socio-political biases encountered by Haitian immigrants in contemporary American society. The modern cultural and political rhetoric that frequently marginalizes Haitian migrants ignores the structural, centuries-long economic destabilization inflicted upon Haiti by Western powers.

Following 1804, the United States enforced a strict economic embargo and denied diplomatic recognition to Haiti for nearly six decades. This isolation, coupled with the exorbitant "independence indemnity" forced upon Haiti by France in 1825, systematically drained the nation's capital and stymied its infrastructural development.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the contemporary characterization of Haitian immigrants as demographic burdens is a historical inversion. The modern American state exists, in part, due to the tactical sacrifices of the *Chasseurs-Volontaires de Saint-Domingue*. Restoring these soldiers to the prominent historical narrative is not merely an exercise in inclusive pedagogy; it is a necessary confrontation with the historical debt that the United States owes to the people of Haiti.

- **Subject:** The hidden history behind America’s rise to a global superpower 🌍
- **Body:**
Hello [Dear Members],When we think about the American Revolution, we rarely hear about the critical role played by Caribbean soldiers.In our latest feature on easyfynt.com, we explore the remarkable history of *Les Chasseurs-Volontaires de Saint-Domingue*—a regiment of over 500 Free Black Men from Haiti who fought heroically at the Siege of Savannah and the Siege of Charleston.We also trace the direct line between their subsequent revolution at home and the Louisiana Purchase, which instantly doubled the size of the United States. Read the full, fact-checked analysis today to understand the deep historical ties between our two nations.[]

3. Short-Form Video Script

Time	Visual Indicator	Voiceover (Audio Script)	On-Screen Text
[1]			
0:00-0:05	Host looking directly at camera, holding up a	"Standard history textbooks often leave out a critical chapter of the Revolutionary War."	A HIDDEN CHAPTER OF US HISTORY

	standard US History textbook.		
0:05-0:12	Fast cuts of the Revolutionary War, shifting to a map of Savannah, Georgia.	"In 1779, American forces were facing a severe tactical setback during the Siege of Savannah."	Savannah, 1779: A Tactical Crisis
0:12-0:20	Image of the bronze Haitian Monument statues.	"But reinforcing the lines was a regiment of over 500 Free Black Men from Haiti, known as the Chasseurs-Volontaires."	500+ Haitian Volunteers Arrive
0:20-0:30	Dramatic painting of a military retreat under heavy smoke.	"When the Allied assault failed, these troops formed a disciplined rear guard, absorbing heavy casualties to cover the American retreat."	A Disciplined Rear-Guard Action
0:30-0:42	Slide a map expanding the United States (Louisiana Purchase).	"Years later, their military experience helped win the Haitian Revolution. This defeat forced Napoleon to sell the Louisiana Territory to the US, doubling the nation's size."	The Catalyst for the Louisiana Purchase
0:42-0:50	Images of early American historical archives or census documents.	"Why was this erased? Early American political leaders suppressed the narrative to prevent inspiring domestic slave revolts."	Suppressed to Protect early Institutions
0:50-1:00	Host back on camera, pointing down.	"Haitian history is deeply intertwined with American freedom and expansion. Head over to easyfynt.com to read the fully documented facts."	Explore the facts at easyfynt.com

4. Interactive Quiz Questions

Question 1

- **Prompt:** Which historical battle featured the largest unit of soldiers of African descent to fight in the American Revolutionary War?
- **Choices:**
 - A) The Battle of Yorktown
 - B) The Siege of Savannah
 - C) The Battle of Bunker Hill
 - D) The Battle of Trenton
- **Correct Answer: B) The Siege of Savannah**

Question 2

- **Prompt:** What happened to the Haitian soldiers who were captured by British forces at the fall of Charleston in 1780?
- **Choices:**
 - A) They were treated as standard prisoners of war under military parole.
 - B) They were sent safely back to the Caribbean.
 - C) They were stripped of military status and sold into domestic plantation slavery.
 - D) They were forced to join the British Royal Navy.
- **Correct Answer: C) They were stripped of military status and sold into domestic plantation slavery. [1]**

Question 3

- **Prompt:** How did the Haitian Revolution directly impact the territorial size of the United States?
 - **Choices:**
 - A) It led directly to France selling the Louisiana Territory to the US.
 - B) It allowed the US to acquire the Florida territory from Spain.
 - C) It resulted in a direct land exchange between the US and Britain.
 - D) It led to the annexation of the Caribbean islands.
 - **Correct Answer: A) It led directly to France selling the Louisiana Territory to the US.**
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Written as a "Tribute to the Brave Black Men of St. Domingue (Haiti)" and their role in shaping our nation, this paper serves as an educational resource for the State of Florida and its Board of Education to promote historical awareness and official acknowledgment.