

panic throughout the city. Three cannon shots summoned a special session of the Provincial Assembly. Stores closed and house slaves were closely watched. People came and went, passing each other unrecognized, posing a thousand questions without waiting for an answer. Soon the call to arms was heard, echoed by everyone's voice. Eventually two or three hundred national guards, reinforced by a detachment of the Cap regiment and by three small artillery pieces, were dispatched to the Haut du Cap.\* There they encountered the whites fleeing from Acul and neighboring parishes. The roads were filled with carriages, carts, women, children, the sick and the dying. . . .

During the night of Tuesday to Wednesday August 23, the rebels left the parish of the North Plain behind them and attacked Petite Anse. Their furor was exerted against the Choiseul plantation. Enraged at not finding the manager, they took his domestic slave, who they accused of helping him escape, and threw him into the burning plantation house alive, despite the prayers, sobs, and despair of his mother. From here they went to the plantation of the Fathers of Charity; some lit the bagasse houses<sup>†</sup> on fire while others pitilessly took the under-manager and killed him. The Bongars and Clericy plantations experienced the same horrors. The bodies of their manager and under-manager were displayed at the gate. Pushed away from the Quartier Morin by the resistance of the slave crews, the brigands retraced their steps and arrived as a group at La Gossette. M. Odelucq was there with all the whites. There were even fifteen or twenty national guardsmen who had arrived the previous day, but they were so poorly armed, so little accustomed to war that as the rebels approached, hearing the sound of their ferocious cries, they threw down their weapons and fled through the cane fields to the camp at the Cap Français Heights. M. Odelucq remained, almost alone, believing he could face down the brigands. He appeared before them; the most savage of all, named Mathurin, came up to him and plunged his knife into his chest. M. Daveiroult, the representative of Gros Morne to the new Colonial Assembly, was cut down at his side, as well as two men from the detachment that had arrived the previous day.

The *nègres*, emboldened by their success and rendered even more violent by their overindulgence in wine and strong spirits, advanced

\*A small town one league from the city.

†These are vast barns used to store the sugarcanes after they have passed through the mill. They are kept to burn for heating [in the refinery].

toward the Haut du Cap. The cannon here stopped them. But the Denort, Decourt, and Vergennes plantations went up in flames, and before ten o'clock the three parishes of Acul, the North Plain, and Petite Anse were only a heap of cinders. . . .

The size and the number of establishments consumed by the flames created a spectacle that witnesses will never forget. The thick cloud of black smoke, which during daylight hung above the Cap Français horizon, after sunset took on the appearance of an aurora borealis situated above about twenty plantations changed into so many volcanoes. At midnight, fire appeared at the wharf of Limonade, announcing the appearance of the rebels in this district. And the next day, the two richest and most important parishes of the northern province were nothing more than a pile of ashes and ruin.

This was just the fourth day of the revolt, and already the whites of six parishes were either refugees, prisoners, or corpses. Flames had consumed one hundred sugar works; and twenty thousand slaves, once peaceful and submissive, were now so many cannibals, threatening Cap Français with the same fate.

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PIERRE MOSSUT

*Letter to the Marquis de Gallifet*

September 19, 1791

*In this letter, plantation manager Pierre Mossut described the slave uprising to his absentee employer, the Marquis de Gallifet. Mossut blamed the circulation of abolitionist writings and the indiscreet conversations of planters for the revolt, but he also wrote that there was something driving the insurgents that he could not understand.*

The varied writings produced in your capital [Paris] in favor of the Negroes, the unbelievable discussions that led to the May 15 decree,

writings that have long circulated in the colony and that the negroes knew about, the very indiscretion of the planters who show no restraint in their actions or their statements, all these causes united have finally led the class of the slaves to revolt. . . .

We were attacked by a horde of assassins and could only offer meager resistance. After the first volley, we took refuge in flight. M. Odelucq, weakened by his age, by a wound he had already received, and weighed down by the boots he was wearing at the time, had the misfortune to fall under the daggers of these brigands. I owe my safety to a domestic servant who presented me with a horse at the moment when our resistance was becoming impossible. But, Monsieur, I saved myself wounded, with only the shirt on my back, having lost in an instant the fruit of nine years of work on your plantations; the other people employed on your properties are all more or less in the same situation. . . .

There is a motor that powers them and that keeps powering them and that we cannot come to know. All experienced planters know that this class of men have neither the energy nor the combination of ideas necessary for the execution of this project, whose realization they nevertheless are marching toward with perseverance. . . . we have executed many slaves, among them ten from your plantation; all have observed their obstinate silence when questioned about who armed them and incited this odious conspiracy,<sup>9</sup> though they admit to being guilty and having participated in it. . . .

Despite my wounds, I climbed up the highest hill bordering Le Cap, and from there with a telescope I could see your plantations perfectly well. All the bagasse houses have been destroyed, along with all the cane that was to be crushed between now and the end of the year. The main houses, the buildings, the sugar refineries are intact. . . . but it is to be feared, and in fact it is probable and almost certain, that when these fanatics are attacked in their retrenchments, they will set fire to all the remaining buildings before retreating to the hills. If we are able to defeat them, we will have to resolve ourselves to the sacrifice of a large portion of the work gangs and establish the most severe discipline to control those people, who more than ever will be difficult to command.

<sup>9</sup>This word is unclear in the letter; it could be either *transe* (trance) or *trame* (conspiracy), but the context of the document makes it probable that it is the latter.

## PHILADELPHIA GENERAL ADVERTISER

### *Reports from the Insurrection*

October–November 1791

*The following reports from the Philadelphia General Advertiser provide interesting fragments of information about the insurrection, notably regarding the presence of some whites among the insurgents, the various roles played by free people of color in both supporting and resisting the insurrection, and the military tactics of the rebels. Newspapers captured only a small portion of information about the insurrection that spread to North America by word of mouth, including among communities of slaves to whom the news of insurrection was of particular interest. We have maintained the sometimes awkward punctuation of the original reports here. The first report is in the form of a journal, with the numbers at the beginning of each entry corresponding to the date of the month.*

PHILADELPHIA GENERAL ADVERTISER, No. 322, TUESDAY, OCTOBER 11

The following concise and connected account of the late disturbances at St. Domingo, from their origin down to the latest intelligence received from that island, is taken from a Journal kept there, handed to us by an obliging Correspondent, and translated for the GENERAL ADVERTISER. . . .

Sept. 1. There has been an engagement in the upper part of the Cape. About 60 negroes were killed. A mulatto and two negroes, after the engagement, advanced, and asked to parley with the General.—He came forward, and they were asked what they wanted. They answered that they required perfect liberty for all the negroes;—the two negroes were killed, and the mulatto was suffered to escape.

A free negro, named Cappe, made his appearance on the plantation *Lambert* near the city, to encourage the negroes to revolt. He has been seized, and it is expected much will be learned from him.

2. Two whites have been stopped, together with a Spanish mulatto. Their names were given up by Cappe; who has given an account of the