

English Translation of the HaitiDOI

Posted on by [Julia Gaffield, PhD](#)

I found this translation of the Haitian Declaration of Independence in the Admiralty Records from the Jamaica Station (ADM 1/254) (it was next to the paper that noted that the broadside copy had been removed and recataloged). I think it's interesting to read translations like this because it reveals how contemporaries interpreted the text. One interesting translation is of the word "lugubre" that Dessalines and Boisrond-Tonnerre use as a verb in the Declaration of Independence. This translator uses the word "overclouds" although historians have used "haunts," "overshadows," or "darkens" (and I'm sure other variations too). Here is the first page along with my transcription of the text.

Liberty Or Death Indigenous Army

The first day of January 1804, The General in Chief of the Indigenous Army, accompanied by the Chief Generals of the Army assembled in Order to take measure for the Welfare of the Country.

After having made known to the Generals assembled his true intentions which are to insure for ever to the Inhabitants of Hayti a solid Government, the Object of his most lively Solitude, he has made known by Proclamation to foreign Powers, his Resolution of making the Country Independent and to enjoy a liberty consecrated by the Blood of the Inhabitants of the Island & after having taken their advice demands that each of the Generals assembled shall take the Oath of renunciation to France forever, of dying rather than living under its dominion, and to content to the last moment for their Independence.

The Generals penetrated with the sacred Principles, after having given in an unanimous Voice their determination to adhere to the Project of Independence, having all sworn to Posterity, to the whole Universe to renounce France for ever and to die rather than live under its dominion.

Made at Gonaives the first of Jan'y, 1804
the first day of Independence of Hayti

(Signed) Dessalines General in Chief, Christophe, Petion, Clervaux, Geffrard, Vernet, Gabart, Generals of Divisions; P Romaine, E. Gerin, F Capaix, Daut, Jean Louis Francois, Ferrou, Cange, L Bazelai, Magloire Ambroise, Jn. Jques. Herne, Touissant [*sic*] Brave, Yayou, Generals of Brigade; Bonnet, F Papalier, Morelly Chevalier and Marion, Adjutant Generals; Magny & Roux, Chiefs of Brigade, Chareron, B. Loret, Queni [*sic*], Makajoux, Dupuy, Carbonne, Diaquoi ainé, Raphael, [Malot], Derenoncourt, Officers of the Army, and Boirond Tonnerre Secretary

The General in Chief To the People of Hayti

Citizens

It is not enough to have forced out of your Country the Barbarians who have ensanguined it for the Space of two Centuries. It is not sufficient to have put an End to factions reviving from_ Phantom of Liberty, which France exposed to our Eyes. It is necessary by the last Act of National Authority, to ensure everlasting Liberty to the Country which gave us Birth. we must convince the inhuman

Government which has hitherto kept us in the most humiliating State that all hopes of ever enslaving us are at an End, and we must live Independent or die.

Independence, or Death, let these sacred Words rally us, and let them be the Signal of Battle, and of our reunion.

Citizens, Countrymen, I have assembled on this solemn day, those Courageous Soldiers, who at the expiring moment of Liberty, have spilled their blood to revive her, those Generals who have guided your efforts against Tyranny, have not yet done enough if your happiness; the name French overclouds our Country.

It retraces the remembrance of the Cruelties those Barbarians, our Laws, manners, Towns, everything still retains the French impression; what do I saw, there are Frenchmen existing among us, and yet you think you are free, and Independent of the Republic, which has made War against every other Nation & have never Conquered those who are determined to be free.

What, Victims for fourteen Years of our Credulity and Indulgence, Vanquished not by French Armies, but by the Chicanery of the Proclamations of their Agents when will we be tired of breathing the same Air as they do? What have we to do with these Barbarians? It's [*sic*] Cruelty compared to our patient moderation, the difference of their Colour to ours, the length of the Seas that separate us, our revenging Climate show sufficiently that they are not our Brothers, that they will never be, and if they find an Asylum amongst us they will be again the Plotters of Troubles, and divisions.

Citizens, Inhabitants, Men, Women, Sisters & Children, take a review of the whole of this Island, look for your Wives, Husbands, Brothers, and Sisters, what do I say look for your Children at the Breast, what's become of them? I shudder to mention it they were the Prey of these Vultures; instead of interesting Victims your Eye meets; but their Assassins the Tygers [*sic*] still covered with their blood, whose presence reproaches your Insensibility, and culpable dulness [*sic*] in revenging them, what are you waiting for to pacify their Shades? remember that you wish your remains to be interred near those of your fathers, when you have Chaced [*sic*] Tyranny will you descend into their Tombs, without revenge, no! their Bones would repulse yours; and you precious Men, Intrepid Generals, who insensible to your own misfortunes, have rescued your liberty at the Expence of your blood, known that you have done nothing, unless you give to Nations, a terrible, but just example of the Vengeance that a proud Nation should exercise after having recovered its Liberty, and jealous of maintaining it, let us frighten all those, who would attempt to force it from us; let us begin with the french, let them shudders in accosting our Coasts, if it is not on account of the Cruelties they have exercised let it be by the terrible resolution that we have entered into of putting to Death whoever is born french & who would Soil with their Sicriligious [*sic*] foot the Territory of Liberty.

We have dared to be free, let us dare to be so by ourselves, and for ourselves; let us imitate the Child thats growing whose own weight breaks the list, which becomes to him necessary, and shackles him in his Walk, what Nation has fought us? what Nation shall gather the fruits of our Labours, and what a great absurdity it would be having Vanquished, to become Slaves. Slaves! let us leave to the french that Epithet, they have Conquered to loose their freedom.

Let us walk on other grounds, let us imitate those Nations, who carrying their Solitude to the future, not willing to leave to Posterity to purchase it, prefer being exterminated, than be struck off the Number of the free Nations.

Let us take Care however that we are not converted from our purpose, let our Neighbours, remain in Peace, let them live quietly under the Laws which they have made and let us not go as incendiaries, erecting ourselves legislators of the Antilles constituting our Glory in disturbing the tranquility of the neighbouring Islands, they have not like that which we Inhabit been drenched with the innocent blood of its Inhabitants; they have no Vengeance to exercise against the Authority which protects them.

Happy are they in having never suffered under the Scourge that destroyed us they can only wish for our welfare.

Peace to our Neighbours, but annihilation of the french Name, eternal hatred to france thats our cry.

Indigenous of Hayti, fate reserved me one day to be the Centry to guard the Idol to which you sacrificed yourselves; I have Watched, Combated, sometimes alone; and if I have been happy enough to return into your hands the sacred Charge you entrusted to my Care, remember that you are to defend it, I Combating for your liberty, I laboured for my own happiness Before I Consolidated by Laws, which are to insure your individual liberty, the Chief assembled by my, and myself owe you this last proof of our devotion to your Cause.

Generals, and you Chief united near me for the happiness of your Country, the day is come which is to eternalize our Glory, and Independence.

Should a cool heart be amongst you let him draw back, and shudder in pronouncing the Oath that's to unite us.

Let us Swear before the whole Universe to Posterity, to ourselves to renounce france for ever, and to die rather than live under its dominion, to fight to the last moment for the Independence of our Country.

And you People too long unfortunately Witness to the Oath we are taking, remember that it is one your fidelity and Courage, I depended upon when I rushed into the Pursuit of liberty to Combat with the despotism, and tyranny against which you have struggled for these fourteen Years, remember that I have sacrificed every thing to fly to your defence [*sic*], and fled from Parents Children, and fortune, and that now I am rich only in your Liberty that my name is become the dread to all wish for Slavery, and that Despots, and Tyrants never pronounce it, without Cursing the day that gave me birth, and if ever you refuse to receive without murmuring the laws that the Genius that watches on your destiny, dictates to me for your happiness, you will deserve the fate of the most ungrateful People.

But far from me is such a shocking idea, will be the Support of the liberty you Cherish, as well as of the Chiefs who Command you.

Take then before him the Oath of living free and Independent, and to prefer death to any other thing that should put you again under the Yoke, Swear at last to pursue eternally the Traitors, and Enemies of the Independence.

Made at the General Quarters at Gonaives.

the 1st January 1804

(Signed) J. J. Dessalines

In The Name of the People of Hayti

We the Generals in Chief of the Armies of the Island of Hayti penetrated with the Gratitude and kind which we have experienced by the General in Chief Jean Jacques Dessalines protector of the liberty which the Nation now enjoys.

In the Name of Liberty and Independence, in the Name of the People he has made happy, we proclaim him Governor General for life of Hayti, we Swear to obey implicitly the Laws issued by his authority, the only one we acknowledge, we give him power to make Peace War, and name his successor.

Given at the General Quarters of Gonaives

First of Jan'y 1804 First Day of Independence

(Signed) Gabard, P. Romaine, J. Herne, Capaix, Christophe, Geffrard, E. Gerin, Vernet, Petion, Clerveaux, Jean Louis Francois, Cange, Feron, Yayou, Touissant Brave, Magloire Ambroise, and Louis Barelaize [*sic*]