

Bordeaux

An Inconvenient Note

Modeste Testas

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modeste_Testas



Al Pouessi, baptized Marthe Adélaïde Modeste Testas and known under the name of Modeste Testas (1765–1870) was an Ethiopian woman who was enslaved, purchased by Bordeaux merchants and subsequently freed after living on three continents. One of her descendants is a former president of Haiti, François Denys Légitime.

Testas was born with the name Al Pouessi, and was originally from Ethiopia in

East Africa. She was captured in a raid at the age of fourteen, following a dispute with another tribe. She was taken to West Africa from where she was sold.

She was purchased between 1778 and 1781 by Pierre and François Testas, who were merchants and slave-traders from Bordeaux, and owners of a sugar plantation on the island of Haiti.

She travelled to Bordeaux, where she was baptized by the Testas brothers in 1781, giving her the name Marthe Adélaïde Modeste Testas. The same year, she was transported with François Testas to their plantation in Haiti. As an enslaved person, Testas could not consent to a relationship or sex and the circumstances under which she had two children with her owner are not known.

In 1795 François Testas left Haiti for New York, travelling with his enslaved servants, who included Modeste Testas and Joseph Lespérance. After moving to Baltimore, François died in Philadelphia. However, in his will he freed the slaves he owned. For Testas, however, one of the conditions of her emancipation was that she would marry Lespérance. The couple returned to Haiti, where Testas inherited fifty-one tiles of land. She and Lespérance had a number of children.

Testas died in 1870 at the age of 105 years, on the *Testas* estate, located near to Jérémie.

One of Testas' grandsons, François Denys Légitime, who was the son of Tinette Lespérance, became President of the Republic of Haiti from 1888 to 1889.

French slave statue defaced in apparent racist attack

[bbc.com/news/world-europe-58549730](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-58549730)

September 13, 2021

A statue of a black female slave in the French city of Bordeaux has been covered with white paint in an apparent racist attack, city officials said.

The bronze statue is of Modeste Testas, an African slave who was bought by a family in Bordeaux in the 18th century. She was later freed.

The statue was found defaced on Monday morning, but has now been cleaned.

Bordeaux city hall said it would file a criminal complaint, saying it was “probably racist” in nature.

Testas was sent to the Caribbean island of Hispaniola to work on a sugar plantation.

She was later moved to the United States and was freed after her French owner died. She then settled back in the western part of Hispaniola, which is now Haiti, and died at the age of 105.

The statue of Testas was inaugurated in 2019. It is one of a number of gestures aimed at addressing the colonial past of Bordeaux, *which was one of the country's major slave trading hubs*.

The councillor in charge of heritage, Stephane Gomot, said that if racism was confirmed as the motive it constituted a “very violent attack on everything this statue represents”, including “the memory of people deported by slave traffickers”.

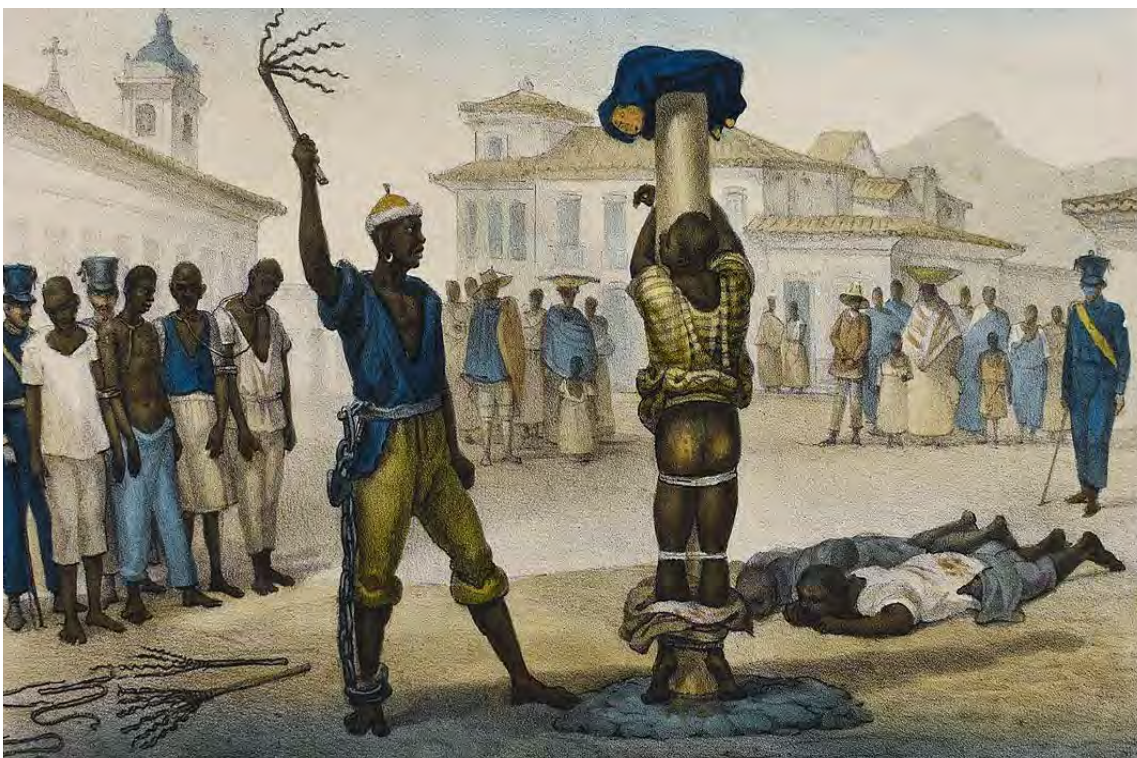


An Inconvenient Note:

In wine publications, be they pretty pictorial books, periodicals or even columns in newspapers, not any mention whatsoever of Bordeaux's long legacy in the slave trade for centuries is religiously made. It is like a Bernie Madoff / pseudo-Ponzi wine conspiracy and the time has come to call in the chips. The returns are abnormally too good at any time. Anybody who can add and subtract should find this disturbing when taking this history into account; history and pedigree loom large in Bordeaux. Something is curiously amiss to not state the obvious. Nobody leave the room.

The craven omission of this pertinent construct has been by design. The time is long overdue for writer's childish cherry-picking nonsense to come to

an abrupt stop to save France's face. Admired wine authorities have long known but are patently loathe to divulge this monumental fact that sticks up like an unwanted obelisk so, therefore, it is persistently cut-out in lore to comport with what writers believe their readers would much prefer saddled safely in their cellars. Slavery is piebald to the cause when readers are desiring Cheval Blanc. They want the stories to be blissfully happy, prosperous and assuredly white. It is as ridiculous as writing about New Orleans in Louisiana without a word murmured about African slavery at the port or on expansive plantations. By not mentioning this peculiar and cruel institution, authorities believe they are protecting Bordeaux's lofty standing for reassuring prestige by not daring



L'exécution de la Punition du Fouet / Execution of the Punishment of the Whip 1829 by Jean-Baptiste Debre

to tarnish the sterling perception –not reality – that Bordeaux rests its gilded crown upon. Asian importers especially want an all-white fairy tale Bordeaux devoid of Blacks, Arabs and, curiously, other Asians. The fetish for achieving a modicum of what is perceived as French or European culture is aspirational for many Asians and wine is an obvious vehicle for raising one's game in the social hierarchy of status chasing. The French are all too kind to oblige by feeding this gross cultural inferiority complex with glossy sales propaganda. Most in the wine trade prefer the plushy comfort of being willfully historically ignorant so they can believe what they wish without any requirement for sober reflection. The published wine authorities don't want to pop the bubble of any châteaux fantasies so Bordeaux is elevated as irreproachably cultured without any frightful saurian historical inconveniences slithering by that can distract our attention and praise. It's a big con-game and we sit smiling with friends at the table satisfied with half-truths and a full glass of wine in awe. We don't want to know the other half is decidedly wicked and awful.

All involved in the wine trade should be aware of the legacy of slavery with France's ports just as throughout the Americas. Millions of Africans were shipped and sold for profit, not for altruism. The wealth of many châteaux was made primarily from the slave trade in banking, insurance, timber, shipbuilding, chandlery, etc. When Bordeaux is written of and its florid perfumed history wafted about at wine shows to adoring fans, the authorities need to recognize France's involvement in the trade, and not just about in wine but in something far more precious: humans. Publications and importers should make it their duty to be aware and confront the sacrifices and pains of the past to be courageously honest in the present. French wine will somehow surely float and survive without the pretense that Bordeaux's history is entirely rich, enlightened and perfect. That's just a fantasy sold to keep us impulsively buying to impress, if not ourselves and loved ones, but our aspirational cultured guests. The world of wine can do better. Yes.

Frommer's France, 24th Edition, 2019

– Jane Anson is a recognized wine authority on Bordeaux



Display at Musée d'Aquitaine

Musée d'Aquitaine • HISTORY MUSEUM

This museum offers a fascinating look at the growth of Bordeaux from its Gallo-Roman beginnings right up to the outbreak of World War II, passing by its explosive growth as a global port in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. The 20th century selection is undergoing expansion and has already hosted some fascinating temporary exhibitions. However, the real draw here is the unflinching permanent exhibition looking at the role that slavery played in the growth of Bordeaux.