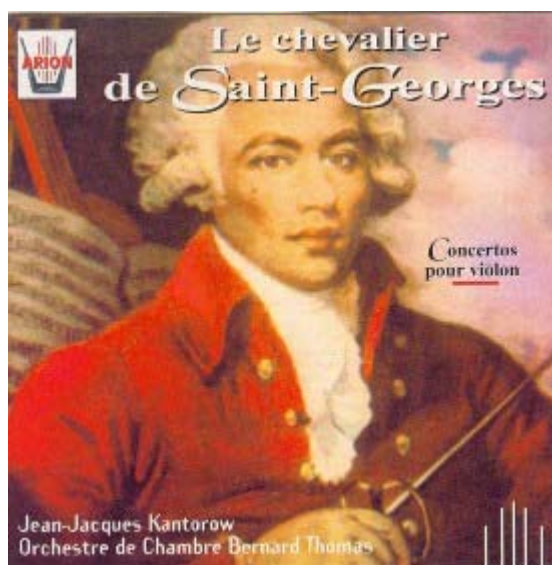


## Le Chevalier de Saint-George (1745-1799)

Afro-French Composer, Violinist & Conductor - France's Best Fencer & Colonel of Black Legion

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Violin Concertos, Op. 5, Nos. 1 & 2;  
Op. 3, No. 1; Op. 8, No. 9  
Bernard Thomas Chamber Orchestra  
Jean-Jacques Kantorow, Violin  
Arion 68093 (1990)

### Welcome to the biography of Saint-George!

#### 1 Overview

Welcome to an overview of the life and music of Joseph de Bologne, the Chevalier de Saint-George (also spelled Joseph Boulogne, the Chevalier de Saint-Georges), one of the most remarkable figures of the 18th century. Incredibly, this son of a slave of African descent rose to the top of French society through his mastery of fencing and his genius for classical music! His dual career is illustrated in the above portrait, in which he is dressed for a concert but holds a sword in place of a conductor's baton. The painting was done in London in 1787 by the American artist Mather Brown.

#### 2 CDs

Much of the music of Saint-George has been released on CD. Some of the covers are shown on this page, and several recordings are described in detail on the Saint-George Sub-pages. They can be reached via the links at the top of the page. Many music Web sites sell the CDs of Saint-George. Links to several of them are provided at left as well.

#### 3 Biography

An important French language biography of Saint-George is *Le chevalier de Saint-George*, written by Claude Ribbe and published in 2004 by Perrin. Professor Ribbe is a French author and historian from Guadeloupe. His research into historical records such as ship's manifests has added considerable detail to our knowledge of the life and career of Saint-George. A major biography in English is *The Chevalier de Saint-Georges: Virtuoso of the Sword and the Bow*, published by Pendragon Press in 2006. The author is Gabriel Banat, former First Violin of the New York Philharmonic and author of works on music. Banat also appears in the 2005 DVD *Le Mozart Noir*, providing analysis of the music and career of Saint-George.

#### 4 Annals of History

Another important source is an article by Luc Nemeth, Professor of Contemporary History, in the *Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française [Historic Annals of the French Revolution]*, No. 339, January, 2005, pp. 79-97. Here is an excerpt translated from French: "The gaps in the old records of the parish archives of Bailliff (Guadeloupe), and the illegitimate birth of Saint-George, the natural child of a slave, partially explain the confusion which was able to envelop his public records: three different dates of birth have been able to be attributed to him, not without some basis for each." The author adds that the identity of his father was proven in 1972 by Odet Denys.

## 5 Birth

Joseph de Bologne's father was George de Bologne de Saint-George, a member of a wealthy family which had lived in the French West Indies colony of Guadeloupe since 1645. He married Élisabeth Merican on September 8, 1739. By January, 1740 he had moved to a 250-acre plantation with 60 slaves. One of the slaves was an attractive young woman about 17 who was named Anne but was called Nanon. She was of African descent and was born on the island. George and Nanon began an intimate relationship shortly after his arrival. Their son Joseph de Bologne came into the world on Christmas Day, 1745. His African heritage made him ineligible for the nobility and its titles under French law.

## 6 Fugitive

George de Bologne soon found himself a fugitive. On December 17, 1747 he fatally wounded a man in a fencing duel caused by a drunken quarrel. He fled Guadeloupe secretly the following month to avoid a charge of homicide. In spite of his absence he was sentenced to death on March 31, 1748 and his goods were ordered confiscated. Surprisingly, his wife Élisabeth was given permission on September 1, 1748 to leave the island with Joseph and Nanon. Joseph turned 3 at sea and arrived in France on January 4, 1749. The Bologne family used its influence with the royal court to secure a pardon for George from King Louis XV. Joseph and his parents sailed from Bordeaux, France on September 2, 1749. The ship's manifest said George was 38, Nanon was 26 and Joseph was 3 years old.

## 7 Childhood

Young Joseph lived a privileged life on the plantation. He had ample time to play, and his father gave him lessons in music and fencing. When he was 8 years old, Joseph sailed for Bordeaux with Élisabeth to start school, arriving on August 12, 1753. Nanon landed at the same port on September 10, 1754 and visited Joseph for several weeks. Nanon and George arrived back in France on September 10, 1755. They took Joseph to live with them in the fashionable Saint-Germain quarter of Paris. George obtained the position of Gentleman of the King's Chamber, which meant he was a personal assistant to King Louis XV.

## 8 Fencing Academy

Joseph's life changed radically the following year. In October, 1756 the 13-year-old entered the fencing academy of Nicolas Texier de La Böessière, an elite boarding school for the sons of the aristocracy. Mornings at the academy consisted of classes in mathematics, history, foreign languages, music, drawing and dance. Afternoons were devoted to the most important subject, fencing. Joseph trained alongside the son of La Böessière and became a friend of the family. The younger La Böessière later wrote that Saint-George was the most extraordinary man of arms ever seen. Training in horsemanship took place at the Tuileries under expert guidance. In 1761, at the age of 15, Joseph obtained the coveted position of officer of the King's Guard. He served only 3 months per year, so his education continued without interruption.

## 9 Racism in France

The increasing presence of people of color in France resulted in the rise of government efforts to limit and regulate their immigration. The Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire was among those who argued that Africans and their descendants were genetically inferior to White Europeans. More influential on the King were the demands of slave owners and traders to maintain racial separation in order to protect their businesses. A Code Noir [Law of Blacks] had been on the books since the 17th century. On April 5, 1762 King Louis XV decreed that Nègres et gens de couleur [Blacks and people of color] must register with the clerk of the Admiralty within two months. Nanon registered herself; La Böessière registered Joseph. Gabriel Banat reports that the total number of persons registered in Paris under the decree was 159.

## 10 Fencer

Joseph studied at the fencing academy for 6 years, until he was 19. By that time everyone called him Le Chevalier de Saint-George. Several excerpts from Claude Ribbe's book have been translated from French by the Webmaster. This is the first:

- Whether or not his use of the title was legal, this Chevalier was in any case inimitable. He excelled at everything he did. His budding reputation led him, in spite of himself, to link his exploits. At age 17 Joseph was not only an accomplished athlete but already a public figure. Known and recognized, he practiced, with a disconcerting superiority, all of the artistic and athletic disciplines in which the young aristocrats chose to do no more than they had to.
- Was Joseph's body astonishing? It was more surprising when the American showed he knew how to use it.

- With a consummate sense of provocation, the young man made of this problematic body, which the readers of Voltaire were supposed to regard as a degenerate product, the instrument of his glory. He transformed it into an admirable object to which, however, he refused to reduce himself. Because it was not the body of Joseph which was in command, it was Joseph himself. He subjugated his own flesh as easily as he knew how to control the most skittish horses.

...

The sword being reserved to the nobility, the apprenticeship of arms, heavily regulated to exclude undesirable students and masters, belonged to the elite. To figure among this aristocracy, and in first place yet, was no small thing. By his preeminence in fencing, Saint-George acquired a position of invulnerability which was both physical and social.

Saint-George had become known in the world of fencing as the god of arms.

### 11 Athlete

Emil F. Smidak is the author of *Joseph Boulogne called Chevalier de Saint-Georges*. He writes of Saint-George:

He could often be seen swimming across the Seine with only one arm, and in skating his skill exceeded everyone else's. As to the pistol, he rarely missed the target. In running he was reputed to be one of the leading exponents in the whole of Europe.

In addition to his skills as an athlete, Saint-George was also an excellent dancer.

### 12 Picard & Faldoni

When Saint-George was 19 his father offered him a fine English horse and a fashionable 2-wheel cart if he could defeat Picard, a skilled fencing master at Rouen. Saint-George won the match and was soon riding in style on the streets of Paris. In the following year [Gian Faldoni](#), a famous Italian, came to Paris to challenge Saint-George. He refused at first, but after Faldoni defeated every other prominent fencer in the city he finally agreed. The match was a public spectacle attended by the royal court. The opponents were of comparable skill; they fought long and hard. Each took a turn in the lead but ultimately Faldoni won, 4 touchés to 2. It was the first defeat in his remarkable career, and Saint-George took it hard.

### 13 Le Concert des amateurs

Saint-George had mastered both the harpsichord and the violin. Successful composers who dedicated works to him included Antonio Lolli in 1764 and François-Joseph Gossec in 1766. It is believed that he had been tutored in violin by Jean-Marie Leclair, another important composer of the time, and had studied composition with Gossec. He is believed to have become the first violin, or concertmaster, of the ensemble by 1771, Gabriel Banat writes. He was already serving as the *battueur de mesure*, or timekeeper. Gossec was the orchestra's founder and Conductor. Professor Ribbe gives this description of the orchestra:

The ensemble, in which amateurs sat beside professionals from the King's Royal Academy and from the King's Music, consisted of more than 70 performers, with 40 violins and violas, 12 cellos, and 8 double basses, to which were to be added the winds: flutes, oboes, clarinets, trumpets, horns and bassoon.

### 14 Violinist & Composer

Saint-George first composed a *Concerto for Harp*. Subsequently, he and Gossec were among the earliest French composers of string quartets, symphony concertantes, and quartet concertantes. His first string quartets were performed in the salons of Paris in 1772. They were published in the spring of 1773. Claude Ribbe recounts:

During the 1772-1773 concert season, Joseph directed and played his first two violin concertos at the Amateurs. *Le Mercure [The Mercury]* reported that they 'received the greatest applause as much for the quality of playing as for that of the composition'.

In the liner notes for the Arion CD 55445 (1999) violinist Joel Marie Fauquet writes:

...Saint-Georges acquired the mastery over his technique and sonority early on, to an extent that 'his velvety talent on the violin sometimes gave him preference over the cleverest artists of his day'.

### 15 Conductor

Saint-George became Conductor of Le Concert de amateurs in 1773, combining his duties with composing. He produced 7 violin concertos and 2 symphony concertantes in the next two years. In 1775, only two years after Saint-George became Conductor, *L'Almanach Musical [The Musical Almanac]* wrote that the ensemble was "the best orchestra for symphonies in Paris and perhaps in Europe".

## 16 Paris Opera

Biographer Gabriel Banat explains that bids to manage the Paris Opera were solicited in 1775, and one was submitted by a company headed by Saint-George. He quotes Baron Grimm's review of Parisian life, the *Correspondance*, on the point, and adds this excerpt:

No sooner were Mesdemoiselles Arnauld, Guimard, Rosalie, and others informed about the news [that Saint-Georges had been proposed as music director of the Opéra], they presented a placet[petition] to the Queen, assuring her Majesty that "their honor and their delicate conscience could never allow them to submit to the orders of a mulatto." Such an important consideration makes all the impression it is expected to make, but, after many projects and discussions regarding the matter, the question has been decided by the king, who in the end took it upon himself to have the Opéra managed on his behalf by the Intendants and Treasurers of the *Menus Plaisirs* [the king's light entertainments].

## 17 Intrigue

Gabriel Banat asks if race was the true motive of the protesters who submitted the petition to the Queen:

That so-called placet put an end to any aspirations Saint-Georges may have had of becoming music director of that great institution, the most prestigious musical post in France. This was, as far as we know, the most serious setback yet he had suffered because of his color.

But was it really about that?

Banat writes that Saint-George had proposed a reorganization, causing Arnauld and Rosalie to fear dismissal. He adds that the victorious Intendant of light entertainment, Papillon de La Ferté, was the lover of Guimard:

Indeed, each member of the cabal would benefit from the intrigue. The singers, fearing dismissal, were reassured that the status quo would prevail; La Guimard, through her lover, would have virtually a free hand at the Opéra; and Papillon would wield greater power than he had ever dreamed of in the good old days before Louis, the frugal, mounted the throne.

## 18 New Racial Controls

Religious leaders urged King Louis XVI to abolish slavery. About 1776 he condemned the practice himself. Reaction from slave owners and traders was so strong that new racial controls were adopted in 1778. The King ordered Nègres, mulâtres et gens de couleur [Blacks, mulattos and people of color] living in Paris to carry identity cards. Captains of ships were required to notify the Admiralty before allowing any such persons to disembark in France. Interracial marriages were prohibited if the African or person of African descent had disembarked before August 9, 1777. Saint-George had not always lived in Paris, so he did not carry an identity card.

## 19 Don Juan Noir

Much has been made of Saint-George's reputation as a Don Juan Noir [Black Don Juan]. Professor Ribbe traces such talk to a jealous remark of Bachaumont:

In attributing seduction by Saint-George to neither his handsomeness nor his personal qualities but to his 'marvelous talents', in other words to his sexual performance, Bachaumont embellished upon a recurrent racist fantasy which attributes to Africans and their descendants an anatomy in proportion to their temperament; that is to say their supposed bestial sexuality.

Saint-George did have at least one serious romantic relationship, but racial attitudes made it impossible for him to marry anyone at his level of society.

## 20 Musical Theater

Although rejected for the post at the Paris Opera, Saint-George was later appointed music director of the private theater of the Marquise de Montesson. He directed 2 to 3 performances each week. He also served as Lieutenant of the Hunt for her husband, Louis Philippe, Duke of Orléans. The composer's first musical comedy was a 3-act work, *Ernestine*, for which he wrote only the music. Its first performance, on July 18, 1777, drew warm applause. A second staging, at the larger Comédie-Italienne, was given good reviews in the press for the music but was panned for its lyrics.

## 21 Professional Peak

Professor Ribbe writes that by 1778 Saint-George had reached his professional peak as a composer. He published 2 symphony concertantes in 1776 and 2 more in 1778. In 1777 he wrote 3 violin concertos and 6 string quartets. It has long been known that Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) was influenced by the music of the Chevalier. The author recounts that on June 11, 1778 the Royal Academy of Music premiered a ballet *Les Petits Riens [The Little Nothings]* for which Mozart had written the music. He writes that the final section of the score copied the theme from a concerto Saint-George had published months earlier! Some people call Saint-George the Black Mozart, but that nickname is not accurate. Saint-George was always much more than a figure in classical music. He was one of the best fencers in Europe and a heroic Colonel in the French Revolution. Saint-George wrote the music for a second musical comedy, *La Chasse [The Hunt]*, first performed on October 12, 1778. It was a big hit with the audience and was unanimously praised by the press.

## 22 Queen Marie-Antoniette

Early in 1779, Saint-George began performing music with Queen Marie-Antoniette at Versailles, at her request. Professor Ribbe notes that some people were unhappy about the arrangement. One night that spring, Saint-George and a companion were walking alone when 6 men attacked them. The two defended themselves until a passing police patrol arrested several of the assailants. They were quickly released from jail when they were identified as members of the secret police at Versailles! It was obvious that someone in power had ordered his murder, so Saint-George began taking precautions to avoid further incidents. For example, he chose Mme. Montesson's private theater for the premiere of *L'Amant anonyme [The Anonymous Lover]* in March, 1780. He had also published 2 more symphonies by then.

## 23 Olympic Lodge Orchestra

The Chevalier was one of the first Black Masons in France. He was initiated into a Parisian lodge of the Grand Orient of France called Les 9 Soeurs [The Nine Sisters]. The Concert des amateurs closed in early 1781, and Masons quickly founded a new orchestra, Le Concert de la Loge Olympique [The Olympic Lodge Orchestra]. It was sponsored by a lodge known as l'Olympique de la Parfait Union [The Olympic of the Perfect Union]. The musicians were all Masons and were as skilled as those of the Amateurs. They performed in elegant quarters in the Palais-Royal [Royal Palace] under the direction of Saint-George. In 1784 he was authorized to commission Franz Joseph Haydn to write 6 symphonies for publication in Paris.

## 24 La chevalière d'Éon

The Prince of Wales arranged a friendly fencing demonstration in London between Saint-George, who was 42, and a 59-year-old French woman, La chevalière d'Éon. Saint-George had broken an Achilles tendon at age 40, and was not as nimble as before. He could still parry and counterattack effectively. On April 9, 1787 Saint-George politely allowed his opponent to get the better of him. The chevalière was actually Charles d'Éon de Beaumont, a diplomat who dressed as a woman for many years to help him spy on foreign countries for the King of France. D'Éon was a multitalented man of letters, law, diplomacy and the military but had fallen out of favor with the royal court. He practiced fencing daily, in fear of his life.

## 25 Voltaire's Influence

Four months after the fencing match in London, Saint-George premiered *La Fille Garçon [The Girl Boy]* at the Comédie-Italienne. Once again, most of the press praised the music of Saint-George. Baron Melchior von Grimm's newsletter on Parisian culture was an exception. Professor Ribbe notes that its critique reflected the racist opinions of Voltaire. He begins by paraphrasing the review:

Certainly, the Chevalier was capable of playing the violin, but he was not creative. It would be contrary to Nature if he were. In the rest of his review Grimm showed that he had retained the lesson of Voltaire well: 'This piece, he said, is the best Monsieur de Saint-George has ever written. Nevertheless, it also appears to be lacking in creativity. This recalls an observation, which has not yet been contradicted, that if Nature has served the mulattos well in a certain way by giving them a marvelous aptitude to practice all the imitative arts, it seems however to have refused this impulse of feeling and genius which alone produces new ideas and original designs.'

The author points out that the term mulatto was as demeaning and insulting in the 18th century as it is today.

## 26 Paris Symphonies

Saint-George and the Concert de la Loge Olympique premiered Haydn's 6 *Paris Symphonies*, Nos. 82-87, in a triumphant series of concerts in 1787. Queen Marie-Antoniette attended them. Symphony No. 85 is called *The Queen* because it was Her Majesty's favorite.

## 27 Friends of Black People

Saint-George's trips to England introduced him to the country's anti-slavery movement. He helped found a French group called the Société des amis des noirs [Society of the Friends of Black People]. He also produced a children's musical, *Aline et Dupré ou Le Marchand des marrons* [*Aline and Dupré or The Chestnut Seller*]. It was staged on August 9, 1788. As a violinist, Saint-George gave concerts in England as well as France. One dark evening in January 1790 on which he was scheduled to perform in England he was walking alone, carrying his violin, when a man with a pistol and a stick tried to rob him. He fought off the robber, only to be attacked by 4 more men. He overpowered them as well. Gabriel Banat argues that Saint-George's support for the liberation of slaves was known in England, "...and no doubt sufficiently irritating to Britain's slave cartel to make them try to eliminate him."

### **28 French Revolution**

Saint-George was living in Lille when the French Revolution broke out in July, 1789. He joined the National Guard in Lille later that year. He obtained the rank of Captain in 1790. Saint-George the soldier was still a musician and a fencer, so he organized concerts and fencing demonstrations in Lille while stationed in the city. He even wrote an opera, *Guillaume-Tout-Coeur ou les Amis de village* [*William-All-Heart or The Village Friends*]. An actor from Lille wrote the lyrics for the work, which was performed September 8, 1790. Saint-George's connections with the Ancien Régime now made him the object of great suspicion, so he began signing his name Monsieur de Saint-George.

### **29 Saint-George Legion**

Members of the National Guard were asked to volunteer for active duty, so Saint-George enlisted on June 21, 1791 as an aide-de-camp to two generals. He soon received another call to duty. On September 1, 1791 a delegation of men of color, led by Julien Raimond of Saint-Domingue, asked the National Assembly to allow them to fight in defense of the Revolution and its egalitarian ideals. The next day, the Assembly approved a corps comprised mainly of men of color, with 800 infantry and 200 cavalry personnel. Saint-George was appointed to be its Colonel. Its official name was légion franche de cavalerie des Américains, but it soon became known to all as the légion Saint-George [Saint-George Legion]. The Colonel chose his friend and protege Alexandre Dumas as Lieutenant-Colonel. Like his Colonel, he was the son of a French aristocrat and an African slave. He later had a son, also named Alexandre Dumas, who won fame as author of *The Three Musketeers*.

### **30 13th Combat Regiment**

Austrian troops laid siege to Lille and the men of the Saint-George Legion were among the first in combat. The Colonel led his own troops and others, fighting on the front lines even though his rank did not require it. The Austrians were ultimately repulsed and Saint-George proudly informed the Convention of the victory. Soon, however, the authorities began removing men of color from the Legion. They renamed it the 13e Régiment de chasseurs [13th Combat Regiment]. Many men of color in the infantry were sent to the colonies to put down slave rebellions. Critics, including Alexandre Dumas, tried to undermine Saint-George's position. They blamed him for chronic shortages of food and equipment, and for poor morale.

### **31 Treason of Dumouriez**

Saint-George played a crucial role in halting la trahison de Dumouriez [The Treason of Dumouriez] at Lille in April, 1793. General Charles François Dumouriez had been defeated at Neerwinden, Belgium in March and had subsequently made a secret armistice with Austria. He intended to capture Lille, crown the son of the dead King as Louis XVII, and use the city as a base for regaining control of France for the monarchy. Dumouriez sent General Miaczinski to a town near Lille with 4,000 troops. Miaczinski told Saint-George and Alexandre Dumas of the plan in person. They let him believe they would allow his soldiers to seize Lille. When the time came for him to take control of Lille, Miaczinski brought only a small escort. Saint-George and Dumas arrested him and sent him to Paris, where he was executed. His troops did not try to take the city; Dumouriez took refuge outside France; and the young French Republic was saved.

### **32 Prisoner**

Saint-George was a hero, but not for long. His ties to the aristocracy made him vulnerable to false charges of misusing public funds. A friend of Robespierre wrote a scathing denunciation. Alexandre Dumas apparently had different political sympathies than his Colonel. He joined others in accusing his commanding officer of wrongdoing. Monsieur de Saint-George was arrested on November 4, 1793 and was imprisoned without trial. Robespierre eventually fell, signalling a change in the political winds. The Committee of Public Safety finally heard Saint-George's case, and ruled that he had been removed without cause. On October 23, 1794 it ordered his release from prison. Saint-George's hopes of returning to his former position were dashed by a general decree of October 25, 1795. He subsequently spent some time in Saint-Domingue.

### **33 Le Cercle de l'Harmonie**

In spring 1797 Saint-George returned to Paris and took charge of his final orchestra, Le Cercle de l'Harmonie [Circle of Harmony]. The Departmental Archives of Guadeloupe has published a book whose title translates to: *Foil and Bow: Chevalier de Saint-Georges, Créole in the Century of the Enlightenment*. The following excerpt has been translated by the Webmaster:

Toward the end of his life, in 1797, Saint-George directed the Circle of Harmony, a concert organization newly established at the Palais-Royal, in the former residence of the Duke of Orléans. "The concerts which have been held there under the direction of the famous Saint-George have left nothing to be desired for the choice of works or the superiority of performance" one could read in the journal *Mercury* for the month of April 1797.

### **34 Death**

Saint-George lived alone in a small apartment in Paris during the last two years of his life. In late spring, 1799 an untreated bladder infection caused him to become weak and feverish. He was taken in and cared for by Nicolas Duhamel, an old friend who had served under him. He died on June 10, 1799. Claude Ribbe points out that Saint-George did not die forgotten, as has often been said:

"All the newspapers celebrated his memory with respect and emotion".

A music publisher later issued posthumous editions of a violin concerto and a series of sonatas, the author observes.

Luc Nemeth remarks that when his obituary was published, Saint-George already represented a distant past in the eyes of the era. "For having represented the future too well", he writes, "Saint-George could no longer be identified even remotely with the present." The author quotes an obituary's description of Saint-George's superiority in "arms, dance, riding and music", noting that it limits recognition to those talents of Saint-George which fell in the artistic and athletic domains.

### **35 Slavery**

The Convention had abolished slavery in French colonies on February 4, 1794. The ideal of equality for which Saint-George and his volunteers of color had fought so bravely soon fell into disfavor. Napoleon Bonaparte sent troops to Guadeloupe and Saint-Domingue in 1802 with orders to reinstitute slavery. People of color on Guadeloupe fought valiantly under Louis Delgrès, but on May 28, 1802 their defenses fell to General Antoine Richepance. Rather than live as slaves again, hundreds of people blew themselves up in a gunpowder warehouse. Emancipation would not return until 1848. The assault on Saint-Domingue killed people of color by the thousands and still France could not regain control. The former colony declared its independence in 1804, becoming the first Black republic in the world. People of color in France suffered setbacks as well. On May 29, 1802 a secret decree expelled all officers of color from the Army, ending the military career of General Alexandre Dumas.

### **36 Verdict of History**

Professor Ribbe has this to say of the verdict of history: In History texts, which have little to say about the Chevalier de Saint-George or of the million slaves deported to the French West Indies, Voltaire is honored as the most brilliant of the humanists and Napoleon as the most glorious of men of state.

### **37 Rue du Chevalier de Saint-George**

For many years Paris had a street named for General Richepance. In December, 2001 the Paris City Council voted to change the street's name from Rue Richepance to Rue du Chevalier de Saint-George. The name change had been requested by French citizens from the West Indies. A commemorative plaque for the street describes Saint-George as a "Colonel de la Garde Nationale" ["Colonel of the National Guard"]. Luc Nemeth calls this "non-information", because there was nothing unusual about being in the National Guard, for anyone who had taken part in the French Revolution. He adds: "One could not better lie by omission, more than two centuries after the decree of December, 1792 stripped the unit of its identity as the 'Black Legion'."