

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

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

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

1789

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

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

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

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

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

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