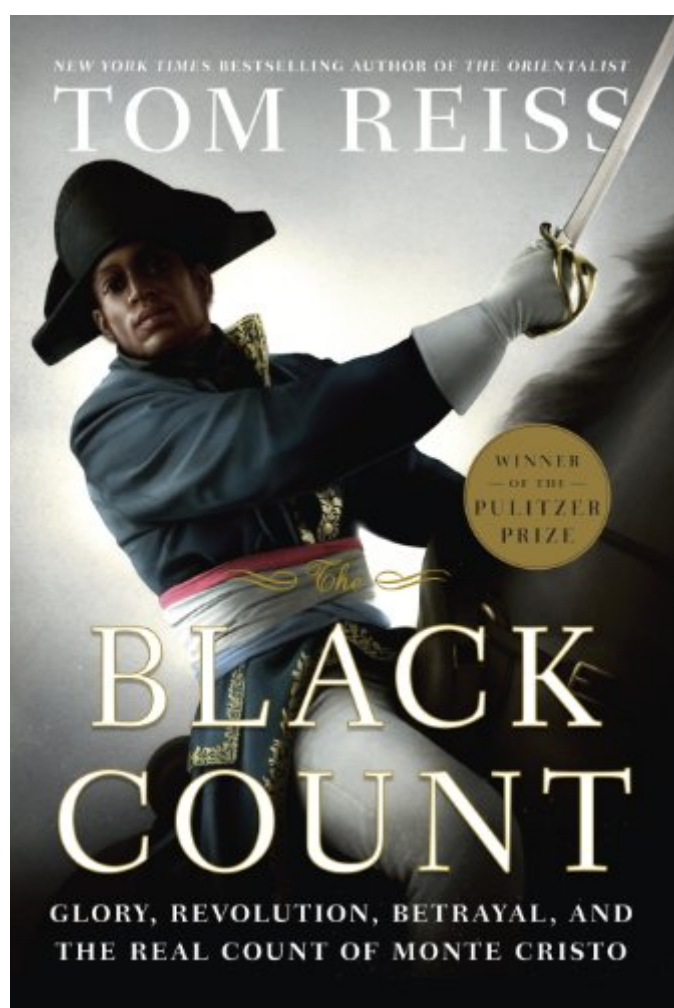


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# The Black Count: Glory, Revolution, Betrayal, And The Real Count Of Monte Cristo (Pulitzer Prize For Biography)



## 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. *The Black Count* is simultaneously a riveting adventure story, a lushly textured evocation of 18th-century France, and a window into the modern world's first multi-racial society. *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." But it is also a heartbreaking story of the enduring bonds of love between a father and son.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

For the sake of full transparency, this book was on my Kindle because 1) it was recommended as free or inexpensive by BookBub (I don't remember which) and 2) Alexandre Dumas caught my eye, having enjoyed a few of his works immensely. A biographical account of a soldier of the French Revolution is certainly unique in my library. That said, I read this in 3 days (as a busy, working parent;)! The plight of Alex Dumas is surprisingly accessible and captivating. The author did an excellent job creating an informative, thrilling narrative. It was also very enjoyable to me, in that I've always felt somewhat flummoxed by the various aspects and timeline of the French Revolution - following particular characters through the first several years allowed information to be synthesized (vs perusing wiki). I now feel confident / compelled to find information on the later portion of the conflict, since the author did such a nice job presenting the beginning. The racial component is utterly fascinating as well! Excellent read for anyone who enjoys biographies, wants to learn more about the French Revolution, is interested in civil rights throughout history or simply is a fan of all things Dumas!:)

Tom Reiss, the man who gave life to the obscure and romantic Kurban Said returns with a hero from history but nobody knew. The Black Prince tells the story of a great man who was erased from history. General Alex Dumas was a commanding figure of the French revolution and the father to the most famous author of the novel about literature's most famous erased man: The Count of Monte Cristo, By Alexander Dumas. Part of what makes Tom Reiss so readable is that he relies on his story. He will embellish (lightly) and is not good at critical biography, but what is important to me: He trusts his story and stays with it. In order to understand how unlikely General Dumas's life was the reader needs a background in the man's heritage, his unexpected survival as a slave turned favored richman's son and a military career unlikely for even a white man of his generation and title. Yes a mulatto slave boy with a French title. Clearly there is need for explanation. In deft and short chapters Reiss gives the back story on the General's French white heritage, some of his childhood and orientation in the French Revolution. A rarely related aspect of the revolution is that it built on a pre-existing tradition of granting freedom to black slaves. Then capped it by ending slavery, even if not effectively. Again, understanding this requires time away from the central character. This is in answer to criticisms that Black Count includes substantial material not directly about General Dumas. From slave to count to enlisted dragoon to general to military hero are a lot of unlikely events. Absent the back story half of the achievements of this man cannot be appreciated. For all of his achievements, the life of the Black Count was all but erased. His family left in poverty and

friends choose expedience over the duties of friendship. This is a lot of story for a relatively short book, but Tom Reiss gets it. As much as I enjoyed the improbable life of this black hero, this is not a critical biography. We know of the great deeds of General Dumas, often through the eyes of his adoring novelist son, but often with objective corroboration. That said, this is not a critical or a balanced analysis of General Dumas. Reiss is not a military historian and so there is little military analysis of the General's battles or strategy. General Dumas tending to lead from the very front of the front, and perhaps he had no strategy. From this biography we cannot know. The story of General Dumas is an important, dramatic and inspirational. The Black community has an ownership in his achievements and his legacy. Tom Reiss has done important work in returning General Dumas to his readers. One hope there will be more books, and with them more depth.

I'm a huge fan of History and truthfully I'm a little embarrassed to admit that I knew very little about the father of one of France's greatest novelists. Tom Reiss' account of the life of this INCREDIBLE man reads like an epic of old. Son of a scoundrel with a title Alexandre Dumas rose through the ranks from a private in the cavalry to France's highest ranking General. I loved this book so much I recommended it to several friends who found it as enthralling as I did. If someone with the history channel doesn't opt to make a mini-series out of this incredible book I'll be amazed!

The life story of Alex Dumas is quite interesting, and the beginning of the book moves the narrative along fairly well, but it bogs down once Dumas becomes a general--too many details about battles and military campaigns, at least for me. The author is excruciatingly faithful to history, as he reminds the reader often during the course of the book; however, his side notes detailing his research tend to take away from the story-telling, and the account becomes more of a history lesson than a good read. I would have enjoyed the book more if it was written in the style of a novel (even if the author had to add details from his own imagination).

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