

Angel Mejia

In the Shackles of Prejudice

The dichotomy of “us” and “them.” A breath so familiar to our lungs since the breeze of times forgotten. A rabid instinct that reeks of death. Empty and silent sockets staring at us, yet calling our names. Reflecting our faces. Echoing our voices. We have ripped and gorged on the very significance of “humanity”. We have been crucified upside down by our very own reflection. However, there are some that have kept living despite the absurd and abhorrent nature of simply “being”. Ethereal fireflies that have shined through even the darkest of places. One of these fireflies is Toussaint Louverture. His story is that of liberty and the “pursuit of happiness”. Toussaint Louverture was born into the rotting mouth of slavery. Like the unfortunate infants of Sparta, his world deemed him unworthy of life. Much of his early life is drowned by a sea of mystery, but he is said to have been born around 1739 - 1746. He was born on a plantation called “Bréda at Haut de Cap” in Haiti. A Haiti that was at the tip of France’s spear of conquest.

One of the most important things Louverture did was to become educated. The simple act of learning ripped the world in half. He was familiar with the philosophers of Greece, Italy and France. He spoke French and Creole. The raging sea of prejudice had violently devoured everything around Louverture, but he had decided he would not be gored by it. He would not be eaten by the foaming waves of hate. He swam through black rivers, like bubbling veins of tar, that ripped through the landscape of his time.

Louverture was freed in 1776 when he was 33 years old. 3 decades of slavery. I have not lived even 2 full decades, and I have experienced so many things. I have felt love and loss. Happiness. Sadness. The lilac kiss of elation and the ardent fangs of grief. I’ve seen the

blossom of spring and the silver rays of the phantom moon. However, there was a time in my life, when my home was not a sanctuary of comfort. I've experienced domestic violence with a controlling and abusive parent. I cannot fathom the abandonment of solace for 33 years.

Despite his situation, Louverture ensued to change the fate of our history. Yet I've never met anyone who knew of him.

There was a serpent shade that followed Louverture after his freedom was granted. The very serpent he would behead later in life, would first find an abode in his heart. According to *The Smithsonian*, "Louverture amassed a small fortune through the exploitation of enslaved individuals on his leased coffee plantation." In 1789, the French Revolution and its ideals would act as sparks to the pyres of rebellion. Louverture became a strategic military leader and went on to negotiate the "banning the use of the whip, allowing an extra day off, and emancipating some of the rebellion's leaders." (Smithsonian). Then in the 1790's, he went on to want the complete abolition of slavery and freedom for his people.

After the French outlawed slavery, Louverture returned to a French allegiance with truce ending tensions in 1796. In 1801, Louverture had suddenly conquered the entire island. The French emperor, Napoleon Bonaparte, saw Louverture as a threat to the use of Haiti. The stench of blood once again intoxicated Haiti in 1802. Louverture was arrested and was deported to France. He was confined to the prison of Fort-de-Joux, where he died in 1803. Incarcerated in a cold damp cell. He was born into a cage, and he died inside a cage. His last breath was devoured by 4 walls. However, the flower of Liberty that he so nurtured, wasn't stomped under the boot of Napoleon. The revolution ensued under Louverture's lieutenant, Jean-Jacques Dessalines. Haiti was the first free state in Latin America. It was where the first blooms of liberty kissed the wailing air. The air that for so long had carried the wails of the

dead and the dying. The air that for so long had vomited the stench of blood. Here it was. A bellowing gale. Here it rested, but others called its name. In the lands of Mexico and Venezuela, it was to be. To this day, it is still there. The violence and brutality of the Haitian revolution are like shadows that follow Louverture. His memory should not be forgotten under the stars of memory. His footsteps should not fade away from the plains of history. Louverture gave us the imprint of Liberty. The warm and soft sensation of solace. Away from the cold metal of prejudice. Toussaint Louverture is history. An example that you can write your own fate, no matter your shade of skin. You are history and you have the power to make it.