



# Thomas Jefferson's Haitian Policy: Myths and Realities

*Arthur Scherr*

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Among the most controversial aspects of Thomas Jefferson's presidency, indeed of his political career, is his policy toward the country that is now Haiti, then known as St. Domingo. While eschewing substantial research on his Haitian policies, most historians condemn Jefferson as a racist who implemented his anti-African American agenda by plotting with Napoleon to "starve Toussaint," Toussaint Louverture, Haiti's ruler, into submission to the French armies. When the strategy failed, and Haiti became independent in 1804, Jefferson allegedly exerted his efforts to force Congress to impose an embargo on Haiti from 1806–1809. This is the orthodox, mainstream interpretations of Jefferson's Haitian policies today.

In a revolutionary revisionist reassessment, Arthur Scherr's *Thomas Jefferson's Haitian Policy: Myths and Realities* challenges and undermines this interpretation. His extensively researched work reveals that Jefferson was in fact generally favorable to the Haitian Revolution, before and during his presidency, and supportive of its independence. Moreover, during his retirement from the presidency, when no longer burdened with the responsibilities of national consensus-seeking in public office, he went so far as to propose the newborn slaves in the southern United States be emancipated once they reached puberty and sent to Haiti, a scheme which would strengthen the unique, black-ruled West Indian country and gradually eliminate the repulsive powder keg of Southern slavery from US shores.

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