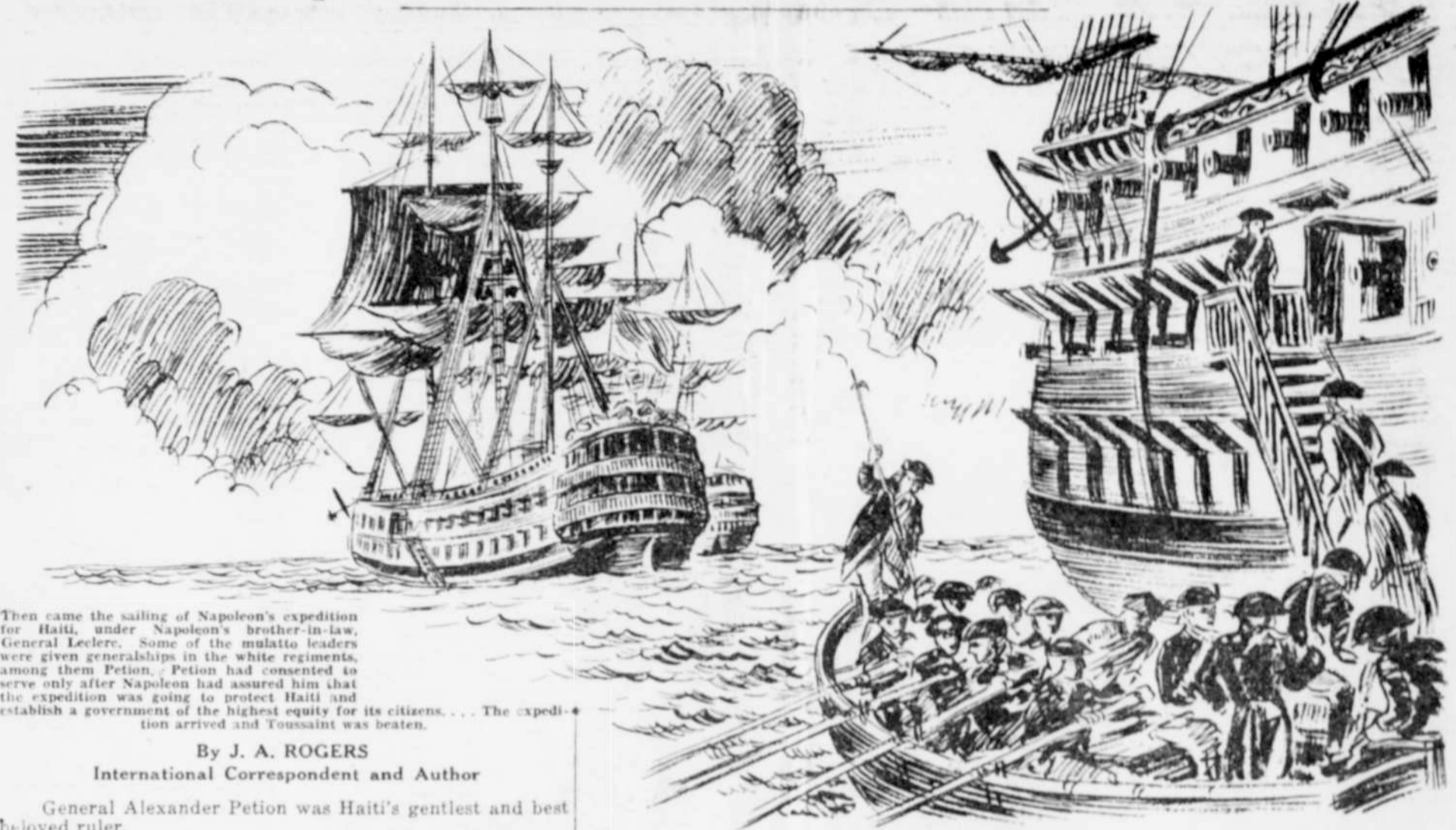


# GEN. ALEXANDER PETION, Haiti's "Blood-hating" Leader

## In Some Respects, He Was Greater Than Toussaint L'Ouverture



Then came the sailing of Napoleon's expedition for Haiti, under Napoleon's brother-in-law, General Leclerc. Some of the mulatto leaders were given generalships in the white regiments, among them Petion. Petion had consented to serve only after Napoleon had assured him that the expedition was going to protect Haiti and establish a government of the highest equity for its citizens. . . . The expedition arrived and Toussaint was beaten.

By J. A. ROGERS  
International Correspondent and Author

General Alexander Petion was Haiti's gentlest and best beloved ruler.

At a time when war, bloodshed, and massacre were the order of the day, Petion distinguished himself by a humanity and a forbearance rare in history. The devastating war between the whites and the blacks grieved him immensely, and the bloody conflicts between the mulattoes and the blacks broke his heart. Yet, as a military commander, he was the equal of every one, white or black, engaged in the great struggle.

At his death it was said of him: "Il n'a jamais fait couler les larmes de personne." (He never caused anyone to shed a tear.)

### More Fortunate than Toussaint

Petion was born April 2, 1770, the son of a rich French planter and a free black woman. He had a fair education, being in this respect more fortunate than any of the three great black leaders, Toussaint, Christophe, and Dessalines, all of whom were born slaves.

At the time the population of Haiti was divided into three classes: (1) the whites and very near whites; (2) the freedmen, who were chiefly mu-

lattoes; and (3) the slaves, nearly all blacks.

The first numbered 40,000; the second, 28,000; and the third, 450,000.

The jealousy and ill-feeling between the three groups were strong; the whites hated the mulattoes and contemned the blacks; the mulattoes despised the blacks. The blacks hated both whites and mulattoes; and if their hate of the mulatto was different, it was, perhaps, fiercer.

The freedmen, while demanding equality, did not wish to see the blacks free. Many of them owned slaves.

This situation is, of course, broadly stated. During the revolution, numbers of each class fought beside the other. Many whites and mulattoes aided the blacks, and the blacks, nearly all illiterate, fought in great numbers with the mulattoes.

### Captured Port au Prince

When Petion was twenty-one, a double insurrection broke out; that of the slaves under Blassou, Jean Francois, and Toussaint; and that of the

freedmen, under Gen. Beauvais. Petion joined the freedmen, and distinguished himself so well that he rose to be a general of artillery. Later, when the mulattoes had won equality (on paper) Petion fought under Toussaint against the English. It was Petion's brilliant capture of La Coupe that forced the English out of Port au Prince.

Petion, from the first, was for wiping out French rule altogether. The island was exceedingly wealthy; the slaves were a source of great profit, and Petion saw that there would be strife as long as this tempting bait existed. Toussaint, on the other hand, now virtual ruler, was patriotically French, or pretended to be. After slavery had been abolished by decree of the French, Toussaint, abandoning Spain, had returned feeling that henceforth all would be well.

With the whites subdued the rivalry between the mulattoes and the blacks increased. The former charged that Toussaint, flattered by his exalted position and the advances of his former masters, was depriving them of their rights and was using the ex-slaves for that purpose, all for the benefit of the whites and of himself.

Toussaint, on his side, asserted that the mulattoes objected to him because of color. "Gen. Rigaud," he said, "refuses to serve under me because I am black. Mulattoes, I see to the bottom of your souls. You are ready to rise against me. I am leaving Port Republic for the Cape but I leave my eye and my arm; my eye to watch, my arm to strike."

### Women and Children Tortured

Civil war broke out—the blacks under Toussaint, the mulattoes under Gen. Andre Rigaud. Dessalines, Toussaint's lieutenant, ruthlessly ordered a massacre of all the mulattoes in his power. Women and children were done to death by the most horrible torture. When Toussaint was reproached for this he said: "I told Dessalines to prune the tree, not to uproot it."

Petion feeling that Toussaint was being used as a tool by the whites, left him, and threw his support to Rigaud. Later, when Toussaint was treacherously captured by the whites and sent to die in the frozen fortress

of Le Joux, Petion explained his reason for deserting Toussaint thus: "I could not," he said, "support Gen. Toussaint against what I considered the best interests of the Haitian people. How could Toussaint ever have counted upon the sincerity of the whites, he, their former slave, when I have not the friendship even of my own father simply because I have African blood in my veins?"

In this civil strife Petion again distinguished himself. He defeated Dessalines at Grand Goave, and captured Port au Prince. His most notable exploit, however, was his entry into Jacmel, in open boats under a heavy shell fire. The city was being closely be-

sieged by Toussaint with 20,000 men. In Jacmel he held out for a long time, and finally fought his way out to liberty with 1900 survivors through Toussaint's large army.

Not long after Toussaint was victorious, and when Napoleon confirmed him as commander-in-chief, the mulatto leaders fled to France. Petion, however, was captured by the British, and spent two months in prison.

### Studied in France

Arriving in France he devoted himself to the study of military tactics, especially artillery. Then came the

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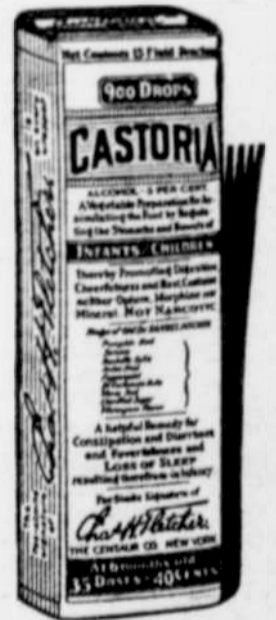
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