

## “You want to slaughter all the whites?”

Toussaint Louverture

1797

In 1797 Toussaint Louverture, as General in chief of the French forces in Saint-Domingue, sent this report to the Directory, which was then in charge of France. In dialogue form he recounts his conversation with Léger Felicité Sonthonax, the head of the French commission to the island. Since his arrival in 1792, Sonthonax had been a strong opponent of slavery (which he had banned in 1793), a supporter of the black and mulatto forces, and a fierce enemy of the white colonists. He had been forced to go back to France for an inquest into his actions on the island, but cleared of all charges and returned to Saint-Domingue. It was Sonthonax who named Toussaint to his position as head of the army. In August 1797, shortly after the events in this report, he was expelled from Saint-Domingue by Toussaint.

**Commissioner Sonthonax:** Do you know what we are going to do first? The blacks are worried for their freedom. We have here colonists of whom they are suspicious. They must all be slaughtered. Everything is ready. You only have to be in agreement with me.

**General Toussaint:** What? You want to slaughter all the whites? Aren't you white yourself?

**Commissioner Sonthonax:** Yes, but not all of them. Only those who are enemies of freedom.

**General Toussaint:** (With an impatience he can no longer hide) Let's talk of other things. We'll talk about this tomorrow.

**Commissioner Sonthonax:** Alright. That's enough.

**General Toussaint:** Sonthonax then wanted to bring the conversation back to the events in the south. As I feared that this affair would make him return to the horrible proposals he'd just made me I said I had a headache and left.

The next morning I went to the commissioner's house before going to the parade with the commission. After the parade I gave orders to have my horse saddled without the commissioner's knowledge. Sonthonax, having taken me back to his house, led me to his office, where after having congratulated me he had me sit next to him.

**Commissioner Sonthonax:** Let's talk about the affair.

**General Toussaint:** What affair?

**Commissioner Sonthonax:** That which we broached yesterday evening. I am very happy to see you head of the armed forces of the colony. We are in a perfect position to do all we want. You have much influence over the inhabitants. We must carry off our project; it is the perfect moment. The circumstances have never been more favorable, and there's no one better than you to act together with me.

**General Toussaint:** You mean, commissioner, that you want to ruin me... Kill the whites? Take our independence? Did you not promise me that you'd never again talk of these projects?

**Commissioner Sonthonax:** Yes, but you see it's absolutely indispensable.

**General Toussaint:** You complain of the Cayes Affair <sup>[1]</sup>, and you want to carry out the same thing.

**Commissioner Sonthonax:** No, it's to chase them out. We won't kill them

**General Toussaint:** Today you say you want to chase them out, but yesterday and just now you said they had to be killed. But if a white was killed here it is I who would be held responsible. (With impatience) I'm leaving, commissioner. I took my hat and left. Sonthonax ran after me. He reached me just as I opened the door and asked me to return. I went back to his office, saying to him: "Commissioner, I am very angry with you."

**Commissioner Sonthonax:** Well, if you are angry, let's talk about anything.

**General Toussaint:** You have already given me your word of honor not to talk any more about this, yet you still bother me, you persecute me. I am angry. Very angry.

**Commissioner Sonthonax:** It is over. I thought you would have joined me, but since you take this ill I'll no longer speak to you about anything. Do you promise not to tell anyone about this?

**General Toussaint:** I have often promised this, but this time I can't promise you anything.

**Commissioner Sonthonax:** I swear to you that I won't ever talk about this ever again. Promise me you'll say nothing.

**General Toussaint:** No, because of the promise you made to me but didn't keep, one can't count on your word. I'm leaving. My thought was to gather my officers and make known to them your projects, so that if I were to die they could be on their guard against you and my memory wouldn't be dishonored.

**Commissioner Sonthonax:** I give you my word of honor. I swear to you never to speak of this again. But promise me that you'll keep this secret. This isn't something your officers should know about. Give me your word of honor that you won't speak of this to anyone.

**General Toussaint:** (With ill-humor) Alright then. I give you my word. Farewell.

I abruptly left and mounted my horse to go to Gonaïves.

#### Notes

1. Scene of rioting the previous year that had resulted in the death of many white colonists.

**Source:** *Extrait du rapport adressé au Directoire executif par le citoyen Toussaint Louverture, general en chef des Forces de la République française a Saint-Domingue.* Chez P. Roux, imprimeur. Cap-français, n.d. [1797];

**Translated:** for marxists.org by Mitch Abidor;

**CopyLeft:** [Creative Commons](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) (Attribute & ShareAlike) marxists.org 2004.

Taken from: <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/toussaint-louverture/1797/report.htm>