

# Dramaturgical Research

# Once On This Island

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## Introduction

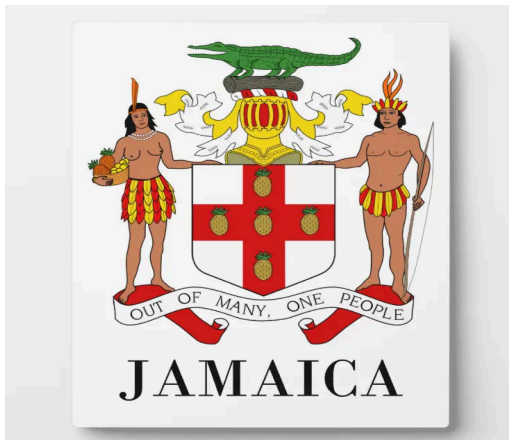
1. The Countries and Their Defining Qualities
2. The History of Haiti and the Dominican Republic
3. The Haitian Revolution
4. The Haitian Revolution Impact
5. The Inspiration and Plot
6. The Characters
7. Fun Facts
8. Conclusion and Resources

## The Countries and their Defining Qualities



Haitian Flag Emblem

- Weapons represent the nation's readiness to defend its freedom
- Royal palms represent the independence of the nation



Jamaican Emblem (not on the flag but a good representation of values)

- "The sun shineth, the land is green, and the people are strong and creative" flag colors symbolism
- One Love -> countries slogan like on the Emblem; they believe in unity and community
- Black = strength/creativity; Gold= natural wealth/sunlights beauty; Green=hope and agricultural resources



Cuban Coat of Arms

- X equals the strength of the union.
- Sea represents the positioning of Cuba, and the mountains represent the rising of a new nation (Cuba) between the two Americas.



Puerto Rican Emblem

- Royalty = Who authorizes the shield. F for Fernando and a Y for Ysabel, who were the ruling royals at the time
- Lions and castle represent the unity of both kingdoms
- Flags and crosses of Jerusalem as symbols of Saint John the baptist



Dominican Republic Emblem

- God, Fatherland, Liberty - meaning on the top banner
- The Cross is a symbol of the country's religious heritage

## The History of Haiti and the Dominican Republic



We cannot discuss Haiti without acknowledging the Dominican Republic. A part of the Greater Antilles, Haiti, lies within the Caribbean Island of Hispaniola, connected and owned by the Dominican Republic. Though Haitian independence is acknowledged, their revolution was mainly against the colonization of the French and their stipulations, in contrast to the Dominicans' struggle with the Spainard's. Rather than a fight over the land, it was a fight over people's freedom.

The Dominican Republic was explored and colonized by Christopher Colombus on his first voyage in 1492 and was the first colony established in the New World. He landed in the western hemisphere at Santo Domingo (at the time, the capital of all Spanish colonies in America). Columbus named the island La Hispaniola, and his son Diego was its first governor. Originally Haiti was a part of the Dominican Republic. Yet, in 1697 the Treaty of Ryswick gave the western part of the Hispaniola Islands (Haiti) to France (acknowledging their sovereignty) while the eastern part remained under the Spaniard's control. While Under France's Control, they renamed their part of the island Saint-Domingue. During the 18th century, Haiti became France's most Prosperous New World "possession" (it is important to note that much of the land and people's lives were monetized and considered a business by colonizing countries).

Though the La Hispaniola islands are connected and colonized by Columbus, the massive space of land causes steady language divergence. The Eastern Half, Dominican Republic, retained the Spanish language while the Western Half, Haiti, Developed a French-influenced Creole language.

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## The Haitian Revolution



Originally called Saint-Domingue by the French, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, upon the victorious revolution, renamed the island with the original Arawak name: Haiti. Haiti was the second country to claim freedom of independence, but the first enslaved person-driven revolution to gain freedom from their colonizers and abolish slavery. The Haitian Revolution to independence sparked inspiration in many enslaved people populated states due to the triumphant rise against colonizers. Though instilling the possibility for freedom within enslaved people around colonized lands, the Haitian revolution generated hate in opposing countries, and the sudden boost in enslaved people's mental morale scared slaveholders. The revolution caused unease in the only independent country, The United States of America, a slaveholder state who didn't recognize Haitian freedom until the late 1800s and actively instilled policies with other countries that still weaken Haiti today. The revolution's Caribbean impact was broad and strong. Many countries looked up to the revolutionary Toussaint Louverture, a formerly enslaved person who took control of the rebels.

The revolution in Haiti blocked the French from building an empire due to a loss of significant financial resources; this forced Napoleon to hand over Louisiana and eventually give up their territories in America. The ability to be free and a wealthy person of color within Haiti was unheard of in other places and the hope for freedom and equality began to spread within the rest of the Caribbean.

## The Haitian Revolution Impact



Much like Haiti, colonization occurred in the other Caribbean Islands of the Antilles. Jamaica was colonized by the British, and Spain colonized the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and Cuba. The enslaved people worldwide barely survived brutal travel and worked hard hours. To places like Jamaica, the revolution was "unheard" of due to the diligence of sugar barons in an attempt to squash any progressive thoughts. Entry into Jamaica was withheld from enslaved people sent to help in the war against the French, creating many freed people (though they did accept many of the corrupt politicians that fled post-revolution). To clarify, the effort was there on the British colonizer's side, but the slave communication network was too efficient to stop any communication.

The opposite effect happened in Puerto Rico. The government did not attempt to restrict communication. Instead, it became more established and assisted the African and Afro-Puerto Rican communities because of the contradictory Spanish Policies they also suffered from. Puerto Rico offered asylum to runaway Africans, hosting Emigres from the French Colonies. Through smuggling Goods and enslaved people, Puerto Rico contributed to developing an active Caribbean communication network. While in Cuba, they took advantage of the implosion of the sugar industry in Saint-Domingue, monetizing off of the crash surging ahead within the 20 years of the first Haitian Slave Revolt. It was becoming the largest sugar producer (hence why enslaved people were imported more significantly to Cuba, some of which were Haitian Captives).

Lastly, but most importantly, the Dominican Republic supported the Haitian Revolution (when Spaniards were ruling) because it meant the weakening of the French in their attempt to build an empire. Post-revolution, the Dominican Republic freed itself from Spain, emulating the "One land, two worlds" idea. Making it the first independent nation in the Caribbean. The rule of President Boyer caused much demonization of Haitian politics and racial anxiety discourse ensued, as many of the Dominican Elites believed Haiti was to blame for their territory's ill/weakened state. Thus the tension between Haiti and the Dominican Republic continued.



## The Inspiration and Plot



Once On This Island is a faithful retelling of the story of Desiree. Born within the book *My Love, My Love* - a tale of a young girl, much like Ti Moune - who finds and saves an aristocratic man from death—falling in love at first sight and praying to the gods to help her find him on his side of the island. Sounds familiar, doesn't it? *My Love, My Love*, the origin story for *Once on this island*, is another spin-off adaptation of the *Little Mermaid* - but Caribbean (and both have hints of *Romeo and Juliet*!). The story itself is about a young woman who stumbles her way through the world, Ti Moune, who devotes her whole being to Daniel, hoping that with love and determination, she may overcome the societal boundaries between them, and more importantly overcome death with love. Unfortunately, Ti Moune's love is not enough for Daniel, and after Ti Moune sacrifices herself for him, she is reborn as a Tree that breaks the wall of division between the two societies.

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## The Characters



“There’s a mixing, a blending of worlds,” says [Ardizzone-West](#). “There’s the world of the play, kind of literally being set in Haiti, but also the world of the present moment. Here we are, a community of theater-goers gathering together in a similar way that this community of storytellers is gathering together, and we’re kind of all in the same space.”

### Ti Moune

An adopted peasant girl, she is an island girl with much curiosity and energy; her earnest and romantic view of all creations cause her to fall in love with Daniel, sacrificing her whole being for him.

Ti Moune is based on the main character in *My Love, My Love* - Desiree. It does not shy away from the fact that Ti Moune's casualty is a **"social commentary of how Black women constantly serve as casualties for the greater good and progression of society"** (Jazmin Maco). Reading *My Love, My Love* is a great way to understand the show more.

### Azaka

[The Wild One](#), [God of Earth](#). She is very caring and nurturing. Her kind disposition makes her well-suited to provide inhabitants with anything they need. \*most interaction with people on land!

This god was quite elusive in my research. From the Haitian to the Taino Native Caribbeans, there is not much to find, BUT it is important to note that Asaka, like the other Gods, is connected to earth and water; through it, they create life. Azaka is connected to the Gods, the Sky, and the people like the world's people. They are the most involved, similar to the Taino God Yocahu (Child of Atabey, identical to Erzulie), who was the god of the leading food crop, Cassava.



## **Agwé**

The God of Water. He is strong, clever, and compassionate.

[Some Fun Characteristics](#): Protector of Sailors, especially Fishermen. Age is similar to the Taino God Jurakan, a storm god. They are one of the Sky Gods and connected to the other gods by water (again, water is a symbol of life that touches the gods and people!) Jurakan is hard to appease and a bit belligerent. With a little incentive sometimes.

## **Erzulie**

[The Goddess of Love](#); beautiful and elegant, with a strong belief in the power of the heart, hence her tendency towards sympathy.

They have many names, from Erzuli Freda/Dantor/Ge-Rouge/Toho/Mapiangue, each with unique characteristics. Erzulie is multifaceted and considered a feminist, displaying every aspect of femininity. She is thought to be a wilder version of the virgin mary. They are similar to The Taino God Atabey (Goddess of Fertility, Mother of Yocahu), a beautiful, compassionate energy source. Atabey is like the Mother of the Gods. Their affinity for women goes so far as to connect emotionally; they are often there to intercede during children's birth.

## **Papa Ge**

The Demon of Death. He is proud and sly. His menacing ways are often a cause of distress, as he is in control of life and death.

The god of death within Haiti is called [Ghede](#) - a fashionable but deadly god also referred to as a spirit named Baron Samedi, who watches over cemeteries and stands as a metaphysical symbol of life and death. Also known as the god of sweetness and eternal delight, contradictory, but it is a good representation of the duality of death. This character is not simply evil or a protagonist nor are they good in any way, shape, or form. Like the God Maquetaurie Guayaba, the Lord of the Dead, ruler of Coabey, the underworld, prohibits unworthy souls from the Taino Ancestral Spirit Realm of eternal reward and peace.

## **Daniel Beauxhomme**

A youthful man from the wealthy part of the island. He is pale-skinned and inherently bound to fulfill the expectations of his higher social class. He struggles with his feelings for Ti Moune, another commentary on the fascination with the unknown. Daniel is fascinated by Ti Moune, her skin, clothes, etc. His ignorance of the repercussions of his rejection and his prioritization of status causes Ti Moune's death.



### **Mama Euralie**

Ti Moune's adoptive mother. She is fearful of social status and incredibly protective of her family. She and Tonton represent the unity of people within the Caribbean community.

### **Tonton Julian**

Ti Moune's adoptive father. He is filled with courage, fueled by his Love for his wife and daughter. Tonton and Euralie are good examples of how some Free enslaved persons lived content lives that could be better or worse but were just right, hence their fear of social status and Ti Moune's explorative nature.

### **Storytellers**

Represent the people of Haiti through their stories. Oral tales and stories were how many traditions were passed down from elders to the next generation, thus making the storytellers very influential in Ti Moune's outlook on life and her place in the world.

### **Andrea Deveraux**

Daniel's Fiance and later wife (a good representation of what was "expected" of people of the upper class at the time. An economically prominent French woman would likely have been considered a "Grand Blanc."

### **Armand Deveraux**

The Father of Daniel strongly disapproves of Daniel's association/and infatuation with Ti Moune. Most likely, an economically prominent French man, would have been considered a "Grand Blanc," basically a settler and likely either a plantation owner or a former one.

**\*It is important to note that many Gods had multiple personalities and names, so take the references and pictures/descriptions as a seed for growth and potential creativity/curiosity, NOT rock solid evidence, since much of the history was lost during the Taino Genocide post-Columbus**



**MOBOYAS** The *Taino* deity of death, darkness and destruction...His was the station of strife and fear, which he spread over the native *Taino* indians who did not placate him with sacrificial tributes. He's an ominous figure ever jealous of the attention and praise heap apoud *Yocahu*, *Atabey* the fertility deities... *Moboyas'* works are known throughout the *Carribean* and what is modern day *Santo Domingo*, *Cuba*, *Puerto Rico* and other connecting regions...



By Israel Solero

**JURAKAN** *Taino* storm god of hurricane. He is hard to appease, quite belligerent...



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**TABEY** *Taino* fertility goddess and she is on a par with *Yocahu* creator god. The *shean* goddess of ponds, streams and rain. *Atabey* has a affinity for woman and most often intercedes in their be- have dring time of birth... She is greatly revered by the *Taino*, *Arawak* indians...



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**GUABANCEX** The *Taino* wind goddess spurned by *Yocahu* (Supreme creator) in favor of *Atabey* (Fertility goddess). This ill-tempered wind goddess takes great pleasure in frustrating the affairs of man and woman by driving a wedge of jealousy between them. *Guabancex's* hurricane winds



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## Fun Facts

- French Colony in Haiti started as a pirate outpost; it made its living selling leather and a smoked beef called Boucan (the meat came from cattle left behind by the Spanish)
- In 1640, when they ran out of beef, the pirates started robbing Spanish ships loaded with silver mined in South America. French put a stop to this and forced settlement which started sugar plantations (which worked enslaved people to death in a vicious cycle)
- More than 40,000 enslaved people were shipped to Haiti every year due to the harsh conditions; 90% of the population, making the population outnumbered that of the French settlers (which may have contributed to the victorious revolution)
- French had a level system that separated the wealthy white people and the wealthy free people of color from the poor white people and enslaved people. Free people of color also owned plantations and enslaved people and were allowed to accumulate wealth, which caused much tension between them and the "Petit Blancs," the poor white settlers who lived on the island.
- **Order of Social Status:**
  - **Grand Blancs** (Wealthy French),
  - **Grand Hommes** (Wealthy Free People of Color),
  - **Petit Blancs** (Poor white people, basically the tension between the Petit blanc and Grand Homes started the war as they felt those of a darker complexion were not equally discriminated against)
  - **Enslaved people**
- Toussaint L'Ouverture became an officer in the Spanish Military due to the Spaniard's support in the revolution weakening the French Community (a lot of their revenue came from the sugar plantations of Haiti). He lost his French citizenship for this but was able to support the revolution. Also, L'Ouverture was an able politician and helped complete emancipation between 1784 and 1802, building more acceptable conditions for work for the now formerly enslaved people working on sugar cane plantations.
- The US isolated Haiti and cut off funds, fearing they would influence their state during the revolution.
- The Haitian Revolution was a significant source of inspiration for art during the Harlem Renaissance; it served as a way for people to get in touch with their roots. It bridges the African and Caribbean Diaspora and our deep connective history to the homeland.
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## Conclusion and Resources

### My Pinterest Boards:

<https://www.pinterest.com/abithanunis/>

### Reading Links:

#### My Love, My Love, and Once on This Island:

<https://barnard.edu/news/once-island-and-my-love-my-love-or-peasant-girl-conversation>

#### Pre-Columbian History of the Native Arawak:

<http://faculty.webster.edu/corbetre/haiti/history/precolumbian/tainover.htm>

#### Timeline of Haitian Revolution:

<https://historyincharts.com/timeline-of-the-haitian-revolution/>

<https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/haitian-independence-proclaimed>

#### Summary of Haitian Revolution:

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Haitian-Revolution>

#### The God's History Sources:

[Vodou Mythology - the gods and Spirits of Vodou \(godchecker.com\)](#)

<https://study.com/learn/lesson/taino-religion-gods-mythology-spirituality.html>

<https://www.pinterest.com/honeyangel0015/taino-gods-and-goddesses/>

#### My Love, My Love or The peasant Girl Book:

<https://www.amazon.com/My-Love-Peasant-Girl/dp/1566891310?asin=1566891310&revisionId=&format=4&depth=1>

<https://archive.org/details/mylovemyloveorth00guyr/page/n7/mode/2up> - Free! Just make an account with the school email and borrow until you are done reading

#### Costuming Links - CAP Haitian Festival (an excellent source to build ideas):

<https://haitianculture.tumblr.com/post/43572321255/accras-cap-haitian-festival-2013-source> - looking up the festival in general, you can find more pictures like this!!



Once on This Island inspiration:

<https://www.cincyplay.com/blog-single-post/cinncinati-blog/2019/09/27/rosa-guy-and-once-on-this-island>

More about Rosa Guy the Author of My Love, My Love

<https://blacktheatrecommons.org/dramaturgy/once-on-this-island/> - Mentions French breakdown of social status!

Jamaican Revolt in the 1830s:

<https://ageofrevolutions.com/2020/07/20/jamaica-on-fire-haiti-and-the-problem-of-inspiration/>

<https://www.zocalopublicsquare.org/2020/05/28/jamaican-uprising-samuel-sharpe-rebellion-christmas-uprising-great-jamaican-slave-revolt/ideas/essay/>

Dominican Republic Haitian Revolution Reactions:

<https://www.aaihs.org/haitian-and-dominican-freedom-struggles-in-the-nineteenth-century/>

Puerto Rican Haitian Revolution Response:

<https://africana.library.cornell.edu/thesis/interpretations-and-influences-of-the-haitian-revolution-in-puerto-rico-resistance-and-racism/>

Cuban Haitian Revolution Reactions:

<https://www.aaihs.org/haitian-and-dominican-freedom-struggles-in-the-nineteenth-century/>

Cross Cultural References - The Harlem Renaissance and Haiti:

<https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/harlem-haiti>

US Being Nosey AF:

<https://library.brown.edu/create/modernlatinamerica/chapters/chapter-14-the-united-states-and-latin-america/moments-in-u-s-latin-american-relations/a-history-of-united-states-policy-towards-haiti/>

<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1784-1800/haitian-rev>