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In The Time Of The Revolution ¹

[Maryse Condé](#)

ACT I: 1789

THE STORYTELLER Why are people so afraid of death? If they knew how gentle and fraternal it is for bodies and souls defeated by existence, they would desire its coming instead.

As for me, I've only known peace since my death, on that night of carnage and blood, a few steps away from here on Sartine Square, that you people call Victoire Square now. ² What a night that was! I'm still overwhelmed by the memory of it. My name is Zephyr. ³ You don't recognize it? Not at all? And yet it appears in some of your history books. And yet it's for you that I and so many others, anonymous or famous, lost our lives. So many others!

Then I'll have to refresh your memory and remind you of that historical moment that you can't remember anymore. Ladies and Gentlemen, this evening we're going to perform "In The Time of the Revolution." It was long, very long ago . . .

The stage on the left lights up gradually.

In those days, our country was called . . .

It was called Guadeloupe, as it is today! ⁴

There were 109,639 inhabitants.

13,969 Whites!

The so-called "grands blancs": owners of plantations, sugar mills, and hundreds of slaves.

A white man in expensive clothes goes by, struts, and disappears.

or merchants trading wine, flour, goods and slaves, why not?

The white man goes by again. Same movements.

The so-called "petits blancs": farmers, artisans, sometimes owners of one or two slaves.

A peevish, poorly dressed white man passes by without greeting anyone.

3,125 free persons of color: artisans, owners of land and slaves. ⁵ **[End Page 454]**

A Mulatto as expensively dressed as the "grand blanc" passes by, swaggers, and disappears.

82,978 slaves transported in the holds of ships from the coast of Africa, for on the eve of 1789, the slave trade has become prosperous. They don't own anything, not even themselves. ⁶

The storyteller pulls a proclamation out of his pocket and reads it.

"FOR SALE. 12 superb, first quality Blacks, accustomed to the heaviest labor, in works of making levees, digging trenches, digging holes to plant sugar cane, felling trees on the hills. They are available on a trial basis upon request."

During the reading of this announcement, a group of slaves appears, staggers and disappears. The light fades.

France was no longer called Gaul. No, that was ancient history! It was called France, the kingdom of France.

Slowly the right stage lights up.

It had 26 million inhabitants. The aristocracy: 350,000 people, who owned lands, castles, personal property, real estate, servants to serve them from the time they got up to the time they went to bed.

An expensively adorned, bewigged aristocrat struts and disappears.

The clergy: 120,000 persons in monasteries, churches and rectories taking away the sins of the world.

A priest passes by and gives his blessing.

The Third Estate: 25 million men, women, and children in the cities and the countryside. ⁷

The storyteller recites like a schoolchild.

What is the Third Estate? Everything.
What has it been up until now in the political order? Nothing. *The storyteller recites like a schoolchild.*
What is it asking for? To become something.

As the storyteller is reciting, a group of peasants and bourgeois cross the stage. The storyteller laughs.

Do you at least remember this? You all recited it in school.
Now be quiet. Our story is about to begin.

Darkness on the two stages. Then the right stage lights up. The priest reappears.

THE PRIEST [He accentuates his speech by beating a drum like a town crier] Brothers! Now is the time for justice! Brothers, our good king Louis XVI, by the grace of God, concerns himself with our condition! **[End Page 455]**

Brothers, our good king invites you to write to him on cahiers stating your grievances! ⁸ Brothers, now is the time for hope!

Write to him, write to him quickly! I'll be back to collect your grievances in an hour . . .

He disappears. A peasant couple listens to him, overcome with joy.

NESTINE What a good king! what a good king! Gaspard! What a good king!

GASPARD [*Embracing her*] What a good king!

NESTINE But what about the salt tax?

GASPARD No more!

NESTINE The harvest share? ⁹

GASPARD No more!

NESTINE The direct and indirect taxes? ¹⁰

GASPARD No more!

NESTINE Floods . . .

GASPARD No more!

NESTINE Sickness, plague, rabies, death

GASPARD No more!

NESTINE And a full stomach?

GASPARD That we'll have . . . Along with knowledge, good manners, education . .

BOTH We'll have them, we'll have them, we'll have them! [*The stage becomes progressively darker*]

THE STORYTELLER Leave them to their moment of joy! It's not often that their eyes shed tears of joy! For us in Guadeloupe, the month of May 1789 is no different than other months. No sun, no joy!

The left stage lights up. A group of slaves is looking at a big black man, surrounded by two foremen, standing in front of the master, M. de Juremont. Standing back, Julien, a free Mulatto, is also watching. [End Page 456]

THE MASTER Have you rubbed his back and buttocks thoroughly? Have you put pepper on his wounds?

THE FOREMAN Yes master!

THE MASTER Good. Untie him. Jean Louis, next time we'll cut out your tongue. [*To the slaves*] This is the fate that awaits anyone who dares to speak of freedom here!

The group disperses. Jean Louis and Julien remain on stage.

JULIEN Poor Jean Louis! Now look what's happened to you!

JEAN LOUIS Julien! Why are you still here? I'll end up believing what people say about you, that

you've got your eyes on buying this plantation with the money that you'll borrow from your friend Des Chaumes, the merchant.

JULIEN Don't believe what they say. All they like around here is rumors. The bigger, the more nauseating, the more they like them.

JEAN LOUIS Is it also a rumor that you're going to marry the widow Chambart and that as a dowry she's bringing you a lucrative sugar mill and 35 slaves? Soon you'll be as rich as a "grand blanc"; as rich as your father before he vanished . . .

JULIEN I have no father! I was born from the sperm of the wind that laid my mother under a casuarina tree, then blew down to ransack the plain . . .

JEAN LOUIS [*Laughing*] You're always dishing out the same old bull. [*Serious*] I bet you were splitting your sides while I was kicking and screaming?

JULIEN You're wrong. It was like when we were little. When I used to see my fath . . . [*he corrects himself sharply*] Monsieur de La Salle kick you senseless because you had looked directly at him in the whites of his eyes. What's the use, unless you're looking for a martyr's crown? Saint Jean Louis! Can a Black become a martyr? No, because he doesn't have a soul. [*he laughs*]

Jean Louis moves back.

JULIEN We have a meeting tomorrow at Noel's place at Sainte Anne, under the pick cedar . . .
[End Page 457]

JEAN LOUIS A meeting to do what? Like the last time, to rail against your mean white daddies? And yet it's mighty useful to have a white daddy who gave you your freedom!

JULIEN We've gotten news from Saint-Domingue. ¹¹ The free men of color there want to send deputies to the Estates General. ¹² We're going to do the same.

JEAN LOUIS And you think that the king will allow you to attend the Estates General? You? You who don't even have the right to sit in the same churches and the same meeting halls as the Whites?

JULIEN Don't speak against the king. The problem is his advisors, who cook up schemes around him at Versailles and who tell lies about us! The king cannot exclude men who are free, property owners and tax payers!

JEAN LOUIS Men who are free, property owners and tax payers . . . But we aren't men. I'm not coming to your meeting, Julien. There's nothing I can do there!

JULIEN You're wrong. As usual, you're not thinking. Once our deputies are in Versailles, they'll raise the issue of their brothers, the slaves . . . They'll raise your issues!

JEAN LOUIS And I'm the one you accuse of not thinking! But the free men of color hate our skin. Those who've emerged straight from the womb of a Negress want to forget it. The others have already forgotten . . .

JULIEN All that's over. OVER. We've understood that we have to unite. That it's our union . . . Yes, our union . . .

Their voices fade out and darkness returns.

THE STORYTELLER Dreams, people's dreams! Thicker than the hair that grows on their heads! Justice for some folks. Unity for others. Happiness for everyone. But alas, people's dreams are

not made to grow freely like guinea grass on the banks of the highways. ¹³ Some people try to pull them up, to mow them down, to dry them out, to burn them and see them go up in smoke.

The right stage lights up. It's crowded. King Louis XVI, a caricature on a throne, and some of the deputies standing on one side. On the other side, the people look at them, wearing rags and holding pikes. [End Page 458]

THE KING [Gesticulating] Consider, Gentlemen, that none of your projects, none of your deliberations has the force of law without my special consent. So far I have been the one responsible for the happiness of my people! Gentlemen, I order you to divide up immediately and to each go to the chambers assigned to your order. ¹⁴ Accordingly I order the great master of ceremonies kindly to prepare the rooms.

THE MASTER OF CEREMONIES [Addressing the deputies] Have you heard the wishes of his Majesty the king?

MIRABEAU ¹⁵ Yes sir, we heard the intentions that the king is supposed to have expressed, but you can't serve as his voice for obvious reasons: you who are not here to remind us of the speech, you moreover who have no place or right to speak whereas we're here by the will of the people and will only leave at the point of a bayonet!

A MAN OF THE PEOPLE [On the other side] Citizens, what are they going on about over there? Words, fine words! Hot air! Rich folks' French!

ANOTHER Meanwhile the king has called for 20,000 men. All they're awaiting is an order, one single order to level Paris! You are some cowards! What's holding you back from rebelling? Are you going to let them have the better of you?

ANOTHER They've closed the stores.

WOMEN [Stepping out of the fray] Let's dance the Carmagnole ¹⁶

Long live the sound of the canon
Let's dance the Carmagnole
Long live the sound of the canon
Oh, ça ira, ça ira!
Rejoice, Good times are on their way.
Everyone to the Bastille! To THE BASTILLE!

Shots, smoke, shouts. Without transition, the light fades out on the right and comes on on the left. Same confusion. On one side, a group of masters and foremen. On the other, Jean Louis, Julien, numerous others, Blacks and Mulattoes around them.

A FOREMAN They're conspiring! At this very moment they're having a meeting. Last month some of them had one at Sainte Anne. Others have taken place, even on Marie Galante. ¹⁷ Slaves and free men of color together.

A MASTER You've got to be kidding! Free coloreds together with slaves? Those people can't stand one another! They hate each other like salt hates water! [End Page 459]

THE FOREMAN The free men of color want to send deputies to the Estates General. ¹⁸

A MASTER What? Even we have been excluded. The king didn't include representation from the colonies!

MONSIEUR DE JUREMONT [Learnedly] The oversight has just been corrected thanks to our

friends from Saint-Domingue. Soon we too will send two deputies to Versailles.

A MASTER How will they be chosen?

A FOREMAN The Mulattoes have friends in Paris . . . ¹⁹

A MASTER *[Rising]* "Let's hereby grant free persons of color the same rights, privileges and immunities enjoyed by persons who were born free."

A MASTER *[Rising]* Come on! "All or almost all persons of color are the shameful fruits of their masters' licentiousness and I demand that, in deliberating here on their pretensions, we reduce them . . ."

ANOTHER *[Rising]* "It would be totally absurd if legislators who claim to be convinced of the necessity of respecting public morality were to grant the most immoral protection to the practice of concubinage, which is unfortunately already so common in the Antilles."

ANOTHER *[Rising]* "Mulattoes are not true Frenchmen because they have never seen France."

ANOTHER *[Rising]* "The colonies are being overrun by these people!"

THE FOREMAN Gentlemen. Here you are. All you do is talk! And meanwhile I'm telling you that they are off conspiring against you. They have sworn to kill you all and steal your plantations!

MASTERS *[In unison]* Steal our plantations!

On the other side of the stage.

JEAN LOUIS What they say is true. I have always conspired. The desire for freedom stuck in my throat like a bone; in my loins like the desire for a woman. No matter what I did I couldn't get rid of it; my days were made feverish by it. So I went from slave cabin to slave cabin and in each ear I whispered: "Let's rise up in revolt; let's burn down the master's plantation. We'll jump over the wall of flames and we'll find ourselves free!"

JULIEN I've conspired too. I've said to the other free coloreds: "What do they have that we don't? Their skin is a little lighter than ours, that's ALL. They're parasites, we're the ones who make the **[End Page 460]** country run." Jean Louis, Jean Louis, let's forget our differences, let's march together against them.

MONSIEUR DE JUREMONT *[Rising and shouting]* So it's true that they're conspiring! Call out the militia!

Shots, smoke, shouts. Darkness on both stages. Silence. The left stage slowly lights up, without ever being fully lit. You can see bodies spread out on the ground. In complete silence, women dressed in white arrive from staircases leading to the different corners of the stage. They crowd onto the stage, kneel next to the dead men, place lit candles at their feet and sing a cappella. The scene must give the effect of slow motion. Suddenly men burst in among them, dressed as nèg mawon.

NEG MAWON ²⁰ Don't cry! They're not dead. Can't you see they're not dead? Their spirit has joined us up there on the mountain! Jean Louis isn't dead! The soldiers' bullets couldn't pierce his chest, his chest is made of iron wood. When the bullets hit him, they obeyed his orders and were transformed into butterflies that lit upon his shoulders. Jean Louis isn't dead. He's up there. He's become a tree: a royal mapou, a malimbé, an acomat-montagne that protects us with its shade. ²¹ He's a sun . . . A star guiding us toward freedom! For freedom will come to us all, slaves and free coloreds! To people from the hills as well as people from the savannahs! For city dwellers as well as country folks! As sure as the sun will rise tomorrow!

Silence and darkness come back.

THE STORYTELLER [A little jealous] And that's how popular memory rescues some from oblivion, from the ingratitude of your memory. Some live forever and even today we remember Jean Louis who died so that there could be a tomorrow! Just this morning I heard his song. [He hums.] [Silence.] Everything is going wrong in the kingdom of France! People are alarmed by the taking of the Bastille. In the countryside the peasants have taken up arms. Castles are burning, corpses are piling up. My friends, my friends the soil we tread upon is a vast graveyard and if it's soft and spongy it's because it's soaked with blood. The dead outnumber the living and it's their sighs that you hear at night. It's the Great Fear. ²² So the hearts of some noblemen and clergymen were touched. And that led to the month of August. ²³ Frenzy, inebriation of renunciation.

The right stage lights up. The king, still seated like a caricature on his throne, looks on while the deputies stand up, sit back down like puppets, speaking rapidly, increasingly rapidly, swallowing their words. The king tries at first to stop them, then covers his ears, then hides his face.

A DEPUTY The National Assembly declares the abolition of the exclusive right to hunt rabbits and pigeons. **[End Page 461]**

ANOTHER And the abolition of the status of serf and the practice of mainmorte ²⁴ under any conditions whatsoever.

ANOTHER And the abolition of all seigniorial jurisdiction.

ANOTHER And of any tax in silver representative of tithes.

ANOTHER And of any rights to deportation.

Another And of venal offices. ²⁵

Another And of the annates taxes. ²⁶ A deputy [Reading very distinctly] The National Assembly has just decreed the cessation of the special privileges of provinces and cities and the reformation of corporation and guild masters. ²⁷

Applause. Then, silence.

A DEPUTY [Very slowly] The National Assembly now declares

Article 1: men are born and remain free and equal; social distinctions can only be based on the common good.

Applause, embraces.

THE KING [Uncovering his face, speaking plaintively to the deputies] Gentlemen, don't you see that it's dangerous to promise things like that?

A DEPUTY Dangerous? Why? We're not talking about the slaves from the colonies.

ANOTHER Nor the Mulattoes, of course!

A DEPUTY Even those who are free?

THE DEPUTIES [Unanimously] Enough! Enough!

NECKER [Rising solemnly] ²⁸ Perhaps the day will come, gentlemen, when you will extend your

interest farther; the day will come when, joining hands with the deputies from the colonies in your deliberations, you will look with compassion upon this unfortunate people who have been calmly turned into a barbarian object of trade, upon these people who resemble us by their ability both to think and above all to suffer . . .

THE DEPUTIES *[Unanimously]* Sit down! Sit down! *[He sits down. But an immense echo amplifies the words]*

THE ECHO Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Men are born and . . .

While the lights go out on the right, the left stage is lit up. First it is empty; then it fills up with slaves, masters, foremen, all listening to this mysterious voice. [End Page 462]

THE VOICE Men are born and remain free and equal in rights.

The slaves throw their arms around one another, cry, embrace.

THE SLAVES Libèté! Libèté! Freedom! Freedom!

M. DE JUREMONT Keep quiet! They're not talking about you. They're talking about men. Not about slaves!

ANOTHER MASTER They're not talking about Mulattoes either!

M. DE LOYSEAU *[Rising, forcefully]* I don't agree. I have two mulatto sons . . .

Shouts.

A MASTER You should be ashamed! It's men like you who have sullied Guadeloupe!

M. DE LOYSEAU *[Unwilling to give up]* I've freed them, I've given them land, they pay their contribution.

THE MASTERS *[Unanimously]* Enough! Enough!

M. DE LOYSEAU *[Desperate]* I'm not asking for any favors for them. I'm claiming their rights as men and citizens . . .

THE MASTERS Enough! Enough!

M. de Loyseau finally keeps quiet and sits down.

THE SLAVES *[Chanting rhythmically]* Libèté! We want freedom!

M. DE JUREMONT *[Solemnly]* The immediate emancipation of Blacks would not only be fatal to the colonies; it would be the kiss of death for Blacks in the state of abjection and incapacity to which greed has reduced them.

THE SLAVES *[As if they haven't heard anything]* Libèté! We want freedom!

M. DE JUREMONT If you continue I'll call out the troops again!

A FOREMAN *[Arriving running]* Wait! Wait! The ship "La Jeune Bayonnaise" has docked at Pointe-à-Pitre . . . ²⁹ It has just arrived from Bordeaux. It brings the news that when the king entered Paris he was presented with the tricolor cockade and that His Majesty deigned to accept it and attach it to his

hat . . . [30](#)

THE MASTERS The king has accepted the tricolor cockade!

THE FOREMAN Yes he has. It appears that everyone in France wears it as a sign of allegiance, respect and love for the person of His Majesty. . .

THE MASTERS What?

THE FOREMAN As the sign of the union of all the French people and their devotion to their sovereign. **[End Page 463]**

THE MASTERS What is he talking about?

THE FOREMAN The governor, M. de Clugny, who happened to be at Le Moule, has come to Sainte Anne and then to Pointe-à-Pitre to show everyone that he himself is wearing it . . .

THE MASTERS The governor has betrayed us! He has become a patriot. He has become a Patriot!

THE FOREMAN M. de Clugny is wearing it on his hat. You should follow his example. Everyone is supposed to wear it. On the plantations as well as in the cities! In Pointe-à-Pitre as well as Basse-Terre!

Silence.

A MASTER *[Quietly, somewhat ashamedly]* What does a cockade look like? I've never seen one . . .

A MASTER It's a horrible cloth rag. Red and blue for the colors of Paris, white for the colors of the monarchy.

M. DE JUREMONT *[Fatalistically]* Gentlemen, gentlemen, don't talk that way. Since His Majesty has agreed to accept it: Long live the tricolor cockade! Long live the National Assembly!

THE MASTERS *[After some hesitation]* Long live the tricolor cockade! Long live the National Assembly!

THE SLAVES *[Clapping their hands and singing]* Long live the cockade . . .

THE FOREMAN *[Interrupting them]* Quiet you people! To the sound of drums, M. de Clugny has proclaimed everywhere that slaves who wear the cockade will be whipped on the public square.

The slaves remain motionless.

M. DE JUREMONT How many times do we need to repeat to you that none of this concerns you? Return to your slave cabins!

The right stage [stage 1] lights up and during the end of the play, the two stages [1 and 2] will remain lit. The voices will come from the right [stage 1] and the left [stage 2], as if one single scene were being enacted. On the right [stage 1], a crowd surrounds the deputies. The king hides his head.

A DEPUTY *[Stage 1]* Now what do you want? Go home. A free people is a reasonable people! Go home!

M. DE JUREMONT [Stage 2] Go back to your slave cabins! There's nothing here for you!

A WOMAN [Stage 1] We want to bring the king back to Paris! We're hungry!

A SLAVE [Stage 2] Nou las soufè! We're tired of suffering! **[End Page 464]**

A MAN [Stage 1] We've been had! The power of the nobles has been replaced by that of the bourgeoisie! Only the rich have been given the right to vote!

A DEPUTY [Stage 1] Go home! The revolution is over! OVER!

M. DE JUREMONT [Stage 2] For you there never was a revolution. For you the word means nothing! The revolution doesn't exist!

A DEPUTY [Stage 1] Martial law has been proclaimed. All assemblies are criminal. Good citizens must leave the premises! We'll fire on anyone who remains!

M. DE JUREMONT [Stage 2] Good slaves should leave! Mano, José, Célestine. We'll fire on anyone who remains.

A DEPUTY [Stage 1] Fire!

M. DE JUREMONT [Stage 2] Too bad for you! Tell the militia to fire!

Sound of shots. Darkness simultaneously on both stages. Silence.

THE STORYTELLER That's it. Revolution is like a woman: you do whatever you want with her. Soldiers of fortune sodomize her, poets read her poetry, the middle class makes her cough up the cash. In the kingdom of France, revolution aborted the baby that had turned its womb into a mountain of justice. All that remains is a stinking pile of coagulated blood lying in the gutter. Yet it could have been beautiful, this child, born on July 14! I picture it dressed in white, blue and red, laughing in the new light of the sun! But the bourgeois didn't allow it to live . . .

For us in Guadeloupe not much has changed. Our men and women continue to have the taste of freedom in their mouths. Alas, they're still in chains and the blood of the dead continues to bleed in the silos of the earth until finally, in the evening dew, their spirits flutter in the air as fireflies. Be patient for my story isn't over. I still have a lot to tell you. A lot, a lot. After the days that taste bitter on your lips, the days without joy, the days that are rotten, be patient; other days will come! I can already feel the winds of change.

ACT II: 1794

*Stage 1 lights up. With his back to the audience, the storyteller looks at the stage. A woman is standing and singing a voodoo song: "O-Ho, Papa Damballah . . ." from the middle of a circle of kneeling slaves. In chorus the slaves repeat the song. The woman sings solo again, followed by silence as the slaves remain immobile, their heads bowed. After a moment, a madras cloth under his hat, a slave silently climbs one of the stairways leading to the stage. He stops and states: **[End Page 465]***

TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE "Brothers and friends, my name is Toussaint Louverture; you ³³ may have heard of my name. I sought vengeance. I want freedom and equality to prevail in Saint-Domingue. I'm working to make them a reality. Join me."

The slaves turn toward him and stand up in disorder.

A WOMAN We're in pain. Papa loa Boukman ³⁴ has been killed. They dried his head in the sun on

a stake. Our hearts are in disarray and our eyes are filled with water.

TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE [Brutally] Dry them, I'm telling you, and follow me! I have come to avenge you. I've come to plant the tree of freedom. Even if its branches are cut down one day, it will grow back, because its roots will go deep, deep. They will reach down to the heart of the earth to find water and other nutrients.

The last slaves who remained kneeling arise and everyone surrounds Toussaint Louverture.

TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE Listen carefully to what I have to say to you. We're going to join the Spanish who are at war at this moment against the French. . . ³⁵

THE SLAVES [Shocked] Join the Spanish.

TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE [Angry] French, Spanish, what do you care? It's all the same to us, isn't it? What do we care about these white folks' stories? What matters to us is our freedom. And only a king can grant it. I'm suspicious of the poisoned gifts of people who killed their king!

The stage becomes dark gradually. Only the storyteller, who is now turned toward the audience, remains visible.

THE STORYTELLER The rascally Little Stick, Toussaint Bréda, Toussaint Louverture. ³⁶ For that's the name that has stuck in your memory. He understood that you couldn't rely on anyone. Neither the Whites and their half-aborted revolution in the kingdom of France. Nor on the Mulattoes revolting in Saint-Domingue. And especially not on the "grand blancs" and their conspiracies. He understood that he had to play his own cards, his black man's cards! What an extraordinary story! The driver of horses became a driver of people. The "leaf doctor," the dokté-fèye, ³⁷ became his people's doctor. He became a Spartacus, a martyr. [Silence] What would old Toussaint think if he came back to life and saw his country up for auction, handed over to the rage of the Tontons Macoutes, ³⁸ his people bleeding from the eternal wounds of injustice and hunger? What would he do if he saw that the enemies of the Blacks are not only the Whites? [Silence] Didn't he already know it? "Nèg ap trayi nèg dinpi nan Ginin"? Blacks have betrayed Blacks even back in Guinea. He said it himself. [Silence] Perhaps [End Page 466] he would start all over again. Unless, discouraged, he decided to dive again into the black waters of death!

But I stand here before you, chattering away, chattering away. This isn't the story that I'm supposed to relive with you tonight. No, no, no! I'm supposed to tell you our story as Guadeloupeans. Will it leave a better taste in your mouth? It's up to you to decide! [Grabbing a drum, he beats it. Then he speaks in the voice of a town crier] Silence, silence! Listen to me! The play has begun or rather begun again! 1789. . . No, you already know about that year! 1790: the tricolor flag becomes the symbol of France.

1791: The royal family flees to Varennes. Don't you remember that in your history books? [The tone of a school boy reciting his lesson] the king, the queen, their two children and Madame Elizabeth, the king's sister, flee during the night. They head to the border in a carriage painted yellow and green, drawn by sturdy horses. [On the stage, a parody of this flight]

1792: The king and the queen are locked up in the Temple. Let's not forget the Dauphin and Madame Royale, who are also imprisoned. ³⁹ 1793: Good God, what a year that was! January 21: The execution of the king. He climbs the scaffold bravely. [Here the silhouette of a guillotine might be seen or the loud sound from a guillotine heard] July 13: The assassination of Marat. You know what I'm talking about! Charlotte Corday and the bathtub! October 16: The execution of Marie Antoinette. She climbs the scaffold bravely. [The same effects as for Louis XVI] 1794: Stop! We're in 1794. The new year opens its shark's jaws to devour the succession of months that have been recently renamed to fit the times: Germinal, Floréal, Prairial, Messidor, Thermidor, Fructidor, Vendémiaire, Brumaire, Frimaire, Nivôse, Pluviôse, Ventôse. ⁴⁰ What a poet that Fabre d'Eglantine is! ⁴¹ Those names of months are a bed of flowers grown on the dunghill of the revolution. [Stage 2 lights up. Slaves are cutting sugar cane under the surveillance of a foreman] In Guadeloupe, our home, sugar cane grows tall and green. Men suffer just as much, but they always have the same taste of salt in their mouths!

JUSTIN [To his neighbor] Have you heard what I've heard? The slaves have revolted in Saint-

Domingue. They've burned and ransacked everything. Flames have reached the treetops!

NARCISSE What I've heard is that the Whites have done away with the whip and given the slaves three whole days to take care of their gardens.

JUSTIN Three whole days for their garden! **[End Page 467]**

PIERROT *[Throwing down his cutlass and coming near]* You know, you slaves have understood nothing! Absolutely nothing! It's not a matter of whips or gardens . . . It's freedom, total and complete freedom, that the Whites have been forced to give them!

JUSTIN, NARCISSE *[Together]* Freedom!

JUSTIN Don't talk nonsense. There'll never be freedom for our color.

PIERROT I'm not talking nonsense. From what I've heard there are more than 500,000 slaves in Saint-Domingue. Kongo, Nago, Moudongue, all kinds of slaves. ⁴²

JUSTIN *[Ironically]* So what?

PIERROT So what? So I mean it's not the same as it is here. Those 500,000 slaves have come together like the fingers of a hand. Then the Whites got scared . . .

NARCISSE The Whites got scared of the slaves?

PIERROT Obviously, because the slaves were united!

Justin and Narcisse burst out laughing.

JUSTIN Have you ever seen slaves united?

NARCISSE The minute two of them get together, there's always one who wants to screw the other!

JUSTIN A pa jé, non! Nèg ni malédisyon! It's no joke! Black folks are cursed.

They all laugh.

THE FOREMAN Justin, Narcisse, Pierrot! Are you looking to get whipped? I can oblige if you like!

PIERROT *[Loud enough to be heard]* Do what you want. You won't be able to forever!

At this moment, a slave arrives running and shouting. He's a house slave. He should be dressed differently.

HIPPOLYTE You know what I've heard? The English have landed! They're at Gosier!

Everyone comes near him, even the foreman.

HIPPOLYTE Yes, I've heard that the masters are the ones who've called for them. They want to avenge the king, the poor king . . .

Here he makes the sign of the cross and looks contrite.

PIERROT [Harshly] Leave that white man where he is and tell us what you heard. **[End Page 468]**

HIPPOLYTE That's all I heard. The English have landed at Gosier. They're going to kill all the Patriots, all those who wear the tricolor cockade.

JUSTIN Our master has been wearing the cockade. [Joyful] Does that mean that they're going to kill him?

PIERROT You still don't understand the Whites, do you? He'll remove it in a flash and swear that he never was a Patriot. That'll be the end of it!

Shots are heard. The slaves scurry in all directions. The light goes out, but the shots do not cease.

THE STORYTELLER More blood! How I would like to tell you stories as bright as a sunny day, as sweet to the tongue as the juice of Bourbonnais oranges. ⁴³ Alas! Men who died without burial, anonymous martyrs. That's all I have to offer you! Guadeloupe has been occupied by the English. The French armies have to fight hard.

Stage 2 is lit again, but it remains in partial darkness. Shots; smoke; soldiers, women, slaves running in all directions. Amid the disorder and the noise, a man in uniform climbs one of the stairways leading to the stage. He is flanked by two officers. He grabs a loudspeaker and shouts.

VICTOR HUGHES Men and women citizens, I am Victor Hughes, the commissioner of the Convention. ⁴⁴ For the first time a fleet has headed toward America without bearing the cross. Columbus's fleet had it, painted on the sails. Those sails were the symbol of the slavery that would be imposed on the men of the New World in the name of . . .

The two officers become excited.

AN OFFICER Commissioner, commissioner, that's not what it's about!

VICTOR HUGHES [Continuing without hearing him] We are those without cross, without redeemer, without gods, and we came aboard ships without chaplains . . .

AN OFFICER Commissioner, you're losing your mind!

VICTOR HUGHES [As if awaking from a dream] Oh yes, oh yes! I must read you the decree of the 16th day of pluviôse in the second year of the French republic. [He coughs, clears his throat] The National Convention declares that the slavery of Blacks in all the colonies is abolished; consequently, it decrees that all persons living in the colonies, regardless of color, are French citizens entitled to all rights guaranteed under the constitution.

The crowd is completely silent.

AN OFFICER Don't those animals understand anything? You are free! FREE! **[End Page 469]**

A WOMAN Lib? Ou vlé di nous lib? Ou vlé di nèg lib? Free? You mean to say that we are free? You mean to say that the slaves are free?

The words reverberate and slave men and women emerge from all sides and invade the stage.

THE CROWD [Delirious] Nèg lib! nèg lib!

JOSYNA We've been waiting for this day for so long!

ELISA God is great!

JOSYNA My child will be free. He won't spend his time coiling tobacco leaves for the pleasure of the Master. He'll wear shoes. He'll go to school. He'll read books . . .

ELISA And he'll learn to read music and play the violin . . .

VICTOR HUGHES Not so fast! Not so fast! First you have to fight against the English, those vile satellites of despotism. Join our ranks!

Onrush of men and women slaves.

AN OFFICER Let's have some order here. The men on one side, the women on the other. Men, begin your drills.

The file of men marches off in step.

THE OFFICER One, two! One, two!

AN OFFICER You women will learn to oil and maintain the guns. To sew the uniforms. To keep the beds and the infirmary clean.

The women bustle about.

JOSYNA Taking care of the sick is what I know how to do. I'm especially good at getting rid of fevers and the clap.

Suddenly the sound of an explosion, and, if possible, fire works.

A VOICE The English are at Fort Fleur d'Épée! [45](#)

A VOICE It's the gun powder magazine that's blowing up!

The crowd moves around.

A VOICE We must follow them to Rivière Salée! [46](#)

ANOTHER VOICE Beyond Rivière Salée! Let's all go to Fort Saint-Charles!

ALTOGETHER To Fort Saint-Charles!

The shots become sparse. Gradually, silence prevails. The smoke fades away. Surrounded by his officers and a group of male and female slaves, Victor Hughes places a wreath of flowers in front of a monument and speaks.

VICTOR HUGHES We honor the spirits of the departed who defended their country. After six months and eight days of combat they met their death in the conquest of Guadeloupe. **[End Page 470]**

Men and women citizens: You've become equal in order to enjoy happiness and to make it the lot of others. He who oppresses his fellow citizen is a monster who must be immediately banished from society.

Shouts, applause, hurrahs. Lights out.

THE STORYTELLER Hadn't we waited long enough for freedom? It was like a new wine that went to our heads. Or like a shot of rum that made us talk nonsense, that put a fire in us, that made us soar to new heights. Oh, those were beautiful days!

Scene of great merriment. Women dance to the cadence of the gwo-ka. ⁴⁷ *This goes on for several minutes. Suddenly a procession of soldiers led by an officer arrives.*

AN OFFICER [*Harshly*] Where is the owner of this plantation?

A MAN He's fled, citizen officer!

THE OFFICER This plantation, Juremont's plantation, will heretofore be sequestered and the income deposited in the Treasury. Foucault, Marchant, Robert, put these men and women back to work.

The soldiers carry out his order with brutality.

A MAN Back to work? How can that be? Slavery has ended!

THE OFFICER Who will keep the plantations running? Who will grow the sugar cane and the coffee?

JUSTIN [*Dragged off unceremoniously by a soldier*] I was sure that slavery would never end.

The men and women are forced to begin cultivating sugar cane supervised by the soldiers, who point their guns at them. This scene lasts for several minutes. Then the stage becomes dark.

THE STORYTELLER The worst intoxication comes from wearing a uniform; happy are those who have nothing but old rags on their backs. Victor Hughes wastes no time in becoming the Robespierre of the tropics. On Sartine Square, now renamed Victoire Square, he installs the guillotine. And from that day on, Monsieur Anse, the executioner, a distinguished Mulatto, raised in Paris if you please, a pleasing violinist whose pockets were always full of candy for the children, was no longer out of a job. Cut heads like sugar cane. Clack, clack, clack . . . Cut heads like sugar cane. Clack, clack, clack! [*Silence*] The entire city reeks of rotting flesh. [*Suddenly he goes back to the tone of a smooth talker*] Meanwhile in Saint-Domingue, Toussaint Louverture has rallied to the Republic. He frolics on the heights of Nerette, at Rivière Froide, at Crête à Piquant, at Montagne Noire. ⁴⁸ He builds and dismantles white power. The French are eating out of his hand. [*He strikes a pose*]: **[End Page 471]**
"The leaders who were slaves are the backbone of the freedom of the Republic."

Stage I is illuminated. Toussaint Louverture is hailed by his followers and applauded by the white generals. He seats himself on a kind of platform and holds an audience.

TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE "I hereby declare that all colonists who do not reside in France, or who live abroad without the authorization of the commissioners, are émigrés, whose properties are subject to sequestration."

Applause.

A MAN [*Throwing himself at his feet*] General, Savior, Osagyefo, First among Blacks, Mwalimwana ⁴⁹ : I come from Mirebalais. The plantation you were kind enough to rent to me bears nothing, neither sugar nor coffee. Now that the slaves think they are free they don't want to work any more.

TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE How can that be? Work is a virtue. Anyone caught wandering and idle will be arrested and punished by law. Get the military commander of your region to help you.

A SOLDIER [*Pushing a group of men before him*] General, Savior, Osagyefo, Mwalimwana . . .

TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE Get to the point!

THE SOLDIER These peasants come from Dondon. ⁵⁰ They've rebelled.

VOICES THAT ARE PRESENT The same has happened in Marmelade, Plaisance, and Limbé.

TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE What more do they want? Aren't they free?

THE SOLDIER Savior, Osagyefo, Mwalimwana . . .

TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE I told you to get to the point. Didn't you hear me?

THE SOLDIER Yes, Savior, I'm getting there! They want the lands to be distributed!

TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE [Furious] What?

THE SOLDIER Distribution of lands, Dear Father of the People! Land for those who cultivate it. They say that your generals have taken over the Whites' properties and that they're no better off than under slavery. No, no better at all!

TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE What insolence! They deserve the whip! **[End Page 472]**

He stands up.

TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE [Shouting] "All overseers, drivers, and farmers who do not scrupulously fulfill the duties that farming imposes on them will be arrested and punished with the same severity as soldiers who fail to meet theirs . . . I, Toussaint Louverture, commander in chief of the army, have spoken."

He sits back down.

ANOTHER SOLDIER [Coming forward with a group of women] Father, Benefactor, these women say that . . .

TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE Quiet. I no longer want to hear anything. The audience is over.

He stands up and withdraws. His followers accompany him. The lights dim.

THE STORYTELLER So it goes, so it goes! As for me, I found Toussaint Louverture a little frightening, in spite of all the respect to which he is entitled. You didn't? Didn't he remind you of anyone? No? Good! Too bad! Too bad for me; I'm kind of over sensitive when it comes to freedom! He reminded me of . . . His manner was a little like . . . No, nothing, no one. Let's talk about something else. About what's going on in the kingdom of . . . excuse me, what am I thinking about? In the republic of France. [He takes on the tone of a smooth talker] Some people saw the king's execution as a crime. Brittany, the Vendée, the Gironde revolt. ⁵¹ War is horrible. The countryside and the villages are ransacked from top to bottom. The fields are burning. The trees are cut down. In Paris the Convention votes for the formation of the Committee of Public Safety to punish the traitors to the young republic. [He becomes serious] I was mistaken. Revolution isn't a woman. It's a witch. She feeds on fresh blood. She smears it all over her jowls. She licks it off her fingers. And then, in the colorless hours before dawn, she gives birth to monsters. The hopes of 1789 are so far, far away!

Stage 1 lights up again. A circle is formed of onlookers, with women knitting in the front row. Men put up a guillotine. During the whole scene they are hammering loudly.

THE STORYTELLER [In a comic way, showing no pity under any circumstances] This is the Reign of Terror, which pits royalists against republicans and republicans against each other. 16,600

heads will roll in the gutters, making an average of 200 heads a week, including Danton's. You remember he said, "Executioner, be sure to show my head to the people. It's worth showing." You've got to admit he had nerve! And style! So there was Danton. And then Camille Desmoulins, Robespierre, Couthon, Saint Just, Lavoisier, for the republic didn't need chemists; and then André Chenier, **[End Page 473]** because it had no need for poets, especially poets. Why? What did it have against them? Yes, the revolution gives birth to monsters.

The storyteller remains prostrated while the light goes out. Darkness for several moments. Stage 1 is lit again. The slaves Justin and Narcisse are seated and talk.

JUSTIN They say that the stores in Pointe-à-Pitre . . .

NARCISSE Port de la Liberté!

JUSTIN What are you talking about?

NARCISSE That's how Monsieur Victor Hughes wants us to call it now!

JUSTIN The hell with him. Isn't it the same city? Over there the stores are full of merchandise. How come over here we're dying of hunger? It's worse now than it was before. At least before I had my two pounds of salt pork a week.

NARCISSE All you think about is your stomach!

JUSTIN I'm telling you that's it's worse than before. Singing the Marseillaise morning and night while marching in step. The morning when your eyes aren't even open yet, the evening when your body can't even stand up and all you want to do is to lie your bones down and sleep, sleep . . .

NARCISSE For me that isn't even the worse part. We're used to working like slaves, aren't we? But now we're working for nothing. For peanuts. After everything that they promised us! What did they say a barrel of coffee would cost? And a cask of sugar? In the end we never got a glimpse of any money at all!

JUSTIN And weren't we supposed to be able to make our gardens bigger? I asked for the piece of land along the river. They answered: "Wait Citizen Farmer." Today I'm still waiting. I'm telling you, things are worse now.

NARCISSE Not worse. The same. The same old thing! . . . Sometimes I wonder if we should go join those who are up there in the mountains? At least the Whites don't screw them!

JUSTIN If I haven't done it so far, now isn't the time when I'm going to do it! You know, I'm not so young anymore! When I was born, the master . . .

NARCISSE *[Harshly]* You don't have a master any more, Justin. You're a free man! On top of it, the person you call your master was arrested trying to flee to Martinique and *[meaningful gesture]* he suddenly became much shorter. *[Laughter]* I can't tell a lie, I've enjoyed seeing all these heads of Whites falling to the **[End Page 474]** ground. As soon as I could I went down to Pointe-à-Pitre and I ran to Victoire Square. There it was, set up like a guardian angel! . . .

JUSTIN Don't say things like that. Good God, it's not a sight for a Christian!

NARCISSE *[Breaking out laughing]* Who's the Christian, you or me?

At this moment a man comes out of the shadows wearing a uniform, a rifle slung over his shoulder. He comes toward them.

JUSTIN [Noticing him] Isn't that Pierrot that I see there?

NARCISSE Pierrot?

PIERROT Yup, it's me alright!

Affectionate back slapping and scuffles.

JUSTIN But what did you come back here for? Do you miss the smell of the earth? Didn't you go off to be a soldier?

PIERROT Yes, I learned to use arms. I know how to take aim and kill a man standing ten steps away. [He cocks his gun and fires. An enormous sound is heard.]

JUSTIN [Terrified] You're as crazy as always! Do you want the soldiers to come take us away?

PIERROT How are things going here? On the way I saw fields lying fallow and sugar cane withering on the stem.

NARCISSE Still the same misery here, brother. Nothing has changed. But tell us about you. [Excited] So, have you killed a lot of Whites?

PIERROT Yes, I was at Fort Fleur d'Épée and God preserved my life. But I defended myself. I killed a whole bunch! I was drunk with blood. When my bullet tore half a brain out or ripped open a chest, I said to myself: "Take that, take that! This one's for Bonhomme who you hung from the top of the acomat-boucan tree. This one's for Vincent who you broke live upon the wheel. For Sérafina who you buried alive."

JUSTIN But you were killing Englishmen. They hadn't done anything to you.

PIERROT They were Whites, weren't they? I'll tell you why I came back. [He motions to them to come near and whispers] In Saint-Domingue, the slaves have come together like the fingers of a hand, and they've forced the Whites to respect them . . . [End Page 475]

NARCISSE It's not only a matter of them respecting us. They have to share the land with us, the land on which we sweat and slave. They have to pay us our wages . . .

PIERROT I'm going to tell you more . . .

JUSTIN [Interrupting] I don't understand you, Pierrot. In the past you yourself said that it's not the same in Saint-Domingue as it is here. They have thousands and thousands of slaves while here we . . .

PIERROT Yes, but things have changed now. We've learned to use arms [He plays with his gun] and we know where we can get them. One slave with a gun is worth two. Or even three. Now there are millions of us.

Justin and Narcisse say nothing and look at him.

PIERROT What do we need Whites for to govern us? This is our country.

He lowers his voice. From this point on the discussion of the three men is inaudible even though a lively discussion goes on among them for several minutes. The light fades.

THE STORYTELLER Plots, plots! Dreams, men's dreams. But I told you, men's dreams are

not meant to flourish freely. They go up in the smoke of stacks of burning wood. You know how it will all end, don't you? You've seen things like this before, haven't you?

The light on stage 2 comes back on. Soldiers climb up the stage led by an officer. Brutally they drag Pierrot, Justin, Narcisse and as many others as one wishes. They line them up, blindfold them, take their positions.

THE OFFICER Fire!

Shots. The men fall. The lights go down. When they go back on, bodies are stretched on the ground. Women dressed in white arrive from staircases leading to the different corners of the stage. They crowd onto the stage, kneel next to the dead men, place lit candles at their feet and sing a cappella. This scene should be an exact replica of the one from the preceding period of 1789.

THE STORYTELLER Yes, you've already witnessed scenes of despair and mourning. They're the same in the past and still today. Men dying, men shut up in solitary confinement in prisons in the name of their people's freedom, women crying, orphans. You've seen them, you've seen them. You still see them today. Our history consists only of starting all over again . . . even though I promised you that after the days that left a bitter aftertaste, after rotten days, there would be days filled with sunshine. Now you don't want to listen to me anymore and you're saying to yourself, "This is getting to be too sad." How can I make you smile again? **[End Page 476]** *[Silence]* I have an idea. *[Changing the tone radically]* Come over here, ladies and gentlemen. Come close! Come to the Rendez-vous des Sans Culottes ⁵² and get a little shot of rum or drink a few glasses of bourbon from morne à Caille. Here you won't hear about land reform, freedom, independence. You'll meet the commissioner Victor Hughes himself, the pirates Jambe de Bois, Vidal, Crassin, Jamarque, Antoine Fuet . . .

The light flickers on and off on stage 1, giving the impression of a blackout. During this brief interval one can see a few men in a bar scene.

THE STORYTELLER *[Startled]* What's the matter? Don't you want to come with me? Would you rather throw a hibiscus flower to our martyrs? As you wish. *[Silence]* So the year 1794 comes to an end. No more king. No more queen. No more dauphin. All of Europe has ganged up against France. The revolutionaries have eaten each other up alive. The people are wondering what they got out of it. And everyone is asking: what, what will tomorrow bring? *[Silence]* Ladies and gentlemen, look above you. The moon has opened its big yellow eye and the sky is locked up. That means it's time to get home to bed, each man with his woman. It's too bad for those who have to sleep alone with their desires. We've performed enough for tonight. I've stuffed your heads enough for tonight. "In the Time of the Revolution" is over for tonight. The actors are going to take their costumes off, remove their makeup, and return to the present.

But I promise, I swear, we'll meet up again and I'll finish this story that I've begun. For the moment I wish you good evening, good evening to one and all. See you soon!

ACT III: 1802

This period is obviously less grotesque than the two preceding ones. Nevertheless, it should never be performed in a tragic mode. On the contrary, the presentation should be very sober. Moments of parody should be accentuated. With the exception of the short scene between Solitude, Joséphin and Sergéius, there should be no emotion. Scenic arrangement should be identical to the preceding periods. Creole can be used whenever the actors want, except for the storyteller. The storyteller on his platform declaims somewhat emphatically.

THE STORYTELLER "The century was two years old. ⁵³ Rome was replacing Sparta. Already Napoléon was breaking through Bonaparte. And through the cracks of the First Consul's tight-fitting mask, The face of the Emperor was appearing." Oh, Victor Hugo! Say what you like, he's the prince of poets. The immortal genius! When I was a child, I wrote in my notebook: "I want to be Victor Hugo **[End Page 477]** or nothing." ⁵⁴ Yes, "Victor Hugo or nothing." Can you imagine that? Me, a little black

nobody, that's what I dreamed.

[*Silence, then he bursts out laughing*] You believed me? I pulled one over on you! You know, when I closed my eyes, Victor Hugo was far away, very far from opening his eyes. And then, in my time we didn't dream about poetry, literature, all that meaningless stuff. We dreamed about freedom. Not like you who dream about BMWs or VCRs or vacations to Caracas! No! We dreamed of being free, of standing up straight. As straight as a pié-bwa ! [*Silence*] Why am I telling you all this? Oh yes, I was telling you that we are in the year 1802. Listen again to how nice this sounds: "The century was two years old . . . Already Napoléon was breaking through Bonaparte . . ." [*Smooth talking*] We are in the year 1802 and the name of the new strong man is Bonaparte. No one seems to suspect what's he's planning. No one is worried. No one has panicked. On the contrary. Everyone is acclaiming the young general who transported the obelisk to Paris as if he were a savior.⁵⁵ Remember, he took that crazy lady, Revolution, who was beginning to frighten everyone, and put her in jail under lock and key. Europe is cozying up to him, even England, France's perennial enemy. The middle class is busy belching and growing bigger paunches. The triumph of that class is assured. Order has been restored.

Stage 1 lights up. A group of soldiers, surrounded by a silent, prostrate crowd, uses pikes to contain them.

FIRST SOLDIER "Citizens, The experience of centuries teaches us that revolutions are dangerous. Their actions comprise all the human passions; violence is always the main element; and until the end of these terrible crises, no one can say if their occurrence was good or not."

SECOND SOLDIER [*Violently brushing him aside*] You talk too much! Citizens, the revolution is inseparable from the principles that set it in motion. It is OVER. "OVER, do you understand!"

THIRD SOLDIER [*Even more violently*] Citizens, You've been dreaming! No society can exist without inequality of fortunes. Period!

The lights dim completely.

THE STORYTELLER And so it goes! That's all it takes. With a few words, revolution is abandoned, put aside, terminated. And there's no one around to cry for that world of equality and fraternity that could have been born, for that new sun that could have shone forth if only the landowners had allowed it. The world is a big cake, an apple pie, an upside-down tart, a strawberry cake, a doukoun if you [**End Page 478**] prefer,⁵⁶ that only a few get their fill of. Some people look at them and rub their empty stomachs, for they're mighty hungry. Others run over to pick up the crumbs. That's the way the world is! [*Returning to his smooth talker's tone*] So it's 1802. In the ports of Flessingue, le Havre, Cherbourg, Brest, Lorient, Cadix, and Toulon a half dozen frigates are preparing to sail to Saint Domingue. It's an amazing expedition that is getting ready to leave, one of the most amazing that's been seen for a long time!

Behind him, stage 1 is illuminated. Standing in a circle of light, a man in uniform reads from a large register. His reading should give the impression of being interminable.

THE MAN Guns loaded aboard the flotilla. Bronze canons 26 Bronze mortars 4 Howitzers 2 Gun mountings 37 Gun trucks 13 Mortar wagons 8 Cannonball carts 20 Forges complete with tools 2 Ammunition 12-pound shells 633 8-pound shells 2072 4-pound shells 620 Assorted ammunition 24-pound round cannonballs 3060 16-pound round cannonballs 3060 12 inch bombs 520 8-inch bombs 1020 12-pound encased cannon- balls 416 8-pound encased cannonballs 1747 Assorted arms [*He's still reading when the lights dim gradually and the storyteller begins to speak again.*] Bonaparte pours thousands of soldiers into Saint-Domingue and he puts in command his bravest officers, including his own brother-in-law, General Leclerc.⁵⁷

Stage 1 lights up again. Toussaint Louverture is speaking with some of the officers.

TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE [*Angrily*] My express wish is that before long there be no way of

finding white man's flesh here, even if it were the sole remedy for the most serious illness.

Shots, smoke. Soldiers emerge from the stairs.

VOICES The Whites have landed! The Whites have landed!

TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE Christophe, ⁵⁸ Dessalines, ⁵⁹ Maurepas ⁶⁰ . . . Mine all the roads; throw dead bodies and horses in all the water supplies; annihilate and burn everything. Le Cap, Port au Prince, Port de Paix! Burn everything!

The gun shots increase, the smoke becomes thicker.

AN OFFICER [*White, appearing suddenly on the stage*] Stop! Stop! Read the proclamation by the first consul of the republic. It grants Blacks the freedom for which they fought so hard. I swear it's true, I swear it!

The light goes out. Silence.

THE STORYTELLER Don't listen to him! Despite the hypocritical and mendacious words of the proclamations, here's the real truth. The colonies **[End Page 479]** aren't earning one red cent. The plantations are deserted. The sugar cane is dying on the stalk, the coffee plants are riddled with insects. Slavery must be reinstated.

SLAVERY, this word must be amplified and repeated like an echo. While it still resonates, stage 1 is lit up. In one corner, a group of black soldiers is seated on the ground playing cards, or any other game played for money. The game is lively. Suddenly, one of them stops and raises his head as if he heard the word SLAVERY floating in space.

SOLDIER CORNEILLE Don't you hear . . . ?

THE OTHERS [*Preoccupied with the game*] What?

CORNEILLE I thought . . . But it must be the dream I had last night that's bothering me. I dreamed . . .

SOLDIER JOSÉPHIN Play, instead of telling your life story . . .

At this moment, another soldier arrives who is younger, almost a child.

SOLDIER INNOCENT What are you doing there? Don't you know that it's forbidden to play for money?

JOSÉPHIN Forbidden by whom?

INNOCENT By the governor of course!

JOSÉPHIN Which one? I'd really like to know how many governors we have! There's Governor Pélage at Pointe-à-Pitre. ⁶¹ There's Governor Lacrosse in Dominica. ⁶² Not to mention Commander Delgrès ⁶³ at Basse-Terre who may well become a governor, and Captain Ignace who would like nothing better than to become one, which is fine with me!

INNOCENT There's only one governor here, Governor Pélage!

SOLDIER Don't talk about Lacrosse. That man hated our color and could ACHILLE think of only one thing: to enslave us again!

CORNEILLE *[Bursting out laughing]* I won, I won! Let's have the money! *[While the others reluctantly give him money he becomes serious]* That's what I dreamed. That's it exactly. I dreamed that Lacrosse came back to la Pointe with hordes of English soldiers and put us all back into the sugar cane fields.

JOSÉPHIN If you ask me, that's pretty much what's going to happen. I'm afraid that this expedition that's approaching doesn't bode well. What's it coming here for? Shall we play another hand?

THE OTHERS Yes! Corneille, it's your turn to deal! **[End Page 480]**

INNOCENT Governor Pélage has told us not to worry. On the contrary. Haven't you seen his proclamation?

JOSÉPHIN I've seen it, I've seen it . . . *[He reads mockingly]* "Let's be happy and surrender . . . May the republic live forever." As if the republic ever cared about the slaves.

INNOCENT How can you, a soldier, say that? You deserve twelve bullets!

JOSÉPHIN You know what I'd like to do to your Governor Pélage?

INNOCENT *[Menacingly]* What? What?

THE OTHERS Leave us in peace with your stories! If you want to fight, go somewhere else!

JOSÉPHIN I heard that an expedition like the one that's on it's way here arrived in Saint-Domingue and that they killed all the slaves.

INNOCENT It's not the same! The slaves in Saint-Domingue are lawbreakers, Governor Pélage said so . . .

JOSÉPHIN Lawbreakers, lawbreakers! When the Whites decide to put goddamn irons on your feet again you'll see what you think of the law!

Everyone laughs. At this moment, the sound of a bugle is heard. A soldier arrives running.

THE SOLDIER Gather together immediately. We're leaving for Port de la Liberté.

JOSÉPHIN What are we going to do there?

THE SOLDIER General Richepanse's ⁶⁴ expedition can be seen from the coast. Apparently the troops will disembark tomorrow. We need to form an honor guard. Captain Ignace has sent the order.

JOSÉPHIN Captain Ignace! An honor guard! Are you sure you heard it right?

INNOCENT If you stay here talking instead of following orders, they'll throw you in the slammer.

JOSÉPHIN It won't be the first time!

The stage is invaded by soldiers rising up from various stairways and running in the same direction.

JOSÉPHIN *[Addressing one of them]* Pierrot, do you have a clue what's going on here?

SOLDIER PIERROT *[Stopping]* A clue about what? **[End Page 481]**

JOSÉPHIN Captain Ignace can't be asking us to go form an honor guard for those Whites. Doesn't

he know what they're up to? If he didn't understand, why would he have opposed Governor Lacrosse? He knows perfectly well that the Whites despise and scorn us. They've proven it!

PIERROT Orders are orders. We're soldiers. We've been ordered to go to Port de la Liberté. Let's go!

Pierrot runs away. Joséphin hesitates, then runs away in the diametrically opposite direction.

THE STORYTELLER In this year of 1802, the sound and the fury are deafening. Let's leave the celebrating to those who have something to celebrate. Let them let loose 1789 balloons in the tricolored sky. As for us, once again all we can do is to honor our dead. I'm tired. I wish I could crawl back into my mother's womb and nestle there like a crab inside a hole in the ground. I wish I could close my eyes and ears and not have to hear any sounds of our world anymore. I wish I could die a second time. Alas, I have to lead you to the end of this trip backward in time. Even if it brings blood to my mouth and tears to my eyes, it's my duty to go all the way with you.

Stage 2 lights up A family of peasants is eating: the mother, Hosannah; the father, Fériér; children of different ages including a fifteen year old boy, Sergélius.

HOSANNAH I've heard that the Whites are coming to put us back into slavery.

SERGÉLIUS [*Violently*] You don't know what you're talking about! Captain Ignace will never let that happen.

FÉRIER If the Whites come here with canons, I can't see what your Captain Ignace will be able to do about it.

SERGÉLIUS As long as Captain Ignace is alive, it won't happen! Captain Ignace has said that the way things are now isn't freedom. He's said that as long as a single White, a single European landowner, is here, we won't be free.

FÉRIER [*Bursting out laughing*] And who does he want to give the plantations to? Perhaps to the slaves. All they know how to do is drink, play cards or parade around in their soldiers' outfits. Look around! In the whole village here there's only one single slave who's stupid enough to work: it's ME!

SERGÉLIUS Is that how you talk about the people of your color! Could General Victor Hughes have kicked the English the hell out of here without the slaves? Let me tell you, when the slaves take over this country it will be a paradise!

FÉRIER [*Laughing even harder*] My, oh, my! Fortunately I won't live to see that day. You want me to tell you . . . ? **[End Page 482]**

HOSANNAH Listen, will you let us eat in peace? You never let up!

They hear a sound.

HOSANNAH Who goes there?

A minute later Joséphin appears.

FÉRIER [*Harshly*] Joséphin! If you're looking for Mayotte, she doesn't live here anymore. She took off for Grippon.

SERGÉLIUS [*Gleefully*] Joséphin!

JOSÉPHIN How's it going, kid? . . . [*Slapping Hosannah on the back*] You have a little breadfruit

stew for me? I haven't eaten a bite for three days other than a few guavas. [*Sitting down*] No, I'm not looking for Mayotte. Captain Ignace has given the order to go to Pointe-à-Pitre to suck up to the white general who has arrived. So I've decided to get lost.

SERGÉLIUS You don't get it! You just don't get it! Captain Ignace did that on purpose! To test this white guy. After he figured it out, he got his soldiers together and left for Lamentin!

JOSÉPHIN What are you talking about?

SERGÉLIUS Anyway that's what I heard. The white man put Governor Pélage in prison, and if Captain Ignace hadn't left, he would have done the same with him!

JOSÉPHIN [*Getting up*] Are you sure of what you're saying? Pélage is in prison and Ignace is at Lamentin? Well then goodbye my friends! [*He leaps up and runs off.*]

SERGÉLIUS [*Running after him*] Joséphin! Wait for me! Wait for me! I'm coming with you!

HOSANNAH Sergélius, you're crazy! Stay here!

FÉRIER That Joséphin never brings anything but misfortune!

Joséphin and Sergélius run off. Stage 2 is in darkness for a moment. When the lights come on again, the stage is overrun with men and women, especially women, armed with an array of objects, marching and singing. They can be singing a republican song, but it would be preferable to have a song composed for the play. People should be coming up all the stairs leading to the stage. The crowd marches and sings for a moment. At one corner a man in uniform appears, wild looking, surrounded by officers and soldiers. He is greeted by shouts.

THE CROWD Ignace! Ignace!

At this moment, Joséphin and Sergélius arrive from one of the staircases, hand in hand. They try to move into the first row. A pregnant young woman also appears and sits down on the side. Ignace jumps onto an improvised platform. [End Page 483]

IGNACE [*Declamatory voice, with an element of parody*] Citizens, France has just sent us 3,470 soldiers, under General Richepanse's command. [*The crowd jeers*] Three times that number, led by General Leclerc, has been sent to Saint-Domingue. [*The crowd jeers*] What are all those soldiers, who've been chosen from among the fiercest of Bonaparte's troops, here for? [*The crowd jeers.*] Do we really need to ask? Their mission is clear: To reestablish slavery! SLAVERY! And do you know who General Richepanse is bringing back from Dominica? Governor Lacrosse, who treated you like dogs! [*The crowd jeers.*] Will we ever accept slavery being reinstated?

THE CROWD NEVER! NEVER!

IGNACE Would it be better to die?

THE CROWD YES! YES!

IGNACE Citizens, What are we united?

THE CROWD Strong!

IGNACE What are we divided?

THE CROWD Weak!

IGNACE We're going to join up with the troops of Delgrès, the commander at Basse-Terre, and together we'll defeat the enemies of our freedom!

The crowd shouts.

ANOTHER OFFICER [*Taking his place on the platform*] Citizens, I'm going to read you officer a proclamation by the commander of Basse-Terre, Delgrès. [*He reads very badly.*] May the whole universe hear this last protest of innocence and despair. In the finest days of a century that will be forever celebrated for the victory of philosophy and enlightenment . . .

The crowd is obviously becoming restless.

THE OFFICER A suffering class menaced with annihilation has had no choice but to raise its voice to posterity . . .

A WOMAN What does all that mean?

A MAN Be quiet! It's white folks' French.

ANOTHER Shut up! Too bad for you if you don't understand French!

THE OFFICER [*Continuing to read*] so that after its death a record will remain of its innocence and misfortunes. Victims of a few bloodthirsty individuals, who dared to deceive the French government . . .
 . **[End Page 484]**

A VOICE Enough, enough! We're wasting time! Let's be off to Basse- Terre!

ANOTHER VOICE That's the way white folks talk!

THE CROWD To Basse-Terre! To Basse-Terre!

IGNACE [*Motioning to the officer to be silent*] Let's go!

The crowd moves off. Joséphin and Sergélius stand next to the pregnant woman, who raises herself up with difficulty.

JOSÉPHIN [*Coming up level with her*] Really, women are crazy! With your big belly, is this where you should be?

THE WOMAN But it's my belly that gives me strength and courage! [*She touches her belly.*] I don't want her to live through what we've endured. For it will be a girl. That's how I want it to be. I'll call her Aimée!

JOSÉPHIN Lean on me. Sergélius, take her other arm. What's your name?

THE WOMAN Solitude! ⁶⁵

SERGÉLIUS [*Bursting out laughing*] What a funny name!

SOLITUDE My mother gave it to me because her life had been a long, drifting journey to the end of night in a hearse drawn by four horses. But for Aimée, everything will be different. The world will change. There will never be any storms or rains ever again; only clear blue sky.

SERGÉLIUS There will never be any empty bellies ever again. Our cooking pots will be full!

JOSÉPHIN We'll never have to work for free ever again! The land won't belong to the Whites anymore. It will be ours, and we'll plant green fruit, red fruit!

SOLITUDE No more masters, no more slaves ever again!

JOSÉPHIN No more rich people ever again, no more poor people ever again!

SERGÉLIUS [*With expressive gestures*] No more tattered rags that barely cover your behind! Clean white clothes, neatly ironed!

SOLITUDE Oh! How beautiful tomorrow will be! I can see it! Can you?

SERGÉLIUS AND JOSÉPHIN [*In unison*] I can see it!

A MAN [*Mockingly*] What do you see? Hurry! **[End Page 485]**

SOLITUDE , JOSÉPHIN, SERGÉLIUS Off to Basse-Terre!

They join the others who go off singing the song from the beginning of the scene. The lights go off abruptly.

THE STORYTELLER What do you want me to say? That I've invented a happy storyteller ending like in American movies? This time will be like all the others. Death, which never has its fill, will have a belly full; and those who love freedom will end up in mass graves. Sometimes I say to myself that if the earth is so red in Guadeloupe it's because she's seen so much blood flowing!

The sound of shots, canons. The storyteller listens for a moment without saying anything.

THE STORYTELLER [*Very coldly; definitely very coldly*] Cornered by Pélage, who had storyteller surrendered, Captain Ignace put a bullet through his head on May 25. Surrounded by Richepanse's troops, Commander Delgrès and his 300 companions, who had taken refuge in the d'Anglemont plantation, were blown to bits on May 28. The mulatto woman Solitude was executed shortly after that. Joséphin and Sergélius are among those anonymous figures >whose names history does not remember. They gazed in the face of death somewhere between Trois Rivières and Saint Sauveur. Give us freedom or death!

Silence. The light goes up on the two stages. On the second stage, the scene replicates the earlier scenes in 1789 and 1794, but in complete silence. On the first stage, white officers are seated around a table and discuss terms. For a while the two parallel scenes are performed together. Then the light will slowly go out on stage 2.

AN OFFICER [*Solemnly*] The order of the day calls for the report by the special commission that was named at the last session to present its opinion concerning the expression of national recognition by the senate to the first consul of the republic . . .

BONAPARTE [*Angry and brutal*] Gentlemen, get on with it! Have you made a decision or not?

Hesitation. At this moment, an emissary runs in.

EMISSARY General, General, General Richepanse has accomplished his mission! God is with us. Slavery has been reestablished in Guadeloupe.

The officers rise enthusiastically.

BONAPARTE [*Gloomy and remaining seated*] I don't give a damn about Guadeloupe. It's nothing but a speck of dust, of spit, in the sea. What about Saint-Domingue? What about Saint-Domingue?

[End Page 486]

EMISSARY General, there are two letters from General Leclerc!

BONAPARTE Couldn't you have said so sooner? What does he have to say? Read them!

EMISSARY *[Opening one of them hastily]* Citizen consul, illness is devastating the army under my command. The army that you estimated at 20,000 men has been reduced to 12,000. At the present time 3,600 of my men are hospitalized. Order the shipping of medical supplies to us. This loss of men is truly frightening . . .

All the officers seem appalled except for Bonaparte, who shouts.

BONAPARTE This is not what I want to hear. The hell with this. What does the other letter say? Has he gotten rid of those gilded Africans?

EMISSARY Yes, General. The other letter. *[He opens it]* "I have had General Toussaint arrested and I'm sending him to you with his whole family . . ."

Shouts of joy, hugs.

THE OFFICERS He has had Toussaint Louverture arrested! Finally! Finally!

The lights go out on stage 2 and go on again on stage 1. Standing on three sides of the stage, men blow into conch shells while others beat drums. [Drum roll] It is important that the fourth side remain open. It symbolizes the seashore.

MEN Yo pri Toussaint! Yo pri Toussaint! They've taken Toussaint!

THE FIRST MAN Mé yo pa pri Sans Souci! But they didn't get Sans Souci!

THE SECOND MAN Mé yo pa pri Lamour Dérance!

THE THIRD MAN Mé yo pa pri Cangé!

THE FOURTH MAN Mé yo pa pri Magloire Amboise!

THE FIFTH MAN Mé yo pa pri Gilles Bambara!

THE SIXTH MAN Mé yo pa pri Makaya!

THE SEVENTH MAN Mé yo pa pri Dessalines!

Ovation by all.

EVERYONE Freedom! Independence! **[End Page 487]**

A din of conch shells, gwo ka drums, songs, applause, cheers. Dancing. Since this is the final scene it should be noisy and very lively.

DESSALINES *[Climbing up on a platform; tone still somewhat marked by parody]* War to the end against tyrants! That's my motto! Freedom! Independence! That's our rallying cry! Generals, officers, soldiers, I make a vow to you that I swear to uphold as long as one breath of life remains in me. *[Ovation]* Never again will any colonialist or any European set foot on this territory as a master or property owner. This resolution will be the foundation of our constitution.

Ovation, applause.

SECOND GENERAL [Lamour Dérance] The Whites have understood nothing. They took Toussaint. But there are thousands of Toussaints in Saint Domingue!

Ovation. Confusion. Suddenly, guards positioned along the coast start moving around and pointing with their spyglasses.

A SENTRY There are men out at sea! They are swimming toward us!

VOICES Swimming! They're Whites! Whites who want to catch us by surprise!

The crowd begins to stir.

A SENTRY No, they're not Whites! They're Blacks!

DESSALINES [Coming close] Blacks?

All becomes still. The crowd gathers on the fourth side of the stage and looks out at the horizon. After a moment, men and women who are soaked and exhausted drag themselves forward, climb the stairs and move onto the stage. Confusion. One of the women faints.

DESSALINES [Showing no kindness] Who are you? Where are you coming from?

A MAN [Crying] We're coming from Guadeloupe. Slavery has been reestablished . . .

THE CROWD Reestablished!

THE MAN Yes! Guadeloupe is again in chains! She is covered with blood again! She's in ruins!

Appalled silence.

THE MAN We were deported along with thousands of others on the frigate "La Cocarde." But when night came, we jumped into the sea! We've been struggling for hours to stay alive at sea. Some of us were carried away by the waves, and we'll never see their bodies again. **[End Page 488]**

DESSALINES Don't cry! Aren't you at home here? Aren't Guadeloupe and Saint-Domingue one and the same?

THE CROWD They're the same! They're the same!

DESSALINES Don't we all come from Africa?

THE CROWD Yes! Yes!

DESSALINES Don't we all speak the same Creole?

THE CROWD Yes! Yes!

DESSALINES Don't we all dance to the same drum?

Beating of drums.

THE CROWD Yes! Yes!

DESSALINES Men and women of Guadeloupe, stop crying! Consider this your home!

This land is yours! We'll share with you, and even if there were thousands of you asking for refuge, we would welcome you in the same way!

Ovation. Drums. Applause.

A man from [*Surrounded by all the others*] One day, despite all of this, our Guadeloupe country will be independent. Yes, it will be independent, and we will plant it with the fruits of hope and fraternity!

THE CROWD [*Standing around them and embracing*] Yes! Yes!

DESSALINES [*Resuming his stentorian tone*] Citizens, rather than diminishing our courage, the terrible news that Guadeloupe has been enslaved again only incites our rage to avenge our brothers who have been abused by the Whites! I've spoken. We'll fight with our last breath! What is our rallying cry?

THE CROWD Freedom! Independence!

Here, group dances, solos by women, and above all very loud beating of the gwo ka drum for several minutes. Then, darkness on the stage and silence. THE STORYTELLER That was in 1802! Since we all know the outcome of this story, I'll let you judge whether the promises that were made that year were kept; whether the dreams were realized or whether tomorrow still remains nestled in its mother's womb, waiting to be born. My eyes see nothing; only many, many corpses; many prisoners; many exiles; many, many. . . It's late. It's time for me to return to my eternal night, to my resting place under the casuarina trees, right by the sea! The sea is my companion. On stormy days, I hear her roar against the rocks. When the weather is fair, **[End Page 489]** I hear her babbling like a little child! I'll let you get back to your lives. I'll let you get back to life! To the sun! To the red flowers of the balisier tree on the slope of the volcano. I bid you a good evening. Remember me. Zephyr. My name is Zephyr.

Translated by Doris Y. Kadish and Jean-Pierre Piriou

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Notes

1. In French, the title of the play, "An Tan Revolisyon," includes the subtitle "elle court, elle court la liberté," which alludes to the French children's song and game about chasing a ferret: "il court, il court le furet." A possible translation might be "chasing the greased pig of freedom." The play was first staged at the Fort Fleur d'Épée in Gosier, Guadeloupe on November 11, 1989.
2. The corrupt regime of Sartine, minister of the navy, was overthrown in 1794 under the leadership of Victor Hughes, governor of Guadeloupe, who recruited black soldiers and defeated the English on Sartine Square, which was renamed Victoire Square.
3. The storyteller is a mythical character found in tales from the Caribbean. Guardian and dispenser of the islands' histories, he is presented by the celebrated Haitian writer Jacques Stephen Alexis as flying all night from island to island; hence the name Zephyr.

4. The island of Guadeloupe is today an overseas department, standing in relation to France as Hawaii does to the United States. It enters written history in 1493 when Christopher Columbus landed on the island, which was at that time populated by Amerindians. Different periods mark the life of Guadeloupe at the end of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries: revolution, counter-revolution, occupation by the English, reconquest by the French, and abolition of slavery.

5. In the usage of the times, such terms referring to color, social condition, or legal status as "gens de couleur" [persons of color], "affranchi" [free colored], and "mulâtre" [mulatto] were used interchangeably and in various combinations with one another.

6. In the usage of the times, "nègre" conveyed the social condition of "slave" whereas "noir" [Black] had abolitionist meanings more directly connected with race. See Doris Y. Kadish and Françoise Massardier-Kenney's *Translating Slavery* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1994), 18-19.

7. The Third Estate comprised all people not in the nobility or the clergy: the middle class, craftsmen, and peasants.

8. The "cahiers de doléances" were lists of grievances that were submitted to the king. In the colonies, local assemblies were formed by white deputies and citizens to compose them. Their requests included limiting the powers of the king and his agents, gaining the right to make their own laws and to enforce them with local militias and courts, retaining their properties and thereby stabilizing their possessions.

9. The harvest share ["champart"] was the part of the harvest taken by the lords under the feudal system. It was set apart in the field before the tenant farmer collected his harvest.

10. Direct taxes ["taille"] were imposed on peasants, with their value determined by the king's council. The nobility and clergy were generally exempted from such taxes. Indirect taxes ["aides"] affected the sale and distribution of certain kinds of merchandise. They were the monetary allowances that a vassal owed to his lord.

11. Before the arrival of Christopher Columbus on the island that he named Hispaniola in August 1492, its Carib inhabitants called it Haity. Under colonial rule, the Western half of the island was known as Saint-Domingue, a name that was changed to Haiti when independence was declared on January 1, 1804. Haiti thus became the first independent black state in the new world. The Eastern half of the island was known then and now as Santo Domingo.

12. The Estates General were assemblies summoned by the king under the ancien regime to deal with important matters of state. Among their duties were to make recommendations and vote on subsidies.

13. Guinea grass is tall African forage grass introduced into tropical America and the Southern United States, where it is used for hay. In the Caribbean, "Guinea" symbolizes the African continent, the cultural roots of the slaves, and the promise of ultimate freedom and rebirth. Upon death, it was believed, slaves would return to Guinea, the land where men stand tall.

14. In this scene, the king is still able to separate the three orders, but he eventually had to agree to allow them to meet together, at which time the Third Estate was able to gain control.

15. Count Honoré-Gabriel Riqueti de Mirabeau, a celebrated orator and moderate politician who advocated constitutional monarchy, played a major role in the National Assembly.

16. The Carmagnole and "ça ira" were popular revolutionary songs and dances during the Terror. In Guadeloupe, they marked the advent of the revolution.

17. Marie Galante is an island near Guadeloupe that administratively forms part of Guadeloupe today. In the eighteenth century it was the location of lucrative sugar plantations.

[18](#). Only later, in February 1794, were deputies of color sent to the National Convention: Jean-Baptiste Mills, a Mulatto; and Jean-Baptiste Bellay, a Black.

[19](#). The friends of the Mulattoes in Paris were the Société des Amis des Noirs, created in 1788 on the model of American and English abolitionist societies.

[20](#). Until the time of independence, numbers of runaway slaves or maroons succeeded in surviving in independent slave communities throughout the Caribbean.

[21](#). The mapou is a very tall tree found in Guadeloupe and other Francophone islands. In Haiti it is used in voodoo ceremonies. The malimbé tree, which grows in the Grande-Terre region of Guadeloupe, does not exist in Martinique or French Guyana. The acomat is a species of tree native to the Marie Galante region.

[22](#). The Great Fear was a peasant uprising that took place in the summer of 1789, as news of the taking of the Bastille spread through the countryside. It prompted the National Assembly to address the issue of abolishing privileges.

[23](#). In response to the spread of revolutionary violence in the provinces, the National Assembly officially abolished feudal privileges in August 1789.

[24](#). Mainmorte was possession of lands by corporations.

[25](#). Venal offices ["vacat"] were sold by the crown and had noble privileges attached to them. Many subsequently became hereditary.

[26](#). The annates taxes were paid annually to ecclesiastical beneficiaries.

[27](#). Under the ancien regime, guilds or labor corporations entered into an oath ["la jurande"] with their members.

[28](#). The Swiss banker Jacques Necker served as finance minister to Louis XVI from 1771 to 1781, when the king fired him for publishing a report on the precarious financial status of France. As attempts to withstand the financial crisis failed, Louis XVI reinstated him in 1788. He played an important role in the early years of the revolution as an advocate for social and constitutional reform. He resigned in September 1790 and lived in retirement until his death in 1804.

[29](#). Pointe-à-Pitre is a major city of Guadeloupe. Victor Hughes's battle to regain control of this city raged from June to September 1794.

[30](#). The tricolor cockade ["cocarde tricolore"] is a circular insignia bearing the national colors: blue, white, and red.

[31](#). Damballah is a voodoo deity, a "lwa" or "loa." He is represented as the great snake who surrounds the world.

[32](#). Madras, a piece of cloth used as a head scarf, is an integral part of the Caribbean culture. It is mentioned nostalgically in folk songs such as "Adieu madras" that recount the departure for France.

[33](#). Toussaint Louverture was born on the Bréda plantation in Saint-Domingue on May 20, 1743. Still a slave at age 48, he nevertheless learned to read and write, thus assuming a position of influence within the slave community. He joined his fellow slaves in August 1791 to plan the general rebellion and played a major role in Saint-Domingue's military activities, becoming Commander in Chief in 1797. Proclaimed governor for life in 1801, he was arrested in 1802 and sent to France, where he died in prison on April 7, 1803.

- [34.](#) Boukman, a slave and voodoo high priest [a "papa loa"], organized the revolution in Saint-Domingue, which began with a spontaneous slave insurrection in the north. He was captured and killed.
- [35.](#) Toussaint, like many other slaves of Saint-Domingue, responded positively to the Spaniards, who offered them an alliance against the French government.
- [36.](#) During his slave years, Toussaint was commonly referred to by his nickname of Little Stick [FAtlas Baton], a reference to his short, frail stature; or in conjunction with the name of the plantation where he was a slave [Toussaint Bréda]. It was only after 1793, when he emerged as a military leader, that he assumed the name of Toussaint Louverture. In *The Black Jacobins*, C.L.R. James observes that "l'ouverture" means "the opening," a reference to his military victories or openings if not also to the gap in his teeth. He preferred that his name be written "Louverture," without the apostrophe.
- [37.](#) Recognized for his knowledge of herbs as a "leaf doctor" [a "médecin feuille" or in Creole as a dokté-fèye], Toussaint was appointed physician in the army of Saint-Domingue.
- [38.](#) Elected president of Haiti in 1957, François Duvalier destroyed the military as an independent force and created his own militia, nicknamed the "Tontons Macoutes," or bogeymen. He preserved them until he was forced out of power in 1985.
- [39.](#) The Dauphin, son of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, was born in 1785, seven years after his sister known as Madame Royale, born in 1778. The Dauphin, who would have succeeded his father to the throne as Louis XVII, died during his incarceration in the Temple prison with his parents.
- [40.](#) The republican calendar was instituted by the National Convention on November 24, 1793. It was divided into twelve months of thirty days each, with five or six additional days devoted to the celebration of republican holidays. The months were renamed for plants or other phenomena in the natural world as a rejection of the religious and regal connotations of the existing names of months.
- [41.](#) Fabre d'Eglantine was a French poet and political personality who named the months of the republican calendar.
- [42.](#) Kongo, Nago, and Moudongue all refer to African peoples sold into slavery in the West Indies. The Kongo came from the Central and Southern parts of the continent, while the Nago originated from the Western coast. The Moudongue is a reference to those from the Mandingue [mandingo] part of West Africa.
- [43.](#) In addition to referring to a type of orange, "Bourbonnaise" can be read as an allusion to the ill-fated Bourbon monarchy, which for monarchists at the time would have seemed "sweet to the tongue."
- [44.](#) A Mulatto serving as public prosecutor in Rochefort, Hughes was dispatched to Guadeloupe to bring the National Convention's message to the slaves and form them into an army.
- [45.](#) Located within two miles of Pointe-à-Pitre, Fort Fleur d'Epée had great strategic importance as a buffer zone, an area of protection from enemy attacks from the southeast. Captured by the English in 1794, the fort was retaken by Victor Hughes and successfully defended against subsequent English attempts to regain control of it.
- [46.](#) Rivière Salée and Fort Saint-Charles were key locations in Hughes's successful battle to oust the English from Guadeloupe.
- [47.](#) The gwo-ka refers both to a Caribbean drum and to a dance performed to the rhythm of the drum.
- [48.](#) The places named here witnessed key battles opposing Toussaint Louverture and his enemies in the struggle for Haitian independence.

[49.](#) Osagyefo, a title and praise-name in the Akan-Twi language, is a collector of an army, a deliverer. It was the praise-name appropriated in recent times by Kwame Nkrumah after Ghana's independence since he "delivered" the promised independence. Mwalimu, of which "mwalimwana" appears to be a variant, means master or professor in Swahili.

[50.](#) Dondon, Marmelade, Plaisance, and Limbé are towns where Toussaint fought and defeated his old allies, the English, in May 1794.

[51.](#) 1791 marked the beginning of counter-revolutionary activities and uprisings in France in the western regions of Brittany and the Vendée as well as the Gironde province, whose chief city was Bordeaux.

[52.](#) The name of the café, the Rendez-vous des Sans Culottes, refers to the working class attire that marked the end of the ancien regime practice of wearing "culottes," or knee breeches.

[53.](#) The poem "The Century was two years old" ["Ce siècle avait deux ans"] first appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* on August 1, 1831 and was then published that same year in the collection "Les Feuilles d'Automne."

[54.](#) This remarks constitutes a parody of Hugo himself, who at sixteen is reported to have claimed that he wanted to be Chateaubriand or nothing ["Etre Chateaubriand ou rien!"]

[55.](#) Bonaparte's military prestige was greatly enhanced by his Egyptian campaign in 1798. When he returned to France he was hailed as a hero. The obelisk, located today at the Place de la Concorde in Paris, commemorates his military victories.

[56.](#) A doukoun is a Caribbean pastry.

[57.](#) General Charles Leclerc, the husband of Bonaparte's sister Pauline, commanded the expedition of Saint-Domingue, where he met his death during the insurrection in 1802.

[58.](#) Born in Grenada, Henri Christophe was a slave who came to Saint-Domingue at an early age. Having served in the Savannah campaign in the American War of Independence in 1778, he returned home as a free man and went on to achieve the highest military rank during the Haitian revolution. He was declared king of Haiti in 1811 and died in 1820.

[59.](#) The Haitian born slave Jean-Jacques Dessalines was a leader of the 1791 uprising leading to Haitian independence in 1804. After Toussaint Louverture's deportation, Dessalines succeeded him as commander in chief. Declared governor for life of Haiti, he died in ambush on October 17, 1806.

[60.](#) A black general, Jacques Maurepas was summoned to Le Cap in November 1802 where General Leclerc ordered him and his whole family drowned at sea.

[61.](#) A mulatto leader, Pélage took control of the government for a period in 1801 during the revolutionary uprisings that occurred in Guadeloupe. Despite his attempts to effectuate reform, he was deported to France and imprisoned. Later he regained his military rank and died in Spain in 1813.

[62.](#) Originally sent to Guadeloupe in 1793 to institute revolutionary reforms, Lacrosse returned there in 1801 with instructions to reestablish slavery. Despite uprisings directed against his rule, which forced him to flee to the island of Dominica in 1801, he was successful in putting down the slave revolts, and slavery was restored in 1802.

[63.](#) A black officer and former slave, Delgrès led the forces of revolt in Guadeloupe. Forced to retreat to the d'Anglemont plantation and threatened with imprisonment, he and 300 of his followers ended their battle in a fiery and heroic death.

[64.](#) Napoleon's instructions to General Richepanse in Guadeloupe paralleled those he gave to

General Leclerc in Saint-Domingue. He defeated the leaders of the revolutionary uprisings, deported their leaders, and restored slavery.

[65](#). The legendary story of the pregnant mulatto woman named Solitude, who went to her death in the Guadeloupean revolution of 1802, has been told by André Schwarz-Bart in the novel *La Mûlatresse Solitude* [1972].

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