Laurent Dubois & John D. Garrigus, Slave Revolution in the Caribbean: 1789–1804 (2006)

through the Constantin passage and two companies of the center the Nosières bridge.

The enemy had advanced posts close to the bridge over the Pères river. As soon as they saw our troops, they retreated behind the St.-Louis River, whose wide crossing, at the level of the Fifi-Massieux plantation, was defended by two cannons. The third battalion of the sixty-sixth performed marvels of bravery to penetrate it, but all its efforts were useless. While the firing was very heavy, the commander Delacroix, with 150 men, crossed the river at its narrowest ford in the area called the horseshoe and took the battery that was stopping his battalion. As he was carrying out this success, the citizen Cambriel, with the second battalion of this demi-brigade, arrived near the Lassale coffee plantation after having overcome incredible difficulties in the woods, which are not pierced by any trails. The enemy, surprised by a maneuver they did not expect, and which put them in a very bad position, hastily retreated to Anglemont. The commander Delacroix took advantage of this to occupy the Parc, which the insurgents could have taken great advantage of. He established communication with the citizen Cambriel, and they both agreed to let their troops take a rest so they would be ready for a vigorous attack. All the bravery of the company of grenadiers was unable to break through the passage of the Constantin hill. The situation of the enemy was so advantageous that, without risking the loss of a single man, they killed all those who presented themselves. Seven grenadiers were killed in this attack. . . . [I]n 1793, the English sacrificed 700 men trying to take this same position without making any progress. The Nosières bridge presents the same difficulties. In any case, the enemy had mostly destroyed this bridge that crosses a precipice 150 feet deep.

The general-in-chief, having visited these two points, ordered that we limit ourselves to harassing the blacks by firing a cannon in their direction. Because of this, the successes of the day were left to the two battalions of the sixty-sixth. At three o'clock in the afternoon, they continued their march towards Anglemont, tightening their line more and more as they approached. The activity, the courage, even recklessness of the *nègres* since the beginning of the attack, the unanimous cry of "Live free or die!" that they often repeated, the care they took to remove the white color from their flag to symbolize their independence clearly announced that their situation was desperate and their resistance would be terrible. It was, in effect, but seeing that it was useless, and with fear beginning to win them over, about 150 men escaped by slipping into the woods that paralleled the pass of the Nosières bridge, and the

rest retreated to the d'Anglemont plantation. We charged after them with fixed bayonets. Already a few of the bravest had crossed a ditch surrounding it when a terrible explosion showed us one of the most horrible scenes that war can produce. D'Anglemont had just exploded; its dispersed rubble became a vast pyre whose flames devoured more than 500 corpses, among which we could see women and children.

A surviving prisoner told us that Delgrès, having been wounded in the knee and no longer able to ride a horse, had resolved to die once he saw himself surrounded. He communicated this project to his companions, who adopted it with a ferocious enthusiasm. Immediately, barrels of powder were positioned in such a way as to create the most terrible effect. The blacks, holding each other by the hand, encouraged one another by shouting "No slavery! Long live death!" The signal was about to be given when one of those humanitarian impulses which are sometimes placed in the souls of villains to soften the horror they inspire, pushed Delgrès to save the whites who the fortunes of war had placed in his hands. They exited, but almost all of them were killed by the far-reaching fragments from the explosion.

This act of appalling courage ended the war by destroying all at once, with one blow, the leaders of the revolt, their elite soldiers, and the rest of their ammunition.

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NAPOLÉON BONAPARTE AND GENERAL CHARLES-VICTOR-EMMANUEL LECLERC

Letters

1802–1803

In late 1801, Napoléon Bonaparte, now the First Consul of France and its most powerful political leader, began negotiations to secure a peace with the British. After the preliminaries of a peace treaty were signed in October, he set in motion preparations for a massive expedition to be sent to Saint-Domingue. Having learned about Louverture's constitution, and

Paul Roussier, ed., *Lettres du Général Leclerc* (Paris, 1937), 263–74.

considering it a slap in the face, he had determined to rid himself of the black general and his partisans in the island.

The following selections come from the instructions given to Napoléon's brother-in-law, Charles-Victor-Emmanuel Leclerc, by the French government. Although their intent is clearly to destroy the power of the black generals of the colony, the instructions claim that the "blacks" of Saint-Domingue will remain free under a coercive labor regime like that of Guadeloupe. This statement may have been included to trick the population of the colony, since Bonaparte understood that the threat of a return to slavery would probably incite massive resistance. Or it may be that Bonaparte had not yet decided to reestablish slavery in the colony, as he eventually would.

Notes to Serve as Instructions to Give to the Captain General Leclerc

CHAPTER I

In order to clearly understand these instructions, it is necessary to divide the time of the expedition into three phases.

The first is made up of the fifteen or twenty first days that will be necessary to occupy the key points, organize the national guard, reassure those with good intentions, unite the convoys, organize the artillery transports, accustom the mass of the army to the habits and character of the land, and take possession of the plains.

The second phase is that during which, with the two armies prepared, we will pursue the rebels without mercy; we will flush them out first of the French part and then of the Spanish part. . . .

The third phase is that in which Toussaint, Moyse,[1] and Dessalines will no longer exist and three thousand or four thousand blacks who have retreated into the hills of the Spanish part will form what we call in the islands maroons, and who we will succeed in destroying with time, steady effort, and a well-organized strategy of attack.

CHAPTER II

The prospect of a black republic is equally disturbing to the Spanish, the English, and the Americans. The admiral and the captain general will write circulars to neighboring establishments to make them know the goal of the government, the common advantage Europeans have in destroying this rebellion of the blacks, and the hope of receiving support. . . . Jefferson has promised that at the instant the French army has arrived, all measures will be taken to starve Toussaint and to assist our army.

[1]Bonaparte is referring here to Moïse, one of Louverture's top generals. Louverture had accused Moïse of participating in an uprising against him and had executed him a few months earlier.

CHAPTER III

The French nation will never place chains on men it has recognized as free. There all the blacks will live in Saint-Domingue as they live today in Guadeloupe.

The conduct to follow depends on the three phases talked of above.

During the first phase, we will disarm only the blacks who are rebels.

In the third, we will disarm them all.

During the first phase, we will not be demanding: we will deal with Toussaint, will promise him whatever he might ask for in order to take possession of the key points, and introduce ourselves into the country.

Once the first goal is accomplished, we will become more demanding. . . . In interviews we might have with Moyse, Dessalines, and the other generals of Toussaint, we will treat them well. We will win over . . . all the blacks who support the whites. During the first phase, we will confirm them in their ranks and their employment. In the third phase, we will send them all to France, keeping them in their ranks if they served well during the second. . . .

Toussaint will be considered subdued only once he has come to Le Cap or Port-au-Prince, in the middle of the French army, and made an oath of loyalty to the republic. On that day, we must, without a scandal, without insults, but with honor and consideration, place him on a frigate and send him to France. We should arrest Moyse and Dessalines at the same time if we can, or pursue them without mercy and then send to France all the whites who are partisans of Toussaint, all the blacks with positions who are suspected of ill will. Moyse and Dessalines will be declared traitors to the fatherland and enemies of the French people. Put the troops on the march and take no rest until we have their heads and have dissipated all their partisans.

If after the first fifteen or twenty days it is impossible to bring back Toussaint, we must declare in a proclamation that if he does not come in a set number of days and make his oath to the republic, he will be declared a traitor to the fatherland, and at the expiration of the deadline we will begin a war without mercy.

Even if a few thousand blacks are still wandering in the hills and seeking refuge in the backcountry, the captain general should still recognize that the second phase is over and promptly move on to the third. This will be the moment to forever assure the colony for France. And on that same day throughout the colony, we must arrest all untrustworthy men in positions of authority, whatever color they are, and place all the black generals on ships, regardless of their behavior, their patriotism, and the services they have rendered, being careful however to maintain not to demote them, and providing assurances that they will be well treated in France.

All the whites who have served under Toussaint and committed crimes in Saint-Domingue will be sent directly to Guyana.

All the blacks who have behaved well, but who because of their rank cannot be left on the island, will be sent to Brest.

All the blacks and men of color who have behaved badly, of whatever rank, will be sent to the Mediterranean and dropped in a port of the island of Corsica.

If Toussaint, Dessalines, and Moyse are taken with weapons in their hands, they will be judged by a military commission within twenty-four hours and shot as rebels.

Whatever happens, we believe that in the course of the third phase we must disarm all the *nègres,* no matter what party they are a part of, and put them back to work in the fields.

White women who have prostituted themselves to *nègres,* whatever their rank, will be sent to Europe.

Little went as Bonaparte planned, however. The resistance of Louverture and his partisans was fiercer and more successful than the French expected, and the war against them dragged on for many months and cost the French significant casualties. Several weeks after writing the following letters, Leclerc died of the yellow fever that had taken so many of his troops. He was succeeded by General Donatien Rochambeau, who took the level of atrocity directed against the blacks to a new level, massacring many black soldiers still fighting for the French.

Leclerc to Bonaparte, October 7, 1802

In Messidor[2] and a part of Thermidor, I held the country without any real forces. At the end of Thermidor, the war began, and it doubled my losses of men. At the end of Fructidor, my army and my reinforcements had been destroyed. Then the blacks, witnesses to my weakness, became audacious. . . .

One battalion of the eleventh colonial regiment that had been merged into the Cap Français Legion had suffered a number of desertions, and so 176 men from this battalion were shipped from Jacmel to Port Républicain.[3] Of this number, 173 strangled themselves on the way, with the leader of the battalion at their head. These are the men we have to fight. . . .

You will perhaps blame me for not having gotten rid of the black chiefs earlier, but remember that I was never in a position to do so and that I was planning on being able to act against them during this season. I have no false moves to reproach myself of, citizen Consul, and if my position has changed from very good to very bad, what is to blame is only the sickness that has destroyed my army, the premature reestablishment of slavery in Guadeloupe, and the newspapers and letters from France that talk of nothing but slavery.

Here is my opinion on this country. We must destroy all the *nègres* of the mountains, men and women, and keep only children under twelve years old, destroy half of those of the plain, and not leave in the colony a single man of color who has worn an epaulette. Otherwise, the colony will never be quiet, and at the beginning of each year, especially after murderous seasons like this one, you will have a civil war that will compromise the possession of the country. If you wish to be the master of Saint-Domingue, you must send me twelve thousand men without wasting a single day. . . .

If you cannot send me the troops that I have asked for, and by the time I have requested, Saint-Domingue will be forever lost to France.

[2]Messidor, Thermidor, and Fructidor are months from the revolutionary calendar. Leclerc is describing his situation in July, August, and September 1802.

[3]Port-au-Prince. Revolutionary governments in both Saint-Domingue and France frequently changed place names that had previously referred to the new toppled aristocratic regime.

Roussier, *Lettres,* 253–59.

In another letter written the same day to Bonaparte, Leclerc lamented:

As for me, I have always served you loyally; I will continue to do so and execute all your orders to the letter. I will justify the good opinion you have of me, but I cannot resign myself to stay here for next summer. Since I have been here, I have seen only the spectacle of fires, insurrections, murders, of the dead and the dying. My soul has withered, and no joyful idea can ever make me forget these hideous scenes. I fight here against the blacks, against the whites, against misery and the lack of money, against my discouraged army. Once I have spent six more months in this way, I will deserve some rest.

Roussier, *Lettres*, 259–60.

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MARY HASSAL

From *Secret History; or the Horrors of St. Domingo*

1808

One of those who witnessed the French debacle in Saint-Domingue was Leonora Sansay, the wife of a Saint-Domingue planter who had left the colony during the early years of the revolution but returned after the arrival of the French expedition, hoping to regain his property. Sansay wrote a letter to Aaron Burr, whom she had met during her stay in the United States, about her experiences during this time. A few years later, under the pseudonym Mary Hassal, she published a book, in the form of a series of letters that described the last days of the French presence in the colony.

Mary Hassal [Leonora Sansay], *Secret History; or, the Horrors of St. Domingo, in a Series of Letters Written by a Lady at Cape François to Colonel Burr* (Philadelphia: Bradford & Inskelp, 1808). Sansay's original letter to Aaron Burr is reprinted in Charles Burdett, *Margaret Moncrieffe; the First Love of Aaron Burr* (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1860), 428–37.

Letter II

What a change has taken place here since my last letter was written! I mentioned that there was to be a grand review, and I also mentioned that the confidence General Leclerc placed in the negroes was highly blamed, and justly, as he has found to his cost.

On the day of the review, when the troops of the line and the guard national were assembled on the field, a plot was discovered, which had been formed by the negroes in the town, to seize the arsenal and to point the cannon of a fort, which overlooked the place of review, on the troops; whilst Clairvaux, the mulatto general, who commanded the advanced posts, was to join the negroes of the plain, overpower the guards, and entering the town, complete the destruction of the white inhabitants. The first part of the plot was discovered and defeated. But Clairvaux made good on his escape, and in the evening attacked the post General Leclerc had so imprudently confided in him. The consternation was terrible. . . .

The ensuing morning presented a dreadful spectacle. Nothing was heard but the groans of the wounded, who were carried through the streets to their homes, and the cries of the women for their friends who were slain.

The general, shut up in his house, would see nobody; ashamed of the weakness which had led to this disastrous event, and of the want of courage he had betrayed: a fever seized him and he died in three days.

Madame Leclerc,[4] who had not loved him whilst living, mourned his death like the Ephesian matron,[5] cut off her hair, which was very beautiful, to put it in his coffin, refused all sustenance and all public consolation.

General Rochambeau, who is at Port-au-Prince, has been sent for by the inhabitants of the Cape to take the command. . . .

Letter III

The so much desired general Rochambeau is at length here. His arrival was announced, not by the ringing of bells, for they have none, but by the firing of cannon. Everybody, except myself went to see him

[4]Pauline Bonaparte, the sister of Napoleon.
[5]In *The Satyricon,* the Roman author Petronius tells the story of an inconsolable widow in the Greek city of Euphesus.