

## Letter by Tobias Lear to James Madison

1801 letter by Tobias Lear to the U.S. Secretary of State, James Madison. Lear was traveling in Saint-Domingue after his appointment as U.S. Consul by U.S. President Jefferson in 1801. Lear reports about a meeting with his predecessor Dr. Edward Stevens and a meeting with Moïse, Henri Christophe and Toussaint Louverture. Lear had arrived in the French colony on July 4, 1801.

CAPE FRANÇOIS, July 17th: 1801

SIR,

I have the pleasure to inform you that I arrived here on the 4th, instant, after a passage of 21 days from the Capes. We met with no Cruisers, and saw but three or four Vessels of any kind on our passage.

On my arrival I delivered your letter to Dr. Stevens, and received from him every mark of polite attention. He went with me to General Toussaint Louverture, to whom he introduced me as the person who was to succeed him in his Office. I handed my Commission to the General, who asked me if I had not a letter for him from the President, or from the Government. I told him I had not, and explained the reason, as not being customary in missions of this kind, where I should be introduced by my Predecessor, and exhibit my Commission as an evidence of my Appointment. He immediately returned my Commission without opening it, expressing his disappointment and disgust in strong terms, saying that his Colour was the cause of his being neglected, and not thought worthy of the Usual attentions. I explained to him, with temper and candour, the nature of the Appointment as not requiring those particular introductions which are given to Diplomatic Characters, and assured him of the President's respect & consideration. He became more cool -- said he would consider the matter, and desired me to see him at 9 o'clock the next morning. I went accordingly, and found with him Genl. Moyese [Moïse] and Genl. Christolphe[Christophe], two of the principal Generals. He repeated the observations which he had made the Evening before, and added, that it must hurt him in the eyes of his Chief Officers, when it was found that he was not thot. worthy of having a letter from the President of the Governmt. I gave the same explanations wh. I had offered before. He appeared to be much hurt; but after some further conversation, said, that, notwithstanding the mortification he felt, he would give an evidence of his sincere desire to preserve harmony and a good understanding with the United States, by received me, and giving me all the countenance and protection, in the execution of my Office, which I could desire. I left my Commission with him to be translated and recorded, and received it back the same evening. Since that time I have had no cause to complain of a want of attention.

I enclose you several papers printed here, by, which you will see the Arretes which have been passed at different times respecting Commerce. That of the 18h of Floriel [Floreal] seemed to bear hard upon the American Merchants settled in this Island. Dr. Stevans [Dr. Stevens] had remonstrated against it. Several Americans were put upon the list of Consignees; byt many remained without that priviledge. On the 18th instant I wrote to the General on the subject in strong but temperate terms. His answer was expressive of warm wishes to fabour the Commerce of the United States; but still reserving to himself the right of judging of the qualifications of those who were desireous of being allowed to become Consignees. Since that time he has, however, granted permission to all the Americans settled here

(about 20) excepting two or three, and I have reason to suppose that the same has been extended to those settled in other parts of the Island.

I have heard of no Captures by the British since I have been here, and do not learn that they have any Cruizers on this side of the Island. There are 32 American Vessels now in this Port. Flour, Fish and Dry Goods constitute almost all their Cargoes. The first of these Articles is 16 1/2 dolls. Pr bbl -- Herrings 6 1/2 -- Dry Goods sold at a loss. Coffee is 24 sous (abt. 15 Cents) -- good sugar 6 1/4 dolls. P. Cwt.

The British Agent was in Jamaica when I arrived here; but I have since been informed that he has arrived at [Port Republican](#).

I have not been long enough here to form a correct opinion of the state of things in this Island. The General in Chief expresses, on all occasions, his strong wishes for a friendly intercourse with the United States.

A new and important Symbol Aera has commenced here. A [Constitution](#) has been formed for the Government of this Island, by Deputies called together for that purpose by the General in Chief. It was read in public, with great parade, on the 7th instant. The papers which I send you will shew the Addresses which preceded and followed the reading. It is not yet printed from the public. It declares [Genl. Toussaint Louverture](#) Governor for life, with the power of naming his successor. It is to be submitted to the French Republic for approbation; but in the meantime, it is to have effect here in the Island.

I shall have the honor of writing to you more fully in a few days, by the Brig Neptune, in which I came out, and which returns directly to Alexandria. By that time I hope to get a Copy of the [Constitution](#) which I shall forward to you. At present I shall only add, that I have this moment received a letter from the Governor informing me that provisions are much wanting at Port Republican, and requesting that I would communicate it to the Merchants here. The consequence of which I expect will be to drain this market, which is at present full, and create a demand in this place. With the highest respect & sincere Attachment I have the honor to be Sir, Your most obedient Servant

[TOBIAS LEAR](#)

P.S. It is past midnight & the Vessel wh. Carries this sails before day light which must apologize for errors &c.

## Letter by the French Minister of the Marine to the Fort de Joux Commandant (1802)

*Toussaint Louverture arrived at the French prison [Fort de Joux](#) in August of [1802](#), and the French Minister of Marine and the Colonies, Admiral Denis Decrès [1](#) (1761-1820), following [Napoléon Bonaparte](#)'s orders, ensured that Toussaint's conditions of imprisonment would be as difficult as possible, by giving these instructions to the Commander Amyot. Toussaint died at Fort de Joux on [April 7, 1803](#).*

5 [Brumaire](#), Year X (October 27, 1802)

I received your letter of 26 [Vendémiaire](#) relative to the prisoner of state [Toussaint Louverture](#). The [First Consul](#) charged me to make known to you that you will respond with your head for his person. Toussaint Louverture has no right to any consideration other than that demanded by humanity. Hypocrisy is a vice as familiar to him as honor and loyalty are to you, Citizen Commandant. His conduct since his detention is such as to have fixed your opinions on what one should expect of him. You have seen yourself that he sought to fool you, and you were in fact fooled by the admission to his presence of one of his satellites disguised as a doctor.

You should not restrict yourself to what you've done in order to assure yourself that he has neither money nor jewels. You must search everywhere to assure yourself and examine to make sure that he hasn't hidden or buried any in his prison. Take his watch from him. If this is agreeable to him, this need can be met by establishing in his room one of those cheap clocks that are good enough to show the passing of time. If he is sick, the health officer best known by you must alone care for him and see him, but only when it's necessary and in your presence, and with the greatest precautions so that these visits don't in any way go beyond the sphere of what is most indispensable.

The only way Toussaint would have to see his lot improved would be for him to set aside his dissimulation. His personal interests, the religious sentiments with which he should have been penetrated for the expiation of the evil he has done, imposed on him the obligation of truthfulness. But he is far from fulfilling it, and by his continual dissimulation he approaches those who approach him with interest in his lot. You can tell him he can be tranquil concerning the lot of his family; its existence is committed to my care and they want for nothing.

I presume that you have put away from him everything that could bear any relation to a uniform. Toussaint is his name; it's the only denomination that should be given him. A warm garment, gray or brown, large and comfortable, and a round hat should be his apparel. When he brags of having been a general he does nothing but recall his crimes, his hideous conduct, and his tyranny over Europeans. He merits then, nothing but the most profound contempt for his ridiculous pride.

## Toussaint letter to Napoléon from Fort de Joux (1802)

[Toussaint Louverture](#) wrote the following letter from captivity in the dungeon at [Fort de Joux](#) to [Napoléon Bonaparte](#).

In the dungeon of [Fort Joux](#), this 30 [Fructidor](#), an XI. (17th September, [1802](#))

GENERAL, AND [FIRST CONSUL](#),

The respect and the submission which I could wish forever graven on my heart [*here words are wanting as if obliterated by tears ([Beard](#))*]. If I have sinned in doing my duty, it is contrary to my intentions; if I was wrong in forming the constitution, it was through my great desire to do good; it was through having employed too much zeal, too much self-love, thinking I was pleasing the Government under which I was; if the formalities which I ought to have observed were neglected, it was through inattention. I have had the misfortune to incur your wrath, but as to fidelity and probity, I am strong in my conscience, and I dare affirm, that among all the servants of the state no one is more honest than myself. I was one of your soldiers, and the first servant of the Republic in [St. Domingo](#); but now I am wretched, ruined, dishonored, a victim of my own services; let your sensibility be moved at my position. You are too great in feeling and too just not to pronounce a judgment as to my destiny. I charge [General Cafarelli](#), your aide-de-camp, to put my report into your hands. I beg you to take it into your best consideration. His honor, his frankness have forced me to open my heart to him.

Salutation and respect,

TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE

## Toussaint L'Ouverture in *An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti*

*British Officer Marcus Rainsford, writing in 1805, paints a glowing portrait of the abilities and accomplishments of L'Ouverture, the most noted leader of the rebellion and one of the key founders of the nation of Haiti.*

If during this early period of his life, the black general had shone conspicuously, through every disadvantage, with the brightest talents and the milder virtues, he now rose superior to all around him, with the qualities and rank of an exalted chief. Every part of his conduct was marked by judgment and benevolence. By the blacks, who had raised him to the dignity he enjoyed, he was beloved with enthusiasm; and, by the public characters of other nations, with whom he had occasion to communicate, he was regarded with every mark of respect and esteem. General Laveaux called him "the negro, the Spartacus, foretold by Raynal, whose destiny it was to avenge the wrongs committed on his race": and the Spanish Marquis d'Hermona declared, in the hyperbole of admiration, that "if the Supreme had descended on earth, he could not inhabit a heart more apparently good, than that of Toussaint L'Ouverture."

His powers of invention in the art of war, and domestic government, the wonder of those who surrounded, or opposed him, had not previously an opportunity for exhibition as at the period to which we have arrived in this history. Embarrassed by a variety of contending factions among the blacks, and by enemies of different nations and characters, he was too much occupied in evading the blows constantly meditated in different quarters, to find leisure for the display of that wisdom and magnanimity which he so eminently exercised. Nevertheless a variety of incidents are recorded in the fleeting memorials of the day to corroborate the excellence of his character, and still more are impressed on the memory of all who have visited the scene of his government. Notwithstanding the absoluteness of military jurisdiction, which existed with extra power, no punishment ever took place without the anxious endeavors of the General-in-Chief to avoid it, exerted in every way that could be devised. No object was too mean for his remonstrance, or advice; nor any crime too great to be subjected to the rules he had prescribed to himself.

Source: Marcus Rainsford, *An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti: Comprehending a View of the Principal Transactions in the Revolution of Saint-Domingo; with its Ancient and Modern State* (London, 1805), 239–43, 245–248.

*TO TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE*

TOUSSAINT, the most unhappy of men!<sup>1</sup>  
Whether the whistling Rustic tend his plough  
Within thy hearing, or thy head be now  
Pillowed in some deep dungeon's earless den; -  
O miserable Chieftain! where and when  
Wilt thou find patience? Yet die not; do thou  
Wear rather in thy bonds a cheerful brow:  
Though fallen thyself, never to rise again,  
Live, and take comfort. Thou hast left behind  
Powers that will work for thee; air, earth, and skies;  
There's not a breathing of the common wind  
That will forget thee; thou hast great allies;  
Thy friends are exultations, agonies,  
And love, and man's unconquerable mind.

--William Wordsworth, 1802

**...TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE**

waz the beginning uv reality for me  
in the summer contest for  
who colored child can read  
15 books in three weeks  
i won & raved abt TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE  
at the afternoon ceremony

waz disqualified  
cuz Toussaint  
belonged in the ADULT READING ROOM  
& I cried  
& carried dead Toussaint home in the book  
he was dead & livin to me  
cuz TOUSSAINT & them  
they held the citadel gainst the French  
wid the spirits of ol dead Africans from outta the ground...

Excerpt from: *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf* a stageplay  
by Ntozake Shange (1975)

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<sup>1</sup> In his autobiographical text *Memoir of Toussaint Louverture, Written by Himself*, Toussaint Louverture writes: "...I am made the most unhappy of men; my liberty is taken from me..." ([Beard](#) p. 325)