Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Black Spartacus: The Epic Life of Toussaint Louverture*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020. xxvi + 429 pp. (Cloth US\$30.00)

Sudhir Hazareesingh is a specialist in the political and intellectual history of modern France. This is his ninth book but his first that concerns the Caribbean. He thus joins a host of other writers whose biography of Toussaint Louverture represents their first publication on the Haitian Revolution. With nearly 1,700 endnotes, works such as *Black Spartacus* are routinely hailed as “meticulously researched” by reviewers who know nothing of their subjects’ source material. As Hazareesingh tells us that “closer scrutiny of the French and Spanish archival sources” (p. 42) has enabled him to solve problems in the historiography, and as he occasionally ventures statements like “the archives of the colony offer no evidence of ...” (p. 49), the issue warrants some attention.

Hazareesingh has read extensively in the secondary literature, though apparently missing some of the more academic Louverture research, and he references a large body of primary sources. A few (from the National Army Museum and La Courneuve diplomatic archives) have not been used by other scholars. Yet he has also ignored a large swath of the manuscript material on the early revolution in France, England, and Spain, and many of the documents cited are taken from others’ publications. For Spanish matters, he seems to have relied on the unreliable work of Alain Yacou and Antonio Pinto Tortosa. For much of Toussaint’s correspondence, he used the Baggio and Augustin printed edition that is marred by omissions and faulty transcriptions. Misleadingly, he ascribes to “oral tradition” statements that simply derive from nineteenth- or eighteenth-century writers. A better command of the primary sources might have prevented Hazareesingh’s perpetuation of flimsy popular stories such as Toussaint’s being the mysterious Médecin Général, his driving his employer’s wife to safety at the start of the slave uprising, or the British seeking to make him an independent monarch; so, too, perhaps some of his own patently erroneous assertions: that Africans were unusually concentrated in northern Saint-Domingue, that Toussaint negotiated the terms of Spain’s intervention in the slave uprising, or that most of his early soldiers came from maroon bands. While certain vital points, like the latter, go unreferenced, the endnotes quite frequently fail to support the text that is referenced, because of careless organization or because Hazareesingh stretches his evidence. Exaggerations, factual errors, misidentified individuals, and faulty chronology abound throughout the first half of the book. Its one use of economic statistics is hugely deceptive. A weirdly botched map perfectly complements its uncertain handling of geography.

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As a political scientist, Hazareesingh is perhaps less interested than historians in narrative and evidence, or the interplay of events and aspirations. His focus is Louverture's "character and ideas" rather than the world around him, producing a somewhat ahistorical idealist portrait. Before the Revolution, Toussaint appears already committed to opposing slavery, and northern Saint-Domingue already has a "fully fledged revolutionary culture" (p. 39). Rejecting the Black nationalist portrait in the biographies by Philippe Girard and Pierre Pluchon, and their cynical turn, Hazareesingh restores the traditional picture of a humane leader genuinely committed to a multiracial future. He did not want independence from France, yet was less of a Black Jacobin than in C.L.R. James's account, not least because he was Catholic and also "fully immersed in vodou culture" (p. 161)—a view that most of his biographers dismiss. This Toussaint was both conversant with Enlightenment thinkers and influenced by the mysticism of the Taino and the sorcerer Makandal. Hazareesingh calls it a creole identity.

The main reason to read this book is for its handling of the mid- and late 1790s. The chapter devoted to explaining Louverture's military success contains vivid description and cites amply from his letters. There follows a lengthy analysis of the "making of the Louverturean order." It emphasizes, unusually, the general's control of patronage and municipal government, charity, and schools, alongside his more familiar use of republican and religious rhetoric, and ability to appeal to diverse interest groups. The heft and detail of these sections, though marred by the blemishes mentioned above, set the book apart from its competitors. The depiction of Toussaint's relations with the White officials Roume and Sonthonax is quite novel, and the expulsion of General Hédouville receives extended treatment. Hazareesingh does not ignore Toussaint's brutal response to the *ancien libre* rebellions that accompanied the War of the South, but assumes that it was justified. It was "not primarily a racial war" (p. 204) of course, but the geographical spread of these rebellions surely reinforces that impression rather than weakening it, as he argues.

Seemingly researched and written in two years, this book has substantial flaws but makes a substantial contribution.

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