

Illustrated Times about the riot, November 3. 1878

The Illustrated Times (*Illustreret Tidende*) was a Danish weekly magazine that was published from 1859-1924. The magazine brought news and entertainment with pictures and illustrations. In November 1878 the magazine brought a longer article about the riot in St. Croix. In this article, the responsibility for the events is placed solely with the black plantation workers. The illustration that went with the article can be seen below the source.

The debauchery of the Negroes in St. Croix

An unhappy star rests above St. Croix. For a number of years the island has been under pressure because of the unsatisfactory outcome of the harvest; This year everything seemed to go perfectly, when the Negro was seized by an uncontrollable desire for destruction that not only destroys the hope for the good fortune, but also throws the population into great misery. It's awful to read the stories that have come to us from the West Indies these days. Wild Negro mobs in ran over the island in devilish rage and burned one plantation after another. A third of Frederiksted has been transformed into a firepit, and half of its fortune has been grounded. The unfortunate residents of the city and of the plantations had to escape without taking with them anything other than what they had on. Women and children hid in the sugar fields while waiting for the negroes to move along and continue their vandalism elsewhere, but were seized with fear again by seeing attempts to set the sugar cane on fire.

In Frederiksted, where the excesses began, the Chief of Police only had a small force of of three soldiers and seven police officers who had to lock themselves up in the fort to save their own lives. But what good fortune it was that the arsons were not accompanied by a common bloodbath! The negroes, who were completely intoxicated, hardly let human reason lead to spare the lives of the whites; They

were so engulfed in their desire to destroy and burn property that they had no sense for anything else which gave the citizens time to flee.

Several white people were violated, but only one, the planter Fontaine, was killed in the city. The negroes even killed to more weaponless Danish soldiers just outside of Frederiksted. On one of the plantations, where the steady workers had been seduced or forced to join the arson, the people had been warned that the buildings were going to be burned down and were encouraged to leave. The fact there were so little bloodshed is said to be a seldom thing for a negro riot, but the horrible events that has occurred on St. Croix is just as terrible and when one sees how easily the riot is suppressed by a peleton of soliders one must very much regret that there weren't a small garrison of soldiers in Frederiksted.

There cannot be the slightest doubt that even a small troop under a Sergeant would have choked the whole movement at its very beginning; Since the negroes did not put up any serious resistance anywhere the military went, but fled as soon as a few shots were fired. It is a bad economy that has led to the reduction of the military forces in the West Indian islands; to spare a small expense one has wasted great values and brought St. Croix to the brim of destruction.

The unrest broke out on October the 1st, which is changeover-day and also a day off for the Negroes. Many of these had come to Frederiksted because of this, where they got drunk, and when the police wanted to drive them out of the city, they refused to do so, cheered on by a few leaders. To begin with, the drunken Negroes thought of nothing else but revenge over the police, who had withdrawn to the fort, and after they tried to attack the fort in vain, they tried to set it on fire with kerosene. This attempt was also in vain, but the fort was in great danger because of a storage room with kerosene next to it, which was on fire for a while. As soon as the Negroes realized that they couldn't do anything to the fort, they turned against the city where they burned the customs building together with the area where most of the stores were.

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After that there were some more attacks on the fort, and although the negroes did this in a very clumsy manner they might have succeeded in taking the fort or burning it down, had it not been for the reinforcements from Christiansted that arrived on the 2nd of October at 5 in the morning, which the Chief of Police had managed to send for. This reinforcement, led by Lieutenant Ostermann, only consisted of 22 men, of which two had to stay outside the city to bring the wagons, that had brought the soldiers to Frederiksted, to a plantation nearby. At that point it was assumed that it was only a Negro unrest in Frederiksted and that there was no danger in the countryside. This mistake cost the two poor soldiers their lives, as they carried no weapons and the Negroes killed them in the cruelest way. As soon as Lieutenant Ostermann showed up the events quickly took a different direction and the Negroes hurried out of town.

If the police in Frederiksted immediately had had these men to begin with, both the city and the plantations could have been saved. Now, on the other hand, the negroes were excited by their own excesses, and as they could no longer destroy Frederiksted, they threw themselves at the plantations. From the west to the east of the island, the flames rose one after another, and in Christiansted people began to be seriously worried as the Negroes constantly moved closer. Early in the morning on the 2nd a telegram had been sent to St. Thomas, and help was therefore expected from there. But the residents of Christiansted could not be sure that the help would come on time, and they sought to quickly organize a defense. They succeeded in arming 150 volunteers with three canons under the command of men who had previously been officers in the Danish Army, and a small force was sent out on recognition: but Christiansted got away with only the scare since the Negroes wanted to burn the plantations along the way instead of immediately move moving towards the city.

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Governor Garde, who had left St. Thomas at 12.30 with 50 men, arrived at Christiansted at 6 in the morning and freed the citizens from great terror. The following day, on the 3rd of October, Governor Garde moved from Christiansted with 45 Soldiers and a corps of 50 Volunteers, partly to prevent the killers from moving further towards the East and saving the still unharmed plantations, partly to bring further help to Frederiksted. The first Negro mob was struck at the plantation Anna's Hope, whose burnout the military's arrival prevented, and the rebels scattered quickly, almost without resistance. Afterwards, the force advanced to Frederiksted, and a mile away, it collided with another Negro mob that fled wildly when the soldiers shot at them. At 3 o'clock the governor arrived at Frederiksted, where the troops were greeted with jubilation, and after the horror this expedition had instilled in the Negroes on their way across the island, any fear that they could take the island had been removed; but more plantations were burned and it took a couple of days before the peace was completely restored. A French and an English warship as well as the Spanish Governor of Puerto Rico had offered help: But as foreign assistance could not be of any use, these offers were not taken.

Governor Garde declares in the official report to the Government that it can not yet be known with certainty whether the rebellion was the result of an organized plan or due to an immediate inclination of evil passions. However, he leans to the latter, since no one had the slightest idea of the riot, and all other intelligence agrees. That is precisely why there is a dual reason to regret that immediate measures could not be taken against the rebels. The incurred damage is very significant; out of the 80 plantations, 51 are burned. However, the attempt by the negroes to burn the sugar cane fields failed because of the fact that the fields were moist. Fortunately, the state has only lost of the Customs Building in Frederiksted and most of the buildings at King's Hill. A martial court has been set down, and some of the Negroes have been shot. It seemed that some of the planters were heavily absorbed by revenge thoughts at first; but it is a matter of course that the Danish authorities would not let the executions exceed beyond the necessary boundary.

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The private reports from St. Croix are very bleak sounding, as if the island is destroyed forever. That's probably not quite how it is; but it is clear that it will take a long time before the loss is overcome and it is clear that the so heavily tried population greatly needs assistance.