PRUNING THE TREE OF LIBERTY: THE LIMITS OF THE EARLY FRENCH ABOLITION MOVEMENT

by

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(Under the Direction of Laura Mason)

ABSTRACT

This study explores the Enlightenment's intellectual heritage on race and slavery and how French Revolutionaries used these ideas to delay legislating rights for non-whites in the early years of the revolution. Revolutionaries braced themselves for the colonial question armed with a century's worth of rationale that esteemed whites above blacks and associated black skin with brutality, laziness, lack of civilization, and servitude. The revolution forced the French to confront their entrenched, home-grown racism whose genesis in the French Enlightenment was validated through eighteenth-century French legislation and ultimately the revolution's denial of non-whites from the new French family. Only by linking the intellectual and political histories of Enlightenment and Revolution can we begin to determine why revolutionaries failed to legislate freedom for non-whites until the post-1790s revolts in Saint Domingue forced racial equality in 1792 and the abolition of slavery in 1794.

INDEX WORDS: France, Slavery, Abolition, French Enlightenment, Race, French Revolution, Saint Domingue, Eighteenth-Century

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to two important men in my life. First, to my grandfather, Roland C. Barefoot, without whom I would never have had the opportunity to live in France, become enamored with French history, and learn the language skills necessary to become a French historian. He will now have missed two of my graduations, but I know he would be so proud of me.

Secondly, I dedicate this thesis to my husband. In a world where women are expected to exchange their educational and professional aspirations for domestic and family plans, my husband lovingly and fully supports my desire to pursue both. I could not have ventured into and flourished in graduate school without his help and support. His love for me has helped my love for my craft thrive, and for this, I am so grateful.

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INTRODUCTION

BRIDGING ENLIGHTENMENT WITH REVOLUTION

In 1788, the first French abolition movement sprouted when Jacques Pierre Brissot and Etienne Clavière formed the *Société des Amis des Noirs* as a protégé of the London Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, commencing a decades-long Anglo-French humanitarian alliance to end the slave trade and secure the gradual emancipation of all slaves. These abolitionists rejected the legality of slavery but nonetheless insisted that phenotype denoted certain psychological traits that rendered blacks less civilized than their white counterparts. Borrowing from the Enlightenment, the most ardent abolitionists still subscribed to the corrupting influence of slavery on slaves, believing that all blacks required regeneration before stepping into freedom let alone citizenship. These philanthropists carried the weight of a humanitarianism complicated and corrupted by the very movement that generated it: the Enlightenment.

The French Revolution in 1789 opened the door for the abolitionists' confrontation with the contentious issue of anti-slavery legislation, but they conclusively failed to garner adequate support in the newly elected Estates-General in contrast to the well-organized, prestigiously ranked members of the pro-colonial force representing port cities and merchants.[1] Similarly, the *cahiers de doléances* barely mentioned slavery,

[1] Marcel Dorigny, "Mirabeau and the Society des Amis des Noirs." In *The Abolitions of Slavery From Léger Félicité Sonthonax to Victor Schoelcher.* Ed. Marcel Dorigny. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003). 125

indicating a divergence between center and periphery in France.[2] In the early years of the revolution, the pro-slavery contingency played the strongest cards, emphasizing the importance of economic stability founded on racial hierarchy and the colonies' critical role in the French economy. Eager to preserve their advantages, pro-colonial advocates elevated property rights to claim that slave-owners had fairly purchased such labor and therefore held legal protection of their property. Slavery proponents also warned that without slave labor, the fruits of colonialism would wither and stifle the thriving metropolitan economy. Claiming the "civilizing mission" of slavery dating to the 1685 Code Noir, slavery advocates promised that slaves were not only treated fairly but also were introduced to Christianity and thus civilization after suffering under "oppression" in their African homeland. Enlightenment hypotheses on the hierarchy of races allowed the pro-slavery camp to appear rational in their belief that emancipation would unleash the "brutish" slaves while also perilously affecting the French economy. Pro-colonial legislators plotted in Paris to protect Saint-Domingue, "the pearl of the Antilles," but the political instability of the colonial question during the Revolution spurred white and black autonomist movements in the Caribbean, arousing fear and making the slave trade and slavery taboo for lengthy discussion in the legislative Assemblies.[3] The tension between property rights and economic freedom grated against the proclaimed "natural" freedoms of man, forging an ambiguous arsenal of "enlightened" thought on the matter.

Race would prove the hinge that opened and closed the door to rights for non-

[2] Louis Bergés. "Introduction historique." In *Guides des sources de la traite négriére, de l'esclavage, et de leurs abolitions.* Ed by Claire Sibille. (Paris : Direction des Archives de France / Documentation Française, 2007). 27.

[3] David Patrick Geggus, "Racial Equality, Slavery, and Colonial Secession during the Constituent Assembly." *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 94, No. 5 (Dec., 1989), 1295-96.

whites in the early years of the French Revolution. The question of race occupied both sides of the slavery debate, and phenotype served to either completely discredit men from rights, or warrant their inclusion as a "mediating class" after revolts engulfed the island of Saint Domingue post-1790. After Vincent Ogé's failed revolt in 1790, colonial racial agitation prompted the May 1791 decrees granting active citizenship to all economically qualified men regardless of race. When the National Assembly tried to remove phenotype from the citizenship equation, revolutionary tensions culminated in the revolt of *grands blancs* in St. Domingue, who had been clamoring for independence from France to govern their island without the ever-growing reaches of state power. At the same time, the *gens du couleur libres* battled in Paris and St. Domingue for their political and social rights, ushering in legislative back peddling to remove free blacks' rights in September only to later reaffirm racial equality in the face of open race warfare. Finally, on May 15, 1792, the legislature extended political and civil rights to all free men of color. After months of slave and free black insurgency, the National Assembly deemed racial equality for already free blacks necessary to secure the chains of those already enslaved. To restore order in the wake of rebellion, law makers circumvented universal emancipation by granting freedom to some blacks in order to continue enslaving others.

The National Convention would not free black slaves until its hand was forced in the Winter of 1794. The legislature commissioned Léger Felicité Sonthonax and Étienne Polverel to the colony after the May 15th decree to ensure the application of rights for free *gens du couleur,* but these men were greeted with an island in continued, open revolt.[4] In 1793, the two Commissioners promised freedom and citizenship to garner the support of

[4] See Pierre Victor Malouet, M. Député de la colonie de St. Domingue. *Examen de Cette Question: Quel sera pour les Colonies de l'amerique le Résultat de la Révolution Françoise, de la Guerre qui en est la Suite, et de la Paix qui doit terminer ?* De L'Imprimerie de BAYLIS, 15, Greville-Street, Helborn. 1797.

slaves and free blacks against the British and Spanish as the European war against France played out in the Caribbean. On February 4, 1794, the French government validated Sonthonax's proclamation, slavery was outlawed, and former slaves gained French citizenship.[5] Racial tensions had sparked revolts in Saint Domingue that decisively changed the colonial question in France, inciting Ogé's revolt in 1790 that first challenged the color line, provoking the May 1791 decree granting active citizenship apart from phenotype, pushing white planters to threaten secession, forcing legislators to grant racial equality in 1792, and prompting slave emancipation in 1794.[6] While the revolutionaries stammered over practically applying their universalist declarations of freedom, the slaves and free blacks of Saint Domingue seized the "natural rights" that "enlightened" legislators had failed to secure.

Why did revolutionaries fall so far short of their proclaimed "enlightened goals"? We can only begin to answer that question by linking the intellectual and political histories of Enlightenment and Revolution. From the Louis XIV's ascent to the throne in 1664 to Napoleon Bonaparte's defeat at Waterloo in 1815, France and Britain endured a grueling war to control Europe. Their *champs de mars* was not continental, however, but maritime, as the rivals competed to command the American colonies and the slave trade and ensure stability for the vast, complex, extremely integrated colonial-continental

[5] Dubois offers a chronologically arranged narrative of the events in Saint Domingue, beginning with a snapshot of the pre-Revolutionary colony, Ogé's Revolt (1790), the slave uprising (1791), the Spanish-British invasion (1793), the War of the South (1799), and the Leclerc expedition (1802). *Avengers of the New World. (* Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004).
[6] Geggus, "Racial Equality, Slavery, and Colonial Secession During the Constituent Assembly," 1303.

economy based upon Atlantic commerce.[7] These trade networks supported mutually beneficial commercial agreements through production and sale of merchandise, naval materiél, armaments, and shipping insurance. The linchpin for lucrative colonial economies and thus metropolitan profit was the slave system, under which hundreds of thousands of captive Africans labored.[8]

Even as the French economy flourished on slave labor, a blossoming Enlightenment rhetoric was condemning the irreconcilable dichotomy between celebration of man's natural freedoms and the existence of slavery and the slave trade. In addition to broad metaphoric uses of slavery to challenge despotic rulers, *philosophes* like Montesquieu hinted at opposition to chattel slavery or denounced it outright, like Jean Jacques Rousseau. Others joined economists to denigrate slavery as an archaic form of work compared to the preferable free wages system. By the end of the eighteenth-century, true abolitionist movements were burgeoning in North America, England, and France as the plight of the *"non-blanche*" emerged from soldiers' tales, slave ship crews' testimony, and traders' authentication. These personal testimonies were broadened by almanacs, *livres de colportage,* popular theater, slave suit memoirs, images, and caricatures, all of which disseminated knowledge of the problem of slavery in the age of Enlightenment. [9]

Despite the emerging abolition movement and the coming of the French Revolution, revolutionaries enthusiastically promised Frenchmen the freedoms and

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[7] Marcel Dorigny and Bernard Gainot, "Introduction," In *Atlas des esclavages: traits, sociétés coloniales, abolitions de l'antiquité à nos jours. »* Edited by Marcel Dorigny and Bernard Gainot. (Paris : 2006). 22.
[8] Dorigny and Gainot, "Les Traites Anglaise et Francaise." In *Atlas des esclavages.* 26-27. For example, Bordeaux, "le port Atlantique par excellence" was well-placed for Antilles expeditions and maritime routes to African coasts. Eighty percent of Bordeaux's slave trade slaves landed in Saint-Domingue. (26-27)
[9] Dorigny and Gainot, *Atlas des esclavages,* 48.

"natural rights" enshrined in the Enlightenment canon, the same arsenal that linked race with immutable, inheritable physical and psychological characteristics. The Enlightenment established a rationally "proven" hierarchy of races with whites at the top. Roger Chartier has argued that the Enlightenment did not create the Revolution. Rather "the Revolution invented the Enlightenment by tempting to root its legitimacy in a corpus of texts and founding authors reconciled and united, beyond their extreme differences, by their preparation of a rupture with the old world."[10] Revolutionaries looked to Montesquieu, Rousseau, Voltaire, Diderot, and Raynal to help them fashion a new society based on natural rights and natural law. However, as Lynn Hunt reminds us, those same revolutionaries who learned languages of reform and opposition from *philosophes* and *parlementaires* faced revolution itself with no practical prototype**.** When they borrowed Rousseau's notion of the social contract, their ideologies splintered over how to rearrange it and who to include. Hunt concluded that "once Revolutionaries acted on Rousseau's belief that government could form a new people, the world was never again the same." [11]

Enlightenment also offered a shaky foundation for the application of natural law to blacks, particularly slaves. Pro-slavery supporters gathered ammunition from ambiguous assertions in the Enlightenment canon, specifically from Montesquieu, while anti-slavery proponents too cited Montesquieu, along with Voltaire and *L'Encyclopèdie* authors.[12] The *philosophes'* ambiguity on literal chattel slavery bequeathed a rhetorical canon useful for both anti- and pro-slavery proponents regarding the rights of man. For

[10] Alyssa Goldstein Seppinwall, *The Abbé Grégoire and the French Revolution: The Making of Modern Universalism*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). 11.
[11] Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution. (*Berkeley : University of California Press, 1984).
[12] Bergés, "Introduction historique." 26.

Louis Sala-Molins, "the crucial test of the Enlightenment is the slave trade and slavery."[13]

Because revolutionaries sought legitimacy in the canon of the Enlightenment, revivals of the *philosophes*' anti-slavery positions fortified pre-existing ambiguities between the demands for liberty and the enshrinement of property, creating constant tension in anti-slavery sentiment and reflecting ambiguity in Enlightenment thought itself.[14] To determine who was included in the "man" of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, revolutionaries looked to both Enlightenment texts and political circumstances to reconstitute the nation and reconcile ideal with practice. Yet, the tangled colonial and race question was further complicated by eighteenth-century legal battles over France's "Free Soil Principle," the mythical notion that *"Nul n'est esclave en France,"* which allowed for spatial dichotomies to authorize slavery in French colonies while refusing it in the metropole.

Many French historians have examined the philosophical view of slavery in the Enlightenment, or meticulously analyzed the abolition movement from the 1788 founding of the *Amis des Noirs* to the conclusive 1848 abolition of slavery. And yet, few bridge the divide between Enlightenment and revolution. If scholars of the French Enlightenment heartily recognize the ambiguities on slavery in the period's texts and legal history, they fail to link the heritage of this paradoxical anti-slavery discourse to the early abolitionists' growing pains and failure to legislate slaves' liberty until circumstances forced their hand.

Among the earliest to treat the issue, historian Peter Gay claimed the *philosophes*'

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[13] Louis Sala-Molins, *Dark Side of the Light: Slavery and the French Enlightenment.* Trans and with an Introduction by John Conteh-Morgan. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). 8.

[14] Jean Ehrard. "Slavery Before the Moral Conscience of the French Enlightenment: Indifference, Unease, and Revolt." In *The Abolitions of Slavery From Léger Félicité Sonthonax to Victor Schoelcher.* Ed. Marcel Dorigny. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003).

views on slavery were "well-meaning, often vague… an automatic response to human misery that…hardly amounts to a crusade." And yet, while Gay triumphantly credited the *philosophes'* writings with "swell[ing] anti-slavery sentiment from a trickle to a respectable stream of opinion that would grow, at the end of the century, with their help, into the torrent of abolitionism,"[15] he failed to recognize the stop and stutter nature of Revolutionary legislation on slavery until slaves themselves forced emancipation. Even then, the 1794 abolition victory proved fleeting. The compulsory retreat of the anti-slavery proponents during the Consulate and the early Restoration halted abolitionism entirely until 1821, when the resurgence was a slight trickle until the mid- 19th century.

Sue Peabody's *There Are No Slaves in France* reveals how the myth of France's "free soil," which dated back to Louis X, complicated the issue of slavery in the Enlightenment. The budding abolitionism in the Enlightenment and the legal battles over "free soil" grated against the nascent racist justification for slavery and inequality based on phenotype. However, Peabody's study stops on the eve of the revolution and so fails to consider how French racial legislation coupled with the Enlightenment's hierarchy of civilized man shaped the revolution's anti-slavery rhetoric. Peabody laments the closing of French Admiralty Courts early in the Revolution, since this effectively silenced slave suits for freedom. Recognizing the silencing of actual slaves seeking representation in Admiralty Courts, Peabody ignores new avenues for anti-slavery advocates to argue their case with the rise of a French abolition movement in the wake of Enlightenment rhetoric and the "Free Soil" principle. Her conclusions on eighteenth-century legislation intended to patrol race and cement the already rooted "racialization of servitude" offer insight into

[15] Peter Gay. *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation. Volume II: The Science of Freedom*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969) 410.

abolitionist and pro-slavery arguments in the early years of the revolution, providing a more holistic picture of theories of race in eighteenth-century France rather than continuing to treat the pre-and post-revolutionary periods as separate entities.

While Peabody concludes on the eve of revolution, Shanti Marie Singham begins with the immediacy of 1789. Examining the revolutionary plight of those in French society deemed weaker because of biological or environmental factors, namely Jews, women, and blacks, Singham too fails to link the paradox of an enlightened heritage with the real, practical constraints on legislating idealistic theories. Although Singham grounds her study in efforts on behalf of minorities' claims of the Declaration's rights, arguments about the political and intellectual limits of "uncivilized" people trace their intellectual roots back to the Enlightenment.[16] Again, bridging the revolutionary divide will provide greater insight into the anti- and pro-slavery arguments, answering the polyvalent question of why the revolutionaries failed for so long to deliver on their promise of liberty.

Carolyn Fick also utilized a narrow intellectual history to examine the Declaration's universalist principles of liberty and equality. Fick asserts that the slave trade, the colonial question, and slavery overlapped in interlocking spheres that founded the economic roots of the rising French bourgeoisie, producing different meanings of "liberty and equality" for those in the metropole than those in St. Domingue.[17] The cultural interpretations of the Declaration's language impacted early revolutionary

[16] Shanti Marie Singham, "Betwixt Cattle and Men: Jews, Blacks, and Women, and the Declaration of the Rights of Man." In *The French Idea of Freedom,* Ed. Dale Van Kley, (Stanford: Stanford University Press) 1994.
[17] Carolyn E. Fick, "The French Revolution in Saint-Domingue: A Triumph or a Failure?" In *Turbulent time : the French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean*. Edited by David Barry Gaspar and David Patrick Geggus.(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 51-53

legislative debates regarding the slave trade, slavery, and free men of color, exposing the tension between race and citizenship and citizenship and property rights. Yet, Fick too fails to concretize assertions of shared intellectual strands from the Enlightenment to the early years of the revolution, instead blaming the fractious views on the context of the Revolution rather than realizing the deeper eighteenth-century intellectual and legal roots.

If many historians offer narrow studies, Louis Sala-Molins' broad-ranging study encompasses Enlightenment thought, the Code Noir, and the Declaration of the Rights of Man. He has argued that the Enlightenment merely secularized religious justification for slavery based on Ham's curse and the need for Catholic conversion to recover lost humanity, changing Noah's curse into environmental theories of climate, food, and tyrannical government.[18] Sala-Molins, who analyzed Enlightenment abolitionist sentiment in comparison with stipulations in the 1685 *Code Noir,* determined that "the Enlightenment… is not all light and radiance but also night and darkness, not all insight, but also blindness."[19]

He also examined the *Declaration of the Rights of Man* with the *Code Noir* in hand, since he argues that legislators would have been familiar with existing edicts. Offering Article 44 of the *Code,* which legalized slaves as "chattel" or *meuble,* Sala-Molins deduced that the *Declaration* denied slaves citizenship and therefore denied them rights. Satirically, Sala-Molins exclaims over Article 2 in the *Declaration,* "the Negro triumphs!" since property rights were enshrined as a natural right:

> The purpose of all political associations is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.[20]

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[18]John Conteh-Morgan, "Introduction," In *Dark Side of the Light,* xxii-xxiii.
[19] Sala-Molins, *Dark Side of the Light,* xi, 11-13.
[20] Sala-Molins, *Dark Side of the Light,* 59-62.

Sala-Molins, however, ends his analysis with the Declaration and fails to show how the Revolution took the very ideas he critiques, wrenched them around, and changed them as the course of revolution dictated. Sala-Molins' study concludes before the revolutionary action really took place. If we extend his argument that the Enlightenment provided a "rational" basis for racism, we find that the revolutionaries had to muddle through the colonial crisis with, from our perception, a flawed prototype. As George Lefebvre has argued, the authors of the Declaration aspired to correct past injustices. Since the Enlightenment failed to issue a conclusive verdict on slavery as either economically necessary and civilizing or antithetical to natural rights, the Declaration didn't recognize slavery as a concrete wrong that required revision. Tracing the intellectual history of anti- and pro-slavery thought in France from the Enlightenment through the early years of the French Revolution will allow for the correction of such oversights in interpretation.

Thus, as scholars have asserted, the history of abolition in the French Revolution prior to the Saint-Domingue revolts proved an embarrassment to the revolutionary principles at stake. Governing bodies in France repeatedly deflected attention from abolition by granting all-white legislative authority in the colonies, debating colonial citizenship rights only for property owning free blacks, and discussing the slave trade's abolition only after Commissioner Sonthonax had already declared slaves' freedom in Saint-Domingue.[21] Recent historians have revised earlier triumphal accounts of France as the first great power to abolish slavery, crediting instead the slave revolt in Saint-Domingue, the role of revolutionary commissioner Sonthanax, the war against Spain and England, and the climate of universalist freedoms initiated by the Revolution's founding

[21] Fick, "The French Revolution in Saint-Domingue" 53.

principles but not the Revolution itself.[22] Only on February 4, 1794, prodded by the *fait accompli* in Saint-Domingue, did France abolish colonial slavery.

But scholars' tenuous links between Enlightenment rhetoric on slavery and French Revolutionary legislation fail to conclusively cross the revolutionary divide between theory and practice to contextualize the anti- and pro-slavery arguments or the legislation within the period's intellectual history. Historians have successfully answered *why* France abolished slavery in 1794, but the question glaringly remains as to why the French Revolution, purveyor of man's natural rights, only initiated liberty for some and not all. How did eighteenth-century developments of a more biological racism, the Anglo-French commercial rivalry, and escalating tensions between property rights and natural rights contribute to an equivocal abolition treatise in the early French Revolution?

By joining Enlightenment discourses about slavery with the revolution's rhetoric on the colonial question, I mean to demonstrate that ambiguity about slavery did not begin in 1789 with the storming of the Bastille but lay rooted in the past. Without this broader view, the history of the early abolition movement in France remains incomplete, obscuring possible reasons for failures in light of contemporary philosophical and political constraints. Revolutionaries braced themselves for the colonial question armed with a century's worth of rationale that esteemed whites above blacks and associated black skin with brutality, laziness, lack of civilization, and servitude. Even the most ardent abolitionists agreed with this seemingly "rational" justification for racism. Free men of color even subscribed to the credence that black slaves were uncivilized and

[22] See David Patrick Geggus, ""Racial Equality, Slavery, and Colonial Secession during the Constituent Assembly."; Carolyn Fick "The French Revolution in Saint-Domingue: A Triumph or a Failure" Fick writes "One cannot speak of any real triumph of the French Revolution in Saint-Domingue, but rather of the revolution's role in the unfolding of this 13 year liberation struggle." 70; Jeremy Popkin *You Are All Free.* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2010).

degraded by their condition. The existence of deliberate racism even among non-whites illustrates the deep entrenchment of eighteenth-century theories of hierarchy and scientific racism. To neglect the revolutionaries' intellectual legacy is to deprive ourselves of a full understanding of the limits of the French Enlightenment and its complicated influence on the early French abolition movement.

Chapter One, "Enlightened Racism," analyzes philosophical notions of slavery developed in key Enlightenment texts. Unable to reach consensus on the slave question, *philosophes* often contradicted one another, alternately justifying slavery to preserve European wealth and condemning it because each human is "naturally equal." Yet in the midst of new-found human equality, novel theories on the variety of the human species created a belief in a "hierarchy of races" based on phenotype and levels of civilization. The convergence of this new science with views on human nature racialized slavery by the mid- to late- eighteenth century, and even the most ardent abolitionists believed in racist notions of the 'barbaric" non-white in need of civilization. The Buffonian Revolution popularized the creed that all men may have been born equal, but their climate and experiences degraded some, making them in need of regeneration and civilizing by white, Europeans untouched by such abasements. The Enlightenment's ambiguity on slavery and firm hypotheses on racial hierarchy colored the revolution's intellectual arguments in favor of and against slavery.

Chapter 2, "The Revolutionaries' Conundrum: A Racist Legacy," examines the first years of the French Revolution and the abolitionists' failure to abolish the slave trade or slavery. While historians have unearthed some of the motives behind the gradualist approach, bridging the revolutionary divide unearths the roots of gradualism in the

Enlightenment. Proponents for or against slavery utilized rhetoric from the Ancien Regime to commandeer the past to suit their purposes. Slaves and free men of color were considered unFrench and in need of "civilizing" because of their race and heritage, regardless of free coloreds' ability to cloak their demands for citizenship in the language of the Enlightenment. Pro-slavery arguments used economic concerns as their main tool, melding economics with racism based on hierarchies of civilization. Both sides of the debate were heavily informed by Enlightenment theories on racial hierarchies wherein phenotype bestowed the psychological blessing of whiteness or curse of blackness. The debates over practically legislating the Declaration's promises to "natural rights" of freedom and "political rights" to active citizenship could not escape the stain of phenotype, even for abolitionists.

Chapter 3, "An Ambiguous Victory: The 1791 and 1792 Decrees" exposes abolitionist and legislative attempts to remove phenotype from the debate by instead promoting economic criteria for granting active citizenship in May 1791 to all who qualified. Therefore, similar to notions present within France of "earning" political freedom based on heritage, education, and condition, the intellectual history of the Enlightenment that dictated "civilizing" citizens before granting them full rights influenced revolutionary colonial legislation. The idea of "active" and "passive" citizens translated into the colonies, but only for already free blacks. Rather than echoing the crown's policy of limiting freedoms based on spatial differences, the National Assembly came to curtail liberty according to economic qualifications that extended throughout the empire.

The free *gens du couleurs'* battle for citizenship would change the entire debate,

but revolt in the colonies pried the door for racial equality wide-open by 1792. Earlier cries for maintaining the racial status-quo in the name of colonial economic and social stability were stifled by the drum beat of racial war, and in March 1792, legislators granted racial equality in the name of economic stability, implementing exactly what they so feared just one year before in a strange reversal of fate. Before 1791, phenotype served to deny all non-whites access to the Declaration's promises for fear of toppling colonial profit. Revolts, first with Vincent Ogé then with free coloreds and slaves, forced the legislative hand. Granting racial equality in March 1792 ironically meant freedom for *gens du couleur libres* as a means to secure black slaves' labor and thus colonial stability. Free blacks, earlier a threat to colonial solvency, now arose as France's saving grace, a liaison-class between the rebellious slaves and spurious free whites, an asset that earned their "natural" freedom. The intersection of eighteenth-century intellectual notions of slavery and race with revolutionary legislation opens further insight into the nuanced role of racism based on Europeaness as well as whiteness.

What "enlightened" legislators failed to deliver, "uncivilized" non-whites successfully procured through revolutionary action. The revolutionaries did not "invent" racism in response to the shifting sands of revolutionary demands based on the Declaration's promises. Rather, the revolution forced the French to confront their entrenched, home-grown racism whose genesis in the French Enlightenment was validated through eighteenth-century French legislation and ultimately the revolution's denial to include non-whites in the new French family. Phenotype and the eighteenth-century implications associated with race informed abolitionists' Eurocentric, paternalistic decision to embrace gradualism and rights for only those with sufficient cash

power. Pro-slavery hardliners couldn't distinguish between racial hierarchy and economic stability, wedding the two irrevocably and ultimately losing opportunities to quell revolt because of their racism. The same Enlightenment that justified continued exclusion of non-whites from "natural" and "political" rights also encouraged them to revolt against their oppressors and seize what nature bestowed and man had violated. Bridging the Enlightenment with the revolution not only exposes cracks in the glory of the former, but also explains the racist delays of the latter.

CHAPTER ONE

ENLIGHTENED RACISM

In the mid-eighteenth century, Englishman Arthur Young slogged through three hundred miles of French "wastes, deserts, heath… and bog" to reach the coastal town of Nantes, the symbol of French colonial profit and origin of over fifty-five percent of slaving voyages. Upon arrival, Young marveled: "Mon Dieu! …What a miracle, that all this splendor and wealth of the cities in France should be so unconnected with the country!"[23] As Young recognized, the mansions, luxury, and palpable wealth of Nantes came courtesy of the enormously lucrative French colonial system, an economic structure founded on the coerced labor of hundreds of thousands of Africans.

The French, however, take no credit or blame for the origin of colonial plantation systems. In the fifteenth century, Portuguese explorers raided the coast of Africa seeking labor only to find greater success procuring slaves through "legal" local trade alliances, commencing what would become the most lucrative European commerce in the coming centuries: the slave trade. Over forty thousand European slaving voyages transplanted more than eleven million African captives in just four centuries. Sugar cane arrived in the New World with Christopher Columbus in 1493, and once Spaniards had decimated native populations through disease and forced labor, King Ferdinand of Spain determined that Africans' suitability for labor far exceeded the natives'. Soon the Dutch and the

[23] Robert Harms, *The Dilligent: A Voyage through the Worlds of the Slave Trade.* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), xvii.

British joined the trade of black Africans, and by the seventeenth century France heartily endorsed the commodification of humans to supply labor for sugar-producing colonies.[24]

Two French government-chartered monopolies supplied most captives to the French West Indies: the Senegal Company and the Guinea Company. The eighteenth century marked the pinnacle of the Atlantic slave trade as French ships transplanted over a million slaves from Africa to the French Caribbean islands, namely Saint-Domingue and Martinique. By then, the demand for slaves far exceeded the government monopoly's capacity to supply, so in 1725, the French crown opened the slave trade to private traders, enriching France's coastal towns far beyond locals' expectations. The merchant voice in France stood backed by the enormously lucrative stakes of the French colonies and the slave traders, forging a staunch pro-colonial, pro-capitalism lobby. By the end of the eighteenth-century, France had earned third rank in slaving, falling just behind England and Portugal.[25]

Eighteenth-century France was not only reaching the zenith of its slave-trading but also witnessing the emergence of the Enlightenment, a philosophical movement that championed man's natural rights. Because the French Revolution rooted its legitimacy in texts the Enlightenment produced, the contemporary beliefs on "man" and "humanity" in the Age of Reason provides the context for studying revolutionary legislation and discourse on slavery. Alongside rhetoric of high-minded natural freedoms lurked a scientific justification for racist classification that served not only to excuse enslaving black Africans but also to delay realization of their "natural" freedoms. Novel theories on the variety of human species established a "hierarchy of races," allowing the same men

[24]Harms, *The Dilligent,* Preface.
[25]Harms, *The Dilligent,* xi-xxi.

who praised man's natural rights to freedom and security to justify white domination over blacks based on European criteria for "civilization." This paradox of the Enlightenment links the movement to slavery rather than opposing the two phenomena. Just as racial categories were not merely "black" and "white," so too the Enlightenment view of slavery did not merely classify African forced labor as "good" or "evil" but considered the complicated, various shades in between. Thus historians must recognize the paradox of an Enlightenment that promoted "inclusion based on ideas of toleration, equality, cosmopolitanism, and natural rights at the same time that it produced powerful and lasting discourses of exclusion based on the perception (and creation) of differences of race, sex, and gender."[26]

This chapter will explore the eighteenth-century *philosophes*' ruminations on slavery and humanity, novel scientific elaborations on racial categories, racial justifications of slavery, and the slave suits that countered emerging racial legislation with Frances' centuries-old tradition of "No slaves in France." Outlining the ambiguous and contradictory attitudes about race and slavery on the eve of the Revolution as well as the arsenal from which revolutionaries drew will allow for a comparison of ideas on slavery that bridges the gap between Enlightenment and Revolution. Racist rationales allowed for philosophies that espoused man's natural equality and freedom to breathe comfortably in the same canon as pro-slavery sentiment. This legacy served nearly to suffocate the French Revolution's abolitionist movement as both sides of the debate plucked racial theories to justify calls for continued slave labor or gradual emancipation.

[26] William Nelson. "Making Men: Enlightenment Ideals of Racial Engineering." *American Historical Review.* December 2010. 1367.

While the issue of race and the variety of mankind stimulated innovative theories, the centuries-old debate on slavery admitted newly fractious viewpoints in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Secular pro-slavery arguments dated from Aristotle, "the high priest of natural slave theory," when he condoned the enslavement of "barbarians" by those he deemed morally superior.[27] Jewish and Christian tradition garnered pro-slavery ammunition from the Biblical "curse of Ham," which condemned Ham's sons to perpetual, hereditary bondage for their father's sins against his father, Noah.[28] Yet ancient philosophy also initiated some stirrings of abolitionist sentiment, particularly among the Stoics, who argued for the abolition of slavery in men's minds and for equanimity between masters and slaves since all men "sprang from the same stock."[29] While Roman law described slavery as contrary to the laws of nature it was nevertheless sanctioned by the laws of man, the *ius gentium.* Some Christian theologians and Roman lawyers opposed slavery, but any doubts of slavery's criminality were resolved in favor of the slaveholder.[30] Justinian's slave code in the sixth century AD further reinforced legal property rights over slaves, hereditary bondage, and slaveholders' physical power over the slave's person and freedom.

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[27] Peter Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine. (*Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 9, 13.

[28] See Edith Sanders, "The Hamitic Hypothesis; Its Origin and Functions in Time Perspective." The Journal of African History. Vol. 10, No. 4 (1969), pp. 521-532

[29] Walter Scheidel. "Stoics." In *The Historical Encyclopedia of World Slavery.* Vol. II. Ed. by Junius P. Rodriguez. ABC-CLIO: Santa Barbara, 1997. 611-12. Scheidel continues that writings against slavery emerged among the late Stoics, but only against slavery "of the mind" since slavery justified by law was "an external" and out of human control. Slavery as a condition of the soul was internal and therefore within man's control, prompting the epigram "every good man is free, every bad man a slave." Further, Scheidel argues that Stoics did not confront Aristotle's theory of natural slavery but instead encouraged man to transcend physical bondage through the freedom of the spirit. Stoics did believe in a "doctrine of kinship" that espoused man's common origins, whether slave or free.

[30] Peter Gay. *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation. Volume II: The Science of Freedom*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 407-410.

The revival of Roman law in Medieval France further fortified respect for property rights, including the right to hold slaves, while Catholic and Protestant readings of the Bible, particularly the writings of Paul, provided justification for slaves obeying their masters.[31] The 1685 French *Code Noir* was drafted to protect slaves from the abuses of masters and to bring Catholicism to the "heathen" Africans. Ironically, the *Code Noir* legitimized enslavement as necessary to redeem the souls of those degenerated by the curse of Ham, condemning the African slave to "legal and political non-existence."[32] Because slavery was a "necessary" evil in the colonies and because geographic boundaries shielded the metropole from the sight of its tangible effects, justification of the "peculiar institution" as a Christian missionary imperative soothed the consciences of many Frenchmen and mollified fears over property rights.[33]

Abolitionist sentiments in the eighteenth century had their own history, however. In the sixteenth century, Frenchman Jean Bodin revisited the debate over slavery and provided sound moral and legal arguments against the institution of slavery, buttressed for centuries by the ignorance of positive law on the issue. The seventeenth- and eighteenth centuries witnessed moral outrage over slavery among Quakers and other Protestant dissenters, as well as "a handful of Anglicans and Catholics who took the virtue of Christian charity seriously."[34] But the Enlightenment also produced two definitions of slavery: that of chattel slavery and that of despotic slavery of subject to king. Early *philosophes,* including John Locke, offered counterarguments to slavery

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[31] Robin Blackburn. *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848. (*London: Verso, 1988)
[32] John Conteh-Morgan, *Introduction,* in *Dark Side of the Light: Slavery and the French Enlightenment.* Trans. John Conteh-Morgan. *(*Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006) x, xi.
[33] Sue Peabody, *There Are No Slaves in France: The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien Régime*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 11-12.
[34] Gay, *The Enlightenment,* 407-410.

primarily as political metaphors, which later French *philosophes* would borrow: "Slavery is so vile and miserable an estate of man, and so directly opposite to the generous temper and courage of our nation, that it is hardly to be conceived that an Englishman, much less a gentleman, should plead for it."[35] Like other *philosophes*, Locke held conflicting interests however, as his financial portfolio listed investment in the Carolina colonies as well as the slave-trading Royal African Company, revealing few qualms of conscience over actual chattel slavery.[36]

The first European intellectual to unequivocally attack chattel slavery after Bodin was Scottish jurist George Wallace in his 1760 publication *A System of the Principles of the Law of Scotland.* Wallace ridiculed mankind for abusing fellow men "that our pockets may be filled with money, and our mouths with delicates."[37] He advanced legally grounded conclusions that "men and their liberty are not *in commercio,*" therefore, man can never lose his liberty because the sale of men is "*ipso jure* void." While Wallace's book itself remained quite obscure, the sections on slavery were widely reproduced, influencing Frenchman Louis de Jaucourt, who copied Wallace verbatim for his *Encyclopédie* entry on the slave trade, and Jean Jacques Rousseau, who echoed Wallace's radicalism.[38]

If the roots of English and American anti-slavery sentiment grew deep in the soil of Protestant thought, eighteenth-century French abolitionists used reason to attack the peculiar institution. Enlightenment thinkers used science and reason to interpret society and to understand man rather than relying on the "superstition of religion." Diderot

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[35] John Locke, *First Treatise,* Reprinted in Gay, *The Enlightenment,* 409.
[36] Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation.,* 410. See Peter Hulme, "Spontaneous Hand of Nature*"* in *The Enlightenment and its Shadows,* Ed. Peter Hulme and Ludmila ?? (London, 1990).
[37] Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery,* 50.
[38] Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery.* 50-51.

vehemently opposed Christianity for depraving the conscience, corrupting the mind, multiplying crime and misery and retarding society's progress. Whereas Christianity forced man's dependence on God, the Enlightenment exalted man's dependence on himself with the credo "no God, no master."[39] The *philosophes'* avowal of man's original innocence directly flouted Christianity's claims of original sin, since Enlightenment anthropology proclaimed that "the evils man is inclined to commit only man is capable of preventing or curing," be it through education, environment, or reason.[40] The *philosophes* undoubtedly viewed their humanist crusade as antithetical to irrational Christianity, and the Enlightenment decrees against slavery "became one more weapon in the *philosophe's* crusade for secularism" since one had a "better opportunity to be humane, it seemed, as an atheist."[41]

Defenses and attacks on slavery, however, became racialized by the mid- to late-eighteenth century as *philosophes* ruminated on the convergence of the new science with the theory of human nature. During the second half of the eighteenth-century in Europe and the Atlantic world, evolving notions of race promoted the fundamental idea that race was a "heritable and inescapable way of being that encompassed physical, moral, intellectual, and psychological characteristics and provided a basis for hierarchical differentiation."[42] The cultural encounters between Europeans and the wider world during the eighteenth-century's push for exploration and rational questioning served to define and often undermine Enlightened notions of human nature, society, and history.[43]

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[39] Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation.* 199.
[40] Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation,* 171-172.
[41] Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation.* 413-415.
[42] Nelson. "Making Men," 1364.
[43] *The Enlightenment: A Sourcebook and Reader.* Ed. By Paul Hyland with Olga Gomez and Francesca Greensides. (New York: Routledge, 2003), 296.

Central to the Enlightenment was a novel emphasis on the study of human nature that focused particularly on the "primitive" cultures of the New World and Africa. Adopting John Locke's notion of the "blank slate," some *philosophes* insisted that all humans begin life mentally equal, creating a belief in a common humanity that could improve with education. Questions of man thus occupied much of Enlightenment discourse, especially regarding race and racial differences. As travelers and researchers encountered non-European people, particularly those groups absent from the Bible, suspicion engulfed the traditional Christian view of Adamic man with an original unity as created in the image of God. The nature of racial distinctions demanded inquiry on whether all humans were descended from one source, monogenesis, or many, polygenesis? Was human nature mutable depending on environment and experience? Did a racial hierarchy position white Europeans above the "inferior" races of Africa?[44]

These questions proved central to philosophical meditations starting in the mid-eighteenth century. The subject of the "negro," the general term for Africans, garnered high interest as scholars discussed differentiation of phenotype. In *System of Nature (*1735), Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus classified human races according to a divinely ordained natural hierarchy. Within mammalian, however, "sapiens" varied by "education and situation," reflecting a hierarchy of civilization implicit in racial categorization. Whereas Linnaeus classified Europeans as "acute," "inventive," and "governed by laws," he labeled blacks as "indolent, negligent," and "governed by caprice."[45] In 'Of National Characters' in 1748, David Hume footnoted "I am apt to suspect the negroes and in general all the other species of men to be naturally inferior to whites. There never was a

[44] *The Enlightenment: A Sourcebook and Reader.* 6.
[45] Carolus Linnaeus, *System of Nature.* Excerpts in *The Enlightenment: A Sourcebook and Reader.* Ed. By Paul Hyland with Olga Gomez and Francesca Greensides. (New York: Routledge, 2003), 103-4.

civilized nation of any other complexion than white."[46] Notions of a racial hierarchy wherein certain phenotypes suffered while others benefited from particular physical and psychological characteristics began effervescing in the mid- eighteenth century.

G. L. Leclerc Buffon made an auxiliary strike against blacks with his theory that varieties within the human species resulted from "1. the influence of climate, 2. Food, which has a great dependence on climate, and, 3. Manners, on which climate has, perhaps, a still greater influence." This "arm chair" scholar selected his proof from travel literature of missionaries and voyagers, crafting an argument of climatological origins of racial distinctions and proving the degeneracy of Africans based on skin color and habitat.[47] In Buffon's *Natural History,* he proclaimed his belief in white superiority thus: "The most temperate climate lies between the 40th and 50th degree of latitude, and it produces the most handsome and beautiful men. It is from this climate that the ideas of the genuine color of mankind, and of the various degrees of beauty, ought to be derived. The two extremes of climate are equally remote from truth and from beauty."[4849]

If "varieties" in human species were the reversible result of "degeneration" due to climate and food, Buffon continued, then non-whites were neither uncivilized nor un-human. On the contrary:

> If the Negro and the white could not reproduce together, if even their offspring remained infertile, if the mulatto was truly a mule, there would then be two quite distinct species; the Negro would be to man what the donkey is to a horse; or rather, if the white was a man, the Negro would no longer be a man; he would be a distinct animal, like the monkey, and we would be right to think that the white and the Negro would not have had a common origin. But even this supposition is

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[46] *The Enlightenment: A Sourcebook and Reader.* 7.
[47] Peabody, *There Are No Slaves in France,* Footnote 29, pg. 161.
[48] *The Enlightenment: A Sourcebook and Reader.* 7.
[49] Also, see Ibn Khladun's *Book of Evidence* for 14th century Arabic notions on climate affecting skin color and psychological attributes.

> given lie to by fact; and since all men can have intercourse and reproduce together, all men come from the same stock and are of the same family.[50]

Refuting Linnaeus' system of classification, Buffon argued for classifying species "naturally" based on two animals' ability to procreate fertile offspring.[51] Because all humans could reproduce together, variances in human phenotype stemmed from climate and moeurs rather than insinuating a variety of humanity. Buffon's theories sparked the "Buffonian Revolution," and, overturning centuries of anti-miscegenation beliefs, his monogenist followers held that "the mixing of races, far from being disastrous, is in fact advantageous, as though the métis inherit the best qualities from their parents." This phenomenon also questioned the racial hierarchy in French colonies, where all non-whites, even slave-holders, remained under the thumb of whites. Therefore, the Buffonian Revolution popularized the theory that "crossbreeding was one of the most assured means of rehabilitation, of renovation, indeed of redemption, of races declared "degraded'" by their climate.[52] By the mid-eighteenth century, this new science declared all humans the same species, regardless of skin color. However, the empirical evidence suggested to monogenists that humans nonetheless existed in a hierarchy of civilizations, with white Europeans enthroned at the top and black Africans on bottom.

Alongside the "new science" of the Enlightenment that determined a racial hierarchy wherein phenotype and climate determined levels of "civilization," a discourse emerged that decried the European slave trade and forced chattel slavery. A clear abolitionist, Jean Jacques Rousseau outlined his belief in *Discourse on Inequality* (1755)

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[50] G.E. Leclerc. *Varieties of the Human Species.* Reprinted in Claude Blanckaert. "Of Monstrous Métis." *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France.* Edited by Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 45.
[51] *The Enlightenment: A Sourcebook and Reader.* 103.
[52] Blanckaert. "Of Monstrous Métis", 47

that all men were born naturally equal until the hierarchies, aggression, ambitions, and moral degradation of civil society corrupted men.[53] The issue of slavery surfaced explicitly in his *Contrat Social (*1762). While historians question the extent of Rousseau's readership in the eighteenth century, the Revolutionaries championed Rousseau, increasing the likelihood of their applying his musings on slavery in the French Revolution. Much of Rousseau's treatise concerned the metaphorical subject-as-slave under despotism, but he clearly censured the pro-slavery contention that slavery provided a humanitarian option for prisoners of war who would otherwise face death. To this argument, Rousseau countered, "A slave made in war…is under no obligation to a master. By taking an equivalent for his life, the victor has not done him a favor; instead of killing him without profit, he has killed him usefully." Evoking the oldest of pro-slavery arguments, Rousseau dissected Aristotle's creed that "men are not naturally equal, but that some are born for slavery and others for domination." He countered the ancient Greek's theory by blaming the cause of slavery, which was Europeans' unnatural quest for domination, for the effects of the slave condition, potential violence and degradation.

> Aristotle was right; but he mistook the effect for the cause. Any man born in slavery is born for slavery, nothing could be more certain. Slaves lose everything in their chains, even the desire to be rid of them; they love their servitude, as the companions of Ulysses loved their brutishness. Hence, if there are slaves by nature, it is because there were slaves contrary to nature. Force made the first slaves, their cowardice perpetuated them.[54]

Rousseau thus unequivocally labeled slavery as contrary to nature and blamed the degradation of slaves on their oppressors.

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[53] "Jean Jacques Rousseau." In *The Enlightenment: A Sourcebook and Reader.* Ed. By Paul Hyland with Olga Gomez and Francesca Greensides. (New York: Routledge, 2003), 17.
[54] Jean Jacques Rousseau. *The Social Contract and Other Writings*. Ed. Victor Gourevitch. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997). 43.

Rousseau's argument was based in the mutual exclusivity of slavery with man's natural rights. In Book IV, he wrote that "To decide that the son of a slave is born a slave is to decide that he is not born a man." The inheritability of slavery only served to further indict masters for their slaves' condition. Not only did man's vice and greed provoke an unnatural institution with ill effects, it perpetuated it and then blamed the victims for their debasement. Since man's natural rights to freedom and to be master of himself nullified slavery, Rousseau reasoned that "the words 'slave' and 'right' contradict each other and are mutually exclusive," effectively defying the raison d'être of the *Code Noir* and the notion of slaves in the Antilles as "rescued" from the tyranny of African rule. Rousseau continued in his writing to deny political or literal inherited slavery, echoing Wallace's ruling on slavery as contrary to the laws of nature.[55] For Rousseau, the argument against slavery was entirely rights-based: all men were born with natural rights to civil freedom, so no argument in favor of slavery could hold any weight.

Voltaire's 1755 *Candide,* however, reflected a trend among philosophers to use anti-slavery as means of expressing anticlericalism. A response to the Lisbon earthquake and counter to *optimisme,* Voltaire's narrative included Pangloss and Candide's encounter with the suffering of a slave "with only half his clothes left, that is, a pair of blue drawers… [and] missing his left leg and his right hand." Voltaire then proceeded to condemn "the negro's" master "Mr. Vanderdendur, the famous merchant" for profiting off of ill-treatment of those who labored for his benefit. After the "negro" described his dismemberment at the hands of his "master," he judged, "This is the price of the sugar you eat in Europe." Ironically, the black "savage" perceived the corrupting nature of

[55] Jean Jacques Rousseau. *Contrat Social.* Excerpts reprinted in *The Enlightenment : A Comprehensive Anthology,* Ed. Peter Gay (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), 328.

slavery on masters and slaves alike. Voltaire further challenged assumptions of slavery offering a much desired alternative to "savage" life in Africa when "the negro" bemoaned the irony of his mother selling him to "have the honor of being a slave to our white masters." Ranking his lot below that of "dogs, monkeys, and parrots," "the negro" then commented on the lunacy of Christian monogenism in light of black slavery:

> The Dutch witch doctors who converted me tell me every Sunday that we are all the sons of Adam, black and white alike. I am no genealogist; but if these preachers are right, we must all be remote cousins; and you must admit no one could treat his own flesh and blood in a more horrible fashion.

Voltaire's comments were humanitarian and anticlerical in nature, numbering slavery as yet another ill consequence of the Church's irrationality. Yet, here again, by the mid-eighteenth century, Voltaire's denouncement of chattel slavery recognized the racialization of slavery and rejected it, instead promoting the cause of a common humanity wherein all men should be equal.

Upon learning of the "abominations" of chattel slavery, Candide renounced *optimisme,* denouncing the philosophy as "a mania for saying things are well when one is in hell."[56] With European-sponsored chattel slavery, the world could not possibly be progressing rationally. Voltaire's piece also revealed the physical suffering of slavery, allowing the slave to criticize the barbarity of the white Europeans consuming the products of slavery while touting rhetoric of civilized humanitarianism. In just one encounter, Voltaire reversed the "civilized - savage" dichotomy between whites and blacks, instead promoting the empirical reasoning of the slave compared to the greedy ignorance of Europeans.

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[56] Voltaire. *Candide or Optimism*. Translated and Edited by Robert M. Adams. (New York: Norton, 1991), 41-42.

If Rousseau and Voltaire explicitly rejected slavery, albeit for different reasons, the Baron de Montesquieu vacillated between circumstantially denouncing and vindicating slavery. Montesquieu's epistolary *Lettres persanes* was the first to revile slavery by indicting Christianity for profiting from the institution. Usbek's letters to Rhedi relating French society reflected Montesquieu's anticlericalism and satirized Christianity's shades of truth as dependent on economic advantage:

> A long time ago Christian princes freed all their slaves from servitude because, they said, Christianity makes all men equal… Subsequently, they made conquests in countries where they saw it was to their advantage to have slaves; they allowed the buying and selling of them, oblivious to the principle of their religion which had so touched them. How shall I put it? Truth in one era, falsehood in another.[57]

Montesquieu criticized the hypocrisy of Christianity regarding slavery, especially in light of the *Code Noir* as "missional" justification for slavery. He later caustically condemned the economic arguments favoring slavery, since slaves brought to the Americas "die by the thousands," proving that "nothing could be quite as extravagant as to cause the death of countless men in order to dig gold and silver from the earth."[58] While the French colonies exported mainly sugar and coffee, the problem of slavery and the absurdity of killing men for luxury goods were likely not lost on Frenchmen.

The Baron's writings denounced the absurdity of chattel slavery, but Montesquieu nonetheless offered shades of racial apologetics for slavery. He underscored the importance of education and environment to civilize man when Usbek wrote, "Men are like plants: they never grow well unless they are well-cultivated. Among people living in

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[57] Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes, LXXV,* reprinted in *The Enlightenment : A Comprehensive Anthology,* Ed. Peter Gay (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), 128.
[58] Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes, CXVIII.*

poverty, the human race loses and even degenerates."[59] He further wrote of a Frenchman's horror at learning that Persians live with their slaves, **"**whose heart and mind will always reflect the baseness of their condition; these ignoble people undermine the virtuous feelings that are given to you by nature, and they destroy them in childhood, when they control you."[60] If slavery was unnatural, slaves were nevertheless debased by their condition and therefore in need of reform. Likewise, masters suffered from the corrupting influence of degenerate slaves who cared for them as children, the most impressionable phase of life. *Philosophes* were "pedagogical optimists," believing that, in the words of Helvetius, "Man can be educated to be almost anything, even a good citizen."[61] John Locke's theory of sensation and reflection composing the "white paper" of the virgin mind insinuated that the experience of slaves and masters was corrupting rather than edifying.[62] À la Buffon, Montesquieu insinuated that the harsh climate and poor living conditions of slaves, and by extension Africans, rendered them by implication reprobate. The Enlightenment emphasis on literacy and literary achievements relegated Africans and African slaves "degenerate" compared to their "civilized" European mentors, casting doubt on black humanity since blacks were to depend on whites, rather than themselves, to achieve regeneration and full humanity.

Even in the early eighteenth century, Montesquieu evoked the racialization of slavery when Usbek described the colonial juxtaposition of white skinned Spaniards with their non-white servants. Usbek caricatured colonists who

> claim the sublime virtue of being, as they put it, white-skinned…A man of such consequence, a creature of such perfection, would not work for all the gold in the

[59] Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes, CXXII.*
[60] Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes,* XXXII.
[61] Gay, *The Enlightenment : An Interpretation.* 512.
[62] Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation.* 178.

> world; he would never bring himself to compromise the honour and dignity of his skin with any base, mechanical labour.[63]

While this derision spoke to new notions of useful labor instead of aristocratic idleness, Montesquieu nonetheless attributed servitude with non-whiteness, reflecting the evolution of racialized labor in the Spanish colonies without specifically referencing the French case.

His *De l'esprit des lois* treated slavery in greater detail, at once staunchly condemning the anti-philosophical nature of slavery and then offering hesitant practical conclusions, tingeing his work with concessions to slavery.[64] In Book XV, Montesquieu declared the "law of slavery… contrary to the fundamental principles of every society" because it granted the master primacy over his slave.[65] He further chastised Europe since, "having exterminated the American nations, European nations had to enslave those of Africa, to use them for clearing all that land."[66] While Montesquieu's position on slavery seems to unfalteringly support the unnatural state of slavery and the illegality of selling men, he failed to clarify his position as referring to *all* forms of slavery, including royal subjects' metaphorical slavery to a despot alongside literal chattel slavery. Further, in Book XIV, Montesquieu conceded the necessity for slavery when "the heat of the climate may be so excessive as to deprive the body of all vigor and strength," which in essence condoned slavery in the West Indies and provided climatic justification for pro-slavery

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[63] Montesquieu, *Lettres Persanes,* LXXV.
[64] Jean Ehrard. "Slavery Before the Moral Conscience of the French Enlightenment: Indifference, Unease, and Revolt." In *The Abolitions of Slavery From Léger Félicité Sonthonax to Victor Schoelcher.* Ed. Marcel Dorigny. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003), 114.
[65] Ehrard, "Slavery Before the Moral Conscience of the French Enlightenment," 118.
[66] Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation.* 413.

defenses. While admitting the corrupting nature of slavery, Montesquieu all the same foundered before concretely denouncing the institution.[67]

Voltaire and Rousseau seemed to clearly deplore slavery, but the *philosophes'* canon as a whole, like Montesquieu, failed to unequivocally decry the colonial plantation system. A survey of the *Encyclopédie* uncovers only thirty-three explicit references to slavery and the slave trade, out of a total of seventy-two thousand articles. While writings on slavery increased post-1760, the philosophes still displayed unease over slavery as "both against nature and natural." Further, no clear distinction existed between "slavery" and "serfdom" or "servitude," since Montesquieu, Voltaire, and the Chevalier de Jaucourt offered the terms as interchangeable.[68]

While slavery rarely surfaced in the Encyclopèdie, the subject earned conflicting treatment when it did occur as some contributors condoned or justified the practice while others explicitly denounced it. Supporting the *philosophes'* ambiguity on slavery, Louis de Jaucourt's 1757 entry on "France" equated the French people with "slaves" until "the time of Phillip Augustus."[69] However, following an increase in French slave-trading and novel legislation patrolling race in the metropole, de Jaucourt's 1765 entry on *"Traite des nègres"* severely judged the European trade of African slaves, including slavery, since it "violates all religion, morals, natural law, and human rights." Further, Jaucourt's later entry revealed the racialization of slavery, equating slavery with Negroes from Africa. The Chevalier indicted "everyone" for the crime of illicit human trafficking, since

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[67] Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws,* reprinted in *The Enlightenment : A Comprehensive Anthology,* Ed. Peter Gay (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), 520.
[68] Ehrard, *"*Slavery before the Moral Conscience of the French Enlightenment," 112, 117-118.
[69] Louis, Chevalier de Jaucourt. "France." The Encyclopedia of Diderot & d'Alembert Collaborative Translation Project. Translated by Nelly S. Hoyt and Thomas Cassirer. Ann Arbor: Scholarly Publishing Office of the University of Michigan Library, 2003. http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.did2222.0000.149 (accessed February, 2011). Originally published as "France," Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, 7:282 (Paris, 1757).

"everyone knows" African slaves are transported like "merchandise" after being illegally commercialized by their princes. He plainly denounced the sale of men as illegal, claiming that if a slave escaped, the master had only himself to blame since he had criminally purchased a human being.

Jaucourt called on the sense of common humanity to end the practice where "in the free country to which the Negro is transported, judges do not immediately decide to liberate him by declaring that he is free, as he is the judges' fellow man and has a soul like theirs." The Chevalier further elided the spatial dichotomy between "Free Soil France" and her slave-ridden colonies when he spoke against the Old Regime belief in particularism. Jaucourt declared that judges must prioritize the laws of humanity over "the arbitrary and inhumane customs of colonies." Acknowledging economically-based defenses of slavery, Jaucourt looked at not only the nature of slavery but its racialization:

> One might say that these colonies would be quickly ruined if the slavery of Negroes were abolished. Is it legitimate to strip the human species of its most sacred rights, only to satisfy one's own greed, vanity, or particular passions? No...European colonies should be destroyed rather than create so many unfortunates!

He then concluded his derision of the slave trade with proof that the Americas remained "barely populated by savages and ferocious beasts" as a result of the degradation of slave and master under the colonial system. With the end of slavery, trade would suffer slightly, but in the end, civilization would triumph with expanded arts and the talents of industrious, free men left to flourish in an environment with no slavery.[70] Otherwise, he

[70] Louis Jaucourt. "Slave Trade." The Encyclopedia of Diderot & d'Alembert Collaborative Translation Project. Translated by Stephanie Noble. Ann Arbor: Scholarly Publishing Office of the University of Michigan Library, 2007. Web. February 2011. Trans. of "Traite des nègres," *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers,* vol. 16. Paris, 1765.

argued, the colonies should just be destroyed all together rather than play a role in the demeaning practice of slavery.

Denis Diderot's 1765 article on "Humanity" further supported Jaucourt's claims of common humanity and Buffon's claims of monogenism:

> there is only the one same race of men, more or less dark skinned. The Americans come from the same stock... All goes therefore toward proving that mankind is not composed of essentially different species. The difference from whites to browns comes from food, customs, habits, climates; that from browns to blacks, from the same cause.

Diderot resolutely condemned the state of slavery, albeit with a paternalistic notion of "the negro." Although he generalized that "Negroes have little intelligence," he maintained their human sensitivity "to good and bad treatment." He, like Voltaire and Montesquieu, indicted religious and rational men for treating their fellow man with such inhumanity and cruelty: "We have reduced them, I wouldn't say to the condition of slaves, but to that of beasts of burden; and we are reasonable! And we are Christians!"[71] Diderot's conviction appealed to the emerging cult of sensibility and belief in the shared humanity of all men, arguing that the use of reason could alleviate human suffering rather than justify it. Likewise, in his 1772 *Correspondence Littéraire,* he ranked liberty above property, proclaiming, "A man can never be the property of a ruler, a child the property of a father, the wife the property of a husband, a servant the property of a master, a black the property of a colonist."[72] Chattel slavery explicitly ranked on his list rejecting all forms of slavery, even noting the difference between a voluntary servant and a "black."

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[71] Denis Diderot. "Humanity (Type)." The Encyclopedia of Diderot & d'Alembert Collaborative Translation Project. Translated by Naomi Andrews. Ann Arbor: Scholarly Publishing Office of the University of Michigan Library, 2010. Originally published as "Humaine espece*," Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 8:344 (Paris, 1765).

[72] Ehrard, "Slavery before the Moral Conscience of the French Enlightenment," 112, 117-118.

The racialization of slavery was familiar enough for Diderot to merely call the slave "a black" without having to mention the word "slave."

At the same time Diderot and Jaucourt questioned the sacrifice of humanitarianism and civil law to the system of slavery, Jean-Baptiste-Pierre Le Romain reconciled the economic imperative of slavery with the need to "civilize" and "save" Africans from their race's inherent savagery. Le Romain's 1765 entry for *"Nègres"* echoed Buffon's theory of climate and a hierarchy of civilizations since "These black men, born vigorous and accustomed to coarse food, find comforts in America that make animal life much better there than in their own country." Le Romain maintained that slavery was "good" for Africans. His entry provided an anthropological sketch of the various people groups of Africa, identifying physical and psychological characteristics as belonging to particular groups. For instance, the Fonde negroes worked best on plantations while the Congolese were "lazy" and "humorous," therefore disrupting plantation labor. The "least valuable" negroes were the Bambara, who Le Romain described as "hideous" and "lazy, drunken, gluttonous, and great thieves."[73]

Not only did Le Romain equate race with chattel slavery, but he argued that phenotype determined physical and psychological characteristics. He noted that negroes from Guinea were in the majority "depraved," while the "prejudices of education" made "Creole negroes" still subject to their passions but for the most part "commonly nice, courageous, compassionate, charitable." Under white influence, the "Creole negroes" had inched up the hierarchy of civilization. Le Romain asserted that once in the colonies,

[73] Jean-Baptiste-Pierre Le Romain. "Negroes." The Encyclopedia of Diderot & d'Alembert Collaborative Translation Project. Translated by Pamela Cheek. Ann Arbor: Scholarly Publishing Office of the University of Michigan Library, 2003. Originally published as "Negres," *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 11:80–83 (Paris, 1765).

slaves were treated "like children," leading "these grown men [to] submit to their fellow kind with great resignation." While admitting that slaves were part of humanity, Le Romain nonetheless failed to indict the institution. He did however laud the Code Noir's attempt to regulate those masters who were especially brutal and admitted that the egregious slave errors were perhaps the fault of masters who put slaves "in the position of being derelict" because of the condition of slavery.[74]

The exploration of the scale of human civilization continued in the Abbé Raynal's *Histoire des deux Indes* (1770), a collaboration between *philosophes* to publish a six-volume compendium about the nature and effects of European trade and colonization meant to extend Europeans' awareness of the wider world. Eurocentric in nature, *Histoire des deux Indes* nonetheless issued a cry of conscience for Europeans to recognize the destructive effects of their commerce and conquest, most notably through the slave trade and slavery.[75] Raynal chastised the Spanish *encomienda* system for reducing the natives to the likes of animals while simultaneously destroying the population. Mothers clutched "to their shriveled breasts their dead or dying children" while fathers hanged themselves after hanging the rest of their families. Emotionally, Raynal paused after this description since, "My eyes are filled with tears, and I can no longer see to write."[76]

Escalating Diderot's horror at European apathy to slavery, Raynal's sentimentalism pleaded for recognition of a common humanity that pitied the suffering Africans under the gruesome experience of slave raiding and transfer:

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[74]Le Romain. "Negroes." The Encyclopedia of Diderot & d'Alembert Collaborative Translation Project.
[75] "The Abbé Raynal." *The Enlightenment: A Sourcebook and Reader.* Ed. By Paul Hyland with Olga Gomez and Francesca Greensides. *(*New York: Routledge, 2003), 304-305.
[76] *A History of the Two Indies: A translated Selection of writings from Raynal's Historie philosophique et politique des etablissements des Europeens dans les Deux Indes.* Trans. and ed. by Peter Jimack. (London: Ashgate, 2006), 79; Also, see Lynn Hunt on the Enlightenment, sentimentalism, and the birth of human rights.

> Oh reader! As you read this horrible account, does your heart not fill with the same indignation that I feel as I write it? Do you not want to hurl yourself furiously on these infamous slave-drivers? Do you not want to smash the forks which shackle all these unfortunates and restore them to freedom?[77]

Evoking a humanitarian duty to alleviate the suffering of fellow men, the Abbé reminded his audience that the slave condition was avoidable and that Europeans could foil the inhumane effects of the slave-traders' and slave-owners' profit motive. The author further justified the right of conquered peoples to overthrow their European oppressors:

> It is with even more justification, and without offending the laws of humanity and justice, that the people are entitled to drive me out and kill me if I steal their womenfolk, their children and their lands, if I infringe their civil liberty, if I restrict them in their religious opinions, if I attempt to rule over them, if I try to enslave them. Then I become merely another wild beast around them, and they owe me no more pity than they would a tiger.[78]

Raynal determined the environment of slavery to be equally detrimental to both master and slave since it reduced human relations to those of beasts rather than civilized, rational beings. Commodifying men was unnatural and illegal, so enslaved men's' rights were vindicated to resist their oppressors and to retrieve their natural liberty.

By 1780, *Histoire des deux Indes* had been enlarged and radicalized by the contributions of Denis Diderot, who dedicated Book XI entirely to the subjects of slavery and the slave trade.[79] Diderot heartily supported monogenism, reminding his readers, "Men! You are all brethren." He then proceeded to explain that the inhabitants of Guinea were born white but towards the eighth day of their life evolved into blackness. Despite phenotypical differences, however, Diderot assured his audience that "all the internal

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[77] *A History of the Two Indies,* 148-149.
[78] *A History of the Two Indies,* 112.
[79] "Denis Diderot." *The Enlightenment: A Sourcebook and Reader.* Ed. By Paul Hyland with Olga Gomez and Francesca Greensides. *(*New York: Routledge, 2003), 22.

parts" of Africans are the same color "in Negroes as in white people."[80] He then lambasted his European counterparts' cheap humanitarianism wherein "even imaginary distresses…draw tears from our eyes" while "only the fatal destiny of the Negroes" fails to concern: "The torments of a people, to whom we owe our luxuries, can never reach our hearts." Contemporary metropolitan knowledge of the plight of chattel slaves is difficult to ascertain, but those who read Diderot learned of the relationship between slaves and their English, Dutch, Spanish, or Portuguese masters. Diderot treated the French master less harshly, claiming that the Frenchman saw the Africans as "a species of moral beings," which made the Africans see themselves "treated almost like rational creatures" and thus forget that their masters in fact were extracting all labor possible from them. He finally warned governments whose power rested on slavery that reasonable men would soon realize, "there is no reason of state that can authorize slavery."[81]

Thus Diderot, Raynal, and Jaucourt offered harsh rhetorical denunciations of chattel slavery while still submitting to a Eurocentric, paternalistic notion of the savage non-white in need of civilization, partially from the experience of slavery but also from the original distance from European enlightenment. In the 1786 *Histoire des Deux Indes,* Raynal wrote

> We should not…shatter the chains of the unfortunates who are born into slavery and have grown old in it. These stupid men, who will not have been prepared for this change in status, will be incapable of conducting themselves well. Their life would be nothing more than a habitual laziness or a tissue of crime. The great boon of liberty should be reserved for their posterity, with certain modifications.[82]

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[80] Denis Diderot. 'Color of the Inhabitants.' In *The Enlightenment: A Sourcebook and Reader.* Ed. By Paul Hyland with Olga Gomez and Francesca Greensides. *(*New York: Routledge, 2003), 23.
[81] Denis Diderot. 'Wretched Condition of the Slaves in America.' In *The Enlightenment: A Sourcebook and Reader.* Ed. By Paul Hyland with Olga Gomez and Francesca Greensides. *(*New York: Routledge, 2003), 26-7.
[82] Abbé Raynal, *Histoire des Deux Indes,* 1786. Reprinted in Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the Carribean. (*Chapel Hill: UNC, 2006), 182.

The Enlightenment thinkers' prized theories of the civilizing nature of education and the common humanity of the human species grated against racist notions of the barbaric non-white. While admitting the illegality and artificiality of slavery, anti-slavery *philosophes* still viewed their crusade as one to civilize the enslaved Africans on European terms, leading to later complications for the practice of abolition.

Recent historiography has shattered the triumphalist account of Enlightenment anti-slavery sentiment, revealing the cracks in a philosophy that advocated men's natural rights while simultaneously justifying enslavement. As some have argued, the Enlightenment merely secularized religious justification for slavery based on Ham's curse and the need for Catholic conversion to recover lost humanity, changing Noah's curse into environmental theories of climate, food, and tyrannical government.[83] Medieval notions of man's original sin evolved into humanity made "degenerate" in varying degrees according to their distance from European cultural, physical, and religious norms.[84] Much of what later abolitionists theorized on legislating slaves' freedom drew heavily from the *philosophes'* writings, shaping the paternalistic, Eurocentric abolitionism that upheld black slaves' rights to civil freedoms but condemned black Africans as inferior to white Europeans.

If French philosophes deemed slavery illegal and unnatural, French economists proved less concerned with the economic problems of colonial slavery than with the metropolitan effects of Anglo-French colonial rivalry. François Véron de Forbonnais' 1753 Encyclopédie entry for "Colonies" perhaps alludes to French justification for

[83]Louis Sala-Molins, *Dark Side of the Light: Slavery and the French Enlightenment.* Trans. John Conteh-Morgan. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). xxii-xxiii.
[84] Sala-Molins, *Dark Side of the Light* , xxii.

founding their colonies on chattel slavery. In his entry, Forbonnais described American colonies as requiring the subjugation of native inhabitants to import new, European ones. Further, the American colonial system "best fulfills its purpose when it adds to what is grown in the metropole, when it supports a greater number of its men, and when it increases trade with other nations." Finally, Forbonnais concluded with reminders of the foreign predators, namely England, waiting to fill the commercial vacuum in the case of failed French colonies.[85] Thus colonial slavery's economic necessity emerged in Forbonnais' definition, even though actual slaves made no appearance in a definition with slave labor as its base.

On the contrary, the Physiocrats emphasized the importance of productive work to national wealth and so considered colonial slavery dangerous because it encouraged idleness among masters. The elder Mirabeau's *L'Ami des Hommes* (1759) attacked colonial slavery for making masters lazy so that "every man endowed by nature with a white colour believes himself privileged for idleness."[86] Affirming the racialization of slavery, Mirabeau noted the heightened maliciousness of colonial slavery based on skin color compared to the foundations of ancient slavery. Further, the economic effects of forced slavery degraded labour and yielded mediocre production since slaves were "worn out by labor for their masters."[87] The intendant of Martinique Le Mercier de la Rivière further supported Mirabeau's claims, writing that slave labor proved more costly than

[85] François Véron de Forbonnais. "Colony." The Encyclopedia of Diderot & d'Alembert Collaborative Translation Project. Translated by Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall. Ann Arbor: Scholarly Publishing Office of the University of Michigan Library, 2004. Originally published as "Colonie," *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers,* 3:648–651 (Paris, 1753).
[86] Victor de Riquetti, Comte de Mirabeau, *L'Ami des Hommes,* 1758. 262. In Philippe Steiner, "Slavery and the French Economists, 1750-1830," In *The Abolitions of Slavery From Léger Félicité Sonthonax to Victor Schoelcher.* Ed. Marcel Dorigny. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003), 135.
[87] Mirabeau, *L'Ami des Hommes,* 1758. 285. In Philippe Steiner, "Slavery and the French Economists, 1750-1830." 135.

free labor.[88] In 1767, when the *Ephémerides du Citoyen* became the Physiocrats' official journal, Pierre-Samuel Dupont de Nemours and Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot argued that slavery was fundamentally flawed because slaves' lack of incentive impeded efficient labor and warranted coercion and violence for sustained production.[89] The Physiocrats deflated pro-slavery arguments that abolition would generate an economic crisis since slave labor proved economically superior to free labor. While they admitted that slave labor profited slave owners, they insisted that free labor was the most efficient and profitable form of production to craft an industrious society.

Complicating the issue of slavery in the Enlightenment was the myth of France's "free soil," which dated back to Louis X and was a point of national pride well-ingrained by the eighteenth-century. Tracing the development of French juridical and government policy towards blacks and slaves reveals their legal evolution as distinct racial and social groups, and weaving together the strands of European Imperialism and the Atlantic slave system highlights the paradoxical yet near simultaneous emergence of anti-slavery sentiment and legalized racism in France.[90] At the end of the eighteenth century, the clearly bounded geographical divisions between "Free soil" France and slave colonies under Louis XIV evolved into the highly contested and politicized confrontations with slavery under Louis XV and Louis XVI. An elaboration of the "freedom principle" reveals how legal ambiguities in French law allowed some slaves in mainland France to successfully sue for freedom in the Admiralty Courts with the defense "*nul n'est esclave*

[88]Philippe Steiner, "Slavery and the French Economists, 1750-1830." In *The Abolitions of Slavery From Léger Félicité Sonthonax to Victor Schoelcher.* Ed. Marcel Dorigny. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003), 135.
[89] Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the Carribean. (*Chapel Hill: UNC, 2006), 178.
[90] Peabody, *There Are No Slaves in France,* 89.

en France."[91] Clinging to the myth of "French liberty," slaves in the continent successfully sued for their freedom while slaves in the colonies persisted in forced servitude. The Atlantic ocean served to spatially vindicate dichotomous policies on slavery and prompted an entrenchment of racializing slavery within France and the empire.

As a result of the vague legality of slavery in France, over one hundred and fifty slaves in Paris alone obtained legal counsel and successfully challenged restrictions on freedom. A small coterie of lawyers published *Memoirs* which based their defense of slaves' liberty on the "Freedom Principle," the myth of French kings dating back to Louis X declaring free soil in France.[92] "Free soil" policy proved a contentious part of a myth of French monarchical goodness as slave suit *memoirs* mingled disputes over literal chattel slavery with metaphors of "slavery under despotism" in the increasingly disputatious political culture of the late eighteenth century. For the "Freedom Principle" became entwined with the mounting clash between monarchy and sovereign courts of law.[93] As the crown battled the Paris Parlement over taxation, religious deviance in the Jansenist debate, and freedom of slaves, the French judicial system came to be seen as an expression of public opinion in the absence of a free press or parliamentary system.[94] After Maupeou dissolved the Paris Parlement, political pamphlets that linked royal despotism to the slavery of subjects prompted *philosophes* to mimic their English

[91] Peabody, *There Are No Slaves in France,* 89. Translates to "There are no slaves in France."
[92] Peabody, *There Are No Slaves.*
[93] See Michael Kwass, *Privilege and the Politics of Taxation in 18th Century France.* (Cambridge University Press:2000)
[94] Peabody, *There Are No Slaves,* 96. In *Private Lives and Public Affairs (*Berkley: University of California Press, 1995), Sarah Maza originated the argument that literary publications of French judicial system arguments served as an expression of public opinion in the years prior to the French Revolution.

colleagues by offering the slave as a key symbol for discourse on political reform.[95] The emerging print culture and increased readership encouraged the development of critical attitudes "freed from the ties of dependence and obedience of earlier representations."[96] Implicit in the emerging readership was the evolution and heightened exposure of abolitionist sentiment.

The 1770 memoir of *avocat* Henrion de Pansey on behalf of freedom for a slave named Roc issued the initial challenge to the institution of slavery in its entirety, moving beyond merely defending the "Free soil principle" to decrying the criminality of slavery as an institution. Although the readership of Pansey's memoir is uncertain, the slave suit was published by the King's Cabinet's Press.[97] Despite adopting Montesquieu's theory that slavery corrupted both slave and master, Henrion combated his predecessor's argument that climate necessitated slavery by asking, "Does the morality of our actions vary like the climates? Can that which is unjust under one latitude be just under another?" He decried the proclaimed economic imperatives of slave labor as "cruel," and, as other critiques on the monarchy, declared the need for Parlement to protect the king from the malignant influence of courtiers:

> The highest wisdom makes itself heard by the mouth of our Kings. They said: "We are the most cherished of the princes, let us be the best; we are the greatest, let us be the most just. But the more we are elevated, the more we will have ambitious flatterers, greedy courtiers, deceitful and mistaken advisors. One mistaken word could make twenty million Frenchmen unhappy; if this word escapes us, will there be a citizen general enough, powerful enough, to send the truth to us? It is you," they said to the Parlement, "whom we charge with this formidable and sacred function. Born in the cradle of the monarchy, always wise,

[95] Peabody, *There Are No Slaves.*
[96] Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution,* Translated by Lydia G. Cochrane. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 91.
[97] Henrion de Pansey, *Memoir pour le nommé Roc, Nègre, contre le sieur, Poupet, Négociant.* 1770. Reprinted in *La Révolution Française et l'Abolition de l'Esclavage.* Volume 1. Editions d'Histoire Sociale. (Paris: 1968), 3-29.

> always resolute, always incorruptible: surround the throne, guard the glory of the master and the happiness of the subject…" In this way our kings showed themselves greater than their own dignity; in this way their prudence became a shield against deceit; in this way our public law was formed. To scorn the formality of registration, to cite in the tribunals a law which has not been invested with it; this is to shock the constitution; it is at the same time to break the nation and to disobey the prince.[98]

Henrion evoked nationalistic terms of "citizen" and "nation" to remind the courts of their role as guardians of French law and to reflect growing challenges to monarchical absolutism on issues of freedom. Echoing Montesquieu, Henrion warned that chattel slavery in France could evolve into political slavery to a despot. The avocat even attacked pro-slavery contentions that colonial slavery was economically vital to France: "Servitude, like a destructive volcano, desiccates, burns, engulfs everything it surrounds: liberty, on the contrary, always brings in its wake happiness, abundance, and the arts."[99] If slavery was lucrative now, it was only a short-term gain since ultimately forced servitude would destroy the colonies. Linking the ill effects of chattel slavery in the colonies to the consequences of despotic slavery to a king, Henrion bridged the gap between the two definitions of slavery popular in Enlightenment literature.

Although slaves increasingly sued for freedom in Admiralty courts, the attempt to legislate their restricted freedom in France proved a glaring failure. Indeed, this movement was paralleled by a growing inclination to police race and so control the perceived threat of the non-white population in France. The premise of France's free soil prevailed until legislation in the first half of the eighteenth-century attempted to correct legal ambiguities and so allow masters to retain their slaves in the metropole if the latter

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[98] Shanti Marie Singham, "Betwixt Cattle and Men: Jews, Blacks, and Women, and the Declaration of the Rights of Man." In *The French Idea of Freedom,* Ed. Dale Van Kley, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 130-131; Peabody, *There Are No Slaves in France,* 101.
[99] Peabody, *There Are No Slaves in France,* 103.

were registered with the Admiralty. But the Paris Parlement refused to register any edict with the word "slave." Thus, by 1762, the procureur du roi Guillame Poncet de la Grave was alarmed by the introduction of "too great a quantity of negroes in France," some free and some slave. Fearful of such "dangerous men," Poncet de la Grave recommended an ordinance to police *all* black persons in France. Accordingly, rather than registering *slaves*, the 1762 ordinance required all *persons of color* to register as well. France would now patrol based on race, legislatively associating phenotype with specific psychological and social characteristics.[100] The philosophical and scientific theories of inherent character flaws in non-whites prompted French authorities to legislate based on their fears of blacks outside of white control.

The liberation of slaves through publicized suits intensified racial legislation. Minister of the Marine Antoine de Sartine ridiculed the posters and memoirs publicizing the slave suits for deluding blacks of their equality with the "superior [white] beings they were destined to serve."[101] Colonial lobbying motivated the French monarchy's *Police des Noirs* in 1777, new legislation that imposed law based on color distinctions to avoid the word "slave" and to regulate the boundaries between the colonies and France by policing race. Under the new law, blacks were no longer allowed to enter France, and those living in France had to register with the Admiralty. Further, refuting Buffon's theories of miscegenation, inter-marrying between whites and "blacks, mulattoes, and other people of color" was strictly prohibited.[102] To correct lax enforcement, Louis XVI issued an *arête du conseil* in 1778 requiring all blacks to carry identification cards with

[100] Peabody, *There are No Slaves in France,* 73.
[101] Peabody, *There Are No Slaves in France,* 119.
[102] Peabody, *There Are No Slaves in France* , 118.

their name, age, and master, if applicable.[103] Although the legislation was poorly enforced and slaves continued to sue for freedom until the Revolution dismantled the Admiralty courts in 1790, the French government introduced novel legislation against blacks based on their race to avoid facing questions of slavery that challenged France's "free soil." The budding abolitionism in the Enlightenment and the legal battles over "free soil" grated against the nascent racist justification for slavery and inequality based on phenotype.

While some *philosophes* denounced the illegality of chattel slavery based on the emerging consensus of common humanity, the prevalent credos of a hierarchy of civilization supported freeing black slaves but not granting them full equality with educated, civilized white Europeans. Meanwhile, the racialization of slavery reflected in Enlightenment writings and in French law equated those of African descent with servitude and baseness. Therefore, on the eve of the Revolution, the problem of slavery, a system that enriched France at a time of crippling economic crisis, was no longer a spatially, religiously, or completely philosophically justified system. Ruminations on man's natural freedoms, monogenism, and common humanity questioned the legality and corrupting nature of slavery while still justifying a hierarchy of civilization based on phenotype. Ideas that black Africans were naturally inferior to white Europeans implied a cultural and phenotypical prejudice that worsened as African slaves became increasingly corrupted and barbarized by slavery. The eighteenth-century discourse on race, slavery, and freedom bequeathed a Byzantine legacy that would create a clash between philosophy and practice.

Whether or not the revolutionaries read philosophical writings on the nature of man or the slave suits advocating for freedom on French soil, a healthy discourse on the

[103] Peabody, 129. An *Arret du Conseil* is an official ruling.

new science of man and novel notions of race emerged. Roger Chartier has warned against forcing an overly linear cause and effect between the Enlightenment and the Revolution, but he nevertheless claims that the *philosophes*' ruminations made the Revolution possible by making it conceivable.[104] When pro-slavery and abolitionist proponents faced the issue of arguing and legislating on slavery, no clear prototype existed from the *Ancien Regime*, but ambiguous arguments supporting either side simmered in the cauldron of pre-revolutionary discourse and rhetoric. The Enlightenment belief in slaves' corruption from their environment and conditions complicated any programs for abolition for fear of "unleashing" the consequences of slavery's school of violence. The next chapter will consider how early French abolitionists bridged the gap between Enlightenment and Revolution, embodying the complicated eighteenth-century inheritance of ambiguity and irony in anti-slavery rhetoric and forging racist justifications for barring slaves and free blacks from citizenship.

[104] Chartier, *Cultural Origins of the French Revolution.* 19, 32.

CHAPTER 2

THE REVOLUTIONARIES' CONUNDRUM: A RACIST LEGACY

In 1788, at the birth of the abolitionist *Société des Amis des Noirs,* founding member Jacques Pierre Brissot is said to have reported King Louis XVI's exclamation, "The poor blacks. Have they indeed some friends in France? So much the better, I do not wish to interrupt their labors!"[105] The French abolition movement had officially commenced, but the eighteenth century's ambiguous legacy on slavery and race lent serious intellectual baggage. The discursive convergence of the Enlightenment, the Buffonian Revolution, and French slave suits to uphold the centuries-old myth "There are no slaves in France" created a humanitarian movement that advocated universal rights to natural liberty but subscribed to a paternalistic notion of a hierarchy of civilization. If French abolitionists borrowed ideas from their anti-slavery predecessors about the illegality of slavery and the equality of all races before the law, they also endorsed the notion that civilized Europeans must rescue and refine enslaved Africans.[106] Meanwhile, slavery's advocates utilized paternalistic notions of racial hierarchy to justify continued enslavement of Africans, insisting that black skin made humans prone to violence and laziness and that white civilization better served Africans than their barbaric homeland. The Enlightenment, it seemed, had a corrupting influence, providing a rational basis for racism through either the "civilizing mission" or defense of the racial hierarchy.

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[105] Anna Julia Cooper, *Slavery and the French Revolution.* 1925. Translated and with an introduction by Francis Richardson Keller. (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press,1988), 71.

[106] Jean Ehrard. "Slavery Before the Moral Conscience of the French Enlightenment: Indifference, Unease, and Revolt." In *The Abolitions of Slavery From Léger Félicité Sonthonax to Victor Schoelcher.* Ed. Marcel Dorigny. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003).

As France faced revolution in the summer of 1789, revolutionaries used the intellectual legacy of Enlightenment and the New Science to interpret political circumstances, reconstitute the nation, and reconcile ideal with practice. If the Enlightenment offered only ambiguous theories on the criminality and inhumanity of slavery in regard to man's natural rights, how were the Revolutionaries to determine the place for slavery in their universalist claims? Slave suits and enlightenment discourse that challenged, albeit uncertainly, the status-quo claims of racial hierarchy formed an uneasy marriage with the French Revolution's universalist rhetoric, creating the conundrum of how to put abstract intellectual notions of freedom into practice. Because Enlightenment texts offered peripatetic condemnations of slavery, often wavering between hazy rhetoric and clear condemnation, both sides of the slavery debate could take what philosophical snippets they needed, alternately enshrining property rights alongside the "civilizing mission" of slavery and defending the extension of natural rights to all humans regardless of race. As French revolutionaries sought legitimacy in the Enlightenment canon, the *philosophes'* own ambivalence about slavery fortified tension between demands for liberty and the enshrinement of property. Linking Enlightenment anti- and pro-slavery arguments with the early years of the French Revolution reveals that the ambiguity regarding slavery did not manifest itself in 1789 with the storming of the Bastille but lay rooted in the past. French revolutionaries delayed legislating freedom for non-whites in part because of the paradoxes bequeathed by an Enlightenment that paired universal natural rights with racist principles of exclusion grounded in a hierarchy of civilization and the need for economic growth.

No single figure better bridges the gap between Enlightenment and Revolution than the Marquis de Condorcet, both *philosophe* and revolutionary, who found himself in a position to apply liberal but paternalistic ideas about race during a particular historical moment. Publishing under the pseudonym M. Schwarz, Condorcet's *Reflexions sur l'esclavage des Nègres* (1781) embodied Enlightenment views on slaves' right to liberty but also their need for civilization. Condorcet thus dictated a trajectory for abolishing slavery that called for ending the slave trade, conceding rights to free blacks and gradually emancipating all slaves, while securing the general public from slaves' putative potential for violence. For although Condorcet rejected the institution of slavery as criminal and contrary to natural law, he nevertheless feared that slaves would be "incapable of fulfilling the duties of free man" after an education in the school of violence and vice.[107] Still, the Marquis ranked black slaves above their violent and decadent colonist masters: "If you were to search for a man in the American islands, you would not find him among the whites."[108] Condorcet thus agreed with Montesquieu that slavery corrupted both slave and master. À la Rousseau, he insisted that the justification for continued enslavement of blacks stemmed from their initial enslavement. The barbarity of slavery deprived slaves of their freedom and in doing so degraded them:

> If because of their lack of education and the stupidity contracted through slavery by the corruption of their morals (the necessary result of their masters' influence), the slaves of the European colonies have become incapable of fulfilling the duties of free men, we can (at least until the experience of liberty has returned to them what slavery has taken away) treat them as men who have been deprived by misery or sickness of a portion of their faculties. We cannot, therefore, grant them

[107] Marquis de Condorcet, *Réflexions sur l'esclavage des Nègres.* Presented by David Williams. (Paris: L'Harmattan,2003), 14.
[108] Condorcet, In Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the Carribean. (*Chapel Hill: UNC, 2006), 178.

> the full exercise of their rights without exposing them to the risk of hurting others or harming themselves.[109]

Slavery corrupted all who were exposed to it so, just as sick patients needed time to heal, slaves demanded rehabilitation from their debasement. Incongruously, although Condorcet suggested that white masters were equally corrupted, he did not insist on any punishment or recuperation for them.

Reflexions sur l'esclavage des Nègres signaled that Condorcet and other abolitionists proved to be reformers seeking to end slavery as peacefully as possible, especially given the precarious role of colonial slavery in the French economy. What legislators needed to grant slaves was not immediate freedom but "the assurance of their well-being" and protection under the law.[110] Condorcet placed reform above abolition, ultimately soft-pedaling emancipation and instead favoring security for slaves in their present condition rather than demanding an immediate end to the system.

At the same time, Condorcet explicitly rejected economic justifications for slavery, arguing that while slaves shouldn't gain immediate freedom after a corrupting experience, the institution shouldn't continue expanding just because of finances. The Marquis caustically attacked fiscal grounds for continuing slavery *sans* reform, quipping

> if this interest makes slavery legitimate, it's like demanding personal permission to conserve my fortune by a crime. The absolute need that I might have for my neighbor's horse to cultivate my field does not give me the right to steal it. Why then would I have the right to obligate my neighbor, through violence, to cultivate the field for me ?[111]

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[109] Condorcet, In Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens*, 181.
[110] Condorcet, In Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the Carribean. (*Chapel Hill: UNC, 2006), 181.
[111] Condorcet, *Reflexions sur l'esclavage des Nègres,* Presented by David Williams.(Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003), 11.

Enslaving humans was clearly criminal, and the large financial gain of free forced labor didn't justify continuing a criminal action. Interestingly Condorcet placed his metaphor in the context of using beasts of burden to reap agricultural benefits, highlighting the legal irony that stolen horse labor was criminal in positive law even though stolen human labor remained legally supported.

Again rejecting economic arguments in favor of slavery, Condorcet sided with fellow *philosophes* Wallace, Rousseau, and Diderot. He unambiguously determined that slaves were human and therefore not legitimate property:

> …the master has no right over his slave… the action of detaining him in servitude is not enjoyment of property but a crime…by freeing the slave the law is not attacking property but ceasing to tolerate an action which it ought to have sanctioned with capital punishment. The ruler therefore owes no damages to the master of slaves, just as he owes none to the thief deprived by a judgment of possession of the thing stolen.[112]

For Condorcet, the slaves' right to their stolen liberty trumped the right of masters to their slaves purchased as property. Radically, Condorcet recommended capital punishment of slave owners for criminal behavior, dismissing outright some pro- and anti-slavery endorsement of indemnifying masters for freeing their purchased slaves. Despite accepting the idea that slavery was a sort of psychological sickness that produced violence and instability, Condorcet insisted that enslaving humans was criminal. Even if only gradually phased out, colonial slavery should unquestionably end.

Condorcet's Buffonian-inspired advocacy of miscegenation and his prescriptions for gradual emancipation have garnered harsh criticism from scholars, who have disparaged him and other abolitionists for saying, "Black, you are now white. Come in

[112] Condorcet, *Reflexions sur l'esclavage des Nègres.* In "Mirabeau and the Société des Amis de Noirs." In *Abolitions of slavery : from Léger Félicité Sonthonax to Victor Schoelcher, 1793, 1794, 1848*. Edited by Marcel Dorigny. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003), 128.

and legislate with us."[113] However, attempting to tread lightly on a sensitive topic, "balancing the pole of philosophy and colonialism," Condorcet unequivocally judged the slave trade and slavery as criminal. Because of slaves' "degenerate" nature, the marquis recommended stages of emancipation that would ensure continued labor in the colonies as well as social stability as the new population integrated into French society.[114] Thus, Condorcet was shaped by the context of his time, facing the French Revolution's political constraints and the ambiguous legacy of anti-slavery opinion in France. In the flurry of discourse on man's natural rights, French abolitionists faced an ambiguous "enlightened" stand on slavery, a new scientific racism that equated black skin with servitude and barbarity, and a political climate in France that allowed for pushing formerly rigid boundaries regarding slavery without completely toppling existing and ever-evolving notions of race and the forced labor system.

In the late 1780s, the *anti-esclavagist* Condorcet found solidarity in the budding French abolition movement. In 1787, fellow abolitionist the Comte de Mirabeau circumvented the monarchy's censorship and the colonial lobby's power through a strict agreement with the Bureau de la Librarie that approved publication of *L'Analyse des Papiers Anglaise.* In theory, the *Papiers Anglaises* offered translations of English newspapers. In practice, it unofficially advocated for the emerging abolition movement in France. May of 1787 witnessed the founding of the London Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, and ringing in the New Year was the *Papiers Anglaises'* translation of founding-member Granville Sharpe's "Plan for the Total Abolition of the Slavery of Negroes in British Possessions." Following Reverend Sharp's writing, Mirabeau

[113] Louis Sala-Molins, *Dark Side of the Light: Slavery and the French Enlightenment.* Trans. John Conteh-Morgan. *(*Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). 29.
[114] Condorcet, *Reflexions sur l'esclavage des Nègres,* 30-31; Sala-Molins, *Dark Side of the Light,* 15.

published a letter from Jacques Pierre Brissot to Etienne Claviere that announced the London Society's founding and issued a call to arms in France: "We intend to publish very shortly a prospectus with the aim of inviting all friends of humanity to join with us, and in it we shall set out the means necessary for the formation of that society."[115]

In 1788 the *Societé des Amis des Noirs* formed with the aid of the British abolitionists, and the *Papiers Anglaises* published Brissot's founding speech, appending notice of the *Amis'* educational campaign to "enlighten people on the important matter of the abolition of the slave trade and slavery."[116] The Amis immediately issued a second edition of Condorcet's *Reflexions sur l'Esclavage* in 1788, dictating the French movement's plan for gradual abolition of slavery after a process of "civilizing" slaves through education and rule of law. While agreeing with the Enlightenment challenges to the legality of slavery, many abolitionists also supported the *philosophes*' views on the effects of bad laws and violent environment on men's moral fiber. The *Amis'* stance was thus "Republican Racism: an abolitionist version of the history of slavery [that] became a vehicle for justifying continued racial exclusion."[117] Although advocating for abolition, the Amis upheld Enlightenment theories of slaves' degeneracy and blacks' need for whites to civilize them with education and law. The *Amis des Noirs,* heavily influenced by their Anglo alliance, demanded an end of the slave trade, believing that would cut off the supply of slaves and thus phase out the institution.[118] By the summer of 1789, Thomas Clarkson had relocated to Paris because the ground for securing the abolition of the slave

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[115] Marcel Dorigny, "Mirabeau and the Société des Amis de Noirs. » In *Abolitions of slavery : from Léger Félicité Sonthonax to Victor Schoelcher, 1793, 1794, 1848*. Edited by Marcel Dorigny. (New York: Berghan Books, 2003), 121-132.
[116] Dorigny, "Mirabeau and the Société des Amis des Noirs." 123.
[117] Dubois, *Colony of Citizens,* 182.
[118] Marcel Dorigny, "The Abbé Grégoire and the *Societé des Amis des Noirs." The Abbé Grégoire and His World* Ed. Jeremy D. Popkin and Richard H. Popkin (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000).

trade "seemed to have shifted from the banks of the Thames to those of the Seine."[119] As the French Revolution's calls for universal rights escalated, the British hoped that French leadership on abolition would pressure the English to follow-up.

French abolitionists continued debating their choice method of emancipating and integrating slaves as the financial crisis forced Louis XVI to call the long-neglected Estates General and plunged France into a political revolution in 1789. By August, the new National Assembly had produced *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* declaring "all men...free and equal in rights" while striking down past injustice. Thanks to the uncertain legacy of abolitionism, however, it was unclear whether slavery was an old-regime injustice to be corrected by the new order, or a necessary evil rooted in geography and the natural order of humanity. Georges Lefebvre has argued that the Declaration neglected issues deemed overly divisive or unimportant, like public education, care of the needy, and the right to petition. Slavery did not make his list, but the topic surely was divisive of revolutionaries attempting to forge a new nation that deemed the colonies an economic imperative. Per Lefebvre, the Declaration enshrined equality in rights before the law but not social equality, which skirted the issues of slavery, women, and the poor in this new universalist Republic.[120]

In Lefebvre's defense, perhaps neither he nor the *Declaration of the Rights of Man* addressed slaves because the preamble granted "natural, inalienable, and sacred rights of man" only to "all members of the social body" and all citizens. Therefore, questions of race and ethnicity required inquiry into notions of Frenchness, environment, conditions, and blood purity. Just as blacks were excluded from revolutionary claims, so

[119] Dorigny, "Mirabeau and the Société des Amis des Noirs." 125.
[120] Georges Lefebvre, *Coming of the French Revolution,* Tr. by R.R. Palmer. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1947), 173-179.

were Jews, who Frenchmen considered un-French and degraded by their living conditions.[121] Thus the revolutionary stammering on slaves' rights does not stand alone: women, Jews, and Frenchmen too poor to contribute taxes were denied "active citizenship" in the metropole until they were sufficiently "regenerated" to take on the duty of the full citizen. The Declaration acted as a "constitution of citizenship," but the early years of the revolution witnessed conflicts over who "qualified" for civil as opposed to political equality. The answer for revolutionaries emerged in "active" versus "passive" citizenship, the former granting suffrage and the possibility of being elected to represent the latter, who gained protection under the laws of the new Republic but no agency in crafting these laws.[122] Further, Republicans debated the inherent divergence between universal and natural rights of man, determining that "people" had natural rights whereas "citizens" who met certain criteria could protect and legislate the people's rights, "a citizenship at once universal and exclusionary."[123] Even with the creation of this "aristocracy of riches", Jews, mulattoes, and free blacks who qualified monetarily didn't meet the implied cultural, biological, or ethnic criteria. Women were ignored throughout most of the revolution.[124] Black slaves, however, continued in forced servitude, falling somewhere between the controversial categories of "person" and "property," consigned to the outskirts of society or entirely outside its bounds.

The issue of who belonged to the French nation and who qualified for citizenship preoccupied seminal Republicans, including the Abbé Sièyes in his celebrated pamphlet

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[121] For more on the plight of French Jews in the Revolution, see Shanti Marie Singham, "Betwixt Cattle and Men: Jews, Blacks, and Women, and the Declaration of the Rights of Man." In *The French Idea of Freedom,* Ed. Dale Van Kley, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 130-131.
[122] Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens,* 172. "Constitution of citizenship" is a term by Etienne Balibar.
[123] Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens,* 173. The Abbé Grégoire referred to active citizenship as the "aristocracy of the riches."
[124] Shanti Marie Singham, "Betwixt Cattle and Men," 115-116.

What is the Third Estate. Sièyes desired a representative government of qualified citizens, those who were French nationals and performed useful work, thus excluding the "idle" nobility who profited from the labor of others.[125] Hard laborers, however, completed the work foundational for France but were disqualified from "active" citizenship by the degradation of their condition. Taking up slavery as a case of "hard labor," Sièyes deemed black laborers as already in a position of degradation based on their skin color and ethnicity and therefore the perfect replacement for French nationals forced into degradation by labor. To free good Frenchmen from the bonds of burdensome labor, Sièyes proposed a Buffonian solution: racial engineering to breed negroes with "certain animals" to create a race of servants capable of completing the nation's production.[126] Just as black slaves in French colonies provided the economic base for metropolitan profit, so would Sièyes' engineered servants provide the economic base for a French nation of "active" citizens. These engineered servants would unfetter French nationals from the shackles of their labor, fulfilling the goal of allowing the Third Estate to truly be "everything." Sièyes viewed blacks as non-French and therefore resolutely excluded from citizenship, regardless of education, background, or civilization.

More problematic, the early discourse on universal rights enshrined principles that proved contradictory for slaves: freedom to liberty and property. Because some considered slaves to be property, they believed abolition would violate property rights. However, continued enslavement and the absence of protection under the law invalidated natural rights to freedom and security. A study of the revolution's language has traced the simplification of property from Old Regime meanings of privilege over others and

[125] William Sewell, *A Rhetoric of Bourgeois Revolution: The Abbé Sièyes and What is the Third Estate*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 149.
[126] Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens,* 175.

property in objects to the Enlightenment ideal of individual, private property.[127] John Locke equated the entire meaning of civil society to preserving private property, including man's life and liberty. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen conceived the right to "property" in a Lockean sense: "an extension of personhood," "the means accumulated by labor that enable a free person to maintain his independence and liberty in the face of actual or potential oppression."[128] The colons thus considered the slaves their "means" accumulated by labor, and the attempt to free slaves constituted "actual oppression." For the slaves, however, their labor accumulated no means and granted them no power of independence and liberty.

As revolutionaries deliberated how to constitute the nation, pamphlets published from 1789 onward promoted competing notions of a "person's" natural rights and a "citizen's" political rights. In a 1789 National Assembly motion, deputy M. de la Fayette proposed that

> Nature makes men free and equal; distinctions necessary to social order are founded only on general utility. Every man is born with inalienable and imprescriptible rights; these are liberty to all his opinions, care of his honor and life, the right to property, complete control of his person, his work, and all his faculties; the communication of his thoughts by all possible means, and the resistance to oppression.[129]

For M. de la Fayette, men born free and equal were still subject to distinctions necessary for social order. Further, men's inalienable rights included "civil rights," making no mention of political rights. Rhetorically, M. de la Fayette's proposal would include black slaves under "men" born "free and equal," even granting slaves the right to resist

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[127] William Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848, (*New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 121.
[128] William Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France,* 134-135.
[129] *Motion de M. de la Fayette.* 1789. University of Florida Special Collections, French Revolutionary Pamphlets. Box 18, Pamphlet 1596. Pg. 5

oppression and to control work and livelihood. However, in the same passage, M. de la Fayette insisted on universal rights to property, the very tension at the heart of the debate over abolition. How could one legislate to grant slaves their "natural" freedom while still upholding the colons' right to property?

An anonymous pamphlet published at roughly the same time echoed M. de Lafayette's mutually exclusive rights to freedom and property: "the social pact guarantees for the citizen and man in society protection, safety, and reassurance of his person and his property."[130] When applied to the question of slavery, the author's rhetoric mandated the protection and security of all persons in society and all property. If slaves were "in society," they qualified as persons even if they were not considered citizens; however, if excluded from society, slaves were property. Because the guarantees were mutually exclusive for slaves, Frenchmen had to conceive of slaves as either persons and therefore illegally enslaved, or as property, and therefore outside of society and legal equality. Yet, the author continued to explicate the need for citizens to reside under the law since "in the eyes of the law, all men are equal" without distinction of rank, fortune, or birth.[131] Finally, the author metaphorically referred to Frenchmen under despotism as "slaves" who "know only to submit to their chains, or break them." In contrast, "free men, under the law, know to respect them, since the laws are man's guarantor of liberty."[132] The only exclusive factor arose if one citizen's liberty threatened "one or many other citizens," thereby creating a loophole for pursuing gradual emancipation of slaves. Since slaves were considered "corrupted" and thus potentially threatening to the

[130] *Vues sur les bases de la constitution et la declaration des droits d l'homme et du citoyen. 5 aout, 1789.* University of Florida Special Collections French Revolutionary Pamphlets. Box 15, Pamphlet 1386. Pg. 4
[131] *Vues sur les bases de la constitution et la declaration des droits d l'homme et du citoyen.* Pg. 4
[132] *Vues sur les bases de la constitution et la declaration des droits d l'homme et du citoyen.* Pg. 4

greater society, abolitionists and pro-slavery forces deemed it necessary to either perpetuate slavery or only gradually emancipate, respectively. Written on the heels of the August 4th abolition of privilege, this author contextualized the problem of slavery in the age of revolution. If the revolution's ideology purported that nature promised equality of all men, and the law guaranteed this equality, then slaves were either considered outside of society, uncivilized and therefore harmful to others, or non-human and therefore barred from all civil rights.

Colonial slaves often did not even benefit from protection under the law, as promised according to man's "natural" rights. Although the 1685 Code Noir was drafted to "protect" the slaves from oppressive masters, colonial administration ruled arbitrarily and slaves gained little if any legally regulated security. The reason for this discrepancy between law and practice stemmed from what William Sewell labels the cultural construction of language.[133] If "all experience is construed experience," the language of the revolution changed according to one's perspective.[134] The slave trade, the colonial question, and slavery overlapped in interlocking spheres that founded the economic roots of the French empire's rising bourgeoisie, producing different meanings of "liberty and equality" for those in the metropole and those in the colonies.[135] Planters believed that slaves were property and so exempt from the Code Noir's legal regulations and the Declaration's promise of freedom. Slaves and abolitionists argued that the Code Noir guarded slaves legally and extended political and civil rights to free blacks; the

[133] William Sewell. *Work and Revolution in France,* 12.
[134] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture, (*New York: Basic Books, 1977), 405.
[135] Carolyn E. Fick, "The French Revolution in Saint-Domingue: A Triumph or a Failure?" In *Turbulent time : the French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean*. Edited by David Barry Gaspar and David Patrick Geggus. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 51-53

Declaration delivered on these promises as well as guaranteeing the right to freedom from oppression.[136]

This cultural construction of language then informed the legislative debates in the early years of the revolution. Subsequently, advocates of slavery defined slaves as property protected by the Declaration. But abolitionists denounced the idea that human beings might be considered property to focus instead on freedoms promised by the Declaration and the Enlightenment defenses of man's natural rights. Regarding abolition, "Politics, the complicated game of winning, losing, and compromising, played havoc with the implementation of the high sounding ethical principles of the Declaration."[137] Culturally constructed definitions of "slaves" and their rights meant that colonial laborers fell prey to considerations of the vitality of West Indian sugar to the French economy as well as of the international repercussions of the Anglo-French rivalry in the New World. At the same time, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen promised liberty and equality, prompting sustained battles for membership in the French family. [138] The Declaration forced upon the French a "painful confrontation of principle and interest."[139] Despite the successful passage of a Declaration that enshrined liberty and equality, the solid colonial contingency ensured that their most prestigious members gained seats in the Estates-General and then National Assembly. Deputies favoring the colons boasted the likes of Antoine Barnave, Moreau de Saint-Méry, and Pierre-Victor Malouet whereas the abolitionists were less prestigious and under-represented. The Comte de Mirabeau was the only abolitionist deputy prominent enough to voice the Amis des Noirs agenda,

[136] Carolyn Fick. "The French Revolution in Saint-Domingue: A Triumph or a Failure?" 51-52
[137] Singham, "Betwixt Cattle and Men," 115.
[138] Singham, "Betwixt Cattle and Men," 115.
[139] David Patrick Geggus, "Racial Equality, Slavery, and Colonial Secession During the Constituent Assembly." In *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 94, No. 5 (Dec., 1989), 1291-92.

exercising his collaboration with Thomas Clarkson to convince "an Assembly that knew little about the subject and was very sensitive to pressures from the interests of the ports and colonial circles."[140]

The French abolitionists, it seemed, had their work cut out for them. The reality in France was that "since Colbert, too many French ports had been developed and enriched by the [slave] trade."[141] Of all the *cahiers de doléances* remitted in 1789*,* only thirty-seven favored Negroes, eleven demanded eventual abolition of the slave trade, fifteen recommended the eventual abolition of slavery, twelve concerned the improvement of slave conditions, and one promoted rights for free blacks.[142] Despite the legal precedents defending freedom for African slaves and the *philosophe* musings on anti-slavery as a political motif, the early French abolition movement was a mere trickle, relegated primarily to intellectual circles, on the eve of the Revolution. [143]

The issue of property weighed heavily on the abolitionists' minds as they crafted the most savvy and expedient means of securing abolition of the slave trade and then slavery. Clarkson's correspondence with Mirabeau divulged the Count's desires to destroy "the system of slavery" and his British friend's insistence on first ending the slave trade, "the source of all evils," to ultimately abolish slavery.[144] In a letter dated 14 November, 1789, Clarkson wrote to Mirabeau,

> …If we ask for emancipation as well as abolition as the same time, the planters will say that we are taking their property – property that the laws of France itself encouraged them to acquire. We would necessarily call down on ourselves the

[140] Dorigny, "Mirabeau and the Société des Amis des Noirs," 125.
[141] Cooper, *Slavery and the French Revolution,* 7.
[142]Cooper, *Slavery and the French Revolution,* 7.
[143] Geggus, "Racial Equality, Slavery, and Colonial Secession During the Constituent Assembly," 1295-96.
[144] Letter 14, Clarkson to Mirabeau. Nov. 1789. Reprinted in Marcel Dorigny, "Mirabeau and the Société des Amis des Noirs," 128.

> opposition of the planters and all their adherents… not only would the question of emancipation be lost, but that of abolition would be exposed to the same danger.

Clarkson, referring to "emancipation" as ending slavery and "abolition" as ending the slave trade, feared risking the entire enterprise of anti-slavery aims over the controversy of property. He assured Mirabeau that the focus should fall on ending the slave trade, since "slavery in the islands will fall after that, and fall advantageously for planters and slaves without any need to touch it…This reasoning compels us to put aside any idea of emancipation."[145] While the Amis accepted Condorcet's view that slaves could not legally stand as legitimate property, they shied away from relying on that argument, recognizing the political constraints of attacking their opponents' strong appeals to property. Potentially, the Amis, particularly Mirabeau, sought to push the gradual abolition of slavery to the forefront of French legislation, but contemporary debates over property, and the British influence, swayed their stance to instead first attack the slave trade. The abolitionists thus settled on a gradual stance, agreeing with Condorcet and Clarkson to focus on anti-slave trade laws with the ultimate goal of freeing all slaves.

As Jews, free blacks, mulattoes, and women clamored for their share in the new nation, they sometimes advocated for one another. In December of 1789, outspoken feminist Olympe de Gouges supported abolition with her *L'Esclavage des Noirs,* which debuted at the Comédie Francaise. Although she was originally forced to present the play as a "drame indien" instead of using blacks, the abolition of privilege and the moment of the French Revolution changed the context for de Gouges, allowing her to *met en scène* a play that affirmed universal equality and the inhumanity of selling slaves "like cows at

[145] Clarkson to Mirabeau, Fall 1789. Reprinted in Dorigny, "Mirabeau and the Société des Amis des Noirs," 127.

market."[146] And yet, having denounced slavery as contrary to man's natural right and a source of inequality between men, de Gouges' play simultaneously affirmed the paternalistic notion that slaves needed whites to rescue them while encouraging slaves to work hard and follow the laws. Like other abolitionists, de Gouges borrowed Enlightenment notions of universal equality that paralleled with the need for just laws and civilized labor.

Set in the East Indies originally and then recast in the West Indies in 1792, de Gouges' plot tells the tale of slaves Mirza and Zamore, forced to flee after Zamore murders a white man in defense of Mirza's honor. Pondering her exile, Mirza questions the Europeans' power over their non-white slaves, asking why skin color placed men above other men when all are humans.[147] Zamore replies that Europeans gained power through subjugation based on nothing but skin color. The Europeans invaded and conquered other peoples and resources, but 'the man degraded by slavery has lost all his energy" echoing Montesquieu's view of slavery's corrupting nature and Rousseau's opinion of slavery's perpetuation of cowardice.[148] Zamore, however, reminds Mirza hopefully that "a gentle morale has fallen on Europe" that must return to slaves "this precious Liberty, the highest treasure of man which these cruel ravishers have deprived [slaves] of for so long."[149] Meanwhile, while hiding in the forest discussing man's shared humanity despite race variances, the two lovers encounter Sophie and Valère, a shipwrecked white couple who the slaves befriend and nurse to health.

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[146] "Introduction." Sylvie Chalaye and Jacqueline Razgonnikoff. In *L'esclavage des Nègres, ou l'Heureux Naufrage.* By Olympe de Gouges. Edited by Sylvie Chalaye and Jacqueline Razgonnikoff. (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006).
[147] Olympe de Gouges, *L'esclavage des Nègres, ou l'Heureux Naufrage.* By Olympe de Gouges. Edited by Sylvie Chalaye and Jacqueline Razgonnikoff. (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006), 7-8.
[148] Gouges, *L'esclavage des Nègres,* 7-8.
[149] Gouges, *L'esclavage des Nègres,* 7-8.

Mirza, Zamore, Sophie, and Valère live in a racially equal utopia for years, but Zamore's crime remains unpunished, and the colonial governor, M. de Saint-Fremont, ultimately recaptures Zamore and sentences him to death because the rule of law demands respect. M. de Saint-Fremont, however, suffers a crisis of conscience over slavery, even stating, "in this country of slavery, one must be barbarous" when "the voice of humanity cries from the bottom of my heart, 'be good and be sensitive to the fate of these unfortunates."[150] M. de St. Fremont represents the tension between the law and humanitarian motives to remember slaves' crimes and actions in light of their despoiled condition. Just as the firing squad of slaves aims their arrows at Mirza and Zamore, M. de Saint-Fremont laments the necessity of punishing the slaves, deriding "civilized men" for believing themselves superior to slaves, "who show grand spirits" and "feel nature."[151]

Reflecting the abolitionist movement's paternalism, Zamore, facing death, used his final words not to scorn the injustice of his state but rather to entreat his comrades in slavery to "cherish" M. de Saint Fremont, "this good father, with a filial tenderness." Zamore then happily embraces his death, elevating the importance of the rule of law and blessedly resting in the assurance of his master's love even when being torn from the love of Mirza. Suddenly, Sophie, the virtuous white female, intervenes and defends the black couple's humanity for saving her from death. Sophie then passionately exclaimed, "It is at the feet of virtue that one finds mercy."[152] Miraculously, M. de Saint-Fremont realizes that Sophie is his long-lost daughter, assumed to have died at sea. Illustrating female sensibility and agency in humanitarianism, Sophie's pleas for mercy prompt the governor to completely pardon the two slaves. In gratitude, Mirza promises eternal loyalty and

[150] Gouges, *L'esclavage des Nègres,* 40.
[151] Gouges, *L'esclavage des Nègres,* 65
[152] Gouges, *L'esclavage des Nègres,* 70.

servitude to white-skinned Sophie for saving her life, even though Sophie never swore fealty and life-long service to dark-skinned Mirza for rescuing her from sea.

M. de Saint-Fremont closes the drama with a speech to all the gathered slaves watching these events unfold, inciting them to "follow wise laws" to "listen to the voice of humanity, follow honest industry, and be honorable in all things," even if "no one ever breaks your chains."[153] Rife with Enlightenment notions on natural freedom and the rule of law, Olympe de Gouges' play elucidates the residual paternalistic Eurocentrism of the Enlightenment in the early stages of the French Revolution. Black slaves were clearly human, as Sophie attested, but they were nevertheless in need of white, European laws and guidance. Gouges failed to address citizenship or property rights, but she denigrated the "aristocracy of the skin" and illegitimacy of slavery while still ensuring the need for whites to civilize slaves during a gradual emancipation that continued plantation profit and upheld stability.

While the *anti-esclavagistes* strategized about how to abolish slavery and advertised their position through journals, books, and theater, the pro-slavery colonial lobby, represented by the Massiac Club, clamored for property rights and geo-privilege between metropole and colony in application of "natural" rights. The August 27, 1789 minutes of the Massiac Club reference drafting a letter destined for all commercial cities in France on behalf of the colonial lobby. The drafted letter enjoined the "French-Americans" throughout the country to collaborate on "enlightening the nation on the almost incalculable importance of the commerce of the colonies, and on the necessity of proscribing forever the system of the Friends of the Blacks, which would destroy it." The minutes of a September 9th meeting reveal legal strategies for refusing colonial right of

[153] Gouges, *L'esclavage des Nègres,* 73-74.

passage to blacks familiar with the Declaration of the Rights of Man in an attempt to maintain stability on the islands and contain rumors of liberation.[154]

An undated letter from French colonial property owners residing in Bordeaux written to the National Assembly portrays the weight of economic concerns on the minds and purses of French ports. The *colons* entreated the Assembly to cast aside "Humanitarianism" which "sometimes misleads the wisest of men, and the word 'slavery' appears no doubt to present a vast field for their eloquence." The slave owners applied the legality of property rights to guarantee protection of their slaves and to ensure the economic and social stability of France. Graciously appealing to the "justice" of the legislators, the Bordeaux authors decried those who "say that we must apply to the Negroes the Declaration of the Rights of Man which you have solemnly proclaimed for the mainland of France." If the Assembly failed to censor these abolitionist inciters, "torrents of blood and tears" would flow in the colonies since the slaves, unprepared for freedom, would succumb to their inherently violent nature. Besides, the *colons* never "enslaved" the blacks but rather "discovered them in the hardest and cruelest of slavery" and "transplanted" them to French territories to "live without fear" under a "kind and humane government." The white Frenchmen were thus civilizing the slaves, saving them from their own barbarity. The authors concluded with a final dramatic entreaty that "factories, commerce, the Navy, our property, our lives" depend on the Assembly's refusal of rights to the Negro.[155]

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[154] *Written Report of Meetings of the Massiac Club.* In Anna Julia Cooper's *Slavery and the French Revolution.* 1925. Translated and with an introduction by Francis Richardson Keller. (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), 176-179.

[155] *Address to the National Assembly, By the Commissioners of the Owners of Property in the French Colonies of America, Residing in Bordeaux.* In Anna Julia Cooper's *Slavery and the French Revolution*. 166-68.

Similarly, a November 1789 letter from the inhabitants of Nantes counseled on "the rumors" of the intent of "Messieurs de Mirabeau, Chapelier, de la Rouchefoucauld, de Lameth, and Barnave" to address the slave trade. If this "disastrous" decree was pronounced, France would "forever be lost" since "commerce in blacks" formed the "foundation" of trade in French colonies. Finally, the letter denounced the *Amis des Noirs* as "the declared enemies of the whites" for inciting the blacks against their white owners.[156] The abolitionists were seen as inflaming racial tensions in a well-ordered phenotypical hierarchy, all for ideals that many deemed irrelevant for non-white, non-Europeans. Economic concerns and property rights relegated blacks outside of the French family of citizens and therefore excluded them from the "new" natural rights.

Central to the pro-slavery claims were the realistic pitfalls of practically applying freedom to slaves. In *Reflexions sur le commerce,* the author mocked high-minded philanthropy since one cannot "substitute the systems of philosophes for experience." The author numbered colonial profit in France as 243 millions annually, providing business for 800 grand merchant ships and 6000 to 7000 smaller ones, employing five-six million men on the coasts of France, and amounting to 75 million livres in net gain. Without the colonies, France would change "the tastes, the spirit of a people who have had these habits for more than a century."[157] A France *sans* colonial trade would suffer an immense deficit, inevitably leading to bankruptcy and demoting France to the likes of Poland, "the attic of Europe," where all work, profit, and industry ceased. The author ranked the French as "equal in genius to the English," their perpetual rival. The English

[156] *Letter from an inhabitant of Nantes, November 21, 1789.* In Anna Julia Cooper's *Slavery and the French Revolution.* 169- 170.
[157] *Reflexions sur le Commerce.* N.D. University of Florida Special Collections French Revolutionary Pamphlets. Box 28, Pamphlet 2385. 1, 11.

had long considered ending the slave trade but after years of debate ultimately decided that slavery existed in Africa for centuries, and European involvement lessened the horrors of the traffic. If the English would continue trading slaves, the French, to maintain competition, must also.[158] If France abandoned the slave trade, the English would fill that commercial vacuum, gaining merchant profit and increasing slave labor production in the colonies. France should be wise enough to avoid the blinders of humanitarianism and see the truth of economic imperative. Finally, the author warned against any quick legislation on commerce and the colonies that could negatively impact the entire French population. For this author, the profits of Frenchmen outweighed any concerns for black slaves' freedom, especially since, he argued, slaves were better protected under white Europeans' care than in Africa.

Similarly, an *Observation de M. Charton* substantiated the commercial necessity of the slave trade for colonial and thus metropolitan stability. M. Charton criticized those demanding "total liberty for Nègres" when under the philanthropists' noses, "our religious and our soldiers" were treated worse and "dishonored more inhumanely" than blacks in the colonies. Charton averred that colonists swore to the benign nature of colonial slavery: "This slavery, that revolts you, is nothing more than a name." Further, the Nègres in Paris testified that they were "happier under his Maitre Colon than he was under his first African master." In the colonies, as opposed to in Africa, "blacks promenade, breath the sweetest air, relax from the fatigues of the day in the arms of Love; and, in the morning you see the slaves return to their work with gaiety. We colons

[158] *Reflexions sur le Commerce.* N.D. University of Florida Special Collections French Revolutionary Pamphlets. Box 28, Pamphlet 2385. 8-9, 16.

alone have the trial of leading."[159] The hierarchy of civilizations conquered all concerns for white mistreatment of blacks since Africans fared far better under refined Europeans. For Charton, the *colons* were the true victims, forced to carry "the white man's burden" and lead these savage brutes.

The Anglo-French commercial rivalry heavily informed Charton's opinions as he warned of the apocalyptic consequences of ending slavery and thus increasing the national debt and giving profits to the enemy, England. While Charton claimed that tangible calamities would befall a France free from slavery, he also appealed to property rights: "Why are our brother colons excluded from this privilege? Did they cease to be men? Are they no longer our fellow citizens… To touch their possessions, without reimbursing them, is to reduce three-thousand families to poverty." For Charton, blacks were not "men" or "citizens" who deserved rights. Rather, the deputy remained occupied with the potential poverty and violation of the white colons than the state of slaves.

Further, Charton prophesied that granting full liberty to the Nègres would immediately incite "this rustic and vindictive specie" to "slit the throats of fifty-thousand whites," earning the reproach of all of Europe. Speaking to fears of phenotypical associations of black-skin with violent and indolent actions, Charton implied that slavery controlled black impulses rather than exciting them. Instead of ending slavery, Charton concluded with a plan to "provide for the Nègres" by regulating the slave trade to ensure that they "breath easily and enjoy perfect health" while on board. Regulating the slave

[159] *Observation de M. Charton à la motion de M. Moreau de Saint-Méry.* In University of Florida Special Collections French Revolutionary Pamphlets. Box 4, Pamphlet 521. 1-2. Imperialists would use this same argument to justify colonization of Africa in the name of the "white man's burden." Also of interest is the juxtaposition between M. Charton's Parisian negroes' testament with that of Olaudah Equiano in England. Equiano promoted an image of Africa that included community, harmony, and peace until the slave raiders interrupted and led him to the most barbarous conditions he had ever experienced. See Adam Hochschild, *Bury the Chains: Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free an Empire's Slaves,* (New York: Mariner Books, 2006). Also, see Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative.*

trade would guarantee that "our fellow citizen colons enjoy their property, the nation its glory and revenues."[160] For Charton, the slaves' liberty and property rights over their own life mattered not; the rights of the white colon citizens and the economic imperative of colonial commerce that relied on slavery trumped any high-minded rhetoric about freedom. Fiscal constraints and rights for civilized men, especially citizens, prevailed over literal freedom for "violent" slaves.

Slavery's advocates put abolitionists into a corner by defending state-sanctioned rights to property. At the same time, free *gens du couleur* demanded their rights as free, property-owning men and thus synchronized their claims with those of slavery's supporters. Racism in France was not merely confined to whites versus blacks. On October 22, 1789, the National Assembly heard from a deputation of free *gens du couleur,* property owning blacks in French colonies who demanded "to enjoy all the advantages of citizens."[161] Speaking for the delegation, *gen du couleur libre* M. de Joly presented his commission as "free and propertied citizens, of color" who still existed in "degradation," "doomed to the scorn of all the humiliations of slavery."[162] Because of their skin color, these free, property-owning men could not escape the stain of colonial slavery that equated black skin with forced servitude. Their phenotype chained them by association to slavery, so the deputation consciously distanced itself from black slaves. M. de Joly celebrated the *gens du couleurs'* French citizenship and allegiance to their *patrie,* promising that "the cry of liberty rang out in the other hemisphere" just as in France.

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[160] *Observation de M. Charton à la motion de M. Moreau de Saint-Méry.* In University of Florida Special Collections French Revolutionary Pamphlets. Box 4, Pamphlet 521. 1-2

[161] "Séance du jeudi 22 octobre 1789." *Archives Parlementaires*, Volume 9. (Paris : Librairie administrative de Paul Dupont), 476.

[162] "Séance du jeudi 22 octobre 1789." 476

Comparing their situation under "tyrannical whites" to the metropole's hatred of idle aristocrats, the *gens du couleur* quoted the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the National Assembly's promise of the right to resist oppression. M. de Joly reminded the deputies of the Code Noir's assurance of legal rights and the revolution's promise to enact these rights. The free blacks spoke in terms that justified their citizenship: unlike black slaves, they were taxpayers, property-owners, and prepared to shed their blood in defense of the nation. The delegation even offered to use their wealth to end French debt, a common promise at that time reflecting again their efforts to speak the language of the "civilized." Using the language of universal equality, the social contract, natural rights, and the general will, the *gens du couleur* asserted their Frenchness and their qualifications for citizenship as opposed to slaves, with whom the free blacks only shared phenotypical similarity.[163] M. de Joly represented his delegation in terms of European civilization: these men owned property, labored freely, and were educated in Enlightenment terms, just as their white counterparts. The National Assembly vowed to consider their pleas, but the colonial lobby triumphed, justifying a very-white version of the newly gained right to representation.

Whereas slavery advocates relied on arguments for property rights to uphold slavery, the free *gens du couleurs* demands revealed their desire to maintain the racial status quo for *all* non-whites who didn't qualify economically. Free blacks purposefully described themselves in white, European terms of civilization to distance themselves from the heritage of their phenotype. In response to this rising free black population that was gaining economic power and voicing citizenship demands, the planter coalition represented by the Club Massiac sought legislative white supremacy. The issue was no

[163] "Séance du jeudi 22 octobre 1789." 477.

longer simply one of property but racial order. From 1775-1789, the free blacks numbered around 28,000, putting them on par with Saint-Domingue's white population size. Further, free blacks owned one-third of the colony's plantations, one-fourth of the slaves, and one-fourth of the real-estate property. The free blacks demanded their civil and political rights as early as the fall of 1789, threatening white colonial rule. Antoine Barnave led the Massiac Club to represent the French white-planter coalition in the National Assembly, and the Club strove to prevent open debates on colonial issues in the Assembly for fear of opening the door to free blacks' political rights. The Colonial Committee was established to this end to debate colonial legislation separately from the National Assembly and thus ban any free black participation.[164] Even qualified free blacks using the same arguments as their pro-slavery white counterparts were barred from admission to active citizenship. In the eyes of the Massiac Club and the Colonial Committee, no blacks, free or slave, were qualified for political rights. Slaves were even deemed unqualified for civil rights to freedom of property, work, or equality before the law.

On March 8, 1790, after the Colonial Committee refused even to hear abolitionist arguments or admit an abolitionist to their committee, the colonies were granted internal legislative autonomy. The March 8 decree thus legally upheld existing, all-white colonial and provincial assemblies in Saint-Domingue. M. Barnave's report to the National Assembly in favor of colonial administration cited the primary interests of the French nation as upholding commerce and conserving the colonies, "a point of view of

[164] Fick, "The French Revolution in Saint-Domingue," 56-57.

incontestable truth."[165] For Barnave, guarding the colonies meant guarding the white colons' interests. Losing the colonies would end the revolution and catalyze "a grand disaster for the nation." In the name of the revolution, slavery must continue; for Frenchmen to guard their newfound rights, slaves must continue to labor under a masters' whip and the racial order must remain intact. Privilege was abolished in August 1789, but the right of particularism remained in tact as the National Assembly affirmed that the revolution's legislation should not extend beyond the metropole's borders.

To this end, Barnave argued that the colonies guaranteed French external trade, which supported internal trade, so while French colonies were vital, spatial differences nonetheless demanded different laws in the metropole than overseas. Echoing Montesequieuan arguments of climate as well as the earlier French dichotomy between "Free Soil" France and slave saturated colonies, Barnave contended that "the difference of place, customs, climate, productions appear to us to necessitate a difference in the laws…we did not believe that the colonies should be included in the Constitution decreed for the kingdom."[166] Ironically, Barnave then requested unity with the colons, who "shared our oppression, our servitude…today, share our happiness, our liberty!" Paradoxically, Barnave insisted that the laws governing the colonies should differ from those of the metropole because of divergent customs, moeurs, climate, and production. For this reason, Barnave supported the colonial assemblies to represent the colonies better than the National Assembly could alone. Clearly for Barnave, the white colons shared the oppression of metropolitan Frenchmen under the monarch, but black slaves

[165] *Rapport fait à l'Assemblée Nationale, le 8 mars 1790, au nom du comité des colonies, par M. Barnave. Imprimé par l'ordre de l'Assemblée Nationale.* In University of Florida Special Collections French Revolutionary Pamphlets. Box 2, Pamphlet 202b. 3-4

[166] *Rapport fait à l'Assemblée Nationale, le 8 mars 1790,* 14-15.

and free blacks shared no Frenchness and thus did not factor into sharing the "glorious liberty" of the new nation. Making legal exceptions to the Declaration extended only to non-white and thus non-French blacks in the colonies. The new particularism was no longer geographic but racial.

The National Assembly's decision to create a Colonial Committee stifled any abolitionist activism. The March 8 decree's language ambiguously granted voting and office-holding rights to any "property-owning persons" aged 25 and up, who fulfilled tax and residential requirements. [167] The concept of "active citizenship" translated nicely to the colonies, but the newly-validated colonial autonomy allowed the white colonists to define who was deemed a "person" that met citizenship requirements. Free blacks did not meet the one implicit criterion: white skin. Economically qualified free blacks were thus denied entrance into the French family because they lacked a vital characteristic that was never explicitly mentioned but always heavily implied. And, black slaves remained a threat to the entire French nation's economy, the white colons, and the free blacks, leading even abolitionists to support a policy of gradual emancipation.

Thus, in the first years of the Revolution, the pro-slavery Massiac Club's strategy triumphed. The issues of the colonies took legislative center-stage only after the colonial lobby raised the issue of *colon* representation in the National Assembly and insisted that their slaves be counted to determine the colonists' numbers. After 8 March, 1790, the Colonial Assemblies became the sole governing bodies on the islands, and the National Assembly had no power to legislate in favor of free blacks or slaves.[168] Thomas Clarkson's book *Essay on the disadvantages of the slave trade* was translated into French

[167] Fick, "The French Revolution in Saint-Domingue." 57-58.
[168] Dorigny, "Mirabeau and the Societé des Amis des Noirs." 128-129.

and published in 1790 in preparation for a great debate on abolishing the traffic of slaves, but the National Assembly's ruling effectively tabled the issue. As war against France's concerned monarchical neighbors threatened the revolution, the Anglo-allied *Amis des Noirs* were slandered as British bed-fellows and as unpatriotically opposed to French colonies.[169] The political instability of the colonial question spurred white and black autonomist movements in the Caribbean, arousing fear and branding the slave trade and slavery as taboo for discussion in the Assemblies. In the midst of debating the practicality and extent of the revolution's universalism, the slave trade reached its peak.[170]

Throughout its first year, the French Revolution stammered on slavery; the idealistic rhetoric of man's natural rights stopped short of granting citizenship or liberty to non-white, non-French "men" who were considered degraded by their condition or status. Free blacks, despite meeting all qualifications for "active citizenship" and speaking the language of enlightened Europeans, were barred from entrance to the French family. Black slaves, supposedly born "free and equal" with rights to "liberty and property" were deemed ill-prepared for these natural entitlements until adequately civilized under white, European influence. Pro-slavery arguments clearly positioned black slaves as ancillary humans, valuable only as producers and of too little consequence to jeopardize France's economic power and commercial rivalry with England. Yet, arguments on the pro- and anti-slavery sides of the rostrum plucked arguments from the Enlightenment to justify their ruling. While abolitionists proclaimed their humanitarian ethos, their treaty nonetheless employed paternalistic, Eurocentric rationale despite harshly denouncing slavery. Worse, the colonial lobby relegated black slaves to the very

[169] Geggus, "Racial Equality, Slavery, and Colonial Secession During the Constituent Assembly," 1295-96.
[170] Geggus, "Racial Equality, Slavery, and Colonial Secession During the Constituent Assembly," 1295-96.

margins of society, insisting that white Europeans saved these "brutes" from their African captivity. Both sides issued the dual test of skin color and education, albeit for different reasons. The French Revolution delayed legislating freedom for non-whites based on the paradox of the Enlightenment, a period that promoted inclusion of all into the family of common humanity while defining a hierarchy of civilization based on race to exclude men from instant gratification of human rights.

The early French abolition movement failed to deliver; as the situation in Saint-Domingue became less stable, fears of economic loss and the ever-present *perfide anglaise* finally prompted the French government to address rights for free blacks in 1791-92, the subject of the subsequent chapter. The Enlightenment inspired theories of regeneration and natural law, but the revolutionaries clearly exercised agency in strategizing how best to apply such theories. When the colonial lobby and commercial fears silenced abolitionist calls to end the slave trade, the Amis refocused on the cause of free blacks. The *Amis'* decision to champion the mulatto cause over that of the slaves proved strategic since "the civil rights of tax-paying, property-owning non-whites seemed a much safer issue than did the slave trade" for testing the racial boundaries in France.[171] The shift from abolishing the slave trade to instead champion the rights of free blacks proved far more successful in the years following the May 8 decree, as revolutionaries endeavored to practically apply universalist rights in a political climate informed by Enlightened racisms and paternalism.

[171] Geggus, "Racial Equality, Slavery, and Colonial Secession During the Constituent Assembly," 1301.

CHAPTER 3

AMBIGUOUS VICTORY: THE 1791 AND 1792 DECREES

The French revolutionaries had stuttered on the question of slavery. The subject of who was included in the French family and who constituted the nation remained bitterly divisive as free *gens du couleur* clamored for their rights and abolitionists struggled to advocate judiciously for black slaves in the tense political climate. For the abolitionists, the matter of granting citizenship to free *gens du couleur* proved less contentious in France than that of freeing "degraded, uncivilized" slaves: the middle class *mulâtres* were of mixed racial descent, were often wealthy and well-educated, and numbered among the colonial slaveholders and property-owners. The Enlightenment, moreover, viewed the plight of the *mulâtres* favorably, and the *Amis des Noirs* expediently embraced the cause of the free men of color.

The pleas of Julien Raimon, a free *gen du couleur* planter from Saint Domingue demanding Assembly representation for French colonial free blacks and mulattoes, opened abolitionists' eyes to the colonies' urgent need for regeneration and political equality for "mixed bloods," "mulattoes," or "free *gens du couleur."* According to Enlightenment criteria for civilization, these men's white, French blood gave them greater claims to citizenship.[172] Modern scholars have condemned philosophes for preoccupying themselves with mulattoes of mixed blood; for "blacks – whose biological being had not been regenerated by the slight touch of Europeanness- it was thought

[172] David Geggus, quoted in Alyssa Goldstein Seppinwall. *The Abbé Grégoire and the French Revolution: The Making of Modern Universalism.* (Berkely: University of California Press, 2005). 95-96.

normal, moral, logical, and political to wait" to change slaves from a "moveable asset" to a "subject" through a gradual path that didn't infringe upon the economic imperatives of metropolitan France.[173] However, placing legislators' and activists' arguments in the context of the Enlightenment's legacy exposes the intellectual impetus for prioritizing free *gens du couleur* over black slaves. The Buffonian Revolution's conclusions assured that the mulattos' lighter complexion moved them one notch closer on the *philosophes'* racial ladder of "civilized" humanity since a white or mixed-race parent had genetically conferred upon them the best traits Europe had to offer. Contrary to Old Regime notions of "blood purity," eighteenth-century monogenists like Buffon held that "the mixing of races, far from being disastrous, is in fact advantageous, as though the métis inherit the best qualities from their parents."[174] Thus, the Enlightenment inspired theories of regeneration and acknowledged rights according to natural law, but the revolutionaries' decisions on implementation were contingent upon the political climate in France and the events in the colonies. Rather than vigorously testing the empire's racial boundaries through universal emancipation, abolitionists and the National Assembly utilized Enlightenment rhetoric and economic arguments to first justify extending rights to those who fit "civilized criteria" largely independent of phenotype only to later reverse the

[173] Louis Sala-Molins, *Dark Side of the Light: Slavery and the French Enlightenment.* Trans and with an Introduction by John Conteh-Morgan. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). Quoting Michele Duchet.

[174] As Rebecca Hartkorp Schloss explains, of notable motivation for keeping tabs on the African population in France was preventing corrupted bloodlines, "the stain of French blood," on French soil, a notion that Creole Martinicans staunchly feared as well as native French men. As Schloss explains, the *tache de sang melée* mentality inspired Creole racism and methods forbidding the marriage of whites with blacks or mulattoes (41). See *Sweet Liberty: The final days of slavery in Martinique.* By Rebecca Hartkopf Schloss. University of Pennsylvania Press (2009). Scholar Guillaume Aubert traces the roots of "blood purity" notions to French nobles interchanging "race" with "blood" to express lineage in the mid-sixteenth century and thus defend and preserve their privilege as nobles. See Guillaume Aubert, "'The Blood of France': Race and Purity of Blood in the French Atlantic World," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 2004

debate to prioritize mixed race as a stabilizing factor in the midst of increasing racist colonial revolt.

While phenotype originally played a large role in the debate over slavery because of Enlightenment views on racial hierarchy, the argument in favor of citizenship for free men of color shifted the debate away from race to focus instead on economics and the rights of man. Because free men of color met all criteria for "active citizenship" as stipulated in metropolitan France, the *Amis des Noirs* strategically championed their cause over that of the slaves. Granting active citizenship to free people of color in the colonies tabled the question of the slave trade and slavery in favor of granting rights to a small minority of non-whites whose economic status merited active citizenship. Further, proponents of "colored" rights insisted that the colonies would be more productive if *gens du couleur* were given citizenship, especially since these men already possessed the same qualities of property-holding whites enjoying political rights.

Of course, free men of color did not "earn" their rights without struggling through months of heated debate and colonial revolt. Since the Revolution's inception in 1789, pro- and anti-slavery advocates alike had agreed that the questions of race and slavery were inseparable. The Paris Commune and Antoine Barnave's colonial committees both humored non-white deputations' arguments but let themselves off the hook by declaring all free persons to be citizens. Ultimately, however, they granted the decisive vote on rights of free persons to the existing, all-white colonial assemblies. The ambiguity of the March 8, 1790 decree rhetorically satisfied the anti- and pro-slavery lobbies, since technically *all* free persons had political rights, including free men of color. Practically, however, the white colonial assemblies held the power to exclude based on phenotype.

Following the March 8 decree's indistinct definition of enfranchised men as "citizens" or "persons," abolitionist Abbé Grégoire sought clarification on phenotypical issues. Barnave assured off-the-record that *gens du couleur* would count among those enfranchised, but colonial implementation proved otherwise. The issue of phenotype prominently factored in blacks' continued exclusion to maintain the colonial racial status-quo.

This continued oppression did not sit well with free *gens du couleur* lobbyists in Paris, namely Julien Raimond and Vincent Ogé. Both men endorsed slavery as part of their program to gain rights for free, property-holding men of color, denoting the racism at play between non-whites. Ogé, a Saint-Domingue coffee plantation owner, had worked alongside Raimond in Paris to demand active citizenship for all free, property owning men regardless of phenotype. Early on, the free men of color lobbyists utilized economic arguments in attempts to deflect attention from phenotype as a basis for discrimination. The ambiguity of the March 8 decrees, however, gave the white colons a free hand in maintaining the *prejugé du couleur* in the colonies.

In October 1790, Ogé returned to his colony, "arms in hand, to demand the political rights of his caste."[175] He consulted with the island's Governor Blancheland insisting that he implement the March 8 decree for *all* free persons, regardless of skin color. When Blancheland refused, Ogé marched on Grande Rivière with several hundred supporters, occupied the town, and penned a letter to the colonial assembly detailing his motives and the consequences of continued prejudice against free men of color:[176]

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[175] Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution. (*Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard, 2004). 87. Dubois offers evidence that Ogé purchased arms in Le Havre before leaving France for London, or in the United States before reaching Le Cap.
[176] Dubois, *Avengers of the New World,* 87.

> When I solicited a decree in favour of the American colonists, formerly known under the injurious epithet of mulattos from the National Assembly, I did not include in my claims the condition of the negroes who live in servitude. You and our adversaries have misrepresented my steps to discredit me with honorable men. No, no, gentlemen! we have advanced a claim only on behalf of a class of freemen, who, for two centuries, have been under the yoke of oppression. We require the execution of the decree of the 8th of March. We insist on its promulgation, and we shall not cease to repeat to our friends that our adversaries are unjust, and that they know not how to make their interests compatible with ours. Before employing my means, I make use of mildness; but if, contrary to my expectation, you do not satisfy my demand, I am not answerable for the disorder into which my just vengeance may carry me.[177]

Appealing to the honor and virtue of his audience, Ogé explicitly distinguished between free men of color who qualified for suffrage like their white, property-owning counterparts, and "negroes who live in servitude." Ogé represented himself as like-minded with "honorable" whites who believed slaves' servitude should endure. However, Ogé also promoted the honorability of enacting justice with the promulgation of the March 8 decree. If the colons delayed justice and rejected Ogé's "mildness," he warned of dire consequences and the effects of the free men of colors' "just vengeance" after "years of oppression."

After facing persistent refusal to certify the March 8 decree for free men of color, Ogé and fellow activist and former militia-man Jean-Baptiste Chavannes joined forces and gained some initial victories with their "colored" army. Ogé's uprising was quickly crushed by colonial troops sent from Le Cap, and after escaping to Santo Domingo only to be betrayed by the Spanish, he and Chavannes were executed, broken on the wheel, and beheaded. His brutal execution instantly elevated him as a "martyr for liberty," and

[177] Vincent Ogé, "Letter to the Members Composing the Provincial Assembly of the Cape." October, 1790. Reprinted in *Toussaint L'Ouverture: A Biography and Autobiography.* By J.R. Beard. (Boston: James Redpath Publishers, 1863), 46-47.

over the next several months free men of color bore arms throughout the colony to demand rights and to defend themselves against white aggression.[178]

Because of Ogé's revolt against oppression of free blacks and perhaps even black slaves, the National Assembly issued another decree on October 12, 1790 that promised it wouldn't govern "the status of persons" in the colonies, essentially supporting the colons' rights to continue discriminating against non-whites.[179] The Provincial Assembly of the Northern Province of Saint-Domingue also insisted that free people of color recognize that their fate was in the hands of the colonial assemblies; like school children earning rewards from their teacher, free blacks were only to expect and obtain benefits "by wise behavior and respectful bearing."[180] As Raimond lamented in a 12 October letter to abolitionist Milscent Creole, "The population of free persons of color is little known [in Paris], as is their utility, their wealth, their moeurs, and their patriotism."[181] Despite the Code Noir's extension of political rights to all *affranchis* and the parity between property-owning free coloreds and whites, the colonial lobby had triumphed. The Assembly's deference to colonial self-rule and its ambiguous rhetoric regarding the "status of free persons" allowed for continued prejudice and injustice to free men of color who would otherwise qualify as "active citizens."

Immediately following the October 12 decree, abolitionist Abbé Grégoire penned his *Lettre aux Philanthropes* on behalf of the rights of free *gens du couleur* in Saint

[178] Dubois, *Avengers of the New World,* 87-90.
[179] Geggus, "Racial Equality, Slavery, and Colonial Secession During the Constituent Assembly," In *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 94, No. 5 (Dec., 1989), 1301.
[180] Dubois, *Avengers of the New World,* 87.
[181] Sophie Piollet, Nathalie Piquionne, and Delphine Roux. « Milscent Créole, historien de la Révolution de Saint-Domingue 1790-1794. » In *Périssent les colonies plutit qu'un principe ! Contributions à l'histoire de l'abolition de l'esclavage 1789-1804.* Ed. Florence Gauthier. (Paris: Société des etudes Robespierristes, 2002). Reprint of letter from Julien Raimond to Milscent Créole, 12 october 1790. P. 25.

Domingue. Grégoire's beliefs had outlined a French family that closely matched Enlightenment criteria for "civilized" Frenchmen, including "fully regenerated citizens [who] would be French-speaking, Christian, enlightened, and light skinned" since "universalism involved not only political inclusion but also cultural melting."[182] Free men of color closely matched his definition of civilized Frenchmen, so he demanded their political rights. His "enlightened religion" surfaced throughout his theorizing, evoking the principles of God-given rights alongside the natural rights of man, the validity of citizenship for "mixed-blood" mulattos given their "Frenchness," and the portrayal of the free blacks' cause as the perfect amalgamation to satisfy the universalist claims of the Revolutionaries and the economic and social concerns of the colonists.[183]

Grégoire's letter invoked a three-pronged argument in favor of active citizenship for free blacks: historical precedence from the Code Noir, economic incentive given free blacks' qualifications, and racial stability in the colonies with free blacks controlling and civilizing black slaves. He united the utility of the mulattoes' phenotype for social order with their economic potential in the colonies to convince the Assembly of the necessity of extending rights. Grégoire warned the legislators that if the metropole decided to wait for colonists to grant mulatto freedom, "the eternal rights of men will be subordinated to pride, to avarice!" He then appealed to self-interest, arguing that the *sang-mêlées* would help preserve stability in the colonies by serving as "the firmest support in the colony against a negro insurrection and marronage." *Philosophe* and legislator alike feared

[182] Seppinwall, *The Abbé Grégoire,* 97. Grégoire also attempted to "regenerate" patois speakers in provincial areas of France to make French the universal language on the continent.
[183] "Enlightened Religion" is a term coined by Alyssa Goldstein Seppinwall to describe the Abbé Gregoire's unique blend of enlightenment philosophy with Catholicism, seeing the two camps as mutually reinforcing rather than exclusive. See *The Abbé Grégoire and the French Revolution: The Making of Modern Universalism.* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2005).

slaves' violent nature, either blaming the potential brutality on blacks' lack of civilization or on the effects of slavery's school of cruelty. Either way, Grégoire catered to both parties by offering the free blacks as an intermediary class not prone to violence thanks either to their freedom from slavery or their mixed race.

Most innovatively, the Abbé contested climatalogical and phenotypical arguments aimed at delaying rights for non-whites, daring the legislators to claim that "whites alone are born and remain free and equal in rights." If earlier in the letter the Abbé offered phenotype as a reason for extending political rights, he now asserted the primacy of principle with man's natural rights to freedom regardless of race. Because his "enlightened religion" informed his theory, Grégoire could appeal to those who subscribed to scientific racism regarding "mixed blacks'" ability to harness the best "white traits" and therefore mediate with the slaves. At the same time, he firmly believed that, regardless of skin color, all men were created in God's image and therefore should be equal under the law. His creed conflated science, philosophy, and religion to advocate for free men of color on all three grounds. Grégoire reaffirmed the mulatto right to freedom as dictated in the *Code Noir,* but echoing the verdicts of Rousseau, Montesquieu, Condorcet, and Wallace, he repudiated the right of the Assembly to legislate against God-given rights: *"*men have the right to exercise their liberty just as they have the right to eat, sleep, etc." Rousseau's right of revolt emerged when Grégoire demanded that the Assembly categorize the *sang-mêlées* as either part of the French empire and thus citizens or as foreigners rebelling against despotism. Regardless, the revolutionaries *"*had consecrated the principle of resistance to oppression as legitimate." Uniting the cause of humanity with economic concerns, Grégoire denied their mutual exclusivity, angrily

regretting that many mulattos proposed to flee "a country where the sun casts light only on their suffering" and take their talents, riches, and business with them. Since free men of color owned much property and wealth, and were only increasing in population while the white colons' numbers stagnated, the economic consequences of a mulatto exile proved a threatening prospect to the island's prosperity.

Grégoire further warned that if whites refused to ally with the *gens du couleur,* these oppressed men would have no recourse but to "*faire cause commune"* with slaves. He concluded with the mandate: *"*avenge these great principles of equality, liberty, justice, that nature inspires, that religion consecrates, and without which one soon sees men degrade themselves and empires crumble."[184] While rife with Enlightenment ideas, Grégoire's writing also underscores the revolutionaries' need to address questions in the ever-changing political and social context of France and her colonies. Instead of attacking property-owning planters for their involvement in suppressing the natural rights of their "uncivilized" and potentially violent slaves, Grégoire critiqued the white colons for their prejudice solely based on phenotype against free persons who otherwise would readily qualify for active citizenship.

The increasingly radical political climate in France bristled against the limitation of the franchise to "active citizens" and thus garnered more support for the free *gens du couleur*. Just as abolitionist arguments provided a vehicle to attack Christian defenses of slavery, the issue of free colored rights gave the Jacobins a foothold for their attack on the political status quo. Further, news of Vincent Ogé's short-lived rebellion in Saint

[184] Henri Grégoire, *Lettre aux philanthropes.* 1790. Reprinted on the website "Making of the Modern World," the Goldsmiths' Library Collection, University of London.

Domingue and his subsequent public and torturous death on the wheel in February of 1791 led the National Assembly to question the validity of colonial self-rule.

On 13 May, 1791, Dupont de Nemours championed principle against the colonies' continued racism, comparing the colon pleas for maintaining the "prejugé de couleur" to the aristocracy's desire to uphold the order of the nobility:

> There exist white nobles who… haven't left their titles, some of which make you in Europe laugh; there are the *grands blancs* property-owners, the *petits blancs*… and underneath them, one finds the *quarterons*, the *métis*, the *mulatres*, the free blacks, and finally the black slaves, who are the true people of the country because it's them who cultivate the earth and exercise their arms. It's bad enough that slavery's deep wound to humanity cannot be healed but by degrees. At least, is it not to the founders of human liberty to admit to adding to this inequality by instituting new classes of nobility, when they destroyed those that existed in their country?[185]

If French legislators prided themselves on having abolished privilege and nobility in France, why did a hierarchy of race exist in the colonies among men who were otherwise equal based on citizenship criteria? Nemours even mocked the absurdity of the racial categories in Saint-Domingue that not only specified between white and black but even the degrees of "mixture" between the two. If France agreed on the need to "heal by degrees" the wounds of chattel slavery through gradual emancipation, at least the Assembly should enact justice for those who would otherwise qualify for active citizenship if not for their non-white skin.

He further argued that French fears of losing the colonies to secession over slavery clouded the true issue at stake in this debate: the universalist claims of the French Revolution in the Declaration of the Rights of Man. Nemours claimed, "If you abandon

[185] Gauthier, "Perissent les colonies plutot qu'un principe!" In *Périssent les colonies plutot qu'un principe ! Contributions à l'histoire de l'abolition de l'esclavage 1789-1804.* Ed. Florence Gauthier. (Paris: Société des etudes Robespierristes.) 2002. Pg. 95. Reprint of Dupont de Nemours speech. Originally in *Archives Parlementaires*, t. 26, séance of 13 mai 1791, pg. 49.

this base, then you will expose the safety of so much work that you have made for humanity; and thus, your interest, that of Europe, that of the world requires that you not hesitate to sacrifice a colony rather than a principle."[186] Elevating philosophy above economics, he reminded the French of their legacy of universalism in an age that otherwise promoted hierarchy based on exclusion. In response to economic concerns of losing Saint-Domingue, Nemours responded with a principled response: Perish the colonies before a principle.

For the colons, however, retaining the colony was the priority. The threat of legislatively annulling the pro-colon 8 March and 12 October decrees inflamed debate in the Assembly, and by May of 1791, the colonial faction demanded a separate constitution for the colony that would legally conserve the segregated slave society and maintain "the prejudice of color."[187] Many whites proposed the sole solution to the "contagion of liberty" was to "cut the throats" of the free coloreds, "desert" France, and "call in the English."[188] The stakes for "crossing the color line" were fastidiously drawn and dangerously high.

As the legislative debate escalated, the colonial lobby contended for continued exclusion of free blacks in the name of commercial stability, which in turn promised French economic stability. In a 7 May, 1791 pamphlet from the *Departement de la Somme*, the author maintained that because of the 12 October decree, the colonial assemblies demanded their own constitution. Further, the colonies should "have no reason to dread" the National Assembly ruling on the status of free blacks since the Assembly assured that only the colonial assemblies could rule on such matters. For the

[186]Gauthier, "Perissent les colonies plutot qu'un principe!" Pg. 95.
[187] Gauthier. "Perissent les colonies plutot qu'un principe!" pg. 95.
[188] Dubois, *Avengers of the New World,* 90.

National Assembly to pass judgment on free persons' status would be a violation of the 12 October decree.[189] The author, M. de Lattre, insisted that the Assembly must "accomplish this promise" to "ruin the guilty hopes of your enemies" and "to return calm" in the colonies in the wake of Ogé's revolt. Without this stability, the colonies would not prosper under "the influence of the only fertile activity of commerce." The economic argument for colonial and thus commercial stability remained the colonial lobby's strongest ammunition. However, the colons also argued for the constitutional rights from the 8 March and 12 October decrees that guaranteed the colonial assembly's power to determine free persons' status.

Philosophically, M. de Lattre averred that the colons believed free blacks' status should improve and that colonial assemblies should offer "all that humane and wise politics can reasonably accord to them." However, the metropolitan assemblies should not abandon their earlier decrees but should instead establish a general colonial committee for deciding the most just reform for free men of color. Then, "the whites are reassured, and the free blacks and mulattoes have the certainty of being treated with justice."[190] Further, since the colonies assumed their rights under the current law of 8 March and 12 October, the National Assembly's discussion on overturning colonial autonomy haunted the "colons, an important part of the empire, [who are] tormented by fear." The Assembly delegates must realize, then, that "all is delicate and dangerous in this question… [and] the fate of your colonies, your commerce, consequently of your

[189] *Rapport fait au nom des comités réunis, de constitution, de la marine, d'agriculture et de commerce, & des colonies*, 7 mai 1791. Box 6, Pamphlet 712. In University of Florida Special Collections. French Revolutionary Pamphlets. M. de Lattre restated the October 12 decree as follows: "La ferme volonté d'établir, comme article constitutional, qu'aucunes lois sur l'état des personnes ne seront décrétées, pour les colonies, que sur la demande precise et formelle des assemblées coloniales. » Pg. 4

[190] *Rapport fait au nom des comités réunis, de constitution, de la marine, d'agriculture et de commerce, & des colonies*, Pg 5-6.

political state, is attached to the manner in which you decide" on the status of free persons in the colonies.[191] For the colonial lobby, the stakes were not just philosophical but practical and fractious. The colonial whites believed that the National Assembly's debate on granting active citizenship to free blacks and mulattos who qualified, although a very small portion of the non-white population, nevertheless would upset the racial balance of power on the island and also violate the colons' constitutional rights. If the French legislature could usurp the local assemblies' power to govern non-whites, what was to stop them from meddling in matters of slavery?

To quell the racist storm, on May 13, 1791, the National Assembly decreed, "as a constitutional article," that the legislature could make no law on the status of non-free persons in the colonies except with a formal and spontaneous demand of the Colonial Assemblies.[192] Yet, just two days later, the Assembly amended that ruling to assert its power to rule on the status of free persons *not born to free parents* only when the colonial assemblies asked them to. This seemingly minor change in fact granted political and civil freedom to all free blacks born to free parents, effectively denying the colonial assemblies' power to maintain prejudice against free blacks. The Assembly's ruling removed colonial power over the status of free blacks, born to free parents, who met economic criteria for active citizenship. Aware of the colons' insistence of their constitutional right to their own island assemblies, the National Assembly upheld that "the colonial assemblies, currently existing, will remain." The Assembly decided, however, to enfranchise non-whites born to free parents and to admit these men to the

[191] *Rapport fait au nom des comités réunis, de constitution, de la marine, d'agriculture et de commerce, & des colonies*, Pg 7

[192] *Extrait des procès verbaux de l'assemblée nationale relativement a l'état des personnes dans les colonies, 1791.* Box 10, Pamphlet 1000, In University of Florida Special Collections. French Revolutionary Pamphlets. Pg 1.

parish and colonial assemblies since "they have the required qualities." Therefore, the National Assembly granted free blacks and mulattoes active citizenship, preserving a colonial middle class between slaves and whites but changing the basis of difference from one of phenotype to one of legal standing.[193] The French legislature chose to link economics with political rights while offering free blacks' race as a positive asset for colonial stability. Phenotype was not specifically removed from the debate, but it was now subordinate to economic qualities.

Aware that the 15 May decree could potentially "harm the tranquility and surety of the Colonies," the National Assembly assigned commissioners to write an *Extrait des motifs, Des Décrets des 13 & 15 Mai, sur l'état des personnes dans les colonies.*[194] The pamphlet immediately justified the decrees based on the Assembly's occupation of "assuring the prosperity of the colonies" and ensuring that all "citizens" in the colonies "participate in the advantages of the constitution." The *extrait* further justified overturning the 8 March and 12 October decrees because "the local circumstances, and the species of culture that makes the colonies prosper, obliges the admittance in the colonial constitution of some exceptions to general principles." While the colons argued that granting political rights to free non-whites would embroil the colonies in turmoil, the Assembly insisted on the contrary that extending freedom to *all* those who qualified, regardless of phenotype, would guarantee colonial stability and prosperity. The May 1791 decree, then, defied the entrenched and centuries-old argument for particularism

[193] Geggus, "Racial Equality, Slavery, and Colonial Secession During the Constituent Assembly," 1302-1303.
[194] *Extrait des procès verbaux de l'assemblée nationale relativement a l'état des personnes dans les colonies, 1791.* Pg 2-3..

and geo-privilege that had allowed the strict colonial racial hierarchy to survive on the grounds of maintaining economic prosperity.

Further, because the 1685 *Code Noir* certified the *affranchis* with all rights that other citizens enjoyed, the Assembly would be required to craft an entirely new law to exclude free non-whites from rights that had technically belonged to them for over a century. The March 28, 1790 decree reinforced these rights of active citizenship for all who qualified, stating: "All free, property-owning persons who have been domiciled for at least two years, and are tax-paying, will enjoy the right of suffrage that constitutes the quality of an active citizen."[195] Since the colonies had accepted and understood this law in 1790, the colonies must now extend these constitutional rights to qualified men of color. The implicit exclusionary criteria of skin color was thus deemed inconsequential compared to economics.

Similar to the Abbé Grégoire's earlier arguments in 1790, the 1791 *extrait* established that the French legislature "could not accord to one part of the empire the faculty to exclude men from the rights of active citizenship constitutionally guaranteed throughout the entire empire. The rights of citizens are anterior to society; they serve as its base: the National Assembly can only recognize and declare them… in the happy inability to break them."[196] Therefore, whereas prior to the Revolution, rights were limited spatially, allowing for prejudice against free non-whites in the colonies, active citizenship must now apply to all corners of the empire, to all citizens who qualified. While the Assembly recognized the colonists' temptation to "maintain the privilege of

[195] *Extrait des procès verbaux de l'assemblée nationale relativement a l'état des personnes dans les colonies, 1791.* 4-5.
[196] *Extrait des procès verbaux de l'assemblée nationale relativement a l'état des personnes dans les colonies, 1791.* 6.

initiative" concerning free blacks' rights, the Assembly could not wait concerning "a natural, social, and positive right already declared." The Assembly was required to "remain loyal to respect for the rights of citizens, on which the French Empire's constitution had been so solidly founded."[197] Just as the colons had argued for their constitutional rights to rule in colonial assemblies, the National Assembly countered that the decrees empowering colonial assemblies to judge on free persons' status had in fact been unconstitutional to free blacks and mulattos who had been guaranteed their political rights since 1685.

To prove the political equality of free blacks with free whites, the *extrait* was remarkably color-blind and abandoned phenotype in favor of economic merit. Since the white colons were all born to free parents, admitting the same condition for non-white men to enjoy the rights of active citizenship was "nothing but maintaining a constitutional and legitimate equality." The Assembly had granted the white colons a delay before extending rights to those certified in attempts to secure colonial stability and confirm the colonial assemblies' existence. During this intermediary period, prejudices had time to weaken as "the sentiments of justice and humanity, the evidence of a common interest of all free men in a country where the security of all demands the greatest union" developed and took root. In this delay, the white colons should have ultimately regarded the free blacks "as brothers." To correct the error of colonial deputies who failed to recognize this, the Assembly acted with "maternal affection" to correct injustice. Just as the Assembly upheld the constitutional law allowing colonial assemblies to determine the status for non-free persons, it also was bound to apply the law that

[197] *Extrait des procès verbaux de l'assemblée nationale relativement a l'état des personnes dans les colonies, 1791.*Pg 6.

extended active citizenship to free persons born to free parents, regardless of skin color.[198]

To soften its discipline of the colonies, the National Assembly highlighted its overall agreement with white planters except in regards to the rights of free blacks. Finally, the *extrait* pledged the Assembly's recognition of the importance of the colons' interests and of commercial relationships with the metropole. However, the *extrait* warned against colonial rejection of the May decrees, since all good citizens would understand the need to enforce natural and legal rights and reject those who attempted to thwart them. In summary, the commissioners who penned the *extrait* expressed the Assembly's desire for harmony between the metropole and colonies while also powerfully reminding the colonies that the Assembly would ensure justice based on "natural, imprescriptible rights" to *all* free men born of free parents.[199]

Thus in the wake of Ogé's revolt and the resultant colonial instability, property-owning, tax-paying mulattoes born to free parents received their political and civil freedom. In Paris, colonial delegates greeted the law's passing with a dramatic walk-out in protest, but colonial revolt had forced the metropolitan legislature's hand regarding political rights for free men of color, a relatively small concession with potentially huge ramifications. In Paris, however, news of Ogé's execution stoked the already simmering embers of hostility against "aristocrats of the skin" who refused to embrace the Declaration's principles in the colonies.[200] An *Extrait du Registre des Déliberations de la Chambre du Commerce du la ville de Bordeaux* dated 24 May, 1791 fully supported the

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[198] *Extrait des procès verbaux de l'assemblée nationale relativement a l'état des personnes dans les colonies, 1791.* 7-9.
[199] *Extrait des procès verbaux de l'assemblée nationale relativement a l'état des personnes dans les colonies, 1791.* 11-12.
[200] Dubois, *Avengers of the New World,* 88.

National Assembly's decision to grant active citizenship to free blacks who qualified. The Bordeaux citizens applauded the decrees, even offering National Guardsmen for the colonial expedition to enforce the laws.[201] In the *extrait,* the Directoire de la Girondin, the Bordeaux Société des Amis de la Constitution, and the Club Café national lauded the legislature's actions, praising the Assembly for "making natural the grand principles" upon which "our sublime constitution" is based. The Club concluded that the Assembly's decrees had earned the body the "homage" of "all good citizens" from "all corners of the Empire." The Club too demanded that the National Assembly dispatch the National Guard to "topple a barbarous and revolting but profoundly deep-rooted prejudice; to return to these distant climates the laws of justice and equality, and to change the reigning moeurs and opinion." Echoing Montesquieuan theories of climate, the Club Café letter belittled the colons for succumbing to the influence of their distant climate and forfeiting justice in the name of prejudice. It even condemned the colonists' "egotistic spirits" for spurring rejection of the National Assembly's "wisdom" in bringing equity to the entire Empire.[202] Bordeaux, a port region enriched by colonial commerce, perhaps recognized the vitality of the wealthy, property-owning, expanding non-white free population.

The Abbé Grégoire also rejoiced at the decree, broadcasting his support in his *Letter to the Citizens of Color.* Grégoire affirmed the *gens du couleur* who "were men; - You are now citizens." The Abbé verified the rights of free blacks dating back to the *Code Noir* and reminded the "new citizens" of their duty to "confine your commercial connections to France." Since the argument for citizenship rested on economic

[201] *Extrait du Registre des Déliberations de la Chambre du Commerce de la ville de Bordeaux, 24 Mai, 1791.* Box 3, Pamphlet 331. In University of Florida Special Collections. French Revolutionary Pamphlets. Pg. 7.
[202] *Extrait du Registre des Déliberations de la Chambre du Commerce de la ville de Bordeaux,* Pg. 14-15, 17, 20.

foundations, free blacks should now sustain their end of the agreement by upholding their financial ties with the metropole. Grégoire encouraged the free blacks to "bury then in eternal oblivion every sentiment of hatred," anticipating pro-colonial arguments against the mulatto cause and fears of race war. His enlightenment rhetoric oozed as he appointed the free blacks to "civilize" enslaved blacks, who "like yourselves, are born to freedom and perfect equality" but "are ignorant of the duties of citizens" and must endure regeneration before becoming citizens. The Abbé concluded his letter with a patriotic challenge to the "virtuous citizens" and "enlightened men" of the colonies to channel the Revolution and "repeat our oaths! Live to love them; and if necessary, die to defend them!"[203]

Grégoire illustrates the abolitionists' move to support the cause of free blacks and mulattos, who through their proximity to European terms of civilization were better qualified for freedom. Further, in advocating for free blacks, Grégoire upheld the abolitionist argument that black slaves required gradual emancipation to "learn" the civility of citizenship. Borrowing from the Enlightenment's Eurocentric, paternalistic theories on race, Grégoire demonstrated his belief that mulattos possessed the "civilized" necessities of education and property, which guaranteed their patriotism and sustained their efforts to stabilize the colonies. Free men of color might even serve as mentors to black slaves aspiring to freedom and civilization, thereby guarding economic growth for generations to come. Grégoire linked economics with political rights, reminding free blacks of their commercial responsibility to France, but he also promoted the role free blacks' phenotype would play in helping French colonial interests.

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[203] Henri Grégoire. *Lettre aux citoyens de couleur.* 1791. Reprinted in Bryan Edwards, Esq. *An Historical Survey of the French Colony in the Island of St. Domingo. (*London: John Stockdale for Piccadilly, 1797). 88-101. Found in "The Making of the Modern World," the Goldsmith's Library Collection.

While Grégoire was pleased with the May decree, the *Amis des Noirs* feared its long-term consequences on the goal of ending slavery. By granting rights only to free blacks who qualified for active citizenship, the *Amis des Noirs* argued that the May decrees basically constitutionalized slavery in the colonies.[204] Breaking with Grégoire, the Amis addressed the National Assembly in July, 1791 insisting that they could not embrace the 15 May decree without "deviating from eternal principles." The Amis demeaned the decree's stipulations that "legislators can never pronounce with regard to slaves, except when the colonies demand it; and this article is constitutional." Since the colons clearly and openly exercised profound prejudice against non-whites, especially slaves whose labor determined their wealth, the Amis despaired that the Assembly had bound itself to perpetuating slavery with no outlet to legislate gradual emancipation. The group nullified the constitutionality of the decree based on the fact that the constitution "could only embrace the distribution of powers and their functions, and the fate of slaves is not a power." Further, the Amis insisted that the Declaration of the Rights of Man laid out the fate of men, so a similar provision against slaves' potential freedom was a "manifest violation" of declaration and constitution because "never can a constituent or legislative assembly delegate to one class of men the right to dispose of the liberty and the fate of another."[205] Although the Amis supported citizenship for the *gens du couleur*, they feared that the May decrees would bestow it to sustain slavery. This group favored gradual emancipation for slaves yet still supported genuine universalism that would eventually include all inhabitants of the French Empire within the Declaration's

[204] Gauthier, "Perissent les colonies plutot qu'un principe!" Pg. 98. Excerpt of Société des Amis des Noirs, *Addresse à l'Assemblée Nationale,* July 1, 1791.
[205]Gauthier, "Perissent les colonies plutot qu'un principe!" Pg. 98. Excerpt of Société des Amis des Noirs, *Addresse à l'Assemblée Nationale,* July 1, 1791.

purveyance. Granting colonial assemblies the power to delay a ruling on the status of blacks born to slave parents might ultimately impede the emancipation of French slaves.

The Amis clearly suspected the long-term consequences of the May 15 decree and its extension of rights only to very small number of free blacks while potentially endangering future attempts at emancipation. Other abolitionists, like Grégoire, viewed the new law a victory. The colonial lobby, however, exploded in outrage. In Cap Francais, whites threatened to cut all dealings with the Bordelaise upon hearing of their former commercial ally's congratulatory letter to the National Assembly for the May 15 decree. As whites learned that the French government would force even a modicum of racial equality in their city, Cap Francais erupted into agitation against metropolitan policy. Governor Blanchelande even refused to enforce the decree, giving whites hope that their racist autonomy could persist.[206]

By July, white colons were discussing secession and organizing united resistance to the decree. Then, to the horror of whites in Le Cap, a slave insurrection engulfed the region in August as black slaves burned plantations and were rumored to boast of plans to "murder all the whites." Throughout the region, rebel slaves destroyed "not only the cane fields, but also the manufacturing installations, sugar mills, tools and other farm equipment, storage bins, and slave quarters; in short, every material manifestation of their existence under slavery and its means of exploitation."[207] On August 23, a battle-wearied man rode into Le Cap, brandishing his sword, exclaiming, "To arms, citizens, our brothers are being slaughtered and our properties are being burned; all the slaves of the

[206] Jeremy Popkin, *You Are All Free: The Haitian Revolution and the Abolition of Slavery. (*New York: Cambridge University Press. 2010), 72-73.
[207] Dubois, *Avengers of the New World,* 96.

plain are advancing with fire and iron in hand!"[208] The white colons found themselves awakened by a nightmarish shift in consciousness to the reality of their worst fears. One master demanded incredulously, "How could we ever have known that there reigned among these men, so numerous and formerly so passive, such a concerted accord that everything was carried out exactly as was declared?"[209] The answer for many lay with the free men of color, who presumably allied with their black slave brothers to incite race war.

The forced application of the May 15 decrees and subsequent white opposition had piqued the island's racial tensions, so the August slave insurrection ignited already combustible feelings between whites and free coloreds. Free *gens du couleur* were blamed for directing the slave conspiracy since whites believed slaves incapable of organizing themselves in resistance without the aid of "civilized" outsiders. The worst fears of the colons were becoming reality: the free men of color had allied with the black slaves to unleash violence and Armageddon on the white population. Fearful of white vengeance for the purported influence of free coloreds in the insurrection, the free *gens du couleur* in Cap Francais approached the whites and pledged to help defend the town against the slave insurgents. The free men of color even offered their wives and children as hostages to convince the whites of their stance against the slaves and stave off white retributive violence against their class.[210]

If slaves controlled events in the Northern Province, the clash between free coloreds and whites prompted revolt in other regions. In the Western Province, free coloreds secured a military alliance with rebel slave groups calling themselves the Swiss

[208] Dubois, *Avengers of the New World,* 96.
[209] Dubois, *Avengers of the New World,* 97.
[210] Popkin, *You Are All Free,* 73.

in honor of the king's Swiss mercenaries. This newly forged alliance coined themselves the "Confederates" and successfully trapped their white opponents in cane fields where fire spread rapidly. A "concordat" between local authorities and the Confederates stopped hostilities, but the Port-au-Prince white authorities, after a series of bureaucratic slip-ups, left the Swiss who had surrendered to die of starvation and sickness on a boat in harbor as their former enemies and compatriots looked on. Worse, the conservative free colored leadership had acquiesced to this horror. The scars of the Port-au-Prince incident were deep and festering, prompting free coloreds to declare war on whites. Both sides of the color line recruited slaves into their ranks, discrediting the plantation slave system and offering the slaves a taste of autonomy.[211] Saint Domingue couldn't even achieve stability among free coloreds and blacks, much less between non-whites and whites. By late November, the Western and Southern Provinces, like the North, were in a state of war.

The colony's implosion bolstered the growing strength of the colonial lobby, the opponents of the May decrees smirking and gloating as their prophesies became reality. The May decrees had to be overturned to restore order. A September 25, 1791 pamphlet penned by pro-colon M. Roussillou rehashed the customary but contemporarily compelling economic case to persuade the National Assembly to modify the spurious May 15 decree. M. Roussillou lauded the March 8 and October 12 decrees for settling colonial agitation in 1790. The May 1791 decree, however, not only reneged on the earlier constitutionally recorded mandates granting a degree of colonial autonomy but also compromised "our lives and our property" as slaves revolted and whites bucked

[211] Dubois, *Avengers of the New World,* 121-122.

metropolitan authority.[212] M. Roussillou, contrary to Bordeaux's earlier support statement, attested that the port towns of Bordeaux, la Rochelle, Le Havre, Rouen, and Marseille experienced "terror" from the May decree. The pro-colon author even criticized the Abbé Grégoire for ludicrously stating that commercial considerations carried little weight in determining the May decree when the colons "feared for their existence" in the face of losing their property and their livelihoods. Grégoire and other free *gens du couleur* advocates elevated philosophy and the claims of the Revolution, but the pro-colonial lobby worshiped at the alter of profit, irrefutably melding financial gain with racial hierarchy. Whereas advocates for free blacks' citizenship wed economic criteria to political rights irrespective of race, opponents of the May decrees threatened that legal change of the existing racial hierarchy would create economic disaster.

M. Roussillou reminded the Assembly delegates that "if man is free to complain of his sufferings, then just men must listen to them." So before the Assembly ruled on maintaining the May decree with no modifications, the colon plea must be heard. Taking another shot at Grégoire, Roussillou mocked philanthropy, claiming, "It's more beautiful, more sublime to go and search for objects of pity in another hemisphere than to concern yourself with the unhappiness… that [is] the price of these grand efforts for humanity."[213] Listing the breadth of professionals involved in petitioning the Assembly for change, Roussillou vowed on behalf of the petitioners that their interests were "the most pressing" for commerce and thus for all of France. [214]

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[212] *Opinion de M. Roussillou, sur l'Affaire des Colonies,* 25 Septembre 1791. In University of Florida Special Collections. French Revolutionary Pamphlets. Box 29, Pamphlet 2487. Pg 1-2.
[213] *Opinion de M. Roussillou, sur l'Affaire des Colonies,* Pg 3-4.
[214] *Opinion de M. Roussillou, sur l'Affaire des Colonies,* Pg 4.

The author detailed the monetary specifics of the French balance of trade based on colonial goods: exporting colonial material offered an annual prospect of 148 millions, and without these goods, French exports would shrink. France would then grow more and more impoverished because of "continual outflow of cash" to purchase goods formerly gained from the colonies and "suppression of industries that sustain colonial commerce." Basically, Roussillou outlined the intensity of the economic stakes that demanded retaining colonial stability and a mutually respectful relationship between islands and continent. He concluded with a blatant directive to guarantee colonial autonomy regarding commerce and thus the status of free coloreds: "Everyone knows, and experience has taught us, that commerce, peace, freedom, security, and protection are necessary to prosper; that trouble and war discourage prosperity and finish by destroying it."[215] In validating colonial power to make laws concerning the status of free and non-free persons of color, the Assembly could avoid "great unhappiness."

Roussillou concluded with advice that "it's not enough…to be just, it is necessary still to act with prudence." To maintain racial balance and thus commercial stability, the Assembly must remember that "true justice…has missed its goal, if in doing good, it has not avoided all the bad that was within its power to eliminate."[216] Suavely upholding the principles of the Revolution in rhetoric, M. Roussillou epitomizes the colonial lobby's strategy of spouting the need for extending natural rights to non-whites while truly seeking to maintain the racial status-quo and uphold commercial prosperity. His rhetoric reveals how much racism and fear of pioneer legislation motivated the colonial lobby.

[215] *Opinion de M. Roussillou, sur l'Affaire des Colonies.* Pg 5-7.
[216] *Opinion de M. Roussillou, sur l'Affaire des Colonies,* Pg 8.

Roussillou articulated the colons' economic priority over philosophical and philanthropic reform, explicating their view of natural rights in relation to their property and purses.

Contrary to M. Roussillou, a September 1791 letter from M. Louis Monneron, Deputy of the *Indes Orientales*, reversed the pro-colons theories to pronounce that continued oppression of the increasingly wealthy and powerful free *gens du couleur* would spell material disaster for the colonies and the French nation.[217] M. Monneron admitted to the prevalent sentiment that the May decree would agitate the Saint-Domingue colons. Despite the entrenched opposition of deputies who voted against the decree, and the backing of commercial towns demanding the law's suspension, Monneron nonetheless reminded his audience that the mandate was "founded on justice and on politics." He expressed that the dispute in question at bottom pertained to "depriving free men of their natural right" based on the "demand of the white Colons" to advance "a purely honorific distinction that certifies their origin and satisfies their prejudices…"[218] He reversed colons' constitutional defense of the October decree by arguing that it had placed the fate of free coloreds in the hands of prejudiced colonial delegates disproportionately concerned with their property. The National Assembly, recognizing the injustice of the October 12 decree, returned to the true principles of the March 28, 1790 decree that allotted political rights to qualified, free non-whites. Monneron too disputed the colons' constitutional argument for overturning the May 15 decree, stating instead that the law constitutionalized justice for eligible free men of color.

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[217] *Lettre de M. Louis Monneron, Sur le decret du 15 Mai 1791, en faveur des hommes libres de couleur.* In University of Florida Special Collections. French Revolutionary Pamphlets. Box 23, Pamphlet 1992.
[218] *Lettre de M. Louis Monneron,* Pg. 4

Cleverly, Monneron transposed the pro-Colons economic argument demanding modification of the May decree. Quoting Julien Raimond, he enumerated the mulattoes' status on the island as owners of one-quarter of the land and one-third of the slaves. Further, their population had quadrupled in the last fifteen years, as the white colon population stagnated because of emigration to the metropole. Free men of color were "increasing their property with an astonishing rapidity since they devote themselves to their culture with the order and attachment that the natal country alone can inspire."[219] Native mulattoes truly understood the colony and were deeply entrenched in its success. Considering the vitality of the free colored population to the island's economy and culture, the National Assembly "in good politics" decreed political freedom for this most productive and growing class. Rather than wrecking the colonies, the French legislature's ruling in fact conserved them. If the Colons alone had retained power over the mulattoes, the island would have been destined for "certain war." In effect, the sustained oppression of the free men of color would have relegated the colony to a "vast desert" as these "sub-alterns" fought to protect their "life, liberty, and property."[220]

For Monneron, the island revolts and crisis between the French metropole and colonies would only advance if the Assembly deferred to white Colons and refused "justice" to the men of color. Even if loss of the colonies was one potential outcome of May 15, "all our resources will not be destroyed, we must not despair of the health of France…" Similar to Nemours' claims, Monneron upheld principle over colony, deciding that loss of empire in the name of virtuous laws would ultimately benefit France: "When

[219] *Lettre de M. Louis Monneron,* Pg. 8-9.
[220] *Lettre de M. Louis Monneron,* Pg. 8-9.

you no longer cut the vines, you no longer sow the land."[221] Capitulating to the fearful prejudice of the white Colons would usurp the constitutional rights of the free men of color and compromise the principles of the Revolution. Rather than pruning free *gens du couleur* from the tree of liberty, Monneron advocated pruning "counter-revolutionary" white colons.

Despite vociferous efforts to maintain the May decrees' rulings, slave revolts in Saint-Domingue and white colons' threats to secede persuaded the National Assembly to annul the decree in September 1791. On the 24th, it declared authority over the "exterior regime" of the colonies, particularly trade policies, but "the laws concerning the state of unfree persons and the political status of men of color and free blacks" were returned to the purveyance of the local assembly. Years of struggle, the death of Ogé and Chavannes, months of indiscriminate killing in Port-au-Prince now culminated in a frustrating return to no political rights for free blacks and no power against racist colonial assemblies.[222] The Colonial Assembly subsequently banned any alterations to the status of free men of color until the slaves laid down their arms. The racial tensions in Saint-Domingue reached frightening heights as mulatto agitation in the South evolved into open, armed rebellion in collaboration with slaves. Rebels in the West seized Port au Prince, and Le Cap was burned to the ground. Monneron's prophesies were reaching fruition as slaves and *gens du couleur* warred against the racist status-quo.[223]

In response to the revocation of the May 15 decree, Milscent Créole published *Sur les troubles de Saint-Domingue*, a vitriolic condemnation of the "despotic party " of pro-slavery colons who had sparked the slave and free-black revolts on the island. Créole

[221] *Lettre de M. Louis Monneron,* Pg. 10-12.
[222] Dubois, *Avengers of the New World,* 125.
[223] Popkin, *You are all free.*

namely berated Antoine Barnave, Pierre Victor Malouet, Moreau de Saint-Méry, and their consorts, a roll-call of leading slavery proponents. Créole urged the Assembly to grant liberty to free blacks to maintain harmony on the island, claiming his certainty that only the free blacks had the ability to conserve "this happy equilibrium" between slaves and colons, "without which you have just seen… [that] the colonies run the risk of total subversion." Using the revolts in the colonies as proof, Créole reintroduced phenotype in favor of citizenship rights for free blacks who not only deserved them but would also serve colon interests if given them.[224] If free blacks found no allies among the colons, they had no choice but to ally with the slaves, resist oppression, and secure their rights.

Revoking the May decrees backfired and only fueled non-white agitation in the colony. The commissioners who delivered news of the September revocation also announced the new French constitution that "destroyed 'stone by stone' the 'edifice of the Old Regime.'" The king had agreed to the new government and hoped to bring peace to France after years of revolution, so in the spirit of peace and stability, the National Assembly had decreed amnesty for "acts of revolution" throughout the empire, including the colonies. A return to order would result in forgiveness for participants in war and violence. Of course, race entered the debate regarding colonial application since "granting amnesty to 'free coloreds and free blacks' would establish 'a perfect equality between them and the whites,'" an unacceptable proposition considering the recent race war.[225] To accept the racially inferior insurgents as equals and declare their rebellion "an act of revolution" worthy of amnesty would be to legitimize it, threatening the institution of slavery and white power. But the slaves were already a legitimate political power, and

[224] Piollet, Piquionne, and Roux. "Milscent Créole, historiean de la Révolution de Saint-Domingue 1790-1794." Pg. 27-28.
[225] Dubois, *Avengers of the New World,* 125.

the commissioners aptly realized that to end the conflict, insurgents must be guaranteed amnesty. The insurgent leaders Jean-Francois and Biassou capitalized on the situation and negotiated a plan to end the revolt: grant "liberties" to several hundred insurgents and amnesty to those remaining. In return, they would call off the war and coax the rebels to return to plantations. The planter-heavy assembly refused to "lower themselves so far" as to negotiate with "rebel negroes," so a prime opportunity to end the slave insurrection evaporated.[226] Clearly the colonies could not govern themselves in the fog of race war.

Abolitionists in Paris and London scrambled to cover ground lost by the insurrection, blaming the slave revolt on "the Slave Trade" or the slaves' "right to resist oppression" just as the white colonists in their strivings against French legislation. Jean-Paul Marat labeled the whites "despotic masters of the mulattoes and tyrannical masters of the blacks," so the latter was fully justified in violent measures to "overthrow the cruel and shameful yoke under which they suffer" and to "use any means available," even "massacring their oppressors to the last."[227] On the flip side, some were repelled by the colonial violence, including former champion of abolition Olympe de Gouges. De Gouges admonished the slaves for imitating their tyrants and thereby justifying enslavement: "Men are not born in irons, and now you prove them necessary."[228] The abolitionists were cornered by the fearful backlash of the whites and the imposing demands of rebellious slaves. The answer, according to leading abolitionist Brissot, lay in the free people of color. Whereas earlier debates for free coloreds' citizenship divorced the issue from phenotype, abolitionists now cloaked their defense in the trappings of race.

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[226] Dubois, *Avengers of the New World,* 126-128.
[227] Jean Paul Marat, *L'Ami du peuple,* Décembre 12, 1791, in Jacques De Cock and Charlotte Goetz *Jean-Paul Marat: Œuvres Politiques, 1789-1793,* (Brussels, 1993), 3788. Reprinted in Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World, Pg.* 129.
[228] Dubois, *Avengers of the New World,* 129.

Just as the revolt in Port-au-Prince reached calm through inter-racial concordats between whites and free men of color, so too would the alliance between free coloreds and whites pacify the racial eruptions on the island.[229]

So, in the wake of slave and free colored mutiny, the argument about racial equality "had been transformed by the sight of the smoke rising from burnt-out plantation buildings and cane fields."[230] Initial proposals for granting free blacks citizenship were founded in economic interests independent of race, but the shifting racial alliances made the new debates contingent on race. In early 1792, Julien Raimond assured "his brothers in Saint Domingue" that the May 15, 1791 decree would soon be revised since "the sacred rights of man are so profoundly engraved upon all hearts" that Parisians, particularly the Jacobin clubs, "are indignant" that differences still remain between free men. Raimond further encouraged his friends that "our defenders are multiplying" as the cause of the *gens du couleur* distanced itself from the cause of slaves, "which everyone agrees it would be impolitic to concern ourselves with at the present moment."[231] Slippery alliances throughout the Saint-Domingue uprisings prove the complexity of race in the colonial question, even among those of varying degrees of African descent.

In the name of racial and economic order, the National Assembly spent one day, March 28, debating racial equality in the colonies, a topic embroiled in years of revolt and vitriolic rhetoric. Debate over the ruling circulated around the subsequent articles of urgency following the initial decree, namely determining the instigators of the rebellion and how to secure stability and peace. Deputy Pierre Bergeras' opinion entreated the

[229] Dubois, *Avengers of the New World.* 130.
[230] Dubois, *Avengers of the New World,* 130.
[231] *No. 13 in the Correspondence of Julien Raimond with his Brothers of Santo Domingo.* Reprinted in Anna Julia Cooper's *Slavery and the French Revolution*. 184-185.

Assembly, "If iron and fire ravage the French in Saint-Domingue, don't accuse philosophy that enlightened a humanity brutalized by slavery, nor philanthropy that searched to assist it."[232] Bergeras instead blamed "the mother country" for all injustice against the free men of color since the French Assembly extended rights on May 15 then revoked them on September 24. This revocation gave the free men of color no recourse but to resist the oppression of their own government.

Further, the May 15 decree differentiated based on a man's parents' status when the law should in fact "recognize [man] as born free," according him "civil attributes" as such. The Code Noir didn't distinguish between men "born free" or men who "became free" but stated that "all *affranchis* were considered born free, and all free men were citizens."[233] Bergeras then embodied the Enlightenment's determination of man's natural rights from birth and the government's responsibility to uphold these rights:

> Should equality between free men be less sacred under the reign of liberty than under despotism? Does African blood degrade men whom it enlivens or does it dishonor European blood when mixed? Does the color of a Negro and his descendants wound them in regards to the law and render them indigent of their blessings? No, a prescription so immoral and unjust cannot be tolerated under a legislation who dissipated all the phantoms of prejudice and pride and who sees in the great French family only what really is: man and citizen.[234]

He concluded with affirmations that the National Assembly should grant all free men, including non-whites, political rights and thus prove "the honor of the nation, which can only be as grand as it is just."[235] Interestingly enough, Bergeras considered all free men of color "French" and therefore members of the "great French family" as either "man or

[232] *Séance de 28 mars, 1792.* In *Archives Parlementaires,* Volume 40. (Paris : Librairie administrative de Paul Dupont), 581.
[233] *Séance de 28 mars, 1792.* 582.
[234] *Séance de 28 mars, 1792.* 582.
[235] *Séance de 28 mars, 1792.* 583.

citizen." Slaves, however, fell beyond his purveyance, perhaps because they were not considered "French."

As the political climate intensified and war loomed on the horizon, the French legislature desired stability and peace in the colonies. Bergeras estimated that the Assembly's original malfeasance, first in the May 15 decree discriminating against *affranchis* not born to free parents and then with the decrees' revocation against all free men of color, stimulated the mulattos to revolt against oppression. Therefore, constitutionalizing their century-old rights to freedom would appease their desires for justice and calm their rebellious actions. Ultimately, after only one day of debate, the French National Assembly decreed on March 28, 1792 political and civil liberty for all free men, of all colors, regardless of their parents' status: "The National Assembly recognizes and declares that the men of color and free blacks must enjoy equality of political rights, just as the white colons do."[236] King Louis XVI signed the decree into law on April 4, 1792.

Meanwhile, in Saint-Domingue, the Cap Francais Colonial Assembly voted on May 28, 1792 to bar any concessions to free people of color or blacks until the insurrections ceased.[237] Shortly thereafter, the colony learned of the French Assembly's March 28 ruling, continuing to escalate racial tensions and white colon resentment of French meddling. The Convention sent Commissioners Léger Felicité Sonthonax and Étienne Polverel to the colony after the March 1792 decree to ensure the application of rights for free *gens du couleur* only to find the island in an open slave revolt. The planters blamed the revolt on the meddling of the abolitionists, the free coloreds, and

[236] *Séance de 28 mars, 1792.* 575.
[237] Popkin, *You Are All Free,* 80-81.

counterrevolutionaries, an argument that would continue throughout the subsequent years of the clash over slavery.[238] From 1789 to the fall of 1792, the complicated friction between whites, free men of color, and slaves played out beyond the reach of metropolitan intervention. When Sonthonax and Polverel landed in Saint-Domingue in September, however, the colonial situation drastically changed.

In response to the continental war and colonial hostilities, the commissioners eventually assumed dictatorial powers to defend French national interests. Further, Brissotins themselves, they were convinced that ending racial discrimination against free *gens du couleur* was crucial. Therefore, the two men allied themselves and thus the French government with the free men of color.[239] The recently vindicated free *gens du couleur* now served not only as an intermediary class to influence slaves but also a crucially compatible accomplice to enact colonial change and protect French interests during wartime. As the European War against France played out in the Caribbean, the Commissioners promised freedom and citizenship to garner the support of slaves and free blacks against the British and Spanish. In response to swelling crises in the colony, Sonthonax and Polverel boldly emancipated slaves on June 20, 1793.[240] French troops were being decimated by disease, and former slaves were making alliances with the Spanish in Santo-Domingo, convinced that the Spanish king would grant them freedom. Sonthonax and Polverel, while hesitant to free the slaves, utilized the measure as a weapon of war to garner troops and maintain French possession in the face of British and

[238] See Pierre Victor Malouet, M. Deputé de la colonie de St. Domingue. *Examen de Cette Question: Quel sera pour les Colonies de l''amerique le Résultat de la Révolution Francoise, de la Guerre qui en est la Suite, et de la Paix qui doit terminer ?* De L'Imprimerie de BAYLIS, 15, Greville-Street, Helborn. 1797.
[239] Popkin, *You Are All Free,* Pg. 85.
[240] Popkin, *You Are All Free,* Pg. 85.

Spanish invaders. On February 4, 1794, the French government validated Sonthonax's proclamation, slavery was outlawed, and former slaves gained French citizenship.

The Revolutionaries had failed to conclusively apply universalist principles to non-whites until events demanded change. When political tensions silenced motions to abolish the slave trade, abolitionists embraced *la cause des gens du couleurs libres*, seemingly at the cost of *la cause des noirs.* These men abandoned phenotype and linked citizenship for free men of color with economic qualifications and the principles of the revolution. The decision over political rights for free blacks played out largely independent of phenotype, with the National Assembly finally granting suffrage in 1791 on the sole basis of property criteria equal to that of whites, purporting to be color-blind. After a year of colonial revolts involving black slaves and free men of color excluded from citizenship, in 1792, just months before the Republican revolution in France, the Assembly moved to grant liberty to all free men of color with no economic stipulation, enlarging the "French family" as a means of stabilizing the colonies while delivering on principle.

The revolts in Saint Domingue decisively changed the colonial question in France, prompting legislative action to favor free men of color, pushing white planters to threaten secession in 1791, forcing French legislators to grant full racial equality for free men in 1792, and mandating slave emancipation in 1794.[241] Until the revolutionary hand was forced, the blinders of Enlightened ideals of racial hierarchies and the financial plunder of the colonial system allowed both pro- and anti-slavery advocates to justify gradual application of the revolution's universalist promises. The changing fortunes of phenotype shifted with political expediency, intersecting with economics and the

[241] Geggus, "Racial Equality, Slavery, and Colonial Secession During the Constituent Assembly," 1303.

celebration of the rights of man to at first deny citizenship and then by 1791 to grant it, both times in the name of colonial stability. In the end, racial equality and slave emancipation came in the name of saving the colonies whereas just years before these very changes were feared to bring destruction. The power of economics and self-preservation coalesced with principle to finally deliver on the French Revolution's promises, even if in a most circuitous route.

CONCLUSION

FREEDOM'S INTERLUDE

On February 18, 1794, days after the Convention's emancipation proclamation, Citizen Chaumette produced a celebratory pamphlet on behalf of the Paris commune to welcome their "black brothers" into the great French family. He called upon the new citizens to rise in their liberty, gathering the ashes of "your loyal friend, the courageous Ogé," who first dared to speak of liberty and "brave tyranny." The great cancer of slavery had invaded two hemispheres and ravaged nations ancient and modern, but "today, the bell of eternal justice has rung, the government of a powerful and good people has pronounced the sacred words: SLAVERY IS ABOLISHED." After years of resistance, good legislators had finally answered the voice of nature, harkening in "a concert of gracious actions, cries of happiness and blessings, from the slaves whose chains you've just broken."[242]

Chaumette was channeling Enlightenment condemnation of illegal and corrupting slavery and contemptuously judging the revolutionaries' widely prevalent economic arguments in favor of slavery. His discourse surveying the most powerful nations of history, Persia, Rome, Greece, and Thebes, he concluded that slavery had ultimately brought about the demise of each: **"**The epitaph of these great civilizations boils down to three words: slavery, corruption, destruction." France, too, nearly succumbed to this fatal flaw thanks to the greedy and capricious men who answered objections to slavery's

[242] *Discours prononce par le citoyen Chaumette au nom de la commune de Paris, le Décadi 30, Pluviôse, l'an II de la République francias, une et indivisible, à la fête célébré à Paris en rejouissance de l'abolition de l'Esclavage.* Box 4, Pamphlet 533. University of Florida Special Collections. 15-21.

violation of "sacred laws of nature, principles of civilization, and imprescriptible rights of man" with the ignorant phrase, "it's my commerce." Speak to these men of slavery corrupting both master and victim, and the simpletons would respond by numbering the financial loss of freeing slaves. To this, Chaumette cried, "Stop! You will not outrage nature in my presence! I will say to my nation: These three thousand slaves, *who were never eligible to be bought or sold,* will form an army of three thousand invincible men, then they'll fight for their liberty and for a country that will be theirs."[243] Suddenly, after years of insurrection, the French legislature repented of its sins against nature, recognized the non-whites' rights to resist oppression, and heralded the apparently long-over due emancipation of slaves. Colonial non-whites seized their liberty through violent revolt, just as the Enlightenment allowed, and an exhausted and war-wearied France finally embraced the entirety of the philosophical principles of man's freedom so long ignored in the name of those credos upholding racial hierarchy and economic stability.

The colonial question "racialized the Revolution" and led to the abolition of slavery in 1794, "one of the most radical acts of the entire revolution." The significance of the questions raised by colonial issues during the French Revolution led to the world's first example of colonial representation in metropolitan government, of legally imposed racial equality in an American colony, of universal emancipation in a slaveholding territory, and of the exportation of freedom as a "weapon of war" against the imperial aims of enemy neighbors. As David Geggus has contended, the emancipation decree of 4 February, 1794 freed approximately 700,000 people without compensating slave-owners

[243] *Discours prononce par le citoyen Chaumette ,* 15-21.

for some 1,000 million livres tournois in capital investment that they lost.[244] The urgency of liberty had fleetingly trumped the enshrinement of property. If Enlightenment and revolution stammered over slavery, the events in Saint Domingue forced the Assembly to articulate in favor of non-whites. In the ever acerbic words of Sala-Molins, "Louverture settled the question, not the Enlightenment; Dessalines, not Napoleon."[245]

The French Revolutionaries delayed implementing and upholding all men's natural freedoms until the slaves and free men of color in the colonies proactively and violently demanded it. But we can only truly contextualize and begin to comprehend the revolutionaries' failures in light of the Enlightenment heritage on race and slavery. Even the most progressive Enlightenment *philosophes,* including Rousseau, Diderot, Raynal, and Condorcet, who rejected outright the institution of slavery, nonetheless insisted that black slaves needed "civilizing" by white Europeans. The entrenchment of such racial hierarchies, even among liberal thinkers, effectively prevented abolitionists from forcefully rebutting wealthy planters' contentions that change to the racial hierarchy would topple social and economic order in the colonies and metropole.

Race was the contingent factor in the evolution of colonial legislation, and the violent culmination of centuries-old racial tensions forced the revolutionary hand. Prior to colonial insurgency, phenotype barred all non-whites, even economically eligible free men of color, from enjoying the fruits of the 1789 revolution. Ogé's 1790 small-scale revolt had profound implications, however, stirring racial tensions and inspiring the 1791 decree that strove to remove phenotype from the discussion of active citizenship to

[244] David Patrick Geggus, "Racial Equality, Slavery, and Colonial Secession During the Constituent Assembly," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 94, No. 5 (Dec., 1989), 1290-1308.
[245] Louis Sala-Molins, *Dark Side of the Light: Slavery and the French Enlightenment.* Trans and with an Introduction by John Conteh-Morgan. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis. 2006. 53.

instead ground rights in property criteria. As colonial racial tensions escalated into war, phenotype came to favor free men of color who could serve as "mentors" and "pacifiers" to the angry slave mobs, prompting the 1792 proclamation of racial equality. And when white colonists refused to accept French legal changes to the racial hierarchy, Commissioners Etienne Polverel and Leger Felicité Sonthonax leaned on the newly enfranchised free men of color and ultimately newly emancipated slaves to retain French possession of Saint Domingue against the clutches of their English and Spanish foes. Whereas the Enlightenment and the New Science of the eighteenth century racialized slavery, colonial questions of rights for non-whites racialized the French Revolution.

Colonial revolt forced the hand of the French legislature, provoking an about-face philosophically and an ephemeral repudiation of gradual emancipation, the need to civilize blacks before freeing them, and the fragile balance between racial hierarchy and economic stability in the islands. Abolitionists who disapproved of the immediate emancipation of non-regenerated slaves nevertheless supported the February 4, 1794 proclamation.[246] For many abolitionists, especially the Abbé Grégoire, abolition was a matter of principle as a first step towards abolishing racism. The hastiness of France's anti-slavery legislation provoked his prescient fear that this freedom stemmed only from political opportunism. The February 4th decree was not rooted in systematic, prevalent beliefs of non-whites' need for civil and political freedom, showing the instrumental impact of Enlightenment thinking on race and slavery. When abolition was no longer politically advantageous, what would become of anti-slavery?

Because of his skepticism, Grégoire, perhaps voicing a whole history of legal

[246] Jean-François Brière and Thomas Cassirer, "Introduction." *On the Cultural Achievements of Negroes,* Translated by Thomas Cassirer and Jean-Francois Brière. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996) xxv.

ambiguities that tacitly allowed racism, insisted that the February 4th decree contain the word "slave" explicitly: "the word slave must be included; otherwise, it will be claimed once again that you wanted to say something else, and what you want is the disappearance of all slavery."[247] The slave revolts forced the hand of French legislators, but the French population remained splintered or apathetic over slavery. At the moment of abolition, two French women are rumored to have decried to each other, "My God! They have made us sisters with blacks*;* We can never live with women like that!*"*[248]

The Enlightenment *philosophes* stammered on slavery, oscillating between the recognized criminality and the perceived necessity of the institution. While French legal struggles over the "Free Soil Principle" injected anti-slavery discourse into the rhetoric for change, the abolition movement on the eve of the revolution boasted few members and low recognition. In the early years of the Revolution, abolitionists were preoccupied with the paradoxical Enlightenment views on slavery and the tangles of a fragile, splintered political climate that feared too much change too fast. After 1794, however, the few abolitionists who survived the Jacobin-Girondin struggle remained devoted to the necessity of regenerating slaves but embraced the political context and crusaded to protect the slaves' hard-won emancipation from the reviving French imperial aims. Unfortunately, the colonial lobby emerged victorious in 1802 when Napoleon reinstated slavery in the French colonies and reintroduced the *Police des Noirs* of 1777, toppling

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[247] Marcel Dorigny, "The Abbé Grégoire and the *Societé des Amis des Noirs." The Abbé Grégoire and His World* Ed. Jeremy D. Popkin and Richard H. Popkin (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000.) 35. Sue Peabody's study reveals that as slaves increasingly sued for freedom in Admirality courts, the French monarchy imposed the *Police des Noirs* in 1777, new legislation that imposed law based on color distinctions to avoid the word "slave" and force registration in the Paris parlément. See Sue Peabody, *There are no slaves in France.* (1996).

[248] Lucien-Réné Abénon. "*De la littérature des Nègres* ou défense et illustration de la race noire*." Gregoire et la Cause des Noirs (1789-1831): Combats et projets.* Ed. Marcel Dorigny and Yves Benot. (Paris: Publications de la Société française d'histoire d'Outre-mer et de l'Association pour l'étude de la colonisation européenne, 2005). 70.

decades of abolitionist achievements. Abolitionists' fears for the long-term security of France's convenient emancipation proved well-grounded with Bonaparte's 30 Floréal decree, "the most odious manifestation to [their] eyes."[249]

After Napoleon militarily reinstated colonial slavery in 1802, the unfinished revolution in Saint-Domingue culminated in Haiti's 1804 proclamation of independence. France was thus stripped of its most lucrative "pearl of the Antilles," and the French struggled to recover colonial profitability by exploiting slave labor in their remaining scattering of Antillean possessions.[250] The rights of man succumbed, once more, to economic imperative. In the spring of 1814, the restored Bourbon government nostalgically recalled the pre-Revolutionary trade prosperity in France, prompting the French government to deem slavery necessary to restore a French economy based on agriculture, manufacturing, mercantile trade, and colonial commerce.[251] Slavery, "one time abolished... had ceded a place... so large and profound in the midst of colonial populations - to a society reconstructed as if by miracle according to the predominant economic necessities, those of sugar industrialization, development of commerce, [and metropolitan] wage-earners."[252] The path to abolition was definitely the road less-traveled following the turn of the century as colonial slave labor provided the base for French industrialization.

After years of abolitionist impotence, and French embarrassment in the face of the British emancipation of 1833, the French anti-slavery movement once again began to

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[249] Marcel Dorigny. "The Abbé Grégoire and the *Société des Amis des Noirs."*
[250] Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Revolution, (*New York: Vintage Books, 1962). 302.
[251] Francis Démier, "Slavery, Colonial Economy and French Development Choices during the First Industrialization (1802-1840)." In *The abolitions of slavery: from Léger Félcité Sonthonax to Victor Schoelcher, 1793, 1794, 1848.* Edited by Marcel Dorigny. (New York : Berghahn Books., 2003) 239.
[252] Nelly Schmidt, "Avant-propos." In *Abolitionnistes de l'esclavage et réformateurs des colonies, 1820-1851 : analyse et documents.* Ed. by Nelly Schmidt. *(*Paris : Karthala, 2000), 7.

gain ground. In France, slaveholders, abolitionists, and political elites waited out the "great experiment" of British emancipation's transition from slave to free labor only to then delay emancipation efforts with fruitless bickering over the outcome of Britain's model.[253] Yet British emancipation takes credit for reviving French abolitionism post-1833. Remembering the revolution in Saint-Domingue, French legislators preoccupied themselves with potential emancipationist "contagion" from recently-freed British colonies. The questions of indemnity and maintaining colonial profitability also preoccupied many legislators on the issue of slavery. The British decree had included indemnification payments of "500 millions to free its colonial slaves" and "liberate without charges and without the risk of industrial decline in the Antilles."[254] A decade later, French abolitionists remained weary of brandishing the British precedent, since while freedom had been garnered without violence, plantation labor and output had clearly declined and the British government absorbed the debt of indemnification. Only with London's stiff protection for colonial sugar did plantation profits remain afloat.[255]

If British pressure spurred French abolitionist efforts, French emancipation still "came in a reassuringly French way, at the hands of the left, led by [Victor] Schoelcher, an atheist untainted by British evangelicalism, echoing the events of the Revolution of 1789, and in response to both domestic and colonial turmoil."[256] Unlike the long-awaited British emancipation of 1833, the French decision of 1848 was "more analogous to the Convention's spasm of emancipationism in 1794." Britain followed the "Anglo-

[253] Seymour Drescher. "British Way, French Way: Opinion Building and Revolution in the Second French Slave Emancipation." In *American Historical Review,* Vol 96. No. 3 (June, 1991) 714.
[254]Charles Fourier, « Remède aux divers esclavages. » extract from *La Phalange,* 1836. Published in Charles Dain, *De l'abolition de l'esclavage,* Paris: Bureau de la Phalange, 1836. Reprinted in *Abolitionnistes de l'esclavage et réformateurs des colonies, 1820-1851 : analyse et documents.* Ed. by Nelly Schmidt. Paris : Karthala, 2000. pg 903.
[255] Drescher. "British Way, French Way," 714.
[256] Drescher, "British Way, French Way," 712.

American" anti-slavery path, effectively harnessing massive appeal, engaging the periphery with the center, and succeeding thanks to mass propaganda, petitions, newspapers, public meetings, lawsuits, boycotts, and electoral campaigns to introduce anti-slavery candidates to Parliament. On the contrary, French abolitionism followed the "Continental" tradition, confining abolitionism to an elite group working from Paris and disengaged from the periphery.[257] Still, even if over fifty years after the 1794 emancipation decree, the February Revolution of 1848 exposed the base of slavery to the blows of abolition. The universalist claims in the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* had reached fruition for slaves in French colonies, finally reconciling Enlightenment ideal with practice and lending credence to the no longer mythical adage, "There are no slaves in France."

In 1850, Alphonse de Lamartine's jubilant production *Toussaint L'Ouverture* debuted, lauding France's emancipation decree of 1848 and honoring Haiti's leader for independence against Napoleon Bonaparte's belligerent reversal of the first 1794 emancipation decree. The play's initial scene spotlighted a black man named Samuel teaching black children "La Marseillaise Noir," "a hymn of love and fraternity" that "speaks peace." To the familiar drum-beat tune, Samuel musically breathed the liberating verse: "Child of the blacks, exiles of the world/ poor flesh changed in flocks / who of yourselves, filthy race / are in mourning for your skin! / Raise from the ground your head / dare to reclaim in any place, / Women, children, a God: / The name of man is your conquest!" He then incited his comrades to join the harmonious refrain: "Let us offer peace, Let us offer ill sufferings, Let us open (let us open) to our white friends, our arms

[257] Drescher, "British Way, French Way, " 713-714. Also, see Lawrence Jennings *French Reaction to British Slave Emancipation* (Baton Rouge, La., 1988), Chap. 7.

free from chains."[258] In the wake of liberation, France rejoiced in having fulfilled the 1789 revolution's claims at last, securing man's "natural right" to liberty, in theory, throughout the corners of the French Empire. After a decades-long interlude, the French had finally truly answered the voice of nature, broken the chains of slavery, and declared "You are all free."[259]

[258] Alphonse de Lamartine, *Toussaint L'Ouverture,* 1850. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1998.) 14.
[259] This phrase is borrowed from Jeremy Popkin's work *You Are All Free.*

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