

The Black Count:

Glory, Revolution, Betrayal and the Real Count of Monte Cristo, by Tom Reiss

Book Review by Kam Williams



When anyone mentions Alexandre Dumas, they're ordinarily talking about the author of such memorable novels as "The Three Musketeers" and "The Count of Monte Cristo". What almost nobody knows is that the great writer shared his name with a father who was perhaps more famous in his day, a decorated military hero who led an army of over 50,000 soldiers during the French Revolution.

Thus, it is no surprise that the exploits of the elder Dumas might serve as the inspiration for much of his son's work, especially the aforementioned classics, as well as the lesser-known "Georges." That thinly-veiled biography of his dad revolves around a young man of mixed race from a French sugar colony who makes his way to Paris where he becomes a celebrated swordsman.

Unfortunately, the real-life Alex, Sr. fell from grace and became lost in obscurity because of ideological differences with a fellow general, Napoleon Bonaparte. For, Dumas had considered theirs a people's struggle for worldwide liberation, while his power-hungry comrade was ostensibly more interested in world domination.

In addition, the statuesque Alexandre was blessed with height and a magnificent physique that left the diminutive Napoleon feeling more than a little threatened. This eventuated in the latter's having his competitor ignominiously tossed into a dungeon, ala the protagonist of "The Count of Monte Cristo."

Napoleon also made sure to have Dumas erased from the history books, a disservice belatedly undone thanks to the efforts of Tom Reiss, author of

"The Black Count." Reiss devoted a half-dozen years to painstaking research to the project, unearthing a cornucopia of astonishing information from dusty archives en route to penning a revealing and compelling page-turner about an unsung icon that time somehow forgot.

Vive la Dumas!

"The original Alexandre Dumas was born in 1762... in the French sugar colony of Saint-Domingue. [His] life is so extraordinary on so many levels that it's easy to forget that it was led by a black man, in a world of whites, at the end of the 18th Century. His mother... was a slave, and he himself was sold into bondage... by his own father, an aristocrat..."

[As] the son of a marquis and a slave, [he] had the unique perspective of being from the highest and lowest ranks of society at once... [He] made it to France and... on the eve of the French Revolution...

... began a meteoric rise through the ranks of the new revolutionary army.

[His] story brilliantly illuminates the first true age of emancipation: a single decade during which the French Revolution not only sought to end slavery and discrimination based on skin color but also broke down the ghetto walls and offered Jews full civil and political rights."

— Excerpted from the Prologue (pgs. 7-12)

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Oral History Focus of Video Workshop

Learn HD Camera Free on September 29



Providing tools to collect the oral histories of those in our community is the current project of the North Portland Multimedia Training Center (NPMTTC). For thousands of years, people have been collecting and learning from oral information passed down from one generation to the next. Today, collecting oral histories provides a different kind of information than what is found in history books: people's personal and subjective memories, their narratives of lived experience, and their own stories surrounding events in their lives helping us understand who we are. Oral histories bring multiple voices, including many ignored or underrepresented voices, into public conversations and the historical record.

A free intensive workshop on Saturday, September 29 from 9 A.M. – 5 P.M. is open to the general public 18 years and over. The workshop blends teaching the mechanics of HD camera operation and the art of produc-

ing oral history in a one-day 8-hour workshop. The first topic used for the project-based training will be "Life in Vanport." This is an outreach to the community to capture any remaining stories about a lost city, once an important part of Portland, before it is too late.

The upcoming NPMTTC workshop is taught by Tim Rooney and Miae Kim, experts in videography and oral history documentation. The NPMTTC workshop takes place at The Skanner, 415 N. Killingsworth, Portland, 97217. "Life in Vanport" is sponsored by The Skanner Foundation and a matching grant from Mt. Hood Cable Regulatory Commission.

For more information about the workshop or to register, go to www.npmc.com. You may also email npmttc@comcast.net or call and leave a message at 503-285-5555, x 521. Registration is required prior to workshop date.



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