

# SLAVE REVOLT ON SCREEN

The Haitian Revolution in  
Film and Video Games



**ALYSSA GOLDSTEIN SEPINWALL**

25293 H/E-6

## A trailblazing book on the depiction of the Haitian Revolution in film and video games

"Alyssa Sepinwall's exciting new book, *Slave Revolt on Screen*, examines how the Haitian Revolution—the modern world's first and only successful Black slave revolt—has been portrayed in film throughout the past century, exposing not only the flagrant distortions and factual departures from the historical record in these films, but also their exoticized notions about Haiti and their implicitly and often explicitly white supremacist attitudes toward Haitians, and toward Blacks in general, that have permeated Hollywood and the film industry up to today. The book draws upon a sweeping range of films and video games (a new genre) on or about the Revolution as well as personal relationships and interviews with some recent filmmakers. Yet the skillful hand of the historian is omnipresent as Sepinwall brilliantly weaves together the history of the Haitian Revolution and the history of filmmaking about it, urgently calling for the yet-to-come masterpiece film on this historically epic Black liberation struggle for freedom."

—**Carolyn E. Fick**, author of *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below*

"*Slave Revolt on Screen* offers a fascinating exploration of the ways filmmakers have (and frequently have not) chosen to depict one of modern world history's great events, the Haitian Revolution. In this pathbreaking study Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall considers a variety of films and videos about the revolution, showing how and why Hollywood and other major centers of cinema hesitated to portray the horrors of slavery, let alone Black slaves in rebellion against their white masters. Of particular interest is Sepinwall's attention to video games, in many ways the greatest entertainment form of the twenty-first century. She shows how video games have frequently proved more receptive than traditional films to portraying Haiti's rebel slaves as the masters of their own fate. Anyone interested in questions of race, history, and film will find much of interest and value in *Slave Revolt on Screen*."

—**Tyler Stovall**, author of *White Freedom: The Racial History of an Idea*

**Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall** is professor of history at California State University San Marcos, where she is a past winner of the university's Brakebill Outstanding Professor Award. She is author of *The Abbé Grégoire and the French Revolution: The Making of Modern Universalism* and of *Haitian History: New Perspectives*. Her work has been published in such journals and edited collections as *Journal of Modern History*, *Journal of Haitian Studies*, *Journal of American Culture*, and *Raoul Peck: Power, Politics, and the Cinematic Imagination*.



CARIBBEAN  
STUDIES  
SERIES

University Press  
of Mississippi  
[www.upress.state.ms.us](http://www.upress.state.ms.us)



The University Press of Mississippi is the scholarly publishing agency of the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning: Alcorn State University, Delta State University, Jackson State University, Mississippi State University, Mississippi University for Women, Mississippi Valley State University, University of Mississippi, and University of Southern Mississippi.

[www.upress.state.ms.us](http://www.upress.state.ms.us)

The University Press of Mississippi is a member  
of the Association of University Presses.

Copyright © 2021 by University Press of Mississippi  
All rights reserved

First printing 2021

∞

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Sepinwall, Alyssa Goldstein, 1970– author.

Title: Slave revolt on screen : the Haitian revolution in film and video games / Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall.

Other titles: Caribbean studies series (Jackson, Miss.)

Description: Jackson : University Press of Mississippi, 2021. | Series: Caribbean studies series | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021006498 (print) | LCCN 2021006499 (ebook) | ISBN 9781496833105 (hardback) | ISBN 9781496833112 (trade paperback) | ISBN 9781496833129 (epub) | ISBN 9781496833136 (epub) | ISBN 9781496833143 (pdf) | ISBN 9781496833150 (pdf)

Subjects: LCSH: Revolutions in motion pictures. | Blacks in motion pictures. | Haiti—History—Revolution, 1791–1804.

Classification: LCC F1923 .S47 2021 (print) | LCC F1923 (ebook) | DDC 972.94/03—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021006498>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021006499>

British Library Cataloging-in-Publication Data available

# CONTENTS

Introduction .....	3
--------------------	---

## Part I: Foreign Views of the Revolution

1 An Unthinkable Plot? The Haitian Revolution in US and European Feature Films .....	23
2 Invoking the Revolution in Caribbean Feature Films .....	43
3 Handling Haiti in HUAC-Era Hollywood: 20th Century Fox's <i>Lydia Bailey</i> .....	55
4 No White Hero, No Funding? Unmade Revolution Epics .....	87
5 Black Lives Mattered in the Haitian Revolution: Hollywood and Slavery in Chris Rock's <i>Top Five</i> .....	101
6 Remembering Haiti's Revolution in France and North America: Documentaries, Dramatic Shorts, and Animation .....	113

## Part II: Haitian Cinematic Perspectives

7 From the Duvalier Years through the 2004 Bicentennial: Haitian Reflections on the Revolution's Legacy .....	135
8 The Rising Generation, Toussaint Louverture, and the Problem of Funding .....	160

## Part III: Video Games on Slavery and the Haitian Revolution

9	North American and European Games: From MECC's <i>Freedom!</i> to <i>Assassin's Creed: Freedom Cry</i> . . . . .	181
10	French Caribbean Games: Honoring Rebel Ancestors in <i>Méwilo</i> and <i>Freedom: Rebels in the Darkness</i> . . . . .	209
	Conclusion . . . . .	226
	Acknowledgments . . . . .	237
	Notes . . . . .	241
	Selected Bibliography . . . . .	301
	Index . . . . .	325

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Courtesy of California State University San Marcos

ALYSSA GOLDSTEIN SEPINWALL is professor of history at California State University–San Marcos. Before coming to CSUSM, she earned a BA at the University of Pennsylvania and MA and PhD degrees in History from Stanford University, and held a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania. Her research specialties include modern Haitian history, the French and Haitian Revolutions, History and Film, French colonialism, French-Jewish history, the Enlightenment, and the history of gender. She is the author of *The Abbé Grégoire and the French Revolution: The Making of Modern Universalism* (UC Press, 2005; published in French by Les Perséides, 2008), *Haitian History: New Perspectives* (Routledge, 2012), and numerous articles in edited volumes and in journals such as the *Journal of Modern History*, the *Journal of Haitian Studies*, the *Journal of American Culture*, the *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, and *Outre-Mers. Revue d'histoire*. Sepinwall is a past winner of CSUSM's Harry E. Brakebill Distinguished Professor Award (the university's top honor for faculty). She is a past member of the editorial board for *French Historical Studies* and has served on committees of the Society for French Historical Studies, American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, French Colonial Historical Society, Haitian Studies Association, Western Society for French History, and the American Historical Association. She currently serves on the advisory boards for H-France's *Fiction and Film for Scholars of France* and the *Revue d'histoire haïtienne/Haitian History Journal*.