



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

PETITION FOR COMPENSATION FOR THE LOSS OF
SLAVES BY EMANCIPATION IN THE DANISH
WEST INDIES ¹

We, the undersigned, inhabitants of the West India Islands St. Thomas and St. John, beg leave most respectfully to present to the Rigsdag of Denmark, this Petition, praying that just and equitable compensation may be granted us for the loss we have sustained in our property, in consequence of the ordinance of the Governor General, bearing date 3d July, 1848, by which he took upon himself to abolish Negro Slavery in the Danish Colonies, and which act received the Royal sanction on the 22d September of the same year.

If, notwithstanding the heavy loss thus sustained, we have hitherto been silent, it should be attributed to the hope we had entertained, that the government, without being called upon to do so, would have taken steps to obtain compensation for us; and to the sentiments of sympathy with which we beheld the struggle of the mother country in the trying situation in which the revolt of the Duchies, and war with many powerful enemies had placed her, a struggle which required all her resources, both intellectual and material, of which she could dispose; and thus it would have been inopportune had we at that time obtruded ourselves on the notice of the government. But now, that the clouds which obscured the political horizon have been dissipated, now, that a glorious war is concluded, and peace sheds its blessings over Denmark, we can no longer defer our just demand for compensation, lest our silence should be construed into acquiescence with the act, by which we have been despoiled of our property, or interpreted as an abandonment of our claims. We had as good a title of property to our negroes, as to our land, houses, or any other property we possess; this right was established not only by law, but the government had moreover ever encouraged the subjects to acquire such property as being advantageous to the state. For this purpose the government granted loans to the colonists upon reduced interest from the so dominated "negro loan." The government bought and sold such property, took it in mortgage, levied

duties upon their importation, and imposed a yearly capitation tax, consequently not a shadow of doubt could exist of the legality of such property; and if it was a fault to become possessors of such property, it must be laid to the charge of the government which had fostered and encouraged it. The highest tribunal of the land, the King's High Court, acknowledged this right in its fullest sense, so that a negro slave, even on the free soil of Denmark, continued to be the property of his master so thoroughly, that the latter in direct opposition to the slave's will, could oblige him to return to the West Indies. That the negro's ability to work, and personal qualities, enhanced his value, is a fact too palpable to stand in need of proof; the numberless legal appraisements upon oath, the sales which took place daily between man and man, as well as the normal value, which according to the Ordinance of the first of May, 1840, was determined every year by the government, after a previous hearing of the Burgher Council, and the respective authorities, render this matter incontestable.

This ordinance admits the owner's right to full compensation, for only on condition of paying the full value of the services which the master could have from the slave, had the slave the right to demand his freedom; but without such remuneration, his master could not be deprived of him.

The forementioned ordinance, the common law, and in particular the eighty-seventh section of the constitution, lay down as an invariable rule, that no subject can be compelled to cede his property, unless the general good of the commonwealth requires it, and then only on receiving full compensation.

Those civilized nations in whose colonies slavery has been abolished, have neither raised any question nor doubt as to the legality of the principle of compensation. Thus England, France and Sweden have granted compensation. The first £ 25 12 2 sterling at an average per head; the second 490 francs per head, which is, however, considered but part of the whole sum; and the third in the following manner: first class, under fifteen years, \$80 per head, second class, from fifteen to sixty years, \$240 per head; third class, over sixty years, \$40 per head.

With regard to emancipation without compensation, the following language was held to the King of Sweden: "Your most gracious Majesty, in your high wisdom, will never allow such violation of justice as emancipation without compensation would be; such a thing has never anywhere occurred."

The Dutch government has declared that it will not abolish slavery without indemnifying the owners, and for this reason it has not given any formal sanction to the liberty which the Dutch governor of St. Martin's (with the consent of the planters) found himself compelled to concede to the negroes, when emancipation was proclaimed in the French part of the same island, but left matters in *statu quo*. Once, however, there existed an instance of emancipation without compensation. The National Convention of France, in the year 1793, did, disregarding the sacred rights of property, proclaim the abolition of slavery; but ten years afterwards, on the 28th of May, 1802, that act was declared by the corps legislatif, to be an act of spoliation, and as such illegal; consequently slavery was re-established by decree of the First Consul, and continued for half a century, and would in all probability be still in full vigor, at least for some time, had it not been for the revolution of February. For us, we have the most implicit reliance on the honor of the Danish Government, and the Danish people, and we feel persuaded that they will not follow the example of the National Convention. In Denmark, love of justice and respect for the sacredness of the rights of property are too deeply implanted in the soil to be easily rooted out. The proverbial honesty of Denmark is as firm as the courage, loyalty, and gallantry of which her sons have so lately given such signal proof.

The Rigsdag of Denmark will not on account of the burden, shrink from the demands of justice; it will not allow it to be said that it refused to satisfy a claim, the justness of which has never been doubted by any civilized nation, nor will it suffer a number of its fellow citizens to be illegally bereft of their property without compensation. The Rigsdag of Denmark will not leave it in the power of the world to say, that it was liberal at the expense of others, or that it denied compensation to the weak, because they had only the right, but not the power to enforce it. In reviewing the means that present themselves, the burden will not be so considerable or so heavy, when we take into consideration that the state possesses many plantations, in respect of which to their former complement of slaves, there will of course be no question of compensation, and that it also holds mortgages on many properties, where the compensation can be written off, without any real loss in many cases; on the other hand, the realm, by fulfilling its duty in settling a lawful claim, will gain by the disbursement of the compensation, which will as may reasonably be expected, not alone

increase the prosperity of the colonies, but their inhabitants will attach themselves more closely to Denmark.

We do not entertain any doubt but that the Rigsdag will grant us the compensation to which we have the most incontestable right, and which cannot be controverted by such futile arguments, as, that the owners have lost nothing by the government depriving them of their property, as the stock of labor is the same, and to be had for an equitable hire. If it even in reality were the case, that the expenses were not greater, and the work not less than before the emancipation, while, alas! the contrary is the case, it would, nevertheless, be a species of argument in itself contrary to common sense, in a degree, that it would scarcely require any refutation at the bar of the enlightened Rigsdag, as it might with just as much reason be said, that all the rest of the property of people could be taken away whenever the government managed matters in such a way, that the properties could be rented at so moderate a rate, that the expenses did not exceed, what those of the keeping of the property yearly had amounted to. It will be clearly evident that the owner notwithstanding, loses his essential rights, for the property would no longer be at his disposal, or under his control, he would be dependent upon others not only as to renting of that kind of property of which he had formerly been possessed, but he would not be able to sell, mortgage, or dispose of it in any manner whatever, either in favor of himself, his children, or other heirs; in short, property would to him, entirely lose its money value, and the capital vested in it would be sunk as is now the case with us. Many a slave owner derived his living from the yearly income which the hire of his slaves produced, but now the state has bereft him of his property, and hurled him, widows and orphans into the most abject poverty and misery, while that act, as yet without compensation, has more or less generally affected those who possessed that class of property, and in numberless instances produced pecuniary embarrassment; while the slave owners who are proprietors of plantations have not alone lost the capital invested in their slaves, but the subversion of the ancient normal order in the colonies, but in addition thereto, they are exposed to the imminent risk of seeing their estates, buildings, and fabrics eventually reduced to no value whatever. Most assuredly the circumstances which precede the emancipation, cannot be brought forward in support of the necessity thereof. Such a delusion cannot hold good. It is notorious that the so called insurrection which was begun in the

jurisdiction of Fredericksted, at St. Croix on the 3d of July, 1848, would have been put down, if the forces, although reduced as they had been, had been called out and made use of by the government of that island. This is borne out by the sentence of 5th of February, in this year, rendered against the governor-general by the commission, which sentence expressly states that the declaration of emancipation partly originated in a desire to procure the treasury an exemption from compensation, or what is the same thing, it was intended to serve as a means to deprive the proprietors of their lawful rights. Furthermore, it is quite evident, that even the most trifling commotion would not have occurred, if the Captain-General of Puerto Rico's offer of assistance on perceiving the impending dangers had been accepted. Neither is it less certain that the normal order could have been re-established subsequently. His Majesty's government by presenting to royal assent the emancipation of the negro slaves, which the governor-general had taken upon himself to grant, has adopted the act as its own. It has also from the very beginning been considered that the insurrection could not be viewed as sufficient foundation for the act. This is clearly to be seen from the wording of the royal mandate on which the emancipation is made a concession "to the lively" wishes of the negroes. That his late Majesty King Christian VIII., of glorious and blessed memory, had by rescript of 28th July 1847, given freedom to all children born of slaves in the Danish West India possessions, and at the same time ordained that slavery should finally cease in twelve years, cannot be pleaded as a reason that proprietors of slaves are to sustain loss and receive no compensation, for the question remained open, and had been only glanced at by said rescript. It is much to be lamented that the emancipation in the manner it took place, and with the circumstances with which it was accompanied, induced the slave population, although erroneously, to believe that they had overawed the government, and to receive the emancipation not as boon, but rather as a trophy. The bad impression which such a management of matters has caused, will ever remain, and render the march of administration difficult, for defiance has taken the place which only should have been ceded to gratitude. It ought here to be observed that a succession of ordinances had gradually loosed the ties which existed between the master and the slave. What heretofore had been esteemed as a favor on the master's part, was by law converted into an obligation, and the slave was not only ren-

dered more and more independent of his master, but his sentiments of attachment to him were destroyed. Thus the law made it obligatory on the master to cede a negro his freedom when he could pay his full value; a favor which hardly any one had thought of refusing; thus the law bound the master to give his slaves certain little extras for Christmas, a favor which no one had thought of denying, and thus the law compelled the planter to give his negroes the Saturday free; a boon, which hitherto frequently had been granted as a recompense for diligent work during the week. But from the moment that the law converted into an obligation, that which hitherto had been received as a favor, indifference usurped the place of gratitude. Thus, by consecutive innovations, the state of things became precarious, the relations insecure, impatience sprung up, and the seeds of the tumultuous scenes which ensued and served as a pretext for emancipation, were sown. Here we must observe, that though it were admitted that the pretended insurrection at St. Croix rendered emancipation an act of necessity, it cannot, at all events, in any manner be cited with regard to St. Thomas or St. John, where no kind of disturbance existed among the slave population, Thus, entertaining the intimate conviction that our right to compensation is as conformable to reason, as it ought to be sacred and inviolable, and in solemnly protesting against our being bereft of our property without full compensation, we submit this our representation to the Rigsdag of Denmark, with the most unlimited confidence in its justice. We have the consoling hope and encouraging persuasion that the representatives of a people who, by the bill of indemnity of 30th June, 1850, have gone ahead of, and set a brilliant example to other nations, by the acknowledgment of the principle of equity, that "all citizens ought equally to share the losses which the scourge of war had brought upon individuals," will not deny a principle of justice, which every European nation has hitherto not neglected to comply with towards its colonies.

ST. THOMAS AND ST. JOHN, June, 1851.

To the Rigsdag of Denmark.

¹ Knox, "An Historical Account of St. Thomas, West Indies," pp. 255-261.