

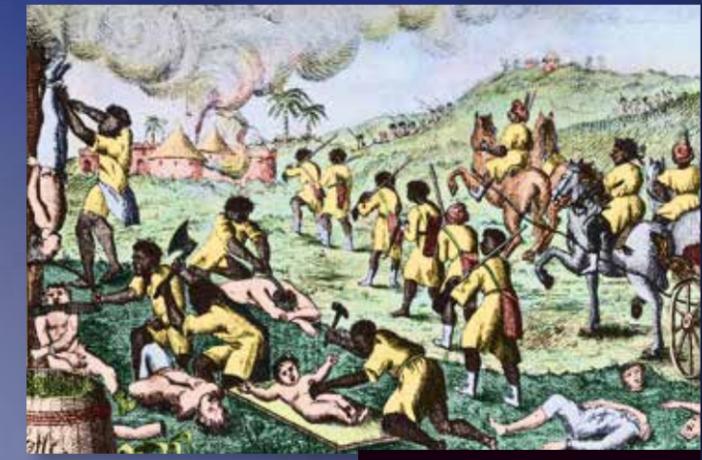
# The Haitian revolution

Explore the only example of a successful slave rebellion in the Americas

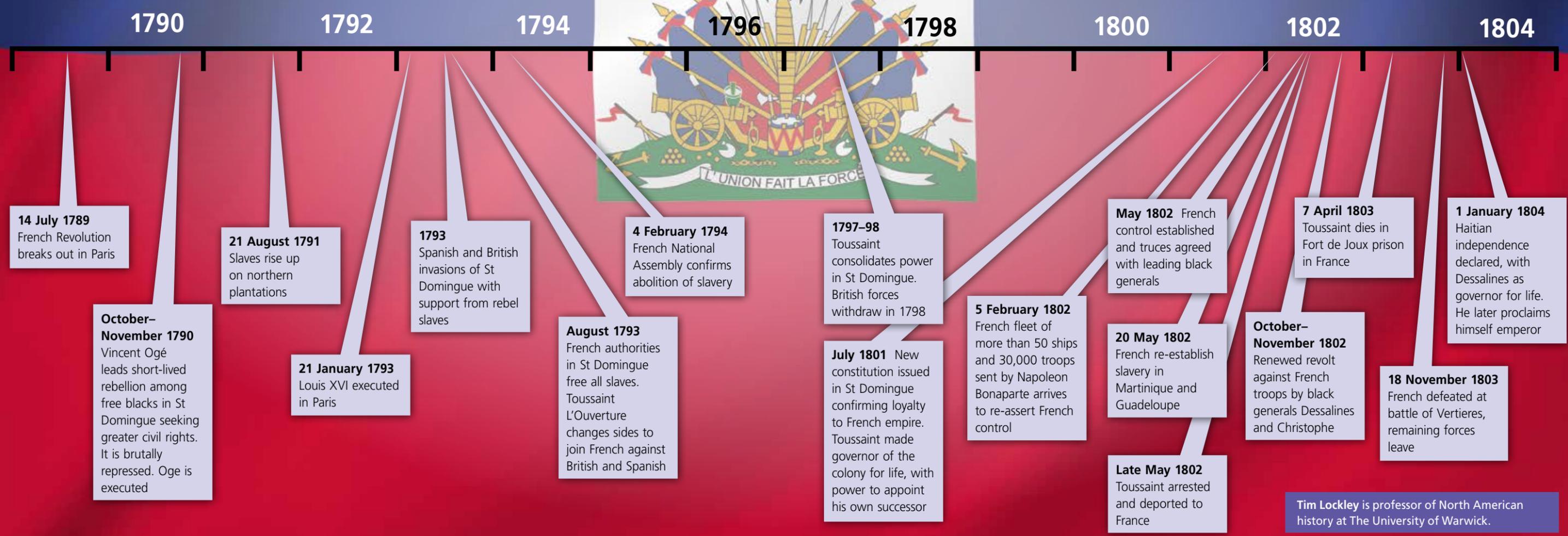
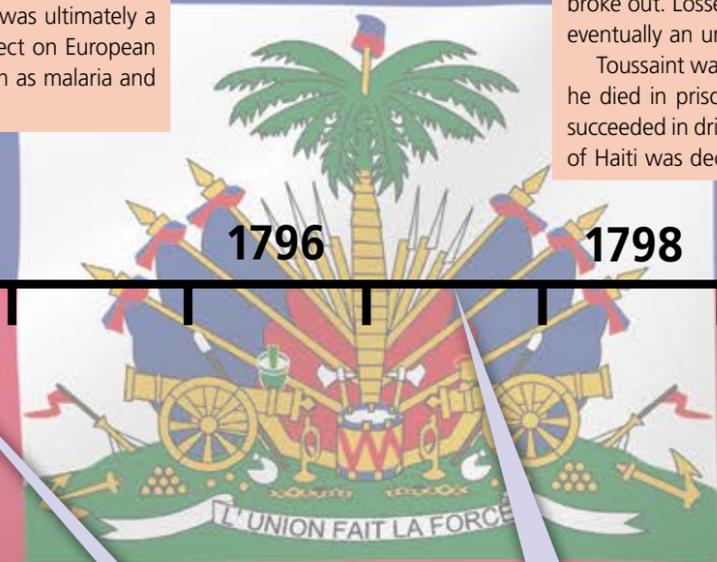
**Sugar, slaves and unrest**  
 The French seized control of the west of the island of Hispaniola from Spain in the 1690s, calling their new colony St Domingue. The colony was an economic success — St Domingue produced more sugar than Jamaica, Brazil and Cuba combined — but it was based on the brutal exploitation of slaves.  
 In 1789, when revolution broke out in France, unrest quickly spread to St Domingue. Following an aborted uprising among free blacks in 1790, the slaves revolted in August 1791. They sought an improvement in their conditions, such as more free time, rather than full emancipation. The revolt spread and white authorities were soon on the defensive. The French government gave political rights to free blacks in the hope of restoring their control.

**British and Spanish invasion**  
 In 1793, Britain and Spain declared war on revolutionary France and saw an opportunity to seize St Domingue. The Spanish allied themselves with rebellious slave leaders such as Francois Toussaint L'Ouverture. In desperation, the French authorities in the colony declared an end to slavery, an act that encouraged several rebel slave leaders, including Toussaint, to change sides. The invasion was ultimately a disaster due in part to the effect on European troops of tropical diseases such as malaria and yellow fever.

**Toussaint and Bonaparte**  
 By 1798 Toussaint had emerged as the most powerful general in St Domingue, acting autonomously from the French authorities and attempting to re-start the economy of the island by sending the population back to work on the plantations.  
 In 1801 a new constitution was issued and, while proclaiming loyalty to France, instituted Toussaint as governor of the colony for life. This alarmed the new French emperor, Napoleon Bonaparte. A large army was sent to reassert French control and war quickly broke out. Losses on both sides were very high and eventually an uneasy peace was agreed.  
 Toussaint was arrested and sent to France where he died in prison. A new black leader, Dessalines, succeeded in driving out the French and the republic of Haiti was declared on 1 January 1804.



French Haitians massacred by the slaves of St Domingue, c.1971



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