



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
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THE MULATTO SOLITUDE



UNESCO Series on Women in African History





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THE MULATTO SOLITUDE

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The Mulatto Solitude (late eighteenth - nineteenth century)

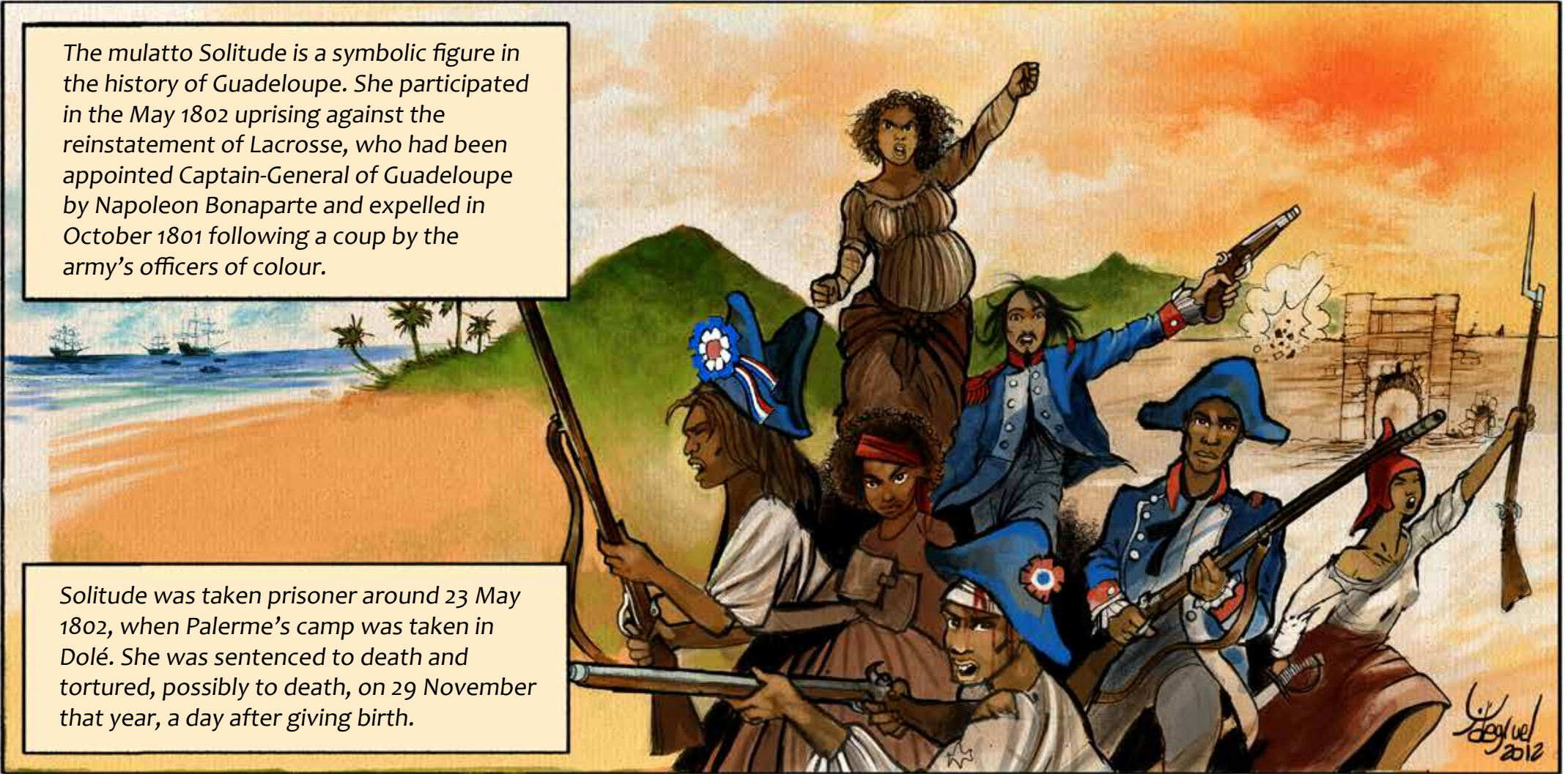
Foreword

The little we know about the mulatto Solitude is taken from a few lines in *Histoire de la Guadeloupe* (History of Guadeloupe), a book written by Auguste Lacour in the mid-nineteenth century. The following comic strip is an interpretation of her story. It is inspired by Auguste Lacour's book, André Schwarz-Bart's novel *La Mulâtresse Solitude*, and the historical context of late eighteenth century Guadeloupe. The illustrations are based on historical and iconographic research into Guadeloupe and slavery. They do not claim to be an accurate representation of the events, people, architecture, hairstyles or clothing of the period.

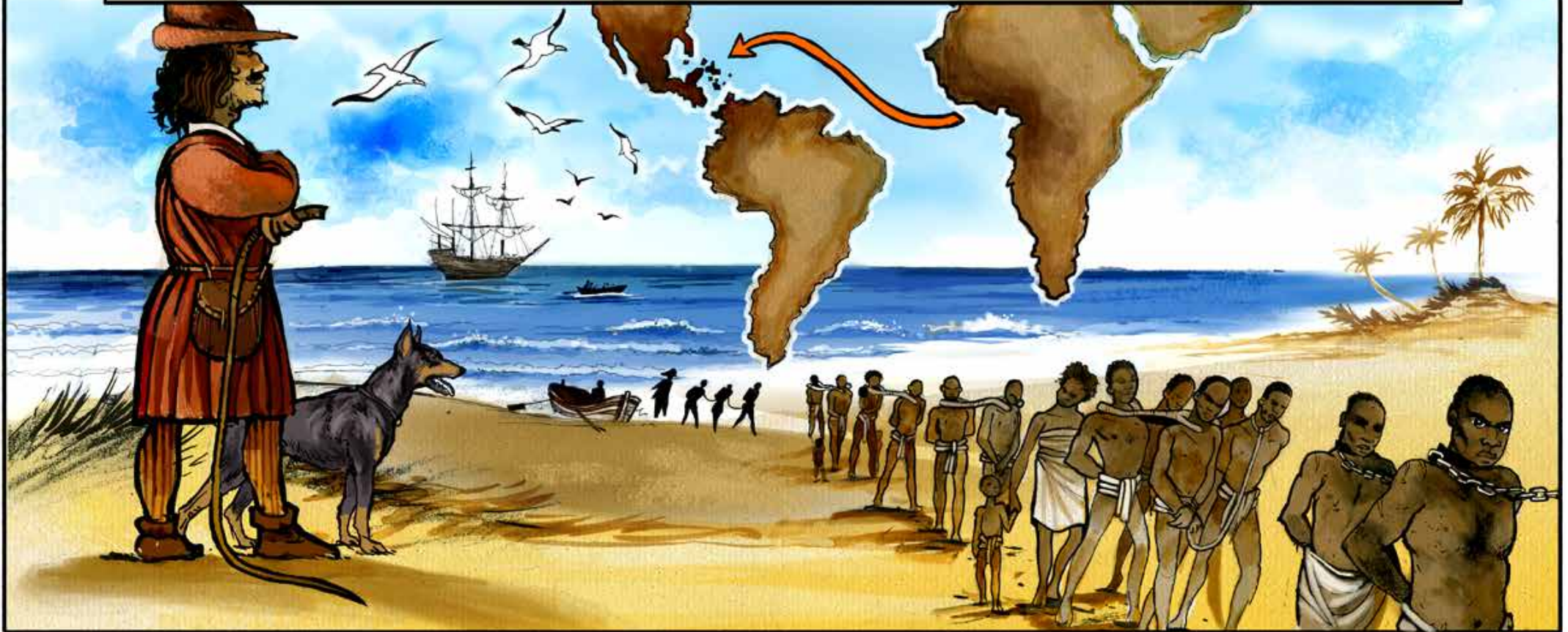


The mulatto Solitude is a symbolic figure in the history of Guadeloupe. She participated in the May 1802 uprising against the reinstatement of Lacrosse, who had been appointed Captain-General of Guadeloupe by Napoleon Bonaparte and expelled in October 1801 following a coup by the army's officers of colour.

Solitude was taken prisoner around 23 May 1802, when Palerme's camp was taken in Dolé. She was sentenced to death and tortured, possibly to death, on 29 November that year, a day after giving birth.



Her story takes place in Guadeloupe, a Caribbean archipelago colonized by the French in 1635. After defeating the Caribs, the island's native people, the French established a slave society. The transatlantic slave trade enabled them to exploit African slaves and their descendants in order to develop an economy based on sugar cane, coffee and cotton farming.



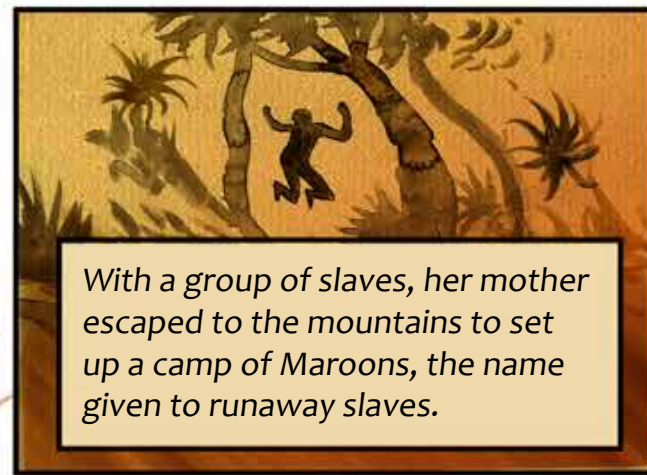
It was in this context, around 1780, that Solitude was born, most probably from a black mother and white father.

Her mother tried to protect her, whose light skin determined in advance which category she would belong to in the slave society: 'the mulattos'. She was saddened by the idea that she would one day be separated from her daughter for this reason.





Unfortunately, that is precisely what happened: the master noticed this little bright-eyed girl. He made her a servant, a higher category than that of slaves. Her mother could therefore no longer see her. She deeply sank into despair.



With a group of slaves, her mother escaped to the mountains to set up a camp of Maroons, the name given to runaway slaves.



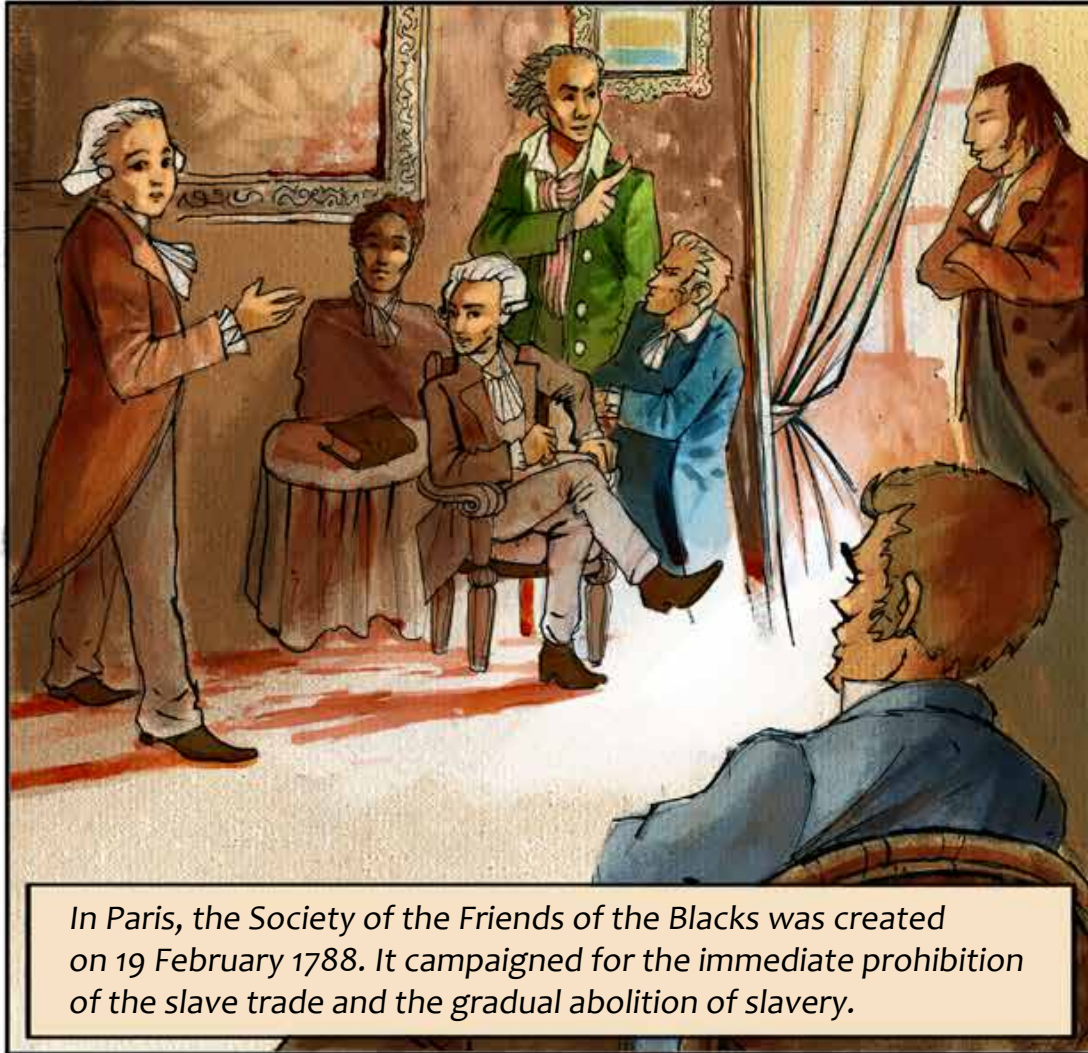
Solitude was given the job of playing with the master's daughters. However, traumatized by being so brutally separated from her mother, she rarely spoke and often remained silent.



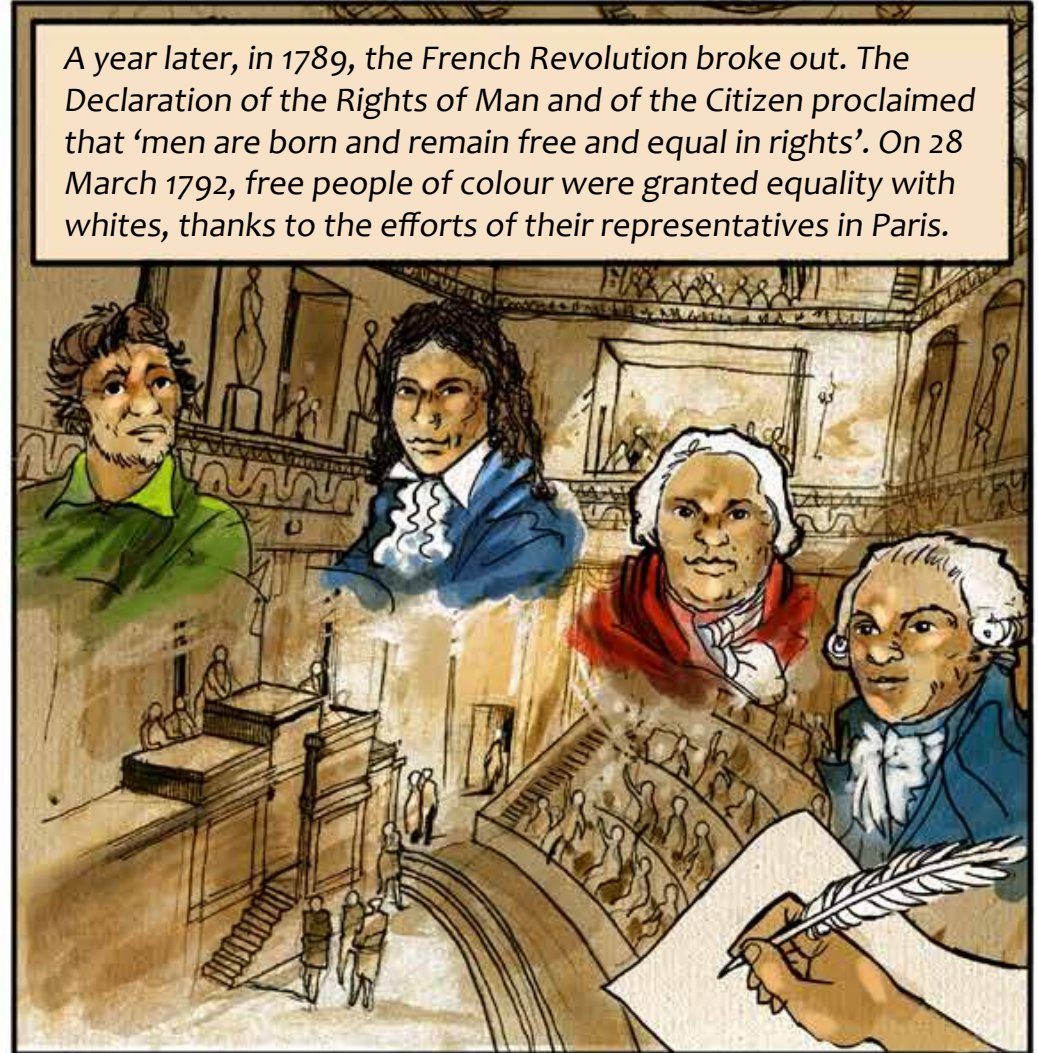


As Solitude grew up and became a woman, she became aware of all the horror that she had witnessed. Humiliation, torture, screaming and pain were constantly in her thoughts.





In Paris, the Society of the Friends of the Blacks was created on 19 February 1788. It campaigned for the immediate prohibition of the slave trade and the gradual abolition of slavery.



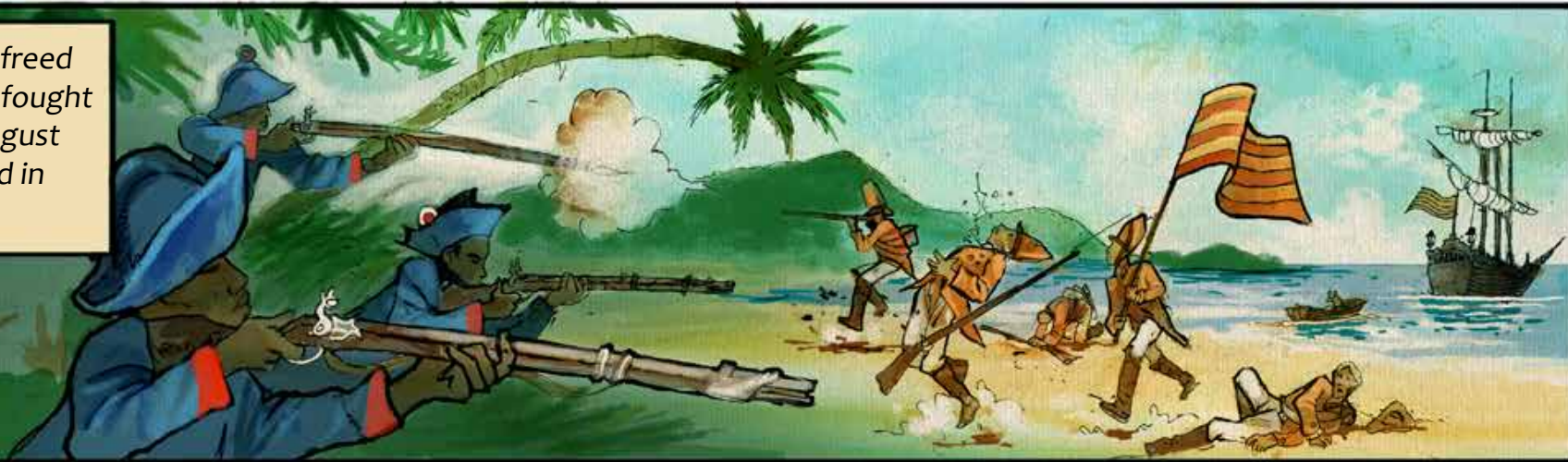
A year later, in 1789, the French Revolution broke out. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen proclaimed that 'men are born and remain free and equal in rights'. On 28 March 1792, free people of colour were granted equality with whites, thanks to the efforts of their representatives in Paris.



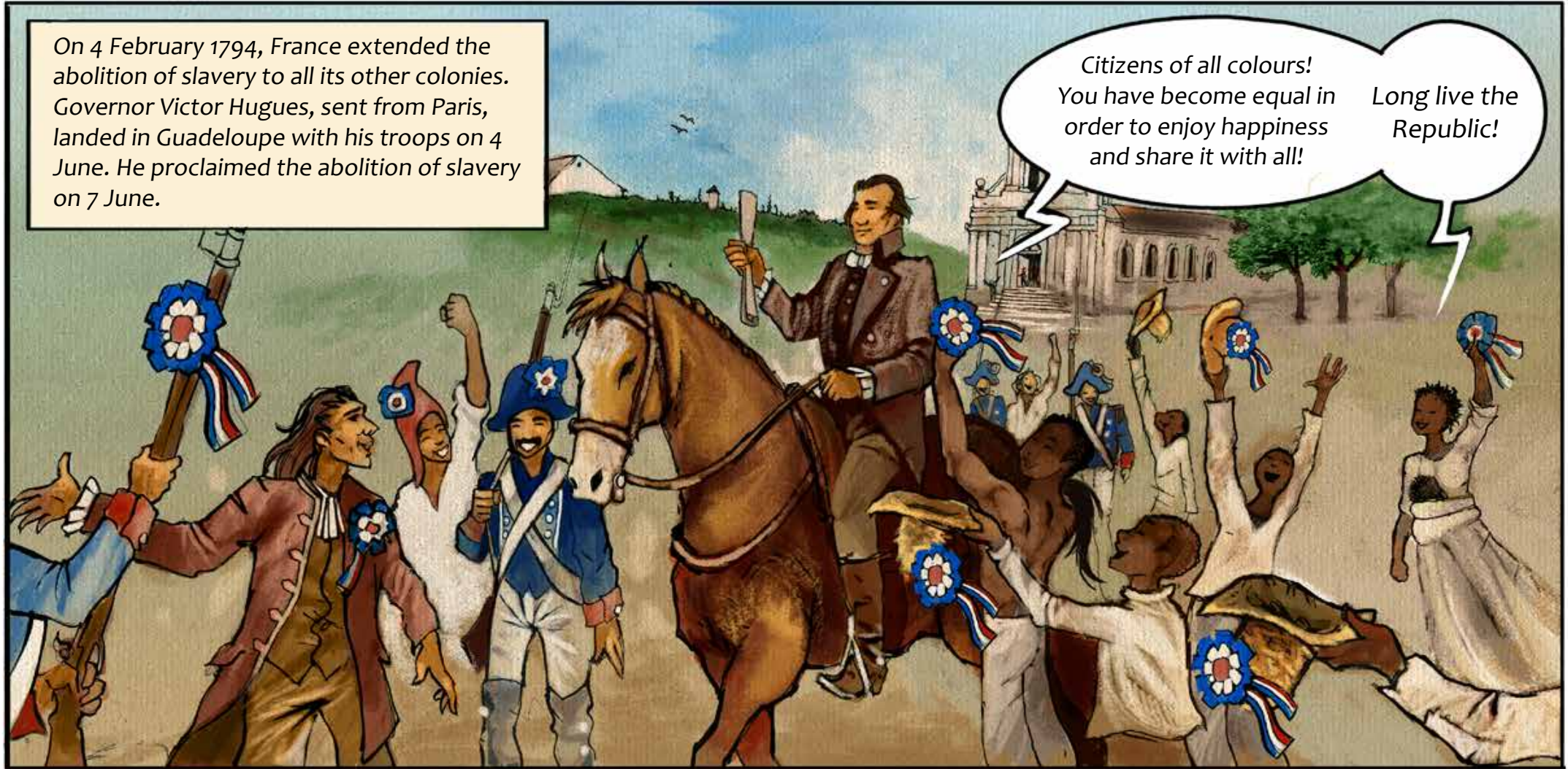
Taking advantage of disagreements between their masters and conflicts between whites and free people of colour, slaves in Saint-Domingue, another Caribbean island, revolted on 22 August 1791. They destroyed 1,400 plantations and killed 1,000 masters in the space of a few weeks.

In 1793, Britain and Spain were at war with the French revolutionaries, who recruited numerous slaves into their armies and granted them freedom.

On 21 June 1793, they also freed the families of slaves who fought for the Republic. On 29 August 1793, slavery was abolished in Saint-Domingue.



On 4 February 1794, France extended the abolition of slavery to all its other colonies. Governor Victor Hugues, sent from Paris, landed in Guadeloupe with his troops on 4 June. He proclaimed the abolition of slavery on 7 June.



Citizens of all colours!
You have become equal in
order to enjoy happiness
and share it with all!

Long live the
Republic!



It's over!

Free!
We're free!

At last, we've
got rid of the
royalists!

The Republic has
set us free!



The news spread like wildfire. Hundreds of slaves abandoned the plantations and hurried to Pointe-à-Pitre.

More than 2,000 blacks and mixed-race people signed up as 'paid-off national volunteers' within sans-culotte battalions.



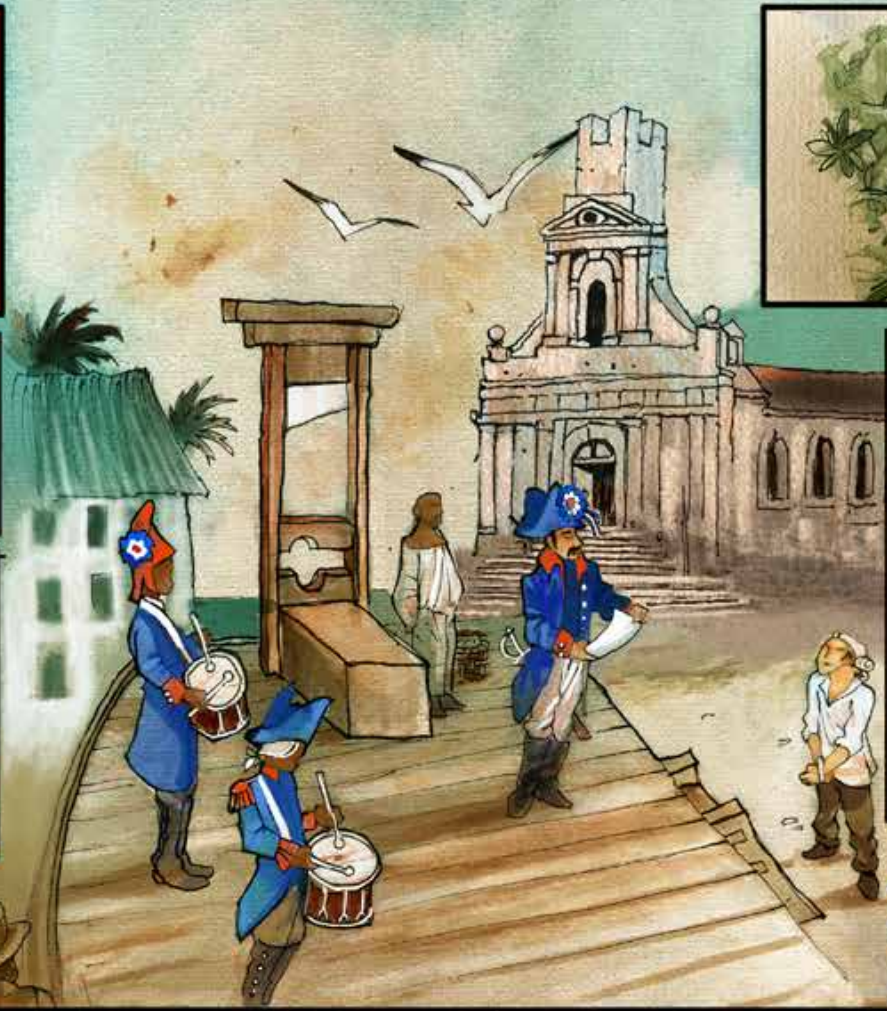
The black sans-culotte battalions showed tremendous courage in the war against the British, who occupied the island. As for Solitude, when she learned that slavery had been abolished, she did not join in with her friends as they danced for joy...



... She attended the execution of the rich royalist landowners who had fought against the Republic in order to maintain slavery.

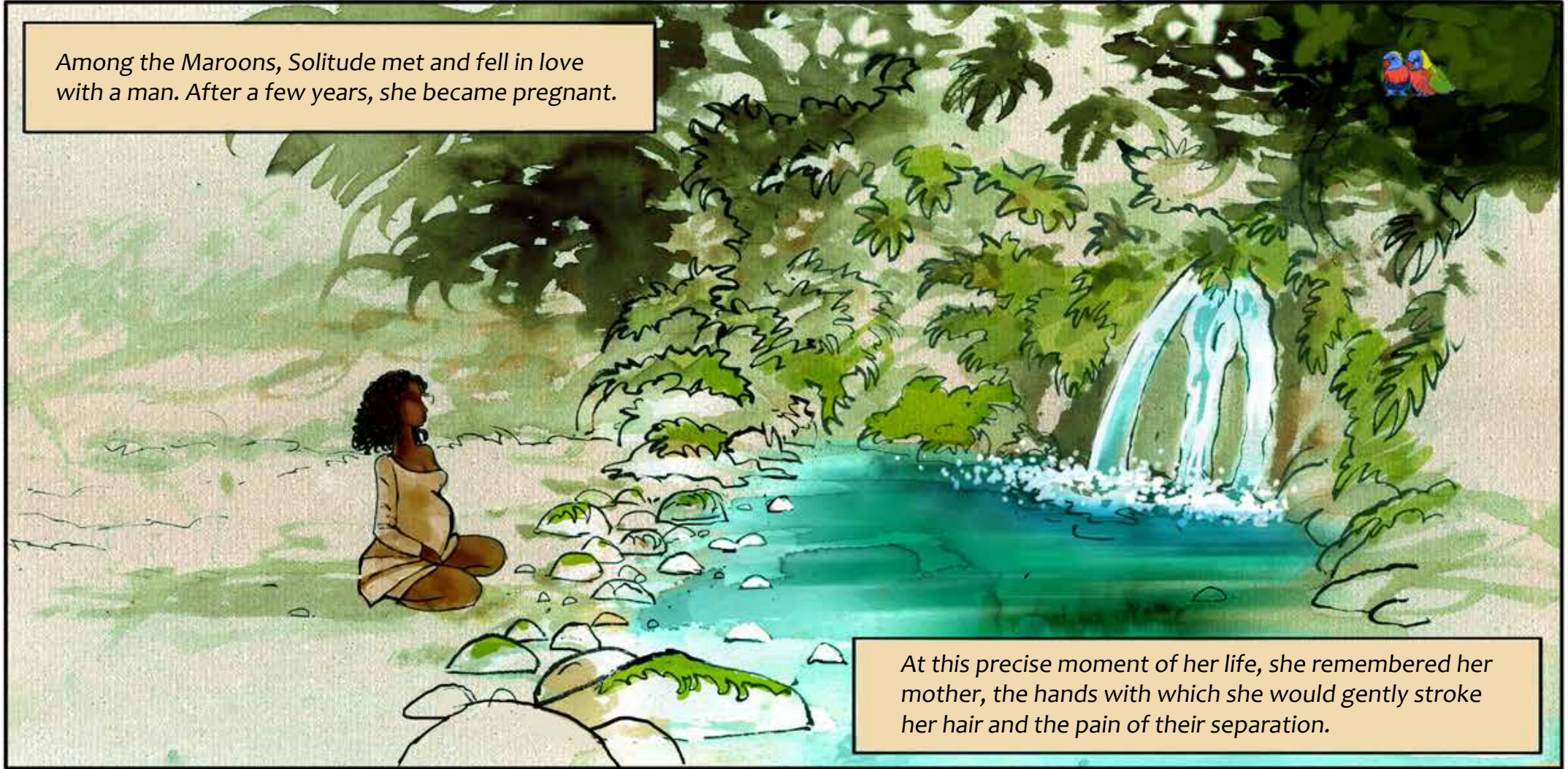


Then Victor Hugues imposed a regime of terror. He replaced the previous slave system with rigorous military discipline and ordered freed slaves to remain on the plantations and work for their former masters. Solitude decided to run away and join a camp of Maroons in the forest.





Among the Maroons, Solitude met and fell in love with a man. After a few years, she became pregnant.

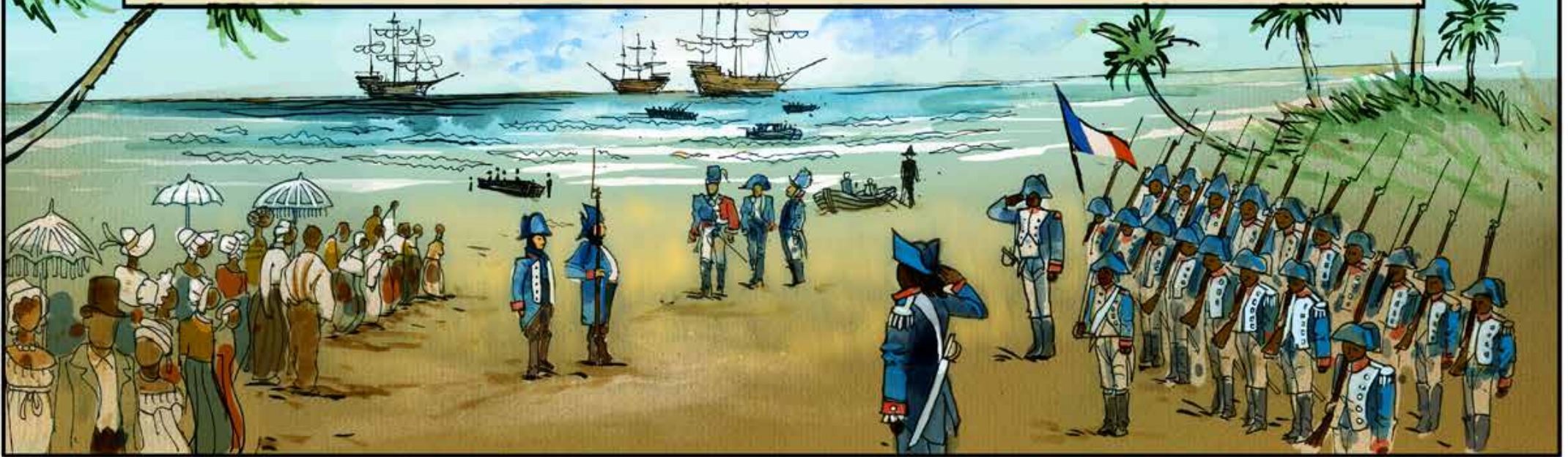


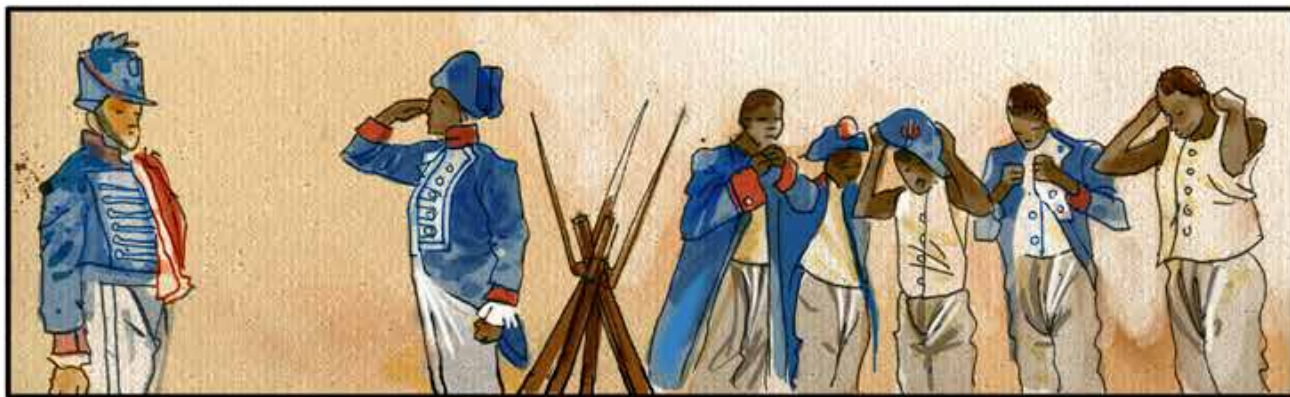
At this precise moment of her life, she remembered her mother, the hands with which she would gently stroke her hair and the pain of their separation.

In October 1801, Lacrosse, appointed Captain-General of Guadeloupe by Napoleon Bonaparte, tried to deport some officers of colour, but they rebelled and expelled Lacrosse from Guadeloupe.

Guadeloupe was run at that time by a provisional government led by Magloire Pélage, Chief of Brigade from Martinique with a mulatto father and a black mother. Pélage swore allegiance to Bonaparte's France. Even so, Bonaparte sent General Richepance to restore Lacrosse to his post and punish the 'rebels'.

The soldiers of colour did not know what awaited them on 6 May 1802 when, from the harbour in Pointe-à-Pitre, they joyfully waved at Richepance's approaching ships, arriving from France.

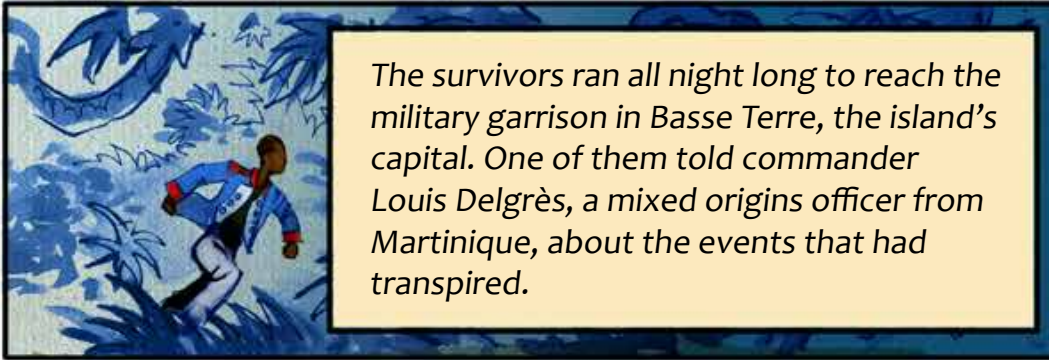




As soon as he landed, Richepance ordered the replacement of the troops and asked the soldiers from Guadeloupe to board the ships, promising that they would fight elsewhere. Some were calmly led aboard, while others were humiliated and beaten up by Lacrosse's supporters.



A wind of revolt passed through the officers and soldiers of colour who remained on land. Taking advantage of the general confusion, around 100 of them disappeared into the twilight.

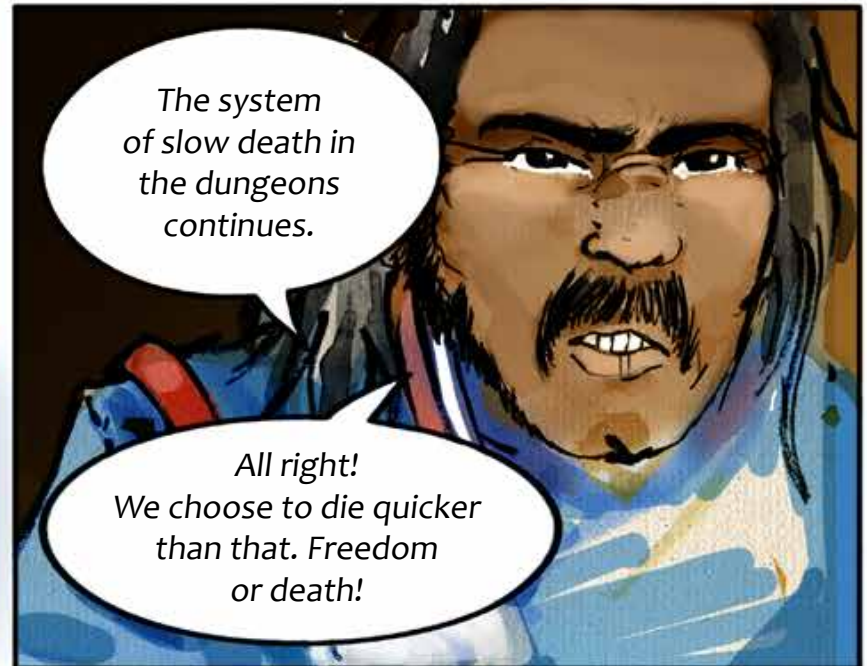


The survivors ran all night long to reach the military garrison in Basse Terre, the island's capital. One of them told commander Louis Delgrès, a mixed origins officer from Martinique, about the events that had transpired.



More than 3,000 soldiers have just landed! They ordered us to give up our weapons. Our soldiers were beaten up and thrown in chains onto the French ships.

Lacrosse is back!



The system of slow death in the dungeons continues.

All right! We choose to die quicker than that. Freedom or death!



Let's join Delgrès and prevent Lacrosse from returning!

On 10 May 1802, Delgrès launched an appeal for resistance and published a proclamation entitled 'To the whole universe, the last cry of innocence and despair'. Solitude, a few months pregnant, was in the Dolé region with a group of insurgents led by Palerme.



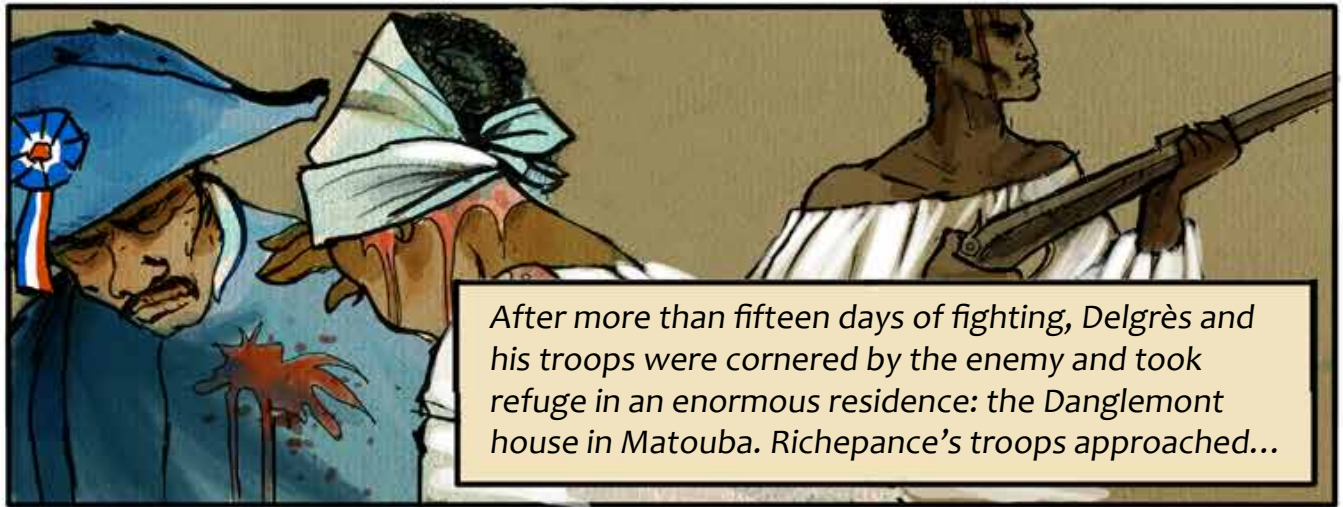
Freedom or death!





Delgrès' appeal brought together several thousand civilians and farmworkers, including Solitude and many other women. During the fighting, the women showed outstanding courage and combative spirit. They carried messages between the troops and galvanized them, defying the enemy.







On 28 May 1802, the house in which Delgrès and between 300 and 500 of his men had taken refuge exploded, killing them and some of Richepance's soldiers.



Solitude, who was on her way to join the resistance, was captured with many other insurgents.



Napoleon Bonaparte, hearing of Richepance's victory, consulted his ministers and decided, on 16 July 1802, to reinstate slavery in Guadeloupe in order to punish the rebels.

The next day, in Guadeloupe, Richepance removed the citizenship of men of colour. Lacrosse, restored to his post, never dared to reinstate slavery officially. His successor did so on 14 May 1803.

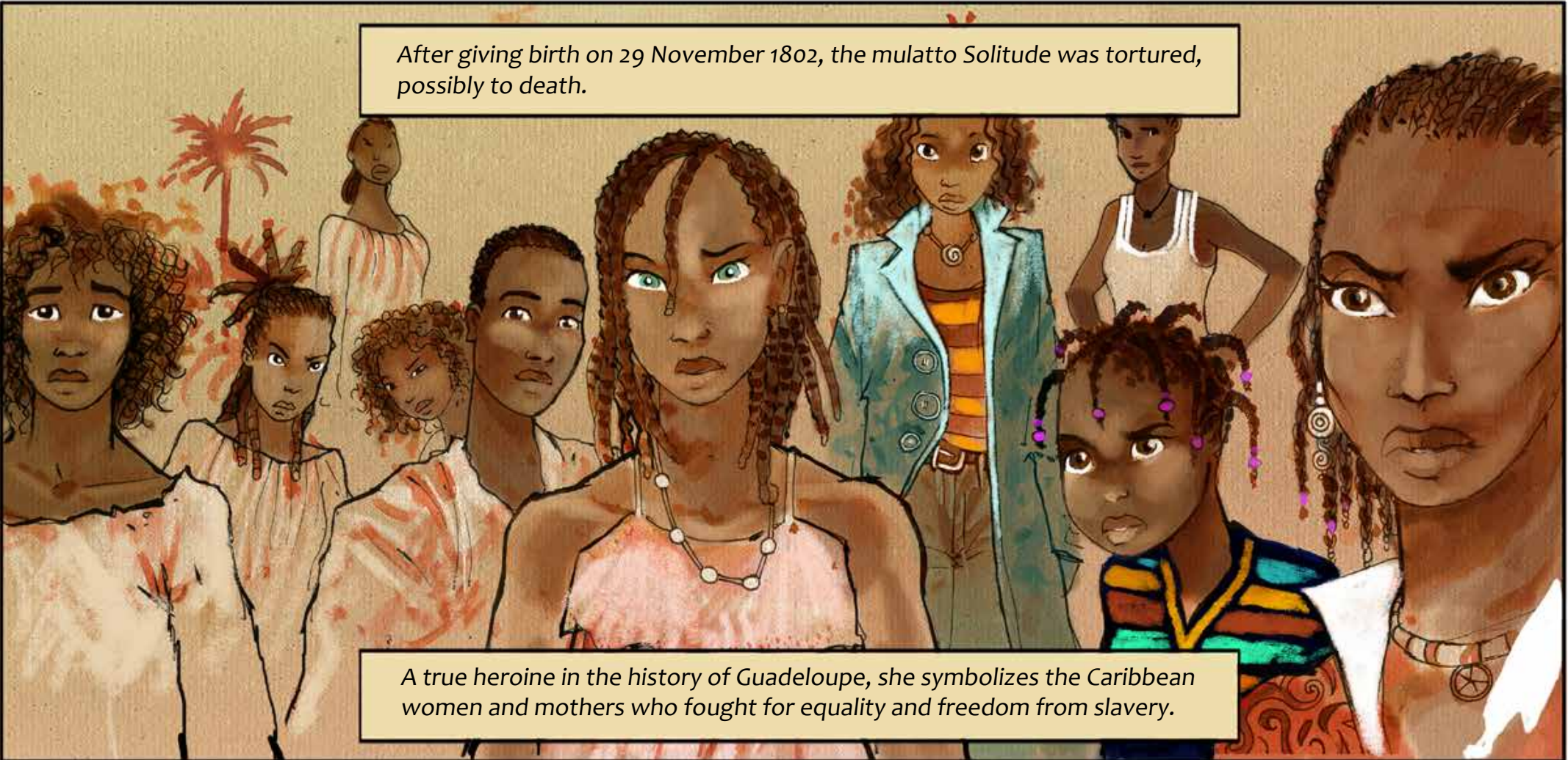


Most of the captured insurgents were executed. Between May and December 1802, more than 3,000 died in battle or were executed. More than 2,000 were deported to France or Venezuela. Solitude, meanwhile, was sentenced to death and imprisoned for several months, until she gave birth.



The new authorities expected her child to become another slave for the plantations.





After giving birth on 29 November 1802, the mulatto Solitude was tortured, possibly to death.

A true heroine in the history of Guadeloupe, she symbolizes the Caribbean women and mothers who fought for equality and freedom from slavery.



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The Mulatto Solitude

In May 1802, while a few months pregnant, the Mulatto Solitude took part in the Guadeloupean uprisings against the reinstatement of Lacrosse, who had been appointed Captain-General of Guadeloupe by Napoleon Bonaparte and expelled in October 1801 following a coup by the army's officers of colour. After her arrest, Solitude was imprisoned and subsequently tortured, possibly to death, a day after giving birth. Solitude symbolizes all Caribbean women and mothers who fought for equality and freedom from slavery.

Women in African History

By way of various artistic and pedagogical resources available online, this UNESCO project highlights a selection of historical female figures, from Africa and of African descent, who have distinguished themselves in the history of the continent in areas as diverse as politics (Gisèle Rabesahala), diplomacy and resistance against colonization (Njinga Mbandi), defence of women's rights (Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti) and environmental protection (Wangari Maathai).

The selection of women figures proposed in the framework of this project is not exhaustive and represents only a small part of the contribution of African women, known and unknown, to the history of their countries, Africa and all mankind.

For additional pedagogical resources, please visit the web site www.unesco.org/womenin africa

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