

Opening paragraphs of M.-R. Trouillot, An unthinkable history: the Haitian revolution as a non-event. In: Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History, 1995.

Decide whether an article, indefinite or definite, or none, is needed in the underlined gaps:

In 1790, just few months before beginning of insurrection that shook Saint-Domingue and brought about revolutionary birth of independent Haiti, French colonist La Barre reassured his metropolitan wife of peaceful state of life in tropics. He wrote: “There is no movement among our Negroes. . . . They don’t even think of it. They are very tranquil and obedient. revolt among them is impossible.” And again: “We have nothing to fear on part of Negroes; they are tranquil and obedient.” And again: “ Negroes are very obedient and always will be. We sleep with doors and windows wide open. Freedom for Negroes is chimera.”

 historian Roger Dorsinville, who cites these words, notes that few months later most important slave insurrection in recorded history had reduced to insignificance such abstract arguments about Negro obedience. I am not so sure. When reality does not coincide with deeply held beliefs, human beings tend to phrase interpretations that force reality within scope of these beliefs. They devise formulas to repress unthinkable and to bring it back within realm of accepted discourse.