

September 27, 1791. Adrien Jean François Duport (1759–1798), a deputy from the nobility of Paris, proposed the motion. The deputies shouted down those who attempted to speak against it, and it quickly passed. A subsequent amendment indicated that swearing the civic oath implied a renunciation of previous Jewish privileges, that is, the right to an autonomous community ruled by its own members according to its own customs. The law required Jews to be individuals just like everyone else in France.

DUPORT: I have one very short observation to make to the Assembly, which appears to be of the highest importance and which demands all its attention. You have regulated by the Constitution, Sirs, the qualities deemed necessary to become a French citizen, and an active citizen: that sufficed, I believe, to regulate all the incidental questions that could have been raised in the Assembly relative to certain professions, to certain persons. But there is a decree of adjournment that seems to strike a blow at these general rights: I speak of the *Jews*. To decide the question that concerns them, it suffices to lift the decree of adjournment that you have rendered and which seems to suspend the question in their regard. Thus, if you had not rendered a decree of adjournment on the question of the Jews, it would not have been necessary to do anything; for, having declared by your Constitution how all peoples of the earth could become French citizens and how all French citizens could become active citizens, there would have been no difficulty on this subject.

I ask therefore that the decree of adjournment be revoked and that it be declared relative to the Jews that they will be able to become active citizens, like all the peoples of the world, by fulfilling the conditions prescribed by the Constitution. I believe that freedom of worship no longer permits any distinction to be made between the political rights of citizens on the basis of their beliefs and I believe equally that the Jews cannot be the only exceptions to the enjoyment of these rights, when pagans, Turks, Muslims, Chinese even, men of all the sects, in short, are admitted to these rights.

Decree of the National Assembly of September 27, 1791

The National Assembly, considering that the conditions necessary to be a French citizen and to become an active citizen are fixed by the Constitution, and that every man meeting the said conditions, who swears the civic oath, and engages himself to fulfill all the duties that the Constitution

imposes, has the right to all of the advantages that the Constitution assures;

Revokes all adjournments, reservations, and exceptions inserted into the preceding decrees relative to Jewish individuals who will swear the civic oath which will be regarded as a renunciation of all the privileges and exceptions introduced previously in their favor.

Free Blacks and Slaves

25

The Abolition of Negro Slavery or Means for Ameliorating Their Lot

1789

The vote on the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, explicitly cited in this pamphlet, did not go unnoticed by those who favored abolition of the slave trade and eventual emancipation of the slaves. Yet even the most determined adversaries of slavery worried about the consequences of immediate abolition, especially for the French economy. As a result, advocates of abolition put forward a variety of proposals for gradual emancipation and restructuring of the colonial economies. Their proposals gained little support in the National Assembly, where the planters in the colonies had many allies.

At a time when a new light has come to enlighten minds in all Europe; when the French National Assembly has already destroyed the hydra of feudalism in the kingdom; when it has established the Rights of Man and recognized that *God has created all men free; that this liberty should only be hampered by chains that they give themselves voluntarily, to prevent the strongest from making an attempt on the liberty, the life or the property of the weakest*; then slavery should only continue to exist for criminals

L'Esclavage des nègres aboli ou moyens d'améliorer leur sort (Paris: Chez Froullé, 1789), 3–10.

condemned according to the laws. In consequence liberty ought to be restored to that multitude of unfortunate beings, our brothers though of different color, whom European greed has kidnapped annually for nearly three centuries from the coasts of Africa and condemned to an eternal captivity, hard work, and harsh treatment.

The political interests and property rights that would be infringed if freedom was suddenly restored to the Negroes of our colonies are without doubt great obstacles to fulfilling the wishes that humanity has made in favor of these unfortunate Africans. If the French nation entirely prohibited the Negro slave trade, if it broke at the same time the chains of all those who live in our colonies, that would jolt commerce too violently; that would risk the loss of the plantations in the colonies and the immense shipping that they feed. . . . Moreover, if France alone undertook something similar, it would render itself a tributary of the other nations that possess sugar colonies and which would keep their slaves. . . .

I propose making Negro slavery like the condition of soldiers by providing an enlistment for a definite time at the end of which freedom would be restored to them. It cannot be concealed that the enlistment of a soldier is a veritable slavery, since from the moment that he contracts his engagement until its expiration, he cannot break it without being punished by death; during all this time he is neither master of his time nor of his actions; he is subject, on pain of punishment, to blindly obey the orders of his superiors; he is subjugated to fatigue, danger, to exposing himself often to an almost certain death. . . .

Being able to be kept similarly in slavery only for a limited time, the Negroes will be therefore no more slaves than a soldier: like him they will be obligated to obey during the duration of their enlistment; they will be subjugated to work of another type, it is true, but proportionate to their strength. . . .

To carry out this proposition, it would be necessary to promulgate a law that would decide: 1) That from such and such an epoch the blacks transported from Africa to our colonies could only be sold on the condition that the inhabitants who bought them would restore their freedom at the end of ten years and give at that time to each Negro a sum sufficient to pay his passage to return to his country. . . . 3) In regard to the Negroes currently enslaved in the colonies, one could divide them into ten classes for every dwelling. One would put into the first class the oldest tenth and the youngest, and the others in proportion to their age in the intermediate classes. At the end of a fixed year freedom would be restored to those of the first class and thus in the same manner as indicated above successively from year to year to those of the other classes.

By this means at the end of ten years all the current slaves will have recovered their freedom, except for those who freely took up new enlistments as previously explained. . . .

Nevertheless, if according to the representation of the inhabitants of the colonies, whom it is suitable to consult before ruling on this subject, this sacrifice on their part is judged too great, could not the state accord them a compensation proportionate to the individual value of the blacks to whom freedom would be restored? There are more than 500,000 slaves in our colonies. If the compensation was set at 500 *livres*, French money, by head, this would amount to 250 million *livres*; that is to say, 25 million a year for ten years.

26

*Motion Made by Vincent Ogé the Younger
to the Assembly of Colonists*

1789

Vincent Ogé presented the views of his fellow mulatto property owners to a meeting of the white planter delegates who had come to Paris from Saint Domingue, the largest and wealthiest French colony. Ogé went to Paris to press mulatto claims for full civil and political rights. This document shows the complexity of the racial and hence political situation in the colonies; the mulattoes wanted to align themselves with the white planters, because they were, like them, property and slave owners. But the white planters resisted any such coalition, for they feared that such an alliance might encourage the slaves to demand changes in their status. When the slaves of Saint Domingue began their revolution in August 1791, the mulattoes and free blacks took varying and sometimes contradictory positions, some supporting the whites, some taking the side of the slaves, some trying to maintain an independent position. By then Ogé himself had died, executed for leading a mulatto rebellion in the fall of 1790.

Motion faite par M. Vincent Ogé, jeune à l'Assemblée des Colons, Habitans de S.-Domingue, à l'Hôtel de Massiac, Place des Victoires (n.p., n.d. but probably Paris, 1789).

But Sirs, this word of Freedom that one cannot pronounce without enthusiasm, this word that carries with it the idea of happiness, is this not because it seems to want to make us forget the evils that we have suffered for so many centuries? This Freedom, the greatest, the first of goods, is it made for all men? I believe so. Should it be given to all men? I believe so again. But how should it be rendered? What should be the timing and the conditions? Here is for us, Sirs, the greatest, the most important of all questions; it interests America, Africa, France, all Europe and it is principally this question that has determined me, Sirs, to ask you to hear me out.

If we do not take the most prompt and efficacious measures; if firmness, courage, and constancy do not animate all of us; if we do not quickly bring together all our intelligence, all our means, and all our efforts; if we fall asleep for an instant on the edge of the abyss, we will tremble upon awakening! We will see blood flowing, our lands invaded, the objects of our industry ravaged, our homes burnt. We will see our neighbors, our friends, our wives, our children with their throats cut and their bodies mutilated; the slave will raise the standard of revolt, and the islands [of the Caribbean] will be but a vast and baleful conflagration; commerce will be ruined, France will receive a mortal wound, and a multitude of honest citizens will be impoverished and ruined; we will lose everything.

But, Sirs, there is still time to prevent the disaster. I have perhaps presumed too much from my feeble understanding, but I have ideas that can be useful; if the assembly [of white planters] wishes to admit me, if it desires it, if it wants to authorize me to draw up and submit to it my Plan, I will do it with pleasure, even with gratitude, and perhaps I could contribute and help ward off the storm that rumbles over our heads.

ABBÉ GRÉGOIRE

*Memoir in Favor of the People of Color
or Mixed-Race of Saint Domingue*

1789

Abbé Baptiste Henri Grégoire (1750–1831), a parish priest and deputy from the clergy of Lorraine, spoke in favor of minorities on many occasions during the Revolution. He had won one of the prizes of the Academy of Metz in 1788 for his essay urging relaxation of restrictions against the Jews in order to encourage their assimilation into the French nation, and he favored granting them full rights of citizenship in the debates of December 1789. He also took up the cause of the free blacks. After trying to speak on their behalf in the National Assembly and publishing this pamphlet, he continued to raise the question in 1790 and 1791. Grégoire tried to argue that giving rights to the free blacks would actually help maintain the slave system (free blacks manned the militias charged with hunting fugitive slaves in the colonies). But he also suggested that he still believed in the abolition of slavery, too.

The whites, having might on their side, have pronounced unjustly that a darkened skin excludes one from the advantages of society. Priding themselves on their complexion, they have raised a wall separating them from a class of free men that are improperly called *people of color* or *mixed-race*. They have vowed the degradation of several thousand estimable individuals, as if all were not children of a common father. . . .

Four questions present themselves relative to free people of color. 1) Will they be assimilated in every way to the whites? 2) Will they have representatives at the National Assembly? 3) What will be the number of representatives? 4) Do those who ask to fill this post have a legal commission? A preliminary examination of what they do in our colonies will resolve these questions by informing us what they should become.

Mémoire en faveur des gens de couleur ou sang-mêlés de St.-Domingue, et des autres Iles françoises de l'Amérique, adressé à l'Assemblée Nationale. Par M. Grégoire, curé d'Emberménil, Député de Lorraine (Paris: Chez Bellin, 1789).

Bearing all the burdens of society more than whites, only partially sharing the advantages, being prey to contempt, often to flagrant insult, to anguish, this is the lot of the people of color, especially in St. Domingue. . . .

One rigorous consequence of what precedes is that the rejection of the people of color threatens the state with an unsettling shock; if on the contrary you fill in the gap that separates them from whites, if by bringing minds closer together you cement the mutual attachment of these two classes, their reunion will create a mass of forces that is more effective for containing the slaves, whose afflictions will no doubt be alleviated and about whose lot it will be permitted to be touched, until that opportune moment when they can be freed. . . .

The people of color being equal in everything to the whites, one will surely not ask if they should be active in legislation and send deputies to the National Assembly. Subjected to the laws and to taxation, citizens must consent to the one and the other, without which they can refuse obedience and payment. If someone could claim to possess to a higher degree this right that is equal for everyone, it would be without doubt those who, having been more afflicted by long and multiple vexations, have more complaints to lodge.

28

SOCIETY OF THE FRIENDS OF BLACKS

*Address to the National Assembly in Favor of the
Abolition of the Slave Trade*

February 5, 1790

The Society of the Friends of Blacks rested their case for the abolition of the slave trade on the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen and the granting of political rights to religious minorities. Their denunciation of the slave trade resembles in its details the account of Abbé Raynal (Document 6). The Friends of Blacks wrote in a defensive tone about

Adresse à l'Assemblée Nationale, pour l'abolition de la traite des noirs. Par la Société des Amis des Noirs de Paris (Paris: De l'Imprimerie de L. Potier de Lille, Feb. 1790), 1-4, 10-11, 17, 19-22.

their position because they faced intense criticism from those who feared a loss of French colonial wealth and power. They denied that they wanted to abolish slavery altogether and made a claim only for the abolition of the slave trade that transported Africans from their homelands to the French colonies. Their pamphlet insisted that opinion against the slave trade was steadily increasing in Great Britain (the British officially abolished the trade in 1807). They also raised the prospect of a slave revolt, which in fact broke out in Saint Domingue in 1791. As a consequence, many planters and their allies accused the Friends of Blacks of fomenting the revolt.

The humanity, justice, and magnanimity that have guided you in the reform of the most profoundly rooted abuses gives hope to the Society of the Friends of Blacks that you will receive with benevolence its demand in favor of that numerous portion of humankind, so cruelly oppressed for two centuries.

This Society, slandered in such cowardly and unjust fashion, only derives its mission from the humanity that induced it to defend the blacks even under the past despotism. Oh! Can there be a more respectable title in the eyes of this august Assembly which has so often avenged the rights of man in its decrees?

You have declared them, these rights; you have engraved on an immortal monument that all men are born and remain free and equal in rights; you have restored to the French people these rights that despotism had for so long despoiled; . . . you have broken the chains of feudalism that still degraded a good number of our fellow citizens; you have announced the destruction of all the stigmatizing distinctions that religious or political prejudices introduced into the great family of humankind. . . .

We are not asking you to restore to French blacks those political rights which alone, nevertheless, attest to and maintain the dignity of man; we are not even asking for their liberty. No; slander, bought no doubt with the greed of the shipowners, ascribes that scheme to us and spreads it everywhere; they want to stir up everyone against us, provoke the planters and their numerous creditors, who take alarm even at gradual emancipation. They want to alarm all the French, to whom they depict the prosperity of the colonies as inseparable from the slave trade and the perpetuity of slavery.

No, never has such an idea entered into our minds; we have said it, printed it since the beginning of our Society, and we repeat it in order

to reduce to nothing this grounds of argument, blindly adopted by all the coastal cities, the grounds on which rest almost all their addresses [to the National Assembly]. The immediate emancipation of the blacks would not only be a fatal operation for the colonies; it would even be a deadly gift for the blacks, in the state of abjection and incompetence to which cupidity has reduced them. It would be to abandon to themselves and without assistance children in the cradle or mutilated and impotent beings.

It is therefore not yet time to demand that liberty; we ask only that one cease butchering thousands of blacks regularly every year in order to take hundreds of captives; we ask that one henceforth cease the prostitution, the profaning of the French name, used to authorize these thefts, these atrocious murders; we demand in a word the abolition of the slave trade. . . .

In regard to the colonists, we will demonstrate to you that if they need to recruit blacks in Africa to sustain the population of the colonies at the same level, it is because they wear out the blacks with work, whippings, and starvation; that, if they treated them with kindness and as good fathers of families, these blacks would multiply and that this population, always growing, would increase cultivation and prosperity. . . .

Have no doubt, the time when this commerce will be abolished, even in England, is not far off. It is condemned there in public opinion, even in the opinion of the ministers. . . .

If some motive might on the contrary push them [the blacks] to insurrection, might it not be the indifference of the National Assembly about their lot? Might it not be the insistence on weighing them down with chains, when one consecrates everywhere this eternal axiom: *that all men are born free and equal in rights*. So then therefore there would only be fetters and gallows for the blacks while good fortune glimmers only for the whites? Have no doubt, our happy revolution must re-electrify the blacks whom vengeance and resentment have electrified for so long, and it is not with punishments that the effect of this upheaval will be repressed. From one insurrection badly pacified will twenty others be born, of which one alone can ruin the colonists forever.

It is worthy of the first free Assembly of France to consecrate the principle of philanthropy which makes of humankind only one single family, to declare that it is horrified by this annual carnage which takes place on the coasts of Africa, that it has the intention of abolishing it one day, of mitigating the slavery that is the result, of looking for and preparing, from this moment, the means.

Speech of Barnave

March 8, 1790

A lawyer practicing in Grenoble before the Revolution, Antoine Pierre Barnave (1761–1793) spoke for the Colonial Committee, which aimed above all else to maintain France's hold on its very rich colonies in the Caribbean. Barnave avoided any explicit justification for slavery; he simply pointed to the need to maintain what France already enjoyed, great commercial prosperity due to commerce with the colonies. He advocated treating the colonies differently, exempting them from the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen and the Constitution. The majority of deputies shouted down objections to his propositions, which were immediately adopted and included a provision outlawing anyone responsible for encouraging slave revolt.

The interest of the French nation in supporting its commerce, preserving its colonies, and favoring their prosperity by every means compatible with the interests of the metropole has appeared to us, from every angle of vision, to be an incontestable truth. . . .

Abandon the colonies, and these sources of prosperity will disappear or diminish.

Abandon the colonies, and you will import, at great price, from foreigners what they buy today from you.

Abandon the colonies at the moment when your establishments there are based on possessing them, and listlessness will replace activity, misery abundance: the mass of workers, of useful and hardworking citizens, will pass quickly from a state of ease into the most deplorable situation; finally, agriculture and our finances will soon be struck by the same disaster experienced in commerce and manufactures. . . .

You should only, you can only speak here one language, that of truth, which consists in disavowing the false extension that has been given [to some of your decrees]. You have not been able to change anything in all of what concerns the colonies, for the laws that you have decreed did not have them in mind; you have not been able to change anything

because public security and humanity itself would offer insurmountable obstacles to what your hearts might have inspired in you [the abolition of the slave trade or slavery itself]. Let us say it then at this moment, since doubts have been raised: you have broken no new ground. This declaration will suffice; it can leave no alarm remaining. It is only just to accompany it with an arrangement suitable for reassuring the colonies against those who, with criminal plots, would seek to bring trouble there, to excite uprisings there. These men whom some have affected to confuse with peaceful citizens occupied with seeking through reflection means for softening the destiny of the most unfortunate portion of the human race [the slaves], these men, I say, only have perverse motives and can only be considered as enemies of France and of humanity. . . .

Here then, Sirs, is the project for a decree that your committee has unanimously voted to propose to you:

The National Assembly, deliberating on the addresses and petitions from the cities of commerce and manufacturing, on the items recently arrived from Saint Domingue and Martinique, addressed to it by the Minister of the Marine, and on the representations made by the deputies from the colonies.

Declares that, considering the colonies as a part of the French empire, and desiring to enable them to enjoy the fruits of the happy regeneration that has been accomplished in the empire, it never intended to include them in the constitution that it has decreed for the kingdom or to subject them to laws which might be incompatible with their particular, local proprieties. . . .

Moreover, the National Assembly declares that it never intended to introduce innovations into any of the branches of indirect or direct commerce between France and its colonies [thus it leaves the slave trade untouched] and hereby puts the colonists and their properties under the special protection of the nation and declares criminal, toward the nation, whoever works to excite uprisings against them. Judging favorably the motives that have inspired the citizens of the said colonies, it declares that there is no reason to pursue them for any charge [there had been widespread agitation among the planters to establish greater independence from Paris]; it expects from their patriotism the maintenance of public peace and an inviolable fidelity to the nation, the law, and the king.

KERSAINT

Discussion of Troubles in the Colonies

March 28, 1792

As a massive slave revolt raged in Saint Domingue, the Legislative Assembly in Paris once again considered the question of free black rights (see Figure 2). Armand Guy Kersaint (1742–1793), a former noble naval officer, defended the reinstatement of the political rights of free blacks and mulattoes and argued passionately for the gradual elimination of slavery. His elaborate plan demonstrates the depth of anxiety felt by whites about emancipating the slaves immediately, but his speech also shows that the deputies knew they had to act decisively if they wanted to keep Saint Domingue at all. The white planters threatened to declare independence from France or else to ally themselves with the king against the Assembly. Kersaint hoped to establish a coalition between the poor whites and the free blacks against both the slaves and the rich white planters. After opposing the death penalty for King Louis XVI in 1793, Kersaint himself was executed in December 1793.¹

Your fears are of three kinds: the first, the revolt of the slaves; the second, that [white planters in Saint Domingue] not call upon foreigners and not wish to make [the colony] independent; the third, that it not protest against national power [the power of the assembly] in order to only recognize royal authority. In effect, the reasons for these different fears are well-founded, but how will you succeed in dissipating them? One sole means should suffice.

There exists in Saint Domingue a numerous class of men who love France, who cherish the new laws, who are in general honest, enlightened, hardworking men who live in a state of few means from the fruits

¹Information on the careers of deputies holding office in 1792–1794 comes from Auguste Kuscinski, *Dictionnaire des conventionnels* (Paris: Au siège de la Société de l'histoire de la Révolution française et à la librairie F. Rieder, 1916–1919).

Armand Guy Kersaint, *Moyens proposés à l'Assemblée Nationale pour rétablir la paix et l'ordre dans les colonies*, in *Archives parlementaires* 40 (Paris, 1893): 586, 590, 595–96.

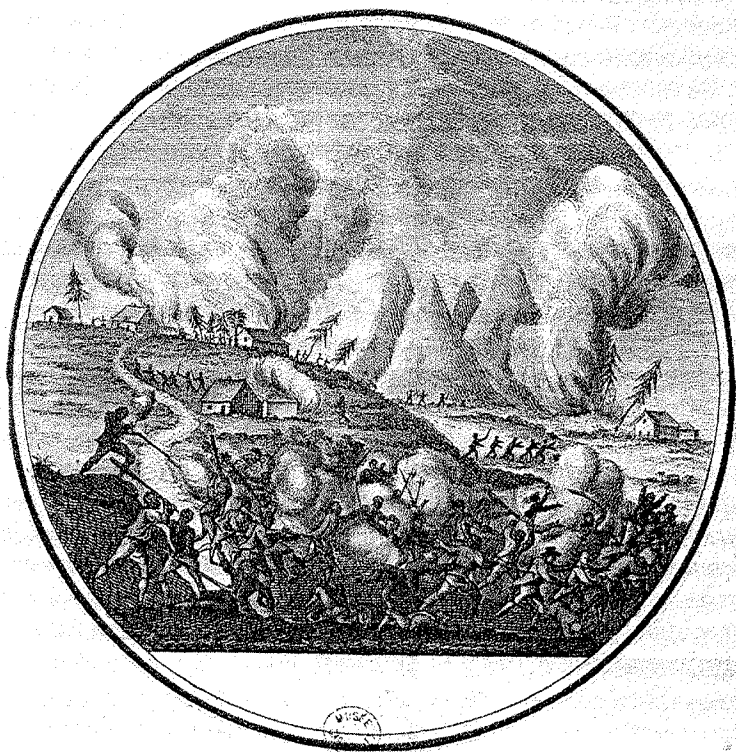


Figure 2. Titled "Revolt of the Negroes in Saint Domingue," this engraving depicts the massive slave uprising against white planters that took place on Saint Domingue.

The Rebellion of the Slaves in Santo Domingo, 23 August 1791 (colored engraving), French School (18th century) / Musée de la Ville de Paris, Musée Carnavalet, Paris, France / Archives Charmet / Bridgeman Images.

of their daily labor and who owe no debts [poor whites]. This class is reinforced by that of the free black propertyowning men; this is the party of the National Assembly in this island; this is the class that must be supported by all means combined. [He then goes on to attack the September 24, 1791, decree rescinding the political rights of free blacks.] . . .

It cannot be denied that when the French nation proclaimed these sacred words, "Men are born and remain free and equal in rights," it

did not break the chains of humankind. The action of this truth, which ought to level the world, had to first fall on us. The fears of our colonists are therefore well-founded in that they have everything to fear from the influence of our Revolution on their slaves. The rights of man overturn the system on which rests their fortunes. No one should be surprised therefore that [the colonists] have become the most ardent enemies of the rights of man; they are right to read in them their condemnation. . . .

I do not belong to the Society of the Friends of Blacks. But, as a friend of all men, I am not indifferent to the goal of the work of this society. The improvement of the lot of the Africans, transported to the European colonies, always appeared to me to be the most worthy subject for exciting the zeal of any being born sensitive to the sufferings of his fellow man. . . .

I lived for a long time in the colonies. I have owned black slaves; a part of my fortune is still in that country; and I cannot therefore wish for the destruction of it. Planters who read me, tell yourselves: He has the same interests as us and his opinions are different; let us see, let us examine; at issue here are the most cherished interests of life, and partiality and prejudice are capable of losing everything irrevocably. . . .

The moment has arrived to change the social system of the colonies, to reintegrate into it humankind, and in this greater view will be found the salvation of all the interested parties, justice and utility, interest and glory.

The free men of color demand justice: the rights of citizens in all their extension will be accorded to them. The colonists will no longer refuse them; they will remember that misfortune makes men sensitive, that those men whom they push away are their sons, their brothers, their nephews. They will honor finally the breast that nourished them, no matter what the color, and this first act of justice will guide them toward another, virtues following from each other as do vices.

Among the slaves you will call to freedom pure and simple all the artisans whose names will be furnished by their former masters, on the sole condition of a tax by head, which you will convert into an indemnity for those whom they made rich in the past.

The Negroes born in the colonies will then be called without distinction to the enjoyment of conditional liberty. It will have as its base the obligation to be reunited on the land of their former masters and to work there for them for a fixed time, after which they will enjoy liberty on the same conditions as the artisan Negroes. I think that this term can be fixed at ten years for those who are 30 years old or older, and at fifteen years for those who are less than 30 years old. But only the Negro

fathers of families should be called to enjoy this advantage; the others should be held to 20 years of work. . . .

Every Negro who has come from Africa, is married for at least 10 years, has a garden in good order and six children, will enjoy first freedom for three days work a week along with his wife. After 20 years of marriage and with four children still living, they will be considered freed . . . ; their children will enjoy the same advantages at 25 years of age, and their grandchildren will be free without conditions. . . .

But some will ask if I am keeping or destroying the slave trade? My pen refuses to trace those words: "You will buy men," but this trade can change character, and the effect of the law that I propose for the colonies would modify the most odious part. It would no longer be slaves that you would export from Africa but farmers, inhabitants that you would abduct from their tyrants to educate them one day by work and instruction to the dignity of free men.

31

Decree of the National Convention of February 4, 1794, Abolishing Slavery in All the Colonies

News traveled slowly from the colonies back to France, and the first news of the emancipations in Saint Domingue aroused suspicion, if not outright hostility, in the National Convention. Many of the original members of the Society of the Friends of Blacks, such as Lafayette, Brissot, and Condorcet, had either fled the country or gone to their deaths at the guillotine as opponents of the faction now dominant in the Convention, led by Robespierre. Three delegates—a free black, a white, and a mulatto—from Saint Domingue explained the situation to the Convention on February 4, 1794. Their report provoked spontaneous enthusiasm, and the deputies promptly voted to abolish slavery in all the colonies. Their decree helped win over the rebellious slaves to the side of the French against the British and Spanish.

Décret de la Convention Nationale, du 16 jour de Pluviôse, an second de la République française, une et indivisible (Paris: De l'Imprimerie Nationale Exécutive du Louvre, Year II [1794]).

The National Convention declares the abolition of Negro slavery in all the colonies; in consequence it decrees that all men, without distinction of color, residing in the colonies, are French citizens and will enjoy all the rights assured by the constitution.

It asks the Committee of Public Safety to make a report as soon as possible on the measures that should be taken to assure the execution of the present decree.

Women

32

CONDORCET

"On the Admission of Women to the Rights of Citizenship"

July 1790

Condorcet took the question of political rights to all of its logical conclusions. He argued that if rights were indeed universal, as the doctrine of natural rights and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen both seemed to imply, then they must apply to all adults. Condorcet consequently argued in favor of granting political rights to Protestants and Jews and advocated the abolition of the slave trade and slavery itself. He went further than any other leading revolutionary spokesman, however, when he insisted that women, too, should gain political rights. His newspaper article to that effect caused a sensation and stimulated those of like mind to publish articles of their own. But the campaign was relatively shortlived and ultimately unsuccessful; the prejudice against granting political rights to women would prove the most difficult to uproot.

"Sur l'Admission des femmes au droit de cité," Journal de la Société de 1789, no. 5 (July 3, 1790): 1-4, 6-9, 11-12.