XVI. Every society in which the guarantee of rights is not assured or the separation of powers not determined has no constitution at all; the constitution is void if the majority of individuals comprising the nation have not cooperated in drafting it.

XVII. Property belongs to both sexes whether united or separate; for each it is an inviolable and sacred right; no one may be deprived thereof unless a legally established public necessity obviously requires it, and upon condition of a just and previous indemnity.

7

TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE

Letter to the Directory, 1797

When the French revolutionaries proclaimed the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen in 1789, the French colony of Saint-Domingue[1] (now Haiti) contained a half million African slaves, most of whom worked on the sugar plantations that made France one of the richest countries in the world. Thus, the French were confronted with the difficult problem of reconciling their enlightened principles with the extremely profitable, but fundamentally unequal, institution of slavery.

French revolutionaries remained locked in debate about this issue when in 1791, the slaves of Saint-Domingue organized a revolt that culminated in establishing Haiti's national independence twelve years later. François Dominique Toussaint L'Ouverture,* a self-educated Haitian slave, led the revolt and the subsequent battles against the French planter class and French armies, as well as the Spanish forces of neighboring Santo Domingo—the eastern side of the island now known as the Dominican Republic—and the antirevolutionary forces of Britain, all of whom vied for control of the island at the end of the eighteenth century.

* too SAN loo vehr TUR

[1] san doh MANG *Santo Domingo* was the Spanish name for the eastern half of Hispaniola (now the Dominican Republic). *Saint-Domingue* was the French name for the western half of the island, now Haiti. *San Domingo*, which is used in the text, is a nineteenth-century abbreviation for *Saint-Domingue*. To further complicate matters, both the Spanish and French sometimes used their term for the whole island of Hispaniola. Spain controlled the entire island until 1697, when the Spanish recognized French control of the west.

Source: Toussaint L'Ouverture, "Letter to the Directory, November 5, 1797," in *The Black Jacobins*, ed. C. L. R. James (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 195–97.

At first Toussaint enjoyed the support of the revolutionary government in Paris; in the Decree of 16 Pluviôse[2] (1794) the National Convention abolished slavery in the colonies. But after 1795 the revolution turned on itself, and Toussaint feared that the new conservative government, called the Directory, might send troops to restore slavery on the island.

In 1797 he wrote the Directory the letter that follows. Notice how Toussaint negotiated a difficult situation. How did he try to reassure the government of his allegiance to France? At the same time, how did he attempt to convince the Directory that a return to slavery was unthinkable?

THINKING HISTORICALLY

Notice how Toussaint defines different groups of people. What does he mean, for instance, by "the proprietors of San Domingo" as opposed to "the people of San Domingo"? What does he mean by "the colonists" and "our common enemies"? How does the use of these terms aid his cause?

. . . The impolitic and incendiary discourse of Vaublanc[3] has not affected the blacks nearly so much as their certainty of the projects which the proprietors of San Domingo are planning: insidious declarations should not have any effect in the eyes of wise legislators who have decreed liberty for the nations. But the attempts on that liberty which the colonists propose are all the more to be feared because it is with the veil of patriotism that they cover their detestable plans. We know that they seek to impose some of them on you by illusory and specious promises, in order to see renewed in this colony its former scenes of horror. Already perfidious emissaries have stepped in among us to ferment the destructive leaven prepared by the hands of liberticides. But they will not succeed. I swear it by all that liberty holds most sacred. My attachment to France, my knowledge of the blacks, make it my duty not to leave you ignorant either of the crimes which they meditate or the oath that we renew, to bury ourselves under the ruins of a country revived by liberty rather than suffer the return of slavery.

It is for you, Citizens Directors, to turn from over our heads the storm which the eternal enemies of our liberty are preparing in the shades

[2] PLOO vee ohs Rainy; the name of the second winter month according to the revolutionary calendar.

[3] Vincent-Marie Viénot, Count of Vaublanc (1756–1845). Born into an aristocratic family in San Domingo, he was a French royalist politician. In Paris in September 1797, he gave a speech intended to impeach republican Directors and trigger a royalist coup. [Ed.]

of silence. It is for you to enlighten the legislature, it is for you to prevent the enemies of the present system from spreading themselves on our unfortunate shores to sully it with new crimes. Do not allow our brothers, our friends, to be sacrificed to men who wish to reign over the ruins of the human species. But no, your wisdom will enable you to avoid the dangerous snares which our common enemies hold out for you. . . .

I send you with this letter a declaration which will acquaint you with the unity that exists between the proprietors of San Domingo who are in France, those in the United States, and those who serve under the English banner. You will see there a resolution, unequivocal and carefully constructed, for the restoration of slavery; you will see there that their determination to succeed has led them to envelop themselves in the mantle of liberty in order to strike it more deadly blows. You will see that they are counting heavily on my complacency in lending myself to their perfidious views by my fear for my children. It is not astonishing that these men who sacrifice their country to their interests are unable to conceive how many sacrifices a true love of country can support in a better father than they, since I unhesitatingly base the happiness of my children on that of my country, which they and they alone wish to destroy.

I shall never hesitate between the safety of San Domingo and my personal happiness; but I have nothing to fear. It is to the solicitude of the French Government that I have confided my children. . . . I would tremble with horror if it was into the hands of the colonists that I had sent them as hostages; but even if it were so, let them know that in punishing them for the fidelity of their father, they would only add one degree more to their barbarism, without any hope of ever making me fail in my duty. . . . Blind as they are! They cannot see how this odious conduct on their part can become the signal of new disasters and irreparable misfortunes, and that far from making them regain what in their eyes liberty for all has made them lose, they expose themselves to a total ruin and the colony to its inevitable destruction. Do they think that men who have been able to enjoy the blessing of liberty will calmly see it snatched away? They supported their chains only so long as they did not know any condition of life more happy than that of slavery. But to-day when they have left it, if they had a thousand lives they would sacrifice them all rather than be forced into slavery again. But no, the same hand which has broken our chains will not enslave us anew. France will not revoke her principles, she will not withdraw from us the greatest of her benefits. She will protect us against all our enemies; she will not permit her sublime morality to be perverted, those principles which do her most honour to be destroyed, her most beautiful achievement to be degraded, and her Decree of 16 Pluviôse which so honours humanity to be revoked. *But if, to re-establish slavery in San Domingo, this was done, then I declare to you it would be to attempt the impossible: we*

have known how to face dangers to obtain our liberty, we shall know how to brave death to maintain it.

This, Citizens Directors, is the morale of the people of San Domingo, those are the principles that they transmit to you by me.

My own you know. It is sufficient to renew, my hand in yours, the oath that I have made, to cease to live before gratitude dies in my heart, before I cease to be faithful to France and to my duty, before the god of liberty is profaned and sullied by the liberticides, before they can snatch from my hands that sword, those arms, which France confided to me for the defence of its rights and those of humanity, for the triumph of liberty and equality.

8

DIPESH CHAKRABARTY

Compassion and the Enlightenment, 2000

In this essay, a modern historian argues that the Enlightenment was not confined to Europe and was more profound than is often thought. Here Chakrabarty demonstrates an Indian Enlightenment in the northeastern region of Bengal. He further reveals the profound way in which the Enlightenment changed not only peoples' ideas but also their feelings, signaling the beginning of the modern self. What does he mean by "the modern self"? What, according to the author, is the role of reason and compassion in creating the modern self? How did the Enlightenment change human feelings?

Compare the ideas noted in this essay of the Bengali Indian authors, Rammohun Roy and Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, with the ideas of European Enlightenment thinkers that you have read in this chapter. How is Roy's compassion for women similar to, or different from, that of Abigail Adams and Olympe de Gouges? How is it like the compassion of Toussaint?

THINKING HISTORICALLY

Chakrabarty underscores the use of some key Enlightenment concepts by these Bengali authors. What does he mean by "compassion in general"? What are the connections, according to Chakrabarty, among such concepts as suffering, compassion, reason, natural sentiments, universality, and custom?

Source: Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 119–24.