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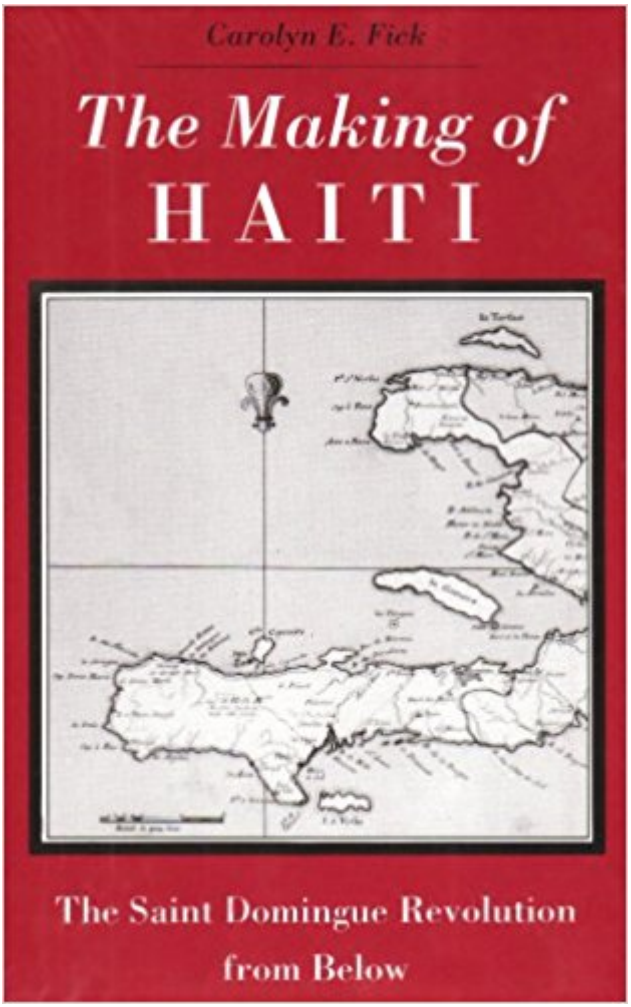
The Making Of Haiti: Saint Domingue Revolution From Below



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Synopsis

In 1789 the French colony of Saint Domingue was the wealthiest and most flourishing of the Caribbean slave colonies, its economy based on the forced labor of more than half a million black slaves raided from their African homelands.Â The revolt of this underclass in 1791â ”the only successful slave rebellion in historyâ ”gained the slaves their freedom and set in motion the colony’s struggle for independence as the black republic of Haiti.In this pioneering study, Carolyn E. Fick argues that the repressed and uneducated slaves were the principal architects both of their own freedom and of the successful movement toward national independence.Â Fick identifies "marronage," the act of being a fugitive slave,Â as a basic unit of slave resistance from which the revolution grew and shows how autonomous forms of popular slave participation were as important to the success of the rebellion as the leadership of men like Toussaint Louverture, Henri Christophe, and Dessalines. Using contemporary manuscripts and previously untapped archival sources, the author depicts the slaves, their aspirations, and their popular leaders and explains how they organized their rebellion.Fick places the Saint Domingue rebellion in relation to the larger revolutionary movements of the era, provides background on class and caste prior to the revolution, the workings of the plantation system, the rigors of slave life, and the profound influence of voodoo.Â By examining the rebellion and the conditions that led to it from the perspective of the slaves it liberated, she revises the history of Haiti.Carolyn Fick is currently a Canada Research Fellow at Concordia University in Montreal.

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Customer Reviews

In 1789 the French colony of Saint Domingue was the wealthiest and most flourishing of the Caribbean slave colonies, its economy based on the forced labor of more than half a million black slaves raided from their African homelands.Â The revolt of this underclass in 1791â ”the only successful slave rebellion in historyâ ”gained the slaves their freedom and set in motion the colony’s struggle for independence as the black republic of Haiti.In this pioneering study, Carolyn E. Fick argues that the repressed and uneducated slaves were the principal architects both of their own freedom and of the successful movement toward national independence.Â Fick identifies "marronage," the act of being a fugitive slave,Â as a basic unit of slave resistance from which the revolution grew and shows how autonomous forms of popular slave participation were as important to the success of the rebellion as the leadership of men like Toussaint Louverture, Henri Christophe, and Dessalines. Using contemporary manuscripts and previously untapped archival sources, the author depicts the slaves, their aspirations, and their popular leaders and explains how they organized their rebellion.Fick places the Saint Domingue rebellion in relation to the larger revolutionary movements of the era, provides background on class and caste prior to the revolution, the workings of the plantation system, the rigors of slave life, and the profound influence of voodoo.Â By examining the rebellion and the conditions that led to it from the perspective of the slaves it liberated, she revises the history of Haiti.Carolyn Fick is currently a Canada Research Fellow at Concordia University in Montreal.

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This book is not only a great companion to CLR James’ classic, The Black Jacobins, it also initiates a deeper understanding of the forces and factors that were at the root of the revolution. Whereas James’ work tends to mythesize leaders, particularly Toussaint, Fick’s work is more likely to detail specific battles and events with information on multiple actors. The only trouble is that Fick’s book lacks some of the moral indignation that James had as well as his interest in connecting the Haitian Revolution to the political context of modern times. This makes the book more "scholarly" but less compelling. This is a small drawback, however, for those already impassioned about the subject.A new most important aspect of Fick’s book is her emphasis and redefinition of the role of the maroons (escaped slaves). Whereas many times the maroons are portrayed as only peripheral actors or precedents to the revolution, Fick’s work shows that the community of escaped slave, a very broad category, was one of the main forces at work in the revolution.This book is a must for understanding maroonage, the Haitian Revolution, and a historical investigative method that is

liberating!

How to follow in the footsteps of a great historian? One answer is found in this important successor to CLR James's 1938 "Black Jacobins," which strongly influenced historiography of Haiti and the rising anticolonial liberation movement. James emphasized the vanguard role of revolutionary leadership. Fick acknowledges their role but gives greater weight to ordinary folk, both rank-&-file followers and Haiti's rich history of maroon resistance. This significantly advances our appreciation of the great achievements of Haiti's founders. "Black Jacobins" remains worthwhile, for literary merit as well as insight and its impact on Third World liberation struggles. L. Dubois, "Avengers of the New World" is probably now the standard work, matching James's thrilling narrative with Fick's excellent research.

Fick's book reveals unknown aspects of the haitian revolution: the fundamental role of the masses without witch the revolution would not have taken place. This book is for anyone who is trying to understand the haitian revolution from the people's point of view. It is the equivalent of Zen's People's history of the U.S.

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