

# Instructions to the Governor General 1771

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## **Reference**

Rigsarkivet. 3.40.1, De dansk vestindiske lokalarkiver, Den vestindiske regering, Instruktionsprotokol, 1723-1784, p. 163-164.

[Danish National Archives. 3.40.1, The Danish West Indian Local Archives, Register of instructions, 1723-1784]

## **Commentary field**

These instructions were issued to Governor General Ulrich Wilhelm de Roepstorff 1771 during a tumultuous and reformist period in the Danish-Norwegian monarchy. They are the first effective regulations that contain provisions for the protection of enslaved Africans and Afro-Caribbeans in the Danish West Indies. In line with the instructions, the Danish West Indian Police Courts and Lower Courts began to investigate and prosecute masters for alleged abuses of their slaves from the 1770s on. Though the instructions were never published, they appear to have changed legal practice, and can accordingly be understood as the very first steps on the very long road to amelioration in the Danish West Indies.

## **Translation**

1771, October 12

Instructions for the Governor General, the Government, as well as the Secret Councils on the Royal Danish Islands in America in respect to the judicial system there.

Instructions

According to which the Governor General and the Government, as well as the Secret Councils on the Royal Danish Islands, St. Croix, St. Thomas and St. John in America, shall conform and act in regard to the judicial system there [...]

4.

Even though it is inadvisable, because of commotion and other great obstacles, to inform the Negroes of what their masters own them, such as food, drink, clothing and certain free hours for their worship of God and for their rest, the Governor General and the Government Council shall still closely watch that the Negroes are not abused by their owner, either by suffering from want of the physical necessities or by being barbarously treated in other ways. – If this unexpectedly happens, then the owner will be called before the Council, where he shall be warned or admonished to be milder in his handling, or else to be fined between 10 to 100 rix dollars payable to the poor. If

this does not have the intended effect, then *Advocatus Regius* is ordered to prosecute him and obtain conviction over him with fairness and according to the opinion of the court. And even though such an owner must admittedly be allowed to make a complaint over the Governor General and the Council to the Danish Chancellery, such petition shall not hinder the subsequent prosecution of him.

5.

When a master is justly found to have some peculiar malice against one of his Negroes that causes severity and tyranny, then the Council shall be allowed to put such a Negro up for public auction at the owner's expense, and neither he nor his children, parents or siblings shall be allowed to buy or ever to own the said Negro [...]

The Royal Danish Chancellery, 12<sup>th</sup> of October in the year 1771 [...]



... at gæve nogen for Regjeringens med  
... at gæve nogen for Regjeringens med  
... at gæve nogen for Regjeringens med

General Gouverneur og Agvisungs Raadets paa, i Caserne af Vacance af nogen  
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General Gouverneur og det Secrete Raad gæve desovergaaet at for sig selv, at alle  
... at gæve nogen for Regjeringens med

General Gouverneur og det Secrete Raad paa St. Croix, ligesom og paa Com.  
... at gæve nogen for Regjeringens med

General Gouverneur det iøvrigt indskrænktes det danske Cancellis, at det  
... at gæve nogen for Regjeringens med

Det Kongelige Danske Cancellis den 12<sup>de</sup> Octobris Anno 1771.  
Lusdorff. A. Schomacher, Doms. Hoyer. (SS.)

1771

12 October

Instruction  
for  
General Gu  
vernøren  
i de  
amerikanske  
Colonier  
og  
Indianske  
Land

Instruction  
af Dens Raade Konge til Danmark og Norge  
... at gæve nogen for Regjeringens med  
... at gæve nogen for Regjeringens med  
... at gæve nogen for Regjeringens med

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