



## The Code Noir (the Black Code)

### France Regulates Slavery

The *Code Noir* initially took shape in Louis XIV's edict of 1685. Although subsequent decrees modified a few of the code's provisions, this first document established the main lines for the policing of slavery right up to 1789. For the most part, the code concentrated on defining the condition of slavery (passing the condition through the mother not the father) and establishing harsh controls over the conduct of those enslaved. Slaves had virtually no rights, though the code did enjoin masters to take care of the sick and old.



King Louis XIV

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#### Following are selected portions of the Code Noir

**Article II.** All slaves that shall be in our islands shall be baptized and instructed in the Roman, Catholic, and Apostolic Faith.

**Article VI.** We enjoin all our subjects, of whatever religion and social status they may be, to observe Sundays and the holidays that are observed by our subjects of the Roman, Catholic, and Apostolic Faith. We forbid them to work, nor make their slaves work, on said days, from midnight until the following midnight.

**Article XIII.** We desire that if a male slave has married a free woman, their children, either male or female, shall be free as is their mother, regardless of their father's condition of slavery. And if the father is free and the mother a slave, the children shall also be slaves...

**Article XXVII.** Slaves who are infirm due to age, sickness or other reason, whether the sickness is curable or not, shall be nourished and cared for by their masters. In the case that they be abandoned, said slaves shall be awarded to the hospital, to which their master shall be required to pay six *sols* per day for the care and feeding of each slave...

**Article XXXIII.** The slave who has struck his master in the face or has drawn blood, or has similarly struck the wife of his master, his mistress, or their children, shall be punished by death...

**Article XXXIX.** The masters of freed slaves who have given refuge to fugitive slaves in their homes shall be punished by a fine of three hundred pounds of sugar for each day of refuge.

**Article XLII.** The masters may also, when they believe that their slaves so deserve, chain them and have them beaten with rods or straps. They shall be forbidden however from torturing them or mutilating any limb, at the risk of having the slaves confiscated and having extraordinary charges brought against them.

**Article XLVII.** Husband, wife and prepubescent children, if they are all under the same master, may not be taken and sold separately. We declare the seizing and sales that shall be done as such to be void.

**Article LIX.** We grant to freed slaves the same rights, privileges and immunities that are enjoyed by freeborn persons. We desire that they are deserving of this acquired freedom, and that this freedom gives them, as much for their person as for their property, the same happiness that natural liberty has on our other subjects.

Versailles, March 1685, the forty second year of our reign.

Signed LOUIS,

and below the King.Colbert, visa, Le Tellier.

Read, posted and recorded at the sovereign council of the coast of Saint Domingue, kept at Petit Goave, 6 May 1687, Signed Moriceau.

Source: *Édit du Roi, Touchant la Police des Isles de l'Amérique Française* (Paris, 1687), 28–58.