The Code Noir (The Black Code)

The *Code noir* initially took shape in Louis XIV's edict of 1685. Although subsequent decrees modified a few of the code's provisions, this first document established the main lines for the policing of slavery right up to 1789. The very first article expels all Jews from the colonies; Jews played a significant but hardly dominant role in the Dutch colonies of the Caribbean region but were not allowed to own property or slaves in the French colonies. The edict also insisted that all slaves be instructed as Catholics and not as Protestants. For the most part, the code concentrated on defining the condition of slavery (passing the condition through the mother not the father) and establishing harsh controls over the conduct of those enslaved. Slaves had virtually no rights, though the code did enjoin masters to take care of the sick and old.