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A COMPARISON OF THE TUPAC AMARU II REBELLION
WITH THE HAITIAN REVOLUTION

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A Comparison of the Tupac Amaru II Rebellion with the Haitian Revolution

A very interesting comparison can be made between the failure of Jose Gabriel Condorcanqui, better known as Tupac Amaru II, to lead a successful rebellion in the Peruvian highlands against Spain and Francois Dominique Touissant's successful slave revolt in Saint Domingue, where he took control of Saint Domingue from the French, as well as Santo Domingo from the Spanish. For instance, both were fighting against established institutions of the government that they objected to. However, each one was fighting from a different rung of the social ladder. Tupac Amaru II was a rich man, fighting to uphold the social order in his country, since the establishment favored the rich, while the other, Francois Touissant, a poor slave, was fighting to destroy the social order and to gain independence because the social establishment of the country favored the rich and not the poor.

In 1770, King Carlos III of Spain wanted to crack down on rich businessmen in the Spanish colony of Peru, who had been successful in bribing local officials in order to avoid paying taxes. To accomplish this task and stop the corruption, King Carlos III realized that he had to take more formal control over collecting taxes, rather than trust the responsibility to local colonists who had proven themselves to be unreliable. The policy of direct taxation was implemented by the Spanish *corregidor*, a position similar to a governor. Those who had evaded paying taxes by using their wealth and power to bribe local officials did not welcome this policy; they were outraged by it. In November 1780, a decade after the forced implementation by the Spanish Crown, one nobleman, Tupac Amaru II, a prominent and respected businessman and chieftain in the province of Tinta had become so fed up with the enforcement of tax payments that he had the Spanish

governor arrested. Amaru charged the Spanish governor with “corruption and abuse of power.” The governor subsequently stood trial for these charges and was executed after being found guilty by the town council.¹ But Tupac Amaru was not content with overthrowing the *corregidor* of Tinta alone. He also wanted to overthrow *corregidores* in other Andean provinces who were, in his eyes, unjustly enforcing the payment of taxes.²

In comparison to Tupac Amaru II, Francois Dominique Touissant of Saint Domingue was born a poor man, a slave in fact. However, these two men shared a common talent in being natural born leaders. For Touissant, his leadership ability helped him greatly in battle as a slave revolt began at the onset of the French Revolution. As a result of ideas born out of the Enlightenment, including equality and social justice, slave owners from Saint Domingue were pushing for independence in order keep slavery from being outlawed by a new French government.³ This sparked anger amongst the slaves of Saint Domingue and they rebelled. But, a French group, *Les Amis des Noirs* was able to help create a compromise. They managed to acquire some voting rights for blacks, giving them a taste of social justice. But with that small taste of social justice, the blacks grew hungrier for more freedom. This hunger exploded into a massive slave revolt in the summer of 1791, resulting in the killing of thousands of slave owners. It was also at this time that Francois Touissant informed his slave family, who were very kind to him, that he wanted to help France keep Saint Domingue as a semi-autonomous colony.⁴

¹ Jonathan C. Brown, *Latin America: A Social History of the Colonial Period* (Fort Worth: Harcourt College Publishers, 2000), 330.

² *Ibid.*, 331.

³ Charles A. Cerami, *Jefferson's Great Gamble* (Naperville: Sourcebooks, Inc., 2003), 46.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

In the ranks of the military, Touissant's natural born leadership ability was quickly discovered. As a result, he was placed in charge of his own troops. However, he had changed his mind about wanting to keep Saint Domingue as a semi-autonomous nation. He now desired to be a revolutionary and to turn Saint Domingue into a free nation. As a result, Touissant, who was placed as head of a Spanish troop, along with "four thousand black troops that he had disciplined and trained in guerrilla warfare" united and, with a strong determination, attacked the French and were able to capture Saint Domingue.⁵ But while he captured Saint Domingue with the help of the Spanish, who shared the island with France, he never claimed that he had captured Saint Domingue for the Spanish. He just exploited the Spanish in order to get their help to free Saint Domingue from the clutches of the French. Shortly afterwards, Touissant turned against the Spanish as well, since he no longer needed them. This was a similar type of exploitation, as was used by Tupac Amaru II, who used indigenous people that he did not care about in order to achieve his desired goal. Along with capturing Saint Domingue, he soon forced Spain off the other half of the island of Santo Domingo, thereby uniting Saint Domingue and Santo Domingo as one.⁶

Tupac Amaru, also a natural born leader, was able to create unity among the six thousand men he recruited for his mission. Like Touissant, Amaru experienced great success. He racked up victory after victory in battles in fighting the militias of other *corregidores*. Many of the men who followed Tupac Amaru were men belonging to "smaller indigenous villages" where they outnumbered the Spaniards. These indigenous majorities of the rural highlands resented having to perform unpaid services for King

⁵ Ibid., 48.

⁶ Ibid.

Carlos III, which included working in mines and in textile factories. A similarity can be found in comparing their discontent for performing unpaid labor to that of the slaves in Saint Domingue who were fighting for their freedom. However, while Amaru took advantage of those resentments, convincing the disgruntled natives to join his militia as subordinates, the blacks, who Amaru considered to be inferior, were the leaders of the revolution in Saint Domingue. But unlike Touissant, who was trying to destroy the social order and end slavery, Amaru tried to preserve the social order within the ranks of his militia so that peasants, blacks, and natives would not rise-up against him. To ensure their subordination, these groups were put on the front lines in battle, while Spaniards, Creoles, mestizos, and other allied chieftains, operating from behind the lines, gave these subordinates orders.

Historian Jonathan Brown points out that it was in Tupac Amaru's best interest to preserve this traditional social order since he was a rich man and in a position of power.⁷ In accordance with the social order, Tupac Amaru claimed loyalty to the Spanish Crown, explaining that he wanted to eliminate corruption in Peru and "rule the kingdom for the monarch's loyal subjects."⁸ But just as fast as he had acquired his stream of victories, his luck ran dry. Instead of continuing his march to take over Cuzco as his wife had pleaded with him to do, he lost his advantage by celebrating for too long in the conquered provinces. This delay gave the Cuzco *corregidor* ample time to put down a rebellion that was already underway in his province, one that would have given Tupac Amaru ample support to gain an easy victory in the province. Instead, Tupac Amaru, his wife, and their son were rounded up and executed for their roles in the rebellion.

⁷ Jonathan C. Brown, *Latin America*, 333.

⁸ *Ibid.*

Like Amaru, Touissant also suffered a similar misfortune. After the victory against Spain and France, Saint Domingue was left in ruins. All the slaves were free, but the new government was broke and had no means to help them find jobs. As the leader of the new government, Touissant felt that he had to do something to correct this. Left without a choice, Touissant was forced to institute a system of forced labor, where the former slaves were turned into serfs. As serfs, they were paid twenty-five percent of the profits from the export of the agricultural goods they produced, while the land owners received twenty-five percent, and the government received fifty percent of export profits, which was needed to help run the new government.⁹ The serfs, considering their past experiences, were not happy in having to continue to work the land. They felt betrayed. As a result, when the French sent new troops into Saint Domingue, hoping to recapture the island, they found little resistance.¹⁰ The island was quickly recaptured and Touissant was arrested and shipped back to France, where he was imprisoned, and because of freezing temperatures in his prison, Touissant slowly froze to death.¹¹

After Touissant's arrest, the French general, Leclerc, re-instituted slavery and then tried to install Frenchmen in all leadership positions in the colony. He was very determined to arrest any of the local Saint Domingue leaders who resisted.¹² However, because of yellow fever that spread to the island in the spring of 1802, Leclerc never had a chance to enforce his plans, as he lost his life from the disease. But the native people of Saint Domingue did not suffer as they had become immune to the disease. As a result of

⁹ Charles A. Cerami, *Jefferson's Great Gamble*, 49.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹² *Ibid.*, 50.

the diseases of yellow fever and malaria that plagued the island, France allowed Saint Domingue in 1804 to become a free nation. They did not wish to rule a nation overburdened with mosquitoes. At this time, Saint Domingue was renamed as Haiti. However, Haiti was left in ruin from both the fighting and the diseases with no bright prospects for the future. In the long run, Haitian independence was only successful because the French no longer wanted this country, because the island had become a disaster.

Unlike the lost unity, which cost Touissant his life, it was Amaru's ability to keep his troops united that allowed his rebellion to continue after his capture and execution. After Amaru's death, however, the rebellion became a real crisis for Spain, as the peasants who assumed leadership of the rebellion threatened the social order of Spanish society, turning against the established leaders. These masses that took over the rebellion were equal in social status to many of the slaves who participated in the Saint Domingue independence movement. Before his death, Tupac Amaru ruled the conquered territory in the name of the King, collecting taxes for him and abiding by the social structure of his society, especially since it benefited him as a rich man.¹³ But the peasants who took over the rebellion wanted more than an end to their forced labor, which was the reason they joined the rebellion; they wanted social justice.

Amaru's ability to keep order, in the presence of a mixed fighting group, should also be considered a claim to his great leadership. After Amaru's death, race became a major issue in the rebellion, with one native yelling, "The time [has] come for all the Spaniards and mestizos to die." Action based on such beliefs, however, was never carried out because of other internal conflicts, namely factions fighting for control within

the militia. Another basic problem was the pre-existing, ancient rivalries between Indian tribes, which joined opposing sides in battle. As punishment for participating in the rebellion, Brown explains that “Spanish authorities deliberately dealt leniently with white and mestizo captives while torturing and executing most captured indigenous leaders.”¹⁴ This was not so with France, however, when they handled the rebels, after recapturing Saint Domingue. As historian W. Adolphe Roberts explains, “Frenchmen were never able to swallow the convenient doctrine that Negroes were a sub-human species.”¹⁵

There should be no doubt that Tupac Amaru II had a self-serving agenda to increase his riches and his influence in Peru, since he was fighting his rebellion to avoid paying taxes. This was quite opposite, in comparison, to Touissant, who was trying to help his people and was forced to institute harsh policies in order for the new government to function. As opposed to Amaru, who may have believed that he was fighting to end corruption, but who was really fighting because it no longer existed, Touissant desired social justice, especially because he was a poor man. Unfortunately, he was not able to provide the people with his desire because the Saint Domingue economy was in ruins.

¹³ Jonathan C. Brown, *Latin America*, 334.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 335.

¹⁵ Charles A. Cerami, *Jefferson's Great Gamble*, 51.

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