

Two excerpts of Boisrond-Tonnerre's *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire d'Ayiti* (1804) translated by Asselin Charles

I. Opening paragraphs of Boisrond-Tonnerre's *Memoirs* (1804)

Before I depict those scenes of horror committed in Saint-Domingue by this trashy collection made up of such French refuse as the so-called captain-general, *préfets*, *sous-préfets*, *ordonnateurs*, and vice-admirals, I must emphasize that there is not a single fact, not a single crime, not a single act mentioned in this book that does not bear the most unassailable stamp of authenticity. I merely evoke the brief, and yet too long, presence of those monsters in Saint-Domingue, and already my pen is frightened when confronted with the number of crimes that I must recount. For who would not tremble at the thought that it took less than two years for some Corsican's agents to repeat the barbarity of the Spaniards against the Indians, the atrocities of Robespierre's reign, the cruel execution methods invented by Carrier and those who carried out those horrible expeditions, although the very character of the ferocious tyrant in whose name those crimes were committed should have forewarned all sensitive souls about the impending fate of the entire population of the unfortunate island of Saint-Domingue, the target of all the tyrants, conspirators, and vile rejects of France?

I asked myself a thousand times as I contemplated writing this book, this inventory of French crimes, who would ever believe the truths I was about to record? What sensible person, even one who had lived through the storm of the Revolution, would think that the French were capable of committing still greater crimes in the most beautiful and yet most unfortunate of their overseas possessions?

How am I to persuade those nations that have not yet succumbed to the French contagion that a tyrant, who has usurped his master's throne and now makes liberty and equality the sole foundation of his power and claims to be the restorer of traditional morals and religion, had decreed in cold blood the massacre of a million people who only wanted liberty and equality and indeed were ready to defend them against the entire universe?

How am I to write about a nation that has been the unrelenting enemy of the Spaniards since time immemorial and yet, [like them], went so far as to have their dogs devour the unfortunate victims of their treachery? How am I to explain that the enemies of the Inquisition were the first to introduce the republican *auto-da-fés* in the unhappy country from which they had sworn to expel the Spaniards?

No, I shall be believed only by that assemblage of vile assassins who have unleashed their fury against my countrymen. Only they shall be aware that there exist cannibals of a species as monstrous as they are. Only they shall know that I have told the truth, and that if my account lacks color it is because the reality I describe is much too overpowering for my feeble pen.

I wield a pen that can never be labeled with venality or be accused of having been guided by partiality. All the facts contained in these memoirs are part of the history that we shall transmit to posterity.

May our descendents be happier than we are and know of the French only their name, and may they read the history of our dissensions and our faults as they would the account of a dream erased by their happiness!

II. Concluding paragraphs of Boisrond-Tonnerre's *Memoirs* (1804)

May the sea on which they sail to invade our island allow them to behold for an instant the prosperity which the country will enjoy under your benevolent auspices, and may the waves vomit them against our rocky shores only so they can be made to expiate by our very hands the crimes they committed for two centuries! May the war you declare against them never end, and may the presence of an armed White man be the signal for war!

Aytians, who have been saved from the curse of prejudice by the courage of a hero, as you read his memoirs you will measure the depth of the abyss from which he has lifted you! And as for you, who live in slavery in various countries, you will learn through this great man that Man naturally carries liberty in his heart and that he holds the keys of this freedom in his hands.