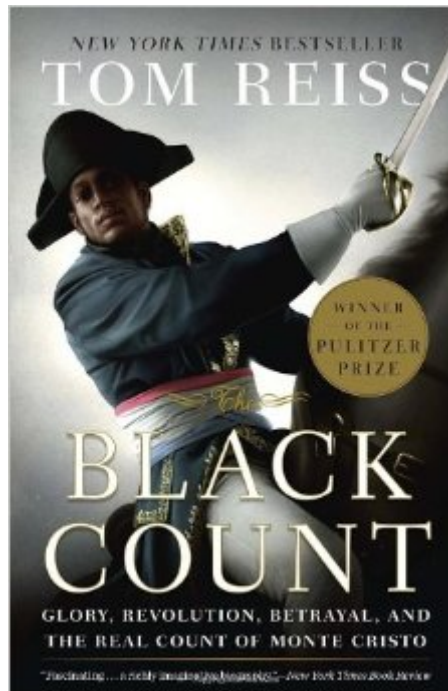


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The Black Count: Glory, Revolution, Betrayal, And The Real Count Of Monte Cristo



Synopsis

WINNER OF THE 2013 PULITZER PRIZE FOR BIOGRAPHY General Alex Dumas, is a man almost unknown today, yet his story is strikingly familiar because his son, the novelist Alexandre Dumas, used his larger-than-life feats as inspiration for such classics as *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *The Three Musketeers*. But, hidden behind General Dumas's swashbuckling adventures was an even more incredible secret: he was the son of a black slave who rose higher in the white world than any man of his race would before our own time. Born in Saint-Domingue (now Haiti), Alex Dumas made his way to Paris, where he rose to command armies at the height of the Revolution until he met an implacable enemy he could not defeat. TIME magazine called *The Black Count* "one of those quintessentially human stories of strength and courage that sheds light on the historical moment that made it possible." It is also a heartbreaking story of the enduring bonds of love between a father and son.

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Customer Reviews

The creative way in which Tom Reiss has written "*The Black Count: Glory, Revolution, Betrayal and the Real Count of Monte Crisco*" is remarkable. In writing the biography of General Alexandre Dumas, the father of the famous author Alexandre Dumas, Reiss engages the reader with the connections between the real life experiences of the father and the characters, plots, and locations used by the son in his novels "*The Count of Monte Cristo*" and "*The Three Musketeers*." Many of General Dumas exploits such as his imprisonment without trial in the Taranto fortress in the

Kingdom of Naples by "The Holy Faith Army" would become inspiration for the son's later book "The Count of Monte Cristo." Thomas-Alexandre Dumas Davy de la Pailleterie arrived in France from Saint-Domingue (Haiti) as a slave in 1776 at age 14, the son of a white fugitive aristocrat, the Marquis de la Pailleterie, and a black slave, Cessette Dumas. Enlisting in the army in June of 1786 Thomas-Alexandre would change his name to Alexandre Dumas for a number of reasons. Among the possible reasons, anger at his father for having sold him in Saint-Domingue or as an aristocrat's son he would be damaging his father name (the Marquis) by enlisting as a private instead of officer as was expected. Note: Thomas-Alexandre Dumas Davy de la Pailleterie would have had difficulty becoming an officer because of his mixed race and the law making it difficult to claim his rightful title. Alexandre's rise through the military ranks from private to general would be meteoric owing to the circumstances of the French Revolution and because of his individual attributes, such as bravery on the battlefield, his strength, equestrian ability, and swordsmanship.

I recently told my son I was reading a biography of Alexandre Dumas, not the novelist, but his father. He raised an eyebrow and said, "You must have more time than I do." He assumed this would be similar to the biography of Hemingway's father, or Steinbeck's father, men we know of only because they had famous sons. But that is just not the case. If young Alexandre had died in infancy, the story of his dashing and remarkable father would still be one worth reading. What an astonishing life. While I would consider myself to know more history than the average joe, my knowledge and understanding of France's past was clearly more slight than I realized. That gap has been diminished immeasurably by this wonderful book. For it deftly and skillfully places the events of the times in the context of the life I was reading about, merging the biography of a gallant, fiery and elegant man and an overview of one of the most tumultuous periods in history. And does so in a manner that manages to keep the reader focused on what was happening at the time, rather than dragging in those irritating, "If only he had known what was about to happen" or "His dreams would soon be shattered" brickbats. And the sordid and sad tale of the temporary revolutionary racial equality and its demise was wonderfully told. That itself would make a great book. My only complaint, and it is just a minor irritation but one that prevents the fifth star, is the incessant authorial interjections. I guess when you see the author's name is Tom, not Thomas, you can expect a more casual book, and while the author is clearly a scholar and superlative researcher, there were, for my taste, too many "When I read this..." and "While discussing that..." moments. I know you read these documents.

Cudos, Mr. Reiss, you have written a masterpiece! This detailed book reads like a novel, with its fluid narrative that presents the autobiographical story of Alex Dumas and his tremendous contribution to the French Revolution. Mr. Reiss weaves a fascinating story while incorporating a plethora of resources having expended years of effort in accumulating tremendous research materials to substantiate the accuracy of this account. It is a quick read that connects the dots and encompasses critical historic moments leading to the re-creation of France and eventually much of the European theater. Surely, this epic tome will become required reading for historians, who want a fresh perspective on the French Revolution and how the freed mulatto slave, Alexandre Dumas born in what is now Haiti, demonstrated throughout his military career, using his tremendous strategic skill, honor, courage and fighting aptitude to win many battles! At first, Mr. Reiss presents a brief history of his father, Alexandre Antoine Davy de la Pailleterie who having left France to seek his fortune in Saint-Domingue (Haiti), then a resource rich colony of France, known for its great production of sugar cane. He married a wealthy woman and purchased a plantation and slaves to become a sugar producer. Later, he purchased a black woman, Marie-Cessette, who was considered quite a beauty for a tremendous sum. Together, they had four children, including a son named Thomas-Alexandre (whom later detached from his father's noble status instead used part of his mother's full name, to be known as Alexandre Dumas or Alex Dumas).

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