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Inventing the Creole Citizen:
Race, Sexuality and the Colonial Order in Pre-Revolutionary Saint Domingue

A Dissertation Presented

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Yvonne Eileen Fabella

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Yvonne Eileen Fabella

We, the dissertation committee for the above candidate for the
Doctor of Philosophy degree, hereby recommend
acceptance of this dissertation.

Herman Lebovics – Dissertation Co-Advisor
Professor, Department of History

Kathleen Wilson – Dissertation Co-Advisor
Professor, Department of History

Jennifer Anderson – Chairperson of Defense
Assistant Professor, Department of History

Aisha Khan
Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology
New York University

This dissertation is accepted by the Graduate School

Lawrence Martin
Dean of the Graduate School

Abstract of the Dissertation

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Inventing the Creole Citizen examines the battle over racial hierarchy in Saint Domingue (colonial Haiti) prior to the French and Haitian Revolutions. It argues that cultural definitions of citizenship were central to that struggle. White elite colonists, when faced with the social mobility of “free people of color,” deployed purportedly egalitarian French enlightenment tropes of meritocracy, reason, natural law, and civic virtue to create an image of the colonial “citizen” that was bounded by race. The purpose of the “creole citizen” figure was twofold: to defend white privilege within the colony, and to justify greater local legislative power to French officials.

Meanwhile, Saint Domingue’s diverse populations of free and enslaved people of color, as well as non-elite whites, articulated their own definitions of race and citizenship, often exposing the fluidity of those categories in daily life. Throughout the dissertation I argue that colonial residents understood race and citizenship in gendered ways, drawing on popular French critiques of aristocratic gender disorder to contest the civic virtue of other racial groups.

To put these competing voices in conversation with one another, the dissertation is structured around a series of practices through which colonial residents fought over the racial order. Those practices include participation in local print culture, the consumption and display of luxury goods, interracial marriage and sex, and the administration of corporal punishments. French legal structures and cultural traditions were imported directly to the colony, strongly influencing each of these practices. However, I examine how these practices changed—or were perceived to change—in the colonial setting, and how colonial residents used them to negotiate local power relations.

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I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my mother, Sandra Thrift Fabella. I think it would have pleased her.

Introduction

In the years before the outbreak of the French and Haitian Revolutions, two men would criss-cross the Atlantic, traveling between the slave colony of Saint Domingue and the European power that governed it, France. Both men were defined as “creole,” that is, born in the Antilles. One, the white colonial magistrate Moreau de Saint Méry, came from another French colony, Martinique, although he and his family resided in Saint Domingue. The other, Julien Raimond, was a wealthy, educated, planter of color who had been born and lived most of his life in Saint Domingue. During the early years of the revolutions, these two men would debate the boundaries of French citizenship in the colonies; Raimond argued for the extension of citizenship rights to wealthy free men of color, while Moreau wanted to limit those rights to whites. Yet this debate began even earlier, before French revolutionaries created the legal category of “citizen” in 1789, and it took place on both sides of the Atlantic.

In the 1780’s, before the “citizen” became a person invested with civil and political rights in the nation, these men, and people in France and Saint Domingue in general, defined the term more ambiguously. Yet metropolitans and colonists generally agreed that a “citizen” was someone with civic virtue—a person who placed the greater good above his or her own self-interest. However, civic virtue appeared incompatible with the greed and immorality that Europeans typically associated with colonial life. In other words, according to the conventional wisdom in Europe, creoles could not be citizens. Separately, Moreau and Raimond would try to convince France’s Colonial

Ministry otherwise, although they made very different arguments. Theirs were just two of the voices contributing to the contested category of “creole citizenship,” if two of the most powerful. This dissertation explains how the residents of Saint Domingue—white, black, and “mixed;” free and enslaved; men and women—fought to define that category in Saint Domingue’s courtrooms, plantations and markets, as well as in print in both the colony and the metropole.

For white colonists, defining the “creole citizen” had concrete social and political implications. By asserting that they were the most virtuous members of colonial society—the true “creole citizens”—colonial whites sought to justify their own legal privileges. Further, white elites hoped such characterizations would convince the Colonial Ministry to grant them greater legislative power. When Moreau sailed from Saint Domingue to France in July 1783, he probably had this latter goal in mind. Engaged in an ambitious project to create a compendium of French Antillean laws and notable court decisions, Moreau travelled to France to obtain the financial support of the Colonial Minister and access to ministerial records.¹ The Minister had already granted Moreau royal privilege to undertake the project, which would soon be published as the six-volume *Laws and Constitutions of the French Antillean Colonies*.²

From the perspective of the Ministry, such a legal compendium would centralize colonial jurisprudence, thereby permitting greater royal control over colonial magistrates. Moreau desired a different outcome, however. He hoped that the compendium would

¹ Etienne Taillemite, "Moreau de Saint-Méry," in *Déscription Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique, et Historique de la Partie Française de l'Isle Saint Domingue*, ed. Blanche Maurel and Etienne Taillemite (Paris: Société de l'Histoire des Colonies Françaises, 1958), xi-xii.

² M. Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Françoises de l'Amérique Sous le Vent*, 6 vols. (Paris: 1784).

allow for a reexamination of colonial law, and serve as a basis for its reform.³ Strongly influenced by Montesquieu, Moreau and other white colonial legal theorists of the 1770's and 1780's asserted that colonial law should be based on local custom, since the laws of France were not always well-suited to the Antilles. Furthermore, they proposed that such reform required "local knowledge," a phrase they used to describe a "secondhand, native legal sensibility to which only creole lawyers could stake claim."⁴ Because good laws could only be crafted with local knowledge, colonial lawmaking required the input—or, even the direction—of creole magistrates, who were by definition white. While they did not call for colonial independence, these magistrates desired, at the least, greater legislative autonomy for Saint Domingue and France's other colonial possessions. But white creole magistrates' claim to colonial legislative abilities rested not only on their "local knowledge;" it also depended on their ability to behave as "citizens."

For free people of color, the contest over creole citizenship had very different stakes. In Saint Domingue, all free people of African descent were legally classified as "*gens de couleur*" (people of color), and the Colonial Ministry had ensured their legal subordination to whites for much of the colonial period. Free to own land and slaves, the *gens de couleur* could not practice medicine, serve as militia officers, or occupy any public position in the colony, including the magistrature. In 1781, however, the Colonial Minister proposed a change in this longstanding policy, suggesting that it might be useful to temper the legal discrimination of the *gens de couleur* in order to secure their

³ Malick Walid Ghachem, "Sovereignty and Slavery in the Age of Revolutions: Haitian Variations on a Metropolitan Theme" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 2001), 239-242.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 221.

allegiance to the colonial state in case of a slave revolt. Raimond and other wealthy *gens de couleur* recognized this as an opportunity to improve the legal status of free people of color, and they thus set out to prove that they too were “citizens.” First, they contributed funds for a French naval ship in order to demonstrate to colonial administrators their civic virtue and patriotism. But Raimond’s efforts did not stop with fundraising. In Saint Domingue and in France, he met with Saint Domingue’s Governor and repeatedly petitioned the Colonial Minister and the King to lessen legal discrimination against the *gens de couleur*.⁵ His petitions, as we shall see, insisted on the value of *gens de couleur* to colonial society, as productive, hard-working, family-oriented property owners. Despite Raimond’s persistence, however, none of the discriminatory laws were rescinded, and the official status of the *gens de couleur* did not change, prior to the French and Haitian Revolutions. Correcting longstanding beliefs that the *gens de couleur* could not be “citizens” proved too difficult during the late-colonial period.

In Old Regime Saint Domingue, as in Old Regime France, “citizenship” was an ambiguous quality. During the French Revolution and after, it would confer political and civil rights within the nation. Before the revolution, however, no constitution defined what it meant to be a “citizen.” Courts of law occasionally clarified differences between members of the nation and “aliens” when they denied the right to inherit or devolve property to the latter.⁶ Yet the term “citizen” remained pliable. Even by the mid-late eighteenth century, as the revolution loomed, French parliamentary magistrates sometimes

⁵ Gabriel Debien, *Les Colons de Saint-Domingue et la Revolution: Essai sur le Club Massiac (Aout 1789-Aout 1792)* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1953), 37-39; John D. Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 218-221.

⁶ Peter Sahlins, *Unnaturally French: Foreign Citizens in the Old Regime and After* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

employed the terms “citizen” and “subject” interchangeably when arguing against abuses of authority perpetrated by royal and Church officials.⁷ Gradually, however, magistrates, newspaper editors, and authors of pamphlets and literary texts began to use the term in its more modern sense, one shaped by the republicanism of the ancients as well as contemporary *philosophes* like Diderot, Montesquieu and Rousseau. According to this new definition, the “citizen” was a legal and cultural member of a national community who, by virtue of that membership, possessed certain civil and political rights protected by the state. In return, this new usage implied that citizens bear certain responsibilities, both legal and moral, to benefit the social good. In its more radical usage, the concept of “citizenship” refuted the traditional notion of the divine right of kings, asserting instead that rulers’ authority came from the people they governed. Just as radical as this notion of popular sovereignty was the premise that citizens were equal before the law; no inherited privileges distinguished one citizen from another. However, just how “good” or “virtuous” a citizen one was constituted a distinction based on “merit,” thought to be measured in part by property ownership.⁸

These new legal and political definitions of the citizen were accompanied by new cultural definitions as well. This dissertation focuses primarily on the latter. In particular, it examines how late-eighteenth century people in Saint Domingue imagined the meaning of colonial citizenship as they jockeyed over the colony’s racial and political order. Drawing on descriptions of the citizen circulating in France, white colonial elites emphasized several important characteristics. First and foremost, they agreed that

⁷ Jeffrey Merrick, "Subjects and Citizens in the Remonstrances of the Parlement of Paris in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 51, no. 3 (1990).

⁸ Sahlins, *Unnaturally French: Foreign Citizens in the Old Regime and After*, 215-266.

citizens possessed civic virtue: that is, citizens put the needs of the community above their own self-interest. Likewise, they maintained that citizens were industrious, and comfortably—but not ostentatiously—wealthy because of their efforts. Out of their concern for the greater good, and their intellectual curiosity, they eagerly participated in the Enlightenment “Republic of Letters.” Thus they worked as part of a community of educated but often amateur scholars who sought to advance scientific, technological, historical and literary inquiry and encourage its circulation among the literate public. Further, they lived in nuclear families with loving relationships between spouses and children. The citizen also exhibited reason, and was capable of controlling his emotional or violent urges. Most importantly, this ideal citizen was white; according to the white elite authors who advanced this image, such qualities were unique to white creoles. Yet people of color sometimes articulated similar understandings of colonial citizenship, although often they deployed the same images to different ends. Raimond, as we will see, depicted elite, “mixed” colonists in similar ways, contrasting their laudable behavior with images of debauched whites.

None of these traits were unique to the discourse of citizenship in Saint Domingue; in fact they very closely resembled the cultural construction of the citizen in France. What differed, of course, was the social and political context in which they operated in Saint Domingue. White creole elites like Moreau employed the rhetoric of citizenship not only to oppose “ministerial despotism,” as did parliamentary magistrates in France, but also to demonstrate their ability to participate in their own governance as rational, civic-minded men. They needed to demonstrate these characteristics because white creoles were typically described, often by Europeans, as violent, unrefined, greedy

fortune-seekers more concerned with rum, gambling and casual sex than the long-term stability of the colony. In short, according to standard European depictions of them, white creoles appeared to lack civilization and civic virtue; one could not be both a citizen and a creole.

In fact, such pejorative characterizations did more than challenge white creoles' civic virtue. Their authors also called into question the very "whiteness" of white creoles. In Saint Domingue, official discriminatory policies targeting the *gens de couleur* aimed to impose a strict color hierarchy in which whites were legally and socially superior to the free people of color and the enslaved. The goal was clear: to ensure the subservience of the enslaved labor force by privileging whiteness and denigrating blackness. According to this logic, maintaining racial boundaries, and the racial and cultural purity of whiteness it implied, was vital. Yet white colonists, especially creoles, seemed culturally and even biologically degraded due to the influence of the *gens de couleur* and slaves as well as the climate. On plantations and in their households, whites were surrounded African and creole slaves. In town markets, the theater and the street, whites conducted business and sometimes interacted socially with enslaved and free people of color. European visitors reported that living in such close proximity to people of color had caused white creoles to take on some of their cultural practices. Moreover, officials, visitors and colonists alike complained that miscegenation was rampant in the colony, and they worried that the tropical environment had altered white bodies so that they differed from those of Europeans. White creoles had "degenerated," according to certain European naturalists.

John Garrigus has proposed that official efforts to discriminate against free people of color, and unofficial efforts to stereotype them in negative ways, resulted in a new, subtle “definition of whiteness.” He argues that by uniting all colonial whites as a privileged racial category, and distinguishing them from the upwardly mobile *gens de couleur*, colonial officials in France and white colonial elites hoped to prove Saint Domingue’s Frenchness even as it was increasingly populated by enslaved Africans.⁹ However, this dissertation proposes that colonial residents, including white elites, did not necessarily envision “whiteness” as a unified category. Rather, it demonstrates that colonists made important distinctions between white creoles and Europeans, particularly the French. They noted physical, cultural and moral differences between the two groups, often describing white creoles in more flattering terms than the French. In fact, for some white elites like Moreau, white creoles had the potential—largely due to their tropical birth—to be better citizens than the French.

Such an argument challenges recent interpretations of “creolization.” As will be discussed in Chapter Two, eighteenth-century Caribbean naturalists and colonists used the term “creolization” to refer to the process by which immigrants from the old world physically adapted to the climate and customs of the new world. To be a “creole” one had to be born in the new world, but immigrants to the colony who resided there for some time were said to have “creolized” (*créolisés*). In the twentieth-century, linguists took up the term to explain the origins and development of “creole” languages, by which they meant “ ‘hybrid’ languages originating in colonial contexts.” Anthropologists and historians then applied this new analytical meaning to the study of creole cultures more

⁹ Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, 160, 162.

broadly. They understood creolization as a process in which previously distinct old world cultures mixed with one another and/or adapted to new world conditions, resulting in the creation of new cultural forms.¹⁰

However, as Caribbeanist anthropologists have noted, “creolization” has of late become a generic term for cultural and biological mixture that obscures the specific historical conditions—and power relations—under which such mixture has taken place.¹¹ Like “hybridity,” “métissage” and “mestizaje,” the process of “creolization” is often interpreted as a creative, anti-colonialist force.¹² Understood in the context of racist imperial histories, biological and cultural mixture blurs the boundary between colonizer and colonized, creating a space of ambiguity that endangers imperial power. Claims of racial and cultural superiority on which colonizers justified their exploitation of indigenous people and imported forced laborers rested in part on the premise of racial and cultural purity. According to such a theorization, mixed-race people, hybrid language and the adoption by whites of “African” practices—dress, childrearing, or cuisine, for example—necessarily called that purity into question. Ironically, theorizing mixture in

¹⁰ Stephan Palmié, "Is There a Model in the Muddle? "Creolization" In African Americanist History and Anthropology," in *Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory*, ed. Charles Stewart (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2007), 180-181.

¹¹ Aisha Khan, "Good to Think? Creolization, Optimism, and Agency," *Current Anthropology* 48, no. 5 (2007); Aisha Khan, "Journey to the Center of the Earth: The Caribbean as Master Symbol," *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no. 3 (2001); Palmié, "Is There a Model in the Muddle? "Creolization" In African Americanist History and Anthropology."; Richard and Sally Price Price, "Shadowboxing in the Mangrove," *Cultural Anthropology* 12, no. 1 (1997).

¹² On hybridity, see Homi K. Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817," *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (1985). The *créoliste* theorists of the contemporary French Caribbean famously proposed such a model of creolization in Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant, *Eloge de la Créolité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993). For a well-argued critique of their position see Price, "Shadowboxing in the Mangrove." For a careful argument in favor of the revolutionary potential of “métissage” see Françoise Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries: Colonial Family Romance and Metissage* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 8-12. Kamau Brathwaite advanced the creolization thesis with reference to Jamaican colonial history and will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two. Edward Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

such a way has the unintended effect of reifying the same assertions of purity on which colonial social inequalities and exploitation rested.

However, these critics argue that the effect of such “mixing” varies according to the particular context in which it happens. Creolization, in other words, is not inherently subversive but rather can also be used to exclude or oppress.¹³ Such was the case in Saint Domingue, where some white elites did not hesitate to explain the benefits of creolization. While European visitors depicted white creoles as having degenerated from their more refined European ancestors, elites like Moreau noted all the ways in which white creoles’ bodies, customs and morality had in fact improved. By articulating the cultural and biological parameters of colonial whiteness, these elites sought to distinguish themselves from the *gens de couleur* and protect white privilege. Portraying themselves as the true colonial citizens, they attempted to naturalize the legal distinctions established by the Colonial Ministry and administrators. In their estimation, creole whiteness became not only a marker of superior virtue, reason and self-discipline, but also a justification for privileged status.

They found proof of colonial whites’ moral and intellectual superiority in their allegedly more civic-minded behaviors. By distinguishing the ways in which white creoles read, dressed, married and controlled their violent urges from the behaviors of free people of color and slaves, these white colonial elites justified whites’ superior legal

¹³ As is the case in contemporary Trinidad, where Afro-Trinidadians have taken on a “creolized” identity (as the products of Euro-Afro “mixture”), distinguishing themselves from Indo-Trinidadians who they perceive as culturally pure and therefore foreign. Aisha Khan, *Callaloo Nation: Metaphors of Race and Religious Identity among South Asians in Trinidad* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Khan, “Journey to the Center of the Earth: The Caribbean as Master Symbol.” For similar critiques of creolization-as-resistance, particularly those put forth by Brathwaite, see O. Nigel Bolland, “Creolisation and Creole Societies: a Cultural Nationalist View of Caribbean Social History,” in *Questioning Creole: Creolisation Discourses in Caribbean Literature*, ed. Verene A. Shepherd and Glen L. Richards (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2002); Price, “Shadowboxing in the Mangrove.”

status. Of course, non-whites and non-elites developed their own understandings of what it meant to be a “citizen,” and they used this discourse to advance their own political and personal agendas. In print, in the courtroom, and in the marketplace, *gens de couleur*, enslaved people, and working-class whites fought over the racial order as well, often exposing the hypocrisy behind elite whites’ supposed monopoly on virtue.

Race was not the only category limiting the universal application of French republican citizenship. Most obviously, that discourse was bounded by class: while philosophes like Diderot and Rousseau were happy to critique centuries-old social distinctions based on “artificial” noble privileges, they excluded from the category of citizens all economically dependent members of society. Indeed, the concept of “citizenship” increasingly became linked to property ownership.¹⁴ The eighteenth-century public sphere so influentially identified by Jurgen Habermas as the site in which citizens came together to become political and produce public opinion, was “bourgeois,” as Habermas himself explained.¹⁵ But eighteenth-century French republicanism was also exceedingly gendered. Joan Landes and Deena Goodman have both demonstrated that Habermas’ public sphere was inherently masculine. Whereas elite women exercised great influence within early eighteenth-century salons and even occasionally voted, such intellectual and political activities were redefined as masculine activities in later generations. Politics and intellectual debate became the purview of educated, propertied men, while their wives and daughters gained a highly circumscribed power as the moral

¹⁴ Sahlin, *Unnaturally French: Foreign Citizens in the Old Regime and After*, 217-220.

¹⁵ Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989).

authorities in the home.¹⁶ Rousseau most clearly articulated this gendered division of power in his educational treatise, *Emile*. Wildly popular in France, *Emile*, like so many other works considered “classic” Enlightenment texts, also circulated in Saint Domingue, both as a physical text and as a philosophy.

Colonists used this emerging bourgeois gender discourse to articulate ideas about race and citizenship and assert their own vision of the colonial racial order.

Administrators and white elites drew heavily on gendered imagery in their attempts to denigrate the *gens de couleur*, and that imagery was also strongly sexualized. They consistently portrayed the *gens de couleur*, and particularly “mixed” women, as the most debauched members of colonial society. Such rhetoric resonated with colonial whites for a number of reasons, but especially due to the growing free population of color. By 1789, *gens de couleur* were almost as numerous as whites. Administrators and colonists understood this group to be problematic because of its seemingly liminal state: in a society in which whiteness was supposed to connote freedom and blackness slavery, free people of color blurred the clear-cut boundaries desired by metropolitan and colonial officials. Over the course of the eighteenth century, women of color shouldered the blame for the growth of this group. Portrayed as both coldly calculating and sexually insatiable, women of color were said to lure white men into inter-racial sexual relationships in order to improve their own economic or legal status.

Administrators and visitors to the colony, as well as colonists complained about the pervasiveness of such relationships, which resulted in ever-growing numbers of “mixed” children. In practice, some women and their children acquired benefits from

¹⁶ Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: a Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).

these sexual relationships. When the mother of such a child was enslaved, both she and her child might gain their freedom as a result of their relationship to the white man. On rare occasions, white men married women of color, ensuring that their children could be legitimate heirs of the man's property. Otherwise, white men sometimes provided for their sexual partners and children in other ways, giving them gifts of property or providing living allowances, for example. Of course, many more women and children remained enslaved or economically neglected by the men. Furthermore, while some of these arrangements were in fact voluntary or even orchestrated by the women, in other instances white men forced themselves on enslaved and free women of color, whose reputations as seductresses—and their vulnerable legal status—rendered them almost defenseless. Yet in the eyes of administrators and white elites, women of color were to blame for seemingly high rates of interracial sex as well as the occasional marriage between white men and women of color. They lamented that such relationships contributed not only to the dangerous growth but also the social mobility of the free population of color. And as importantly, some white elites claimed, they discouraged white men from marrying white women, thereby preventing the growth of a native white population.

Having framed the “problem” of the *gens de couleur* as the product of illicit sexual unions between white men and women of color, white colonists and administrators easily drew on gendered, sexualized imagery circulating in France in order to explain the phenomenon. John Garrigus has argued that descriptions of free women of color rendered by white colonists often resembled those of courtiers' mistresses at Versailles, commonly demonized as over sexualized, domineering, emasculating, and exercising a

dangerous degree of influence over powerful men. Coupled with depictions of debauched free men of color, such imagery produced a feminized stereotype of the free people of color, thereby justifying their exclusion from the newly emerging colonial public sphere.¹⁷ Similarly, Doris Garraway has demonstrated that free women of color, particularly the *mulâtresse*, simultaneously represented white male “sexual hegemony” and the symbolic danger inherent in miscegenation: a blurring of the color line.¹⁸

But such studies of gendered rhetoric in the colony have tended to focus on characterizations of free people of color without considering the broader context of colonial gender discourse. This dissertation analyzes such gendered stereotypes of the *gens de couleur* and the enslaved alongside gendered constructions of the white creole. Drawing on the new Rousseauian gender conventions, white elites emphasized the masculine qualities of white creole men (reason, self-control, physical vigor) and the feminine attributes of white creole women (natural beauty, dependency, emotion, fertility). By contrast, they portrayed enslaved and free men of color as exhibiting feminine characteristics (foppish and overly instinctual) while women of color appeared dangerously masculine (assertive, calculating, and independent). Yet here again, white elite men did not control colonial gender discourse. People of color, middling whites and white women wrote and performed their own gendered understanding of race, often challenging the imagery put forth by white elites.

¹⁷ Yvonne Fabella, ““An Empire Founded on Libertinage”: The *Mulâtresse* and Colonial Anxiety in Saint Domingue,” in *Gender, Race and Religion in the Colonization of the Americas*, ed. Nora E. Jaffary (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007); Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, 151-162; John D. Garrigus, ““Sons of the Same Father”: Gender, Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue, 1760-1792,” in *Visions and Revisions of Eighteenth-Century France*, ed. Christine Adams Jack Censer, and Lisa Jane Graham (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

¹⁸ Doris Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 194-239, quote on page 230.

To put these competing articulations of gender, race and citizenship in conversation with one another, this dissertation is largely structured around a series of practices through which battles over the racial order were fought. First, however, it provides two chapters elaborating the social and political tensions at work in late-colonial Saint Domingue. Chapter One, “Free People of Color and the Stain of Slavery,” provides a short history of the *gens de couleur* in Saint Domingue and the Colonial Ministry’s evolving policy toward the group. It then argues that white colonists, facing the possibility of the end of legal discrimination against the *gens de couleur*, found other, extra-legal ways to assert the racial order they desired. They buttressed legal distinctions with cultural and biological ones, hoping to demonstrate that people of color were naturally very different from whites. Toward that end, Moreau constructed an elaborate racial taxonomy in order to clarify the phenotypic and genealogical distinctions among whites and non-whites.

Chapter Two, “Inventing the Creole Citizen,” argues that white elites constructed an image of the virtuous white creole citizen not only to distinguish themselves from the socially and politically mobile *gens de couleur*, but also to uphold their desire for greater legislative autonomy. Focusing largely on Moreau’s publications in France and Saint Domingue, as well as a public lecture presented in Paris, the chapter explains that Moreau and other white colonists blended popular ideas about the noble savage, climate theory, and masculine republicanism to invent the image of the creole citizen, who was by definition white. Faced with European suspicions of cultural, intellectual, and racial degeneration, these authors suggested that white creole men and women could be citizens—better citizens, in fact, than the French.

Chapter Three, “Creolizing the Enlightenment: Print Culture and the Limits of Colonial Citizenship,” considers the practice of colonial print culture, and particularly the text and readership of the colonial newspaper, the *Affiches Américaines*. Proclaimed as an agent of enlightenment and civic participation in Saint Domingue, in fact the *Affiches Américaines* worked to exclude *gens de couleur* from the community of enlightened colonial citizens imagined by its elite white editors. Meanwhile, the newspaper encouraged readers to take pride in their French heritage and in the French nation while reminding them of their distinctiveness as creoles. However, even as white elites sought to exclude them, *gens de couleur* asserted their civic virtue and their Frenchness by participating in a national fundraising effort advertised in the newspaper.

Chapter Four, ““Rule the Universe With the Power of Your Charms”: Marriage, Sexuality and the Creation of Creole Citizens,” considers the “problems” of miscegenation and interracial marriage in the colony. Beginning with a history of marriage, marital law, and concubinage, it explains that administrators and colonists viewed colonial marriage as a corrupted institution: French marriage laws were difficult to police in the colony, and male colonists preferred to live in extramarital relationships with women of color than to marry. But by contrasting the allegedly unnatural sexuality and femininity of women of color with that of the more maternal and domestic white creole woman, white creole elites encouraged white men to marry white women, leaving women of color as their mistresses. However, free men and women of color took up this same discourse of marital virtue in order to argue for their own interests, in court disputes and in negotiations with the Colonial Minister over the legal status of *gens de couleur*.

Chapter Five, titled “Legislating Fashion and Negotiating Creole Taste: Discourses and Practices of Luxury Consumption,” considers how larger battles over the social hierarchy were waged through the display of luxury items. Elite whites deployed metropolitan critiques of luxury consumption—used to denigrate aristocratic practices of consumption in France—to attack the allegedly ostentatious display of luxury goods by *gens de couleur* and slaves. By contrast, they used gendered descriptions of white luxury consumption, rendering it a virtuous characteristic of industrious men and their domestic wives. Free women of color and white women fought battles over racial hierarchy through the display of fashion and luxury goods, in the marketplace, the theater, and sometimes in court. The chapter ends with a discussion of a court battle in which a white female fashion merchant employed racialized imagery of consumption to sue her *mulâtresse* client.

Chapter Six, “Spectacles of Violence: Race, Class and Punishment in the Old Regime and the New World,” examines the role of violence in the maintenance of the colonial racial order. It focuses on the role of local colonial courts in defining the category of “*gens de couleur*” by sentencing free people of color found guilty of insulting or committing violence against whites. It argues that colonial courts tended to sentence free people of color to public corporal punishments such as whipping, branding and display in the iron collar in order to remind onlookers that the condemned had a direct link to slavery. Although such punishments had been imported from France along with the colonial justice system, they took on a different meaning when implemented in a slave society. Slave traders, planters and overseers whipped, shackled, and branded slaves as forms of discipline and punishment. Therefore, this chapter argues that

performing such punishments publicly, on free people, would have resonated differently in the colony than in the metropole. By visually associating free people of color who had physically or verbally assaulted whites with the disciplinary tools of slavery, colonial magistrates hoped to assert a hierarchy that people of color had dared to transgress. Meanwhile, outside the jurisdiction of the court, white elites sought to distance themselves from instances of extreme violence toward the enslaved. Instead, they blamed the most egregious acts of violence toward slaves on lower class whites, allowing them to claim for themselves a monopoly on reason, self-control and civic virtue, traits fundamental to citizenship.

Moreau and other white elites desired a colonial social hierarchy in which whites occupied the top rung. The boundaries on which such a hierarchy depended were quite porous, however. Thus these men sought new ways to shore up those boundaries, both discursively and in practice. If race alone could not sufficiently delineate colonial society, then codes of behavior could be another way to “perform” difference.¹⁹ Claiming that white creoles, especially elites, behaved in the most virtuous and the most civilized ways—and hoping that they would in fact live up to such claims—they simultaneously justified white legal privilege and creole legislative autonomy. Pejorative images of people of color, and the French, served as convenient foils against which the white creole citizen could be imagined. Just how that figure was born in Saint Domingue, and how it was shaped by competing discourses of race, gender and citizenship, is the subject of this dissertation.

¹⁹ Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2003), 151-155.

Chapter One

Free People of Color and the “Stain” of Slavery

Over the course of the eighteenth century, Saint Domingue’s free population of color grew considerably. The 1700 census counted a mere 500 free people of color in the colony, living alongside 4,074 whites and 9,082 slaves. By 1789, the free population of color had grown to 27,500, and this may have been an underestimate. In the same year, the census counted 30,826 whites. Thus, on the eve of the revolution, the free people of color, or *gens de couleur*, were almost as numerous as the white population. The enslaved population, having grown to 465,429, vastly outnumbered both groups.¹

This chapter will examine how the French colonial administration responded to the growth of the free population of color in its Caribbean possessions, particularly in Saint Domingue. After a brief discussion of how this group came to exist, the chapter explains why the French Colonial Ministry, colonial administrators in Saint Domingue, and local white magistrates came to understand the *gens de couleur* as a threat to colonial stability. The *Code Noir*, issued by Louis XIV in 1685 and designed to regulate slave ownership in the French Antilles, had in fact granted legal equality to all free people. However, colonial authorities soon considered free descendants of slaves to be a source of colonial instability, since their presence threatened to encourage “insubordination” in

¹ Charles Frostin, *Les Révoltes Blanches À Saint Domingue aux XVIIe et XVIIIe Siècles (Haiti Avant 1789)* (Paris: Editions de l'Ecole, 1975), 28, 304. For the likelihood that the free population of color was underrepresented in the census, see Stewart King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig: Free People of Color in Pre-Revolutionary Saint Domingue* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia, 2001), 45-50.

slaves. The Colonial Ministry and administrators issued a series of discriminatory laws, primarily during the years following the Seven Years' War, designed to turn the *gens de couleur* into an intermediary "caste" between whites and slaves.² In so doing, they attempted to define a racial category, the "*gens de couleur*," as socially inferior to whites due to their descent from slavery.

However, by the late 1770's the Colonial Ministry began to re-think its policy toward the *gens de couleur*, and to consider the abolition of certain discriminatory laws and the integration of some *gens de couleur* with whites. Although such proposals did not challenge the premise of white privilege upheld by the discriminatory laws, white colonial elites found them unacceptable. Their opposition was especially acute near the end of the colonial period, in the mid-1780s, when the debate over the *gens de couleur* was exacerbated by other conflicts between metropolitan and local authorities.

Faced with the possible amelioration of the condition of free people of color, white colonists increasingly employed extralegal mechanisms to exclude and oppress. One prominent white magistrate, Moreau de Saint Méry, drew on the work of naturalists to construct an elaborate racial taxonomy that would clarify any ambiguity regarding the boundary between white and non-white. Thus this chapter explains how French colonial administrators and magistrates helped turn the "*gens de couleur*" into a racial category as well as a legal category.

Although whites often lumped the *gens de couleur* together, attributing to them all the same derogatory stereotypes, the group defied simple categorization. While all were free descendants of Africans, they included the formerly enslaved (*affranchis*), as well as

² Yvan Debbasch, *Couleur et Liberté: Le Jeu du Critère Ethnique dans un Ordre Juridique Esclavagiste* (Paris: Librairie Dalloz, 1967), see Chapter Two.

those who were several generations removed from slavery. A *gen de couleur* could be very light-skinned—such as those defined as *quarterons* (one-quarter black), for example—or a dark-skinned *noir*. Often, a free person of color might be referred to generically as a *mulâtre* or a *mulâtresse*, even though the term had, in theory, a very specific meaning: a person with one white and one black parent. Just as *gens de couleur* did not all look alike, neither did they all share the same social or economic conditions, as will be discussed below. This did not, however, prevent colonial officials from imposing color-coded labels which were followed by the word “*libre*” or “*affranchi*” to indicate whether they had been free at birth or manumitted.

Manumission and Early Administrative Opposition to the Free People of Color

The population of *gens de couleur* grew due to a number of factors. First, like free descendants of Africans throughout the Caribbean, this group experienced a higher rate of natural increase than whites and the enslaved, largely due to their tendency to be locally-born. Women born on the island avoided the physically debilitating process of “seasoning” and therefore tended to be in better health, allowing them to bear children more easily than other women. Moreover, as free women their health was not impaired by the hard labor and brutal punishments experienced by enslaved women. Likewise, the free population of color as a whole had a lower mortality rate than other colonial residents.³

³ Barbara Bush, “Hard Labor: Women, Childbirth, and Resistance in British Caribbean Slave Societies,” in *More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas*, ed. David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig: Free People of Color in Pre-Revolutionary Saint Domingue*, 43-45.

While some *gens de couleur* were free at birth, others had at one time been slaves. These *affranchis* could have acquired their freedom by law or by fact. Any legal path to freedom required the consent of one's owner and the colonial administrators. In all, very few slaves gained their legal freedom in Saint Domingue. David Geggus has estimated that slave owners in Saint Domingue manumitted no more than 3 of every 1,000 slaves during the 1770's and 1780's.⁴ Those who were able to secure legal manumission did so in a number of ways. Some purchased their own freedom, literally buying themselves from their masters, with revenue generated from their own labor. Others had family members who bought their freedom. Purchasing oneself or one's family member was more likely in areas frequented by slave merchants, where slaveowners could more easily replace those they had sold. Thus, the more heavily trafficked North and West of Saint Domingue experienced much higher rates of such manumissions than the relatively isolated South; Stewart King found 60 such manumissions out of 606 in the North and West, whereas Garrigus found only 2 of 256 in the South.⁵ Why might slaveowners have allowed self-purchase? Some needed quick cash. Others may have welcomed the chance to rid themselves of a disobedient slave without losing their investment. Still others may have offered the possibility of self-purchase as an incentive for their slaves' loyalty and hard work. Beyond self-purchase, some owners simply manumitted their slaves as a reward for many years of devoted service, or for heroic acts such as protecting the life of

⁴ John D. Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 43; David Geggus, "Slave and Free Colored Women in Saint Domingue," in *More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas*, ed. David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 68.

⁵ Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, 55; King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig: Free People of Color in Pre-Revolutionary Saint Domingue*, 111.

the owner or the owner's family. Wealthy owners preparing to return to France sometimes freed certain favorite slaves before leaving the colony.

Slaveowners also sometimes manumitted their enslaved children and the enslaved mothers of those children. According to the Code Noir, slaveowners were forbidden from fathering children with their slaves, yet the practice was common in the French Antilles as it was throughout new world slave societies. In such cases, the Code Noir ordered that the owner pay a fine, and the enslaved mother and her children be confiscated by local officials, never to receive their freedom. Thus the master was deprived of property, and the slaves were deprived of any chance at freedom. However, the Code Noir made an important exception: if the owner married his slave, both she and any resultant children would be freed.⁶ While some planters did in fact marry their slaves, many more simply freed their mistresses without marrying them. By no means were all such women manumitted; in the French Antilles at large, Arlette Gautier has suggested that perhaps 10 percent of "favorite concubines" obtained their freedom. The enslaved children of planters appear to have been manumitted at a somewhat higher rate, especially the boys.⁷ However, while only a fraction of these women and children received their freedom, their relationships with their owners probably help account for the overrepresentation of women and children in overall manumissions. As elsewhere in the Caribbean, approximately two-thirds of the slaves manumitted by their owners in Saint Domingue were women and children.⁸

⁶ Louis Sala-Moulins, *Le Code Noir, Ou le Calvaire de Canaan*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2005), 108.

⁷ Arlette Gautier, *Les Soeurs de Solitude: la Condition Féminine dans l'Esclavage aux Antilles du XVIIe au XIXe Siècle* (Paris: Editions Caribéennes, 1985), 172, 177.

⁸ Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, 40-41.

Colonial authorities identified the free population of color as a destabilizing force in these early years and therefore attempted to slow its growth over the course of the eighteenth century by imposing more stringent regulations—and higher taxes—on legal manumissions. According to the terms of the Code Noir, which drew on Roman slave law as well as the established custom of planters in the French islands, slaveowners had unlimited authority to manumit their slaves.⁹ However, in the early eighteenth century administrators revised this provision, seeking to assert authority over the manumission process and take it out of the hands of local planters. In 1711 they blamed planters for contributing to a general state of “disorder” among the enslaved due to “the ease with which the Planters grant them liberty in exchange for sums of money.” Planters’ willingness to manumit their slaves promoted illicit activities and immorality among the enslaved because, they claimed, the enslaved were encouraged to engage in theft and prostitution in order to buy their freedom. Furthermore, the administrators disapproved of the assistance offered by former slaves and some whites, who allowed such “infamous and lewd trade” to take place in their homes and taverns. Therefore, the administrators declared that future manumissions would require the written permission of these royal authorities in the colony.¹⁰

Administrators thus linked the growth of the free population of color to sexual impropriety by the early eighteenth century. Such accusations would continue in subsequent decades as administrators grew increasingly anxious over the size, social

⁹ Malick Walid Ghachem, "Sovereignty and Slavery in the Age of Revolutions: Haitian Variations on a Metropolitan Theme" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 2001), 47-49.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 60; M. Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l'Amérique Sous le Vent*, 6 vols. (Paris: 1784), 2: 272. A Royal Ordinance of 1713 upheld the Administrators' 1711 ordinance, see Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l'Amérique Sous le Vent*, 2: 398-399.

mobility, and “insolence” of the *gens de couleur*. In 1731 the Minister of the Navy, Maurepas, expressed such concerns to the colonial administrators. Saint Domingue’s Governor, the Chevalier de la Rochelard, had recently reviewed the militia in the southern district of Les Cayes and reported his findings to Maurepas. He noted that this area was home to “few whites of pure blood,” and that most of the planters were “mulattoes.” In response, Maurepas suggested that miscegenation and the growth of the free population of color were very serious problems with the potential to cause “great harm to the colony,” by “augment[ing] the insolence and insubordination of blacks.” But Rochelard had not blamed free colored population increase on theft and immorality, as had the 1711 ordinance. Rather, he noted that whites (meaning white men) found certain advantages in marrying into already established free families of color. He claimed that whites desired marriage with people of color in this area because the latter easily obtained property due to their thrift.¹¹ As John Garrigus has found, free women of color in the south commonly brought far more wealth to the household than their newly arrived French husbands.¹² Administrators realized, therefore, that the growth of the free population of color could not only be blamed on the illicit activities of slaves: *gens de couleur* were also the product of propertied, even legitimate, families.

Yet illegitimate families were also a concern. In spite of regulations designed to tighten administrators’ control over manumission, planters continued to free slaves without seeking the required permission. Therefore, in 1736 another royal ordinance

¹¹ Centre des Archives d’Outre-Mer, henceforth CAOM F/3/91, fol. 96-97, “Lettre du Ministre aux Administrateurs touchant les couleurs et les mésalliances, du 18 Octobre, 1731.” Yvan Debbasch cites a letter from Rochelard written on July 5, 1734 that contained exactly the same sentiments as this earlier letter. Debbasch, *Couleur et Liberté: Le Jeu du Critère Ethnique dans un Ordre Juridique Esclavagiste*, 48 n.4, 49-50.

¹² Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, 63-65.

attempted to reinforce the previous ones, this time targeting the manumission of children fathered by slave owners. In it the Colonial Minister complained that planters attempted to circumvent the earlier regulations by having children of enslaved women baptized as if they were free. Baptism, in and of itself, was not a practice legally restricted to free people; indeed, article 2 of the Code Noir stipulated that all slaves in French colonies were to be baptized. However, the 1736 ordinance suggests that priests were baptizing enslaved children and then listing them as “free” in the baptismal registry. Because the baptismal record could serve as official documentation attesting to one’s free status, such children were effectively manumitted. The ordinance attempted to prevent such forms of illegal manumission by fining guilty planters and requiring priests to verify a mother’s or child’s liberty papers before baptizing a child as free.¹³

Thus colonial authorities came increasingly during the early eighteenth century to view sexual encounters between enslaved women and their white male owners as a dangerous source of manumissions. In a further effort to control manumissions, the Colonial Ministry imposed a tax on slaves freed in the lesser Antilles in 1745, and at some point shortly thereafter in Saint Domingue. The Colonial Ministry reduced or waived those taxes for slaves deemed worthy, and particularly for enslaved men who served in the local militia or *maréchaussée*.¹⁴ Women were not eligible for such exceptions, however, and the Colonial Ministry attempted to further limit women’s path to legal freedom when, in 1775, an edict of the king set the liberty tax for enslaved men at

¹³ Ghachem, "Sovereignty and Slavery in the Age of Revolutions: Haitian Variations on a Metropolitan Theme", 64-66; Bernard Moitt, *Women and Slavery in the French Antilles, 1635-1848* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 155; Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Françoises de l'Amérique Sous le Vent*, 3: 453.

¹⁴ Stewart King, "The Maréchaussée of Saint-Domingue: Balancing the Ancien Régime and Modernity," *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 5, no. 2 (2004): par 26; Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Françoises de l'Amérique Sous le Vent*, 5: 612.

1,000 livres and the tax for enslaved women at 2,000 livres.¹⁵ Clearly, the intent of the new regulations was to curb the manumission of enslaved women, who, administrators assumed, primarily acquired their freedom through sexual relations with whites.¹⁶

Efforts to restrict manumissions reveal several interrelated anxieties on the part of colonial officials. First, they associated the growth of a free population of color with illegitimate sexuality, particularly on the part of women of color. Second, as we will further explore in the next section, administrators feared the social mobility of the *gens de couleur*. Finally, they linked the *gens de couleur* with “disorder” and “insolence” among slaves. The presence of the *gens de couleur*, they feared, would raise the hopes of the enslaved majority, encouraging them to challenge their status as property. Moreover, administrators often suspected free people of color of allying themselves with the slaves, and facilitating slave escapes.

The Social Mobility of the *Gens de Couleur* of Saint Domingue

Colonial officials’ anxiety over the growth of the free population of color stemmed, in part, from the group’s proven ability to thrive in the colonial economy and to demonstrate the industry officials wished to see in colonial whites. Among the *gens de couleur* were people at almost every level of the socio-economic hierarchy, working in a variety of occupations. Men of color occupied a broader range of positions than women. In urban areas, the most common occupations for men of color were in construction, as carpenters, masons, roofers, and building contractors (*entrepreneur de batiments*). Many

¹⁵ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l’Amérique Sous le Vent*, 5: 581.

¹⁶ Doris Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 213.

also worked as artisans, often as wigmakers or tailors, or as domestics, especially as cooks. Still others made a living as fishermen and postal carriers.¹⁷ Throughout the colony, free men of color gained economic mobility by serving in the army, the militia, and the local police force, the *maréchaussée*.

Free women of color also filled important niches in the urban colonial economy. Most often, they worked as retailers and domestics. In the daily life of the towns, these women could be found selling vegetables, fish, fabric, furniture, and cooking oil, on the street, from makeshift market stalls, and from established shops. Like their male counterparts, free women of color engineered business partnerships, borrowed money and rented their shops, notarizing each transaction.¹⁸ They also worked as servants, cooks, and housekeepers (*ménagères*) for whites and other free people of color. These domestics tended to work for a wage, but for some, their greater payoff came at the end of their service when employers granted them larger sums in order to buy property.¹⁹ The position of housekeeper was typically understood to imply concubinage. Surely, some enslaved and free women of color used their sexuality to gain this position of power within the household, and they may have been able to assert some influence over their white male employers/companions as well as economic mobility. Phibbah, the enslaved Jamaican woman who was both the head domestic slave and the longtime mistress of a

¹⁷ Dominique Rogers, "Les Libres de Couleur dans les Capitales de Saint-Domingue: Fortune, Mentalités et Intégration à la Fin de l'Ancien Régime (1776-1789)" (Université Michel de Montaigne, Bordeaux III, 1999), Chapter Three.

¹⁸ King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig: Free People of Color in Pre-Revolutionary Saint Domingue*, 189; Rogers, "Les Libres de Couleur dans les Capitales de Saint-Domingue: Fortune, Mentalités et Intégration à la Fin de l'Ancien Régime (1776-1789)", 171, 192-194; Susan Socolow, "Economic Roles of the Free Women of Color in Cap Francais," in *More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas*, ed. David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 281-282.

¹⁹ Rogers, "Les Libres de Couleur dans les Capitales de Saint-Domingue: Fortune, Mentalités et Intégration à la Fin de l'Ancien Régime (1776-1789)", 179.

white overseer, Thomas Thistlewood, is perhaps the best-known example of this type of relationship in the colonial Caribbean. Through her close relationship with Thistlewood, who also acted as her creditor, Phibbah was able to grow a lucrative business as a seamstress, baker and occasional livestock dealer, and even served as his creditor once she had accumulated some capital of her own. When she eventually acquired her legal freedom, she already possessed land and slaves, some of which Thistlewood had left her in his will.²⁰ Thus, the position of the *ménagère* could be an important path to freedom for enslaved women and to enrichment for free women of color. But while women of color did sometimes gain freedom and economic mobility as *ménagères*, they performed far more than sexual labor. *Ménagères* were vital to the operation of plantation and urban households, since, like Phibbah, they oversaw the domestic staff. Furthermore, they sometimes brought to the household their own staff of slaves, for which they were paid handsomely.²¹

Free men and women of color in Saint Domingue bought, sold, rented and leased both land and slaves throughout the colony. Some owned and cultivated small plots in rural areas, producing for their own subsistence and perhaps a bit more for sale at local markets, where their produce would be sold alongside the surplus from the provision grounds of slaves. Others proved to be shrewd investors by purchasing property, making improvements on it, and then reselling it for a profit. Still others rented out urban and rural property, to whites and other people of color, demanding that the renters not only

²⁰ Trevor Burnard, "Scenes from an Interracial Marriage, Jamaica 1754-86," in *Beyond Bondage: Free Women of Color in the Americas*, ed. David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

²¹ Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, 56-57. See also King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig: Free People of Color in Pre-Revolutionary Saint Domingue*, 187.

pay an annual fee but also make specific improvements on the property.²² Free people of color also bought slaves, both for their personal use and to lease out to others. As they did for whites, slaves worked as agriculturalists, skilled laborers and domestics on large-scale plantations as well as smaller, subsistence farms belonging to *gens de couleur*.

Free women of color in Saint Domingue participated in the colonial economy on their own far more frequently than white women, and as frequently as free men of color. Like free men of color, these women recorded their business transactions in notarial records at a higher rate than whites in order to legally protect those transactions. Using those documents, Rogers has found that 62 percent of all free colored notarial clients in Cap Français and Port-au-Prince were women. Similarly, Garrigus has found that in the 1780's free women of color in Les Cayes participated in 43 percent of urban property leases and rural land sales involving people of color. By contrast, white women participated in only four and eleven percent of these respective transactions.²³ At least one free woman of color, the *mulâtresse* Zabeau Bellanton, dealt in slaves. Bellanton practiced a particularly callous brand of trading, buying up young, infirm (and therefore cheaper) slaves from slave ships or smugglers, renting them out during their precarious "seasoning" period, and then selling them at a handsome profit if they survived.²⁴ Thus, as members of a slave society, free women of color participated at every level of the economy.

²² King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig: Free People of Color in Pre-Revolutionary Saint Domingue*, 114-115, Chapter Six; Socolow, "Economic Roles of the Free Women of Color in Cap Français," 282-284.

²³ Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, 176. Garrigus cites Rogers' forthcoming manuscript.

²⁴ King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig: Free People of Color in Pre-Revolutionary Saint Domingue*, 81-82, 113-118; Dominique Rogers, "Reussir dans un Monde d'Hommes: les Stratégies des Femmes de Couleur du Cap-Français," *Journal of Haitian Studies* 9, no. 1 (2003): 41; Socolow, "Economic Roles of the Free Women of Color in Cap Français," 286-291.

Some *gens de couleur* became well-connected planters and slaveowners who were members of the social elite. The wealthiest planters of color tended to come from mixed-race families, particularly in the south—the region commented on by Maurepas in the 1731 memo discussed above. John Garrigus has shown that, by the 1760's, a mixed-race elite grew up in the colony's southern province. Far from the bustling port of Cap and its surrounding sugar plantations, the southern part of the colony developed smaller-scale plantations devoted to secondary crops like coffee, indigo and cotton. This region, which Garrigus describes as “Saint-Domingue's frontier,” remained relatively isolated from France. There were fewer white women to marry and fewer whites in general with whom to contract business in this region, which thus witnessed more social and economic connections between whites and people of color.²⁵ Moreover, marriage between white men and black or “colored” women was not uncommon in the region; over the course of the eighteenth century, approximately 17 percent of marriages recorded in southern parishes united white men with free women of color.²⁶ As Rochelard implied in 1731, the mixed-race daughters of successful planters were considered desirable marriage partners for middling white immigrants to the colony.²⁷ Like wealthy colonial families in general, these mixed-race families sent their children to France to be educated, consumed luxury goods from abroad, and generally possessed all the trappings of the white colonial elite. Even in other parts of the colony, white fathers often recognized their

²⁵ Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, 51-54.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 63. Garrigus cites Jacques Houdaille, “Trois paroisses de Saint-Domingue au XVIIIe siècle, Etude démographique,” *Population* 18 (1963): 100.

²⁷ Garrigus demonstrates this trend in the southern province of Saint Domingue. John D. Garrigus, “Blue and Brown: Contraband Indigo and the Rise of a Free Colored Planter Class in French Saint Domingue,” *The Americas* 50, no. 2 (1993). Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, 63-65.

mixed-race children, sometimes arranging an apprenticeship for them or granting them property in land or slaves.

The social mobility of the free people of color clearly continued to concern colonial administrators in the mid-eighteenth century. In a 1755 letter to the Colonial Minister, the administrators echoed some of Maurepas' concerns in the 1731 memo cited above. Like Maurepas, they noted the thrift of the *gens de couleur*. But at this later date, free colored thrift appears to be a negative trait, one used by the *gens de couleur* to ruin French trade and humiliate white colonists. The administrators explained that the growing numbers of *gens de couleur* lived simply, surviving "only on roots...[and were]... accustomed to the most exact sobriety...." He claimed that they preferred to drink a strong, sugar-derived *eau de vie* rather than wine, thereby consuming local products at the expense of French imports. Due to their thrift they could save a great deal and "amass immense sums of capital" which made them "arrogant because they are rich...." Further, and somewhat paradoxically, their thrift permitted them to acquire choice properties in some parts of the colony. In fact, these administrators blamed the *gens de couleur* in those areas for driving up property values (by their ability to pay higher prices) and outbidding poorer whites. Having acquired such wealth, the *gens de couleur* then attempted to mimic the lifestyle (*le ton*) of the whites in order to make one forget "the memory of their origin." And yet, in the same *memoire*, the administrators voiced suspicion that the property of these same *gens de couleur* served as the "hideout and asylum" for free colored vagabonds as well as fugitive slaves.²⁸ Thus, once they amassed property, the *gens de couleur* were accused of assimilating white standards of living,

²⁸ "Mémoire des administrateurs de Saint Domingue au Ministre, du 14 mars 1755," CAOM F/3/144. Quoted in Pierre de Vaissiere, *Saint Domingue: La Société et la Vie Créoles Sous l'Ancien Régime (1629-1789)* (Paris: Perrin et Cie., Libraires-Editeurs, 1909), 222-223.

thereby denying their own humble origins, as well as facilitating slave resistance in the form of maronnage.

The *Gens de Couleur* and the Threat of Slave Resistance

The *gens de couleur*, then, caused anxiety for seemingly paradoxical reasons. Their social mobility—and their “arrogant” insistence on demonstrating it—called into question the premise of white superiority, a challenge invoked in this 1755 *memoire* and in countless official and unofficial publications thereafter. However, while administrators and colonists grew annoyed by the tendency of *gens de couleur* to acquire all the trappings of whiteness, they always suspected that they could also ally with slaves. Official fear of such an alliance had been present since the seventeenth century. Article 39 of the Code Noir (1685) had declared that any *affranchi* harboring an escaped slave would be fined 300 *livres* worth of sugar per day. In 1726 a royal decree reminded “*affranchis* and free blacks” of this penalty and added a more menacing corollary: those who could not pay the fine would be sold into slavery and the profit used to take care of the debt.²⁹ Indeed, colonial administrators had to strike a delicate balance: maintaining a certain level of discrimination against the *gens de couleur* in order to prevent their assimilation with whites and emboldening slaves, while, on the other hand, fostering a sense of superiority in them over the slaves, in order to prevent a slave-free colored alliance.

²⁹ Méderic-Louis-Elie Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: 1797), 3: 159. The Code Noir of Louisiana, issued in 1724, had included this same punishment. For the 1685 version, alongside the text from 1724, see Sala-Moulins, *Le Code Noir, Ou le Calvaire de Canaan*, 168-169.

Behind the fear of slave-free colored alliances and “black insubordination” was the threat of slave resistance, in the form of poisonings, petit and grand maronnage, and armed revolt. Such concerns must have seemed particularly urgent in the mid-eighteenth century, given the success of maroon communities at that time in other new world slave societies: in Jamaica (1739) and in Surinam (1749-1772), escaped slaves living in autonomous mountain communities forced their respective colonial governments to negotiate treaties granting them land in exchange for promises to return future escapees.³⁰ Saint Domingue had its own history of maroon threats. The famous maroon “Canga” and his band were caught and sentenced to gruesome deaths in October 1777.³¹ In 1785, Saint Domingue’s colonial authorities negotiated with the Maniel maroons who lived in the South, near the Spanish border. As a result, these maroons were officially recognized as free in exchange for their assistance in returning other fugitives. Furthermore, each maroon family was granted a small parcel of land; however, the Maniel maroons did not accept this land out of suspicion that the French colonial forces would then try to re-enslave them.³²

Saint Domingue’s most famous maroon, Makandal, lived not among the Maniel maroons but rather in the north. In the 1750’s, this escaped slave and vodou priest terrified whites on the northern plain with threats of mass poisoning. He allegedly built a

³⁰ A point made by Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848* (London: Verso, 1988), 55-56; Rogers, "Les Libres de Couleur dans les Capitales de Saint-Domingue: Fortune, Mentalités et Intégration à la Fin de l'Ancien Régime (1776-1789)", 240.

³¹ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Françoises de l'Amérique Sous le Vent*, 5: 800.

³² Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 51-52; Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue*, 2: 497-503. Moreau’s account of the Maniel maroons is translated in Richard Price, ed., *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*, 3rd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1996), 138-140. See also Yvan Debbasch, "Le Maniel: Further Notes," in *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*, ed. Richard Price (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

network of maroons, slaves, and free people of color who planned to poison the wells on plantations, and then massacre surviving panic-stricken whites en masse. In the end the plan was thwarted and Makandal caught in January 1758. He was tried and burned at the stake, as were many of those believed to be his followers; by June 1758 some twenty-four slaves and three free blacks suffered similar fates, and some 124 others remained in prison. However, Makandal's legend lived on. Vodou priests, and vodou talismans, were thereafter known as "makandals." Among whites, the threat of poisoning remained a constant fear.³³ Although Saint Domingue had relatively small maroon communities, and although the colony experienced no major slave revolt prior to 1791, the experience of their neighbors and the memory of Makandal sufficed to remind anyone invested in the slave plantation complex of the threat presented by a large population of slaves. For white officials, an alliance between free people of color and the enslaved seemed quite possible.

While colonial officials thus feared the prospect of alliances between *gens de couleur* and slaves, they nonetheless relied on free men of color to protect the colony from maroon attacks. Indeed, for most of the colony's history the police force whose job it was to hunt escaped slaves, the *maréchaussée*, was comprised entirely of free men of color. These men patrolled undeveloped parts of the colony as well as plantations searching for fugitive slaves and sometimes settling local disputes. In return for their service, these men gained status, a salary, exemption from certain property taxes, a cash bonus for each runaway caught, and occasionally, extra work as a guard to protect private property. Service in the *maréchaussée* also served as a bridge to freedom for some slaves

³³ Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below*, 60-67.

and allowed their owners to avoid paying the manumission tax.³⁴ Thus, while the *maréchaussée* provided important opportunities for free colored social mobility, it also provided a vital source of social control in Saint Domingue.

Legislating Hierarchy and Enforcing Respect

The colonial *maréchaussée* was the primary means by which colonial authorities sought to prevent slave resistance, but during the eighteenth century, and especially after the Seven Years' War, the Colonial Ministry and local administrators adopted a new strategy: legal discrimination against the free people of color. The Colonial Minister articulated this strategy most plainly in September 1776, in a set of instructions to Saint Domingue's administrators. He justified discriminatory measures toward free people of color, however far removed from their enslaved ancestors, by citing Saint Domingue's bottom-heavy social structure. He argued that even if such discriminatory measures appeared harsh, the *gens de couleur* must "always conserve the stain of slavery...." After all, "in a country where there are fifteen slaves against one White," there could not be "too much distance between the two species (*especies*)," and slaves could not have "too much respect" for those they serve. "This distinction rigorously observed" is the primary way by which "their color is condemned to servitude...."³⁵

Thus, in order to ensure the subordination of the enslaved labor force, colonial authorities focused their efforts on the repression of the *gens de couleur*. The Colonial

³⁴ King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig: Free People of Color in Pre-Revolutionary Saint Domingue*, 58-60; King, "The Maréchaussée of Saint-Domingue: Balancing the Ancien Régime and Modernity."

³⁵ "Sur l'admission aux charges publiques en faveur des descendants des gens de couleur. Question proposée à une assemblée du Conseil Supérieur et des habitants tenue les 11 et 13 1787." CAOM F3/91 fol. 209.

Ministry, the Governor and Intendant issued a series of decrees and regulations to prevent the assimilation of *gens de couleur* with whites.³⁶ As early as 1761, parish priests and notaries were required to indicate, in marriage registers and in any notarized document, when a participant was a *gen de couleur*, thereby legally distinguishing him or her from whites. Specifically, they were required to note whether that person was “black (*nègre*), mulatto, or *quarteron*.”³⁷ Poorer people of color were more likely to be officially identified in racial terms during the 1760’s. But by the 1770’s, elite people of color who had previously been classified as whites in notarial records—by omission of their racial makeup—were re-labeled *gens de couleur*.³⁸

Other regulations excluded *gens de couleur* from certain professions and from the nobility. In 1764 a royal decree prohibited *gens de couleur* from practicing medicine as doctors or surgeons.³⁹ Although militia units had been segregated by race since the early eighteenth century, after 1765 men of color were no longer permitted to serve as officers in their own units.⁴⁰ In 1767 the Colonial Minister ruled that while Indians and their descendents could be nobles, *gens de couleur* could not. He reasoned that, whereas Indians were “born free, and ha[d] always had the advantage of freedom in the colonies,”

³⁶ The history of such legislation is recounted by Debbasch, *Couleur et Liberté: Le Jeu du Critère Ethnique dans un Ordre Juridique Esclavagiste*; Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, Chapter Five, esp. 163; Rogers, “Les Libres de Couleur dans les Capitales de Saint-Domingue: Fortune, Mentalités et Intégration à la Fin de l’Ancien Régime (1776-1789)”, 241-246.

³⁷ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l’Amérique Sous le Vent*, 4: 412-413.

³⁸ Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, 167-169.

³⁹ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l’Amérique Sous le Vent*, 4: 724.

⁴⁰ Debbasch, *Couleur et Liberté: Le Jeu du Critère Ethnique dans un Ordre Juridique Esclavagiste*, 50-52; Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2004), 66; King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig: Free People of Color in Pre-Revolutionary Saint Domingue*, 61-62.

blacks (*nègres*) always retained the “stain” of slavery, “which extends to all their descendents, and which the gift of liberty cannot erase.”⁴¹ In 1773, the Governor and Intendant forbade free people of color from baptizing their children with “white” surnames, or from taking a “white” surname when gaining their freedom. Instead, they were required to select a name “from the African idiom, or from their trade and color, but which can never be that of any white family in the Colony.”⁴² Clearly, administrators understood that the physical “stain” of slavery—that of dark skin—was neither reliable nor sufficient. Light-skinned people of color could pass for whites, and even those with dark skin might achieve some social mobility. These regulations were designed to correct that ambiguity by setting them apart—by name and legal definition—from whites.

But administrators did not merely want to clearly demarcate the subordinate status of free people of color. They also wanted individual *gens de couleur* to perform their subordination to whites. Oddly enough, such a premise had its origin in the Code Noir, which had also guaranteed the legal equality of freed slaves with other free people. In 1685, while the free population of color was miniscule, the Code Noir had required such deference of freed slaves (*affranchis*) exclusively, and then only toward their former owners. Even though *affranchis* had “the same rights, privileges, and immunities enjoyed by persons born free,” they were required to treat with “a singular respect” their former masters and their former masters’ families.⁴³ As the free colored population grew, however, the problem of “disrespect” was no longer limited to relationships between freed slaves and their former masters. Many free people of color had never been slaves,

⁴¹ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l’Amérique Sous le Vent*, 5: 80.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 5: 448-450.

⁴³ Sala-Moulins, *Le Code Noir, Ou le Calvaire de Canaan*, 198.

and as their numbers approached those of the whites, the need to relegate them to a subordinate status intensified. Thus, colonial administrators ruled that all free people of color owed “respect” to all whites. The official change occurred in 1779, in a set of sumptuary regulations intended to curb the luxury consumption of the free population of color. Before listing the restrictions on clothing and other finery, the administrators declared that “all *gens de couleur*, *ingénus* or *affranchis* of one or the other sex, [must] show the greatest respect not only for their former masters, patrons...their widows or children, but also toward all whites in general....”⁴⁴ The penalty for such a lack of respect could be severe: if the offense warranted, the accused could be re-enslaved.

The sumptuary regulations, arguably the most blatant attempt by colonial administrators to legislate colonial social relations, were among the last of the discriminatory laws implemented against the *gens de couleur*. They ordered that “all *gens de couleur*” owed deference to “all whites in general,” regardless of the wealth of the individuals in question. Coupled with their restrictions on free colored luxury consumption, these regulations were intended to ensure that free people of color publicly demonstrated their subordination and deference to colonial whites.

The 1780’s: Rethinking the Role of the *Gens de Couleur*

Official efforts to subordinate free people of color did not indicate a desire to eliminate the group altogether. In fact, in the mid 1770’s, colonial officials and some colonists began to appreciate the advantages of such an intermediate group for the colonial state and the slave system, even providing new avenues to freedom for enslaved

⁴⁴ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l’Amérique Sous le Vent*, 5: 856.

men. In 1775, the same year that the liberty tax increased disproportionately for enslaved women, administrators ordered that enslaved men could earn their freedom by serving ten years in the *maréchaussée*.⁴⁵ Thus, they encouraged the manumission of those who worked to better colonial security while discouraging manumissions resulting from the sexual relationships between white men and enslaved women.

This new appreciation for the free population of color was demonstrated in a rather unexpected place: the supplement to Diderot's *Encyclopédie*. In 1765, the term "mulâtre" had been defined derisively in the *Encyclopédie*, as the product of white colonists' weakness for their female slaves, the unfortunate result of colonial debauchery. But the 1776 *Supplement to the Encyclopedia* included a revised entry for "mulâtre." The article explained that, while it would have been better had European settlers resisted the temptation of their enslaved *négresses*, certain advantages had arisen from the "disorder" of racial mixture. First, colonial security was assured because the emancipation of mulattoes led to the growth of the free people of color, who were the "surest" protection of whites against a slave uprising. Likewise, free men of color made excellent soldiers during wartime. The article also claimed that this group consumed great quantities of products from France, thereby strengthening colonial trade. Perhaps most interestingly, the 1776 supplement listed as an advantage the tendency of even the least wealthy mulatto to "[assume] with the Negroes (*Nègres*) the superiority of whites." Although this revised article was published in the same year that the Colonial Minister ordered that the *gens de couleur* should be forever marked with the "stain of slavery," it proposed a different attitude toward the role of *gens de couleur* in colonial society. As

⁴⁵ Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, 201; Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l'Amérique Sous le Vent*, 5: 612-613.

slave hunters, soldiers, and consumers, they were useful to the colonial project. They upheld rather than challenged the slave system. And rather than fearing that they would compromise the premise of black inferiority by inspiring slaves' insolence with their freedom and ostentation, this author argued that "*mulâtres*" served the dominant racial ideology by treating the enslaved with disdain.⁴⁶

The seemingly incongruous logic may be explained if we consider the possibility that a future governor of Saint Domingue, Bellecombe, authored the article.⁴⁷

Bellecombe became governor in 1782, at a moment when official policy toward free people of color was undergoing official reconsideration. Rather than assuming an antagonistic relationship with free people of color, the Colonial Minister, de Castries, suggested that the *gens de couleur* were the colony's best hope of defending itself against slave revolt. As such, they needed to be courted as allies of whites by bettering their condition. In particular, Minister de Castries proposed "to temper the established degradation, [and] even give it a limit."⁴⁸ For the next eight years, a series of Colonial Ministers, governors, intendants, magistrates and local notables would debate the wisdom of official discrimination. They argued for or against particular policies (such as whether

⁴⁶ *Supplément à l'Encyclopédie*, 4 vols., vol. 3 (Amsterdam: MM Rey, 1776-1777). Cited in Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, 215.

⁴⁷ Michèle Duchet, *Anthropologie et Histoire au Siècle des Lumières* (Paris: Flammarion, 1977), 136. Duchet proposed that Bellecombe wrote the article, but her evidence is unclear. Rogers, "Les Libres de Couleur dans les Capitales de Saint-Domingue: Fortune, Mentalités et Intégration À la Fin de l'Ancien Régime (1776-1789)", 231-232. See also Dominique Rogers, "De l'Origine du Préjugé de Couleur en Haïti," *Outre-Mers* 90, no. 340/341 (2003): 87..

⁴⁸ These 1781 instructions were repeated in later memoirs produced by colonial administrators and local notables charged with commenting on the issue. For example, "Sur l'admission aux charges publiques en faveur des gens de couleur. Question proposée à une assemblée du Conseil Supérieur et habitants tenu le 11 et 13 mai 1787," CAOM F/3/91 fol. 209. See also Debbasch, *Couleur et Liberté: Le Jeu du Critère Ethnique dans un Ordre Juridique Esclavagiste*, 126-127; Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, 216; Rogers, "Les Libres de Couleur dans les Capitales de Saint-Domingue: Fortune, Mentalités et Intégration à la Fin de l'Ancien Régime (1776-1789)", 250-264.

men of color should be allowed to hold positions within the administration). But they also considered whether some *gens de couleur*—particularly those with the lightest skin—should be granted full legal equality with whites. Establishing a “limit” on free colored discrimination meant determining which racial combinations would no longer be subject to legal discrimination. In other words, after how many generations of miscegenation with whites could a family of color become white?⁴⁹

The debate over the condition of the *gens de couleur* was fueled by the efforts of Julien Raimond, an extremely wealthy *quarteron* from the southern province of Saint Domingue. Aware that the Colonial Ministry was reconsidering policy toward the free people of color, Raimond appealed directly to the Minister. With the private encouragement of Governor Bellecombe, Raimond wrote three separate memoranda to the Minister in 1785 and 1786 while visiting France to claim an inheritance. In his correspondence he emphasized that many of Saint Domingue’s free men of color contributed to colonial wealth as industrious owners of slave plantations, and that discriminating against them threatened rather than buttressed the slave system.⁵⁰ He proposed that the wealthiest and lightest-skinned among them, particularly those who were legitimately born, deserved the same status as whites. In particular, *quarterons* merited this change in status, since 2/3 of them had “lost the tint of the color.”⁵¹

⁴⁹ CAOM F/3/91 fol. 198-219.

⁵⁰ Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, 218-220.

⁵¹ CAOM F/3/91 fol. 195.

Ultimately, he predicted that by lifting legal discrimination against this relatively small group, social discrimination against all free people of color would end.⁵²

In 1786, the Colonial Minister requested that Saint Domingue's new Governor and Intendant, Barbé de Marbois and La Luzerne, respond to Raimond's claims.⁵³ Their response sought to discredit Raimond's account of racist practice in Saint Domingue and challenge his portrayal of *gens de couleur* as highly educated elite planters far removed from their enslaved ancestry. However, they admitted that *gens de couleur* suffered "abuses"—namely theft and violence—by white creoles, who never stopped "conspir[ing] to extend their prerogatives beyond the limits that colonial legislation prescribed."⁵⁴ In fact, ultimately they recommended that some *gens de couleur* should be exempt from discrimination, albeit only after further careful consideration.

By the time the French Revolution erupted in 1789, none of the proposed changes had been implemented. No *gens de couleur* had attained the legal status of whites, and all of the discriminatory laws remained in place. However, the Colonial Ministry and administrators had imposed no new discriminatory laws, and those that existed were not necessarily enforced. Often, notaries did not require *gens de couleur* to change their "white" surnames, nor did they enforce regulations requiring free colored parties to produce documentation attesting to their liberty when entering into a contract.

Furthermore, administrators themselves were lax when policing the growth of the

⁵² Raimond would eventually appeal directly to the King, once the sympathetic de Castries was out of office. As Debbasch explains, his memoir to the king has been misleadingly labeled the "2eme mémoire," when in fact it was written after the three others mentioned above. CAOM F/3/91 fol. 185-189. Debbasch, *Couleur et Liberté: Le Jeu du Critère Ethnique dans un Ordre Juridique Esclavagiste*, 122 n. 3.

⁵³ Moreau de Saint Méry credited Raimond with spurring the Minister's examination of the issue in 1786, when he solicited the opinions of not only administrators but also local notables. Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de L'isle Saint-Domingue*, 2: 618.

⁵⁴ CAOM F/3/91 fol. 200.

population of color: when deciding whether to grant a manumission, they often lowered the tax required by law.⁵⁵ Thus, legal discrimination did not always work out in practice.

Such official leniency toward discriminatory policy, combined with administrative reconsideration of the role of the *gens de couleur*, suggests that late-colonial racial ideology was much more fluid than historians have assumed. Even if proposals to ameliorate the conditions of some *gens de couleur* were not benevolently conceived by the administration, could they at least indicate “...a certain neutrality, nearing equality,” as Dominique Rogers has proposed?⁵⁶ From Rogers’ perspective, the colonial legal structure did not oversee a “segregationist order,” as Yvan Debbasch argued. Rather, racial boundaries were not so fixed, permitting both social and commercial integration as well as the possibility of legal integration.

Official discourse regarding the *gens de couleur* did change after mid-century; the group was no longer simply viewed as a threat to colonial order. A new way of thinking about their role in society emerged, put forth by men labeled by Debbasch as “moderate segregationists.”⁵⁷ In the 1770’s and 1780’s, these officials and colonists understood that, as an intermediary group, the *gens de couleur* could be put to use as soldiers, consumers, and proof of black degradation and white superiority. But in order to be useful, they had to remain an intermediary group, separate and subordinate to whites, yet distinct and more privileged than slaves.

⁵⁵ Rogers, "Les Libres de Couleur dans les Capitales de Saint-Domingue: Fortune, Mentalités et Intégration À la Fin de l'Ancien Régime (1776-1789)", 295-312, 328-341, 269-275.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 268.

⁵⁷ Debbasch, *Couleur et Liberté: Le Jeu du Critère Ethnique dans un Ordre Juridique Esclavagiste*, 108-117.

The aspiring colonial magistrate Hilliard d'Auberteuil had proposed a radical program for reform based on a similar theory in his widely-read and highly controversial 1776 publication, *Considérations sur l'Etat Présent de la Colonie Française de Saint Domingue*. Just as the Colonial Minister had done in 1776, Hilliard argued that the colony's "interest and safety" required legal discrimination against the *gens de couleur*, who should be "burdened" with "contempt" so as to be "covered with an indelible stain..."⁵⁸ But not all *gens de couleur* deserved such "contempt." Recognizing the fluidity of racial categories in daily colonial life, Hilliard specified that *gens de couleur* belonging to the "sixth generation" of mixing and beyond should be exempt from discrimination. According to his plan, those light-skinned descendents of Africans would enjoy full civil rights, just like whites. Hoping to construct a social hierarchy that was clearly delineated by color, Hilliard proposed that all dark-skinned people, including "Blacks, *Griffes* and *Marabous*," be permanently enslaved.⁵⁹ Likewise, "mixed" people that did not qualify for full civil rights would all be included in a free group of "Yellows," "an intermediate class...absolutely distinct from that of the slaves, by exterior and individual signs, as well as by civil rights." Freeing any enslaved mulattoes or other "mixed" person was critical to his plan since "Leaving them enslaved would only weaken in the mind of the Blacks the respect that must be inspired in them for Whites: all that proceeds from Whites must appear to them as sacred." Thus the elevated position of "mixed" people served the racial hierarchy by instilling in enslaved blacks a sense of

⁵⁸ Michel-René Hilliard d'Auberteuil, *Considérations sur l'Etat Présent de la Colonie Française de Saint-Domingue*, 2 vols. (Paris: Chez Grangé, 1777), 2: 73.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 2: 83.

their own inferiority.⁶⁰ To better ensure this tripartite, color-coded system, Hilliard planned to darken the class of blacks, lighten the class of whites, and render the class of “Yellows” a more consistent color, all through an elaborate control of interracial marriage. Hilliard’s plan did not work in practice or in theory: color never neatly corresponded to rank in Saint Domingue, and other colonists detailed the many flaws in Hilliard’s theory of racial combination.⁶¹ But elements of his plan could be found in plans for reforms proposed by other colonists and administrators. In particular, adherents of “moderate segregationism” continued to tout the utility of an intermediary group of people, distinguished from whites by their color and from slaves by their legal status.

Echoes of Hilliard’s plan could be found in colonial administrators’ response to Raimond’s proposals in 1786. Using the same logic employed by both Hilliard and Raimond, Intendant Barbé de Marbois and Governor La Luzerne proposed that only those whose “*affranchi*” ancestry could no longer be detected by their color should be granted legal equality. They recommended distinguishing between two periods: the first, when “their color still indicates their origin,” and the second, when “a constant mix with the white race” allowed them to reach “(on the exterior) a perfect assimilation.” But these administrators did not advise the legal equality of *quarterons* with whites, as Raimond had suggested. Rather, they thought that such a mixture could happen only by the “sixth generation,” more or less. (According to this racial calculus, *quarterons* were only the second generation of mixture.) Why, in their opinion, was this distinction

⁶⁰ Ibid., 2: 88.

⁶¹ Pierre Ulric Dubuisson, *Nouvelles Considérations sur Saint-Domingue, en Réponse à Celles de M. H. D.*, 2 vols. (Paris: Chez Cellot et Jombert Fils jeune, Libraires, 1780).

necessary? In order to reaffirm the racial hierarchy that, they assumed, secured the slave system:

...as soon as the signs which attest to the origin of the *gens de couleur* have disappeared, as soon as the slave can no longer recognize in them the descendent of their compatriots, our sincere wish would be, that one allow them to enjoy the advantages attributed to all other citizens, and that they could be immediately merged with the Europeans and the Creoles.⁶²

Thus, administrative proposals for the integration of *gens de couleur* in no way challenged the dominant racial ideology. Even as they recognized the fluidity of the boundary between white and non-white categories, they sought to police that boundary and make it appear impermeable. As long as “whiteness” and its limits could be delineated, as long as the boundaries were clear, the illusion of white supremacy could be maintained. Therefore, *gens de couleur* could only have legal equality if they could no longer be identified by their skin color as people of color.

Holding Fast to White Privilege: Local Resistance

In spite of the conservative nature of these proposals, elite white colonists refused to accept them. In 1787, local white notables gathered along with the *Conseil Supérieur*, the highest court of appeal in the colony. The Colonial Minister had requested their opinions on the possibility of lifting discriminatory policies for those belonging to the fifth generation of “mixing” with whites, i.e., those who could trace at least one white parent, grandparent, great-grandparent, etcetera, for five generations. In particular, they were asked about a proposal to admit such men to “public” positions such as military officers and magistrates. Not surprisingly, the white planters and magistrates opposed

⁶² CAOM F/3/91 fol. 203

both ideas. Admitting *gens de couleur* to public office, they warned, would produce officials and magistrates with familial connections to people of color, and possibly with slaves. And although their color would be light, they would possess “the same interest, the same judgment..., [and] the same disorder would exist.”⁶³ In short, if admitted to official positions, *gens de couleur* would use that authority to serve their own interests; even if they became the legal equals of whites, they would not protect white power. The “disorder” of an ambiguous racial hierarchy would result, and “[t]he color black [would no longer be] dedicated to servitude.” Likewise, if the *gens de couleur* were truly the “strongest barrier” between “Whites and Blacks,” as the minister himself indicated in his 1781 instructions, these proposals only threatened to weaken that barrier. For, what good is an intermediary caste comprised of people who only want to escape it?⁶⁴

By the late 1780’s, white colonists understood the importance of closing off white privilege. For the planters and magistrates of the *Conseil Superieur*, the boundary between whites and non-whites was non-negotiable. Any suggestion to the contrary risked stripping the *gens de couleur* of their usefulness to colonial society, as a “barrier” against the slaves and a tool in the construction of racial hierarchy. Some were willing to concede that *gens de couleur* served the colonial project in particular ways: as soldiers, slave-catchers, and consumers. However, their most important role, in the eyes of elite colonial whites, remained their embodiment of the racial hierarchy. Their degradation needed to continue, whites believed, in order to ensure the debasement of blackness that guaranteed the subservience of the enslaved.

⁶³ CAOM F/3/91 fol. 216.

⁶⁴ CAOM F/3/91 fol. 219.

One prominent member of the white colonial elite proposed a scientific method to clarify the boundaries that the law might fail to maintain. Moreau de Saint Méry, the white creole magistrate and man of letters, attempted to map every possible racial combination in Saint Domingue, essentially instructing his readers how to identify the “truly” white from the imposters. In his *Topographical, Physical, Civil, Political, and Historical Description of the French Part of the Island of Saint Domingue*, an encyclopedic account of colonial life written in the 1780s, Moreau explained the variety of local racial mixture in terms of skin color and combinations of white and black blood. He located this elaborate racial taxonomy in a section of the *Description* devoted to the free people of color, although, as he noted, “mixed-bloods” could also be slaves.⁶⁵

When whites reproduced with blacks or “mixed-bloods,” he claimed, there were six possible results: a white and a black would produce a mulatto, a white and a mulatto would produce a *quarteron*, a white and a *quarteron* would produce a *métis*, a white and a *métis* produce a *mamelouque*, a white and a *mamelouque* produce a *quarteronné*, and a white and a *quarteronné* produce a *sang-mêlé*, a term which simply means “mixed-blood.” Complicating the taxonomy were the various other combinations that produced these same results. For instance, a *quarteron* also resulted from the combination of a mulatto and any one of the following: a white, a *sang-mêlé*, a *quarteronnée*, a *mamelouque*, a *métive*, or a *quarteronne*.⁶⁶

Moreau claimed that each category had telling physical characteristics.

Quarterons had “white skin, but tarnished by a nuance of very pale yellow.” Also, their

⁶⁵ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de L'isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 68.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 1: 71-75.

hair was longer than a mulatto's, and curly. Likewise, the *mamelouc* could "not be confused with the White" due to his or her skin, which was a "flat, discolored white" and which lacked "elasticity."⁶⁷ However, following the logic of the "moderate segregationists" who came before him, Moreau admitted that after the sixth degree of mixture with whites, it took a well-trained eye to be able to distinguish *gens de couleur* from "pure whites." In fact, once color was no longer a reliable indicator of racial identity, labels seemed less relevant: Moreau grouped all mixes six degrees and higher in the same category, the *sang-melés*.

When physiognomy failed, Moreau proposed mathematical calculations of genealogical composition as more reliable indicators of one's race.⁶⁸ Positing that individuals are composed of 128 genealogical "parts," Moreau measured one's degree of mixture by the number of white or black "parts" the individual could claim. For example, a *quarteron* who is the product of a white and a *mulâtresse* possesses 96 parts white and 32 parts black. (Thus he is three-quarters white and one-quarter black). As a group, *quarterons* had anywhere between 71-96 parts white and between 32-57 parts black. *Sang-mêlés*, infinitely mixed as they are, could possess between 1-3 parts black and 125-127 parts white.⁶⁹ The point, of course, is that no matter how fair-skinned a *sang-mêlé* appeared, he or she could never be white, according to Moreau's calculations. The product of a white and a *sang-mêlé* would always be another *sang-mêlé*; the one part of blackness could never be overtaken by the 127 parts of whiteness, at least not on the genealogical table constructed by Moreau.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 1: 76, 78.

⁶⁸ Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean*, 264.

⁶⁹ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de L'isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 84-86.

The racial taxonomy Moreau proposed was not widely employed in Saint Domingue. In fact, Moreau readily recognized that colonists often lumped all free *gens de couleur* in the same category and referred to them collectively *mulâtres*.⁷⁰ Notaries identified their clients as blacks, *mulâtres*, and occasionally as *quarterons*, but they rarely specified other “higher” degrees of mixture. Colonists and metropolitans alike employed the term “mulatto” to identify a person of an ambiguously mixed background. Indeed, the terms “*mamelouc*” and “*métis*” seem to have been borrowed from other contexts: both were used to describe mixes between Europeans and Native Americans in Brazil and French North America, respectively.⁷¹ Thus the taxonomy appears to have been prescriptive rather than descriptive.

Yet its prescription is just the point; he and other white colonists found themselves trying to shore up boundaries that had always been fluid. Moreau provided his readers with a vocabulary and a purportedly scientific method for distinguishing the racially-mixed population from those of “pure” white blood. His calculations implicitly argued against proposals to integrate light-skinned *gens de couleur* by asserting that differences between whites and non-whites were not merely skin deep. Rather, African ancestry carried with it traits that forever distinguished *gens de couleur* from whites, even if the law turned a blind eye to them.

To further highlight the characteristics that defined *gens de couleur*, Moreau provided an extended description of their physical, moral and intellectual qualities. But Moreau focused his attention on the “most numerous” group among all possible racial combinations, the mulatto, noting that the term “mulatto” was often used to describe

⁷⁰ Ibid., 1: 90.

⁷¹ Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean*, 262.

anyone “who is not *nègre* or White.”⁷² Thus in spite of his calculations, which were designed to render racial combinations more precise, Moreau’s qualitative description creates a generalized, derogatory portrait of the *gens de couleur* as represented by the mulatto.

In Moreau’s portrayal, the free mulatto man appears strong, healthy, and with admirable intelligence. However, Moreau emphasized that such qualities were offset by his inherent laziness and desire for pleasure, traits that revealed his blackness. *Mulâtres*, he claimed, “push as far as the *nègre*, indolence and the love of rest.” Mulatto men could be quite successful as skilled workers, he claimed, if “to do nothing wasn’t for them the ultimate happiness.”⁷³ The only activities that motivated them were dancing, horseracing, and sex. The one job they seemed born to do was to serve as a soldier. Mulatto men made “excellent” soldiers, Moreau noted, having proven themselves in the *maréchaussée* as well as a volunteer regiment in the French-supported siege on Savannah, Georgia, in the American Revolution. Yet Moreau undercut his praise of the mulatto’s military capabilities by explaining that his natural laziness and lasciviousness suited the position quite well. For, “everyone knows that the life of the soldier, has in the leisures it permits, attraction for indolent men.”⁷⁴ Thus the mulatto made a good soldier because of, not in spite of, his lack of ambition, industry, and sexual virtue.

As John Garrigus has argued, explaining the participation of the *gens de couleur* in the colony’s *maréchaussée* and militia in this way was critical to Moreau’s effort to distinguish colonial whites from the *gens de couleur*. Militia participation had been

⁷² Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de L’isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 90.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 1: 91.

shunned by white planters and therefore fell disproportionately on the shoulders of Saint Domingue's free men of color, who could have appeared as the masculine defenders of the colony—the true “citizen-soldiers.”⁷⁵ But Moreau's explanation of mulatto military service prevents that association. Instead, that service seems to be a fortunate by-product of qualities that were otherwise harmful to colonial society. Instead of the guarantors of colonial defense, Moreau portrayed these men as the morally degenerated results of white-black mixture. By contrast, as we will see in the next chapter, white colonial men could only shine by comparison.

As importantly, by depicting free men of color as lazy, Moreau denied that their social mobility could have resulted from hard work or good business sense. By contrast, like colonial administrators and authors before him, Moreau suggested that free women of color, and especially mulatta women, plotted their economic success far more ambitiously than free men of color. In women, however, such ambition appeared unnatural and predatory, particularly because it relied on their allegedly exaggerated sexual prowess. Irresistibly beautiful, seductive, and calculating, the stereotype of the mulatto woman pervaded white, male-authored literature about the colony.⁷⁶ Moreau described her as an “elegant,” “graceful” “Priestess[] of Venus” whose “entire being” was “devoted to voluptuous pleasure.”⁷⁷ Hilliard portrayed *mulâtresses* similarly, as women who possessed “well-made” bodies and naturally moved in a “voluptuous”

⁷⁵ Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, 162, 195-213.

⁷⁶ Yvonne Fabella, ““An Empire Founded on Libertinage”: The Mulâtresse and Colonial Anxiety in Saint Domingue,” in *Gender, Race and Religion in the Colonization of the Americas*, ed. Nora E. Jaffary (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007); Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean*, 194-239; Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, 151-162.

⁷⁷ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de L'isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 94.

manner. For Hilliard, the *mulâtresse* was a powerful, dangerous figure: “Mulâtresses are in general much less docile than mulattoes, because they have claimed for themselves, over most of the Whites [men], an empire founded on libertinage.”⁷⁸

How can we explain the appeal of this image for these white colonial authors? First, of course, it justified their own participation in interracial sex by portraying women of color as irresistible. Moreover, these men must have found the economic and social independence of free women of color incredibly disconcerting. As we will explore in later chapters, such independence contrasted with idealized visions of femininity in eighteenth-century France that increasingly defined women’s natural role as a housebound wife and mothers. But they furthered challenged a racial logic that situated them as socially inferior to whites. Not only had their sexuality granted them social mobility, but their “empire,” as identified by Hilliard, granted them power over white men—power to disrupt white families and take white fortunes, as will be explored in Chapter Four. Finally, their forced and consensual sexual relations with white colonists called into question the allegedly superior virtue and self-control of white men more generally. Thus, the daily lives of free women of color demonstrated the unstable boundaries that failed to divide the colony along clearly demarcated color, class, and gender lines. Moreau, Hilliard and other colonists made the body of the free woman of color into a sexual object of desire in order to sharpen those boundaries, thereby consolidating the privilege and authority of whites.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Hilliard d'Auberteuil, *Considérations sur l'Etat Présent de la Colonie Francaise de Saint-Domingue*, 2: 77.

⁷⁹ Fabella, ““An Empire Founded on Libertinage”: The Mulâtresse and Colonial Anxiety in Saint Domingue.”

Such descriptions of the *gens de couleur*—generalized by Moreau as the mulatto man and woman—worked to justify their exclusion from the legal status of whites. Why did white planters and magistrates dig in their heels on this issue, insisting on the salutary effect of discrimination toward even the lightest-skinned *gens de couleur*? On the one hand, they truly believed that the local racism to which Barbé de Marbois and La Luzerne referred was necessary to maintain the subordination of slaves. But maintaining the boundary between whites and *gens de couleur* not only clarified the racial ambiguities embodied by free people of color; it also helped to clarify the ambiguous identity of colonial whites. As the following chapters will address, white colonists, and white creoles in particular, did not fall into neat racial or national categories. The climate and custom of Saint Domingue, as a tropical slave colony, was perceived to alter their bodies, minds, and their morality. Those alterations distinguished them, in negative ways, from the French. In fact, the very whiteness and Frenchness of creoles in particular were called into question. But by distinguishing themselves from the *gens de couleur*, and by heaping on them the negative stereotypes that European writers typically reserved for white creoles, white colonial elites hoped to position themselves as the virtuous backbone of the colony, the only residents capable of behaving as “citizens.”⁸⁰

The opposition of white colonial elites to mitigating discrimination against free people of color was also intensified by the growing tension between metropolitan, monarchical authority and the authority of local planters and magistrates. As the French monarchy centralized its authority throughout the kingdom and empire in the mid-late eighteenth century, Saint Domingue was developing its own creole class of magistrates

⁸⁰ Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, Chapter Five.

who were wary of that centralization. These elite whites developed legal arguments in favor of locally-informed legislation based on the primacy of “local knowledge,” a “shorthand for a kind of secondhand, native legal sensibility to which only creole lawyers could stake claim....”⁸¹ The peculiar context of colonial life required different laws in the colonies, they argued, and who better than local men of letters to shape those laws? Moreover, just as metropolitan Parlements from the period did battle with the king, asserting their role as defenders of the rights of the nation against “royal despotism,” Saint Domingue’s magistrates adopted a similar understanding of their own role.⁸² The colony’s two high courts of appeal, the *Conseils Supérieurs* in Cap Français and Port-au-Prince, viewed themselves as colonial Parlements, simultaneously the representatives of the king’s law in the colony and the defenders of (white, elite) colonial interests before the monarchy. Unlike the British West Indian colonies, the French colonies had no representative legislative bodies; the *Conseils Supérieurs* were the closest approximation because they were charged with registering royal law. In theory, royal decrees and edicts were not legally binding in a particular jurisdiction until they were registered by the jurisdiction’s *Conseil*, granting the magistrates some real power over the imposition of the law.

Conflict between the Colonial Ministry and the *Conseils* came to a head in 1784, when the Ministry attempted to impose new regulations designed to reign in the abuse and neglect of slaves, particularly on the part of plantation managers. The 1784 royal

⁸¹ Ghachem, "Sovereignty and Slavery in the Age of Revolutions: Haitian Variations on a Metropolitan Theme", 221-222.

⁸² On the parlements’ contribution to the discourse of nationalism in France, see David Avrom Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680-1800* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 50-77.

ordinance required more precise plantation bookkeeping (so that plantation managers would have to account for the state of the owner's property), reiterated the Code Noir's requirement that slaves not work on Sundays or holidays, limited the hours during which slaves could work during the week, required that slaves have land to work for their own profit, and determined punishments for excessive abuse of slaves (defined as more than 50 lashes with a whip at any given time, mutilation, or death). They also permitted slaves to lodge official complaints against their masters or plantation managers.⁸³ Needless to say, slaveowners in Saint Domingue (and absentee owners elsewhere) thought the new ordinance was an invitation for trouble, largely because it questioned the authority of slaveowners over their human property.⁸⁴ The *Conseil Supérieur* of Cap Français refused to register the new regulations at first, and as a result, Minister de Castries suppressed the court by royal edict in January 1787, leaving only the more obedient *Conseil* in Port-au-Prince.⁸⁵

The suppression of the Cap court represented a “decapitation” of the wealthiest, most productive region in the colony: the northern plain. The magistrates on the *Conseils* were appointed by the king, but they were chosen from local planters and colonists. Because any royal ordinance had to be registered by the *Conseils* in order to become law, these magistrates were the only local representatives with any real power in the colony. At stake was their ability to reject laws they viewed as antithetical to colonial rule. Thus the wealthiest planters—the most productive colonists, as they saw it—had been stripped

⁸³ Ghachem, "Sovereignty and Slavery in the Age of Revolutions: Haitian Variations on a Metropolitan Theme", 190-203; Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Françoises de L'amérique Sous le Vent*, 6: 655-667.

⁸⁴ Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution*, 31.

⁸⁵ Pierre Pluchon, *Histoire de la Colonisation Francaise: le Premier Empire Colonial Des Origines a la Restauration*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Paris: Fayard, 1991), 613.

of the only voice that could protect their interests against the “despotic” administrators and Colonial Ministry. Yet protests against the suppression of elite creole legal power were not limited to the wealthy, or to the North. In towns and on plantations throughout the colony, the news aroused anger and occasionally violence: at the end of June, there were several attempts to burn the town of Cap. In fact, Gabriel Debien has argued that the revolutionary movement among whites began with opposition to the court’s suppression.⁸⁶

So, in May 1787, when the Colonial Minister asked local notables and magistrates to comment on the proposed laws to ameliorate the condition of some *gens de couleur*, white elites had already “lost” one battle and suffered an additional blow to any presumption to local autonomy. Slaveowners’ authority over their slaves had been lessened by the new ordinance. But more importantly, one of the two most powerful courts in the colony had been suppressed for exercising what French *parlements* were asserting as their right: the right to refuse to register royal ordinances, thereby protecting the colony from “ministerial despotism.”

Thus, in the late-colonial period, and particularly in the 1780’s, white colonists were faced with several simultaneous threats. First, the free population of color was growing in size and wealth, blurring the social, economic, and phenotypic boundaries that they imagined should distinguish whites from non-whites. Second, the Colonial Ministry had considered dismantling the legal boundaries between the two groups. Also, elite men of color, led by Raimond, had grown confident enough to mobilize toward that end, even spurring on the ministry’s efforts. Furthermore, the Colonial Ministry had stripped

⁸⁶ Gabriel Debien, *Les Colons de Saint-Domingue et la Revolution: Essai sur le Club Massiac (Aout 1789-Aout 1792)* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1953), 53-54; Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution*.

planters of some of their power over their slaves. Finally, the Colonial Ministry had disbanded one of the two legal bodies with any power to protect their interests.

In the face of these threats, colonists found other ways to assert the social order they desired. They articulated a racial hierarchy by associating particular physical, intellectual, and moral attributes with specific groups of colonial peoples, dependent upon their parentage. By assigning varying degrees of value to those attributes, they asserted a racial hierarchy that did not need the law in order to function. In other words, they made racial hierarchy appear obvious, both naturally occurring and transparent. The following chapters will demonstrate how that racial hierarchy was negotiated in both discourse and in practice. White colonists, especially elites, identified certain practices and characteristics as virtuous; almost always, the *gens de couleur* as a group appeared incapable of them. People of color, by contrast, pushed at the boundaries of that dominant racial discourse, challenging the white monopoly on civic and sexual virtue, reason and industriousness.

Chapter Two

Inventing the Creole Citizen

On May 27, 1784, Moreau de Saint Méry delivered a public lecture in Paris entitled “Extract on the Character of the Creoles of Saint Domingue.” The lecture was sponsored by a new learned society, the Musée de Paris, of which Moreau was the Vice-President. Like other *musées* launched in late-eighteenth century Paris, the Musée de Paris fashioned itself an Enlightenment institution dedicated to the production and dissemination of useful knowledge in a less exclusive forum than academies and salons, largely through systems of public lecture courses.¹

To begin his lecture, Moreau noted that just as local climatic conditions and other external influences altered the bodies and minds of populations all over the world, so the “constantly burning sun must produce in the organs of the inhabitants of the torrid zone modifications which make them different from the inhabitants of temperate zones.” Therefore, he continued, “those who are born in the French Antilles, conserve, despite the communication and connections with the mother country, traits which distinguish them from the French of Europe....” His lecture would note those differences by outlining the

¹ See the introduction to the Musée de Paris’ Memoires, *Mémoires du Musée de Paris. Belles Lettres et Arts*, vol. I (Paris: Moutard, 1785). For the role of the musées in the French Enlightenment public sphere, see Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: a Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 233-280; Michael R. Lynn, “Enlightenment in the Public Sphere: The Musée de Monsieur and Scientific Culture in Late-Eighteenth Century Paris,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32, no. 4 (1999).

“character” of the “creoles” of Saint Domingue, referring specifically to the Antillean-born white population.²

We cannot know who came to hear Moreau speak on that day, the size of the audience, or how his observations were received. We do know, however, that Moreau’s lecture circulated beyond the assembled group in printed form: in 1785 the lecture was printed and sold in France in a volume containing a variety of lectures, essays and poetry produced by the members of the Musée de Paris. In 1787, Saint Domingue’s newspaper noted that the volume could be purchased in two different locations in the colony, and the title of Moreau’s lecture featured prominently in the notice.³ Two years later, the essay was translated into English and published in the popular Philadelphia journal *The American Museum*.⁴ Eventually, an expanded version of the “Extract” formed part of Moreau’s most famous publication, the *Description*.

Why would Moreau have lectured publicly on the distinctive character of the white creoles of Saint Domingue, and why in Paris? Furthermore, why would that lecture have been marketed in printed form in France, Saint Domingue, and eventually the United States? Can the lecture be understood simply as a contribution to the Musée de Paris’ mission to circulate useful knowledge and literature? In the printed version, the “Extract” is followed by another lecture, also given by Moreau, entitled “Observations on the Warra Kingdom, on the Gold Coast in Africa.” In addition to these texts, the volume contained odes celebrating recent technological feats, namely electricity and air travel, as

² M. Moreau de Saint Méry, "Fragment Sur Le Caractère des Créoles de Saint-Domingue, Tiré de l'Ouvrage des Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l'Amérique Sous le Vent, Etc. ," in *Mémoires du Musée de Paris* (Paris: Chez Moutard, 1785), 21-22.

³ *Supplément aux Affiches Américaines*, 15 septembre 1787.

⁴ M.L.E. Moreau de Saint Méry, "Character of the Creoles of St. Domingo," *The American Museum; or Repository of Ancient and Modern Fugitive Pieces, etc. Prose and Poetical* (1789).

well as an essay on a new form of musical notation. In the context of these other essays, the “Extract” appears to be just one of many rather randomly arranged contributions intended to broaden the knowledge of the listening and reading audience.

Yet this chapter will argue that Moreau’s lecture and its subsequent publication was part of a larger effort to rehabilitate the image of white creoles in France. Considered in the context of the political and racial tensions brewing in late-colonial Saint Domingue, the “Extract,” along with other publications by Moreau and white colonial elites, takes on an overtly political significance. In it, Moreau wanted to define and thereby stabilize the category of whiteness in the colony, in order to invest racial distinctions with greater importance. In other words, he wanted to show that whites were physically, morally and intellectually distinct from and superior to the African-descended population, the same population that threatened to infiltrate the category of “whites,” as noted in the previous chapter. But the redemption and stabilization of colonial whiteness would also serve efforts to gain greater local control over colonial legislation: by showing that white colonial men possessed reason and civic virtue—in short, that they could be citizens—white elites sought to assert their ability to participate in colonial law-making.

Convincing their metropolitan audience that colonial whites could be citizens was no small task. These white colonists wrote against a well-established literature that defined them as backward, unrefined, debauched fortune-seekers, the very opposite of the rational, self-sacrificing citizen they hoped to project. Indeed, their status as “creoles” seemed to preclude their capacity for citizenship. To help make this argument, Moreau and other colonial whites employed some useful rhetorical foils. First, as John Garrigus has demonstrated, and as this dissertation elaborates, white Saint Domingans contrasted

themselves with enslaved and free *gens de couleur* in order to highlight their own allegedly superior virtue.⁵

Yet white colonists also distinguished themselves from Europeans, a point often ignored by historians of Saint Domingue and of new world slave societies more generally.⁶ For example, Garrigus has argued that Moreau and other colonial authors put forth a “definition of whiteness” that elided differences of class and origin. By unifying these groups under the universal category of “whiteness,” he maintains, they could propagate a belief in white racial purity that necessarily excluded the *gens de couleur*. Furthermore, such a definition of whiteness “affirmed Saint Domingue’s French identity,” even as its African and African-descended population grew.⁷ By contrast, I maintain that defining whiteness in the colonial context required a nuanced rhetorical dance that allowed for some slippage between racial categories even as it attempted to shore them up. As Garrigus suggests, white colonists worked very hard to mark out the racial and cultural boundaries between themselves and those of African descent in order to reassure metropolitan officials and readers of their own racial and cultural purity. Yet at the same time, they recognized important differences between white creoles and Europeans, occasionally noting that white creoles shared certain characteristics with their “non-white” colonial neighbors. Embracing this category of white creoleness, they

⁵ John D. Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), Chapter Five.

⁶ Notable exceptions are Deirdre Coleman, "Janet Schaw and the Complexions of Empire," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 36, no. 2 (2003); Rebecca Hartkopf Schloss, "The February 1831 Slave Uprising in Martinique and the Policing of White Identity," *French Historical Studies* 30, no. 2 (2007); David Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity During the Age of Abolition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁷ Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, 160, 162.

claimed the best qualities attributed to inhabitants of both the new and old worlds. This unique combination of qualities, they suggested, made them “creole citizens.”

As described by Moreau, the white creole possessed a combination of characteristics derived from the trope of the noble savage and from an emerging discourse of virtuous citizenship. Due to the climate and customs of life in the tropics, where they lived closer to nature than Europeans, white creoles were kind-hearted, physically strong, proud, and simple in taste. Furthermore, they appear to be largely incapable of deceit—they are transparent due in part to a charming naiveté. By emphasizing these traits, white colonial authors constructed an image of the white creole that had a lot in common with contemporary formulations of the citizen, especially Rousseau’s famous, fictitious students, Emile and Sophie. As did many European authors generally grouped as Enlightenment *philosophes*—among them Rousseau, Montesquieu, and Diderot—these white creole authors condemned despotism while glorifying systems of government that reflected the will of informed citizens; likewise they critiqued aristocratic and urban vice while celebrating the virtue that they believed stemmed from meritocracy and living close to nature. They advocated a Rousseauian “model of healthy masculine republicanism as an antithesis to the over-civilized decay of monarchical France,” suggesting that this healthier alternative could be found in the new world, and that the white creole was its model citizen.⁸ The following two chapters will focus primarily on their articulation of masculine creole whiteness. Like Rousseau, these men conceived of citizenship as a profoundly gendered practice; men and women had distinct responsibilities as citizens based on the qualities they acquired from nature, and

⁸ Sarah Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs: The Causes Celebres of Prerevolutionary France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 269.

those who failed to uphold those responsibilities were accused of behaving contrary to their sex and thereby to nature. White creole men were therefore not merely citizens, rather they were *masculine* citizens.

The Political Context: Moreau and the Desire for Legal Autonomy

Efforts to redefine creole whiteness intensified during the 1780's, as tensions between metropolitan authorities and local magistrates and planters peaked. In May 1784, when Moreau lectured Parisians on the "Character of the Creoles of Saint Domingue," the Colonial Ministry had not yet issued its royal edict regulating the management and treatment of slaves, which the Conseil Supérieur du Cap would refuse to register. However, the Colonial Minister, de Castries, had proposed establishing a "limit" to the legal degradation of the *gens de couleur* just three years earlier. In the meantime, the *gens de couleur* of the southern province, led by Julien Raimond, were organizing efforts to court royal support for the *gens de couleur*. As we will see in the next chapter, in 1782 they began collecting donations to fund France's war with England. More importantly, in 1784 Raimond traveled to France, where he met with the former colonial governor Bellecombe, upon whose advice Raimond began writing to de Castries. While Raimond did not send his petitions advocating the amelioration of the status of *gens de couleur* until 1785 and 1786, his relationship with Bellecombe may have been known to Moreau by the time of the May 1784 lecture.⁹ Certainly, Moreau would have been aware of Raimond's presence in France and his efforts on behalf of the *gens de*

⁹ Debien claims that the Chambre d'Agriculture of Cap Français, of which Moreau was a member, knew about Bellecombe's support of Raimond and chastised him for it. When, exactly, they learned about the relationship between the two men we do not know. Gabriel Debien, *Les Colons de Saint-Domingue et la Revolution: Essai sur le Club Massiac (Aout 1789-Aout 1792)* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1953), 38.

couleur by the time the lecture was published in 1785. The possibility that white privilege could be dismantled by a Minister in the metropole must have loomed in Moreau's mind.

Local magistrates understood the root of these problems to lie in royal control over colonial legislation. Hilliard d'Auberteuil articulated this position most forcefully in his 1776 *Considerations on the Present State of the Colony of Saint Domingue*. Drawing on a Montesquieuan explanation of the particularities of populations living in different climates, Hilliard theorized a "jurisprudence of *créolité*," in the words of Malick Ghachem. He argued, in essence, that good laws could only grow out of local conditions, and that the particular habits and morality of the colonies required a particular type of law. Moreover, making those laws required "local knowledge" of the sort that only creole magistrates could provide.¹⁰

In fact, Hilliard suggested that only white creoles—and not metropolitan immigrants—should be allowed to rise in the colonial judiciary and administration. He proposed limiting service as a colonial judge, member of the Chamber of Agriculture, Commander or a Syndic to creoles. However, rather than restricting such esteemed positions to those born in the colony, he advocated expanding the category "creole" to include those who had demonstrated "integrity and their good conduct...(*leur probité et leur bonne conduite*)."¹¹ As an example, he suggested that lawyers who had served for ten years in Saint Domingue but who had been born outside the colony be granted the title "creole" and thereby access to these other prestigious positions.¹¹ As a French-born lawyer aspiring to a long career in the colony, Hilliard surely proposed this solution out

¹⁰ Malick Walid Ghachem, "Sovereignty and Slavery in the Age of Revolutions: Haitian Variations on a Metropolitan Theme" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 2001), 228-230, quote on page 228.

¹¹ Michel-René Hilliard d'Auberteuil, *Considérations sur l'Etat Présent de la Colonie Francaise de Saint-Domingue*, 2 vols. (Paris: Chez Grangé, 1777), 2: 47-48.

of self-interest. But his expansion of the category “creole” is still significant. He broadened the category to include the type of person with the most important quality he and Moreau desired in what I call the “creole citizen.” That is, he included those who possessed civic virtue, those who served the colony rather than using it as a playground or a place to seek quick fortune.

Tensions between local magistrates and the Colonial Ministry reached a crisis point in January 1787, when the Ministry merged the colony’s two highest courts. The Ministry had effectively suppressed the less obedient of the two, the Conseil Supérieur du Cap Français, as punishment for refusing to register the 1784 edict governing the treatment of slaves. For Moreau, the Conseil’s suppression must have been devastating, for at least two reasons. Not only was the court the colony’s best defense against inappropriate or ill-informed laws emanating from the metropole, but Moreau had also planned to rise in its ranks to advance his legal—and possibly political—career. He had been appointed as a judge on the Conseil du Cap in 1785, but he longed for the top position on that court, that of *procureur du roi*. In 1786, rumors in Saint Domingue indicated that the position would soon be his. In January 1787, however, Moreau’s ambition was crushed along with the Conseil.¹²

And yet, Moreau remained on the Colonial Ministry’s payroll for his continued work on the *Loix et Constitutions* and the *Description*. Furthermore, the Colonial Minister, de Castries, had employed him to draft new legislation for the colonies recently approved by colonial administrators. In other words, Moreau appears to have been in the

¹² Anthony Louis Elicona, *Un Colonial Sous la Révolution en France et en Amérique: Moreau de Saint-Méry* (Paris: Jouve et Compagnie, 1934), 22; Etienne Taillemite, “Moreau de Saint-Méry,” in *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique, et Historique de la Partie Française de L’isle Saint Domingue*, ed. Blanche Maurel and Etienne Taillemite (Paris: Société de l’Histoire des Colonies Françaises, 1958), xvi.

paradoxical—or hypocritical—position of executing the will of the agency whose policies he so opposed. He left Paris for the Antilles in April 1787, traveling first to Martinique and then to Saint Domingue, to continue his research on the two oeuvres. While in Saint Domingue, however, he is said to have rallied opposition against the Ministry’s decision to suppress the Conseil du Cap. Before returning again to France in July 1788, he promised his former colleagues on the Conseil that he would work in France to restore the court. Some assumed that he would return in the fall as the *procureur general*.¹³

In September 1787, during Moreau’s stay in Saint Domingue, another extract from Moreau’s works-in-progress appeared in print. This time, the piece was titled “Extract on the customs of Saint Domingue” and it appeared serially in three issues of the colony’s only newspaper, the *Affiches Américaines*. Moreau explained in the first installment that, having addressed the “character” of those born in Saint Domingue elsewhere, this “Extract” would instead cover “the general customs of the adoptive country of so many Europeans.” Moreau and the editor of the *Affiches*, Charles Mozard, clearly considered the “Extract on the customs of Saint Domingue” to be a companion piece to “Extract on the customs of the creoles of Saint Domingue,” which was advertised for sale at Mozard’s office as well as the home of his brother-in-law and fellow lawyer, Baudry des Lozières.¹⁴

The circulation of both of these publications in Saint Domingue at a moment of such political ferment is telling. I propose that, by emphasizing the differences between Europeans and white creoles, and by constructing a positive image of the latter, Moreau

¹³ Elicona, *Un Colonial Sous la Révolution en France et en Amérique: Moreau de Saint-Méry*, 22-25.

¹⁴ *Affiches Américaines*, 15 septembre 1787. The three installments were printed in the issues of September 15, September 20, and September 22, 1787.

and his fellow white elites hoped to accomplish several tasks. First, they sought to unify their fellow white colonists around a common local identity, while urging the creation of a cohesive civil society in a place that supposedly could not support one. Second, by defining creole whiteness, they asserted a cultural and biological boundary between colonial whites and *gens de couleur*. Finally, by linking white creoleness to cultural definitions of citizenship, they demonstrated to French colonial authorities—especially the Ministry—that they possessed the characteristics necessary to legislate on their own.

Climate Theory and Creole Degeneration

Arguing for white creole reason and virtue required a refutation of a well-established tradition of scientific and travel literature. Such eighteenth-century works typically asserted the physical, intellectual, and moral degeneration of whites who moved to the tropics, and particularly of whites born in the tropics. Indeed, the very whiteness of tropical inhabitants was called into question. Signified by social practice, intellectual capacity and morality as much as biology, whiteness seemed to be compromised by the debilitating effects of the climate, the corrupting influence of slavery, and the influence of African practices on European customs.¹⁵

The view of white creoles as degenerated Europeans stemmed in large part from new scientific theories. By the time that Moreau spoke before his Parisian audience in 1784, educated Europeans would have understood that a multitude of outside factors—such as the humidity of one's immediate environment, the amount of meat consumed on

¹⁵ Scholars of the British Caribbean argue that the whiteness and Englishness of white creoles there fell under suspicion for the same reasons. Coleman, "Janet Schaw and the Complexions of Empire."; Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2003), Chapter Four.

a regular basis, or whether one was swaddled as a child—were crucial to individual development. European naturalists and philosophers had by this time posited a new way of thinking about human difference based on the observation and classification of groups of people throughout the world. In this period preceding the dominance of biological determinism, they explained human difference through the theory of “environmentalism.” They argued that physical attributes, character and morality were determined by “external forces working on the body,” including climate, diet and customs.¹⁶ When studying these differences, European theorists such as Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon and Johann Blumenbach measured populations native to other parts of the world against their own norms. Indeed, they believed that all humans were born with bodies resembling Europeans and were later altered by their environment. People raised in tropical climates suffered the ill effects of “excessive heat” that weakened one’s body, mind and morality. The dark-skinned people who lived in such climates were therefore considered to be lazy, overly sexual and prone to despotic government.¹⁷

Perhaps the most famous environmentalist was the French *philosophe* Montesquieu. In *The Spirit of Laws*, Montesquieu asserted that people in hot climates became “slothful and dispirited,” so that slavery was required to make them work. Likewise, slaveowners required despotic government since the heat rendered them politically slothful.¹⁸ Further, not only did the heat in warm climates make its inhabitants lazy, but it also made them so cowardly that the bolder and more courageous cold-climate

¹⁶ Londa Schiebinger, “The Anatomy of Science: Race and Sex in Eighteenth-Century Science,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 23, no. 4 (1990): 393.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*: 394; Roxanne Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 23-24.

¹⁸ Charles Louis de Secondat Montesquieu, *The Spirit of Laws*, ed. David Wallace Carrithers (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 264.

inhabitants could easily conquer them. Montesquieu used the West Indies as his prime example: “The Indians are naturally a cowardly people; even the children of the Europeans born in the Indies lose the courage peculiar to their own climate.”¹⁹

Moreover, the warm climate promoted a “higher sensibility for pleasures” among its inhabitants. This increased sensibility made for more passionate operas in Italy than in England, and a decreased tolerance of pain among those living at the equator when compared to Russians: Montesquieu claimed that “You must flay a Muscovite alive to make him feel.”²⁰ He also claimed that people in warmer climates were controlled by their emotional and physical passions. Their “[delicate] organs” meant that they were only motivated by sexual urges, and that their only source of happiness was love; these were their only true goals. In northern Europe, therefore, where people were not controlled by such “sensibilities,” people “have few vices, many virtues, a great share of frankness and sincerity.” In southern Europe, however, “the strongest passions multiply all manner of crimes.”²¹ Thus, according to Montesquieu, a warm climate encouraged laziness, cowardice, heightened physical and emotional sensibilities, and criminality.

Thus eighteenth-century philosophy and science explained the multitude of ways in which people living in the tropics differed from those in more temperate climates. The most influential among them was Buffon. His *Histoire Naturelle, Générale, et Particulière*, the first volume of which was published in 1749, proposed a theory to explain differences among human organisms throughout the world.²² Emphasizing the

¹⁹ Ibid., 247.

²⁰ Ibid., 246.

²¹ Ibid., 246-247.

²² Georges-Louis Leclerc Buffon, Comte de, *Histoire Naturelle, Générale et Particulière*, vol. 1-44 (Paris: 1749-1809).

importance of environmental factors on the development of plants and animals, he postulated that embryonic life forms developed differently according to the amount of “organic particles” they absorbed from local food supplies. But they were also fundamentally altered by the degree of heat and humidity in which they lived. Heat promoted growth, whereas humidity hampered it. Central to this explanation was Buffon’s belief in the gradual cooling of the earth, starting at the poles. As regions cooled, the organisms inhabiting them moved toward warmer climates in order to survive, resulting in the presence of large animals like giraffes and elephants in the tropical old world. However, the new world posed problems for this theory since its largest animals tended to inhabit the cold northern regions. Buffon therefore speculated that the new world possessed a moist, cool climate that produced animals that were smaller and more feeble than in Europe. Extending his theory to the indigenous people of the new world, he characterized them as physically weak and lazy, with small reproductive organs, no body hair, and little sexual desire.²³ The cool moist climate had caused them to degenerate so that they were smaller, weaker, and less vigorous than Europeans.

Although Buffon did not theorize what would happen to Europeans who moved to the new world, another European naturalist-philosopher famously did. Cornelius de Pauw published his *Recherches philosophiques sur les Américains* in 1768. A “undoubtable best-seller” in France, the *Recherches* was issued in some fourteen different

²³ Deborah Poole, *Vision, Race and Modernity: A Visual Economy of the Andean Image World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 58-63. See also Thomas Jefferson’s rebuttal of Buffon in “Query VI” of his *Notes on the State of Virginia*.

editions in just nine years.²⁴ This popular work affirmed the degenerative effect of the climate on whites born in the new world, whom de Pauw described as “Creoles, meaning Europeans born in America of parents originally from our continent (i.e., Europe).” Writing primarily about white creoles in Spanish South America, he claimed that, like animals brought from the old world, they did in fact degenerate. It took a longer time to detect “the change in their constitution and the sagging of their spirit,” but those changes became more apparent when comparing creoles with Europeans who had newly arrived to the new world. Such a comparison revealed that “Creoles of the fourth, and of the fifth generation have less genius, less capacity for sciences than true Europeans....”²⁵ After several generations, European descendents lost the intellectual vigor of their ancestors.

The effect of the climate on the colony’s inhabitants was a very real concern, not only because of the long-term changes in body and character it produced, but also because of the immediate health risks it posed, especially for those new to the colony. Out of a desire to maintain the colonial population grew a literature produced in France and the colonies to explain and remedy those health risks.²⁶ Such medical tracts explained the physical transformations experienced by Europeans living in the Antilles with a combination of humoral, miasmatic, and climate theory.²⁷ In them, physicians postulated that the bodies of Europeans—particularly the composition of their blood, “fibers,” and organs—broke down and then reconstituted themselves over time due to

²⁴ Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1995), 28.

²⁵ Cornelius de Pauw, *Recherches Philosophiques sur les Américains* (Londres: 1771), 2: 139, 140.

²⁶ Sean Quinlan, "Colonial Encounters: Colonial Bodies, Hygiene and Abolitionist Politics in Eighteenth-Century France," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 42 (1996).

²⁷ Karol K. Weaver, *Medical Revolutionaries: The Enslaved Healers of Eighteenth-Century Saint Domingue* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 29.

exposure to the hotter, more humid climate, new diseases, and new types and quantities of food and drink. Yellow fever, gout, and gonorrhoea awaited newly arrived Europeans who did not take care to preserve their health.²⁸

According to eighteenth-century European doctors, then, moving from the temperate climates of Europe to the Caribbean tropics posed a multitude of dangers for the body. Humoral theory taught that particular regions of the earth produced people with particular humoral balances; one was born, in other words, with a body designed to live in one's place of birth.²⁹ In order to live healthily in a new region, with a new climate, the humors had to adapt accordingly. When Europeans came to Saint Domingue, physicians postulated that the new intensity with which they sweat unbalanced their humors. Such a dramatic loss of perspiration "thickened" and "depleted" the blood and other bodily fluids, effectively clogging up the circulatory system and making it more prone to fever and even parasitic worms.³⁰ Unhealthy atmospheric conditions exacerbated the problem. The Royal Doctor in Saint Domingue, Duchemin de l'Etang, addressed these risks in the colony's only medical journal, the *Gazette de Médecine pour les Colonies*. In 1778, Duchemin's publication employed miasmatic theory, or the idea that disease originated in rotting vegetable matter, to explain the two primary modes by which the heat attacked the humors: first, it dried out the local swamps and caused the emanation of "all kinds of bad odors and putrid miasmas," and second, by irritating the humors, making them even more vulnerable to the alkalinity and decay left

²⁸ Ibid., 19-21.

²⁹ Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture*, 22.

³⁰ Quinlan, "Colonial Encounters: Colonial Bodies, Hygiene and Abolitionist Politics in Eighteenth-Century France," 108-110.

behind by the evaporated swamps.³¹ An earlier royal doctor, Poupée-Desportes, in his *Histoire des Maladies de Saint Domingue*, linked the dangers of “excessive perspiration” with such miasmatic threats. Coupled with the intense humidity, which “opens” the body to the entry of atmospheric ingredients, intense sweating made inhabitants of Saint Domingue prone to the absorption of such “putrid vapors.”³² Hilliard had explained the colony’s potential health dangers in a similar way, noting that those who moved to Saint Domingue from colder climates would have a hard time adjusting to colony’s “exhalations of the earth.” The sea air, mixed with the “nitrous and sulphuric particles of the soil of Saint Domingue,” and then heated by the Caribbean sun, affected the very organs of those who breathed it. Breathing the colony’s air for the first time, when one is used to breathing the air of a cold climate, could endanger one’s health and dramatically change one’s temperament, he warned.³³

In order for Europeans to live healthily in the Antilles, they had to first survive this initial period of exposure to the new environment. The physician N. Bertin explained this process of “creolization” in a 1786 publication. Only after a period of time in the new environment did “the solids and fluids’... absolutely lose their initial constitution, they creolize (*se créolisent*), as we say, and the temperament begins to unify with the climate.”³⁴ Thus, for example, creoles, and creolized Europeans, were thought to have

³¹ *Gazette de Médecine Pour les Colonies*, No. 1 (1 Novembre 1778), p. 2.

³² Jean-Baptiste-René Pouppe Desportes, *Histoire des Maladies de Saint Domingue*, 3 vols. (Paris: Chez Lejay, 1770), 1: 19.

³³ Hilliard d'Auberteuil, *Considérations sur l'Etat Présent de la Colonie Francaise de Saint-Domingue*, 2: 53.

³⁴ Antoine Bertin, *Des Moyens de Conserver la Santé des Blancs et des Nègres aux Antilles au Climats Chauds et Humides de l'Amérique*, Paris, 1768, pp. 14-15, cited in Quinlan, "Colonial Encounters: Colonial Bodies, Hygiene and Abolitionist Politics in Eighteenth-Century France," 109-110. The author of this

more “aqueous” blood than Europeans, such that the loss of perspiration did not adversely affect them.³⁵ Once a colonist had “creolized,” he or she could survive with much less risk in the Antilles.

Without the proper precautions, such changes were known to bring on debilitating illnesses and death. To survive the transformation, doctors prescribed behaviors and treatments designed to lessen the effects of new environment while the body acclimated.³⁶ The *Gazette* recommended that newcomers adopt a particular regime of bloodletting, baths, and non-alcoholic drinks as soon as they felt ill. Instructions regarding the baths were quite specific: start with water that is body-temperature and gradually replace it with colder water. Such a practice would prevent the dissipation of the humors caused by hot baths, and the fevers brought on by plunging directly into a cold bath. The recommended method would allegedly allow for the blood to recover its “natural volume,” leaving the newcomer “fortified and refreshed.”³⁷

The climate, however, was not the only danger to one’s health. According to the *Gazette*, Europeans who did not monitor their diet carefully risked exacerbating the negative influence of the heat. Above all, Europeans were advised not to follow local customs of eating and drinking, due in large part to the different constitution of their blood. Whereas creoles benefited from coffee, old wine, a bit of liquor and spicy food, newcomers were advised to avoid alcohol as well as spicy food in order to remain hydrated and keep a cool temperature. Instead, the author proposed lemonade or chicken

oeuvre appears to have been a French doctor, “N. Bertin,” rather than the creole poet Antoine Bertin, and the date of publication was 1786 rather than 1768, as Quinlan cites.

³⁵ *Gazette de Médecine Pour les Colonies*, No. 2 (23 Novembre 1778), p. 8.

³⁶ Quinlan, “Colonial Encounters: Colonial Bodies, Hygiene and Abolitionist Politics in Eighteenth-Century France,” 110.

³⁷ *Gazette de Médecine Pour les Colonies*, No. 2 (23 Novembre 1778), p. 7.

broth with a bit of lettuce if one began to feel ill. When hungry, mild local produce such as “sweet oranges, melons, grasses, roots and fresh vegetables” were recommended, presumably for their hydrating benefits.³⁸ Such a diet should be maintained until the newcomer’s blood achieved an equilibrium with the heat. By contrast, the already acclimated colonist thrived on those foods and beverages forbidden to the newcomer because such foods restored to their blood, which was “too aqueous and phlegmatic [,] the balm and the spirits which were dissipated by fatigue, worries or illness.”³⁹ Thus the climate altered the composition of the blood of long-time colonial residents, resulting in different alimentary needs than those of the recently arrived European.

Not only should newcomers limit themselves to lukewarm baths, bland food and non-alcoholic beverages in order to ease into the local climate and diet; many physicians recommended abstinence from Saint Domingue’s notorious sexual pleasures. Pouppé-Desportes repeated Hippocrates’ prescription for men to avoid sexual relations with women during the summer. But while Pouppé-Desportes agreed that this was sound advice, he added that it was unrealistic in the inherently libidinous Caribbean: “I doubt that Hippocrates himself could [obey it] in the Islands, where there reigns a perpetual summer, and where everything animates the passions.”⁴⁰ Sex with women in the Caribbean posed particular health risks for white men, according to these physicians, especially sex with women of color. Pouppé-Desportes warned that one could catch an especially nasty strain of gonorrhea from a *mulâtresse* due to her “hot temperament.” Black women allegedly transmitted a slightly less dangerous form of the disease than did

³⁸ *Gazette de Médecine Pour les Colonies*, No. 2 (23 Novembre 1778), p. 7-8.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁰ Pouppé Desportes, *Histoire des Maladies de Saint Domingue*, 1: 24.

mulâtresses, but catching gonorrhoea from white women allegedly carried the least risk.⁴¹

Beyond the threat of venereal disease, these physicians worried about “spermatic loss.”

When large quantities of seminal fluid left the body, the humors became severely imbalanced, leading to physical breakdown, madness, or disease.⁴² Exercising control over one’s appetite for sex—and for food and drink—became a matter of life and death in the colonies.

Of course, official desire to maintain the colonial population drove these efforts to improve the health of white colonists. The royal doctors quoted above hoped to fend off disease and humoral imbalances among whites in order to encourage population growth. As the enslaved and free *de couleur* populations grew ever larger during the eighteenth century, so grew the need to increase the white population. Therefore, the reluctance of white colonists to police their own behaviors—and thereby ensure their own health—was a source of frustration for these physicians as well as visiting and resident men of letters. Thus regulating one’s diet and sexual urges had implications for the health of the colony and the French empire, and not only the individual: the importation and reproduction of white colonial society depended on it.⁴³

In short, eighteenth-century science taught that Europeans were prone to physical decline in Saint Domingue; however, European immigrants themselves held the key to avoiding the physical dangers of the tropics. Local climate and customs destabilized the

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 1: 66-67.

⁴² Quinlan, “Colonial Encounters: Colonial Bodies, Hygiene and Abolitionist Politics in Eighteenth-Century France,” 111.

⁴³ As was the case in the British Caribbean, where British politicians, doctors, planters, and missionaries outlined similar methods of preserving the health of whites. In both the British and French contexts, temperance was deemed the guarantor of health and population growth. Kathleen Wilson, “Governmentality before Modernity: Practices of Sex and State in the Early Modern British Empire,” (2008).

humoral balance of Europeans and exposed them to new threats in the form of miasmas and disease. The physical process of “creolization” could be deadly, and surviving it required colonists to exercise one trait that creoles and newly-arrived Europeans were said to lack: self-control.

Taste, Immorality and the Creolization of Culture

Indeed, depictions of creoles and creolized colonists from the period often portrayed them as having lost the ability to maintain bourgeois European standards of propriety. European visitors to Saint Domingue were consistently appalled by what they perceived as a debauched lifestyle in which reason, self-discipline and sociability had fallen victim to the heat and the belief that one’s stay in the colony was only temporary. In these accounts, white creoles appeared as languid and lazy philistines, interested in little else than plantation agriculture, trade, and immediate pleasure. The mid-day heat, plus the monotonous boredom of life on the plantation, slowed both the physical movements and intellectual pursuits of planters. The French Baron Alexandre Stanislas de Wimpffen claimed that colonists commonly took naps in the heat of the afternoon following dinner in order to “[alleviate] their *ennui*.”⁴⁴ Other activities, either social or individual, were rendered difficult at best due to colonists’ provincialism. The art of conversation seemed completely lost on colonists, who only wanted to talk about plantation business: after discussing their slaves, cotton, sugar, and coffee, they would

⁴⁴ Alexandre-Stanislas Wimpffen, baron de, *Haiti au XVIIIe Siècle: Richesse et Esclavage dans une Colonie Française*, ed. Pierre Pluchon (Paris: Karthala, 1993 [1797]), 113.

debate these same topics again and again, much to the dismay of the visitor seeking genuine “society” like that in Europe.⁴⁵

Colonists’ taste in home décor was as unrefined as their social skills and reading tastes. Wimpffen mocked the gaudy attempts at elegance displayed in the homes of wealthy planters who preferred “magnificence” to good taste. He complained that they hung heavy damask tapestries from golden rods, a practice that he found as ridiculous in the tropics as wearing gauze in Norway in the month of January. Wimpffen suggested that such practices revealed colonists’ inability to escape the legacy of their rough-around-the-edges predecessors, the buccaneers: “Taste...is still very creole here in Saint Domingue, and creole taste is not good taste, it smells a bit of the *boucan*.”⁴⁶ (The colony’s earliest white inhabitants, the buccaneers, used a grill called a “boucan” to smoke meat.)

Another common criticism of colonists was their lack of civic virtue. Many colonists considered their lives in the colonies to be temporary; they planned to extract what wealth they could and then return to Europe. Such a mindset inevitably led to selfishness and a lack of communal spirit. Colonists, these authors repeated, cared only for themselves and had no sense of responsibility to the colony at large; they were, in other words, not citizens. While visiting plantations near Jacmel, Wimpffen complained that “...instead of citizens, there are in Saint Domingue only voyagers, more concerned with finding a way to leave, than with making a pleasant, sweet life.”⁴⁷ Such isolation had its origin in colonists’ greed, according to Wimpffen. Their ambitions, and not the

⁴⁵ Ibid., 117-118.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 115.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 122-123.

distance between plantations, had destroyed any sort of refined politeness (*urbanité*) among fellow neighbors, who were all consumed with the same desire for wealth. “Less isolated by the woods that surround him than by his self-interest, his first ambition is to make a fortune, [and] the second is to make it sooner, before leaving as soon as possible a country where gold only imperfectly satisfies the needs of vanity...”⁴⁸

While Wimpffen focused his disdain on the planter class, others located creole moral degeneration with working-class whites, or *petit blancs*. When the Swiss naturalist du Simitière visited plantations around the Léogane region of Saint Domingue, he noted that the overseers there lived in “the most sordid debauchery.” Their “depraved inclinations” drove them to three primary vices common throughout the colony. First, the young, the old, the newly-arrived as well as the thoroughly acclimated, all of these overseers gambled. Second, they used their position of power on the plantation to pursue sexual relations—typically forced—with enslaved women, often finding themselves with a life-threatening venereal disease as a result. Finally, du Simitière lamented the creole propensity for drink. While the French consumed alcohol in moderation, “it is not at all the same in their colony of St. Dom [where] the abundance of taffia and its low price wreaks strange havoc among the community of whites.” Lacking the self-discipline to refrain from Saint Domingue’s notorious temptations, the behavior of these overseers identified them as not-French, in the eyes of du Simitière. Unlimited gambling, sex with women of color, and copious consumption of tafia were quintessential features of the creole *petit blanc* way of life.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 240.

Climate and lack of self-control were not the only cause of white creole degeneration. Free and enslaved people of color allegedly corrupted the manners, work ethic, and language skills of whites, threatening the behaviors that should have policed the color line. Wimpffen thought it only natural that white creoles were lazy, selfish and immoral, since they had learned such traits by being surrounded by slaves: “What can one expect from children carelessly left to a troupe of domestic slaves, to whom modesty means nothing?”⁴⁹ Another visitor, the Swiss Girod de Chantrons, critiqued white creoles’ tendency to communicate in creole rather than French. He lamented that white creole women in particular preferred such an “imbecilic jargon” that limited their facility of expression. Moreover, they used creole to participate in indecent conversation, similar to colonial women of color. But Girod proposed that rather than imitating their brown skinned “rivals,” white creole women should “take for models our lovable European women.”⁵⁰ Girod’s comments, like the comments of many others, suggested that the presence of people of color had eroded the whiteness of white creoles. Redeeming that whiteness required a European model.

Thus, at the apex of its economic development, Saint Domingue, the “pearl of the Antilles,” appeared to be home to a group of greedy, unrefined, ignorant whites. Colonial conditions had created a uniquely creole way of life, one that compared unflatteringly with life in France. Everyone and everything that traveled from Europe to Saint Domingue seemed to suffer some sort of corruption: health, morality, intellect and

⁴⁹ Ibid., 215-216.

⁵⁰ Justin Girod de Chantrons, *Voyage d'un Suisse Dans Différentes Colonies D'amérique*, ed. Pierre Pluchon (Paris: Librairie Jules Tallandier, 1980), 188. For similar descriptions of the linguistic and moral degradation of white Jamaicans, see Edward Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 300-303.

cultural practices all degenerated into compromised or bastardized versions of what existed in France.

“Creolization” in all of these forms—physical, moral and cultural—threatened the rationale that justified claims to white superiority in the colony. Indeed, Europeans’ allegedly superior capacity for reason, morality and higher degree of civilization underwrote slavery and the colonial project more generally. When white colonists exhibited a lack of self-control that led them to heavy drinking and sexual promiscuity, when they adopted the customs of the slaves or *gens de couleur*, and when their loss of self-control compromised their health, they failed to uphold those claims. Indeed, even more dangerous, their actions blurred the boundaries between European and African. When the Colonial Ministry and colonial administrators imposed discriminatory legislation against the *gens de couleur* in order to create an intermediate caste, they did so because they believed that distinctions between whites and non-whites needed to be rigorously enforced. Slave obedience rested on that distinction, they argued. As we saw in Chapter One, even those advocating a limit to color-based discrimination in the 1780’s did not dispute this premise. When the above authors worried over white creolization, they expressed shock and disdain over those blurred distinctions.

Similarly, scholars of the colonial Caribbean have tended to interpret creolization as a process antithetical to the maintenance of colonial power. For them, “creolization” signifies a process by which a new society and culture was forged out of two discrete cultures (usually West African and European), previously distinct from one another, in response to one another and to their new surroundings. In his influential theorization of the concept, Kamau Brathwaite described the Jamaican creolization experience as “two

cultures of people, having to adapt themselves to a new environment and to each other. The friction created by this confrontation was cruel, but it was also creative.”⁵¹ In Brathwaite’s formulation, the “creative friction” of creolization had revolutionary potential—had Jamaican whites embraced it, and embraced an alliance with slaves, they could have achieved economic and perhaps political independence from Britain. However, “[w]hat the white Jamaican élite did not, could not, would not, dare accept, was that true autonomy for them could only mean true autonomy for all; that *the more unrestricted the creolization, the greater would have been the freedom* (my emphasis).” Instead, they preferred to remain dependent on Britain and identify not as Jamaicans but as Britons—even though metropolitans would not see them as anything more than “bastardized” Britons.⁵² According to Brathwaite’s formulation, it is only natural that white colonial elites and colonial authorities in the metropole fought creolization as a threat to political autonomy and the preservation of slavery.

And yet, not all colonial whites rejected or denied white creolization. In Saint Domingue, some asserted that white creoles possessed certain flattering characteristics that distinguished them from Europeans. While these authors acknowledged certain truths in the accusations leveled against white creoles and creole society, they also emphasized the natural potential of both. For Moreau and Hilliard, such cultural and biological distinctiveness helped justify their desire for greater legislative autonomy. Indeed, in this sense, Brathwaite’s association of creolization with colonial autonomy holds; however, neither Moreau nor Hilliard linked creolization with freedom or equality for non-whites. They accepted the “creative friction” of colonial cultural mixture in a

⁵¹ Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820*, 307.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 296-311.

very limited way, typically crediting Saint Domingue's climate—rather than the influence of slaves and free people of color—with the positive changes in whites. Still, these advocates of white creole virtue challenged the typical interpretation of colonial creolization. Far from an inherent threat to slavery and racial hierarchy, in this context creolization worked to buttress those practices, and in the process, the French empire they fed. According to Saint Domingue's white creole elites, white creolization benefited the colony by creating a population of robust, honest, potentially civic-minded white natives committed to the maintenance of the slave system.

Defining the Creole Citizen

An analysis of efforts to redeem the white creole reputation during the tense period of the late 1770's and 1780's necessarily relies heavily on the work of Moreau. His 1784 lecture, his 1787 contribution to the *Affiches Américaines*, as well as the *Description*, which appears to have been written during this same period, express this position more coherently than any other publication. However, he was not the only proponent. Hilliard's *Considérations*, published in 1776-1777, was an important antecedent, articulating many of the same points that Moreau would later elaborate. Furthermore, other colonists contributed to the effort as printers, newspaper editors, and writers. Together these colonists countered assumptions about the degenerate white creole with a new figure, the creole citizen. Turning the tables on European naturalists and travelers, these colonists emphasized white creole vitality and morality by contrasting them with allusions to French degeneration. To do so, they drew on discourses of

gendered republicanism and noble savagery circulating throughout France and the Atlantic World during this period.

As noted above, Moreau was a believer in climate theory; neither he nor Hilliard disputed the idea that white creoles differed from Europeans due to the influence of the colonial environment. In fact, most colonial residents probably believed that the creole-European distinction was an important one. In a rare glimpse of the perspective of the enslaved, du Simitière noted that Saint Domingue's slaves employed different terminology when referring to Europeans and white creoles. They used the term "Congo-White" ("*Blanc-Congo*") to describe Europeans, whereas they simply referred to white creoles as "whites."⁵³ What did the addition of "Congo" indicate to the people who used this term? As a place name, "Congo" referred to the African kingdom of the Kongo. In Saint Domingue, however, planters applied the term to enslaved people brought from west-central Africa more generally. So-called "Congo" slaves comprised 40 percent of enslaved people imported to Saint Domingue during the eighteenth century, making them the largest group (to the extent that they were actually a group at all) and making the designator "Congo" a common one.⁵⁴ By using the term "Congo" to refer to whites from Europe, perhaps enslaved people emphasized their old world origins: like "Congo" slaves, "Congo-Whites" came from a foreign land with its own cultural and political traditions. Regardless, it is significant that the enslaved, and not just white elites, complicated the category of colonial whiteness.

⁵³ "Vocabulaire Créole," Du Simitière Papers, Library Company of Philadelphia, 968.F.10a.

⁵⁴ Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2004), 40.

Although Moreau accepted that important differences existed between white creoles and Europeans, unlike Buffon and de Pauw, he posited that the Caribbean climate produced more robust human beings than the old world. In fact, both Moreau and Hilliard portrayed the tropics as a place where human bodies could grow large and vigorous. Moreau and Hilliard both claimed that white creoles in Saint Domingue tended to be “well made,” (*bien faits*), and Moreau attributed to them an “advantageous height.” Hilliard described them as “large and robust.”⁵⁵ Furthermore, both argued that the climate gave creoles a physical dexterity that fostered a natural athleticism. Hilliard contended that even Europeans, once they became acclimated to the climate, would benefit from it, “enjoy[ing] perfect health.” The heat that other observers feared actually produced positive effects, he claimed, encouraging a slight but constant perspiration that “render[ed] limbs more agile and flexible (*rend les membres plus agiles et plus liants*)” and prevented certain diseases, so long as one remained hydrated.⁵⁶

Why focus on the physical vitality of white creoles? First, Moreau and Hilliard were certainly reacting against the Buffonian theory of new world physical degeneration. But European critics of colonial life tended to focus on the intellectual and moral degeneration of creoles, so why not primarily address those criticisms? The choice makes

⁵⁵ Hilliard d'Auberteuil, *Considérations sur l'Etat Présent de la Colonie Francaise de Saint-Domingue*, 2: 25, 27; Moreau de Saint Méry, "Fragment Sur Le Caractère des Créoles de Saint-Domingue, Tiré de l'Ouvrage des Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l'Amérique Sous le Vent, Etc.," 22; Méderic-Louis-Elie Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de L'isle Saint-Domingue*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: 1797), 1: 12.

⁵⁶ Hilliard d'Auberteuil, *Considérations sur l'Etat Présent de la Colonie Francaise de Saint-Domingue*, 2: 27, quote on page 23; Moreau de Saint Méry, "Fragment Sur Le Caractère des Créoles de Saint-Domingue, Tiré de l'Ouvrage des Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l'Amérique Sous le Vent, Etc.," 22; Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de L'isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 12.

more sense when considered in the context of European and Atlantic World critiques of urban life and its negative effect on the human body.

The association of physical, moral and even intellectual degeneration with urban life was a common trope during this period, linked to noble savage and anti-luxury discourse. The writer perhaps best known for his critique of urban life was Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose educational treatise *Emile* was wildly popular throughout late-eighteenth century France, despite being banned.⁵⁷ In it, Rousseau advocated raising and educating children in the countryside, where they could breathe clean, fresh air, far from the artifice and vice he associated with urban areas. Towns, he claimed, “devoured” men so that “[i]n a few generations the race dies out or becomes degenerate; it needs renewal, and it is always renewed in the country.”⁵⁸ He theorized that children living in towns and cooped up in schools during the day acquired stale knowledge through rote memorization. Forced to stifle their instinct to run and play while receiving instruction at a desk, urban children lacked physical exercise, and their physical development suffered. But in the countryside, and under the guidance of a good tutor, a boy could have a “natural education” in which he learned to reason on his own based on lessons taught by nature and experience. In the process, his body would grow strong and healthy: cosmography lessons could be acquired by observing the sun while walking outdoors, basic physics by experimenting with different sized levers in order to move a heavy object, for example. Rousseau emphasized that the body and the mind learn best

⁵⁷ P.D. Jimack, "Introduction," in *Emile* (London: Dent and Sons Ltd., 1974), xxiii-xxiv.

⁵⁸ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. Barbara Foxley (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1974), 26.

together, especially when they learned from nature rather than a rigid, urban schoolmaster.⁵⁹

For both Rousseau and Moreau, custom, as much as climate, impacted the physical development of children. Moreau claimed that white creoles' physical advantages were due in part to colonial parenting practices. Unlike in Europe, in Saint Domingue infants were not swaddled, Moreau explained. Their bodies were therefore able to develop free of the deformities suffered by babies whose movements were restricted by tightly wrapped cloths. Moreover, in the colony children of all ages were encouraged to run and enjoy physical play, further facilitating the development of strong, healthy bodies.⁶⁰ Clearly, Moreau had been influenced by Rousseau's encouragement of physical education, which began with allowing infants to move and eventually run "unfettered" by swaddling cloths. For Rousseau, the cloths that bound babies' limbs were merely one example (a very literal one) of the restraints that social convention placed on individuals, a convention that restricted a child's natural growth and—when understood in its symbolic sense—his or her ability to follow natural law: "The infant is bound up in swaddling clothes, the corpse is nailed down in his coffin. All his life long man is imprisoned by our institutions."⁶¹ In this light, white creole infants' free limbs represent much more than their healthy physical development; they also signify their ability to develop free of harmful European social convention. In fact, to better

⁵⁹ Ibid., 131-132, 97, 89.

⁶⁰ Moreau de Saint Méry, "Fragment Sur Le Caractère des Créoles de Saint-Domingue, Tiré de l'Ouvrage des Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l'Amérique Sous le Vent, Etc.," 22; Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de L'isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 12.

⁶¹ Rousseau, *Emile*, 10.

emphasize the debilitating influence of European institutions, Rousseau contrasted them with Caribbean indigenous people, writing, “The Caribs are better off than we are.”⁶²

Rousseau’s and Moreau’s belief in the healthy life of the countryside was informed by a staple image in Enlightenment literature, the noble savage. European *philosophes* commonly employed the image in order to critique the artifice of purportedly overcivilized European societies, particularly towns, and more generally the decadence of the Old Regime. Instead, they offered depictions of a simpler life in the European countryside, or more commonly, in allegedly more primitive societies overseas. As portrayed by the Abbé Raynal, Denis Diderot, and Voltaire, the “savages” of Africa, the South Seas, and the new world lived in egalitarian societies free from oppressive social institutions. These depictions tended to reduce indigenous people to naive, child-like beings who lived according to instinct rather than reason. By comparison, European civilization stifled natural instincts, replacing them with destructive concerns like the desire for luxury or a preoccupation with hypocritical Christian moral codes.⁶³

Moreau and other colonial whites took an interest in the colony’s indigenous people, the Taino, during the late-colonial period. Exposed to European diseases, overworked in the *encomienda* system, subject to imperial violence and sometimes choosing suicide as an alternative, the Taino had virtually disappeared from Hispaniola

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 15-17. Raynal’s *Histoire des Deux Indes* celebrated the “Hottentots” as well as new world indigenous peoples. See Abbé Guillaume-Thomas Raynal, *Histoire Philosophique et Politique Des Etablissements et Du Commerce des Européens dans les Deux Indes* (Amsterdam: 1770); William Womack, “Guillaume Raynal and the Eighteenth-Century Cult of the Noble Savage,” *The Bulletin of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association* 26, no. 3 (1972). Diderot praised Tahitians for their sexual liberation and equality in Denis Diderot, “Supplement to Bougainville’s “Voyage”,” in *Rameau’s Nephew and Other Works* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1964). Voltaire creates a Huron character to critique French society in Voltaire, *L’ingénu, Histoire Veritable, Tirée de Manuscrits du Père Quesnel* (Amsterdam: 1767).

by the mid-sixteenth century. Their memory remained, however, in the day-to-day life of the colony: Taino artifacts including pottery, fetishes, axes, jewelry and bones were often uncovered by slaves and others working the soil, and the colonial landscape was marked by the caves they had dug into rock formations. Members of the colony's Cap-based scientific society, the *Cercle des Philadelphes*, as well as visiting European naturalists, set out to recover and collect these artifacts in an effort to learn more about the colony's original inhabitants.⁶⁴

In addition to such material evidence, the memory of the Taino was kept alive by white colonists' nostalgic evocations of the Tainos' purportedly simpler life. In typical "noble savage" tradition, they remembered the colony's Indians as pacific, lacking in greed, and living in harmony with their environment. In 1786, the white colonist Charles Arthaud published a pamphlet describing them entitled "Research on the Constitution of the Native Inhabitants, on their Arts, their Industry, and their Means of Subsistence." Arthaud, Moreau's brother-in-law as well as a doctor and president of the *Cercle des Philadelphes*, credited the Taino with more intelligence and industry than earlier European authors. In fact, Arthaud claimed, their elementary agricultural methods, canoe and housing construction would have certainly been "perfected" had their civilization not

⁶⁴ Charles Arthaud, *Recherches sur la Constitution des Naturels du Pays, sur Leurs Arts, Leur Industries, et les Moyens de Leur Subsistance* (Cap Français: Imprimerie Royale du Cap, 1786), 4 n. 5; Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution*, 13-15; James E McClellan, *Colonialism and Science: Saint Domingue in the Old Regime* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 268-269. The Swiss naturalist Du Simitière toured the Léogane region in 1773 in search of such artifacts, eventually finding scraps of earthenware as well as seashells that he speculated had been brought to this interior region by indigenous fathers out of a desire to please their children. Du Simitière depended on planters, plantation managers and enslaved people to find the artifacts. Library Company of Philadelphia, Du Simitière Papers, 968.F.5.

been destroyed.⁶⁵ If Arthaud insisted on Taino mechanical and agricultural knowledge, he was more emphatic when lauding indigenous morality:

...they had principles of equality and justice that ruled their actions; they were gentle, humane, because under the sky where they lived, and in their social relations, they could not be tormented by pressing needs, nor by the strong passions that give birth to qualities that we so pride ourselves on, and the vices that degrade us.⁶⁶

Here Arthaud linked Taino compassion and social harmony to Saint Domingue's climate ("the sky where they lived") and to simpler "social relations." By contrast, he suggests, European overcivilization has led to competition, inequality, and "degradation."

Similarly, in the *Description*, Moreau commemorated indigenous simplicity while explaining how European avarice ended the Tainos' idyllic existence in the colony. He wrote that, prior to European colonization, those who lived on the south-western peninsula around the Abricots plain lived without ostentation in the place that they called "...Haiti, which nature seemed to have made for these gentle, sober men...[who were] peaceable, simple in their wants as in their thoughts...." They considered the Abricots plain a paradise for the souls of good men, which would be nourished by the rich fruit of the mameys or apricot tree. But these men, whom "the vices of great societies had not corrupted," lost their paradise when Europeans arrived. It was "too small for the ambition of certain planters" who chopped down the trees either to plant their own crops or, more maliciously, to prevent the occasional piece of fruit from falling on the heads of passers-by.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Arthaud, *Recherches sur la Constitution des Naturels du Pays, sur Leurs Arts, Leur Industries, et les Moyens de Leur Subsistance*, 2-7.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

⁶⁷ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de L'isle Saint-Domingue*, 2: 771-772.

Although the arrival of Europeans destroyed the Taino civilization, white colonists suggested that certain characteristics had survived—or been revived—by the creoles of Saint Domingue. White colonial authors depicted white creoles as generous, hospitable, friendly toward other whites, candid and trustworthy. As such, they were good friends to have, although Hilliard thought that they were “too trusting.” Indeed, in these descriptions one recognizes a degree of naiveté, as if creoles were more innocent, perhaps even more childlike, than Europeans. Children speak frankly, trust easily, and enjoy physical activity, as did creoles.⁶⁸ Moreover, certain white creole customs—such as avoiding swaddling their infants—marked them as living closer to nature in a way that resembled indigenous lifestyle.

Some white creoles claimed a more overt connection to Saint Domingue’s indigenous population. Laurette Ravinet, daughter of Charles Mozard, editor of the *Affiches Américaines*, published her memoirs in Paris in 1844. In the title, she identified herself as “a Creole of Port-au-Prince (Island of Saint-Domingue).” Born in Port-au-Prince in 1788, she and her father fled the colony for France in 1791. Still, Ravinet credited her birth and early years there with determining her lifelong character as a “creole.” Early in the text, she evoked the memory of the Taino, robbed and murdered without remorse by Columbus and his men. Naively unaware of Spanish ambitions, “these generous and peaceful men, of European color,” had given gifts of gold from their temples to the Spanish. Not satisfied with such generosity, these “cruel oppressors” pillaged indigenous settlements and buried their victims alive. Ravinet’s use of the Black Legend allowed her to contrast European—especially Spanish—cruelty with indigenous

⁶⁸ Hilliard d'Auberteuil, *Considérations sur l'Etat Présent de la Colonie Francaise de Saint-Domingue*, 2: 25-26; Moreau de Saint Méry, "Fragment Sur Le Caractère des Créoles de Saint-Domingue, Tiré de l'Ouvrage des Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l'Amérique Sous le Vent, Etc. ," 30.

new world innocence. But it also sets up her defense of white creoles, who she claims inherited these indigenous characteristics: “The French creole was born in Saint-Domingue under the influence of these innocent martyrs: the air that invigorates its rich vegetation pleasantly hovers there. His heart is compassionate and impressionable; he is rich, proud and generous.”⁶⁹

For Ravinet, insisting on creoles’ unsuspecting generosity and the “impressionable” nature of their hearts served to answer those who blamed them for inciting the slave revolution. Following her invocation of the Taino and her paean to white creole humanity, she launched into a defense of white planters accused of sparking the slave revolution due to their inhumanity. Planters took good care of their slaves, she claimed, only occasionally beating them due to their tendency toward laziness and theft. Old and infirm slaves were well-nourished without having to work.⁷⁰ Illegitimate “mulattoes,” freed and then “enriched” by white fathers at the expense of white wives, were not content with their wealth. Ignoring the efforts of Raimond and other *gens de couleur*, Ravinet claimed that these men fought for the rights of citizens without appealing to the law, for which “one worked with as much justice as generosity.” Thus, not content with the “generosity” of white colonists, who granted them a privileged position in colonial society relative to slaves, these “mulattoes” chose instead to use violence, thereby igniting the revolution.⁷¹ In a revealing leap of historical imagination, Ravinet estimated that the naive humanity of white creoles led to their demise just as it had for the Taino. They too were “martyrs:” Ravinet noted that “the Frenchman of Port-

⁶⁹ Laurette A. M. Nicodami Ravinet, *Mémoires D’une Créole du Port-au-Prince* (Paris: 1844), 22-23.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 23, 25.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 21, 23-24.

au-Prince was the first crowned with the halo of the martyr to the revolution.”⁷² Unlike the other colonial authors cited here, Ravinet wrote forty years after the end of the Haitian Revolution, on the eve of abolition in the remainder of France’s colonies. Thus her motives were slightly different, born out of a desire to preserve the memory and reputation of French creole slave society. Most striking for our purposes is her evocation of an image of the white creole that had begun to circulate prior to the revolution.

Thus the evocation of the Taino served to link white creoles with positive traits like generosity, innocence and a life lived close to nature. But white colonial authors deployed such imagery not only to improve the image of the white creole; by accentuating creole similarities with the Taino, they also emphasized their differences with Europeans, and particularly the French. Writing in the late-eighteenth century, men like Moreau and Hilliard drew on emerging critiques of French national character to highlight the qualities of white creoles. In France during this period, one could find a lively debate over the French national character in essays submitted for academic competitions, history and travel books, periodicals, and major works by the *philosophes*. A more radical form of republicanism, influenced in part by Rousseau, helped shape this debate. Authors who adhered to this view argued that the French had become selfish, consumed with pleasure-seeking, and less vigorous than their glorious Gallic ancestors. In short, the French were degenerating, morally and physically, and “were incapable of becoming good republican citizens.”⁷³ These authors linked national degeneration to gender disorder. Too refined and frivolous, French men had lost the vigor of the Gauls,

⁷² *Ibid.*, 21.

⁷³ David Avrom Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680-1800* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 142.

they claimed, while French women asserted too much influence over their husbands, courtiers and even the king himself.⁷⁴ Such theories of decaying French national character would eventually spark campaigns for national regeneration during the French Revolution. Meanwhile, during the 1770's and 1780's, white elite Saint Domingans used them to affirm their own superior character, and their capacity for masculine citizenship.

According to both Moreau and Hilliard, creole society had been transformed for the worse by the detrimental influence of French society and French immigrants. Moreau claimed that young white creole men, sent to France for their education, lost their simple manners and tastes when tempted by metropolitan sophistication. In France, they developed “a taste for dissipation” and spent wildly. Upon returning to the colony, they were frustrated by their inability to satisfy their new tastes in the colony as they had in the metropole. Furthermore, after experiencing metropolitan manners, these young men became embarrassed by the “rustic customs of their parents.” Thus they developed a “distaste” for their “birthplace,” and dreamt only of returning to France.⁷⁵ In other words, according to Moreau, the extent to which white creoles lacked a commitment to the colony could be blamed on the influence of the corrupt metropole.

Another side effect of white creole students' “dissipation” in France was the “exaggerated” impression of creole wealth they left with metropolitans.⁷⁶ Their

⁷⁴ Ibid., 140-152; Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988). Chapter Four further explores the threat posed by gender disorder for the French nation.

⁷⁵ *Supplément aux Affiches Américaines*, 15 septembre 1787, Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de L'isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 8.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

unbridled expenditures led onlookers to believe that quick wealth was there for the taking in the colony, leading to the immigration of fortune-seekers with no concern for the long-term stability of the colony. A new wave of post-Seven Years War immigration worsened the situation, bringing men with selfish desires for luxury that quickly spread throughout white creole society. Moreau blamed such changes on the arrival of ever-larger numbers of French soldiers to the colony. Faced with defeat to England, he explained, France grew more concerned with protecting its Caribbean possessions and therefore stationed more French troops there. But with these new soldiers came a moral decline, since “the defenders of the nation (*patrie*) are not the guardians of morality.” Apparently, these soldiers injected a new element of greed into colonial society, marked by an increase in luxes as well as the number of marriages motivated “by gold and pride.”⁷⁷ Similarly, Hilliard explained that a “love of finery” reigned in Saint Domingue only since their arrival after 1763. Urban colonists imitated the extravagance of these new, coquettish immigrants, and soon administrators, merchants and factors were “covered with jewels, embroidery and braids.” Military officers then wanted flashier uniforms, and women—white women and *mulâtresses*—wanted “to share the luxury of their husbands and their lovers.” Women, endowed with “more invention in the art of finery and more time to spare,” took extravagant expenditures to the limit.⁷⁸

In contrast with this post-war period, Moreau identified the period prior to the Seven Years War as a colonial golden age in which colonists lived simple yet

⁷⁷ Ibid, *Supplément aux Affiches Américaines*, 20 septembre 1787, Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de L'isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 8.

⁷⁸ Hilliard d'Auberteuil, *Considérations sur l'Etat Présent de la Colonie Française de Saint-Domingue*, 2: 102.

comfortable lives, having established successful crops but not yet consumed with desire for luxury items. These early colonists were “rich without luxury,” living an “existence that was all the more enviable in that they had not yet learned the art of changing vanities into needs.” A healthy yet moderate desire for wealth, held by the members of a sociable, “decent” country, even inspired resident soldiers to settle in the colony permanently.⁷⁹ Thus according to Moreau’s history, local colonists lived happily on their successful yet modest plantations until French soldiers arrived and taught them to envy. Framing his critique of luxury consumption in Rousseauian terms, Moreau juxtaposed local creole simplicity and virtue with the corrupt overcivilization of the metropole. Thus for Moreau, unbridled luxury consumption accompanied greed and the downfall of morality and sociability. In other words, the negative traits that Wimpffen identified with creole society—selfishness, a lack of sociability, and exaggerated desire for luxury goods—could be attributed to Europeans; these were not inherent characteristics of white creoles.

Moreau further maintained that other negative characteristics often attributed to white creoles, which he explained as products of climate and local custom, became exaggerated in European immigrants. For example, Moreau suggested that newly arrived European men were more prone to participate in casual sexual relations with women of color than creoles. The white creole reputation for heightened sexual desire was well established by the late-colonial period, as demonstrated above. Hilliard and Moreau attributed this trait to the climate and to the irresistible allure of the mixed-race woman. Hilliard explained that “The climate of Saint Domingue inspires love. The most severe

⁷⁹ *Supplément aux Affiches Américaines*, 15 septembre 1787, Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de L’isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 7. Thanks to Beth Poe for her help translating this passage.

man can here become lazy: opportunity, the continuous heat, everything down to the arrangement of [one's] organs drives [one] to the trap, and pleasures become needs.”⁸⁰ Moreau elaborated that it was difficult to restrain the creole's libido in Saint Domingue, a place abundant with seductive and beautiful “mixed” women determined to avenge their social subjection by conquering white men. But immigrants from Europe, he claimed, were particularly helpless before such women, since they typically arrived in the colony as young men, “at the age when desires effervesce.” Far from the “surveillance” of their parents, and, as Europeans, especially vulnerable to the influence of the heat, these young men stood little chance of maintaining their sexual virtue.⁸¹ European immigrants, not white creoles, were the most egregious participants in interracial colonial “debauchery.”

While Moreau could forgive Europeans' penchant for *mulâtresses*, he was more disturbed by the severity with which they treated their slaves. Writing in the *Affiches* in 1787, Moreau cleverly reversed the typical formulation in which Europeans criticized creole planters for abusing slaves. Neither Moreau nor Hilliard had denied that white creoles had hot tempers, or that they made unreasonable demands on their slaves. Hilliard described white creoles as “violent and irascible,” Moreau as “fiery, sharp and inconstant.”⁸² From their privileged position in a slave society, white creoles learned in their childhood to rule as “despots” and “tyrants” over their servants as well as their parents. Surrounded by slaves charged with fulfilling their every fancy, creole children

⁸⁰ Hilliard d'Auberteuil, *Considérations sur l'Etat Présent de la Colonie Francaise de Saint-Domingue*, 2: 31.

⁸¹ *Supplément aux Affiches Américaines*, 20 septembre 1787.

⁸² Hilliard d'Auberteuil, *Considérations sur l'Etat Présent de la Colonie Francaise de Saint-Domingue*, 2: 37; Moreau de Saint Méry, "Fragment Sur Le Caractère des Créoles de Saint-Domingue, Tiré de l'Ouvrage des Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l'Amérique Sous le Vent, Etc. ," 29.

were denied nothing, and they were never scolded, making them utterly “incorrigible.”⁸³ But Europeans, not white creoles, made “the most severe masters,” according to Moreau. Desiring nothing more than “to be served,” Europeans rented slaves until they could afford to purchase their own. Taking the opportunity to critique European abolitionism, Moreau noted that this was a “rather astonishing” characteristic for those born in climates where the mere mention of slavery inspired disgust. Tellingly, Moreau revealed in this passage that the most cruel European masters were lower-class immigrants, or those “without education, who were perhaps themselves destined to serve in their country....”⁸⁴ As a member of the legal elite in Saint Domingue, Moreau asserted his superior education, status, and alleged capacity for compassion over his social inferior from Europe. In so doing, he reminded his readers that white creoles were not the unrefined social upstarts Wimpffen and others made them out to be; rather, some could trump their metropolitan cousins in terms of social class, education, and even self-control when disciplining their slaves.

In essence, Moreau had turned the theory of new world degeneration on its head. While he recognized that white creoles battled with some of the negative effects of the tropical climate—most notably its ability to heighten sexual drive—he also claimed, like Hilliard, that the environment had altered them in admirable ways. Raised close to nature, they became physically stronger and freer from social restraints than Europeans. They were generous with other whites, and perhaps more importantly, candid, or “frank.” Far from their reputation as the debauched cousins of the French whose whiteness was

⁸³ Moreau de Saint Méry, "Fragment Sur Le Caractère des Créoles de Saint-Domingue, Tiré de l'Ouvrage des Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l'Amérique Sous le Vent, Etc. ," 23-25.

⁸⁴ *Supplément aux Affiches Américaines*, 20 septembre 1787.

questionable, the white creoles of Saint Domingue better exemplified the model Rousseauian citizen than did European immigrants. White creoles possessed greater self-control, not less, than Europeans transplanted to the colony. Whereas immigrants tended to be selfish, fortune-seekers who brought with them old world vice and overconsumption, white creoles had lived happily and simply as modest planters until French immigrants arrived and taught them to covet luxury items. In fact, the white creole, and this pre-war creole life, appear as the antithesis, or even the remedy, to old world overcivilization and its accompanying moral, physical, and intellectual decay.

Who better, then, to determine the laws that would rule the colony? At the very least, such men deserved to preserve the Conseils that protected them from unwise legislation issued by the Colonial Ministry. In the fall of 1787, news of the suppression of the Conseil Supérieur du Cap Français enraged white planters and magistrates throughout the colony. That Moreau's three-part series in the *Affiches Américaines* appeared at this moment was, I suggest, no coincidence. Nor was the local sale of Moreau's earlier essay on the "Character of the Creoles of Saint Domingue," which was advertised in the first of the three parts. Subject to royal censors, the newspaper could not voice overt criticisms of the Colonial Minister's decision to suppress the court. However, by printing a seemingly apolitical description of the "customs of Saint Domingue," and by endorsing the essay on the white creoles, editor Charles Mozard could implicitly condemn the Ministry's move. White creoles deserved to participate in their own governance, both as the natives of colonial soil who possessed "local knowledge," and as the more virtuous, less corrupt members of white colonial society.

As the next chapter will demonstrate, Mozard and the *Affiches Américaines* worked to consolidate the community of white creole citizens—and rehabilitate their image—in other ways as well. Returning to the threat posed by Raimond and the socially mobile *gens de couleur*, it posits that Mozard, Moreau and other white colonists encouraged colonial participation in Enlightenment practices of learning and sociability. Taking part in the local scientific society, subscribing to colonial publications, and donating to France’s war effort simultaneously fostered and demonstrated colonial education, civic virtue and national patriotism. However, as the next chapter argues, white colonists like Mozard and Moreau sought to limit participation in such practices by race, thereby limiting the ability of *gens de couleur* to claim the qualities that made up the creole citizen.

Chapter Three

Creolizing the Enlightenment: Print Culture and the Limits of Colonial Citizenship

On Wednesday, February 5, 1783, a notice appeared in the *Affiches Américaines*, the only newspaper then printed in the French colony of Saint Domingue. The notice, submitted by Moreau, announced that he intended to expand the scope of the legal compendium he was currently creating. While he had initially planned to publish all the laws handed down by the Colonial Ministry and local administrators relative to Saint Domingue, he had recently decided that the *Laws and Constitutions* should also present a geographic, climatic and historic description of every region in the colony. He envisioned the project as a collective colonial effort, achieved with the participation of other colonists “animated by love for the public good.” One of his subscribers had already submitted such a “useful” contribution, and he called on others to follow suit.¹

Moreau’s project did eventually bear fruit in the form of a separate publication, the *Topographical, Physical, Civil, Political, and Historical Description of the French Part of the Island of Saint Domingue*, the same work in which Moreau detailed the racial taxonomy discussed in Chapter One.² It is unclear how many colonists ultimately submitted entries for the *Description* and how much Moreau researched on his own. But his call for contributors (which was implicitly a plea for subscribers as well), points to the

¹ *Affiches Américaines*, 5 février 1783.

² Méderic-Louis-Elie Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l’Isle Saint-Domingue*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: 1797).

presence of enlightenment practices in the colony. Moreau envisioned a colonial *Encyclopédie*, a project that would rely on the collaborative efforts of a community of informed citizens committed to the pursuit of “useful” knowledge.³

But who, exactly, would comprise that community? Following the notice, Moreau listed the names of 30 of his subscribers, promising to finish the list in future issues of the *Affiches Américaines*. Among the subscribers named here were lawyers, merchants, planters, some local functionaries and militia commanders. In the tradition of the Enlightenment, this was indeed a diverse group, assembled together on the pages of the *Affiches Américaines* irrespective of privilege for the sake of the “public good.” Yet all were relatively wealthy men, and it appears that all were white.

The *Description* is just one example of local efforts to import French practices of sociability and learning in order to refine and educate colonial society. To fend off European accusations of creole degeneracy and forge a vibrant civil society, Moreau and fellow white elites encouraged colonial participation in the local scientific society, reading rooms, and print culture. As explained in Chapter Two, Moreau and other white colonists took pride in some white creole characteristics that seemed to link them to the “noble savage” and distinguished them in positive ways from Europeans. However, and somewhat paradoxically, they also celebrated the colony’s cultural and intellectual French heritage. Positioning themselves as participants in the French Enlightenment project helped them counter the image of white creole intellectual incapacity and

³ To compare, the editors of the *Encyclopédie* defined their project as the effort of a “ ‘society of men of letters and artisans, spread out, each occupied with his own part and linked together solely by the general interest of the human race and by a feeling of reciprocal benevolence.’” [Denis] Diderot and [Jean Le Rond] d’Alembert, eds., *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts, et des métiers*, 17 vols. (Paris, 1751-65), 5: 636. Cited in Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: a Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 27.

selfishness: white creoles, they suggested, could contribute useful knowledge to that project, and they were not so preoccupied by fortune-seeking to do so. In short, the white creoles of Saint Domingue—living close to nature yet “civilized” by French cultural institutions—possessed both reason and virtue. They blended Rousseauian innocence and self-sufficiency with a concern for the greater good. They were creole citizens.

Thus the importation of French Enlightenment practices helped white colonial elites repair their image in the eyes of metropolitans. However, those practices were also employed for local purposes. Moreau, the members of the *Cercle des Philadelphes*, and the editors of the local newspaper all understood that colonists’ participation in a Saint Dominguan branch of the Enlightenment could foster colonial unity and allegiance. In particular, they argued that colonists could better imagine themselves as a community through the circulation of local publications like the newspaper, and through the production of knowledge about the colony.

This was not an inclusionary project, however, as Moreau’s subscription list above suggests. They were perhaps “animated by love for the public good,” but who comprised that public? This chapter argues that white elites like Moreau also used practices of Enlightenment learning and sociability to preserve white privilege within the colony. As the Colonial Minister and colonial administrators debated the status of the *gens de couleur*, Moreau and his fellow colonial elites attempted other, extra-legal ways to assert racial hierarchy. In particular, they limited participation in the community of colonial citizens. Presumably open to anyone committed to the public good, that community—as construed by these white men—was in fact bounded by race and gender.

Colonists like Moreau positioned themselves as the most virtuous members of colonial society due to their contribution to “useful” knowledge through enlightenment practices such as scientific societies and print culture. The colonial newspaper played an instrumental role in those efforts. The *Affiches Américaines* was a weekly performance of white, masculine civic virtue as well as white superiority, fixing in print the social order white elite men craved.

A Tropical Public Sphere

Although Wimpffen and many other European visitors depicted plantation life as dull and painfully solitary, Saint Domingue’s towns had many of the same social and cultural institutions found in France’s urban areas. As in other eighteenth-century new world cities, Saint Domingue’s growing towns were developing the constitutive elements of a Habermasian public sphere: an educated middle class, public meeting places that allowed for debate, and an expanding print culture.⁴

Following the Seven Years’ War, the Colonial Ministry worked to develop colonial infrastructure, particularly in its towns. Hoping to foster civic spirit while facilitating trade and communication, the ministry ordered the construction or

⁴ Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989). Garrigus first identified the growth of a public sphere in Saint Domingue in John D. Garrigus, “Sons of the Same Father”: Gender, Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue, 1760-1792,” in *Visions and Revisions of Eighteenth-Century France*, ed. Christine Adams Jack Censer, and Lisa Jane Graham (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997). For these developments in Barbados, see David Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity During the Age of Abolition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). For Latin America, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

improvement of roads, bridges, market spaces and post offices.⁵ Accompanying these public improvement projects came private enterprise, as entrepreneurial colonists opened European-style entertainments to cater to the growing urban populations. Vauxhalls, cabarets, inns, cafés, and billiard rooms provided popular spaces to gather, drink, eat, read, dance and gamble, in Le Cap and Port-au-Prince as well as smaller towns like Jérémie and Les Cayes.⁶ When the Vauxhall in Le Cap opened in 1776, its owner offered his patrons a range of activities under one roof: one room accommodated dancers, one served as a café, and a third advertised as a “drawing room, similar to those in Europe.”⁷ By 1780, the number of cabarets—which served the low-quality, locally-produced rum called “tafia,” primarily to visiting sailors—had grown to such an extent in Le Cap that colonial administrators felt compelled to limit their number to thirty in the town and its surrounding areas. To curb sailors’ and soldiers’ overindulgence in the drink, the new regulations stipulated that only four of the thirty would be permitted to sell tafia at any given time.⁸

According to Habermas, such popular meeting places were a vital element in the construction of a public sphere as sites of open, critical debate. In the colonial setting, they also helped overcome the isolation and boredom about which Moreau and others complained: they provided opportunities for social interaction and the construction of a colonial community. But this was not an egalitarian public sphere. Colonial authorities

⁵ John D. Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 124-126.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁷ Quoted in Jean Fouchard, *Plaisirs de Saint Domingue: Notes sur la Vie Sociale, Littéraire et Artistique* (Port-au-Prince: Editions Henri Deschamps, 1988), 88.

⁸ M. Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l'Amérique Sous le Vent*, 6 vols. (Paris: 1784), 6: 52-55.

imposed discriminatory policies on such local businesses. Among the cabarets permitted to sell tafia, for instance, owners were charged with policing its consumption differently among different customers. By 1780 they could serve sailors and soldiers only with written permission from their officers; likewise, serving tafia to slaves and “*gens de couleur*” required the written permission of “their Masters.”⁹ How such provisions impacted the cabaret business remains a mystery, but we know that one Vauxhall was forced to close due to segregationist measures. Pamelart, the owner of the Cap Français Vauxhall, had experienced a great deal of success by holding dances for free people of color. White men frequented such balls in order to meet women of color. But when compelled to enforce racial segregation in his establishment, Pamelart’s customers stopped attending and he was forced out of business.¹⁰

Segregationist policy did not prevent the success of Saint Domingue’s theaters. At least eight of the colony’s towns had their own theaters, although the oldest and largest was in Le Cap. The theater there seated 1500 spectators in three levels of boxes (20-21 boxes per level) and the *parterre*. Local troupes performed French plays and operas almost exclusively in French rather than the local creole dialect, so that performances also amounted to “ ‘language lessons,’ ” according to Moreau. The theater brought middling and elite colonists together in a space where they were not only entertained and instructed, but also where they could imagine themselves as part of a colonial community. As Moreau explained, in a colony devoid of communal sentiment, in the

⁹ Ibid., 6: 54.

¹⁰ Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, 141.

theater “we are at least gathered if not united.”¹¹ However, the theater’s seating arrangement imposed an order on that community: Moreau noted that the colonial administrators, their guests, and local magistrates sat in the first-level boxes nearest the stage, while free women of color (who attended the theater to attract the attentions of white men, according to Moreau) were relegated to ten boxes located toward the back of the third level. Other free people of color entered their places in the parterre through a separate hallway.¹² Still, as with so many other aspects of colonial life, official attempts at racial segregation were only partially successful. The need for musicians and actors resulted in integrated performances: enslaved men could be found among the white orchestra members, rented out by their owners to play their instruments, and one of the most famous colonial actresses was a free woman of color named Minette.¹³ Moreover, young white men seated below the “mixed” women on the third level routinely conversed with them during intermission as well as the performance, arranging meetings outside the theater.¹⁴ Although he frowned on the interracial matchmaking that occurred so overtly between audience boxes, Moreau considered the theater an important space in which colonists could be refined by the influence of French productions as they learned their place in the larger colonial community.

¹¹ Cited in Lauren Clay, "Theater and the Commercialization of Culture in Eighteenth-Century France" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2003), 300, 304.

¹² Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 360-362.

¹³ Bernard Camier, "Musique Coloniale et Société À Saint-Domingue: Réévaluation et Perspectives," *Bulletin de la Société d'Histoire de la Guadeloupe* Numéro spéciale (2006): 83. Camier has found advertisements for the sale of enslaved musicians that list their credentials as orchestra members.

¹⁴ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 364-365.

Although these popular forms of sociability remained open to non-whites in a limited way, segregation appears to have been more strictly enforced in elite associations. Moreau and fellow educated whites in the north of Saint Domingue came together in 1784 to form a scientific society, the *Cercle des Philadelphes*. Launched and directed by Le Cap's urban, educated white men, the organization grew to include 162 members throughout Saint Domingue, other French colonies, France and other nations. The organization's membership (which was entirely male, except for one woman in France) was taken from middling and elite white society, and was dominated by doctors and those in the legal profession. Membership dues for residents of Le Cap cost 396 *livres*, although these members often paid much more in order to maintain the organization in its early days. Led by Charles Arthaud, a royal physician and Moreau's brother-in-law, the organization received a provisional royal authorization in December 1786, and then a 3000 livre annual royal budget in 1788. Finally, in May 1789, the Cercle received letters patent and was renamed the Royal Society of Sciences and Arts of Le Cap-Français.¹⁵

From its inception, the organization was conceived as a quintessential, masculine Enlightenment project: a secular group of rational men, gathered irrespective of noble privilege to spread practical knowledge. At its first public meeting in May 1785, Arthaud explained the goals of the society: “ ‘to observe and collect everything relating to physics, astronomy, navigation, agriculture, manufactures, and medicine and to devote ourselves to public utility.’”¹⁶ The Cercle sponsored a variety of research and

¹⁵ Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, 221; James E McClellan, *Colonialism and Science: Saint Domingue in the Old Regime* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 211, 259-265; Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue*, 350-352.

¹⁶ Cited in McClellan, *Colonialism and Science: Saint Domingue in the Old Regime*, 191.

publications designed to improve agricultural production, local building construction and the health of colonists and slaves, sometimes encouraging non-members to participate in the research through essay contests and botanical courses.¹⁷ Its founders also viewed the organization as a cure for the alienation of colonial society and source of international prestige. One of the founders, Baudry des Lozières, voiced both of these beliefs at an early organizational meeting. Speaking to his fellow members-to-be, he contrasted earlier meetings, when the men came together “ ‘for friendly association, [and even] for dissipation in this unsociable country’ ” with what he hoped would be a formal, more serious organization that would bring glory to Saint Domingue. “ ‘One day this colony will be graced with a brilliant Society, a center of enlightenment, from which the colony will achieve a great reputation and the greatest gain....’ ”¹⁸ Likewise, Moreau portrayed the organization in patriotic terms, noting that it brought together a group of colonists with “a veritable love for it [the colony],” in order to support “that which could hasten its progress and take it to its highest level of splendor.”¹⁹

Thus Arthaud and the *Cercle*'s other members worked toward several related goals: within the colony, they hoped to spread “useful” scientific and technological knowledge; outside the colony, they hoped to locate Saint Domingue as a center of scientific inquiry. But most importantly, by participating in the *Cercle*, they demonstrated their civic virtue and their right to their place at the top of the colonial hierarchy.

¹⁷ Ibid., 217.

¹⁸ Ibid., 202-203.

¹⁹ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue*, 347-348.

Colonial Print Culture

The French Antilles, and the Caribbean colonies more generally, had a reputation as intellectual outposts where even social elites—presumably the most educated members of society—had little interest in reading or writing. The visiting Baron de Wimpffen, struck by the monotony and intellectual paucity of plantation life, suggested that colonial *ennui* could have been lessened by education, or by “a taste for reading.” He lamented, however, that colonists lacked both opportunity and interest: schools and books were hard to find, and colonists had crude reading tastes. Of the few books to have been brought to the colony—also “one of the most decent”—was the best-selling pornographic novel *Margot la Ravaudeuse*.²⁰

Scholars of the colonial Caribbean have tended to perpetuate this characterization, and not without reason. Books were in fact more difficult to acquire in the colonies than in Europe since so few were printed there and shipping was precarious. As importantly, tropical humidity and insects rapidly destroyed anything printed on paper.²¹ Furthermore, even Moreau, the most ardent defender of white creole civic and intellectual capabilities, attributed the relatively small colonial book trade to a general lack of interest: how could the trade develop “ ‘in a country where science is not the most venerated idol’ ”?²² The pursuit of wealth often trumped the pursuit of knowledge, much to Moreau’s dismay.

Yet while colonial print culture could not flourish in Saint Domingue as Moreau would have liked, the colony did have an impressive book trade and a community of

²⁰ Alexandre-Stanislas Wimpffen, baron de, *Haiti au XVIIIe Siècle: Richesse et Esclavage dans une Colonie Française*, ed. Pierre Pluchon (Paris: Karthala, 1993 [1797]), 119.

²¹ François Regourd, "Lumières Coloniales: Les Antilles Françaises dans la République des Lettres," *Dix-Huitième Siècle* 33 (2001): 183-184.

²² CAOM F/3/75, fol. 5, and F/3/73, fol 46, cited in *Ibid.*: 184.

readers. Saint Domingue's first bookseller opened for business in Le Cap in 1724, although—true to form—he was arrested and imprisoned shortly thereafter for selling obscene books.²³ Still, the colonial book trade grew over time. Based on an examination of newspaper advertisements from the 1760's, Jean Fouchard has shown that the new and used book market was particularly lively in Le Cap, where one could find everything from medical and legal texts to works of history, natural history, literature, and the most popular works of the *philosophes*. In Le Cap as elsewhere in the colony, licensed and unlicensed booksellers sold publications in storefronts as well as market stalls.²⁴

In spite of the royal system of privileges that should have limited the number of booksellers, competition between booksellers grew with the market. In 1777 the licensed printer and bookseller in Le Cap, Dufours de Rians, complained to local authorities that his business was being undercut by reading rooms and retailers not licensed to sell books. Colonial officials responded with an ordinance imposing a 300 *livre* fine for such infractions. However, Moreau noted that the ordinance was never enforced and that booksellers continued their trade as before.²⁵ In fact, by 1787 competition in Le Cap had grown to the point that at least one bookseller was forced into a new business. The self-described “former bookseller of Le Cap” Sieur de Passier advertised in the *Affiches* that he had recently returned from France with a new idea to set him apart from his

²³ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 353.

²⁴ Books were also sold piecemeal by individuals who wanted to sell their personal libraries before departing for France. Also, estate executors sold off entire libraries belonging to the deceased. Fouchard, *Plaisirs de Saint Domingue: Notes sur la Vie Sociale, Littéraire et Artistique*, 72-75; Regourd, "Lumières Coloniales: Les Antilles Françaises dans la République des Lettres," 188.

²⁵ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Françoises de l'Amérique Sous le Vent*, 5: 782-783.

competition, which he claimed had grown tremendously since his departure: he offered his customers a “library of another sort,” a wide selection of the best wines from France, Spain, and elsewhere, which he would list in a printed catalog.²⁶

But de Passier did not abandon the business of reading altogether. Attached to his wine store, he offered a *cabinet de lecture*, or reading room.²⁷ As in Europe, colonial reading rooms provided subscribers with a selection of books and periodicals, a physical space in which to read, as well as a community of other interested readers with whom they could discuss what they had read.²⁸ By “read[ing] and subscrib[ing] collectively,” reading room patrons could “engage actively with the *philosophes*,” participating in the practice of Enlightenment in Saint Domingue just as one would in Nantes, Bordeaux, or Paris.²⁹ Furthermore, they provided a sorely needed site for colonial sociability. Saint Domingue’s reading rooms may have distinguished themselves from their French counterparts by offering a variety of activities. Moreau praised one reading room in Le Cap—perhaps de Passier’s—as a place where pangs of boredom could be held at bay by not only a “useful library” and a selection of newspapers, but also with a friendly game of billiards or backgammon.³⁰ In his advertisement, de Passier noted that his reading room offered a selection of eighteen different periodicals, as well as a billiards room, a drawing room, and “multiple rooms for games of skill.” He was probably referring to this

²⁶ *Affiches Américaines*, 11 Janvier 1787.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ On reading rooms in France, see Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 209-214; Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: a Cultural History of the French Enlightenment*, 178-179.

²⁹ Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: a Cultural History of the French Enlightenment*, 179.

³⁰ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 347. See also Fouchard, *Plaisirs de Saint Domingue: Notes sur la Vie Sociale, Littéraire et Artistique*, 77.

combination of activities when he described his establishment as “a bit in the style of the Clubs of Paris.” French voluntary societies called “clubs,” modeled on their British predecessors, had appeared in Paris by the 1780’s, and also combined spaces for their members to read and play.³¹

Billiards and “games of skill” were often accompanied by licit and illicit gambling in taverns and billiard parlors, as repeated efforts to regulate them in France and Saint Domingue reveal; it is possible that de Passier’s billiards room similarly served as a front for illegal gaming and gambling.³² Why bring games and gambling, readily available in cafés, taverns and billiard parlors in the colony’s towns, into a reading room? Certainly, de Passier wanted to distinguish his business from the competition. But he also banked on the idea that his subscribers, possessing some degree of education and wealth, would appreciate a place to play solely with others of their station. The reading room simply provided a more exclusive space in which to play and gamble: unlike in the taverns and billiard halls, which were frequented by sailors, soldiers and slaves, de Passier’s gaming rooms only admitted its known, literate, paying subscribers.³³ We do not know if de Passier restricted his clientele to whites only, but it was certainly restricted

³¹ Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies 1580-1800: The Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 17.

³² “Games of skill,” such as billiards and backgammon, remained legal in France and the colonies, although those organizing the games needed the proper license. “Games of chance,” such as certain card games and the loto, were illegal. Both types of games incorporated gambling. Thomas M. Kavanagh, *Enlightenment and the Shadows of Chance: The Novel and the Culture of Gambling in Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 30-31. For a sample of efforts to control illegal gaming and gambling, see Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de L’Amérique Sous le Vent*, 5: 488 and 6: 117, 632-633, 779.

³³ Slaves could not legally gamble or drink in billiard halls and taverns, yet such establishments were known to permit them. David Geggus, “Urban Development in Eighteenth-Century Saint Domingue,” *Bulletin du Centre d’Histoire des Espaces Atlantiques* 5 (1990). For regulations against slave gambling and drinking, see Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l’Amérique Sous le Vent*, 4: 499.

by class. A year's subscription cost one *portugaise*, although visitors to the colony could purchase a month's subscription for a *gourde*, provided they had a letter of introduction from a yearly subscriber.³⁴ Less expensive than other reading rooms, or so de Passier claimed in the ad, the subscription price still would have prevented entry to at least the poorest *petit blancs* and *gens de couleur*. Here, gaming as well as reading was an exclusive activity.

While the majority of the eighteen periodicals available in de Passier's reading room surely came from Europe, North America, and elsewhere in the Caribbean, he would have provided some local publications as well. Local presses served the colony's printing needs beginning in 1763, and by 1764, Le Cap and Port-au-Prince each had their own press.³⁵ The colonial presses existed primarily to serve the colonial administration, printing administrative forms and proclamations as well as court decisions deemed important enough to be posted publicly. But they also printed some periodicals and an occasional book, although all of their publications required royal permission and were subject to royal censorship. Colonial administrators kept close watch over the local presses, and the periodicals, pamphlets and books that they printed reveal little of the tensions that existed between metropolitan authorities and local residents. Still, elite white colonists like Moreau appreciated the local press for its extra-official possibilities. Through the press, they longed to create a community of learned creoles dedicated to not

³⁴ A "gourde," or "piastre-gourde," was the equivalent of 5 livres 10 sols (livres tournois). In the 1780's, one gourde could purchase 2 trips to the public bath house or a place in the parterre at the Cap theater. Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: xix, 332, 362.

³⁵ Moreau claimed that administrative opposition, together with the difficulties of transporting a press to the colony, had foiled earlier efforts to establish a press. *Ibid.*, 1: 353-354.

only the commercial success of the colony but also its redemption as a space where civic virtue thrived.

Moreau praised several local publications for their attempts to educate colonists about the colony and a diverse range of subjects. First published in 1765 in Le Cap, the *Journal de Saint Domingue* was a 64-page publication intended to “mix the useful with the pleasant.” The first half of each issue reported the proceedings of the local Chamber of Agriculture but also included excerpts from works on economics, trade, agriculture, natural history, medicine and technological innovations that could benefit the colony. The entire second half of the journal was devoted to *belles-lettres*. The *Journal* lasted little more than a year, failing after 15 issues due to a lack of subscribers. Moreau lamented the *Journal’s* failure, since it would have increased readers’ knowledge of Saint Domingue and “its importance,” while exposing them to “works of literature that would have stimulated the emulation of Creoles....”³⁶ Tellingly, Moreau thought less of another failed publication, the *Iris Américaine*, which was devoted solely to poetry. The *Iris*, he wrote, was a “light genre” that quickly disappeared without a trace. Perhaps the *Iris*—limited only to “light” verse rather than “useful” information--would entice creoles to emulate the wrong type of characteristics. By contrast, the *Journal* had a clearly utilitarian purpose in Moreau’s mind: disseminating practical knowledge and forging well-rounded, well-informed creole minds.

Another publication with an even more immediate application than the *Journal* did not last nearly so long: the semimonthly medical journal, the *Gazette de Médecine*. Sieur Duchemin de l’Estang received royal privilege on 26 December 1777 to publish his

³⁶ Ibid., 1: 510.

Gazette de Médecine.³⁷ In it, he advised newly arrived Europeans how to best acclimate to the colonial climate, and how to treat common slave illnesses. Given the mortality rates of colonial whites and slaves, perhaps no information could have been more practical than that provided in the *Gazette de Médecine*. Still, the journal was short-lived, surviving only eight issues.³⁸

But the periodical that experienced the greatest success was Saint Domingue's newspaper, the *Affiches Américaines*. In 1764, Saint Domingue's administrators issued a license for the publication of the colonial newspaper to a local magistrate named Monceaux. Published weekly in Le Cap, the paper included some accounts of news from France and abroad and an occasional item relating to colonial trade and agriculture. Every issue, however, included a list of prices paid for imports and exports in the colony's towns, fugitive slave notices, departures and arrivals of ships, and a large section of classified ads listing property or items for sale or rent in the colony. Beginning in 1768 the main issue of the *Affiches Américaines* was printed weekly in Port-au-Prince, the colony's capital, so that administrators could keep close watch over the content of the paper. Printers in Le Cap added their own extensive supplement to the Port-au-Prince edition, covering business and local news in the north.³⁹ By 1783 the publishers of the *Affiches Américaines* could afford to print both the Port-au-Prince and the Le Cap editions twice a week.

³⁷ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Françoises de l'Amérique Sous le Vent*, 5: 807.

³⁸ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 510.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 507. See also McClellan, *Colonialism and Science: Saint Domingue in the Old Regime*, 98-99.

The French *Affiches*

The *Affiches Américaines* was, in many ways, just one example of a growing number of provincial papers appearing throughout France in the mid-eighteenth century. In theory, political news could only be printed in one paper within France, the *Gazette de France*, whose owners had been granted royal privilege for that purpose. Advertising, by contrast, appeared in two separate publications: one called "*Petites Affiches*," which largely addressed the Parisian area, and another named "*Affiches de Province*," intended for the greater provincial market. Until 1758, the owners of the *Gazette de France* were the sole publishers of all three publications, although they allowed provincial presses to reprint the *Gazette de France* and the *Affiches de Province*. However, foreseeing a commercial opportunity in truly local papers, in 1758 they began leasing out their privileges to provincial presses, granting them permission to publish their own local versions of the *Affiches* but not any news that might compete with the national *Gazette*.⁴⁰

The French provincial press grew rapidly as a result, and some 40 provincial *Affiches* were launched within metropolitan France between 1758 and 1788. The *Affiches de Lyon*, *Affiches de Nantes*, and *Affiches de Bordeaux* were among the first, taking their titles from the street posters (called *affiches*) traditionally used to advertise businesses and generally inform the public.⁴¹ Relative to other periodicals published in France, the *Affiches* cost far less: they averaged 6-9 *livres* for a yearly subscription, whereas a

⁴⁰ Stephen Auerbach, "'Encourager le Commerce et Répandre les Lumières:' The Press, the Provinces and the Origins of the Revolution in France: 1750-1789" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Louisiana State University, 2000), 40-44; Jack R. Censer, *The French Press in the Age of Enlightenment* (London: Routledge, 1994), 181-182; Jeremy D Popkin, *Revolutionary News: The Press in France, 1789-1799, Bicentennial Reflections on the French Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 19.

⁴¹ Auerbach, "'Encourager le Commerce et Répandre les Lumières:' The Press, the Provinces and the Origins of the Revolution in France: 1750-1789", 312; Colin Jones, "The Great Chain of Buying: Medical Advertisement, the Bourgeois Public Sphere, and the Origins of the French Revolution," *American Historical Review* 101, no. 1 (1996): 17.

subscription to the *Gazette de France* cost 15 *livres*. Circulation and readership are particularly difficult to determine for the *Affiches* since no subscription lists have been found; however, historians estimate that such papers had anywhere from 200 to 750 subscribers per paper.⁴²

These provincial newspapers, like the *Gazette de France* and all publications legally printed in France, owed their existence to royal privilege and were subject to royal censorship by local officials. Because of the French monarchy's tight control over publications, historians have tended to ignore the Old Regime press, questioning the degree to which it could have contributed to social or intellectual shifts that opened the way for revolution.⁴³ Moreover, among French publications, the *Affiches* have been deemed particularly irrelevant, given their commercial rather than political focus. However, recent scholars have reconsidered the role of the *Affiches* in pre-revolutionary French society. For, while the editors of the *Affiches* could not—and perhaps did not want to—voice overt criticisms of the monarchy or its policies, nor were their papers ever a simple collection of advertisements.

Far from acting as mere mouthpieces of the monarchy (although they did at times read as such), these historians suggest that the *Affiches* served as a mode of transmission for Enlightenment principles of meritocracy and anti-authoritarianism, and for the creation of regional and even national communities. Because these papers circulated

⁴² Auerbach, "'Encourager le Commerce et Répandre les Lumières:" The Press, the Provinces and the Origins of the Revolution in France: 1750-1789", 56-57; Jones, "The Great Chain of Buying: Medical Advertisement, the Bourgeois Public Sphere, and the Origins of the French Revolution," 17, 18. Both Jones and Auerbach depend on estimates calculated by Gilles Feyel, who relied on printing records. Feyel, "La Presse Provinciale Sous l'Ancien Régime" in Jean Sgard, ed., *La Presse Provinciale aux XVIIIeme Siècle* (Grenoble: Centre de Recherche sur les Sensibilités, 1983), 28.

⁴³ Censer, *The French Press in the Age of Enlightenment*, 4-5; Jack R. and Jeremy D. Popkin Censer, "Historians and the Press," in *Press and Politics in Pre-Revolutionary France*, ed. Jack R. Censer and Jeremy D. Popkin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 1-4.

throughout entire provinces, editors emphasized that their papers connected previously isolated areas to one another and to major cities by a weekly source of advertisements and news. Furthermore, by incorporating literary, medical, and scientific content, editors touted the papers' ability to educate the public, a provincial "civilizing mission," in the words of historian Colin Jones. These editors hoped to use their papers as engines for the distribution of both "the useful" and "the pleasing," although, as the *Affiches de Lyon* noted, "the useful...must always prevail over the pleasing." Immediately relevant, practical knowledge—new medical cures or technological innovations—accompanied articles and excerpts that might not normally be sought out by the *Affiches'* readers. For the editor of the *Affiches de la Haute Normandie*, the goal of his paper was "to stimulate the intellectual curiosity of the public, and to involve at the same time its health, its wealth and its economic needs."⁴⁴

Recently, historians have argued that even the content of the advertisements in the *Affiches* had a potentially destabilizing force in the hierarchical society of the Old Regime. Jack Censer and Colin Jones both noted that lists of items for sale and available to all readers reinforced the irrelevance of inherited privilege. Collectively, by "depicting a country where everything is for sale [the *Affiches*] undermined the entire mechanism running the social structure, not just its apex."⁴⁵ Furthermore, the *Affiches'* reliance on reader contributions made them a potentially more democratic form than the political newspapers. On average, 90% of an issue's content had been submitted by the readership. Many of these contributions were advertisements and notices: local

⁴⁴ Jones, "The Great Chain of Buying: Medical Advertisement, the Bourgeois Public Sphere, and the Origins of the French Revolution," 22-23, 27.

⁴⁵ Censer, *The French Press in the Age of Enlightenment*, 84-85; Jones, "The Great Chain of Buying: Medical Advertisement, the Bourgeois Public Sphere, and the Origins of the French Revolution."

merchants and residents listed goods for sale and noted changes of address; individuals sought employment or workers; others noted items lost or found. But readers also supplied theater and book reviews, poetry, and riddles. They posed and responded to one another's technological, moral, and medical questions. In other words, editors were one voice among many contributing to a conversation in which the rank and privilege of the participants was irrelevant. As the editor of the *Affiches de Picardie* explained, his paper aimed to create " 'a commerce of friendship between citizens....'"⁴⁶

The *Affiches Américaines* and the Imagined Community of Colonial Citizens

Like the editors of the provincial papers in France, Moreau and the owners and editors of the *Affiches Américaines* certainly understood their paper to have more than a merely commercial purpose. In the *Description*, Moreau explained that the newspaper was vitally important in order to create a community of readers who would otherwise be isolated from one another. He claimed that this was particularly true in Saint Domingue, where a "lack of communication" between regions and even parishes "lessened every connection, every acquaintance," preventing the circulation of "advantageous" knowledge and the contradiction of "dangerous" ideas. Linking the colony's residents had also been a goal for Monceaux, who complained that the colony's towns were so atomized that residents of Le Cap "spoke of Jacmel and Cap-Tiburon like the mountains of Chili and the *terres Magellaniques*."⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Auerbach, "'Encourager le Commerce et Répandre les Lumières:" The Press, the Provinces and the Origins of the Revolution in France: 1750-1789", 122-127. Quote on page 126.

⁴⁷ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 506.

Moreau believed that the *Affiches Américaines* should instruct the colonial reading public, and he praised one of the *Affiches Américaines*' editors in particular for taking on the goal of enlightening his readership. Charles Mozard took over the editorial position on November 17, 1783. According to Moreau, Mozard was the most committed editor in the history of the colonial paper, ardently seeking out the most complete information regarding the colony on his own or through the deft solicitation of more informed contributors. Mozard's editorial tenure, Moreau added, had made the *Affiches Américaines* "even more useful..." due to his special efforts and fresh ideas.⁴⁸

What, exactly, did Mozard print that attracted Moreau's admiration? Perhaps more than his predecessors, Mozard seemed concerned with improving colonists' knowledge of the colony itself. For example, the *Affiches Américaines* from 1787 included a variety of statistical and descriptive information regarding specific regions within the colony as well as information with a truly colonial scope. One issue featured statistical tables indicating the number of baptisms and burials of whites, free people of color and slaves performed in the parish of Marmalade in 1786; another included a history and description of the town of Léogane, including plans for the construction of a canal there; another displayed a table indicating monthly rates of death among the sick in hospitals in Port-au-Prince, Le Cap and Léogane; yet another table listed quantities of slaves sold in the colony's port towns in 1786, and the revenue generated by such sales (sales and revenue had increased dramatically over the previous year, in spite a decline in the average price of slaves).⁴⁹

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 1: 508.

⁴⁹ *Affiches Américaines*, 27 janvier 1787; *Affiches Américaines*, 2 août 1787; *Affiches Américaines*, 4 août 1787; *Affiches Américaines*, 21 avril 1787; *Affiches Américaines*, 18 août 1787.

By informing his readers about colonial provinces they may not have been familiar with, Mozard reminded them that they were part of a larger “imagined community” of colonial citizens.⁵⁰ While readers in Le Cap might not ever travel to the southern town of Léogane or meet any of its residents, the *Affiches Américaines* invited them to join in common cause as participants in the colonial project. As readers, they could track the progress of the construction of colonial infrastructure as well as improvements in medical practices that would help grow the free population and preserve the health of the enslaved. As slaveowners, or simply colonists whose own interests rested on the health of the slave system, they could track the colonial market in slaves. Through the newspaper, they rooted for the colony’s demographic and commercial expansion.

Occasionally, readers were invited to participate in more overt forms of colonial and national patriotism, particularly during periods of war. In July 1782, the editor of the *Affiches Américaines* ran a notice encouraging colonists to contribute to a fund for the purchase of a new naval ship. “Several French provinces” had already offered sufficient sums to begin construction on seven 120- and 100- gun ships, much to the satisfaction of the King.⁵¹ “Could not the French colony of Saint Domingue imitate so fine an example?” One wealthy colonist thought it could, and in two subsequent issues this individual offered the substantial sum of 6600 *livres* toward the project if other colonists also donated to the fund.⁵² The local Chamber of Agriculture soon took over the project, selecting trustworthy white planters from several towns to collect donations. The names

⁵⁰ Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 33-35.

⁵¹ *Affiches Américaines*, 31 juillet 1782.

⁵² *Affiches Américaines*, 7 août 1782; *Affiches Américaines*, 14 août 1782.

of these planters were then printed in the newspaper so that donors could find them.⁵³

Here the *Affiches Américaines* permitted colonists to practice their membership in the French nation, as a colony. They could demonstrate both their fidelity to the King and to France in its war against England and their right to belong to that community of virtuous patriots.

The creole community that the *Affiches* helped construct was a decidedly French one. As editor, Mozard made an effort to remind his readers of their French roots. Occasionally, French grammar lessons appeared in the *Affiches*, as in one edition that explained to readers the important distinction between two words which both meant “to accompany someone.” “*Accompagner*” was to be used when accompanying someone politely and honorifically because they are of a high rank, while “*reconduire*” should be used when receiving someone out of civility.⁵⁴ For colonists whose French had been altered by the local creole dialect, these lessons served as important correctives. We should note, moreover, that Mozard went beyond mere vocabulary and addressed the nuances of social interactions as they were (or should have been) determined by rank. Colonists’ notorious coarseness no doubt called for an occasional lesson in manners.

The cultivation of colonial Frenchness did not stop with language lessons. Mozard also instructed his readers in French history. In the January 27, 1787 issue, he announced the beginning of a regular feature in the *Affiches*, to appear weekly in the Saturday edition. There readers would find the retelling of “the most remarkable” historic events to have happened that week in years past. Mozard’s goal, clearly stated, was “to instill...in the minds of young Creoles the memory of the principal events in History,

⁵³ *Supplément aux Affiches Américaines*, 7 septembre 1782.

⁵⁴ *Affiches Américaines*, 9 août 1787.

particularly that of France.”⁵⁵ To help young creole readers remember what they read, Mozard promised to keep the summaries short. Ultimately, he hoped that this regular feature would “contribute to their education” since it was so difficult for parents to school their children properly in the colony.

The feature, which ultimately ran in four consecutive issues of the Saturday edition, commemorated the lives of French kings, writers, and philosophers, most of whom had died on the day or week of the particular issue in which they were featured. Similar to iconography and literature circulating in France at this time, Mozard’s biographical sketches contributed to an eighteenth-century “cult of great Frenchmen” that fostered a love of both nation and King.⁵⁶ Mozard selected his subjects carefully. Each was presented as a champion of reason and enlightenment, and as a source of pride for France. The first issue commemorated the 1515 coronation of François I, the “Father of the Arts” who, Mozard noted, had helped revive Greek and Roman learning in Europe. To further demonstrate the enlightened leadership of François I, Mozard explained that he had ordered all royal acts be printed in French rather than the traditional Latin, making legal texts accessible to a much broader population.⁵⁷ Charlemagne, whose death in 814 was commemorated in the February 3 issue, was remembered as “King of France and first Emperor of the West.” Mozard lamented the “dreadful” violence Charlemagne exacted on those he wished to convert to Christianity but announced admiration for his support of education and scholarship at a time when the classical tradition had waned. Referring no doubt to Charlemagne’s revival of clerical training, and particularly the

⁵⁵ *Affiches Américaines*, 27 janvier 1787.

⁵⁶ David Avrom Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680-1800* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 107-139.

⁵⁷ *Affiches Américaines*, 27 janvier 1787.

tradition of reproducing ancient manuscripts, Mozard praised him for having “cultivated” the Belles-Lettres, dubbing him their “Restorer.”⁵⁸

French men of letters received even more glowing descriptions. On the anniversary of his death, Montesquieu was remembered quite simply as “one of the Greatest Men France has produced.”⁵⁹ After listing his most well-known works and citing his Presidency in the Bordeaux Parlement, Mozard noted that his legal theories as explained in *The Spirit of the Laws* served legislatures around the world. Another issue praised the contributions of René Descartes and Molière to the western intellectual tradition. According to Mozard, Descartes “made navigable the labyrinth of Philosophy” that had been full of “detours” for so long. The French region of Touraine could be proud, he argued, for having produced “one of the greatest Geniuses and the grandest *philosophes* to have enlightened the universe.” Similarly, Molière was “the greatest comic Poet to have existed.” He made the “great truths of Philosophy” accessible and appealing to a broad spectrum of theater-goers who were able to appreciate his social criticism after being enticed by his humor.⁶⁰

Mozard chose to honor only one non-French subject in the “Historical Events” feature: Peter the Great, the so-called enlightened emperor of Russia. Appearing in the same issue with Montesquieu, Peter the Great was credited with civilizing the Russian people through wise laws and the spread of western knowledge. Mozard cited his travels to western Europe, where he worked with artists and artisans in Holland and England,

⁵⁸ *Affiches Américaines*, 3 février 1787.

⁵⁹ *Affiches Américaines*, 10 février 1787.

⁶⁰ *Affiches Américaines*, 17 février 1787.

later bringing them to Moscow to reform the capital.⁶¹ Thus Mozard credited Peter with “spreading the enlightenment he acquired during his voyages” and, by his “genius,” leading Russia out of the “chaos in which she was vegetating....” Mozard quoted the French *philosophe* Voltaire to explain Peter’s role in Russia’s quick evolution toward civilization: “Peoples are what Kings and their Ministers make them.”

Mozard’s catalog of great men in history conveyed a clear message: their ideas and policies were only worthwhile when put to practical use. Great rulers studied and encouraged the study of western European philosophy, art and math, and they modernized and rationalized the nations they ruled. Great thinkers used their genius to make law, theater, mathematics—whatever their discipline—accessible to a broad reading public, and have it serve the good of society. In typical Enlightenment fashion, Mozard celebrated those who employed a practical application of knowledge.

As importantly, the western intellectual tradition identified by Mozard as underwriting modernization and civilization had its home in France. Charlemagne and François I had revived the arts and scholarship of the ancients in France, where they would be preserved and protected. Molière, Descartes, and Montesquieu, geniuses in each of their fields, demonstrated France’s continued leadership as the producer of western European enlightenment. When enlightened leadership could be found outside of France, as in the case of Peter the Great, Mozard confirmed his greatness through the words of a Frenchman: Voltaire’s quote rendered judgment on the Russian emperor’s reign, making the French *philosophe* the authority on enlightened leadership.

⁶¹ *Affiches Américaines*, 10 fevrier 1787. Mozard’s passage on Peter the Great may have been influenced by Voltaire’s in his *Histoire de Charles XII*, in which Voltaire describes the Russians prior to Peter’s reign as “less civilized than the Mexicans when they were discovered by Cortez.” Peter Gay, *Voltaire’s Politics: The Poet as Realist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 182.

For colonists reading the *Affiches*, Mozard's "Historical Events" feature reinforced their identification with France, while demonstrating why they should celebrate their Frenchness. Here Mozard drew on a well-established discourse of French greatness and refinement. By the eighteenth century, the French state had positioned itself as the inheritor and protector of classical art and civilization. Francois I had begun collecting and copying masterpieces from Italy in the sixteenth century; Louis XVI continued the tradition, hoping to display such works in the Louvre to demonstrate his magnificence and the superiority of French artistic training.⁶² Likewise, French men of letters and *philosophes*, notably Voltaire, characterized France as the most polite, sociable, and most civilized nation, the natural moral leader in the cosmopolitan humanitarianism of Enlightenment.⁶³ By taking up the discourse of French cultural and moral superiority, white colonists could dispel accusations of their own lack of civilization and compromised whiteness. By participating as readers and contributors to the *Affiches Américaines*, colonists could claim membership in the esteemed tradition of the French "Republic of Letters" as well as the Saint Dominguan reading public.

And yet, while these features seem designed to encourage colonial identification with France, colonists' conflicting interests with the metropole also emerged within their pages. In Chapter Two we noted that Mozard voiced an implicit criticism of metropolitan policy in November 1787 by printing Moreau's reflections on the customs of Saint Domingue. Similarly, Mozard may have intentionally used the "Historical Events" feature to raise the specter of colonial revolution while arguing against

⁶² Herman Lebovics, *Mona Lisa's Escort: André Malraux and the Reinvention of French Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 27-33.

⁶³ Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: a Cultural History of the French Enlightenment*, 3-6.

mercantilism. During the four weeks that the “Historical Events” segment ran, Mozard included only one feature that did not address the death or coronation of a famous man: a short paragraph commemorating the 1778 peace treaty between the United States and France during the American Revolution. On the anniversary of the treaty, Mozard noted that by establishing “friendship,” and more importantly, trade, between the two nations, the treaty gave “courage” to the “Americans” in their fight for freedom against the English. Mozard’s inclusion of the treaty was no accident. The revolution, which he described as “one of the most important in modern history,” pitted France as the defender of an enlightened cause, thereby supporting Mozard’s portrayal of French greatness worldwide. However, the American Revolution was also, of course, an anti-colonial cause, and one which commenced a period of relaxation of the French *exclusif*. The French Antilles had long depended on an illicit smuggling trade with the North American colonies for their provisions, but following the war France essentially legalized that trade by opening three free trade ports in Saint Domingue. While colonists considered the designation of these *entrepots* a victory in their mercantile conflicts with French merchants, they were not convinced that the new policy would last.⁶⁴ In other words, early in 1787, the struggle to relax the *exclusif* continued, and Mozard used the *Affiches* to remind his readers of the need to be vigilant against the return of French mercantilism. Thus, while Mozard, Moreau and other colonial elites were desperate to demonstrate their French cultural and intellectual inheritance, they were keenly aware of the economic interests that separated metropole and colony.

⁶⁴ Malick Walid Ghachem, "Sovereignty and Slavery in the Age of Revolutions: Haitian Variations on a Metropolitan Theme" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 2001), Chapter 3.

Within his newspaper Mozard attempted to create a community of colonists who were both French and creole, or *Américain*, as the newspaper's title indicated. Although the content of the *Affiches Américaines* was dominated by advertisements, fugitive slave notices and other commercial notices, added features like the "Historical Events" made the newspaper more than a mere guide to colonial trade. They allowed their readers to imagine a colonial public united by its French descent, its participation in the national community of France, and its participation in the community of colonial citizens.

Printing the Racial Order

But who, exactly, were these colonial citizens? For what audience were the *Affiches Américaines* intended? Moreau claimed that in 1788, the *Affiches* had 1500 subscribers, each of whom paid 66 colonial *livres* (or approximately 44 French *livres*) for the yearly subscription.⁶⁵ Relative to the price of metropolitan newspapers, subscription to the *Affiches Américaines* was extraordinarily expensive. An annual subscription to the provincial *Affiches* ranged from six to nine *livres*, or slightly less than an urban artisan's wages for a week. Meanwhile, the *Gazette de France* cost 15 *livres* per year, and illicit papers published outside of France could command 36 *livres* per year.⁶⁶ Subscribers to the *Affiches Américaines*, then, would have been limited to well-off planters, merchants and professionals with an ample enough income to allow it. Yet readership was surely not limited to subscribers. One issue of the *Affiches* was probably read by multiple

⁶⁵ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue*, 508. The conversion estimated here is based on Stewart King's estimation that the colonial *livre* was worth two-thirds of a *livre Tournais*. See Stewart King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig: Free People of Color in Pre-Revolutionary Saint Domingue* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia, 2001), ix.

⁶⁶ Jones, "The Great Chain of Buying: Medical Advertisement, the Bourgeois Public Sphere, and the Origins of the French Revolution," 17; Popkin, *Revolutionary News: The Press in France, 1789-1799*, 22.

people in reading rooms, homes, and cafés, either quietly to themselves or aloud to still others.⁶⁷ And what about those who placed the ads? Nearly every issue listed advertisements for plantations, urban residences and slaves for sale or rent by individual men and women or their agents. Merchants and retailers listed their changing stock of products, typically from France. Occasionally, individuals advertised their own services, as private tutors or artisans. Those ads cost money, of course, and thus the poorest would have been excluded from this form of advertising.

It does appear that the vast majority of those who advertised or posted notices in the *Affiches Américaines* were white, or at least passed as white. Colonial law and custom dictated that only whites could take the titles *Sieur* or *Dame*, and men and women of color should be referred to as would be commoners in France: *le nommé* or *la nommée*. Whether a non-white was mixed, and what degree of mixture he or she could claim, was typically listed in legal documents, along with their status as a slave or free person. The same pattern seems to have held in the *Affiches Américaines*. When free people of color placed ads or notices in the *Affiches*, their names were preceded by the designator *le nommé/la nommée*, and followed by their color and legal status. Thus when a woman named Zaire advertised her boarding house in Port-de-Paix, she was identified as “*La nommée Zaire, free mulâtresse*.”⁶⁸ Likewise, a man named Lindor, but “called Michau,” advertised his poultry and produce—which he would deliver to captains of departing ships at no extra charge—under the title “*Le nommé Lindor, called Michau, free black*.”⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Jones, “The Great Chain of Buying: Medical Advertisement, the Bourgeois Public Sphere, and the Origins of the French Revolution,” 18; Popkin, *Revolutionary News: The Press in France, 1789-1799*, 84.

⁶⁸ *Affiches Américaines*, 3 novembre 1787.

⁶⁹ *Affiches Américaines*, 27 janvier 1787.

Free people of color, when they appeared, were clearly distinguished from other white contributors to the *Affiches Américaines*.

People of color also entered the pages of the *Affiches Américaines* as specimens for naturalists to study. The March 24, 1784 issue included an extensive description of a 21 month-old “negro girl” named Adélaïde, described as “pied,” meaning that her skin was mostly dark but had some light marks as well. Adélaïde had been brought with her 25-year old “négresse” mother, Brigitte, and a “young Mulatto” named Jean Pierre, also allegedly “pied.” The three had been purchased in Guadeloupe by Le Vallois, the Royal Dentist for the French Antilles, who brought them to Saint Domingue and to the offices of the *Affiches Américaines*. The bodies of Adélaïde and Jean Pierre were then subjected to “scrupulous observation” and described for Mozard’s reading public in a purported attempt to explore the causes of the skin color of blacks, a topic famously broached by the naturalist Buffon. Buffon’s earlier description of a “pied négresse” appeared in his 1749 *Histoire Naturelle*, a passage so fascinating that the author of this article was sure that “there are few people, no doubt, who have not read [it] with as much pleasure as admiration [for Buffon]. . . .” Likewise, in the November 29, 1787 issue, there appeared a description of a *négresse* from Virginia whose once-black skin was gradually turning white, in essence, a “pied négresse” in the making. The article claimed that this incident had recently been the topic of a publication at the Royal Society of London (and was therefore summarized in its present form), although the story sounds strangely similar to another example given in Buffon’s *Histoire Naturelle* some 39 years earlier.⁷⁰ In any

⁷⁰ For Buffon’s Virginia example, see Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History and the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 242.

case, clearly Mozard found the topic to be relevant for a white reading public curious—and anxious—about skin color that was ephemeral.

Whereas free people of color were typically absent from the paper, slaves appeared prominently in every issue. Fugitive slave notices provided detailed descriptions of slaves' names, origins, faces and bodies (noting scars, brands, and any distinguishing malformations), clothing, disposition, language abilities, and other skills that might identify them. Sometimes these notices were under their own heading of "Marooned Slaves," but occasionally they appear next to a section titled "Stray Animals," which included notices posted by those whose livestock or horses had run away. On such occasions runaway slaves would be listed as "Stray Slaves." In the *Affiches*' advertising section, slaves were listed among the "Items for Sale or Rent." Here advertisers tended to note their slaves' age, skills, disposition, and whether or not they possessed a "pretty face." Of course, such advertisements objectified slaves, listing them as property to be exchanged. Yet fugitive slave notices—while they reinforced slaves' status as property by disembodimenting them—also served as a constant reminder that slaves were thinking, feeling beings capable of resistance.

The *Affiches Américaines* suggested a colonial society that was, for the most part, bifurcated by race, legal status and class. Almost always, advertisers and contributors were referred to as *Sieur* or *Dame*, implying that they were white. Their presence in the newspaper marks them as the agents of trade within the colony, whereas people of color appear almost exclusively as commodities to be bought, rented or captured. Articles on "Natural History" featured people of color too, but here again they appear as objects of observation rather than subjects—their difference from whites must be noted and puzzled

over, a curiosity to be explained by European science. The newspaper distinguished whites and non-whites most explicitly by assigning racial labels—individuals were either white, in which case no color designator appeared, or they were “black,” “mulatto,” or “quadroon.” Print had a special ability to assert that boundary. In fact, distinctions between whites and people of color were probably clearer on the page than in face-to-face encounters. Whites readily recognized that descendents of slaves sometimes had skin as light as people wholly descended from Europeans, admitting to the unreliability of phenotype.⁷¹ The newspaper provided an opportunity to clarify those ambiguities by identifying the race of every individual listed on its pages.

Yet we know that colonial life was not at all the dichotomy suggested by the *Affiches Américaines*. A large free population of color, growing in size and in wealth, challenged the economic domination of colonial whites, even if their presence was not prominently displayed in the newspaper. Moreover, elite and middling *gens de couleur* did business with colonial whites on a regular basis.⁷² Colonial business was an integrated affair in Saint Domingue’s two major cities. But the *Affiches Américaines* seems to have been a publication largely by and for the colony’s white merchants, planters and professionals. Drawing them together in a twice-weekly discussion of colonial commerce as well as sporadic discussions of natural history, colonial statistics and French grammar, the newspaper did more than provide colonists with “useful”

⁷¹ See for example Pierre Ulric Dubuisson, *Nouvelles Considérations sur Saint-Domingue, en Réponse à Celles de M. H. D.*, 2 vols. (Paris: Chez Cellot et Jombert Fils jeune, Libraires, 1780), 2: 65.

⁷² Dominique Rogers, "Les Libres de Couleur dans les Capitales de Saint-Domingue: Fortune, Mentalités et Intégration à la Fin de l'Ancien Régime (1776-1789)" (Université Michel de Montaigne, Bordeaux III, 1999). Rogers argues that the colony was not at all the “segregationist order” that the law had attempted to create.

knowledge. It defined the limits of colonial citizenship by welcoming only elite whites into the community of “useful” colonists for whom the paper was intended.⁷³

Nor was this community open to women, even white women. Women did appear in the advertisements and notices as retailers, and schoolmistresses, and property owners selling slaves and plantations. But in the non-commercial items, their presence was circumscribed and their agency limited. A short feature appearing in the September 6, 1787 issue of the *Affiches Américaines* wondered “Should women be educated? To what degree?” Mozard proposed a response to this question in the form of a long quote from a new publication by Rolland de la Platrière entitled *The Influence of Letters in the Provinces*. It claimed that “[w]e are no longer in a time when one imagines that the ignorance of women is the guardian of their virtue, the guarantee of their wisdom....” Rather, to preserve women’s virtue and to make them wise, a certain type of education was needed. “If it is true,..., as some have so often repeated, that by their very constitution women can never be in a state of indifference, that it is for them necessary to love or to hate,...if it is true, I say, that the vivacity of their affections leads them, and often leads them astray; how useful is it to modify their temper, to direct their inclinations by the influence of enlightened thinkers (*les lumières*), [by] the resources of talents, [by] the appeal of taste.”⁷⁴ Far from welcoming women as equal participants in colonial enlightenment, Mozard felt compelled to weigh the prospect of their education with their forced ignorance. In the end, Rolland’s quote determined that their education was

⁷³ My understanding of the ability of the press to create a racialized, class-based community has been greatly influenced by Kathleen Wilson’s analysis of the provincial press in England. Kathleen Wilson, “Citizenship, Empire, and Modernity in the English Provinces, C. 1720-1790,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29, no. 1 (1995); Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2003), 32-36.

⁷⁴ *Affiches Américaines*, 6 septembre 1787.

necessary if only to harness their inherent emotionality, which might otherwise compromise their feminine virtue.

Contesting the Racial Order

White elite men in Saint Domingue attempted to define participation in the colony's print culture as a practice in which the most virtuous colonists—true colonial citizens—took part. Yet they reserved that practice of citizenship for themselves. But practices of citizenship could be taken up by those they meant to exclude. Julien Raimond, the wealthy “quadroon” planter from the southern coastal province of Aquin, understood well the discourse of citizenship working to exclude him from white privilege. Encouraged by the Colonial Ministry's reconsideration of the status of the *gens de couleur*, Raimond and his neighbors acted by responding to the call for contributions toward the purchase of a new naval ship for the French fleet that had been listed in the *Affiches Américaines*. But they did not send their contributions to the white planters listed in the newspaper. Hoping that a strong show of civic virtue might inspire the administrators to decide in their favor, they requested official permission from the Governor to take up their own collection. Governor Bellecombe asked Raimond to lead the initiative, and he eventually collected 9,450 *livres* from 20 of Aquin's wealthiest people of color.⁷⁵

Impressed by Raimond's efforts, Bellecombe encouraged him to write directly to the Colonial Minister. As noted in previous chapters, Raimond proceeded to send four

⁷⁵ Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, 216-217.

separate memorandums, three to the Colonial Minister and one to the King himself.⁷⁶ However, none of the discriminatory laws were rescinded prior to the French Revolution. Not until May 1791 would some free people of color gain full political rights, granted by the National Assembly over the opposition of colonial planters and Moreau.⁷⁷ Raimond played a part in this early success, having read before the Jacobin Club his recently published pamphlet detailing the history of prejudice against free people of color in Saint Domingue and how it could be alleviated. The National Assembly voted in favor of the reform just two days after hearing Raimond speak.⁷⁸

Not coincidentally, Mozard launched a new newspaper in 1791, the *Gazette de Saint Domingue, politique, civile, économique, et littéraire*. In the prospectus, he welcomed “every resident citizen” to submit opinions on any topic or any event. Liberalization of the press had accompanied the French Revolution, allowing a freer exchange of ideas on the pages of uncensored newspapers. But in 1791, as the revolution in France pressed forward, abolishing noble privilege and welcoming all men into the community of political citizenship, Mozard explicitly qualified his definition of “citizen.” His prospectus, printed in the first issue of the new publication proclaimed the significance of newspapers as the “lamps that enlighten people,” against the wishes of “tyrants.” Inviting readers to participate in that democratic undertaking, he welcomed their submissions, “except [those that] concern the two secondary classes of the colonial

⁷⁶ Ibid., 218-221; John D. Garrigus, "Opportunist or Patriot? Julien Raimond (1744-1801) and the Haitian Revolution," *Slavery and Abolition* 28, no. 1 (2007): 5.

⁷⁷ Only those born to free parents were affected by the May 1791 decree, and their rights were rescinded in September 1791, in the wake of the slave revolt.

⁷⁸ Garrigus, "Opportunist or Patriot? Julien Raimond (1744-1801) and the Haitian Revolution," 7.

population toward whom the authors of the *Gazette de Saint Domingue* will impose on themselves the most absolute silence.”⁷⁹

Saint Domingue’s free people of color, one of the “secondary classes” whose interests Mozard excluded, had forced him to state explicitly what had been implied prior to the revolution: his newspaper served the “public good,” but that “public” was white. Soon the colony’s slaves, the second of Mozard’s “secondary classes,” would push French revolutionaries to further interrogate the limits of enlightenment universalism by demanding their right to freedom. In the process, they forced the new French Legislative Assembly to reconsider the status of free people of color in the colonies. Hoping to secure their allegiance against the rebel slaves, the Legislative Assembly granted citizenship rights to all free people of color in May 1792. Thus in the end, violent revolution rather than print brought free people of color into the community of French citizens.

In the late-colonial period, Saint Domingue’s newspaper was one tool with which white elites attempted to ensure their social and political power. During the 1780’s in particular, as the Colonial Ministry questioned the wisdom of the legal subordination of free people of color, the *Affiches* provided a weekly performance of the racial order white colonists wished to impose. Through it, Mozard communicated that white, literate, relatively wealthy male colonists were the most useful members of society, and therefore they were the true colonial citizens. This performance was designed to buttress racial privilege within the colony while encouraging metropolitan confidence in greater colonial

⁷⁹ Cited in Foucard, *Plaisirs de Saint Domingue: Notes sur la Vie Sociale, Litteraire et Artistique*, 68.

autonomy. However, the tools and the rhetoric that white elites used to cultivate and demonstrate white civic virtue could also be picked up by elite non-whites. By responding to the *Affiches Américaines*' call for patriotic contributions, and by writing their own political pamphlets during the revolution, Raimond his Aquin neighbors used print to push at the boundaries of colonial citizenship.

Chapter Four

“Rule the Universe with the Power of Your Charms”: Marriage, Sexuality and the Creation of Creole Citizens

Writing in the 1780's, Moreau reflected fondly on a pre-Seven Years' War golden age, claiming that Saint Domingue owed its civilization and its existence as a “true homeland” to the sagacity of Governor d'Ogeron. D'Ogeron, he claimed, had engineered a particular type of immigration that turned “bloodthirsty” pirates and buccaneers into family-oriented farmers. The key to this transformation was the importation of white women from France for these men to marry. By “invok[ing] the aid of a seductive sex,” known universally to “soften men,” d'Ogeron transformed these men, rendering them more sociable. However, d'Ogeron recruited a particular type of women especially suited for the task. According to Moreau, he sought

timid orphans to subdue these arrogant beings, accustomed to revolt, and to change them into sensible spouses and virtuous family men. It was in this manner that Saint Domingue had a population that made [the colony] their own, and that one began to consider it as a true homeland.¹

As Moreau noted, early colonial administrators like d'Ogeron understood marriage to be an institution vital to the settlement of the colony. Not only were married men more likely to cultivate the land, making the colony profitable for France, but they were also likely to produce legitimate heirs and loyal French subjects. Marriage, then,

¹ Méderic-Louis-Elie Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: 1797), 1:7.

served the goals of the French state by facilitating white population growth and the spread of plantation agriculture.

By the late-colonial period, however, administrators, colonists and visitors viewed marriage in Saint Domingue not as a panacea for the colony's ills but rather as a corrupted institution. Although plantations had been successfully established throughout the colony, virtuous families had not. Often, these authors claimed, male colonists rejected marriage altogether, preferring instead to live in concubinage with enslaved or free women of color. Thus, rather than establishing lasting family ties in the colony and helping to create a unified community of colonists, white men forged temporary relationships with women of color before making (or failing to make) their fortunes and returning to France. Those who did marry were prone to adultery, and they could easily evade church, monarchical and paternal authority over their matches. Worse still, from the perspective of the Colonial Ministry and administrators, some white men chose to marry the wrong women—they married women of color, thereby blurring the racial boundaries that the administration attempted to erect in the 1760's and 1770's. As we will see, both interracial marriage and interracial concubinage permitted the transfer of family names and wealth from white fathers to women and children *de couleur*, allowing for the “usurpation” of such markers of white status. At the height of the administration's efforts to cement the intermediary status of the *gens de couleur*, then, the practice of marriage in the colony no longer seemed to be serving the goals of the state.

And yet, Moreau and other elite white colonists continued to have faith in the power of marriage to bring about positive reform in Saint Domingue. In particular, when administrators considered a relaxation of the discriminatory policies against the *gens de*

couleur in the late 1770's and 1780's, these white colonists hoped that discourses and practices of marriage could be used to police the racial boundaries that the law could or would not. In addition, they advocated the ability of marriage—white, virtuous marriage—to foster patriotism, reform morality and grow the white population. Marriage's ability to fulfill those goals, however, rested on the quality of the *wife*. In particular, Moreau emphasized the need for “timid” yet “seductive” white women similar to the orphans he imagined arriving in the early eighteenth century. Employing a Rousseauian idealization of docile femininity, and a more general Enlightenment valorization of affectionate marriage, Moreau and other white elites contrasted the allegedly emotional, dependent, naturally beautiful, fertile white creole woman with the coldly rational, independent, lascivious, yet sterile *mulâtresse*. Following Rousseau, Moreau linked white creole femininity with the spread of colonial civic virtue; he proposed that the tempered sexuality of the white creole woman could be directed toward the reproduction of the white creole citizenry. By contrast, the unbridled sexuality of the *mulâtresse* made her an ideal mistress but not a wife. In his formulation, white creole sexuality—so often understood as a threat to the establishment of racial boundaries as well as civic virtue—became an admirable trait with the potential to produce patriotic white colonial families.

Official Encouragement of Marriage in the Early Colonial Period

While d'Ogeron may or may not have consciously sought out “timid orphans” to tame his buccaneer-colonists, orphans were in fact among the women shipped off to France's New World colonies. Poor women and girls who inhabited public hospitals, or

for whom families could not pay dowries, or those whom the police rounded up in the streets of Paris or the port cities, were all vulnerable targets for eager ship captains and merchants organizing shipments of indentured workers—or potential wives. Yet while colonial authorities recognized the importance of allowing married men to bring their wives with them, they vacillated in their decision to send single women. The trading companies that initially governed the French West Indian colonies, particularly the Compagnie de Saint-Christophe and then the Compagnie des Iles, were initially opposed to the presence of single women in the colony, seeing them as “the origin of disputes, jealousies, debauchery, [and] therefore unruliness and desertions.”² Ideally, they hoped that immigrants would arrive already married with their wives in tow. In fact, their preferred immigrant was a free (non-indentured) married male artisan—someone skilled, independent and presumably already under the positive influences of matrimony, and therefore likely to reproduce. However, in reality large numbers of single men migrated to the colonies, men likely to return to the metropole in search of wives rather than settle in the colonies. So, the companies changed their policies toward the civil status of women migrants, facilitating their arrival in order to prevent the departure of needed colonists and encourage the growth of the settled population.³

Mass shipments of single women from France to Saint Domingue arrived during the 1680s and 1690s, under the encouragement of the companies who sometimes paid agents in France for their services in collecting these women.⁴ Such women arrived in the colony with no prearranged labor contract, just the knowledge that they would be

² Gabriel Debien, "Les Femmes des Premiers Colons des Antilles 1635-1680," *Notes d'Histoire Coloniale* XXIV (1952): 4.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.: 7-9.

parceled out for marriage or indenture to an unknown colonist. Local colonial administrators ensured that the women were distributed on a hierarchical basis, with the highest-ranking men receiving the “best” women. On 8 October 1685 Governor de Cussy wrote to the Minister that for the most part, the last group of “girls” to arrive had “contributed to the growth of the colony...having been advantageously married.”⁵ In 1686 he wrote that some 63 “girls” had arrived in the colony, 34 of whom were delivered to Cap Français. Four were to be married the day after their arrival, whereas the others “were distributed among the officers and the best married planters,” presumably as indentured servants. De Cussy also reported that in La Tortue (Tortuga) and another unnamed region, 17 were “good,” 3 of whom were married and 10 of whom were sent by ship to the region of Cul de Sac. He does not mention what happened to the other four, but it is possible that they too were distributed as servants, since they were not “good” enough to be married. Also, he noted that a Dame Rozier brought with her to the island two “girls,” one *mulâtresse* from St. Christophe and another who they later learned had already been married in France.⁶ Thus, by importing single women, the Ministry, the governor and the companies hoped to encourage marriage, thereby establishing a settled population of colonists who would reproduce themselves. In addition to importing women, colonial governors rewarded colonists for marrying. Gallifet reported to the Minister in 1699 that one captain and one ensign had recently married, and that three or four other officers would soon do the same. Gallifet had apparently given the newlyweds a gift as per the instructions of the Minister in order to provide for their households.⁷

⁵ CAOM C/9a/1 fol. 250.

⁶ CAOM C/9a/1 fol. 329.

⁷ CAOM C/9a/1 fol. 181, 27 dec 1699.

In addition to settling colonists, marriage was also believed to prompt moral reform. Colonial governors of the 1680s and 1690s believed in the civilizing power of women and marriage. Governor de Cussy noted the increasing rate of marriage in the colony in order to demonstrate the moral improvement of the colonists. In 1688, a Capuchin missionary, Father Davilla, had apparently complained to the Minister about the colonists' poor behavior. The minister forwarded Davilla's letter to Governor de Cussy, who then responded to the accusations in his correspondence with the Minister. Probably describing Cap Français, de Cussy first admitted that there were more "libertines" there than in any other part of the colony but that it was also the most heavily populated region. However, the population had undergone such a moral improvement in the previous five or six years that "one would no longer recognize them..." Almost all of them, he claimed, tended to their Christian duties, some receiving communion four times per year. They no longer swore as often as before, except for "a few drunks" who the governor regularly put in prison until they could "sleep off their wine." Furthermore, he noted that there was very little concubinage, but when such extramarital relations did arrive, the *procureur du roi* forced the couple to either break up or marry." De Cussy proudly explained that, as a result, in the four previous months, some 20 residents (*habitants*) had married their "*mulâtresses* or *negresses*, whom they preferred to marry rather than leave."⁸ De Cussy no doubt exaggerated the degree to which colonists had reformed in order to allay the Minister's worries. Yet his claim that colonists chose marriage over concubinage or bachelorhood is significant, and not only because it signaled colonial moral reform. Clearly, de Cussy preferred that white settlers marry

⁸ CAOM C/9a/1 fol. 413, 3 mai 1688.

women of color rather than live in concubinage or singly. In the earliest years of settlement, then, the need for settled families outweighed any desire to prevent intermarriage.

Marital Law and *Mésalliance* in France and Saint Domingue

As the colonial population grew, colonial officials became increasingly concerned not only to encourage marriage, but also to encourage the right kind of marriage taking place in the colony. By the mid-eighteenth century, the Colonial Ministry and local administrators called for stricter enforcement of metropolitan marital regulations in Saint Domingue in order to prevent bigamous marriages or marriages without the proper parental consent. Colonial civil courts policed these regulations, as French civil courts did in the metropole, with the goals of ensuring proper lines of succession, asserting state over church authority, and guaranteeing paternal authority over marital choice. This latter goal helped prevent *mésalliance*, or marriage between individuals from unequal social positions. In both metropole and colony, *mésalliance* threatened the socially superior family with the pollution of lineal blood and status. Moreover, it threatened the social order by permitting the “usurpation” of rank, privileges, family name, and property by those of lesser rank. In France, of course, these were the concerns of the old nobility, whose status was steadily diminished as commoners bought and sometimes married their way into noble titles. In Saint Domingue and other colonies, however, *mésalliance* took on a different meaning: it referred to the “usurpation” of white rank, privileges, names and property by people of color through intermarriage. This section will demonstrate how metropolitan marital law and discourse on *mésalliance* was transferred to the colony.

In the sixteenth century, the French monarchy sought to stop what it perceived as a proliferation of clandestine marriages, meaning marriages entered into without parental consent. Such marriages were problematic because they permitted the spouses to evade church prohibitions on multiple marriages and marriage between kin, but also because they resulted in unclear lines of succession and illegitimate children. For the monarchy, charged with ensuring inheritances and the preservation of inherited privileges, this was a danger that had to be controlled. Furthermore, clandestine marriages prevented fathers from orchestrating matches that would preserve—or enhance—noble lineages. Old noble families feared the possibility of *mésalliance*, which could permanently “pollute” the superior lineage.⁹ Moreover, such marriages contributed to the promotion of commoners to the nobility, which was already occurring due to the monarchy’s sale of royal offices. Clandestine marriage provided couples who desired to marry in spite of such risks the opportunity to avoid the condemnation of their families.¹⁰ The newly ennobled purchasers of royal offices who served as administrators and judges throughout France, the new “nobility of the robe,” also had a vested interest in suppressing clandestine marriages. Eager to consolidate their noble status, these early modern jurists sought advantageous family alliances when matchmaking for their children. Disobedient children who married their social inferiors could compromise the precarious status of the

⁹ Guillaume Aubert, ““The Blood of France”: Race and Purity of Blood in the French Atlantic World,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (2004)
<<http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/wm/61.3/aubert.html>>: pars. 5-15.

¹⁰ Sarah Hanley, “Engendering the State: Family Formation and State Building in Early Modern France,” *French Historical Studies* 16, no. 1 (1989); James F. Traer, *Marriage and the Family in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 30.

newly ennobled.¹¹ In short, couples who married clandestinely escaped ecclesiastical, patriarchal, and monarchical authority.

Church reforms proclaimed by the Council of Trent (1545-1563) sought to limit clandestine marriages. Specifically, these “Tridentine” reforms made marriage a public practice; presiding parish priests were henceforth required to publish in the parish church three successive banns proclaiming couples’ intentions to marry prior to performing actual ceremonies. Furthermore, the ceremonies could not take place without witnesses, and marriages could only be performed by couples’ parish priests.¹² These new requirements allowed neighbors, family members and priests—those who knew the couple best, presumably—to reveal any potential impediments to the match. In order to be married by a French priest, the couple should have been Catholic, never before married (unless he or she was widowed), not closely related, and of legal age. The collective knowledge of the local community and their parish priest would theoretically reveal any such obstacles.

Not to be outshone by the authority of the Catholic Church, the French monarchy, supported by jurists in the Parlement of Paris, issued a succession of edicts and ordinances that upheld and sometimes rendered more rigorous the Tridentine marriage reforms. By 1639, the most significant of these reforms were in place. In contrast to the new Church regulations, the new French laws stipulated that minors could no longer marry without the consent of their parents. Also, they raised the age of majority for men

¹¹ Hanley, "Engendering the State: Family Formation and State Building in Early Modern France," 6-9; Sarah Hanley, "Family and the State in Early Modern France: The Marital Law Compact," in *Connecting Spheres: European Women in a Globalizing World*, ed. Marilyn Boxer and Jean Quataert (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 61-64.

¹² Traer, *Marriage and the Family in Eighteenth-Century France*, 30-31.

(from twenty to thirty years) and women (from seventeen to twenty-five), thereby lengthening the period during which parents legally controlled a child's marital choice. In 1639 the Parlement capped these earlier rulings by registering a royal decree requiring *all* children, regardless of age, to have parental consent to marry.¹³ Thus parents, and particularly fathers, could prevent a disadvantageous marriage simply by denying consent. However, major children could circumvent parental disapproval by appealing to a royal judge. With the judge's permission, the couple could hire two notaries to accompany them before the dissenting parents and make a "*sommation respectueuse*," or a formal request for parental consent. Even if the father still refused to grant consent, the couple would thus have fulfilled their legal obligations and the marriage could proceed, but not without the risk of disinheritance.¹⁴ Still, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century changes to marital law ultimately brought marriage under the control of church and state in a way that reinforced patriarchal authority.¹⁵

Escaping state and parental control over marriage was much easier in Saint Domingue than in the metropole, in part because of the transient nature of colonial society. In France, a community of neighbors and family could attest to one's religion, marital status, age, and lineage, or one could refer to parish records or notary records for

¹³ Hanley, "Engendering the State: Family Formation and State Building in Early Modern France," 9-10, 11; Traer, *Marriage and the Family in Eighteenth-Century France*, 32-36. French law also repeated the requirement for the publication of three banns as well as the presence of witnesses, although it increased the number of witnesses required from two to four.

¹⁴ Paul and Jean-Louis Gazzaniga Ourliac, *Histoire du Droit Privé Français de L'an Mil au Code Civil* (Paris: Albin Michel S.A., 1985), 297. Boucher d'Argus, "Sommission respectueuse," in Denis and Jean le Rond d'Alembert Diderot, ed., *Encyclopédie Ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers*, 17 vols. (Paris: 1751-1772), 15: 330.

¹⁵ Sarah Hanley has argued that French legal reforms created a "Family-State compact" in which the interests of French families superseded the interests the Church or the marrying children. Hanley, "Engendering the State: Family Formation and State Building in Early Modern France," 6-9; Hanley, "Family and the State in Early Modern France: The Marital Law Compact."

proof. But newly arrived immigrants—or even those who had lived in the colony for some time—could falsely claim all of those qualities with some ease in the colony, where French parish records and old acquaintances were out of reach. Colonial priests might not know those they married, and therefore unwittingly perform illicit marriages.

Some early colonists expressed concern over the unknown origins of their potential spouses. White men, in particular, worried about the spoiled virtue and status of the poor women imported from France. As de Cussy explained to the minister in 1686, single male colonists preferred to marry creole women because they tended to have more property, and also because the colonists could “not know the families or the morals” of the imported women.” Even though de Cussy had assured the colonists that the Minister had “given orders to choose only those who had been wisely raised,” these men preferred creole girls, of whom de Cussy claimed there were “a rather large number from ten to eleven years old.”¹⁶ Thus creole women were preferable to these early imports, who were assumed to be morally compromised by virtue of their poverty.

As immigration to the colony increased throughout the eighteenth century, so did administrators’ anxieties over marriages among immigrants whose histories were unknown. By 1745 colonial administrators reported that several types of illicit marital situations had become commonplace in the colony because of the transient nature of the colonial population. They noted that couples were coming to the colony claiming to be married, and living as such, without being able to prove it. Others married in the colony without the consent of their own parish priests. Bigamy was also a problem: some married in the colony when they already had spouses elsewhere. The governor and

¹⁶ CAOM C/9a/1 fol. 329, 13 aout 1686.

intendant therefore issued an ordinance designed to “ensure the state of men born in the Colony” by preventing such abuses. Henceforth, all immigrants claiming to be married would have to produce documentation attesting to their legitimate marriage. Failing that, the allegedly married parties were to provide all of the information typically found on marriage contracts and parish records, including their given names, parents’ names, places of birth, places of residence (outside the colony), as well as where, when and by whom they were married. The administrators declared that couples who failed to produce such documentation would be considered as living in concubinage, a designation that would exclude their children from legal inheritance.¹⁷

To prevent the performance of illicit marriages in the colony, administrators declared that colonial priests and curés should not marry any immigrant from Europe who had not resided in their parish for at least six months, or, who did not have a special written permission from their curé or bishop in France. Furthermore, anyone not born in the colony who wanted to marry would need a notarized document attesting to his or her unmarried status. In order to buttress the credibility of such a dubious document, a “known person, of whom the integrity will not be suspect” was also required to testify as to the sincerity of the person.¹⁸ It is difficult to know to what extent church officials enforced these requirements. At least some colonial priests must have upheld the laws because, on many occasions during the late-colonial period, couples or families appealed

¹⁷ M. Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l’Amérique Sous le Vent*, 6 vols. (Paris: 1784), 3: 827-829.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

to local courts to override local priests' decisions not to proceed with a marriage.¹⁹

However, the larger point is that, in the colonies, French marriage practices and laws proved difficult to regulate because the transience of the colonial population permitted an anonymity that did not exist in the old world.

The regulation of colonial marriage had somewhat different aims than the regulation of metropolitan marriage. Certainly, preventing potential inheritance disputes was critical in both places. But in France's slave colonies, and especially in Saint Domingue, the preservation of racial privilege and purity typically trumped concerns over the preservation of noble lineage. In Saint Domingue, accusations of *mésalliance* described marriage between whites and people of color rather than marriages between nobles and commoners.²⁰ And yet the discourse of *mésalliance* in France provided a ready language with which to describe colonial *mésalliance*. By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, French nobles and jurists were framing their understanding of noble lineage in terms of "blood" and "race." As France's longstanding elite families, their blood was "pure" relative to the blood of commoners as well as newly ennobled upstarts. Nor was such language merely symbolic; as early as the sixteenth century nobles argued that blood transmitted certain inherited qualities. Specifically, generosity, virtue and honesty were believed to be passed on by noble blood, whereas the blood of the lower orders produced a depraved nature that education could only partially improve. Therefore, the preservation of France's noble races, or families, required the fierce

¹⁹ Typically the appellants sought to sidestep the residency requirement, and the Conseils obliged in every example listed here. For examples of appeals from 1780-1785, see *Ibid.*, 6: 355-356, 386, 409, 487-488, 552, 587, 773-774.

²⁰ Gene E. Ogle, "Policing Saint Domingue: Race, Violence and Honor in an Old Regime Colony" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2003), 40, 376.

protection of their bloodlines. *Mésalliances* threatened to compromise those races by bringing inferior blood to superior family lines.²¹

However, in France, not all nobles worried about compromising the blood of their lineage. Some, in fact, did not hesitate to marry their children to wealthy commoners in order to improve the economic power of the family. By the seventeenth century, increasing numbers of wealthy commoners became newly ennobled by paying taxes or marrying into more ambitious noble families keen to increase their fortunes. Many old noble families felt threatened by these upstarts, and even the king's ministers lashed out against the trend. Henry IV's minister, the duke of Sully, complained that such marriages threatened to "bastardize all the true Nobility, and there would hardly be a gentleman who would not be a *métis*."²² The duke's language is particularly interesting for our purposes, of course, because "*métis*" was the term used to define children of French-Native American parentage, particularly in North America. Furthermore, as noted in chapter one, Moreau used the word to describe the offspring of a white man and a *quarteronne*. Thus the concepts of polluted blood, blood mixture, and mixed-blood offspring operated in both the metropole and the colonies, helping to frame discussions of marriage that transgressed the social hierarchy.²³

²¹ Aubert, "'The Blood of France': Race and Purity of Blood in the French Atlantic World," pars 5-10; Ogle, "Policing Saint Domingue: Race, Violence and Honor in an Old Regime Colony", 378-394.

²² Aubert, "'The Blood of France': Race and Purity of Blood in the French Atlantic World," pars 14.

²³ In most French provinces, children inherited the status of the father, making the *mésalliance* of noble men less damaging to the lineage, in theory. However, noble women appear to have been married off to commoners at a much higher rate than their brothers, especially younger daughters whose parents sought to reduce the cost of their dowries. Once married to a commoner, the woman lost her noble status. If her husband died, then she (as the widow and new head of household) would be responsible for paying taxes as a commoner. She could regain her privileged status as a noble at this point, however, by obtaining a "letter of relief" from derogation from French courts based on the premise that they had been forced into such marriages by fathers or brothers. Davis Bitton, *The French Nobility in Crisis 1560-1640* (Stanford:

In Saint Domingue, as in France, fathers and children sometimes chose *mésalliance* in order to increase their wealth and expand their social networks. As discussed in Chapter One, the daughters of wealthy families of color were considered particularly desirable marriage partners by newly arrived European immigrants who had little capital or local knowledge. Colonial officials expressed concern about such unions as early as 1731, primarily because they contributed to the growth of the free population of color. However, later depictions of interracial *mésalliance* emphasized its material and symbolic results. Property, lineage and skin color were supposed to set apart the white social elite in colonial society, but *mésalliance* compromised all three of those signifiers. Customary law specified that family names and property were inherited through the father. Therefore, white fathers who married women of color passed down both, along with lighter skin, to their mixed progeny. In 1776, Hilliard complained that whites' impatience to acquire a colonial fortune spurred such a lack of judgment, and as a result "[t]he property of families were sacrificed to passion, became the price of debauchery, and respectable names were lost, with the most beautiful land, to legitimate Mulattoes."²⁴

Not only did *mésalliance* increase and enrich the free population of color; it also tarnished the name and social rank of intermarried whites. Hilliard and other observers remarked that intermarried whites descended in social status and lost their "rank" as whites within the colony. Hilliard approved of such ritual degradation, claiming that "one is right not only in hating him, but more so in suspecting the integrity of those who

Stanford University Press, 1969), 93; Gayle K. Brunelle, "Dangerous Liaisons: Mesalliance and Early Modern French Noblewomen," *French Historical Studies* 19, no. 1 (1995).

²⁴ Michel-René Hilliard d'Auberteuil, *Considérations sur l'Etat Présent de la Colonie Francaise de Saint-Domingue*, 2 vols. (Paris: Chez Grangé, 1777), 2: 81.

by interest or by forgetfulness, descend to marry beneath one's station."²⁵ For Hilliard, it was necessary to punish those who transgressed and blurred racial boundaries. Moreau agreed. He referred to white men who intermarried as "*mésalliés*," arguing that they formed "a new intermediary, between Whites and *Gens de couleur*. They belong however to this latter [group], by their alliance."²⁶ Thus *mésalliance*, according to these men, resulted in the racial derogation of the white spouse. But while both men supported white derogation in this case, they preferred that intermarriage not happen at all. Believing that whites belonged at the top of the colonial social hierarchy, they understood that whites' social descent resulted in a dangerous confusion in the social order.

Colonial law punished men who blurred racial boundaries by marrying free women of color. By 1733, white men who married women of color were excluded from the militia's officer corps, and from serving in the judiciary.²⁷ Local officials praised the ordinance's ability to "maintain [whites] in their purity, and there will be no more fear that mulattoes may tarnish the blood of France through alliances in the future."²⁸ Moreover, since the militia was segregated, such men were only permitted to serve in companies with men of color. In 1776 Barré de Saint-Venant praised this policy for effectively branding the "*mésalliés*" with "prejudice."²⁹ In 1771 the Colonial Minister explained that stripping officers of their command was a natural response to mixed

²⁵ Ibid., 2: 79.

²⁶ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 99.

²⁷ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Françaises de l'Amérique Sous le Vent*, 3: 382.

²⁸ CAOM F/3/91 fol. 96-97, quoted in Aubert, "'The Blood of France': Race and Purity of Blood in the French Atlantic World," par 46.

²⁹ "Chambre d'Agriculture du Cap, Seance du 3 oct 1776, Mémoire sur les Affranchis," CAOM F/3/124 fol. 129.

marriages. When the Marquis de Laage, Captain of the Dragoons in the Legion of Saint Domingue, married a free woman of color (a “girl of mixed blood [*fille de sang-mêlé*]”), the Colonial Minister affirmed the administrators’ decision to demote him on the grounds that “these sorts of marriages leave whites with a permanent stain.”³⁰ The logic was clear: whites who intermarried transgressed racial boundaries, and they thereby acquired a “stain” similar to that of the free descendents of slaves. Therefore, they could not hold honorific positions within the colony, since such positions were reserved for true, unblemished whites.

As in France, colonial elites understood that *mésalliance* posed a serious threat to their position at the top of the social order. In Saint Domingue, elite status was determined not only by property, family name, and title, but most importantly by race. *Mésalliance* permitted non-whites to acquire the material and symbolic markers of the elite, jeopardizing not only the status of the socially “superior” white family, but also the impermeable racial boundaries imagined by the white elite and colonial administrators. In other words, acts of *mésalliance* compromised the status of individual white families while tarnishing the category of whiteness as a whole.

Colonial Mésalliance

Legal marriage between whites and people of color occurred infrequently by the late colonial period, but it was not unheard of. Based on her extensive sample of notary records, Dominique Rogers has found that in Cap Français, “mixed marriage” was not at all the “unacceptable transgression” historians have assumed. Of marriage contracts

³⁰ CAOM F/3/91 fol. 123.

involving people of color, 11% united an interracial couple—always a white man and a woman of color. In Port-au-Prince the rate was lower at 7%.³¹ As noted in Chapter One, rates were much higher in the south. Parish records from three southern parishes spanning the eighteenth century reveal that, on average, 17% of all marriages (not only those contracted by at least one person of color, as Rogers' numbers illustrate) were "mixed."³² Most *mésalliances* in Le Cap appear to have united poorer white men with women of color who were more economically secure; at least, white fiancés there tended to have a smaller inheritance than their betrothed. It is important to note, however, that in such cases the bride's family was often very careful to protect their lineage property in the marriage contract.³³ But not all interracial marriages united ambitious yet impoverished white colonists with wealthy women of color whose families sought to lighten the skin of their progeny, as Hilliard charged. Other examples suggest very different motives: white men sometimes married poor women of color and even slaves, women who brought little to no material benefit to the marriage. Rogers found several such instances in Port-au-Prince, and the following two examples demonstrate that such marriages were also possible in Le Cap.

Marriage to an enslaved woman was certainly the most "dishonorable" type of *mésalliance* available to a white colonist, and it is not surprising that some such marriages provoked heirs to contest the legality of the marriage in court. In 1772, the

³¹ Dominique Rogers, "Les Libres de Couleur dans les Capitales de Saint-Domingue: Fortune, Mentalités et Intégration À la Fin de l'Ancien Régime (1776-1789)" (Université Michel de Montaigne, Bordeaux III, 1999), 545, 547, 632. Rogers found 12 instances of *mésalliance* out of 109 marriages involving people of color in Cap Français. She found 5 *mésalliances* out of 68 such marriages in Port-au-Prince.

³² Jacques Houdaille, "Trois Paroisses de Saint-Domingue au XVIIIème Siècle. Etude Démographique.," *Population* 18, no. 1 (1963): 100.

³³ Rogers, "Les Libres de Couleur dans les Capitales de Saint-Domingue: Fortune, Mentalités et Intégration À la Fin de l'Ancien Régime (1776-1789)", 547-548.

heirs of a white planter named Charles Dubois appealed to the Conseil du Cap to oppose his marriage to his slave, a *mulâtresse* named Marie Anne.³⁴ The family employed the image of the seductive, calculating woman of color in order to strengthen its case. In its decision, the Conseil du Cap portrayed Dubois as the victim of a “clever [*adroit*]” slave and a local priest whose motives were suspect. The ruling indicated that Dubois had been living with Marie Anne “in a commerce of debauchery” during which time Marie Anne had “subjugated him” and acquired “an absolute empire over her master.” In early February, 1772, Dubois fell ill, and so the local curé was called to confess him and perform last rights. The court noted that for unknown reasons, the curé agreed to participate in Marie Anne’s “ambitious designs” by encouraging Dubois to marry her, thus ending the state of debauchery in which they lived. Dubois, impressionable in his weakened state, agreed to the arrangement and so the couple was married on February 11 at his bedside. Dubois died just two days later.

This act of *mésalliance*, while distasteful to Dubois’ family, was not illegal. Thus the family could not simply oppose the marriage because of Marie Anne’s lowly status. Instead, they argued that Dubois had not legitimately obtained dispensation of the three required marriage banns, which would have made the couple’s intent to marry public and given the family time to prevent the marriage.

Had the court declared the marriage valid, what exactly was at stake for Dubois’ relatives? There is no mention of a marriage contract, or a will, and thus Marie Anne’s claims to property would have been limited to the rules established by Paris customary law (the law that ruled in Saint Domingue). The Paris *coutume* stipulated that, upon the

³⁴ CAOM, F/3/91 fol. 125-126.

death of her husband, a widow reclaimed her respective *propres* (lineage property, including their dowry); however, as a slave Marie Anne would probably not have had any *propres* to contribute to the marriage and therefore nothing to claim. Also, a widow was theoretically entitled to half of the marital community, which consisted of movable property brought by both parties to the marriage. Moreover, she should have gained usufruct over half of her husband's *propres* for the rest of her life as her dower right.³⁵ However, she could not legally claim a right to ownership of any land or slaves, both of which were classified as "immovable" property.

Thus when the heirs of Charles Dubois opposed his marriage to Marie Anne, they surely did so in order to prevent Marie Anne from inheriting her portion of the marriage community and from gaining usufruct over half of Charles' *propres*. Furthermore, they may have wanted to prevent any claims to succession by Charles' children. If Marie Anne had any children by Dubois (this document does not mention any), they would stand to inherit the *propres*. Such a possibility would have raised the stakes considerably in their attempt to nullify the marriage, since illegitimate children did not inherit. However, the Dubois heirs also would have realized that invalidating the marriage would simultaneously invalidate Marie Anne's freedom. By law, her marriage to Charles freed her, and in the process, denied Charles' heirs a slave. If the Dubois heirs could get the marriage overturned, then they could increase the value of the *propres* that would return to their lineage. Maximizing the value of their inheritance surely drove them to contest the marriage. But most likely, Dubois' heirs were equally motivated by the restoration of

³⁵ Barbara B. Diefendorf, "Women and Property in Ancien Régime France: Theory and Practice in Dauphiné and Paris," in *Early Modern Conceptions of Property*, ed. John Brewer and Susan Staves (London: Routledge, 1995), 177; Ourliac, *Histoire du Droit Privé Français de L'an Mil au Code Civil*, 307-308.

their family's honor. The marriage, as the court document noted, was "a shameful alliance." It brought to the lineage a polluted bloodline that disgraced the rest of the family, compromising their superior status as whites.

The Dubois marriage appears to have been performed rather hastily and without much forethought, leading to a marriage that could more easily be overturned. Yet other couples ensured the legitimacy of their marriages and their successions by scrupulously following marital law, and by creating a marriage contract beforehand. In November 1788, Sieur François Hanesse and his slave, Marguerite Masinga, "*négresse* of the Congo nation," sought such protection by having their marriage contract notarized before the ceremony.³⁶ The couple was careful to explain early in the marriage contract that they had six "mulatto" children together, all of whom had been baptized and whom they intended to legitimate by marrying. Their daughters, Marie Joseph and Louise, and sons, Louis, Etienne Nicolas, Jean Francois, and Pierre, ranged in age from thirteen to two years. The legitimacy of the children—and therefore their rights to succession—would have been automatically conferred by virtue of the marriage. Perhaps Hanesse predicted a succession dispute from his family in the future, or simply understood the rather tenuous status of *gens de couleur* in the colony. Either way, Hanesse and Masinga wanted to ensure their children's status as legitimate heirs by spelling it out in the contract.

In many ways, their marriage was typical of colonial *mésalliances*. First, like most grooms in interracial marriages, Hanesse was not creole (he came from Bretagne).³⁷ Furthermore, as demonstrated by their six children, this marriage legitimized a

³⁶ CAOM, SDOM 156, 24 Sept 1788.

³⁷ Rogers noted that almost all of the white grooms in her sample came from outside the colony. Rogers, "Les Libres de Couleur dans les Capitales de Saint-Domingue: Fortune, Mentalités et Intégration À la Fin de l'Ancien Régime (1776-1789)", 547.

longstanding relationship, a trait common to marriages linking two spouses of modest means.³⁸ Hanesse was probably a poor man. The notary did not record his occupation, which was unusual and suggests that he did not have one. Furthermore, he must not have owned any land since he was not referred to as “habitant.” Both he and Marguerite claimed to be illiterate and could not sign the contract. Furthermore, Hanesse offered Marguerite a paltry dower of only 300 livres. Yet in spite of their mutual poverty, Hanesse and Marguerite found the 66 livres necessary to have a notary draw up a marriage contract, further attesting to their need to secure legal protection for their union.³⁹

Hanesse’s low status no doubt made this marriage less scandalous than a marriage between a slave and a member of the white elite. However, while their marriage may have been opposed by some locals, at least two neighbors agreed to witness their marriage contract. Messieurs Francois Masson Bétignac, a white planter, and Pierre Pillat, a white militia commander and planter, both signed the contract as witnesses. Having exclusively white witnesses sign the marriage contract was also a common element of *mésalliances*.⁴⁰ It is likely that couples requested the attendance of their most esteemed friends, family and acquaintances to participate in the marriage contract as a status symbol. But Bétignac’s and Pillat’s willingness to serve as witnesses tells us something more: as Hanesse’s white social superiors, they approved of his marriage to an enslaved woman of color. For all three men, then, the marriage merited public

³⁸ Four of the five interracial marriages Rogers found in Port-au-Prince involved poor white men and poor or enslaved women of color who had several mutual children already. *Ibid.*, 545-546.

³⁹ The notarial fee for a marriage contract was raised to 66 livres in 1775. Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Françoises de l’Amérique Sous le Vent*, 5: 638.

⁴⁰ Rogers, “Les Libres de Couleur dans les Capitales de Saint-Domingue: Fortune, Mentalités et Intégration À la Fin de l’Ancien Régime (1776-1789)”, 555.

acknowledgement. Whatever transgression of race and civil status it posed, the marriage was contracted and presumably celebrated like any other colonial marriage.

The continued presence of *mésalliance* into the late-colonial period demonstrates, as Rogers notes, the limit of official and unofficial efforts to seal off the category of whiteness from material, symbolic, and racial “usurpations” by non-whites. No doubt, white men who married wealthy women of color found the material advantages of such marriages to outweigh the risk of social discrimination by other whites. For poor whites like Hanesse, those risks were probably less—already marked as a “*petit blanc*,” becoming a “*mésallié*” may not have concerned him much. Material survival, rather than ascent to the colony’s social elite, most likely trumped concerns of derogation.

Concubinage and Miscegenation

Extra-marital relations between white men and women of color, typically referred to as “concubinage,” were even more common than interracial *mésalliance*. Colonial visitors consistently noted with shock and disgust how generally accepted such arrangements were in Saint Domingue. Traveling around the colony in 1773, the Swiss naturalist De Simitière noted in his journal that “there is nothing more common and to which one pays less attention than the debauchery that subsists between whites and women of color *mulâtresses*, *négresses*, etc.”⁴¹ Similarly, during his visit in 1789, Alexandre-Stanislas de Wimpffen described white men in Saint Domingue as “worn out

⁴¹ “De la Ville et du Quartier de Léogane,” Du Simitière Papers, Library Company of Philadelphia 968.F.28.

by a villainous libertinage” with “black concubines.”⁴² To the European observer, colonial sexual license appeared to be tapping white colonial men of their vigor.

Interracial “concubinage” also seemed to threaten the establishment of legitimate, white marriages. But rather than blame white men for their “debauchery,” the white colonists who described these arrangements tended to portray women of color as irresistible, selfish predators. The stereotypical woman of color, usually depicted as a *mulâtresse*, used her sexuality as a lure to acquire influence over white men. In these descriptions, the intense passion the *mulâtresse* evoked in white men contrasted sharply with the cold calculations she made when plotting her conquests. Moreau claimed that such women sought to sabotage marriages between white men and women by using their sexual skill and voluptuousness: “[White creole women] want husbands, and [*mulâtresses*] seek to prevent that from happening.”⁴³ Thus, even if white men didn’t forge *mésalliances* with women of color, their inter-racial sexual relationships could be just as disruptive to the establishment of white colonial lineages, not to mention white virtue and domesticity. Dubuisson claimed that white men who lived in concubinage and fathered illegitimate children with women of color became so jaded by their experiences that they subsequently rejected marriage to any woman, choosing instead to live lonely lives as single men.⁴⁴ In short, women of color threatened white patrimony and white marriage.

⁴² Alexandre-Stanislas Wimpffen, baron de, *Haiti au XVIIIe Siècle: Richesse et Esclavage dans une Colonie Française*, ed. Pierre Pluchon (Paris: Karthala, 1993 [1797]), 81.

⁴³ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l’Isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 92, 96.

⁴⁴ Pierre Ulric Dubuisson, *Nouvelles Considérations sur Saint-Domingue, en Réponse À Celles de M. H. D.*, 2 vols. (Paris: Chez Cellot et Jombert Fils jeune, Libraires, 1780), 1: 67-68.

While many free and enslaved women were surely forced into sexual relationships with white men, the white men who wrote about such relationships almost universally described them as consensual. Even enslaved women, the least powerful members of plantation society, were reputed to use their sexuality to gain leverage with their owners and other white men. Their sexual expertise allegedly allowed them to exert a great deal of influence over white men, who then yielded to their demands. Moreau maintained that enslaved women were willing sexual partners because they “[knew] that by their illegitimate commerce with Whites, they [could] improve their condition and that of their children.”⁴⁵ In 1787, when colonial notables voiced their opposition to Raimond’s proposals to lessen discrimination against the *gens de couleur*, they claimed that enslaved women did not need even more incentive to exchange sexual favors for better treatment: “The *négresses* already have enough hope of predilection and of freedom, without offering this new lure to their license.”⁴⁶ Likewise, years earlier Hilliard had asked his readers “...how many *Négresses* have not profited by appropriating the fortune of their masters [who are] stupefied in libertinage.”⁴⁷ In reality, the answer was “not many.” Still, these men argued that women of color preyed on white men in order to secure social and economic advantages. Indeed, they reversed the colonial power dynamic by positioning women of color as the party in control.⁴⁸ Of course, some women of color surely used sexual relationships with white men to aid their social

⁴⁵ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 95.

⁴⁶ CAOM F/3/91 fol. 218

⁴⁷ Hilliard d'Auberteuil, *Considérations sur l'Etat Présent de la Colonie Française de Saint-Domingue*, 2: 81.

⁴⁸ Doris Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 232-236.

mobility, or even to acquire their freedom. Such an interpretation seems plausible, for example, in the case of Marie Anne, the enslaved woman discussed above who married her white owner on his deathbed. Sexuality was a tool that allowed some women of color to carve out a certain degree of autonomy in a legal and social system that granted them very little power. However, Hilliard, Moreau, and other white colonists portrayed that tool as an unfair advantage that easily subverted the social power of white men.

Not only were women of color accused of plotting to acquire freedom, economic gain, and privileges with their sexuality. They were also accused of “usurping” the names of white families for their children.⁴⁹ The 1773 regulation prohibiting *gens de couleur* from taking “white” surnames identified two paths through which such usurpation took place: newly manumitted slaves often adopted the surnames of their former white owners; and freeborn *gens de couleur* were baptized with the name of their “putative fathers,” who were white. Free women of color bore the responsibility for the latter “abuse.” Thus the governor and intendant therefore required that “All free and unmarried *Négresses, mulatresses, Quarteronnes et Métives*, who would baptize their children...give them a surname taken from the African Idiom, or from their trade or color, but which can never be that of any white family in the Colony...” However *gens de couleur* acquired a white family name, the risks were clear, according to the regulation. The rank (“*état*”) of people (“*personnes*”) was called into question, and inheritances would be “throw[n] into confusion.” Finally, and most importantly, *gens de couleur* who took on “white” names would “destroy...between whites and *gens de couleur* that insurmountable barrier that public opinion created, and that the wisdom of the

⁴⁹ Ibid., 214.

Government maintains.”⁵⁰ In short, *gens de couleur* could improve their racially inferior status by making public their belonging to a white lineage. Moreover, they could improve their economic status by claiming an inheritance from their fathers. Unmarried free women of color baptized their children with the names of the children’s white fathers in order to provide them those opportunities. In so doing, many white colonists believed, they tarnished white lineages and blurred racial boundaries.

When critiquing colonial “concubinage,” white commentators evoked a relatively simple arrangement in which women of color willingly entered into sexual relationships with white men in order to secure economic advantages or freedom. However, white men and women of color entered into a variety of relationships with one another, relationships forged around exchanges of labor, sex, affection, and no doubt violence. Such relationships between colonial men and women of color took a variety of forms and served a range of needs not always mentioned in their depictions by whites. Some men—white and non-white—lived with enslaved and free women of color as if they were married. As discussed in chapter one, these women, commonly called *ménagères*, managed the household as would a wife or a servant, for which they typically received an income. Some also cared for men during periods of illness; in fact, women of color were known for their superior abilities as nurses to the ill. Although Dubuisson would later dispute his claim, Hilliard credited the survival of many immigrant men from Europe who would have perished due to tropical diseases had it not been for the care of a

⁵⁰ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l’Amérique Sous le Vent*, 5: 449.

mulâtresse.⁵¹ Some *ménagères* bore the children of their employers, and a fairly small number eventually married their employers. “Concubinage” could also refer to a situation in which a man provided materially for a woman who lived in a separate household in exchange for her sexual services or her affection. But “concubinage” was also used to describe less formal arrangements involving paid or unpaid extramarital sexual exchanges. Whatever the quality of the real relationship, the term almost always signified an interracial sexual relationship between a white man and a woman of color, either free or enslaved. The historical record provides little evidence with which to understand these informal relationships, but occasionally glimpses emerge from unusual sources.

A letter from 1766 attests to the complicated nature of these relationships. In that year, a planter from Bois de Lance named LaPorte wrote to Carbon, the absentee planter of a neighboring plantation who lived in France. LaPorte explained that he would like to purchase one of Carbon’s slaves, a 32-year old black creole slave named “Rose hiasinthe.”⁵² Rose had been “attached” to him (*m’est attachée*) for some nine years, during which time she had nursed LaPorte through two difficult illnesses, having “rescued his life” with the care she took.⁵³ LaPorte appears to have thought of Rose as a servant and lover, expressing a degree of gratitude and dedication to her. He felt compelled to explain his sense of “obligation” to the woman. For, “even though [she is

⁵¹ Hilliard d’Auberteuil, *Considérations sur l’Etat Présent de la Colonie Française de Saint-Domingue*, 2: 77-78. Likewise, Moreau noted their “compassion for the poor and especially for the sick...” Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l’Isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 98.

⁵² CAOM, Archives Privées, Carbon-Leroux papers. 41 APC Carton 1, Dossier 6.

⁵³ Lest Carbon resent LaPorte for stealing Rose from her work, LaPorte noted that she came to him only during “the hours and moments she had to herself,” so as not to interrupt her work on Carbon’s plantation.

a] *négresse esclave*,” her services had been essential to LaPorte, who had no other “domestic” to care for him during his illnesses. Moreover, his appreciation for Rose had grown stronger because of her ability to remain childless: LaPorte noted that he “had the good fortune thanks god to have never had a child with her, that’s the reason for which I am all the more attached...” Clearly, LaPorte did not desire to have a family or a wife. But did he want a slave? His long-term intentions demonstrate his desire to be Rose’s literal master for the duration of their relationship. He explained to Carbon that he hoped to grow his “small fortune” in Saint Domingue over the next few years before spending the rest of his days in France. During the remainder of his colonial life, he wanted “the satisfaction of having her for himself...” Before his departure, he planned to grant Rose her freedom “in recognition of her attachment and her good service, if she continues to deserve it.”

The conditional promise of freedom, and LaPorte’s unwillingness to free Rose sooner, appears extraordinarily cold. And yet, LaPorte went to some effort to arrange Rose’s sale. This was in fact his third letter to Carbon requesting Rose, and in it he agreed to whatever price Carbon saw fit to name. In a further effort to encourage Carbon’s compliance, LaPorte offered a full report on the state of Carbon’s plantation and the wrongdoings of his plantation manager. In fact, one of the plantation manager’s faults, according to LaPorte, was to overwork the slaves and deny them sufficient food supplies, which he claimed had led to an increase in maronnage. As a slave on Carbon’s plantation, Rose was probably subject to such mistreatment as well. Thus, on the one hand, LaPorte’s actions demonstrate his commitment to Rose, and his desire to protect her and probably live with her. However, we must also remember that by purchasing

Rose, Laporte would gain much greater authority over her than he would have had as her mere lover.

Unfortunately, we do not know if Rose was ever sold to LaPorte, or whether she ever gained her freedom. Enslaved women did sometimes manage to acquire their freedom as a result of the relationships—sexual or otherwise—they established with white men. Sometimes that freedom came only after the man’s death, stated in his will. The racial description of enslaved women’s children often suggests that they were fathered by their owner. Such was the case with Anne Taquay, a “*négresse*,” and her son, Jean-Pierre “called” Lafayette, a “*mulâtre*.” The heirs of Baudin, the planter, contested the freedom of Anne Taquay and Lafayette, claiming that these two former slaves should have remained part of the Baudin estate. But their freedom appears from the record to have been registered with the colonial administrators, as the law required, making the suit quite tenuous. In the end, the court protected the freedom of Taquay and Lafayette, even ordering the Baudin heirs to leave them alone and pay all of the court costs.⁵⁴

Colonial courts also tended to uphold gifts and inheritances granted by white men to their illegitimate children of color when they were contested by white heirs. As in France, it was rather common for fathers to provide for their illegitimate children by granting them a “donation” during their lifetime or by including them in their inheritance. Fathers passed on to their children land, slaves, sums of cash, and sometimes yearly living allowances. Donations were a more secure method of transferring wealth to one’s child since the father would still be alive to ensure the transfer. Bequests, on the other hand, were more likely to be challenged in court by white heirs. While illegitimate

⁵⁴ CAOM, C/9a/165, 12 oct 1785.

children of color did not always receive exactly what had been promised to them in their father's will, courts, and sometimes white families, typically respected their right to inherit something. For example, upon the death of Sieur Gilbert Viau, his white wife and daughter claimed that the living allowance Viau had willed to his two illegitimate, *de couleur* sons (1,800 *livres* yearly) was more than his estate could uphold. In exchange, they offered a slightly lower living allowance (1,200 *livres* per year) supplemented by a cash sum of 3,000 *livres* and a masonry house worth 15,000 to 25,000 *livres*.⁵⁵ Viau's sons did not lose much of their original inheritance.

Of course, women and children of color could not always secure what had been promised them. In 1786, upon the death of her husband, the Widow Clemenson contested the alleged sale of a piece of property by her husband to a *mulâtresse* named Sallenave.⁵⁶ Sallenave appears to have been the mother of five of Sieur Clemenson's children. In 1765, she acquired five *carreaux* of land on behalf of her children from Clemenson, land located on Clemenson's plantation. Either she purchased the land for 2000 *livres* as the bill of sale indicated, or the land was a donation that masked as a sale. (Although the sale was notarized, the act itself was dubious: it mentioned neither the payer of the 2000 *livres* nor the location of the five *carreaux*.) After residing on the property for over twenty years, Sallenave was ordered to vacate the property immediately by a lower court that declared her bill of sale invalid. She appealed her case to the Conseil du Cap, which upheld the lower court's decision but also required that the widow

⁵⁵ Stewart King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig: Free People of Color in Pre-Revolutionary Saint Domingue* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia, 2001), 129-131. For the Viau example, King cites CAOM SDOM 174 7 mai 1778. Rogers, "Les Libres de Couleur dans les Capitales de Saint-Domingue: Fortune, Mentalités et Intégration À la Fin de l'Ancien Régime (1776-1789)", 373-374.

⁵⁶ CAOM, C/9a/165, 20 mars 1786.

Clemenson reimburse Sallenave the 2000 livres. Thus Sallenave lost her home and her property but received some compensation. However, adding insult to injury, the Conseil du Cap took this opportunity to enforce the prohibition against free colored appropriation of “white” names. The Conseil’s ruling ended by prohibiting the *mulâtresse* from “taking the name of Sallenave,” and instructing her to follow the 1773 ordinance, presumably by adopting a more “African” surname. Thus the court stripped Sallenave of what it perceived as her two material connections to white lineages: her name and her property.

Even though their relationships with white men lacked the legitimacy of marriage, women of color who engaged in liaisons with white men, whether as *ménagères*, de facto wives, prostitutes or victims of rape, still threatened the colonial order in the eyes of white colonists and administrators. They served as surrogate wives to some white men who preferred to live openly with them rather than marry white women. Moreover, their sexuality afforded them a dangerous degree of control over white men, who emancipated and sometimes enriched their mistresses and illegitimate children. Of course, in practice the position of free women of color in colonial society was much more precarious. They had little protection against the physical advances of men in general, but especially white men. Furthermore, whatever economic security they gained from their relationships with whites could never be entirely guaranteed, as the above example illustrates.

Regulating Interracial Marriage and Miscegenation

Marriage and miscegenation between whites and *gens de couleur* were never prohibited in Saint Domingue, or anywhere in the French Caribbean. In theory, the Code Noir prohibited miscegenation between whites and slaves, fining guilty whites and

confiscating the enslaved women and children if they were owned by the white party. However, by marrying the slave the transgression would be forgiven: marriage to a free person automatically freed a slave. In reality, the prohibition against miscegenation was rarely enforced, as is evidenced by the number of mulatto children and their mothers on Saint Domingue's plantations. But the French crown was not so permissive in all of its slave colonies. Once slavery took root in the French colony of Louisiana, the Colonial Ministry created a new Code Noir specific to Louisiana. Largely based on the 1685 *Code* that governed the Antilles, the Louisiana version, issued in 1724, had certain important differences. Most notably, it prohibited marriage between whites and all people of African descent. Like the 1685 *Code*, it prohibited whites from "living in concubinage with slaves," sentencing the guilty to a fine while confiscating the slave and any resultant children if the guilty party was the owner. However, unlike the Antillean *Code*, in Louisiana only people of color could marry their slaves in order to get around these penalties. Interracial marriages still occurred in Louisiana, but far less frequently than they did in Saint Domingue.⁵⁷ Apparently, colonists, local notaries and priests tended to follow these laws since historians have found very few examples of "mixed" marriages.⁵⁸ In the French Antilles, on the other hand, prohibitions on interracial marriage were considered during this period but never implemented. In the end, the Colonial Ministry would only go so far as to penalize white men who had married women of color by excluding them from the militia's officer corps and public employment, as mentioned above.

⁵⁷ Jennifer M. Spear, "Colonial Intimacies: Legislating Sex in French Louisiana," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (2003) <<http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/wm/60.1/spear.html>>: pars 25-29.

⁵⁸ Aubert, ""The Blood of France": Race and Purity of Blood in the French Atlantic World," par 46; Spear, "Colonial Intimacies: Legislating Sex in French Louisiana," par 29.

It seems that in the French Antilles, the need to grow the planter class outweighed the need to control the growth of the *gens de couleur*. As Garrigus has shown, newly immigrated whites could quickly learn colonial agriculture and become productive members of colonial society by marrying into families of color with plantation experience and social networks. By the 1720's, property-owning *gens de couleur* of Saint Domingue were already serving as important agents of integration for a potentially volatile group of young French men. Thus, even if the Colonial Ministry was troubled by their increasing numbers, it must have recognized the vital social and economic role that planters of color played. With the hindsight of Saint Domingue's legal and demographic history, the Colonial Ministry sought to head off the problem in Louisiana by prohibiting interracial marriage at an early stage.⁵⁹

Yet reformers in Saint Domingue issued proposals to ban interracial marriage there during the late-colonial period. While colonial officials attempted to burden the *gens de couleur* with the "stain of slavery" through the imposition of discriminatory legislation in the 1770's, Hilliard proposed a new law intended to cement the hierarchy the officials sought: a three-caste society based on color, which would determine one's rank in society. As discussed in Chapter One, he planned to engineer the colonial population so that the enslaved population consisted solely of the darkest-skinned people, the lightest-skinned people would be full citizens, and those in between would comprise the intermediary class of "yellows." Achieving this color-coded hierarchy required strict

⁵⁹ Aubert, "'The Blood of France': Race and Purity of Blood in the French Atlantic World," par 45.

regulations with regard to marital choice, so that the colonial population would reproduce its way to three distinct colors.⁶⁰

According to his plan, whites would be permitted to marry other whites or the lightest-skinned people of color, but not “*négresses, mulatresses, and quarteronnes.*” (As with other colonial commentary on *mésalliance*, Hilliard assumed that the only interracial marriages taking place were between women of color and white men; thus he used the feminine forms of “*negre*” “*mulâtre*” and “*quarteron*”.) Thus the apex of the colonial social hierarchy could be easily discerned by its light skin. Below them Hilliard envisioned a group of people identified as “yellows,” “meaning, entirely composed of Mulattoes; and to render it such, it is necessary to begin by marrying all free Blacks currently living in the Colony, to *Mulâtresses*, and marrying Mulattoes to free *Négresses*;...”⁶¹ Clearly, not only did he hope to create a consistent skin color among the “yellow” caste, but he also planned to darken it overall by marrying “mixed” people with blacks.

Hilliard wrote the *Considérations* at the height of the colony’s discriminatory policy, and he probably thought it would be well-received by officials who were already in the process of constructing a three-caste society. But by the time that Hilliard’s *Considérations* was published in 1776, official opinion was about to undergo reconsideration. As explained in Chapter One, the Colonial Ministry, administrators, and local notables considered improving the condition of the free people of color by rescinding some of the discriminatory laws. Thus, Hilliard’s elaborate scheme probably

⁶⁰ See Chapter One and Hilliard d'Auberteuil, *Considérations sur l'Etat Présent de la Colonie Francaise de Saint-Domingue*, 2: 83-89.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 2: 88.

appeared too late to have been taken seriously. Rather than ponder the plan's effectiveness, the Colonial Ministry suppressed Hilliard's two-volume work, although proposals relating to marriage and miscegenation were not cited among the reasons for his censorship.⁶² Likewise, Julien Raimond later claimed that a law prohibiting interracial marriage had been proposed, probably in the late 1770's, that would have declared all such marriages invalid and any children of such marriages illegitimate. Governor Bellecombe and Intendant de Bongars, more sympathetic to proposals to improve the status of *gens de couleur*, rejected the law, however.⁶³ Thus, while they never appear to have articulated a clear statement against it, colonial administrators in Saint Domingue did not advocate for legislating against interracial marriage.

Colonial administrators were apt to oppose laws against interracial marriage because they countered their efforts to court the allegiance of the *gens de couleur*. Furthermore, as Doris Garraway has suggested, during the height of the passage of discriminatory legislation against the *gens de couleur*, administrators preferred not to prohibit interracial marriage in order to preserve white male sexual prerogative, limiting miscegenation instead by heaping disdain upon mixed-race individuals.⁶⁴ Such a rationale seems likely although it was never plainly stated. White colonists, however, articulated this logic quite clearly. Dubuisson, who responded point-by-point to Hilliard's entire work in a separate publication, complained that restricting interracial marriage would impinge on "not only the liberty of the *gens de couleur*" but also on that of

⁶² Gene E. Ogle, "'The Eternal Power of Reason' And 'The Superiority of Whites': Hilliard D'auberteuil's Colonial Enlightenment," *French Colonial History* 3 (2003): 38.

⁶³ CAOM F/3/91 fol. 192

⁶⁴ Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean*, 216.

whites.⁶⁵ Other colonists argued that existing laws sufficiently penalized “misallied” whites so that interracial marriage was “stigmatized” but not prohibited. In 1776, Barré de Saint Vénant praised the policy requiring intermarried white men to serve in the non-white militia. He described such men as “voluntarily descending” to the status of their wives, suggesting the importance of preserving white men’s prerogative to marry whomever they chose.⁶⁶

White male colonists objected to attempts to prohibit miscegenation for similar reasons. Yet they argued that such restrictions opposed more than the liberties of free men; they also opposed nature. Barré de St. Venant explained that laws forbidding interracial sex would prove futile. The climate proved too much an obstacle to overcome; white male desire was too strong a natural urge to curb. Moreau repeated Barré de Saint-Venant’s observations, almost word for word, in the *Description* and in a 1789 political tract opposing free colored citizenship rights: “...the heat of the climate which irritates the desires, and the ease with which they are satisfied, will always render useless legislative precautions which one would like to take against this abuse, because the law quiets itself where nature speaks imperiously.”⁶⁷ The law of man was helpless to contain colonial concubinage, since the law of nature had produced it. White male sexual

⁶⁵ Dubuisson, *Nouvelles Considérations sur Saint-Domingue, en Réponse À Celles de M. H. D.*, 2: 74.

⁶⁶ “Chambre d’Agriculture du Cap, Seance du 3 oct 1776, Mémoire sur les Affranchis,” CAOM F/3/124 fol. 129.

⁶⁷ M.L.E. Moreau de Saint Méry, *Observations d’un Habitant des Colonies, sur le Mémoire en Faveur des Gens de Couleur, Ou Sang-Mêlés, de Saint-Domingue et des Autres Isles Françaises de l’Amérique, Adressé À L’assemblée Nationale, par M. Gregoire, Curé D’emberménil, Député de Lorraine* (n.p.: 1789), 41; Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l’Isle Saint-Domingue*, 1:95. Compare Moreau’s words to those of Barré de St. Venant in CAOM F/3/124 fol. 126. Moreau appears to have borrowed generously—without acknowledgement—from this particular document.

license—and the “debauched” status to which women of color were relegated—appeared to these white colonists as unquestionable, unchangeable characteristics of colonial life.

Furthermore, both Barré de Saint-Venant and Moreau imagined that sex between white men and women of color had some advantageous results. Barré de Saint-Venant first argued that such “concubinage,” while offensive to morality and to “religion,” was a “necessary evil” in Saint Domingue due to the drastically uneven sex ratio among whites.⁶⁸ Without sufficient numbers of white women for white men to marry, women of color had to stand in, in order to fulfill white male desire. Furthermore, both men claimed that sexual encounters between white slaveowners and enslaved women had the added advantage of encouraging a more humane brand of slavery since the vice of miscegenation, they argued, “prevents greater vices: the weaknesses of masters for their slaves, are the cause [by which] slavery is softened.”⁶⁹ Barré de Saint-Venant and Moreau were not alone in their understanding of the advantages of concubinage. As an outside observer of colonial society, Girod argued the same point, claiming that “slaves would absolutely be treated today like animals, if the Europeans had never frequented the *négresses*.”⁷⁰ All three men praised concubinage’s ability to “soften” slavery.

Elsewhere in their accounts Moreau and Girod argued for the improved treatment of slaves in order to encourage slave reproduction, and to discourage slave rebellion. Colonial authorities agreed, of course; the contested 1784 legislation regulating the

⁶⁸ CAOM, F/3/124 fol. 126. Again, see Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue*, 95.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 1: 95. CAOM, F/3/124 fol. 126.

⁷⁰ Justin Girod de Chantrons, *Voyage d'un Suisse Dans Différentes Colonies D'amérique*, ed. Pierre Pluchon (Paris: Librairie Jules Tallandier, 1980), 156.

treatment of slaves sought to achieve those same goals.⁷¹ Thus Moreau and Girod wrote at a moment when improving conditions for the enslaved was understood to be a reform that would protect the slave regime. The continued practice of concubinage, they argued, helped that reform take place without restricting the actions of slaveowners (as the 1784 legislation would have done) or any free white man.

The perspective of these elite white colonists appears paradoxical. They recognized the dangers of interracial “concubinage:” the growth of the free population of color, the potential loss of property to legitimate heirs, and the discouragement of marriage with white women. Yet, some of these same men—Moreau, Dubuisson, and Barré de St. Venant in particular—understood that concubinage also upheld the slave system in important ways. Was their reasoning simply an attempt to justify their own sexual exploits? Perhaps. But as we will see, it was also part of a broader logic by which they sought to restrain the most dangerous aspects of colonial “concubinage” without legislating against it.

Likewise, they refused to advocate legal regulation of interracial marriage. Instead, they hoped that social convention would intervene as effectively—if not more so—as the law. As we will see, these elite white male colonists attempted to redefine marriage and concubinage, making sharp distinctions between the emotions and personal characteristics required of both. In their analysis, marriage was a practice best suited for whites. By contrast, concubinage appeared as a casual activity for white men wanting to fulfill purely sexual cravings with the residents best suited to that purpose: free women of color.

⁷¹ See Chapters One and Six.

Affectionate Colonial Marriage, Populationism, and Colonial Citizenship

If the potential of declining social status did not suffice to discourage whites from intermarrying, other forms of discouragement were also at work. White colonial men argued that whites were better husbands and wives than were people of color, due to their characteristics as whites. By contrast, they claimed that enslaved men and women were unfit for marriage and that free men and women of color didn't want marriage.

Deploying new ideas about marriage portrayed in Enlightenment literature, these educated white elites proposed that colonial whites were the only members of the colonial population capable of loving marriages. White creole women were depicted as ideal companionate wives, while free women of color—especially *mulâtresses*—were portrayed to marry only out of self-interest. Thus, these white elites encouraged white men to marry white women, leaving women of color as mistresses. Ironically, in their effort to discourage interracial marriage in the colony, they would employ the same rhetorical tools employed by French Enlightenment authors to support *mésalliance* in France.

Hilliard, Moreau, and Dubuisson drew on eighteenth-century French critiques of upper-class and aristocratic marriages arranged by fathers to maintain or enhance a family's social status. Voltaire, Rousseau, d'Holbach, Montesquieu and Diderot all wrote about the unhappy unions orchestrated by ambitious fathers unconcerned with the desires of their children. In plays, novels, and social commentaries they critiqued the social ambitions that created opposition to *mésalliance* and foiled marriages founded on true love and passion. In his 1749 play, *Nanine*, Voltaire featured a love story between a

count and the daughter of a peasant. Although the count initially refused to allow the marriage because of the young woman's poverty, the story ends happily when the couple's love overcomes a series of other obstacles and the father finally grants his consent. Similarly, Rousseau's wildly popular epistolary novel *La Nouvelle Héloïse* pulled at the heartstrings of readers throughout France. When an aristocratic father promised his daughter, Julie, in marriage to one man, he did so in spite of her love for her tutor. But rather than have Julie defy her father, Rousseau depicts her as the ever dutiful daughter who not only marries but musters some affection for her father's choice of husband over the years. When her true love comes to visit, many years later, she refuses to recommence their once-passionate affair. But her refusal did not end their relationship altogether; rather it rendered their love for one another more "spiritual," and thereby more meaningful.⁷²

Accounts of love that transgressed the social hierarchy traveled from France to Saint Domingue in the works of these Enlightenment authors, which colonists could buy from booksellers and see performed on colonial stages, as noted in Chapter Three. The valorization of marriage founded on love rather than social ambition was a theme present in the colonial newspaper as well. Such a perspective seems to have been shared by metropolitan as well as the colonial *Affiches*. Readers of the *Affiches* in France found book and theater reviews as well as occasional social commentaries lamenting the sad results of love denied.⁷³

⁷² Traer, *Marriage and the Family in Eighteenth-Century France*, 72-73. For the wild reception of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* among French readers, see Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 215-252.

⁷³ Jack R. Censer, *The French Press in the Age of Enlightenment* (London: Routledge, 1994), 67-68.

In the January 27, 1787 issue of the *Affiches Américaines*, editor Mozard included such a story in a section including news from France. Taken from a French paper, the *Gazette des Tribunaux*, the story tells of a young white couple whose wish to marry was almost thwarted due to their unequal social status. The young man was an army captain, M. de ***, whose father, a noble, had granted him legal permission to marry whomever the son might choose while serving in the new world.⁷⁴ When the young son returned to France in 1774 after fulfilling his military service, he stayed with his father at his new home in Beziers, without a wife. There the young man met and fell in love with a Demoiselle P***, whose parents were “honest” but not wealthy or ennobled. Wanting to marry her honorably, the son requested his father’s consent, but his father refused to grant it. According to French law, children could marry against the wishes of their parents only after issuing three successive “*sommations respectueuses*,” or formal pleas for their parents’ consent. After issuing the *sommations*—which did not sway the father—the son had the Bishop at Beziers issue the requisite marriage banns. As mentioned above, marriage banns provided the local community—those who best knew the couple’s family and history—the opportunity to contest the marriage on legal grounds. Before the third and final bann could be issued, the father opposed the marriage, claiming that the son had previously married. His wife, the father claimed, was a landowning woman (presumably white, since no racial designation is given) in Port-au-Prince, Mlle. M***. The son then took the matter to the French civil courts, where he argued that his father’s allegations of bigamy were simply a “chimera” dreamt up by a man who had no other reason to legally

⁷⁴ *Affiches Américaines*, January 27, 1787. The father gave the son a “*procuracion en blanc*,” a document permitting the son to designate someone else to act on his father’s legal behalf. In the end, the son won his case by arguing that, had he in fact already married, he would have had to use the *procuracion en blanc*. However, he still had the blank form in his possession, and thus it served as proof that he had not been previously married.

oppose the marriage. In the end, after the father had appealed the case to the Parlement of Toulouse, the court sided with the son.

Why print such an item in the colonial newspaper? The Port-au-Prince connection is the most obvious answer. Perhaps Mozard wanted to provide Mlle. M*** and her family--if in fact Mlle. M*** existed—the opportunity to know what the young captain was up to in France. Yet it is likely that Mozard also wanted to provide his readers with an inspiring example of a young white couple who denied the wishes of a selfish father to pursue a loving marriage. One might imagine that transferring such a story of *mésalliance* to the colonial setting could only be transgressive; after all, colonial *mésalliance* almost always meant interracial marriage. However, white elite men of Saint Domingue used the imagery of affectionate marriage in order to celebrate romantic love and marriage between whites. As we will see, by denying that people of color were capable of loving relationships and marriage, they ultimately opposed colonial—racial--*mésalliance*.

Hilliard, Moreau, and Dubuisson encouraged white marriages determined by bonds of affection. Similar to the metropolitan *philosophes*, these men criticized the marital aspirations of colonists keen on engineering the creation of large estates as well as savvy political connections. They complained that colonial marriages among whites were driven by greed, arranged by fathers and colonial officials who hoped to advance the private interests of families. According to Hilliard, such arrangements resulted in “bizarre” unions in which the young daughters of less wealthy families wed “old colonists tired by libertinage,” while adolescent boys married rich old women whose

sexual desire had outlived their looks.⁷⁵ But even when marriages were not driven by greed, the tyranny of the colonial state created unhappy unions. Hilliard claimed that the wealthiest fathers gave their daughters in marriage to the friends, family, protégés, and Secretaries of colonial administrators. They did so out of “fear of displeasing and the need to conciliate a power which extends over everything.”⁷⁶ Similarly, Moreau lamented the post-Seven Years’ War influx of fortune hungry immigrants from France who sought marriages motivated “by gold and pride” rather than love. Likewise, he suggested that greedy white families married off their creole daughters at too young an age, sacrificing the young women’s health.⁷⁷

Moreau argued that couples brought together out of such “conveniences” could never be happy, and they could never be expected to maintain their fidelity.⁷⁸ But he observed much stronger marriages between men and women bound by sentiment. White creole women, in particular, could guarantee marital stability if only permitted to choose their husbands: “Happy is the Creole whose wedding vows were vows of love! Cherishing her lover as her husband, her fidelity...will ensure their mutual tranquility.”⁷⁹ Yet in spite of their passionate devotion to their husbands, white creole women quickly recovered from the deaths of their spouses, which ironically also boded well for their utility as wives. As widows, they settled into new engagements soon after the death of

⁷⁵ Hilliard d'Auberteuil, *Considérations sur l'Etat Présent de la Colonie Francaise de Saint-Domingue*, 2: 45-46.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 2: 47.

⁷⁷ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 31.

⁷⁸ M. Moreau de Saint Méry, "Fragment Sur Le Caractère des Créoles de Saint-Domingue, Tiré de l'Ouvrage des Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l'Amérique Sous le Vent, Etc. ," in *Mémoires du Musée de Paris* (Paris: Chez Moutard, 1785), 35.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 34; Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 19.

their late husbands.⁸⁰ Thus their need for love drove them to find new husbands, never remaining single and outside male control for long.

Likewise, Moreau claimed that white creole women had the potential to be excellent mothers. Although they spoiled their children, he explained, they did so out of love.⁸¹ More importantly, both Moreau and Hilliard alleged that they allegedly carried and delivered babies with ease, and were “generally fertile.”⁸² This seemingly natural capacity for childbirth, coupled with the great affection white creole women had for their children, rendered them ideal mothers within the colonial household. But it also made them the potential reproducers of white creole society.

The desire to grow the white population had not died with administrators’ early attempts to import white women and encourage settlers to marry. Hilliard suggested that the colonial government encourage marriage through law in order to increase the number of white creoles, who were generally healthier and more likely to develop allegiances to the colony than French immigrants. Citing a proverb that allegedly promoted the growth of the Persian population, Hilliard proposed advocating such a philosophy in Saint Domingue: “[To] Make a child, plant a new field, and build a home, are three actions

⁸⁰ Moreau de Saint Méry, "Fragment Sur Le Caractère des Créoles de Saint-Domingue, Tiré de l'Ouvrage des Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l'Amérique Sous le Vent, Etc.," 34; Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 19.

⁸¹ Moreau de Saint Méry, "Fragment Sur Le Caractère des Créoles de Saint-Domingue, Tiré de l'Ouvrage des Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l'Amérique Sous le Vent, Etc.,"; Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 18, 21.

⁸² Moreau de Saint Méry, "Fragment Sur Le Caractère des Créoles de Saint-Domingue, Tiré de l'Ouvrage des Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l'Amérique Sous le Vent, Etc.," 37; Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 21. For similar characterizations of white creole women’s maternal capacity, see Hilliard d'Auberteuil, *Considérations sur l'Etat Présent de la Colonie Francaise de Saint-Domingue*, 2: 31. and Abbé Guillaume-Thomas Raynal, *Histoire Philosophique et Politique Des Etablissemens et Du Commerce des Européens dans les Deux Indes* (Amsterdam: 1770), 4: 198.

pleasing to God.”⁸³ The anonymous author of a 1781 colonial pamphlet voiced similar concerns. Growing the local white population was particularly important, he argued, in order to create an indigenous naval force. Locally born whites were naturally suited to the local climate and food, whereas transplanted Europeans became ill from both. Thus the growth of a white creole navy would make for a larger, more robust navy. The colony’s protection during wartime depended on the reproduction of white creoles, and a decreased reliance on European-born soldiers.⁸⁴

Indeed, immigrants comprised the majority of Saint Domingue’s white population. Moreau complained that only one quarter of Saint Domingue’s white population could be defined as creole, whereas the rest came from various parts of France, other colonies, and the world.⁸⁵ The colony’s reliance on white immigration contributed to the disorder that reigned there, in his opinion. According to Moreau, Saint Domingue was a fluid, unstable and “incoherent mixture” of newly arrived fortune-hunters, immoral soldiers, and unhappy creoles who lacked any love for their homeland. By contrast, in other parts of the world, populations reproduced without the aid of immigration, allowing for the creation of “a more or less perfect amalgam” of people united by shared history and custom, where “every member of the general family” resembled one another by easily recognizable traits.⁸⁶ What the colony needed, these passages suggest, was the growth of a stable, local population, a “family” in which the members would have similar customs, moral codes and physical advantages. Fertile

⁸³ Hilliard d'Auberteuil, *Considérations sur l'Etat Présent de la Colonie Francaise de Saint-Domingue*, 2: 44-45.

⁸⁴ Anonymous, *Essai sur la Population des Colonies À Sucre* (A la Haye: n.p., 1781), 19-20.

⁸⁵ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 9.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 1: 6.

white creole women seemed the perfect vessels for the reproduction of the white creole “family.”

But while marriages between white creoles had great potential, largely due to the characteristics granted creole women by nature, marriages entered into by people of color seem doomed. Loving, affectionate, monogamous marriages seemed to be out of the question. Regarding enslaved Africans, Moreau and others claimed that Christian “marriages are extremely rare among them” due to their “polygamy,” and those slaveowners who wanted to have their slaves united in Catholic marriage were forced to forget the idea. Moreau noted that polygamy was natural among the Africans, given their “primitive customs,” and the disproportionate number of women, who he claimed were “barely half as numerous as the men.”⁸⁷ Moreover, enslaved women had good reason not to marry black men, according to Moreau, since they “violently mistreat *négresses* who wrong them or whom they suspect of having wronged them.”⁸⁸

We do not know for sure to what extent slaveowners in Saint Domingue actually encouraged and permitted their slaves to marry. The disruption of slave importation during the Seven Years’ War had forced some planters to imagine ways to stimulate the natural reproduction of their labor force, and some proposed the encouragement of marriage toward that end. Slaves who married would be more likely to live monogamously, they theorized, and those who lived monogamously would be less prone to venereal diseases that allegedly caused low rates of reproduction. A few surviving

⁸⁷ Ibid., 1: 37. In fact, David Geggus notes that on sugar plantations, enslaved men generally comprised 57% of the enslaved labor force, whereas on coffee plantations they just barely outnumbered the women at 52%. David Geggus, “Slave and Free Colored Women in Saint Domingue,” in *More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas*, ed. David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 260.

⁸⁸ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l’Isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 37.

plantation manuals and printed tracts advocated rewarding enslaved women who married (or lived monogamously) and produced children with gifts of fabric, cash, and lighter workloads. Yet it does not appear that these pronatalist proposals were embraced or implemented by many planters. Some apparently rejected marriage between enslaved people for fear that Christian education and participation in the marriage sacrament could embolden them.⁸⁹ Thus, in spite of arguments in favor of enslaved marriage, marriage rates on Saint Domingue's plantations appear to have been very low by the mid-eighteenth century: Gautier found none, in fact, on the large plantations she tracked in Nippes during the 1760's and 1770's.⁹⁰

Just as they blamed low marriage rates on the "primitive customs" of the enslaved, these white male writers attributed low rates of reproduction among the colony's slaves to the moral failings of the slaves themselves. Contrary to the enslaved population of North America, that of the Caribbean never sustained itself through "natural" reproduction. Enslaved women in Saint Domingue possessed some of the lowest fertility rates among enslaved women in the Americas, particularly on sugar plantations, where work loads exceeded those of coffee plantations.⁹¹ But rather than blame low reproductive rates on the harsh labor system, white colonists tended to blame enslaved women and men themselves. Like most European and colonial authors of the period, Saint Domingue's white colonists suggested that African women and their descendents were naturally very fertile and delivered children with great ease. Moreau went so far as to praise enslaved women for their intense maternal love, claiming "never

⁸⁹ Arlette Gautier, *Les Soeurs de Solitude: la Condition Féminine dans l'Esclavage aux Antilles du XVIIe au XIXe Siècle* (Paris: Editions Caribéennes, 1985), 91-103, 110-111.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 103; Geggus, "Slave and Free Colored Women in Saint Domingue," 264.

⁹¹ Geggus, "Slave and Free Colored Women in Saint Domingue," 267.

did children...have more assiduous care” than from enslaved mothers, who bathed them every night and breastfed them for a very long time.⁹² Thus enslaved women seemed naturally suited for motherhood, possessing both physical and emotional maternal instincts. Yet colonists often complained that enslaved women in Saint Domingue lacked the desire to be mothers, aborting their pregnancies in order to deny their owner another laborer, a claim that may have had some truth.⁹³ Others blamed planters for discouraging reproduction, since pregnant women and children were not productive workers: Hilliard accused some particularly tyrannical planters of forcing enslaved women to abort their children so as not to lose their field labor during pregnancy. Dubuisson disputed this, claiming instead that women aborted their children because the responsibilities of motherhood would interfere with their “libertine nights.” In fact, Dubuisson argued that low reproductive rates among slaves could almost universally be explained by the libertinage of people of color: while enslaved men wanted to become fathers, they were left impotent due to their own lascivious ways.⁹⁴ Similarly, the absentee planter Comte d’Agoult explained to his plantation manager that it was “easy to imagine” why the enslaved women on his plantation in Plaisance weren’t conceiving: he blamed their

⁹² Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l’Isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 41.

⁹³ Barbara Bush, “Hard Labor: Women, Childbirth, and Resistance in British Caribbean Slave Societies,” in *More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas*, ed. David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); Gautier, *Les Soeurs de Solitude: la Condition Féminine dans l’Esclavage aux Antilles du XVIIe au XIXe Siècle*, 98; Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l’Isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 42. Studying the British Caribbean, Bush makes the case for enslaved women’s resistance to slavery through their refusal to “breed.”

⁹⁴ Dubuisson, *Nouvelles Considérations sur Saint-Domingue, en Réponse À Celles de M. H. D.*, 2: 42-43; Hilliard d’Auberteuil, *Considérations sur l’Etat Présent de la Colonie Francaise de Saint-Domingue*, 2: 66.

“enjoyment of their rights as women, libertinage....”⁹⁵ Assumptions of the innate hypersexuality of Africans thus served as a convenient justification for low reproductive rates, permitting planters to displace blame for enslaved women’s brutalized bodies on the women themselves.

Similarly, free women of color, and especially *mulâtresses*, had allegedly compromised their fertility due to “the type of life they have adopted.” But not only were they incapable of motherhood; they had no desire to be wives. Moreau maintained that free *mulâtresses* rejected marriage for a number of reasons. They refused to marry men of color, he claimed, because these men were “the most suspicious and the most despotic husbands.”⁹⁶ Instead, they preferred to “flee marriage” and live as the concubines of white men, arrangements which would satisfy their “taste for luxury.”⁹⁷ Furthermore, the *mulâtresse* appears in white colonial writing as virtually incapable of love. The stereotypical *mulâtresse* was mechanical, conniving, calculating, and unfeeling; for her, sex was an economic transaction plotted in advance for personal gain. Far more gifted in the arts of seduction and sex than white women, she appeared devoid of sentiment. Dubuisson explained that blacks were capable of sexual desire but not emotional attachment since they had “vigorous organs, strongly pronounced,” but which “do not suffice to express love....” Moreover, he asserted that black and mixed women lacked “tenderness.” Dubuisson claimed that men would not find such a quality in black or even mixed women, who, “although closer to our species, [are] objects of an unbridled

⁹⁵ CAOM 42 APC/1, “Lettre écrite de 9 7bre au Chr de Pradines de vauroux ayant ma procuration honoraire sur la cafferie de Plaisance.”

⁹⁶ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l’Isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 95.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 95.

debauchery which can inspire love and its frenzies, but who will never be susceptible to the emotional delights of a tender heart...”⁹⁸ For Moreau, the sexual exploits of the *mulâtresse* amounted to no less than an attack, calculated to bring justice to colonial whites for their tyranny over blacks: he claimed they were only interested in “avenging [this] race of tyrants...with the very weapons of pleasure.”⁹⁹

The sexuality of the *mulâtresse* figured as a potentially dangerous characteristic since it gave her power over white men and facilitated her social ascent. But white creole women possessed some sexual power over white men, too. White creole women, like all colonial residents, were known for their heightened sexuality. Indolent, unrefined, immodest and sexually alluring, white creole women appear to have surrendered to the libidinous pull of the climate as well as the influence of slaves. Indeed, the white creole woman’s questionable sexual virtue was often figured as part of a more general portrait of her passive resignation to the climate. Hilliard depicted bored and languid women “lounging idly among their slaves,” singing gracefully in their flimsy dress, with “voluptuousness...in their eyes, seduction in their hearts.”¹⁰⁰ Most commentators attributed the heightened sexuality of the colony’s residents to the climate, making white creole women as likely as their husbands to commit adultery.¹⁰¹ Wimpffen suggested that that local custom was just as much to blame. He argued that, among white creole

⁹⁸ Dubuisson, *Nouvelles Considérations sur Saint-Domingue, en Réponse À Celles de M. H. D.*, 1: 78-80.

⁹⁹ Moreau de Saint Méry, "Fragment Sur Le Caractère des Créoles de Saint-Domingue, Tiré de l'Ouvrage des Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l'Amérique Sous le Vent, Etc. ," 29.

¹⁰⁰ Hilliard d'Auberteuil, *Considérations sur l'Etat Présent de la Colonie Francaise de Saint-Domingue*, 2: 31-32.

¹⁰¹ Dubuisson, *Nouvelles Considérations sur Saint-Domingue, en Réponse À Celles de M. H. D.*, 2: 30-31; Hilliard d'Auberteuil, *Considérations sur l'Etat Présent de la Colonie Francaise de Saint-Domingue*, 2: 46; Moreau de Saint Méry, "Fragment Sur Le Caractère des Créoles de Saint-Domingue, Tiré de l'Ouvrage des Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l'Amérique Sous le Vent, Etc. ," 34; Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 19.

women, sexual desire could be linked to their lack of activity. He explained that except for some cooking, white colonial women engaged in no feminine work (or any work at all); because labor was the mark of a slave, idleness was the “essential prerogative of the master.” Such a sedentary life, Wimpffen claimed, “singularly contributes to the reinforcement of voluptuous affections...”¹⁰² As Joan Dayan has explained, white creole women appeared as if they had “caught a disease, as if they were too weak-willed or amoral to resist the contagious attractions of loose living, scanty dress, and languorous talk.”¹⁰³

That white creole women might be sexually promiscuous—or even sexually desirous—posed a threat to European colonial projects in race-based slave societies. As scholars of colonialism have demonstrated, colonial administrators and colonists alike tended to believe that the maintenance of imperial power depended on white women’s performance of white bourgeois femininity, a cornerstone of which was sexual virtue. In doing so, white colonial women demonstrated the alleged superiority of the colonizer over the colonized, upholding both biological and cultural constructions of whiteness.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Pierre Pluchon, *Histoire de la Colonisation Française: le Premier Empire Colonial Des Origines à la Restauration*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Paris: Fayard, 1991), 230-231. Similar observations were made very early in the colonial period by colonial officials and missionaries. In 1667, Father Dutertre noted that white creole girls in the Antilles were granted too much freedom, and that they lacked “modesty” as well as important feminine skills like sewing and laundering. Gautier, *Les Soeurs de Solitude: la Condition Féminine dans l’Esclavage aux Antilles du XVIIe au XIXe Siècle*, 32.

¹⁰³ Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History and the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 175-178. See also Deirdre Coleman, “Janet Schaw and the Complexions of Empire,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 36, no. 2 (2003).

¹⁰⁴ Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches and Anxious Patriarchs* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), esp. Chapter 9; Trevor Burnard, “‘A Matron in Rank, a Prostitute in Manners’: The Manning Divorce of 1741 and Class, Gender, Race and the Law in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica,” in *Working Slavery, Pricing Freedom: Perspectives from the Caribbean, Africa and the African Diaspora*, ed. Verene A. Shepherd (New York: Palgrave, 2002); Barbara Bush, “White ‘Ladies’, Coloured ‘Favourites’ and Black ‘Wenches’: Some Considerations on Sex, Race and Class Factors in Social Relations in White Creole Society in the British Caribbean,” *Slavery and Abolition* 2, no. 3 (1981); Ann Laura Stoler, “Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Gender, Race and Morality in Colonial Asia,” in *Gender at the*

Moreover, in addition to being the “ideological bearers of whiteness,”¹⁰⁵ white women were also the actual, reproductive bearers of white society, the master class. Therefore, their sexuality needed to be controlled in order to foster the growth of the local white population. Furthermore, the prospect of miscegenation between white women and black or “colored” men threatened to overturn hierarchies of race and class that buttressed the entire slave system.¹⁰⁶ Thus the allegedly charged libido of the white creole woman was not merely an unflattering trait that distinguished her from European women; it had the potential to disrupt colonial projects that depended on culturally-coded definitions of race.

But in contrast to the non-productive, corrupting sexuality of the *mulâtresse*, the sexuality of the white creole woman had the potential to transform the colony for the better. Moreau suggested that they could use their sexual attraction to encourage the reform of white creole men, even rallying white creole women to this task: “Charming sex! This is your prerogative, sweetness and goodness. It is for tempering the pride of man, for captivating him, for making pleasant the dream of life, that nature made you.” Having denied them physical strength, nature blessed women with the ability to persuade—or, in Moreau’s words, “to soften”—with merely a glance “the being you are destined to make happy.” Armed with such capabilities, white creole women should not

Crossroads of Knowledge: Feminist Anthropology in the Postmodern Era, ed. Micaela di Leonardo (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2003), Chapter Four.

¹⁰⁵ Coleman, “Janet Schaw and the Complexions of Empire,” 180.

¹⁰⁶ Hilary Beckles has shown that such encounters were not uncommon in early eighteenth-century Barbados. Later in the century, black or “coloured” men faced brutal punishments, and white women faced social ostracism, for transgressing this racial frontier. Beckles attributes this change to a concern over the growing free population of color, rather than an increased valorization of white womanhood, since children born of such unions would automatically be free by virtue of their white mother’s freedom. Hilary McD Beckles, *Centering Woman: Gender Discourses in Caribbean Slave Society* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1999), 69.

hesitate to “rule the universe with the power of your charms.”¹⁰⁷ Aiding her talent for persuasion was her physical appearance. In a passage in which he compliments the *toilette* and fashion of white creole women, Moreau suggests that this sense of style contributed to their influence over men. By delicately enhancing their natural beauty, white creole women “know how to conserve the empire that nature has given them.”¹⁰⁸ But white women’s “empire” was safely contained by their emotion, which led them to patriarchal marriages. Whereas mulatto women coldly calculated, white creole women *felt*. “Love...[that] tyrant of sensitive souls, reigns over that of [white creole women].” In fact, the heightened sexuality of white creoles—typically understood to compromise their capacity for reason and virtue—appears as a redeemable quality in Moreau’s eyes precisely because of their need to love. For, as long as love was their “tyrant,” and as long as women’s sexuality was contained within marriages brokered around love, women would remain faithful to their white husbands and their sexuality would be directed toward domestic stability and the reproduction of white creole society.

Moreau’s understanding of ideal womanhood corresponded with the ideal popularized by Rousseau in his widely-read, enormously influential book *Emile*.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Moreau de Saint Méry, "Fragment Sur Le Caractère des Créoles de Saint-Domingue, Tiré de l'Ouvrage des Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l'Amérique Sous le Vent, Etc. ," 40-41; Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 23.

¹⁰⁸ Moreau de Saint Méry, "Fragment Sur Le Caractère des Créoles de Saint-Domingue, Tiré de l'Ouvrage des Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l'Amérique Sous le Vent, Etc. ," 32; Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 18.

¹⁰⁹ For the popularity of Rousseau’s *Emile* and its influence on child-rearing practices, see P.D. Jimack, "Introduction," in *Emile* (London: Dent and Sons Ltd., 1974), xxix-xxvi; Mary Seidman Trouille, *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment: Women Writers Read Rousseau* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997). At least nineteen editions were published from 1762–1770, and at least another eight from 1770-1790. See Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1995), 402, n. 90.

Rousseau maintained that, according to the law of nature, women were made to complement men, yet in a subordinate way. Passionate yet modest, Rousseau's ideal women held some influence over their husbands through their sexual attraction. However, husbands ruled the family.¹¹⁰ Rousseau charged women with specific duties: "To give [men] pleasure, to be useful to them, to win their love and their esteem, to train them in their childhood, to care for them when they grow up, to give them counsel and consolation, to make life sweet and agreeable for them: these are the tasks of women in all times for which they should be trained from childhood."¹¹¹ Rousseau compelled women to fulfill these duties because nature ordered them to do so and because the creation of a dedicated citizenry relied on their obedience: "Can devotion to the state exist apart from the love of those near and dear to us? Can patriotism thrive except in the soil of that miniature fatherland, the home? Is it not the good son, the good husband, the good father, who makes the good citizen?"¹¹²

Thus, the family was the site of citizen formation. According to Rousseau, women were the key to the creation of loving homes, as the primary caregiver for children, and as the help-mate of the husband. Therefore, women, as mothers and wives, were essential components of patriotism, since love for one's fatherland (*patrie*) can only exist if one experiences familial love. Familial love, however, depends largely on the wife; Rousseau contends that she alone links father and child with the "loving care" required to "preserve a united family." Furthermore, poor "conduct, manners and behavior" on the part of women have potentially devastating consequences. In particular,

¹¹⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. Barbara Foxley (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1974), 322-323.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 328.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 326.

Rousseau maintained that a women's sexual infidelity would naturally lead to the dissolution of the family, since a man who had lost respect for an adulterous wife could not possibly love his children.¹¹³ Her sexuality had the potential to destroy the family, and by proxy, civic virtue.

But, according to Rousseau, a woman's sexual virtue did not preclude her obligation, or her innate drive, to be sexually attractive. He maintained that women naturally longed "to be pleasing in man's eyes," a longing that was right and good.¹¹⁴ But to what end? Women's ability to arouse men's sexual desire, and then rebuff their advances, gave women leverage in the relationship. The game—his desire, her reluctance, and eventually her surrender—made him "dependent on her good will," although she was dependent upon him in most other aspects of the relationship.¹¹⁵ Thus sexual desire was something women could manipulate in order to help equalize what would otherwise be a tyrannical relationship. Moreover, it facilitated her role in the creation of a patriotic citizenry.

Moreau's white creole woman had the potential to play the same game. Using her "charms" and her beauty, she had the power to attract her husband, to persuade him to remember his familial and civic responsibilities. Her ability and her desire to please him could provide a foundation for loving, monogamous marriages among whites, a characteristic notoriously absent in white creole society. Furthermore, if permitted to marry for love, white creole women had the incentive to remain faithful to their husbands

¹¹³ Ibid., 323-325.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 327-328.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 323.

and thereby maintain familial affection. With the creation of such stable white creole families, white creole civic virtue could not be far behind.

DuBuisson also alluded to the power white women could possess over white men. He pleaded with women, the “Enchanting sex,” to stay faithful in order to maintain marital affection. Without such affection, which he describes as a “pleasure,” “what else is [man] left...in the world? *Ennui* without end, effort without vigor, infirmities without rest, pains without compensation.”¹¹⁶ It appeared that the simple fidelity and “charms” of white women could encourage the happiness and devotion of their husbands. Moreover, marriage to a white woman was far more rewarding than concubinage with a woman of color, or the single life. Dubuisson claimed that white men sometimes shunned marriage altogether after having fathered illegitimate mulattoes who were never content with the financial support offered them by their fathers. Jaded by the “dire consequences of a vile concubinage, and the short-lived errors of an ardent youth,” forty-five year old men spent sad, lonely days amidst their wealth, connected to the rest of the world only by business transactions.¹¹⁷ Dubuisson pleaded with white colonial men to leave their concubines and marry, holding out the loneliness of old age and the prospect of insolent mulatto bastards as disincentive. “Who will surround you [in your old age]?” he asked. “Mercenary” servants, and children who could not inherit their father’s status, and who spoke poorly of him when they deemed their inheritance insufficient? The sacrifices of marriage, he emphasized, were far better than such prospects. A married man could look forward to the love of his family throughout his life. Having outlived the glory of his own youth, he enjoyed that of his children, who could in fact inherit his “rank.”

¹¹⁶ Dubuisson, *Nouvelles Considérations sur Saint-Domingue, en Réponse À Celles de M. H. D.*, 2: 30-31.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2: 68.

Respectful, affectionate sons and “charming” daughters would bring him joy and evoke in him “the most tender emotions.” Finally, Dubuisson noted that the many boons of marriage would continue even after his death, when he would live on, honored, in the memory of his children.¹¹⁸

But for Dubuisson, marriage brought not only comfort in old age. Rather, and perhaps more tellingly, he hoped that his readers would consider it “the sacred goal of nature, and the first obligation of man in society....” Moreover, man’s evasion of this obligation was no less than a “crime.”¹¹⁹ Much like Rousseau, Dubuisson considered the loving nuclear family the cornerstone of a sociable society. The isolated bachelor concerned only for his personal fortune will die alone, having contributed nothing to society. But the married father will have produced new citizens, a task he could only accomplish by choosing to marry. And the only women suitable for marriage in the colony, in Dubuisson’s, Moreau’s, Hilliard’s and many other accounts, were white creole women. They alone were capable of the moral and sexual virtue, as well as the passion, required of good wives.

We know that Moreau took his own advice and married a white creole woman in 1781, Louise-Catherine Milhet, daughter of a planter from Louisiana. With this marriage, however, he appears to have ended a five-year cohabitation with a *mulâtresse*, during which time he probably fathered an illegitimate daughter legally defined as a *quarteronne*. One day before notarizing his marriage contract with Milhet, he notarized a donation to a woman identified as a free *mulâtresse*, Marie-Louise “called La Plaine.” In recognition of her service as his live-in “housekeeper” (*ménagère*) for some five years, he

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 2: 70-72.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 2: 68.

permitted her the use (through usufruct) of an enslaved woman and an enslaved girl and also gave her 2,000 *livres* to be used toward the purchase of another slave. He granted ownership over the first two slaves, however, to La Plaine's daughter. Given that the notary categorized her daughter, Jeanne-Louise, as a "*quarteronne*," it is quite likely that Moreau was her father.¹²⁰ Nor did their relationship end with his marriage, although the nature of the relationship may have changed. At the very least, he maintained decision-making power over Jeanne-Louise's property as her "tutor," or legal guardian, a status typically granted to the legal representatives of orphaned children until those children reached the age of majority.¹²¹

How do we account for Moreau's apparent hypocrisy, painting mulatto women in debauched, selfish terms while having cohabited with La Plaine and perhaps fathered a child by her? It is likely that he saw no contradiction at all in his words or behavior. Perhaps his vision of calculating *mulâtresses* was shaped by his own experience; did he see himself as a duped white man who was now morally obliged to support the woman who had seduced him? Or, did he see his payment as fair compensation for services rendered as a *ménagère*? Or, did he simply want to provide some economic security for his daughter? In any case, he clearly understood that his life with La Plaine, and the obligations that such an arrangement produced, differed from his life with his new wife, Milhet. As a *mulâtresse*, La Plaine could not be a virtuous wife and mother to citizens, he may have reasoned. Milhet, by contrast, as a white creole woman, could provide the

¹²⁰ Michel Camus, "Une Fille Naturelle de Moreau de Saint-Mery À Saint Domingue," *Société Haitienne d'Histoire et de Géographie* 46, no. 162 (1989). CAOM SDOM 861 8 avril 1781. Unfortunately, Jeanne-Louise's age is never mentioned in any of the supporting documents.

¹²¹ Before sailing for France in July 1783, and again in 1788, Moreau transferred his legal status as Jeanne-Louise's "tutor" to fellow lawyer Baudry de Loziers. CAOM SDOM 864, 10 juillet 1783; CAOM SDOM 869, 30 Mai 1788.

emotional glue to bind together a family. Moreover, her sexual virtue and model of familial love could turn their children into civic-minded creole citizens.

Gens de Couleur, Affectionate Marriage, and Familial Virtue

These white elite men used the discourse of marital respectability and affectionate marriage to order society, drawing distinctions between their own imagined superior virtue and that of people of color. But others drew on them, too, thereby challenging the possibility that whites alone were capable of loving nuclear families and the civic virtue that they fostered. People of color drew on those discourses when advocating for their own individual rights and for the rights of the free population of color as a group.

In 1770, Marie-Jeanne Delaunay, a “free quarteronne,” employed the language of familial virtue to fight for the freedom of her husband of thirteen years, Paul Carenan.¹²² Carenan, described as a “*mulâtre*” planter (*habitant*) had lived for some 40 years as a free man. However, the Conseil Superieur in Port-au-Prince recently ordered his re-enslavement because he was unable to prove his legal freedom. Delaunay appealed to the colonial administrators to overturn this decision, pleading as a devoted wife and mother who only wanted to preserve her family. She pointed out to the court that since her husband had been declared a slave, she was free to enter into another union with another man. However, because of her commitment to Paul and her love for their children, she preferred to appeal to the “goodness” of the court to return her husband to her. Her familial appeal was supplemented by an appeal to sentiment reminiscent of Rousseau’s *Heloise*: in seeking the help of the administrators, would she “find...relief from her

¹²² Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l’Amérique Sous le Vent*, 5: 291-292.

troubles other than her tears?” She pleaded on behalf of the family: “Six unhappy children throw themselves before your feet with her to reclaim the liberty of their father; grant him this liberty;...” The administrators promptly freed Carenan, out of the interests of “humanity and religion,” and perhaps not wanting to stir discontent among elite people of color.

Julien Raimond drew on a host of themes typically employed by white elites to harden racial boundaries in his efforts to improve the status of light-skinned *gens de couleur*. In his petitions to the Colonial Minister and the King proposing the entry of *quarterons* to the rank of whites,¹²³ he alluded to the commitment to marriage and family demonstrated by *gens de couleur*—particularly elites. Attempting to dispel the image of the debauched *mulâtresse* and the effete free man of color, Raimond countered with a portrayal of the corrupt sexual (and implicitly, the civic) virtue of colonial whites.

In his first petition, probably written in 1785, Raimond noted that free colored sexual virtue and family values were threatened not by a hypersexuality inherent to people of color but rather by lascivious whites. According to Raimond, white men regularly preyed on the daughters and wives of respectable men of color, who lacked the legal ability to protect them. “One hears every day in Saint Domingue the following words in the mouths of whites. This woman, or this girl pleases me, I must have her;...” If a father or a husband dared to object to such demands, the white might threaten him with one hundred strikes with a cane.¹²⁴ White men in positions of power could have even easier access to women and girls of color by demanding exceptional labor requirements (*corvées*) of their fathers and husbands. If the man objected, he could be

¹²³ See Chapter One.

¹²⁴ CAOM F/3/91 fol. 178

sent to prison for his disobedience. While away, either working on a royal project far from his home, or imprisoned, the wronged man was powerless to protect his wife and daughter from the white official's advances. Raimond lamented that "often the pardon of a father or husband is granted only at the price of his dishonor."¹²⁵ Significantly, Raimond emphasized not only the compromised virtue of women of color but also the threat to free colored patriarchy. White prejudice toward the *gens de couleur* had prevented men from exercising their rights as men, specifically, the right to control the sexuality of the women in their household.

Raimond elaborated his arguments in his third and fourth petitions by evoking populationist anxieties. Like Moreau, Dubuisson and Hilliard, Raimond linked the prospect of advantageous population growth in the colony with moral reform and the encouragement of marriage. Yet, as one might imagine, his plan looked quite different from these others. Raimond placed the blame for libertinage, concubinage, the devalorization of marriage, and the slow growth of the white population squarely on the shoulders of white men and the prejudices they harbored against *gens de couleur*. He claimed that three-quarters of the Europeans who migrated to Saint Domingue did not marry, preferring instead to live with enslaved and free women of color, fathering multiple illegitimate children with them. Those men who did marry took their white wives and children back to France to live once their fortunes allowed, further depleting the white population. Repeating the concerns of white colonists and administrators, Raimond emphasized that white men with enslaved and free concubines of color only contributed to the growth of the problematic group of *gens de couleur*. In fact, Raimond

¹²⁵ CAOM F/3/91 fol. 178

claimed that the free population of color was currently growing three times faster than the white population. He predicted that at such a rate, the population of color would soon outnumber the white population before finally “absorbing it. Which would surely be contrary to the designs of the government.”¹²⁶

Having raised the frightening specter of the disappearance of whiteness altogether, Raimond proposed to solve all the colony’s demographic problems—while reforming colonial morality. By reclassifying legitimately-born *quarterons* as whites, the white population would instantly grow. But furthermore, Raimond claimed that such a policy would encourage Europeans to marry *mulâtresses* without feeling “repugnance,” as they did under the current system of colonial prejudice. Once married, such couples would reproduce, and their children would also be defined as white. Importantly, Raimond specified that such interracial marital unions could also join mulatto men with white women, a prospect that is either entirely absent or dismissed as an impossibility in the proposals of white authors.¹²⁷ Mulatto men and women could thus serve as fathers and mothers to a rejuvenated white population, rather than threatening that population with their lasciviousness.

This elaborate marital scheme was not so different from Hilliard’s: it aimed to grow the white population by marrying whites with “mixed-bloods,” although Raimond’s encouraged white marriage with a much larger range of *gens de couleur*. But whereas Hilliard’s plan proposed to maintain the intermediate class of “yellows,” distinct from both darker-skinned slaves and lighter skinned “whites,” Raimond’s aimed to decrease

¹²⁶ CAOM F/3/91 fol. 195

¹²⁷ CAOM F/3/91 fol. 196

the size of this problematic intermediate group, “almost to nothing.”¹²⁸ The free population of color would decrease because their marriage to whites would produce white progeny, either as children or grandchildren. Furthermore, increasing rates of marriage between whites and women of color would necessarily correspond to declining rates of concubinage with enslaved women, a practice broadly identified with the growth of the free population of color, as we have seen. Having found in mixed-race women “legitimate wives and virtuous mothers,” European men would no longer prefer to live in concubinage with the presumably less virtuous—and darker-skinned—enslaved women (*négresses*). As importantly, Raimond suggested that such a reform would contribute to the natural reproduction of the enslaved population. Once white men stopped living in concubinage with enslaved women, those women would be “returned to the men of their species, [and] would multiply even more and give more slaves to the colony.”¹²⁹

Raimond’s plan—like all of these populationist proposals—was hardly foolproof. Marriage in no way guaranteed an end to concubinage; plenty of married men in the colony had an enslaved or free mistress with whom they fathered illegitimate children. But Raimond’s petitions show a deft ability to manipulate the ideal of affectionate marriage as well as concerns over low rates of natural reproduction among whites and the enslaved, and the growing population of *gens de couleur*. By placing marriage at the center of his proposal, he countered white portrayals of “mixed” people that characterized them as incapable of love and affectionate marriage.

Several years later, the French Revolution was underway and Raimond foresaw an opening for his proposed reforms. In January 1791 he published a pamphlet in Paris

¹²⁸ CAOM F/3/91 fol. 195

¹²⁹ CAOM F/3/91 fol. 196

entitled “Observations on the Origin and the Progress of the Prejudice of White Colonists Against Men of Color...,” intending to draw support among French National Assembly members for *gens de couleur* citizenship rights. In the pamphlet, he continued to draw out the themes developed in his earlier petitions in order to demonstrate that colonial whites, and not the *gens de couleur*, lacked sexual and civic virtue. However, in this publication, he highlighted the role of white colonial women in the ruination of colonial morality and the spread of colonial racism. Referring to the colonial administration’s early efforts to import women from France and thereby encourage marriage and reproduction, Raimond characterized these women in a very different way than Moreau. Rather than portray them as “timid orphans” suitable for marriage and motherhood, Raimond claimed that the imported white women had “virtues” that were “more than suspect.” Furthermore, and more importantly, “their marriages with whites did not bear all the fruit” expected of them.” Thus Raimond once again reversed the polemic typically used to critique the virtue of enslaved and free people of color: he suggested that white women’s questionable virtue led to their incapacity to bear children, just as white colonists argued that the reproductive abilities of enslaved and free women of color had been damaged by their “libertinage.” But not only had white women’s sexuality impeded the reproduction of the white population; Raimond claimed that it led white men to choose enslaved women as wives instead, either in legal marriage or in a de facto state of marriage, calling them “*ménagères*.”¹³⁰ Enslaved women had made better wives than these white women, by virtue of their superior ability to reproduce.

¹³⁰ M. Raymond, *Observations Sur l’Origine et les Progrès du Préjugé des Colons Blancs Contre les Hommes de Couleur; Sur les Inconvénients de le Perpétuer; la Nécessité, la Facilité de le Détruire; Sur le Projet du Comité Colonial, Etc.* (Paris: Belin, 1791), 3-4.

As we have seen, Raimond was not the first to assert the hypersexuality of white colonial women and men. Rather, he drew on one well-worn image—the lusty white colonist—in order to dispute another—the oversexed and unvirtuous *gen de couleur*. Ultimately, he hoped to highlight the capacity of the *gens de couleur* for colonial citizenship—both in the culturally-defined sense of possessing a capacity for civic virtue and in the legally-defined sense of possessing the same rights as whites. Asserting the sexual virtue and familial love of the *gens de couleur* while casting suspicion on the allegedly superior virtue of whites, Raimond called into question white claims to a monopoly on virtue and rights.

White elite men, by contrast, employed sexualized rhetoric for different ends. Eager to redeem the image of the white creole, they hoped to justify a white-dominated social hierarchy while demonstrating to the metropole that white creoles could in fact be trusted with some legislative authority, as shown in Chapter Two. This chapter has demonstrated that the practice of marriage was central to that effort. These white male authors racialized marriage as well as libertinage: they proposed that whites were capable of loving marriages while *gens de couleur* were not—love was the purview of whites, while lust dominated the hearts and bodies of the *gens de couleur*. Thus by calling on white creole women to “use the power of your charms” to encourage white marriage, Moreau actually accomplished several tasks as once. He, like Dubuisson, hoped that white women could prevent interracial concubinage and marriage by wooing white men from women of color. With this appeal, however, he also countered the assumption that white creole women could not be good wives or mothers, or that their children could not be “good citizens.” Loving white families were possible in Saint Domingue, as was

white population growth. The colony was not doomed to be a corrupt outpost of libertinage.

Chapter Five

Legislating Fashion and Negotiating Creole Taste: Discourses and Practices of Luxury Consumption

Saint Domingue's Governor and Intendant issued one of the final examples of discriminatory legislation against the *gens de couleur* in February 1779. Responding to the "extreme luxury in dress and finery" of the *gens de couleur*, which had attracted the attention of magistrates and "the public" as well as the administrators, these regulations required free people of color to "restrain" their luxury consumption according to the "simplicity, decency and respect, [that comprise the] essential characteristics of their state..."¹ Concerned that whites were being upstaged on the colony's streets by well-dressed *gens de couleur*, who were by law their social inferiors, these regulations sought to clarify the racial hierarchy that had been blurred by fashion. They targeted "above all the assimilation of *Gens de couleur* with white people, in the manner in which they dress, the bringing together of the distances between one species and another in the form of clothing...." Thus, free people of color were explicitly prohibited from dressing, arranging their hair, or wearing any finery that resembled "the manner of being of white men and women...." Instead, they were ordered to wear the clothing and hairstyles that had "until presently" served to distinguish *gens de couleur* from whites. Disobeying this regulation could result in imprisonment and confiscation of the luxury item. If the goal

¹ M. Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l'Amérique Sous le Vent*, 6 vols. (Paris: 1784), 5: 855-856.

of these sumptuary regulations weren't clear enough, the colonial administrators also maintained that all *gens de couleur* should treat all whites with "the greatest respect," including their former masters, their employers, their donors (often men who had given property to their illegitimate children or mistresses), and the widows and children of those white men. This part of the regulations, vague and subjective as it was, could potentially be the most dangerous for people of color since those guilty of disobeying it could suffer re-enslavement.

As with all early modern sumptuary law, these regulations were intended to make visually apparent the sanctioned social hierarchy by marking bodies with apparel that signified their place within it. In Saint Domingue, as we have noted, a great deal was at stake in maintaining racial hierarchy: in the 1770's, colonial authorities and white elites agreed that the stability of the slave system depended on it. This chapter will argue that fashion and luxury consumption were practices through which all colonial residents waged battles over the racial order. Saint Domingue's enslaved men and women, free *gens de couleur*, and white creoles all had reputations for ostentatious consumption within and outside the colony. What they wore, how they wore it, and what meanings they and others attached to their consumption patterns shaped the colony's racialized discourse of citizenship in significant ways.

For white elites like Moreau and Hilliard, colonial luxury consumption posed several dilemmas. First, while they desired a clearly demarcated racial hierarchy within the colony, its imposition in the form of sumptuary law smacked of old world despotism, in which artificial privileges were bestowed on the most corrupt members of society. As paradoxical as the argument sounds today, these men contended that colonial society was

in fact more meritocratic than the metropole, a place where hard work was rewarded by economic prosperity; restricting free colored consumption refuted that claim.

Furthermore, it hurt business for colonial merchants, who depended on the *gens de couleur* as customers. But these white elites found other, extra-legal ways to use luxury consumption to assert the superiority of colonial whites. Drawing heavily on French debates over “*luxe*,” they articulated a view of colonial consumption that demonstrated Saint Domingue’s economic vitality, social stability and civic health. Most importantly, they marked particular practices of consumption as gender, class and race-specific in order to consolidate white privilege, claiming that one’s quality as a citizen could be read on one’s exterior.

Of course, poor and middling whites, as well as *gens de couleur* and the enslaved, contributed to discourses of colonial fashion and luxury consumption as well. Through their public display of luxury items and mode of dress, they alternately employed and contested elite definitions of respectable consumption. Colonial women played an especially important role in shaping this discourse. As producers and consumers of luxury goods, they articulated their own understandings of good citizenship and racial hierarchy.

Fashion and Luxury Consumption in Old Regime France

Changing patterns and perceptions of luxury consumption contributed to the tremendous political, social and cultural upheaval that transformed eighteenth century France. Prior to the eighteenth century, conspicuous consumption was considered the preserve of nobility and especially royalty. Under the Old Regime, lavish displays of

wealth, in the form of clothing, jewelry and carriages were expected of nobles, particularly courtiers and members of the royal family. The monarchy and the nobility had long distinguished themselves from those beneath them through such display, simultaneously representing and recreating their higher status through the goods that they consumed.² In this way, the elite's monopoly on luxury goods reinforced traditional social hierarchies. Fashion played an especially important role in maintaining these hierarchies, marking individual bodies in public spaces and making one's status immediately apparent to onlookers. The color and quality of the fabric, as well as the cut and the ornamentation that adorned clothing, all served this purpose. Traditionally, law and custom reserved bright colors, high heels, ribbons, ruffles and brocade for the wealthiest and most prominent members of society. Their custom-made clothes contrasted sharply with the items worn by the poor. Dark in color, coarse in texture, and simple in cut, their clothing was either purchased second-hand or pieced together at home.³ Thus, one wore one's position in the social order.

However, during the eighteenth century, urban France experienced an unprecedented wave of popular consumption that allowed the middling and lower orders to partake of luxury items previously enjoyed only by the elite. As Daniel Roche has documented, the popular classes of Paris began acquiring "furniture for show" such as bookshelves, writing tables and card tables as well as toiletries such as razors, shaving

² Jennifer M. Jones, *Sexing La Mode: Gender, Fashion and Commercial Culture in Old Regime France* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2004), 10; John Shovlin, "The Cultural Politics of Luxury in Eighteenth-Century France," *French Historical Studies* 23, no. 4 (2000): 588.

³ Sarah Maza, *The Myth of the French Bourgeoisie: An Essay on the Social Imaginary, 1750-1850* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 48-49.

mirrors and chamber pots.⁴ Even more dramatic were changing consumption patterns for clothing. Among the popular classes, the real value of their clothing tripled over the course of the eighteenth century. Further, the number and variety of clothing items they owned dramatically increased as well, especially among women. For example, the seventeenth-century *femme du peuple* might have six or seven basic garments, including a petticoat or two, a skirt, shirt, mantle, apron and perhaps a bodice. But by the late-eighteenth century she tended to have twice as many garments, including a dress, multiple kerchiefs, scarves, shoes and gloves, all of which were exceedingly rare in the earlier period. Furthermore, whereas such a woman would have worn clothing made from coarse woolens in drab browns and grays in the early eighteenth century, by the end of the century her clothing would have been cut from lighter and more colorful cottons and even silks.⁵ Thus, more people were consuming in greater quantities, and they were consuming items previously forbidden to them by law or cost.

It is perhaps difficult for the modern reader to imagine how visually disorienting these changes must have been. Previously, the social order was literally color-coded. When walking down the street, one could easily recognize her social inferiors and superiors. Custom and law determined one's dress so that the early modern social order was plain to all, facilitating the day-to-day social relations of a town. Changing patterns of consumption disrupted that visual order, leaving people to wonder about the dangers that accompanied it. In particular, it sparked criticism by those interested in preserving the Old Regime social order. French philosophers, moralists and aristocrats more

⁴ Daniel Roche, *The People of Paris: An Essay in Popular Culture in the 18th Century*, trans. M. Evans (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 145-157.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 162-173.

generally expressed great concern over changing patterns of consumption, particularly among non-nobles. Increased consumption by the popular classes, they argued, would dismantle traditional social hierarchies. When non-nobles dressed in sumptuous clothing and purchased expensive consumer goods typically reserved for their social superiors, “symbolic anarchy” resulted.⁶ Inherited rank was no longer readable on one’s exterior; aristocrat and commoner could easily be mistaken for one another.

But over the course of the eighteenth century, criticisms of *luxe* changed. While early- to mid-century critiques of luxury exhibited such concerns over “symbolic anarchy,” from the mid-century onward anti-luxury discourse became increasingly anti-aristocratic. Whereas previous French commentators objected to the deceitful use of luxury by the lower orders to mask their “true” rank, critics writing later in the century often argued that the use of luxury by anyone to demonstrate rank was a fraudulent practice. They claimed that observers could easily confuse spectacular displays of wealth with greatness and nobility, when in fact the truly noble did not belong to the idle, parasitic aristocracy but rather to the group of useful citizens, including farmers or merchants.⁷ Thus, the symbolic anarchy described by this later group of critics masked a new social hierarchy, one based on social utility.

Other French critics distrusted overt displays of luxury but recognized the economic and social benefits of less conspicuous forms of consumption. These thinkers defended moderate luxury consumption as a stimulus to the economy and a deterrent to idleness, arguing that the luxury of a neighbor first inspires envy, and then inspires labor to attain that luxury. In the *Encyclopédie*, Diderot distinguished between the “pragmatic

⁶ Shovlin, “The Cultural Politics of Luxury in Eighteenth-Century France,” 588.

⁷ *Ibid.*: 597-598.

luxury” of advanced nations and the “ostentatious luxury” of impoverished, despotic nations. “Pragmatic luxury” encouraged industry and liberal economic development and therefore was beneficial to the nation. By contrast, he critiqued the “ostentatious luxury” of the idle aristocracy that benefited no one. Supported by royal revenue, they remained wealthy and “decorated” although they served no practical function in society.⁸ Thus such critics increasingly recognized benefits of luxury consumption while incorporating a critique of the aristocracy.

While debates over luxury consumption consistently addressed concerns about a destabilizing social hierarchy, they also became increasingly gendered, especially debates about fashion consumption. Dressing fashionably was one form of luxury consumption that traditionally marked the noble body. Old Regime fashion existed almost exclusively in the court, the center of both sartorial glamour and political power. Male and female courtiers alike were concerned with dressing in the finest garments cut in the latest style, as well as being well-coiffed and accessorized. Thus, the “Old Sartorial Regime” clearly reinforced class distinctions within French society. However, by the late-eighteenth century, dressing fashionably was becoming a practice that signified gender differences more so than class differences. In other words, fashion was increasingly perceived as an activity naturally suited for women, something for which women had an innate weakness and talent. This evolving commentary on fashion resulted in changes in fashion itself. By the late-eighteenth century, upper-class men dressed in simpler and more functional clothing, abandoning the wigs, makeup and colorful silk breeches of the earlier period for dark trousers that had traditionally been worn by working men. Meanwhile, elite

⁸ Denis and Jean le Rond d'Alembert Diderot, ed., *Encyclopédie Ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers*, 17 vols. (Paris: 1751-1772), 9: 765-771, quote on pg. 768; Daniel Roche, *France in the Enlightenment*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 568.

women's dress continued to follow an extravagant course. Thus, class distinctions marked by men's clothing were gradually erased while gender distinctions between women's and men's clothes increased.⁹

In an interesting twist, professional opportunities opened up for non-elite women as a result of the gendering of fashion. Whereas male tailors had previously dominated the production of women's dresses and their accoutrements, in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, women seamstresses were granted their own guild and, eventually, a monopoly on dressmaking for women. Likewise, female fashion merchants, *marchandes de modes*, emerged as the new "arbiters of taste," specializing in the accoutrements rather than the dress.¹⁰ The *marchandes de modes* made shawls and hats (they were permitted to make only unfitted pieces), and they adorned these items as well as dresses and skirts with embellishments such as ribbons, lace, and feathers. As Jennifer Jones has demonstrated, by the mid-eighteenth century a "new fashion culture" had emerged in which women, and in particular working women, competed with royalty to set new trends through their production and consumption of clothing.¹¹

Many eighteenth-century writers feared that women's fashion, when not kept under control, could potentially endanger the nation. The corruption of the French monarchy and national depopulation were both commonly linked to this allegedly feminine obsession. The woman most associated with fashion in eighteenth-century

⁹ Lynn Hunt, "Freedom of Dress in Revolutionary France," in *Feminism and the Body*, ed. Londa Schiebinger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 191-192; Jones, *Sexing La Mode: Gender, Fashion and Commercial Culture in Old Regime France*, 202-204.

¹⁰ Jones, *Sexing La Mode: Gender, Fashion and Commercial Culture in Old Regime France*, 74.

¹¹ Clare Crowston, *Fabricating Women: The Seamstresses of Old Regime France, 1675-1791* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 31-71; Jones, *Sexing La Mode: Gender, Fashion and Commercial Culture in Old Regime France*, 77-86, 91-103.

France was Marie-Antoinette, and critics of the monarchy attacked her costly passion for fashion along with her alleged sexual debauchery, dissimulation, and bad mothering. Indeed, the tremendous costs of her gowns and jewelry earned her the nickname “Madame Deficit.”¹² The royal revenue, it seemed, was being depleted in order to fulfill the queen’s frivolous demands. But equally as controversial was the Queen’s patronage of and friendship with Rose Bertin, a commoner who became the most famous dressmaker and fashion merchant (*marchande de modes*) in France at the time. Whereas previous queens had delegated the responsibility of creating their wardrobes to others, Marie-Antoinette ordered her own dresses under the guidance of Bertin, with whom she met twice a week. Their relationship confirmed what many critics had long argued: that fashion had the ability to blur social distinctions. In this case, a queen received recommendations from a commoner who then gained access to the queen’s apartments and even her private court events.¹³

Likewise, luxury consumption more broadly was often blamed for France’s allegedly declining population.¹⁴ Throughout the eighteenth century, *philosophes*, moralists and religious clergy sought to explain this phenomenon as the product of emasculated male consumers and women who valued their appearance and comfort more than motherhood. *Luxe*, the argument went, made men feminine and “soft.” One could not expect large families from men dressed in delicate silks and flouncy ruffles, wearing

¹² Sarah Maza, “The Diamond Necklace Affair Revisited,” in *Eroticism and the Body Politic*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 63.

¹³ Jones, *Sexing La Mode: Gender, Fashion and Commercial Culture in Old Regime France*, 96.

¹⁴ Although this belief was widespread among French writers regardless of their social status, religion or attitude toward the crown, France’s population seems to have grown rather than decreased during the century. Carole Blum, *Strength in Numbers: Population, Reproduction, and Power in Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 2.

carefully arranged wigs, whose cheekbones were accented with rouge and powder and whose bodies lounged on gilt chairs. Fashion and luxe alternately signified or caused declining male virility.¹⁵ Critics also claimed that married couples intentionally limited the size of their families in order to acquire more luxury goods for themselves. Further, they argued, some men chose to remain single rather than start a family that would deplete their income and prevent their consumption of luxury goods.¹⁶ All told, luxe and fashion threatened French national glory, male virility and the primacy of the family.

Still other commentators—especially the fashion press—noted the positive effects of fashion for the nation. Criticized in the seventeenth century for its inconstancy, unpredictability and wastefulness, by the late-eighteenth century fashion was lauded as a motor for the French economy and something that operated by its own natural laws. Further, not only did it benefit the economy, but it had also become part of French national character. Fashion was “a quality that the French possessed in greater quantity than other nations, which women possessed more of than men, and which some women possessed more of than other women.”¹⁷ Taste ruled fashion, and the French in general and French women in particular were naturally imbued with taste. Moreover, traditional concerns about fashion—that it was unpredictable and elusive, something “ungovernable and beyond human control”—were alleviated by naturalizing those characteristics in women. Fashion was being redefined as a frivolous, irrational, *feminine* concern. And if

¹⁵ Ibid., 49-50; Maza, *The Myth of the French Bourgeoisie: An Essay on the Social Imaginary, 1750-1850*, 56.

¹⁶ Blum, *Strength in Numbers: Population, Reproduction, and Power in Eighteenth-Century France*, 46-47.

¹⁷ Jones, *Sexing La Mode: Gender, Fashion and Commercial Culture in Old Regime France*, 196, 194.

fashion itself was dangerous because it could not be governed, women's penchant for fashion was made less dangerous because women *could* be governed.¹⁸

Thus, in general, by the late-eighteenth century French commentators advocated that fashion and luxury consumption should not be used to reinforce the traditional social order—nobility and royalty should not be constructed by consumer goods. Such Old Regime practices came to be viewed as deceitful, artificial, and contrary to nature, especially when practiced by men. Indeed, foppish men were suspected of lacking virility. Women, on the other hand, redefined as naturally coquettish and frivolous, were expected to want to participate in fashion; indeed, their desire for fashion was a reassuring marker of their femininity.

At the heart of these debates, then, was a belief in transparency, meaning that one's inner self should match one's outer presentation. Whereas earlier critics of luxury consumption worried about the lower orders masquerading in clothing that did not match their station, mid-late eighteenth century critics worried that the most virtuous citizens might be upstaged by spendthrift, parasitic aristocrats. "Moderate" luxury, and modest male dress, was the sartorial aesthetic of a new discourse of egalitarianism, meritocracy and natural law that rejected artificial, inherited privileges.

In the colonies, however, inherited privilege—in the form of one's color—was believed to be central to the survival of the slave system, and this evolving discourse on luxury consumption adapted to that belief when it reached the Caribbean. White commentary from the period often slips into critiques of free people of color, and sometimes slaves, who were "arrogant" or "insolent" toward whites, and who forgot their

¹⁸ Ibid., 199-200.

“rank.” Thus, whereas late-eighteenth century metropolitan critics worried that aristocrats were masking as hard-working, virtuous citizens, white colonists were concerned with free people of color masking as the colony’s elite—which was supposed to be white. And though they differed from French critics in that they were primarily concerned with fighting an affront “from below,” they often presented similar criticisms, attacking the bad taste and wastefulness of *gens de couleur* consumption as much as its social threat.

Colonial Luxury Consumption and its Critics

While changing patterns of consumption in eighteenth-century France tended to be interpreted as a result of economic changes which made luxury goods affordable to new groups of people, widespread colonial luxury consumption elicited a different explanation. European and creole observers alike sought to explain colonists’ need to consume as a characteristic particular to creoles—the urge to consume and display was deemed part of the creole personality, brought on by the climate and the greed that pervaded colonial society.

In the eyes of Europeans, colonial residents throughout the Americas desperately consumed in an unsuccessful attempt to emulate Old World nobility. This was especially true in the case of Saint Domingue, where plantation slavery had allegedly allowed many middling white immigrants to get rich quickly, creating a class of tacky parvenus whose wealth was often illusory. In 1764, Brueys d’Aigalliers attempted to explain why so many colonists remained in debt when their sugar plantations thrived. In part, he blamed their vast expenditures on luxury items, particularly immense amounts of clothing and

food. However, a much greater danger to colonial fortunes were trips to Paris, where colonists might spend the equivalent of two to five years' revenue in one winter. A creole's desire to flaunt their possessions, he explained, was comparable to a Muslim's devotion to Mohammed, and therefore a trip to Paris was like a Muslim's trip to Mecca. Unfortunately, such spending happened whether their fortunes were "real or pretend, (because there are false rich people in America, just as there are false nobles in France)."¹⁹ Likewise, in 1790, the French visitor Wimpffen explained his shock at seeing poorly-run, miserable plantations whose owners had "pretensions to opulence driven by the most awful taste." To Wimpffen's horror, their carriages were pulled by horses or mules of differing colors and unequal height, with strings for ropes, a dirty harness, and a driver dressed in gold brocade but with bare feet.²⁰

Newspaper advertisements from the period attest to a local appreciation for French styles and goods. Tailors, dressmakers, hairdressers and wigmakers consistently emphasized their recent training in France, as well as their ability to dress or coiffe their clients in "the latest style" from France. Sieur Clavel, a women's hairdresser, advertised in the Port-au-Prince paper that he had been trained by the "Sieurs Votrun and Léonard, Hairdressers of the Queen." Promising to create hairstyles "in the best taste and with the art of the best hairdressers of Paris," he also offered to teach domestic servants how to do the same, following "the method of the best masters of Paris."²¹ Likewise, the Demoiselles Delasalle advertised themselves as having been "newly arrived from Paris,"

¹⁹ "De l'emploi que les habitants de Saint-Domingue font de leur revenus, Année 1764," in *Oeuvres choisies de F. G. Brueys d'Aigalliers* (Nîmes, 1805): 55-58, reprinted in Alexandre-Stanislas Wimpffen, baron de, *Haiti au XVIIIe Siècle: Richesse et Esclavage dans une Colonie Française*, ed. Pierre Pluchon (Paris: Karthala, 1993 [1797]), 291-292.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 172.

²¹ *Affiches Américaines*, 5 avril 1787.

a phrase used repeatedly in such ads. They added that they kept a store with “all sorts of fashions in the latest taste.” Their recent knowledge of metropolitan trends would make their goods more marketable, as well as their knowledge regarding fashion.²² Slaves, too, were occasionally marketed with the same advertising appeal: an unnamed male slave listed for sale in Port-au-Prince was described as “a young negro valet, good subject, wigmaker for men, and having done his apprenticeship in France to coiffe women.”²³ Services and commodities coming from the metropole were obviously in high demand in Saint Domingue, at least among the reading public that would have perused the local paper.

But the white creoles described by Wimpffen and Brueys d’Aigalliers had a taste for French goods without the finances or sense of style to carry off a French appearance. Driven by an irrational and uncontrollable desire for ostentation, these creoles were spending themselves into debt. Having accumulated some degree of wealth in the colony, they could not wait to travel to Paris and assert their new status. However, their attempts to mimic European finery were foiled by bad taste and, in some cases, their lack of wealth. Therefore, neither Brueys d’Aigalliers nor Wimpffen seemed much concerned with the symbolic anarchy that bothered French critics of metropolitan luxury consumption. The “false” wealth of the white creole, they seemed to argue, would be revealed by their botched attempts to display that wealth. Joan Dayan has interpreted this characterization of creole ostentation as a condescending French belief in the colonies as a site of barbarism and degeneration. For French observers of the colonies, she argues, “What is allowed, admired or unquestioned in Europe becomes ludicrous in the colonies.

²² *Supplément à la Feuille du Cap-Francois*, 26 mai 1787.

²³ *Affiches Américaines*, 9 décembre 1777.

The glories and refinements of the Old Regime, when practiced by those who did not inherit the right to do so, can be nothing but the worst kind of imitation, degraded and degrading. When does luxury become cheap?...Some answered: When Paris comes to Saint Domingue.”²⁴

Yet white colonists developed their own interpretation of colonial luxury consumption, one which pitted an inherently more modest white creole impulse to consume against old world ostentation. As noted in Chapter Two, Hilliard and Moreau saw colonial extravagance not as a “degraded” version of a metropolitan practice, but rather as an undesired import from the corrupt metropole. Both men blamed ostentatious consumption—understood as a practice antithetical to sociability and civic virtue—on the influx of coquettish French immigrants to Saint Domingue following the Seven Years’ War. But, in their estimation, Saint Domingue was not doomed to be inhabited by greedy whites incapable of controlling their desire for showy goods. Rather, white creoles could be Saint Domingue’s model consumers, promoting civic virtue as well as local economic growth through their tempered, responsible consumer habits.

Hilliard first articulated this vision, employing criticisms of luxury consumption elaborated by Diderot as well as anti-aristocratic rhetoric circulating in France. Like Diderot, who opposed “ostentatious luxury,” Hilliard attacked the “exterior luxury” of colonials whose buying habits were showy and pretentious, designed to attract the attention (and envy) of onlookers. Instead, he proposed that consumption should be driven less by vanity than by comfort. Such a practice of consumption would reveal a presumably more “natural” hierarchy based on one’s usefulness, since, his argument

²⁴ Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History and the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 172.

seems to imply, the most useful would always have the most to spend. Hilliard claimed to desire a social hierarchy among whites based solely on industry and public utility, one in which white men were distinguished by nothing other than “employment and personal merit.”²⁵ In other words, he opposed artificial social distinctions—like those between aristocrats and commoners—in favor of those occurring naturally as a result of one’s utility to the greater society. “Exterior luxury” is the outward sign of such artificial hierarchies, Hilliard suggests. The colony, however, could witness the reform of both.

Hilliard proposed a transformation of colonists’ consumption practices in order to establish a more virtuous and prosperous colony. One leg of this proposal involved curbing colonists’ spending on apparently frivolous luxury goods from France. Most luxury items were imported from France rather than being made locally, and Hilliard resented that colonists would spend money on those items, sending profit to France, when they could have been investing in local economic development: “One shouldn’t use for lace, diamonds, jewels, [and] precious metals, what is destined for the clearing of the soil.” He further complained that Le Cap, the largest colonial city, was home to “100 boutiques shining with gold and gems,” whose incomes removed significant sums from circulation, sums which could have contributed to colonial production.²⁶ Thus, colonists’ love of metropolitan goods resulted in a capital outflow to the metropole, just as Colbert had designed. But mercantilism benefited the metropole at the expense of its colonies, and Hilliard discouraged colonists from feeding that one-sided relationship.

²⁵ Michel-René Hilliard d'Auberteuil, *Considérations sur l'Etat Présent de la Colonie Francaise de Saint-Domingue*, 2 vols. (Paris: Chez Grangé, 1777), 2: 49.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 2: 103.

In addition to wishing that colonists would buy locally, Hilliard also wished that they buy more rationally. These themes came together in what he called “commodity luxury,” a practice that would not only fuel local economic growth but that would also prevent the exodus of wealthy colonists. Similar to Diderot’s “pragmatic luxury,” “commodity luxury” envisioned a society in which men were motivated by the desire to purchase items pleasing to themselves rather than to others; in other words, their purchases would be determined by comfort rather than vanity. For, the problem in Saint Domingue, as Hilliard saw it, was that men were too concerned with looking good themselves. In the colony, a “love of finery” reigned supreme and one’s priorities as a consumer were out of order. Colonists tended to spend vast sums on their own clothing while neglecting their homes. This problem, he surmised, stemmed from colonists’ tendency to view themselves as temporary residents of Saint Domingue; most planned to return to France in the near future, after making their fortunes. Therefore, they did not commit to improving their homes since their homes were not long-term investments: “...the man who wears 10,000 francs worth of clothing or jewels, lives almost always in an apartment without furniture and tapestries; he does not dare embellish the interior of his home; he fears becoming too attached to his own goods...he wants to be always prepared to depart.”²⁷ Furthermore, Hilliard claimed that another effect of the colony’s poor housing was its lack of sociability. People didn’t want to gather in the houses due to their poor construction and lack of furniture, and therefore they had no place to gather

²⁷ Ibid., 2: 105-106.

and see one another. This lack of social interaction, he claimed, had created an air of fear, sadness and distress.²⁸

In contrast to Saint Domingue was his ideal consumer society, one ruled by “commodity luxury.” In such a place, men would pay more attention to the upkeep and décor of their houses and their wives’ fashion than they would their own attire. Hilliard believed that this model of consumerism would make men more industrious, since their inspiration—comfort—was more rational than the inspiration of those striving for exterior luxury: vanity. Hilliard found evidence for his argument in the wealthy, happy, Dutch citizen, who, although “modest” in his own dress, constantly “embellishes...his wife and his home.” Nature seems to have rewarded his industry and rational lifestyle, Hilliard claims, by allowing him to enjoy what normally can be found only in other climates (perhaps tropical produce). Contrary to the type of luxury consumption in which Saint Domingue’s colonists engaged, the *luxe* of the Dutch man—Hilliard’s ideal consumer—is “the effect of true wealth, [and] it is approved of by reason.”²⁹ Rational living and “true wealth,” i.e., wealth produced by a useful profession, are pleasing to nature and therefore rewarded by nature.

Hilliard predicted a similar transformation in Saint Domingue once “exterior luxury” disappeared. While the colony’s houses would include “all sorts of comforts” due to the attentions of their owners, the garden would provide its own assortment of comforts brought about by the happy marriage of nature and human industry. In fact, Hilliard described this idyllic society as a sort of Eden guided by human hands, in which nature responds to the positive changes brought about by humans by helping to provide

²⁸ Ibid., 2: 107.

²⁹ Ibid., 2: 106-107.

for and protect them. Planted near the orange trees and citrons would be myrtle, whose branches would “intertwine to form cradles.” The water used to irrigate the fields in the countryside would serve other purposes as well. Presumably redirected by humans, this water would, Hilliard claimed, shoot up as high as the trees, only to settle in pools that would provide “delicious baths.” Changes would be apparent on the street, too.

Everywhere along “long avenues,” travelers could seek refuge from the hot sun by resting in caves and groves of trees.³⁰ Clearly, home improvements could bring about important transformations that would encourage industry, make the colony more appealing, thereby keep colonists from returning to the metropole. After all, what colonist would want to leave the paradise described above?

But Hilliard claimed that guaranteeing colonists’ desire to stay in the colony required not only fine furniture and tapestries—attractively attired wives were also necessary. For him, it was right and appropriate that women dress lavishly, that they possess a “love of finery.” He looked forward to a society founded on “commodity luxury” in which men would no longer feel the need to demonstrate their wealth on their own bodies and “objects of vain finery will be employed only to ornament women.”³¹ Why was women’s consumption of “vain finery” acceptable? Hilliard, following gendered fashion discourse emanating from France, portrayed lavish consumption by women as a natural attribute of their sex. By contrast, he suggests that colonial men who desired to be fashionable compromised their masculine identity—and their status as good citizens—by behaving like women. Selfishly concerned with their own appearance, they sacrificed the good of colonial society. They could have funneled their wealth into the

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2: 106.

³¹ *Ibid.*

cultivation of colonial land or the establishment of comfortable living spaces for families to inhabit and colonists to gather. Instead, they chose to waste it on luxury items imported from the metropole, thereby preventing the growth of colonial agriculture and colonial sociability. Furthermore, fashionable men masked their landless, parasitical status by covering their bodies with fancy dress. However, when women, especially wives, dressed ostentatiously, they plainly revealed the social status of their husbands. Hilliard seems to suggest that a wife's attire was a transparent symbol of her husband's wealth, since, after adorning his home, a man could not afford to dress his wife in such a way to feign a higher rank. However faulty his logic, it is significant that Hilliard had consumer expectations that differed by gender. Women's ostentation served a useful purpose by demarcating a man's "true" rank. But women's consumption served another purpose as well. Just as the home was intended to prevent white men's flight to France, well-dressed white wives were intended to prevent white men's flight to mulatto women. Thus by permitting white women their indulgence in fashion, Hilliard gives them an extra tool to help them compete with the *mulâtresse*.

Somewhat surprisingly, Hilliard extends his strategy for preventing "white flight" from the colony to the disciplining of male slaves. In particular, he advocated giving enslaved men wives as well as a taste of "*luxe*" in order to prevent them from running away. Such a strategy was most strongly recommended with slaves from the Congo, who, he claimed, were especially prone to maronnage. By creating material needs that could only be fulfilled on the plantation, and by allowing slave men to have families (whom they would presumably not want to leave), masters could ensure that slaves would stay put. But not only should masters "give them wives [and] encourage them to raise

livestock.” It was also important to “inspire in them the taste for a *luxe* proportionate to their condition.”³² Here again, consumption serves a practical end. As long as slaves consumed luxury goods in moderation, then luxury consumption would facilitate social stability. Ironically, while such slaves would acquire some independence, they were bound to the plantation (and thereby the master) in order to keep that independence. Nevertheless, Hilliard contended that such circumscribed self-sufficiency would permit nature to “free [the slave] from the yoke under which he was oppressed.” Hilliard does not seem to recognize the hypocrisy of his suggestion, viewing it as a more benevolent form of slavery. But put another way, his recommendation appears more insidious. By allowing slaves a limited ability to consume, masters give them the illusion of increased freedom while in fact making them even more dependent on their owner. After all, such “freedoms” could always be taken away.

For Hilliard, then, luxury consumption destabilized the colony when it was extravagant, but it signaled positive reforms when it was practiced according to the role one played in society. As long as consumption was determined by one’s sex, civil status, and one’s “rank”—which was in turn determined by one’s public utility—it promoted industry, local economic development, and domestic harmony. In short, fashion and luxury consumption could be useful tools to distinguish the most useful colonial citizens.

Coding Colonial Luxury Consumption

Hilliard articulated his idealized vision of white colonial consumption in 1776, but later colonial authors picked up on many of the same themes. Writing in the 1780’s, as

³² Ibid., 2: 60.

the Colonial Ministry reconsidered the role of the *gens de couleur*, and as tensions between the Ministry and white colonists mounted, these later white authors employed gendered fashion and luxury discourse to shape those debates. They wanted a clearly delineated colonial social hierarchy based on race and civil status, with whites on top and the enslaved on the bottom. And yet, they imagined a colonial society in which luxury would serve as an outward sign of civic virtue; in other words, a meritocratic society in which one's worth as a citizen could be read on one's exterior. But how to maintain a system of slavery and color prejudice while claiming meritocracy? What happens, for example, when outward signs of merit and public utility—i.e., fashion and luxury goods—reveal undesired hierarchies? What happens when people of color outdress whites? Some white colonial authors solved this dilemma by redefining the signifiers. By explaining colonial consumption in racialized ways, they sought to naturalize a hierarchy that regularly revealed itself as artificially imposed. In short, they suggested that the differentiated ways in which colonial residents consumed justified their position in the social hierarchy. By identifying and devaluing the consumption practices of people of color, they marked those people as their subordinates.

I. Creole Slave Consumption: Colonial Meritocracy and Enslaved Savagery

Surprising as it sounds to the modern reader, Saint Domingue's reputation for overconsumption extended to its enslaved population. Colonists and outside observers remarked on this practice, taking special note of slave fashion, particularly among creole slaves. White colonial elites, however, were careful to note the qualities specific to slave fashion; while a taste for fashion may have pervaded creole society more generally, whites maintained that slaves consumed in particular ways that revealed their inherent

savagery. Yet the fact that slaves had access to luxury items conveniently justified their claims that slaveholding in Saint Domingue was not nearly as brutal as metropolitans assumed.

Dubuisson was one such author, and his comments appeared in his book-length rebuttal of Hilliard's *Considérations*. Contesting Hilliard's suggestion that slaveowners should use *luxe* as a form of slave discipline, Dubuisson claimed that Saint Domingue's slaves already had the freedom to consume, without their owners' aid or encouragement. In particular, Dubuisson referred to the practices of enslaved artisans who worked independent of their masters, but who were obliged to pay their masters a monthly sum from their earnings. He explained that such slaves—usually carpenters or wigmakers—typically earned much more than they were required to pay out to their masters, some earning as much as 10 times their required monthly payment. One could easily recognize these well-paid artisans on the street by their fine dress, which they had acquired “at their own costs.”³³ Concerned with refuting Hilliard's negative portrayal of slaveowners in Saint Domingue, Dubuisson used the example of well-dressed slaves as evidence of the relative benevolence of the colonial slave regime. Here, fashion indicates individual skill and industry—it is a mark of merit, and Dubuisson's mention of it allows him to suggest that even in a slave society there is a path to social mobility and a system of signs to mark that mobility. In other words, Dubuisson's brief reference to slave fashion suggests a

³³ Pierre Ulric Dubuisson, *Nouvelles Considérations sur Saint-Domingue, en Réponse à Celles de M. H. D.*, 2 vols. (Paris: Chez Cellot et Jombert Fils jeune, Libraires, 1780), 1: 77. Skilled artisans were among the enslaved elite, but they were not the only slaves who earned an income from their labor. In the colony's towns, female street vendors paid their owners a monthly sum but lived and worked independently. David Geggus, "Slave and Free Colored Women in Saint Domingue," in *More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas*, ed. David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 262.

society in which distinctions are based on merit rather than inherited privilege—exactly the type of egalitarian, transparent society Hilliard claimed to value.

Moreau came to similar conclusions in the *Description*. His portrayal of the dress of creole slaves critiqued their ostentation and wastefulness as products of “*coquetterie*.” What is perhaps most striking about Moreau’s portrayal of slave dress is the degree of choice he ascribed to slaves. Although he noted varying “degrees of luxe” among creole slaves, he claimed that as long as a slave was the least bit industrious, he generally owned “several” changes of clothes.³⁴ In other words, hard work paid off in the colonies, even for slaves.

He explained that the typical attire for enslaved creole men was simple yet subject to a great deal of embellishment. Male slaves were outfitted with a shirt and culotte, either long or short. The shirt and culotte may have been cut from the same or from different fabrics, an important and well thought-out decision made by creole slaves, according to Moreau. On special occasions, including Sundays and holidays, these men typically wore a white shirt and culotte. They could further express their taste for fashion by shirt details, including variations in the collar, cuffs, and shoulders. Other dress variations might include a hat, “plus ou moins beau,” a vest, and, only occasionally, shoes. Another favorite accessory among creole slave men was the handkerchief, worn on their heads, around the neck, and in their pockets.³⁵

Although these men spent great sums on these accessories, and on their clothing in general, Moreau considered the cumulative effect of this assemblage of handkerchiefs

³⁴ Méderic-Louis-Elie Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l’Isle Saint-Domingue*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: 1797), 1: 58-59.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1: 59.

to be overkill. He described the enslaved men who dressed this way as “*très-petit-maître*,” suggesting pretension and arrogance.³⁶ In the *Encyclopédie*, Diderot explained the term “*petit-maître*” as a “Name given to young men madly in love with themselves, conceited in their speech, affected in their manners, and elaborate in their attire. Someone has defined the *petit-maître* as an insignificant insect distinguished by its ephemeral beauty who flits about waving its powdery wings.”³⁷ By choosing this term, Moreau clearly intended to denigrate male creole slaves in multiple ways. First, although he emphasized the great effort expended by these men to dress well, Moreau mocked the results. They appear to be trying too hard to be fashionable, attempting to hide their lowly status with extra kerchiefs.

Their ostentatious dress also seems to be an attempt to mask their barbarity. However, Moreau’s account suggests to the reader that these men’s efforts to hide their true, uncivilized selves are doomed. For, their poverty, and their animal-like nature, is betrayed by another characteristic remarked upon by Moreau: these men are typically shoeless, and more importantly, they are particularly adept at using their bare feet to pick up objects from the ground. Framed as a compliment, this passing observation undermined any threat of symbolic anarchy their fancy clothes could have caused. Moreau made clear his intent: while they can put on airs and put on clothes, slaves’ animal instincts will give them away. Of course, Moreau’s description of male creole slave fashion also has the effect of feminizing them. Of all the colonial men he describes, Moreau addresses enslaved creole men’s dress in the most detail, taking great pain to

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Quoted in Philippe Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie: A History of Clothing in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Richard Bienvenu (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 200, n. 15.

note the tremendous effort and forethought these men put into their clothing. But in the end, they appear as fops, irrationally spending large sums of money on luxury goods, intent on the study of fabrics, collars and hats.

Enslaved creole women topped the men in terms of extravagance and waste, according to Moreau. Typically attired in a shirt, a skirt and a handkerchief around the head, their dress was “susceptible” to many “nuances.” In particular, their skirts could be made with diverse qualities of fabrics, ranging from courser fabrics from Brittany and typically used for window dressings, to the lighter and more sheer batistes from Flanders. The handkerchief was a versatile accessory for these women, serving “every caprice” whether beautiful or “bizarre,” simple or complex. Scarves were used most complexly in the hair. Hairstyles “sometimes required ten or twelve handkerchiefs successively placed one atop the other, forming an enormous bonnet” that was quite heavy and resembled the large vases slaves used to transport water on their heads.³⁸ Moreau described these handkerchiefs as a “luxury” that cost a demi-louis each. Furthermore, he claimed, the scarf at the bottom of this arrangement would need to be replaced after eight days, presumably having been crushed from the others. He claimed that these women would also match their neck scarves and pocket scarves to the ones worn around the head, for the sake of “elegance,” thus raising the expense even more. The younger *négresses*, however, would forego the neck scarf in order to better reveal their “lovely shape.”³⁹ Other accessories employed by these women included “beautiful” gold earrings, gold and garnet necklaces, and gold rings. Also, Moreau describes hats of “white or black beaver,”

³⁸ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 59.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1: 60.

sometimes detailed with silk or gold to “suggest a *ton plus élevé*,” as well as corsets, *casaquin* jackets “in the style of white women,” leather mules (shoes) and even stockings.⁴⁰

While on the one hand Moreau details the quality and beauty of the creole slave’s clothing and accessories, he is ultimately critical of what he views as overconsumption. Emphasizing the frivolity of the women, he remarks that “one would hardly believe the point to which a *négresse*’s expenses can go;....She can never have too many handkerchiefs or negligees.”⁴¹ His explanation serves two ends. First, as with Dubuisson’s comment, Moreau’s detailed description of fine fabrics, multiple jewels and kerchiefs suggests to his readers that the slave system is rather benign. How brutal could colonial slavery be if the enslaved could afford to be *fashionable*? How tyrannical could white slaveowners be if they allowed their slaves such a degree of independence? Moreover, Moreau’s portrayal presents an image of excessive consumption against which white creole consumption can appear moderate. If the urge to consume was amplified in the colony, people of color—here, enslaved people of color—were the worst offenders.

Yet unlike his description of enslaved men’s fashion, Moreau presents no criticisms of enslaved women’s sense of style. Enslaved women seem to be more skilled at arranging their clothing, a skill that would make them more likely to pass as free women and therefore more dangerous than the men. Thus, in Moreau’s account, the

⁴⁰ Ibid. In France, the *casaquin* jacket featured box pleats in the back, came to mid-thigh, and could be either fitted or loose in the front. Moreau may have confused the *casaquin* with the more common *caraco* jacket, which was fitted to the body, had tight sleeves, and flared at the hips. The *caraco* was traditionally worn by French working women who no doubt preferred it to garments with loose-fitting sleeves that might get in the way of their labor. See Crowston, *Fabricating Women: The Seamstresses of Old Regime France, 1675-1791*, 43.

⁴¹ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l’Isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 60.

fashionable attire of enslaved women becomes a symbol of duplicity and cunning as well as prostitution and moral corruption. Moreau remarked that because creole slave women loved clothing, they commonly fooled prospective lovers into indulging their taste for fashion. “How many of them know, by a studied trick, to inspire the hope of credulous lovers, already duped for a long time, until they realize that their presents will acquire for them no rights!” He claimed to have seen slave women who had “nearly a hundred negligees...[worth] at least two thousand French écus.”⁴² Once again, by portraying enslaved women as conniving agents able to lead on naive white men, Moreau conveniently erased the power imbalance that largely determined relations between white men and enslaved women, making colonial social relations appear to hinge on desire rather than force.⁴³ In reality, white men did not need to “acquire” rights to enslaved women’s bodies by giving gifts; those bodies were theirs for the taking, lacking virtually any legal or physical protection from rape and assault. Of course, some enslaved women probably did use their sexuality to acquire favors, material goods, and even freedom, from free men. But by attributing to creole slaves a desire for clothing, a desire that is fulfilled by white men, Moreau makes their use as sexual objects seem like a more even exchange.

II. The Gens de Couleur and Luxury Consumption: Emasculation and Sexual Immorality

According to most observers, no one had more of a passion for fashion and luxury consumption than the free people of color, especially the “mixed” people of color. The

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Doris Garraway has argued this point convincingly. Doris Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), Chapter Four.

link between fashion and free people of color, particularly the *mulâtresse*, was a trope that circulated throughout the Atlantic world.

Engravings and paintings from the late-eighteenth century attest to Europeans' fascination with these women and their luxurious wardrobes. The two images discussed here, figures 1 and 2, have titles indicating that the scenes they depict were set in Saint Domingue. Although they served as illustrations for Moreau's *Description*, these engravings were derived from a series of paintings set in Dominica and Barbados. When first painted by the Italian Agostino Brunias in the 1770s, these images had slightly different names: "Free Natives of Dominica," and "The West India Flower Girl." Yet the figures depicted in them were duplicated by etching to represent Saint Domingue. The images' ability to represent multiple Caribbean sites suggests the universality of the link between fashion and free people of color.

In figure 1, entitled "*Affranchis des Colonies*," or "Freedpeople of the Colonies," two free women of color stand alongside a free man of color in a tropical setting. All three are elaborately dressed. The man, leaning against a long, slim walking stick—a status symbol all on its own—wears a striped jacket and matching headpiece. A white, high-collared shirt with trimmed sleeves peeks out from the jacket, adding to his refinement. Completing his outfit are culottes, white stockings and shoes with buckles, all of which would mark one as a member of the upper ranks of society. Brunias has posed this free man of color so that he holds his hat off to his side in a delicate gesture, slightly pointing the toe of his outside foot. In sum, this man is boldly and ostentatiously dressed, both arrogant and effeminate in manner: a fop. The two women next to him are equally elegant in long skirts (one of which is solid, and one a striped pattern), shirts with

ruffled sleeves, and $\frac{3}{4}$ sleeved, fitted jackets. At least one of these women wears an elaborate, turban-like head covering, and the other sports a wide-brimmed hat which appears to be perched atop her own arrangement of scarves. Both women wear chokers and perhaps earrings (these are clear in the original painting but less so in the engraving), and both carry handkerchiefs.

Similarly attired women appear in figure 2, “Clothing of Freedpeople and Slaves in the Colonies (*Costumes des Affranchies et des Esclaves des Colonies*).” In this scene, two light-skinned women of color buy flowers from another woman with darker skin, perhaps a slave, whose back is to the viewer. Smelling a flower offered to her by the market woman, the woman on the left sports the same tilted hat featured in the previous image, and her shirt, skirt and bodice look quite similar as well. Her companion wears what appears to be an elaborate wig pulled to the top of her head with a ribbon, along with a boldly striped skirt. In the original painting it is clear that both of these women are wearing shoes, as was the case in figure 1. The market woman’s pose, along with her clothing, seem designed to draw attention to her lighter-skinned and better dressed customers, although the market woman’s dress is rather detailed as well. Her shirt does not seem to have a bodice and therefore is loose, unlike the other women’s more fitted outfits. Her skirt is striped, and she wears a scarf around her shoulders with a bold checked pattern, known as madras. Her headscarf bears the same checked pattern, making her ensemble much louder than the clothing worn by the other two. Clearly, her status as a working woman was revealed in her fashion, particularly the lack of bodice or jacket and the bolder fabric.

Figure 1: “Affranchis des Colonies”



Source: Nicolas Ponce, *Recueil des Vues des Lieux Principaux de la Colonie Française de Saint Domingue* (Paris, 1795): plate 26.
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Figure 2: “Costumes des Affranchies et des Esclaves des Colonies”



Source: Nicolas Ponce, *Recueil des Vues des Lieux Principaux de la Colonie Française de Saint Domingue* (Paris, 1795): plate 25.

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The ease with which these images were used to represent multiple Caribbean colonies reveals that colonial people throughout the new world constructed categories of race and citizenship through practices of fashion and luxury consumption. Indeed, the luxury consumption of colonists, and non-whites in particular, symbolized moral and political corruption not only in the Caribbean but also in eighteenth-century Lima, Mexico City, and Cartagena.⁴⁴ Certainly the mulata image translated rather easily in the Atlantic World by the end of the eighteenth century. Still, there is reason to believe that Brunias' images are of the French Caribbean in particular, rather than representing more generic Caribbean tropes. Brunias lived and painted on the island of Dominica, which had a very strong French influence due to its founding by French migrants from Martinique and Guadeloupe and its political control by France until 1763.⁴⁵ Further, given France's growing reputation as the home to fashion and luxury goods, it makes sense that Brunias would mark his colonial subjects with fashionable clothing in order to indicate their Frenchness. For Brunias and many other observers of Caribbean colonial society, the concerted consumption of luxury goods and fashion in particular was a characteristic of French creoles of all colors, but of French creole *gens de couleur* in particular.

Similar images appeared in commentary by colonists and European visitors. For some, luxury consumption by free people of color indicated the colony's evolution toward a more civilized society, or, it was an aesthetically pleasing characteristic aspect of the colonial scenery. Their attention focused primarily on the *mulâtresse*. Free

⁴⁴ Rebecca Earle, "Luxury, Clothing and Race in Colonial Spanish America," in *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Maxine Berg (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 219-222.

⁴⁵ Kay Dian Kriz, "Marketing Mulatresses in the Paintings of Agostino Brunias," in *The Global Eighteenth Century*, ed. Felicity Nussbaum (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 198.

mulâtresses possessed the reputation as the most stylish colonial inhabitants. Able to arrange their clothing, jewelry, hats and scarves in flattering, ostentatious, and sometimes outrageous outfits, the stereotypical *mulâtresse* was at the center of the colonial gaze in part due to her fashion sense. At least one colonist understood *mulâtresse* fashion in a positive light. In 1769 a debate appeared in the local newspaper, the *Affiches Américaines*, over the possibility of an Academic society being established in Saint Domingue. An opponent of the idea maintained that an Academic society would never succeed in the colony since its residents were concerned with making quick fortunes rather than intellectual endeavors. However, the planter who proposed the idea, G. Lerond, maintained that the colony was no longer an unrefined outpost of profit-hungry adventurers. He suggested that proof of the colony's transformation could be found in its artistic and social life as well as its elegant dress: "...all tastes are found there today: plays, concerts, libraries, sumptuous parties where gaiety and wit oppose tiresome boredom. What an elegant reform for women! Pirates have given way to *petits-mâîtres* with embroidered velvet jackets, and fancy dressing is so common it has passed to the *mulâtresse*."⁴⁶ Thus, the fact that women of color dressed fashionably signified for this planter a new degree of civilization in the colony, one that prepared it to engage in intellectual pursuits. Similarly, Kay Dian Kriz argues that Brunias' portrayal of mulatta women served to convince his British audiences that West Indian colonies were civilized and ready for commercial development. Images of confident, well-dressed mulatto

⁴⁶ *Affiches Américaines, Avis du Cap*, 8 mars 1769; cited in Jean Fouchard, *Plaisirs de Saint Domingue: Notes sur la Vie Sociale, Littéraire et Artistique* (Port-au-Prince: Editions Henri Deschamps, 1988), 36.

women were designed to downplay the violence of the slave economy, and instead served as “a sign of a developing civilization at the rudest margins of empire.”⁴⁷

European visitors to the colony found much to admire in *mulâtresse* fashion sense. The French Baron de Wimpffen remarked that *mulâtresses* “love *le luxe*” since it allowed them to show off their beauty. And although he referred to these women as “lazy,” he admired the great care with which they attired themselves. Wrapping their heads in kerchiefs *des Indes*, *mulâtresses* were the envy of European women who tried (unsuccessfully) to imitate them. European women did not realize, explained Wimpffen, that the vibrant colors of such fabrics complimented the dark skin of the *mulâtresses* much more than that of whites. Wimpffen also praised *mulâtresses*’ taste in fabric, and in the jewels they wore. He noted that these women typically wore earrings of pure gold or gold enamel. Furthermore, not only were they skilled at dressing, but they were also skilled seamstresses. Those who made the effort to market their skill were virtually guaranteed to “make a fortune” for, although they needed “an entire month to sew a shirt,” it would be sewn to “perfection.”⁴⁸

But not everyone viewed pronounced luxury consumption as an innocuous or charming characteristic of the French *gens de couleur*. Although Lerond and Wimpffen saw little harm in the desire for fashion of free women of color, and while Brunias portrayed their stylish dress as an aesthetically pleasing colonial attribute, white colonial elites thought differently as the free population of color grew. By the late 1770’s, free colored fashion and luxury consumption was portrayed as an almost unnatural desire that corroded colonial morality and threatened the social order. Understood as “arrogant”

⁴⁷ Kriz, "Marketing Mulatresses in the Paintings of Agostino Brunias," 210.

⁴⁸ Wimpffen, *Haiti au XVIIIe Siècle: Richesse et Esclavage dans une Colonie Française*, 121.

attempts to feign (or reach) elite social status, the clothing, jewelry and accessories of the free people of color rankled white colonists whose demographic dominance among the free population was slipping. As a result, descriptions of their consumer practices are edged with disdain and moral approbation. Free colored luxury consumption signified a lack of civic and sexual virtue.

Speaking of the men, Moreau claimed that “The mulatto loves finery: jackets, pants [made from] fine fabric, refurbished hats, and headscarves and neck scarves are very dear to him.” He noted that on special occasions, free men of color added the distinctive elements of stockings and a coat. Thus, their attire resembled that of the slaves, if a bit more refined. European style pants, jackets and stockings were complemented by an assemblage of kerchiefs, the Caribbean staple. But free men of color were marked by not only their clothing but also their carriage: Moreau claimed that they always had a certain “grace and elegance,” however they were dressed.⁴⁹

Like the engravings that accompanied his descriptions of the gens de couleur, Moreau’s characterization of mulatto men’s fashion sense is complimentary yet coded. For, while they dressed well, pulling off a truly creole style that mixed pieces used by the French and the enslaved, the extent to which they cared for fashion revealed their effeminacy. These were not the civic-minded, soberly dressed good citizens described by Hilliard or by Rousseau; rather they were fops. Moreover, Moreau detracts from their sophisticated sense of style just as he undermined the fashionability of enslaved men. Depicting mulatto soldiers on whom the colony depended to track down escaped slaves, he praised their ability to climb and descend the colony’s rocky terrain with ease. But

⁴⁹ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l’Isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 91.

they could do so only once they took off their shoes and make use of their bare feet, just like the enslaved.⁵⁰ Ultimately, then, under all the finery, *hommes de couleur* retained their savagery.

For Moreau, however, no colonial resident had a greater passion for fashion than the *mulâtresse*.

[T]he most beautiful products of India, the most precious muslin, in scarves and in fabrics and cloth take fashionable form to embellish this colored sex. Rich thread, jewels whose number more than the type increase their value, are employed with profusion; and the desire for these costly things is so insatiable that one can see a rather large number of *Mulâtresses* in Saint Domingue who could change all of their clothes every day of the year.⁵¹

Moreau's portrayal gave the *mulâtresse* a backhanded compliment. While the fabrics and accessories are "beautiful" and arranged "fashionably," the jewels are cheap, and too many are worn at one time. Like the white creoles depicted by Wimpffen and other European visitors, and like the enslaved creoles described by Moreau, these women could not quite pull off successful emulation of elite dress. Their ostentation, rather than revealing wealth, reveals bad taste.

But it also revealed their sexual improprieties. The *mulâtresse*, as portrayed by Moreau, voraciously consumed fabrics, jewelry and men, and their "insatiable" appetites for each were interrelated. Like the enslaved creole women described earlier, they could afford to be wasteful because their male lovers provided them with a steady stream of gifts. Thus, although the *mulâtresse* tended to be a talented seamstress, she rarely bothered to mend a worn garment since "her pride tells her that it must be replaced with another, and she knows well how she acquired the first..." In other words, she would

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 1: 93.

rather prostitute herself to obtain new garments than mend the old. Accordingly, one could know at what point of her life a *mulâtresse* began to take on lovers, because it was at that moment that she began to consume ostentatiously. As Moreau explained, "...her favored lover adorns his conquest, and...this luxury signifies a new loss for virtue."⁵² Thus, while fashionable attire was a symbol of cunning and duplicity when worn by enslaved women, it also symbolized sexual immorality (or "lost virtue") when worn by the *mulâtresse*.

Dubuisson similarly linked *mulâtresse* fashion with duplicity and sexual immorality. Recalling an attempt by one Procureur General in Cap impose sumptuary regulations on women of color who worked as prostitutes, Dubuisson praised the magistrate's act as "an effort in favor of morality." However, in the end, merchant interests trumped those of "honesty," "decency," and "virtue," and fine fabrics and threads continued to be sold without restriction to these women. Thus, Dubuisson lamented, a large number of young white men continued to pay "the insane expenses expected of them by insatiable girls..., who seek, through their finery, to enhance the darkened charms of their picturesque faces."⁵³ Thus, like Moreau, Dubuisson associated the fashion of free women of color with not only their easy virtue, but also with the fleecing of white men.

III. White Creole Fashion: Transparency and Civic Virtue

For European visitors to the colony, the white creole woman regularly failed to outdress more fashionable *mulâtresse*. Furthermore, they often considered her morality

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Dubuisson, *Nouvelles Considérations sur Saint-Domingue, en Réponse à Celles de M. H. D.*, 2: 37. Debbasch dates this failed attempt to "around 1775." Yvan Debbasch, *Couleur et Liberté: Le Jeu du Critère Ethnique dans un Ordre Juridique Esclavagiste* (Paris: Librairie Dalloz, 1967), 96.

as flawed as her sense of style. The stereotypical white creole woman was “languid” and licentious, and her mode of dress made her appear ready to sleep or seduce. Wimpffen was scandalized by the revealing clothing of white creole women, fearing the effect their almost-bare bodies had on creole children. Typically dressed in one single skirt and a thin dressing gown made of muslin, these women wore “just what is necessary to hide one’s nudity, without hiding one’s shape at all.” However, in Wimpffen’s eyes, even when these women tried to dress more formally, their attempts were hardly worth the effort. Adding to this simple outfit a colored taffeta skirt and a corset was the first step to a more formal look. But if they added other pieces of clothing to improve the outfit, “too bad for them,” since “they are certainly not the prettiest.” (The “prettiest,” one assumes, can only be the *mulâtresse*.) Wimpffen claimed that creole women’s attempts to apply makeup were similarly pointless, since it was only a matter of time before the heat melted away even the most expertly made-up face. According to him, the white creole woman could overcome neither the obstacles posed by the tropical climate nor the competition posed by the *mulâtresse*.⁵⁴

Moreau, by contrast, presented a much more complimentary portrait of white creole women’s fashion, praising what Wimpffen critiqued in order to highlight their adherence to natural gender roles. Contrary to Wimpffen, Moreau portrayed white creole women’s *toilette* as a cache of “delicate resources” from which these women drew to highlight their natural beauty. Employing such resources with “exquisite taste,” white creole women’s appearance was therefore utterly true and honest—they presented not a false version of themselves but rather an enhanced version. Likewise, Moreau contended

⁵⁴ Wimpffen, *Haiti au XVIIIe Siècle: Richesse et Esclavage dans une Colonie Française*, 229.

that their clothing was appropriate for life in a tropical climate. Whereas Wimpffen criticized the thinness of their daily dress for what it revealed, Moreau praised their choice of sensible yet seductive clothing: “Dressed with a lightness that the climate expects,” white creole women were able to move freely since they were unrestricted by heavier garments. The effect, Moreau claimed, was to render their nonchalant way of moving all the more sensual and seductive.⁵⁵ Thus Moreau, the white creole champion of white creole society, paints a much more complementary portrait of these women than did Wimpffen by emphasizing natural beauty and a tempered sexuality. Whereas the *mulatresse*'s beauty was artificially enhanced by excessive jewelry and ostentatious clothing, the white creole woman's dress was natural: determined by the climate, accentuating her natural shape, and still appealing to men.

Moreau's description of white creole women's beauty reveals the influence of Rousseauian criticisms of fashion. Rousseau wrote that girls and women were coquettes by nature; they loved finery and they constantly sought the praise and admiration of others by making themselves attractive. Their desire to be attractive was a necessary trait, he claimed, in order to maintain the attention of men. However, Rousseau complained that women and girls often became overly concerned with their appearance, taking it too far, and ultimately masking or contorting their natural attributes. In particular, he criticized women's use of accoutrements that altered the shape of their bodies, such as whalebone corsets which “distort rather than display their figures.” Rousseau considered these fashions to be deceitful since they gave a false impression of a woman's actual body, but he also objected to them on aesthetic grounds. Such tools created bodies that

⁵⁵ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 18.

were all out of proportion by compressing women's waists to unnaturally small sizes, creating what Rousseau perceived to be a distasteful shape. Further, they made the wearer uncomfortable and restricted her movement. In fact, Rousseau predicted that societies in which such corsets were widely used, such as England, would eventually witness the birth of "a degenerate race."⁵⁶ Thus, fashion that distorted one's natural attributes was not only dishonest; it could be detrimental to the physical health of the nation. By contrast, he advocated a different style of dress, one modeled on the loose, flowing garments worn by Ancient Greeks and Romans. He argued that their robes had allowed the body to move and grow freely, maintaining a natural proportion more pleasing to the eye, as demonstrated by the bodies portrayed in ancient statues. Furthermore, while praising Greek women for their virtue and their devotion to family, Rousseau linked their dress to their capacity as mothers of vigorous male citizens, claiming that they "gave birth to the healthiest, strongest, and best proportioned men who ever lived...."⁵⁷ For Rousseau, then, women's concern for dress had significance for the home and society at large. When women employed it well, their concern for fashion had the ability to encourage domestic harmony and the reproduction of citizens.

Thus, Rousseau argued that it was right for women to want to make themselves beautiful, and that nature had made them "coquettes" so that men would desire them. But he distinguished between appropriate and inappropriate attempts to enhance one's beauty by contrasting a use of finery that followed the model and law of nature with one that attempted to override nature and deceive men. Moreau's portrayal of the colony's women uses Rousseau's distinction to highlight the femininity of white creole women.

⁵⁶ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. Barbara Foxley (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1974), 330.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

White creole women dressed simply, in clothing that allowed for easy movement and revealed their bodies' true shape; their dress was not deceptive or distorted. Yet, it still aroused the desire of men, in keeping with the natural sexual order prescribed by Rousseau, permitting these women to exercise their gendered role as wives and mothers.

As importantly, Moreau makes no mention of white creole men's dress. Indeed, in the section devoted to describing white creole men, he noted only one particular luxury item that they pursued: fast horses. An impatient and proud bunch, white creole men instructed their drivers to race down the colony's roads so that no other carriage would pass theirs.⁵⁸ Given the degree of attention Moreau paid to the dress of free and enslaved people of color and white creole women, this omission is significant. Of all colonial creoles, white creole men appear least concerned with dress and fashion. More than any other creole men, they adhere to the gendered fashion prescriptions of both Rousseau and Hilliard, leaving fashionable attire for women and less masculine, less virtuous men. White creole men's lack of interest in fashion makes them the best colonial male citizens, in Moreau's estimation.

White colonists like Hilliard, Moreau, and Dubuisson used gender, class and race to redefine and revalue practices of luxury consumption in an attempt to gain control over the shifting sand of Saint Domingue's social order. Among the luxuries available in the colony, they gave special attention to fashion, as it posed the greatest challenge to the visual social order. Relative to other status symbols such as carriages or slaves, clothing and jewelry were relatively easily acquired. Furthermore, as we have seen, eighteenth century critics of fashion lamented its ability to mask the self and project a false image.

⁵⁸ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 17.

Moreover, colonial inhabitants were universally known to indulge in fashionable consumption. By describing colonial consumption in terms of gender, class and race, that is, by identifying practices of consumption with aristocratic, non-noble, masculine, feminine, black, white or “mixed” behavior, white colonial elites were able to construct a hierarchy of consumption. They attached moral weight to those practices which then allowed white elites to claim moral superiority within the colony.

Colonial Women, Fashion and Resistance

Thus far we have noted that luxury consumption was becoming a gendered, racialized activity in the colony. White male colonists and colonial administrators labeled certain practices of consumption as immoral, as symbols of compromised virtue and devious intentions when practiced by women. Moreover, as we have seen in the observations of Hilliard, Moreau, and Brunias, when men consumed luxury goods excessively, especially fashion, they were marked as arrogant yet feminine. Because fashion was increasingly defined as a feminine, frivolous, irrational concern, its practitioners were deemed irrational. But reason, philosophes argued, was the foundational characteristic for good citizenship. Therefore, ostentatious fashion marked a man as lacking the capacity to act as a good citizen; Hilliard desired that white men behave as rational consumers for that reason, and Moreau emphasized the irrational consumption of men of color to demonstrate their incapacity for citizenship. Furthermore, for colonists like Hilliard who were concerned with boosting the local economy, being a good citizen of Saint Domingue also meant avoiding the consumption of French luxury items, directing investment to local economic development instead. But

women, too, participated in the creation of this gendered, moralizing discourse on luxury consumption. Some white women emphasized moral distinctions between themselves and women of color through fashion. In doing so, these women worked to police distinctions of color while constructing a more positive image of white creole femininity.

In June of 1783, a woman identified as Dame Durrect, a merchant (*marchande*) in the town of Fort-Dauphin, appealed a decision made by the *Procureur du Roi*, or chief prosecutor, in that town. As the highest court in the northern province of Saint Domingue, the *Conseil du Cap* heard her appeal. What remains today is a rough draft of the appeal.⁵⁹

It seems that the Dame Durrect, whom we can assume was white since she was addressed with the title “Dame,” had been a respected shopkeeper in the town for some ten years. It is possible that she was a fashion merchant, a *marchande de modes*, and also occasionally worked as a seamstress. According to the notes, the incident provoking the appeal began when another woman hired Dame Durrect to sew some kind of trim for a negligee or dressing gown (“*un garniture de deshabilité à coudre*”). The customer, named Suzette, is identified as a former slave and *mulâtresse*, freed by one M. Bosquet de Frédent, a lieutenant judge in the local lower court. Elsewhere in the document she is referred to as “the *mulâtresse* of Monsieur Bosquet,” suggesting that she continued to live with Bosquet, probably in a relationship considered “concubinage.”

When Suzette attempted to pick up the *garniture* from Durrect on June 14, Durrect refused to give it to her on the grounds that Suzette owed money for past purchases. Durrect insisted that she would not give Suzette the *garniture* until Suzette

⁵⁹ “Arret du Conseil du Cap Touchant l’Autorité du Procureur du Roi, en matiere de police du 18 juin 1783,” CAOM F/3/276 fol. 103-109.

paid the approximately 80 *livres* she owed. But Suzette would not be discouraged. The notes state that Suzette sent others in her place in order to recover the garment. First, she sent a black enslaved woman who claimed to be retrieving the garment at the behest of her white female owner, Dame Préfontaine. When Durrect still refused, Suzette herself returned, this time arguing that the garment belonged to a white woman, Dame Massé, and that she would deliver it to her. Durrect still would not hand over the garment, so Suzette complained to the *Sénéchal*, the lead judge in Fort Dauphin's lower court. Unsuccessful, she appealed to the chief prosecutor, the *Procureur du Roi*. He took Suzette's side in the matter by issuing a directive to Durrect, ordering that she return the *garniture* as soon as possible since it belonged to Dame Massé, who, he argued, should not be deprived of her property because of the dispute between Durrect and Suzette. But rather than hand over the garniture, Durrect appealed to the bailiff (who was supposed to be the intermediary recipient of the garniture) to convey to the *Procureur du Roi* that she would happily give the garniture to Suzette if he only forced Suzette to pay her debt. Instead, the *Procureur du Roi* ordered that a member of the local police force be installed "in garrison" at the home of Durrect, until she adhered to the earlier order requiring that she turn over the garniture. Suzette hand delivered this order—promptly—to the *maréchaussée*, where it was quickly executed, by 12:30 of the same day, in fact.

Meanwhile, according to the notes, Durrect learned that Dame Massé was in fact the owner of the garniture, so Durrect had it sent to her right away. Suzette did not report the return of the garniture as promptly as she had delivered the order to garrison Durrect's home, and as a result the garrison remained. Durrect appealed to the *Senechal* the next day, but the Fort Dauphin magistrates dragged their feet, only granting an order

to lift the garrison on the morning of Monday, June 16. However, for the order to be executed she was asked to pay six *livres* for each day the garrison was in place, a fine that she found “unjust and contrary to the law.” Therefore the garrison remained in place, and at that point Durrect appealed to the *Conseil du Cap* to have the garrison lifted along with the fines. Thus, at the end of this appeal, Durrect requested the removal of the garrison, suggesting that it be used instead against Suzette, who should be required to pay the fine since she had “provoked the order” to begin with.. Based on these notes, the Conseil du Cap “dismissed the appellant of the remainder of costs of the conclusion of her petition.” Therefore, Durrect did not have to pay the fine, and we can therefore assume that the garrison was indeed removed.

There is much we don't know about this case. We have only Durrect's side of the story as it was conveyed by the prosecutor on June 16, 1783. However, the way Durrect framed her story tells us quite a bit. The two main characters—herself and Suzette—are juxtaposed early on. Durrect is the hard-working, down-on-her luck yet honest shopkeeper appealing to the court's commitment to justice, and Suzette is the conniving, audacious, immoral, concubine. Durrect established this dichotomy immediately, by describing herself as having been a merchant in Fort Dauphin for 10 years, enjoying the respect of the local community for her work and having never strayed “from the principles that make a commendable citizen and especially a woman.” Lately, though, business had slowed, forcing her take in work from *gens de couleur* clients. Thus, she agreed to sew the garniture for Suzette, but only out of the greatest need. It seems likely that Durrect's respectability as a shopkeeper rested in part on upholding informal

sumptuary restrictions. Expected to discourage luxury consumption among the *gens de couleur*, Durrect claimed to limit herself to white customers when possible.

Suzette's status as a *mulâtresse affranchie* is emphasized early in the appeal as well, as is her relationship to Bosquet. Simply referring to her as having been freed by Bosquet, and then calling her "Bosquet's *mulâtresse*," would have indicated quite clearly that Suzette was a kept woman, and therefore morally compromised. But as if that point weren't clear enough, Durrect added some colorful detail to Suzette's character sketch. In the midst of explaining Suzette's outstanding debts, Durrect adds "parenthetically" that Suzette was single-handedly responsible for the publication of sumptuary laws in Fort Dauphin. Suzette's "insolent luxe and impudence were taken to such a point around last year's Easter celebration" that she forced the local police to publish the regulations restricting the luxury consumption of free people of color. In particular, Durrect notes that Suzette offended women (*Dames*) at church with her elaborate hairstyle, which contained both false hair and feathers. Thus Suzette, as portrayed by Durrect, offended morality in many ways. First, she prostituted herself to gain her freedom, and now, to buy her clothing. Yet this arrangement was not paying for her need to be fashionable, as evidenced by her debt. Furthermore, the disputed clothing only added to the stereotypical vision of the *mulâtresse*: she had hired Durrect to repair, or further ornament, not a dress or a skirt or even a hat, but a negligee. Moreover, Suzette had a reputation in town for having flaunted her stylishness on Easter, a sacred day, and she did so amongst a congregation that perhaps desired subordination from the *gens de couleur*.

And ultimately, Suzette is also quite powerful. Her sexuality had granted not only her freedom, but also an entrée into the circles of judicial and police power in Fort

Dauphin. Her relationship with the Lieutenant du Siège certainly influenced her early success with the Procureur du Roi in Fort Dauphin. But her relationship with Bosquet is not the sole source of her power; she is also quite assertive, and, if we are to believe Durrect's account, quite cunning. Durrect claimed that Suzette created several different explanations of the garniture's ownership in her attempt to avoid paying her debt. When Suzette's initial attempts to reclaim the garniture failed, she appealed to multiple colonial officials until she was successful.

Yet Durrect was no shrinking violet either. She refused to adhere to the Procureur du Roi's initial order, indicating that she would keep the garniture until the Procureur forced Suzette to pay her debt. When the Fort Dauphin officials ordered that she pay for the cost of the garrison before they would remove it, she did not hesitate to appeal to the highest court in the province, the Conseil du Cap. Furthermore, while her appeal carefully describes her as the innocent victim of a *mulâtresse*, it also calls on the court's responsibilities to her as a royal subject and even a "citizen." Explaining why she has come to the Conseil du Cap, Durrect expressed confidence that she would find "in the Court the justice and protection that it never refuses royal subjects, and especially subjects who are irreproachable in their morality and their actions" whose rights as a "citizen" have been violated. Durrect presented herself "with confidence," sure that she would not be "disappointed in her hopes."

It is also important to note, however, that this event was not simply a story about a battle between a jealous white woman defending the color line against a *mulâtresse*. On one side, it is the story of a working white woman trying to recall a debt and make a living. Of course, Durrect may have fabricated large chunks of her story. But clearly,

she is far from the languid, frivolous, irrational creole depicted by white male observers of the period. On the other side of the conflict was indeed a free woman of color, labeled a “*mulâtresse*,” who may have lived with a white man. But the legendary conflict between white women and *mulâtresse* women is disrupted in this case by Suzette’s alliance with Dame Massé. As a married white woman, Dame Massé should have viewed Suzette as competition rather than an ally, if we are to believe the white men like Moreau who wrote about colonial women’s interactions. Furthermore, Suzette was aided by a female slave. We do not know if this enslaved woman had been sent by her owner—a white woman, Dame Préfontaine—or if she helped Suzette out of her own desire. What is clear, however, is that Suzette had the assistance of at least one white woman and perhaps one enslaved woman. Thus in many ways the women named in the appeal challenge stereotypical portrayals of colonial women.

Still, Durrect drew on common tropes that would have resonated with the elite white male lawyers who comprised the Conseil du Cap. Her evocation of the *mulâtresse* image, particularly when embellished with details of Suzette’s insatiable spending, spoke volumes. But she was not the only woman to participate in the creation of the discourse of colonial consumption. Free women of color contributed to these discourses as well. While we have very few sources to reveal their voices, the historical record occasionally gives us a glimpse. Suzette’s behavior, detailed above, upheld the idea that free women of color were the most “insatiable” consumers of fashion in the colony. And if she did in fact owe over eighty livres to Durrect, then her actions confirmed the belief that the *mulâtresse* had an uncontrollable passion for fashion.

Another woman, Laurette Ravinet, left her own contribution to the discourse, and in so doing, documented the contribution of other free women of color. Ravinet, the white creole daughter of Charles Mozard, editor of the *Affiches Américaines*, had fled to France as a child during the Haitian Revolution. Recalling the Saint Domingue of her childhood, Ravinet described the competition felt by white women whose fashion sense and marriages were challenged by women of color:

...[White] creole ladies, humiliated as wives by the luxury and indecency of the *mulâtresses*, [who are] public women, wanted a distinguishing mark that would place them on another level than these courtesans. An ordinance was passed in Cap that prevented this greedy class from wearing shoes. So [instead] they wore sandals, with diamonds on the toes of their feet.⁶⁰

Writing almost fifty years after having fled Saint Domingue, Ravinet clearly resented the mulatto women who dared to challenge white superiority. She drew on all the familiar tropes of *mulâtresse* immorality. The *mulâtresse* was a courtesan who attracted the husbands of white women, and, to add insult to injury, upstaged those same women on the street by dressing more fashionably. These women consumed white men and luxury goods with equal fervor, and their practices of consumption had become a symbol of spoiled virtue in the eyes of colonial whites.

But while whites framed *luxe* in terms of morality, and while they used it to distinguish themselves from people of color, people of color attributed different meanings to the practice of luxury consumption. For the women described by Ravinet and for Suzette, displaying one's luxury goods was a visual challenge to the social order. Ravinet described women who consciously circumvented local sumptuary restrictions by creating

⁶⁰ Laurette A. M. Nicodami Ravinet, *Mémoires d'une Créole du Port-au-Prince* (Paris: 1844), 24. Ravinet fled the colony for France during the Haitian Revolution at the age of three, so she probably did not witness this event.

newer, more ostentatious ways to display their possessions. In a society that legally and socially defined them as an inferior class, people of color found ways to defy those assumptions through consumption.

Recent research suggests that free women of color living in Le Cap and Port-au-Prince during the pre-revolutionary period did consume large quantities of clothing and luxury goods, even when compared with French noble women. Dominique Rogers has found that even free women of color who were not particularly wealthy spent large sums on their dress. When the *mulâtresse* Rosette Angélique was married in 1778, her clothing alone—including shirts, pleated skirts (*cottes*), bodices (*casaquins*), and kerchiefs—was estimated at 600 livres, an amount equal to 200 days of work by a slave. A death inventory for Marie-Anne, called Caniga, described 788 livres of clothing in her estate. When she died in 1782, she owned 36 skirts, some calico and some *de perse*, along with 12 shirts, two dozen kerchiefs of various colors and some old shoes.⁶¹ Compared to the *femme du peuple* of France discussed above, who acquired a record-high 15 basic garments by the end of the eighteenth century, these middling free women of color of Saint Domingue had enormous wardrobes.

Among the wealthy, the death inventories reveal an even more impressive commitment to fashion. A *quarteronne* named Anne-Henriette, known as Fillette, resided at the home of a Monsieur de Ronseray, a *conseiller du Roi*, who was probably her benefactor. She died in 1784 at the age of 20, leaving behind a small tierceronne child. But she also left an armoire that must have been stuffed to overflowing. Most shocking were her dresses. At this time, the French *femme du peuple* may have owned

⁶¹ Dominique Rogers, "Les Libres de Couleur dans les Capitales de Saint-Domingue: Fortune, Mentalités et Intégration à la Fin de l'Ancien Régime (1776-1789)" (Université Michel de Montaigne, Bordeaux III, 1999), 460.

one dress, but not more than one, wearing the much more common and less expensive skirt instead. But Anne-Henriette possessed 32 dresses, 21 of which were calico, and two which were made of a finer fabric, muslin. One of these muslin dresses had a striped bodice and the other a bodice with a floral print. In addition to the dresses, she owned five dressing gowns detailed with muslin, and 46 white and colored kerchiefs made from cotton and batiste from India, Silesia and Bearn. Another 14 kerchiefs of gauze and linen, 10 pair of stockings, and five pairs of shoes added to the wardrobe an unusual array of “extras.” But her sartorial fortune was completed with an impressive, expensive jewelry collection. Two gold watches from Paris, two diamond rings (one white and one pink), several gold necklaces, pearl bracelets, and several gold crosses were found as well. Finally, we may better understand the profusion of dresses when we consider several other items found in her room: a pair of scissors, a pin, and several remnants of the floral muslin fabric that had been cut according to a pattern but not yet sewn.⁶² Anne-Henriette, it seems, may have been a gifted seamstress.

Thus free women of color may have cultivated the image of excessive spending and fashionability, as a strategy to symbolically resist their subjection. Moreover, it seems that they also realized the power they possessed as consumers. A telling incident was described by Leonora Sansay, the wife of a French planter exiled in the United States but who returned to the colony in the last days of the revolution. Under the pseudonym Mary Hassal, she wrote *Secret History; or, the Horrors of St. Domingo*, in which she described colonial life before and during the revolution. According to Sansay, white creole “ladies” were a poor match for the lovely mixed women, who learned at a young

⁶² Ibid., 458-459.

age how to “heighten the power of their charms by all the aids of art, and to express in every look and gesture all the refinements of voluptuousness.” Defeated by this combination of natural beauty, careful toilette and rehearsed grace, local white women stood little chance when competing for white men. So, white women in Le Cap complained to the *Conseil Supérieur* about the “extravagance” of local *mulâtresses*, which was causing the “ruin” of “many families.” Hoping to end “their influence over the men, and the fortunes lavished on them by their infatuated lovers,” these women encouraged the *Conseil* to enact new sumptuary restrictions. The new law stated that women of color could not wear silk, and that they must wear kerchiefs on their heads when in public. However, understanding their consumer power as well as the “power of their charms,” free women of color in Cap organized a boycott of local merchants to protest the new sumptuary law. The merchants’ business was so hurt by the boycott that they complained to the *Conseil* and forced the sumptuary law to be lifted, and “the olive beauties triumphed.”⁶³

Here again, we see that free market concerns overrode the elite desire to protect the color hierarchy through dress. Consumption was a practice that was more racially egalitarian than most others in the colony. The theater in Le Cap was segregated, and most professions were prohibited to people of color; however, if they could pay for gold earrings or silk trousers, then they could wear them in public to proclaim their economic success. Enslaved and free people of color who were able to dress fashionably caused surprise, admiration and fear, sometimes simultaneously, in their white observers. But fear of emulation and “assimilation” with whites produced new forms of social

⁶³ Mary Hassal, *Secret History; or, the Horrors of St. Domingo, in a Series of Letters, Written by a Lady at Cape Francois to Colonel Burr, Late Vice-President of the United States, Principally During the Command of General Rochambeau* (Philadelphia: Bradford and Inskeep, 1808), 77-78.

distinction as sumptuary regulations became less feasible. Particular practices of consumption were gendered and racialized in an attempt to reinforce the color line. Moreover, such practices were given moral meaning as well, so that the white male elite could position itself as the most virtuous citizens within the colony.

But people of color asserted their own unique practices of consumption and attached different meanings to it than did whites. And by doing so, they asserted their own identity. Far from simply emulating white patterns of consumption, people of color took elements of French fashion and made them their own. The fashionable inventiveness of people of color aroused the curiosity of and sometimes shocked white observers, but not merely because it demonstrated their wealth. Moreau, Wimpffen, and Brunais portrayed practices that were different from traditionally French modes of consumption. Headscarves, and a variety of kerchiefs were the most “creole” element of their dress, but their consistent use of bright colors and striped or checked fabrics also set them apart. For women, an abundance of jewelry further marked the creole woman of color.

The trendsetting *mulâtresse* was part of a revolution in fashion happening in France as well. Gone were the days when the court determined what was and was not fashionable. As Jennifer Jones has demonstrated, by the mid-eighteenth century a “new fashion culture” had emerged in which commoners, and in particular working women, competed with royalty to set new trends through their production and consumption of clothing.⁶⁴ In Saint Domingue, white *marchandes de mode* competed with free and enslaved wigmakers and tailors to produce fashion, but it seems clear that free women of

⁶⁴ Jones, *Sexing La Mode: Gender, Fashion and Commercial Culture in Old Regime France*, 74.

color led the colony in the consumption of fashion. They were the consumer arbiters of taste in the colony.

But as much as colonial whites sought to shore up distinctions between whites and people of color, those boundaries were as porous as ever by the end of the colonial period. The “confusion of rank” so feared by Hilliard in his 1776 publication remained confused in 1783 when Dame Durrect lodged her appeal, in spite of the discriminatory legislation designed to shore up “rank.” For, although slavery still thrived, and free people of color were still legally inferior, they succeeded economically and mixed socially and professionally with whites on a regular basis. Just as the colonial population could not be pulled neatly apart into distinct, hierarchical groups, neither could those groups profess cultural practices that were uniquely their own. Colonial fashion was one indicator of the degree to which such cultural mixture occurred. Colonial inhabitants borrowed practices from one another, irrespective of rank or color. As Wimpffen derisively described, white women wore the headscarves typically associated with people of color. Further, free women of color owned—and sometimes made—dresses in the latest styles from Paris. A French creole identity was in formation, and in particular a French creole femininity that drew on white, black and “mixed” women’s practices.⁶⁵

A final example drives the point home. When tourists travel to Martinique or Guadeloupe (today’s French Caribbean), they will find postcards and plastic dolls depicting the *Antillaise*: the French creole woman. Typically light brown in color, she always sports the white chemise, madras headscarf and matching skirt depicted by

⁶⁵ Rogers, “Les Libres de Couleur dans les Capitales de Saint-Domingue: Fortune, Mentalités et Intégration à la Fin de l’Ancien Régime (1776-1789)”, 461.

eighteenth-century observers. And dangling from each earlobe one will find a large gold hoop earring, known in French as a “creole.”

Chapter Six

Race, Class, and Spectacles of Violence: Old Regime Punishments in the New World

One article of the 1779 sumptuary regulations revealed that colonial administrators desired more than a racial hierarchy marked by practices of luxury consumption. The regulations also required that *gens de couleur* owed all whites “the greatest respect.” As noted in Chapter One, the king and the Colonial Ministry had long emphasized the importance of regulating the social relations between whites and free people of color; the Code Noir had ordered that freed people treat their former masters with respect, and in 1776 the Colonial Minister explained that the security of the slave system relied on the deference of *gens de couleur* toward whites.

In the 1780’s, however, as administrators considered improving the condition of the free people of color, other mechanisms of exclusion and oppression continued to operate in order to remind *gens de couleur* of the “respect” expected of them. In particular, this chapter considers how the colonial justice system contributed to a pejorative association of the *gens de couleur* with slavery through the implementation of particular types of court-ordered punishments. It seeks to unravel how such practices were understood by magistrates and colonists; in short, how colonial law and the colonial justice system worked together to produce racially-coded practices. By focusing on cases in which courts prosecuted *gens de couleur* for publicly insulting or committing violence

against whites, this chapter considers flagrant examples of free people of color demonstrating disrespect for whites.

Often, courts described such offenses as acts of “insolence” on the part of *gens de couleur*. Defined at this time as an excessive “boldness, impudence, [or] lack of respect,” the term “insolence” clearly conveyed the sense that the appropriate balance of power had been disrupted.¹ To correct this imbalance, colonial courts tended to sentence “insolent” free people of color to corporal punishments such as public whipping and public display in the iron collar in order to remind onlookers that the condemned had a direct link to slavery. Although such punishments had been imported from France along with the colonial justice system, they took on a different meaning when implemented in a slave society. Slave traders, planters and overseers whipped, shackled, and branded slaves as forms of discipline and punishment. Therefore, I argue that performing such punishments publicly, on free people, would have resonated differently with the colonial public than in the metropole. By visually associating free people of color who had physically or verbally assaulted whites with the disciplinary tools of slavery, colonial magistrates hoped to assert a hierarchy that people of color had dared to transgress.

Thus the categories of identity that structured colonial society were created in part by what Jon Smolenski has called “economies of violence,” meaning “the range of permissible exchanges of violence” that determined who could commit particular acts of aggression against whom, and for what reasons.² In Saint Domingue, these economies of

¹ The Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française defined “insolence” this way in its 1762 and 1798 editions. “Insolence,” *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, 4th edition (1762), 937; “Insolence,” *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, 5th edition (1798), 735.

² John Smolenski, “Introduction,” in *New World Orders: Violence, Sanction and Authority in the Colonial Americas*, ed. John Smolenski and Thomas Humphrey (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 14.

violence helped create a social hierarchy that was not merely a tripartite structure divided between whites, slaves, and *gens de couleur*, however. As we will see, the class and gender of the offender also determined whether an act of violence was appropriate, particularly among whites. While whites could assault their own slaves without much fear of reprisal, elite white men distanced themselves from the most flagrant examples of slave abuse. They did so by claiming that the worst acts of slave abuse were committed by non-elites, and by women. Such claims—while far from true—allowed elite white men to assert their own capacity for reason and self-control that would justify their claims as good “citizens.”

Finally, magistrates and other elites were not the only ones shaping the discourse of colonial violence. Non-elites, and non-whites understood the dominant meanings associated with particular acts of violence, and sometimes they deployed them to their own ends. The chapter ends with a court case in which two free women of color were found guilty of insulting a white man by claiming that he had been whipped and branded in France. I argue that the man in question, and the lower court that sentenced them, found their insult so offensive because it linked the man to practices typically reserved for slaves. Furthermore, the fact that these women were *mulâtresses* only contributed to their perceived “insolence.”

Old Regime Punishments in the New World

In the 1770’s and 1780’s, the local colonial courts, sometimes in conjunction with administrators and the Colonial Ministry, policed free colored “respect” in court and in the public spaces where punishments were carried out. Through their decisions in both

criminal and civil cases they participated in the construction of racial categories, defining the limits of the proposed legal equality of the free population. Moreover, the ways in which colonial courts punished free people of color not only distinguished them from whites by punishing them differently for the same crimes. By sentencing free coloreds found guilty of insulting and committing violence toward whites with spectacular, corporal forms of punishments, colonial magistrates and administrators visually associated their bodies with slavery. Although they used the same forms of punishments prescribed by courts in metropolitan France, those punishments assumed different meanings when implemented in Saint Domingue.

Saint Domingue had, of course, inherited its penal system from the metropole. Under the Old Regime, French jurisprudence specified a range of punishments available to magistrates. These punishments fell into four basic categories, depending on their intent. Courts frequently sentenced people to a combination of punishments from these different categories. Minor forms of punishments were administered within the privacy of the court, and included admonitions, almsgiving, and warnings against recidivism. “Defamatory punishments,” intended to publicly shame the defendant, included temporary banishment from the court’s jurisdiction, criminal fines, and the *amend honorable*, a ritual resembling a religious confession. Typically performed before a church, the *amend honorable* required the condemned to kneel, bareheaded and barefooted, in a woolen shirt, with a placard hung around the neck indicating the crime, and sometimes carrying a candle. He or she would then confess the crime before begging forgiveness from “God, the King, and Justice.” Another category of punishments, “afflictive” or corporal punishments, marked or inflicted pain on the body, or temporarily

deprived the convicted of his or her freedom, often by sending him to the galley. The executioner typically performed afflictive punishments, which included display in the iron collar (*carcan*) or pillory, mutilation, and whipping. When sentencing someone to be whipped, courts often specified that the executioner chain the convicted by the neck to his wagon so that he or she could drive him through the main squares of the town, where the executioner would perform the actual whipping with a switch. Branding also fell into the category of afflictive punishments: those sentenced to the galleys were marked with GAL; convicted thieves were marked with a V (for *voleur*), beggars with an M (for *mendiant*); other crimes might warrant branding with the royal insignia, the fleur-de-lis. Finally, “capital punishment” either took the life of the condemned, or took his or her liberty or rights for life. Thus, in addition to death, capital punishment might include life sentence in the galleys or prison, as well as banishment for life.³

These punishments had several objectives. First, they penalized the guilty party, inflicting physical pain or dishonor as retribution for their wrongs. Furthermore, they were clearly designed to deter others from committing crimes. Having witnessed the spectacle of another’s humiliation, physical abuse, or gruesome execution, the onlooker would associate the pain of the punishment with the crime and thereby be deterred from committing it him or herself. Branding and mutilation served a similar purpose: they were permanent, physical reminders to the convicted and the community of the crime and its punishment. Moreover, punishments also served as reparation to the victim, whether financial or honorable reparation. Finally, as Foucault and others have argued, these

³ Richard Mowery Andrews, *Law, Magistracy, and Crime in Old Regime Paris, 1735-1789*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 307-316; Gene E. Ogle, "Policing Saint Domingue: Race, Violence and Honor in an Old Regime Colony" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2003), 67-73; Steven G. Reinhardt, *Justice in the Sarladais 1770-1790* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), 82-83.

ritualized public ceremonies and the violence they incorporated had important political purposes as well. They simultaneously shamed the guilty party and legitimized the power of the King, who oversaw all court decisions, sentences and punishments through his representatives in the judicial system.⁴

Magistrates in Saint Domingue employed the same range of punishments available to those in France. However, in the Caribbean, there existed another system of justice that operated alongside that of the royal courts. Slaveowners had the authority to discipline their slaves with similar forms of corporal punishment. In theory, that authority was limited by the Code Noir and subsequent legislation. Article 42 of the Code Noir stipulated that masters could chain their slaves, and also beat them with a switch or a cord (*cordes*) “when they believe their slaves have deserved it.” The same article prohibited slaveowners from mutilating or torturing their slaves. A century later, the right of a slaveowner and his or her plantation manager to harm slaves was further curtailed. In 1784, as the Colonial Ministry attempted to tighten its control over plantation discipline in general, a Royal Ordinance limited the permitted number of times a slave could be struck to 50.⁵

Needless to say, these legal restrictions on the punishment of slaves left planters and overseers with a great deal of latitude. Indeed, even those who operated within the

⁴ Andrews, *Law, Magistracy, and Crime in Old Regime Paris, 1735-1789*, 304-306; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish : The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 47-49. Andrews insists that the old regime penal system was rational and not nearly as excessive or violent as Foucault and others have described it. Likewise, he suggests that branding was simply a means to identify recidivists and not a mechanism of public spectacle. Andrews, *Law, Magistracy, and Crime in Old Regime Paris, 1735-1789*, 314-316.

⁵ Malick Walid Ghachem, "Sovereignty and Slavery in the Age of Revolutions: Haitian Variations on a Metropolitan Theme" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 2001), Chapter Two; Bernard Moitt, *Women and Slavery in the French Antilles, 1635-1848* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 101-103; M. Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l'Amérique Sous le Vent*, 6 vols. (Paris: 1784), 6: 659; Louis Sala-Moulins, *Le Code Noir, Ou le Calvaire de Canaan*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2005), 174-175.

legal limits were able to establish a brutal system of punishments that disciplined not only the individual slave but all who witnessed his or her whipping.⁶ On the plantation, drivers and overseers used whips as a regular mechanism of slave discipline, snapping them in the morning and afternoons to announce the start of the work shift, and lashing the bodies of slaves who failed to work at the desired pace. But the whip was also used to punish the transgressions of slaves. One plantation owner instructed the managers on his sugar plantations on the most effective way to administer the whip:

Slow punishments make a greater impression than quick or violent ones. Twenty-five lashes of the whip administered in a quarter of an hour, interrupted at intervals to hear the cause which the unfortunates always plead in their defense, and resumed again, continuing in this fashion two or three times, are far more likely to make an impression than fifty lashes administered in five minutes and less a danger to their health.⁷

This controlled, ritualized whipping was excruciating punishment, deterrent, and *amende honorable* rolled into one. The slaves admitted their guilt (and perhaps anything else that was requested of them), and anyone within earshot would thereby link the crime with the punishment.

Harsher forms of punishments could, in theory, only be administered by colonial courts. The Code Noir had prescribed particular punishments for crimes committed by slaves: striking one's master or a member of the master's family was punishable by death; striking any other free person was to be "severely punished, even by death...;" theft warranted afflictive punishments like public beating with a switch by the executioner, and branding with the *fleur de lis*. However, depending on the nature of the theft, capital

⁶ A point made by Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2004), 50.

⁷ Cited in Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 37.

punishment was also possible. Fugitive slaves who had been gone for at least a month suffered the most extreme forms of court-sanctioned mutilation: one's first conviction would result in having the ears cut off and a *fleur-de-lis* branded on the shoulder; the second time, the hamstring would be severed and the other shoulder branded; the third time received the death penalty.⁸ Obviously, in mutilating and murdering their own slaves, planters damaged or destroyed their property and work force. But demonstrating their authority over their slaves was sometimes worth the loss of one slave's labor.

In the late colonial period, Saint Domingue's courts used corporal and capital punishments against slaves in a variety of ways, making maximum impression through gruesome displays of the state's power and the slave's defenselessness. Public whippings, mutilations (typically cutting off an ear or a thumb), branding, and hanging were all fairly common for serious crimes, as was the display of the decapitated head of the executed. In 1784, when a newly arrived enslaved man named Saint-Eloy was convicted for striking and cutting the arm of a white man, the *Conseil Supérieur* of Cap Français sentenced him to be "thrashed nude with a switch" by the executioner all around town before spending the rest of his life in the colonial equivalent of the galleys: the *chaine publique*, or chain gang.⁹ But first, he was to be taken to the most public place in the town, the Clugny market, where he would be branded with the letters typically used to mark galley

⁸ Sala-Moulins, *Le Code Noir, Ou le Calvaire de Canaan*, 156-163, 166. Interestingly, article 35 of the Code Noir, which determines the punishment for "aggravated theft," lumps slaves and freedmen ("*affranchis*") into the same legal category. Both were subject to the same punishments for such crimes. Thus, the Code Noir paradoxically grants former slaves the same rights as free whites before prescribing different punishments.

⁹ Ogle notes that the chain gang was a punishment largely reserved for slaves and gens de couleur, whose service was used to build colonial fortifications. Ogle, "Policing Saint Domingue: Race, Violence and Honor in an Old Regime Colony", 100 n. 24.

prisoners: “G. A. L.”¹⁰ Such spectacles were the most gruesome when slaves were punished for committing violence against whites. In 1783, the Conseil Supérieur in Le Cap convicted two slaves for killing the white nephew of their owner in the town of Plaisance. They were sentenced to have their thumbs cut off before being hung and then decapitated. Their heads would be put on display on pikes, each in a different square in Plaisance. For those in town who did not witness the mutilations, executions, or see their heads, the court decision would be “read, printed, and posted.”¹¹ Thus in Saint Domingue, as in other slave societies, courts punished slaves with the intent of intimidating the larger slave community; public shaming was a secondary concern, if it was a concern at all.¹²

In practice, of course, colonial courts did not have a monopoly on extraordinary forms of slave punishments. Slaveowners and their hired hands often went far beyond the practices prescribed for them and the colonial courts by the Code Noir to ensure slave discipline. The extreme to which some sadistic planters exercised their authority has been well-documented. The practice of whipping alone had countless variations. It could be implemented while the slave hung by his or her limbs from four posts, or from a

¹⁰ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l’Amérique Sous le Vent*, 6: 474-475. In determining this sentence, the court overturned the sentence of a lower court which had condemned Saint-Eloy to death by hanging.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 6: 370. For similar sentences, see Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l’Amérique Sous le Vent*, 5: 741, 6: 623-625, 640. For an example of harsh sentencing toward slaves committing theft and harboring maroons, see CAOM C/9a/165/ 1 juin 1786.

¹² Diana Paton has demonstrated the tendency of slave courts in Jamaica to forego punishments intended to inflict shame, like the stocks and the pillory, when sentencing slaves. She argues that Jamaican courts used mutilation and other forms of corporal punishments instead because in a slave society the participatory function of the crowd would not be the same. Whereas in Europe crowds would surround the pillory and participate in the shaming of the criminal (and thereby the definition of morality within the community), in a slave society, crowds of slaves would not participate in the taunting, and the convicted “was not expected to feel disgraced.” Diana Paton, “Punishment, Crime, and the Bodies of Slaves in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica,” *Journal of Social History* 34, no. 4 (2001): 94.

ladder. During the whipping, to increase the pain, a piece of burning wood might be inserted in the anus; or, lemon, salt, or hot pepper could be rubbed directly into the wounds made by the whip. Slaveowners and overseers also shackled their slaves in a variety of ways. After locking a slave in the *carcan*, they might apply a gag rubbed with hot pepper. Slaves were sometimes restrained with irons around their feet and hands. In order to prevent them from eating sugar cane, planters might force them to wear the iron mask (“*le masque de fer-blanc*”). In order to prevent maronnage, planters would force slaves to wear an iron collar with large cross protruding upward from the back of the neck, designed to get caught in tree branches should the wearer attempt to flee.¹³

Even when colonial authorities had evidence of planter brutality, especially that of white planters, they rarely prosecuted it. Perhaps the most infamous example of administrative reluctance to punish excessive violence toward slaves involved a coffee planter, Nicolas Le Jeune. In 1788, suspicious that his slaves were trying to poison him, Le Jeune killed four slaves and tortured two enslaved women with fire in an attempt to extract a confession. Having severely burned their legs and feet, he then chained the women in the plantation prison. Fourteen other slaves then fled his plantation to complain to the court about his treatment, begging to be imprisoned in town rather than return to Le Jeune’s plantation. When the court sent an investigative commission to the plantation, they found the two women in question. The iron collars around their necks had almost strangled them to death, and their legs were decomposing. The women died shortly thereafter. After some debate, colonial magistrates and administrators agreed that punishing Le Jeune was too risky. They determined that white planters could not be

¹³ Pierre de Vaissiere, *Saint Domingue: La Société et la Vie Créoles Sous l'Ancien Régime (1629-1789)* (Paris: Perrin et Cie., Libraires-Editeurs, 1909), 189-192.

convicted and punished on the basis of slave testimony, even though the court had all the evidence it needed of Le Jeune's guilt and the women's innocence, lest the colony risk emboldening the entire enslaved population.¹⁴ By contrast, in 1784 when a slave died due to the "cruelties and rigorous, barbarous treatment" of her free black owner, Xavier, the slaveowner's punishment was a violent spectacle. The *Conseil Supérieur* of Port-au-Prince sentenced Xavier to public whipping, branding, and three years forced labor in the galeres, during which time he would have to prove his status as a free man lest he be sold into slavery.¹⁵

I mention these horrific scenes of violence not simply to highlight the atrocities committed in the name of slavery. What is also striking about the punishments inflicted on slaves are their similarities with forms of public, corporal punishment operative in the French penal system. Whipping, iron collars, branding, and execution were accepted modes of punishment in both places; indeed, it seems logical that the penal system developed by French colonists and administrators would have evolved from the system employed in the metropole. Moreover, the use of torture was certainly not unique to the colonies; French jurists had traditionally used torture as a method of interrogation designed to elicit confessions, although they had largely abandoned the practice by the time it was outlawed in 1780.¹⁶

¹⁴ Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution*, 56-57; Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below*, 37-39; Moitt, *Women and Slavery in the French Antilles, 1635-1848*, 106-107.

¹⁵ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l'Amérique Sous le Vent*, 6: 622.

¹⁶ Jurists gradually abandoned the practice of torture (*question préparatoire* and *question préalable*) due in part to changes in criminal law and the penal system. The Ordinance of 1670 permitted judges to convict based on circumstantial evidence, whereas previously the law required a confession (typically elicited through torture). Once the confession became unnecessary, so did the torture that produced it. Thus, torture as a form of punishment gradually gave way (as did capital punishment) to the galley sentence. Reinhardt,

But the French penal system acquired new meaning in the colonies. While the public spectacle of the French penal system served to demonstrate the power of the king over all his subjects, in the colonies such displays did this and much more. They affirmed not only the King's power but also white privilege and black subordination. As we will see, local court magistrates accomplished this by punishing *gens de couleur* convicted of effrontery and violence toward whites with the most spectacular forms of punishment. Those punishments were designed, I argue, to remind onlookers that free people of color were the descendants of slaves, and as such they should remain the subordinates of whites. The whip, shackles, and branding referenced forms of punishment and torture employed on plantation slaves as much as they did royal authority. Moreover, by punishing free colored violence toward whites more harshly (and probably more often) than white violence toward free people of color, the courts made free colored bodies violable. Colonial courts and individual whites could violate non-white bodies without fear of much penalty, much as slaveowners court violate the bodies of their slaves.

White Elite Violence, Respectability and Gendered Colonial Reform

Before turning to the court-ordered punishments of *gens de couleur*, it is useful to think about the political context in which the discourse of colonial violence circulated. Although planters' and overseers' violence toward the enslaved continued throughout the late-colonial period, the Colonial Ministry attempted to curb that violence. But those efforts butted up against the desires of local magistrates to acquire greater control over

Justice in the Sarladais 1770-1790, 79-82; Julius R. Ruff, *Crime, Justice and Public Order in Old Regime France: The Sénéchaussées of Libourne and Bazas, 1696-1789* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), 55. Lisa Silverman argues, however, that the practice of torture became discredited during this period due to a reinterpretation of the meaning of pain. Lisa Silverman, *Tortured Subjects: Pain, Truth and the Body in Early Modern France* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001).

colonial legislation, particularly with regard to the governance of slavery. This tension between the centralizing impulse of the Colonial Ministry, on the one hand, and the autonomist impulse of Saint Domingue's magistrature and planters, on the other, would come to a head over this very issue. In an effort to fend off metropolitan interference, colonial white elites asserted that a self-regulatory system had developed within the colony in order to prevent—or at least punish—the worst abuses of slaves. Moreau claimed that white creole women were at the heart of this reform: their natural femininity, when properly cultivated, allowed them to nurture their slaves rather than commit acts of extreme violence against them.

Since the 1760's, ministers and administrators had voiced concern over the treatment of the enslaved in Saint Domingue. Theirs was not a humanitarian concern: they linked extreme violence toward slaves with maronnage and the prospect of slave revolt. In order for the slave system to remain secure, they argued, slaves could not be arbitrarily abused, and their basic needs had to be provided for. In theory, the 1685 Code Noir had established such minimum requirements for slaveowners. The Code specified minimal amounts of food and clothing provisions to be allotted to the enslaved, and, as noted above, it established guidelines for punishments inflicted by slaveowners.

In day-to-day plantation life, however, Saint Domingue's planters had developed a theory of "domestic" authority in which slaveowners, and not the French state or king, had ultimate power over all decisions regarding their slaves. The notorious planter Le Jeune employed this theory in his legal defense against accusations of slave abuse. He had tortured his slaves, he argued, in order to extract confessions—he was sure that the two women who later died from the burn wounds inflicted by Le Jeune had been

poisoning his other slaves, and he wanted these women to admit their crimes. The crime of poisoning was difficult for the court system to prosecute, he claimed, and therefore slaveowners needed unlimited authority to exact their own justice.¹⁷ Moreover, appealing more generally to the principle of “domestic sovereignty,” he claimed that only “the feeling of absolute power that [the master] exercises over his [slave’s] person” could “prevent[] the negro from stabbing his master...”¹⁸ In other words, only the authority of the master, not the authority of the king or the colonial state, could prevent slave resistance or revolt.

Yet in 1784 the Colonial Ministry had attempted to curb the most flagrant abuse of slaves while chipping away at unlimited planter authority. By issuing the December 3, 1784 regulations targeting the neglect and abuse of slaves, the Ministry set off a conflict with the *Conseil Supérieur* of Cap Français that would result in the Conseil’s suppression in 1787.¹⁹ In some instances the new laws simply restated portions of the Code Noir; in particular, they prohibited slave labor on Sundays, holy days, or between the hours of noon and two o’clock in the afternoon. But the new laws went further than the Code Noir by specifying punishments for slaveowners or overseers who abused slaves beyond a defined limit: namely, delivering over 50 lashes with a whip, mutilation, or death. Most offensive to Saint Domingue’s planters, however, was the provision that their slaves be permitted to register formal complaints of abuse against their masters.²⁰ This last article had also been a feature of the Code Noir, but one that was almost never employed. The

¹⁷ Ghachem, "Sovereignty and Slavery in the Age of Revolutions: Haitian Variations on a Metropolitan Theme", 276.

¹⁸ Cited in *Ibid.*, 269.

¹⁹ See Chapter Two.

²⁰ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l’Amérique Sous le Vent*, 6: 655-667.

Ministry's efforts to revive it infuriated slaveowners. How, they argued, could they maintain their authority over their slaves if the slaves believed that they could appeal to a power even higher than their masters?²¹ In fact, Le Jeune's slaves made use of this provision in 1788, launching the investigation that led to Le Jeune's prosecution.

Adding insult to injury, enforcement of these provisions had been placed in the hands of the Governor and Intendant, rather than local courts. Only the Governor and Intendant would examine the official grievances of slaves against their masters and decide punishments for those they deemed guilty.²² Of course, local magistrates were outraged by this provision. Not only had the Colonial Ministry interfered with the governance of individual slave ownership in the colony, but it had also stripped the local court system of its role in policing slave mismanagement. In protest, the *Conseil Supérieur* of Cap Français refused to register the regulations, complaining bitterly to the Minister, who was then moved to issue a revised version of the original regulations. The later version did not alter any of the controversial contents of the original, but it did placate planters somewhat: it declared that abuse of slaves committed prior to the change in law could not be prosecuted, allowed planters to appeal investigations into slave abuse, and placed a new emphasis on the "respect and obedience" owed by slaves to owners and overseers. However, before the *Conseil* could register these revisions, the Colonial Minister required that it first register the original 1784 regulations. Any dissenting magistrates would be sent by the administrators to France to account for their

²¹ Ghachem, "Sovereignty and Slavery in the Age of Revolutions: Haitian Variations on a Metropolitan Theme".

²² Ibid., 161; Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Françoises de l'Amérique Sous le Vent*, 6: 666.

obstreperousness. The court finally registered both the 1784 regulations and the 1785 revisions in May 1786.²³

Moreau may have known that these new laws were being drawn up in the spring of 1784 when he delivered his lecture on the “Character of the Creoles of Saint Domingue” in Paris. Given that he conducted regular research at the Colonial Ministry and was friendly with the former governor, Bellecombe, this would not be surprising. Either way, however, the problem of slave abuse was probably already a concern for him. Saint Domingue’s slaveowners had a reputation for brutality; even Hilliard, who praised white colonists for certain of their traits, had offered a horrifying list of abuses that he claimed were regularly inflicted on the colony’s slaves with no fear of penalty.²⁴ In fact, some local magistrates worried, like colonial administrators, that continued violence toward slaves would eventually endanger the slave system by encouraging maronage or violent revolt. As a result, the *Sénéchausées* (lower courts) and *Conseils Supérieurs* of both Cap Français and Port-au-Prince occasionally permitted enslaved people to register complaints of abuse against slaveowners. Courts rarely found owners guilty, and when they did, sentences were typically limited to a fine or the mandatory sale of the slaves in question.²⁵ Still, the fact that magistrates sometimes pursued such prosecutions indicates a broader concern with extreme violence toward the enslaved. Colonial administrators

²³ Ghachem, "Sovereignty and Slavery in the Age of Revolutions: Haitian Variations on a Metropolitan Theme", 163-164; Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de l'Amérique Sous le Vent*, 6: 927-928.

²⁴ Michel-René Hilliard d'Auberteuil, *Considérations sur l'Etat Présent de la Colonie Francaise de Saint-Domingue*, 2 vols. (Paris: Chez Grangé, 1777), 1: 144.

²⁵ For examples of such cases see Ghachem, "Sovereignty and Slavery in the Age of Revolutions: Haitian Variations on a Metropolitan Theme", 121-142, 156-157.

and the Colonial Ministry were not alone in their fear that planters, plantation managers and overseers would destabilize the slave regime through their brutal forms of discipline.

Moreau may have worried over the “barbarity” of slaveowners and their agents for these same reasons. However, the local reputation for barbaric acts of violence was problematic for two other reasons as well. First, it invited the intervention of the metropolitan authorities who hoped to temper such behavior. Moreau, as we have seen, was by 1784 a careful advocate of “local knowledge,” the notion that good lawmaking in the colony required creole, rather than metropolitan, legal sensibilities. Therefore he desired less, not more, metropolitan intervention. Second, and related to this first issue, was the fact that the image of irrationally violent white planters contradicted Moreau’s assertion that white creoles were capable of reason and civic virtue. In order to convince the Colonial Ministry that the colony needed greater legislative autonomy, that image had to change.

Similar, though not identical, concerns appeared elsewhere in the French empire at this time. In the slave colony of Ile-de-France (Mauritius), colonial administrators, local lawyers and magistrates reacted to the criticisms of abolitionists by attempting to “civilize” the slave system there. Specifically, as in Saint Domingue, they sought to police the disciplining of slaves by subjecting acts of slave discipline to the law. Megan Vaughan notes that such efforts were not born out of a “growing Enlightenment sensibility of humanitarianism” but were rather a “matter of survival”—magistrates and administrators hoped that such reforms would protect slavery from the attacks of abolitionists. In addition to legal changes, the slaveholding elite developed a new “moral economy of slavery” in which violence toward slaves threatened white elites’ class and

race identity. This new logic stated that white elites should not discipline their slaves themselves; rather, they either referred slave crimes to local officials or enlisted a slave commander to complete the task, thereby displacing the act of violence onto a social inferior. Performing violence against one's own slave compromised one's position as a "respectable" member of society as well as one's whiteness since such acts came to symbolize a lack of self-control, or "weakness," and also of "lowly class origins." Thus elites on Ile-de-France portrayed extreme brutality toward slaves as a vice to be condemned by the community. In this way, Vaughan argues, Ile-de-France's white community disciplined itself as part of a larger system of Foucauldian power relations.²⁶

Planters and magistrates in Saint Domingue addressed such concerns in similar ways. They, too, associated extreme brutality with lower-class colonists, thereby defining themselves as the most rational members of society. Furthermore, Saint Domingue's white elite also claimed that they were capable of self-regulation arguing that they had developed their own "moral economy" to punish the most extreme examples of slave abuse. In 1770, the S n chauss e of Cap Fran ais argued in favor of the authority of local courts to investigate cases of slave abuse. However, these magistrates also claimed that only the "small planters" tended toward "the most horrible excesses" of violence. By contrast, they argued, large planters had developed a "civilized" system of internal discipline which required less oversight by local authorities.²⁷ Similarly, Dubuisson displaced blame for excessive violence toward slaves onto the lower class. Disputing Hilliard's claim that all whites exercised violence at will over all slaves, regardless

²⁶ Meghan Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island: Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Mauritius* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 85-86, 179-180.

²⁷ Ghachem, "Sovereignty and Slavery in the Age of Revolutions: Haitian Variations on a Metropolitan Theme", 127.

whether they owned them or not, Dubuisson argued that the only colonists prone to attack another's slave without provocation were those of the lower class, or those "of the People [i.e., the masses] who do not pride themselves on their self-control..."²⁸ Furthermore, he noted that sheer pragmatism made slaveowners unlikely to abuse their slaves. Making no pretense to "humanitarian" motives, Dubuisson argued that self-interest prevented the most flagrant abuses: "...the life of our Slave[] costs us too much to dispose of it without reason....."²⁹ Hilliard need not advise temperance and moderation to planters accused of "barbarism," Dubuisson suggested, because "interest alone is sufficient to prescribe them."³⁰ Thus, by blaming the worst violence on lower-class whites, white elites distanced themselves from accusations of slave abuse. Moreover, by citing an internal, self-regulatory system that prevented excessive violence against slaves, these men rejected the notion that metropolitan authorities needed to intervene.

In his 1784 lecture, Moreau proposed a different system of internal regulation. His solution, however, would rely on the domestic virtues of elite white creole women. Such a suggestion would have surprised some of his listeners, no doubt, since white slave mistresses had a reputation as the most brutal slave masters.³¹ In fact, Moreau conceded this point in his lecture, effectively displacing the blame for white elite brutality onto the women. He admitted that white creole women ordered punishments that were "rarely

²⁸ Pierre Ulric Dubuisson, *Nouvelles Considérations sur Saint-Domingue, en Réponse à Celles de M. H. D.*, 2 vols. (Paris: Chez Cellot et Jombert Fils jeune, Libraires, 1780), 1: 85.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1: 83.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 1: 86.

³¹ For other accounts of white women's brutality toward their slaves, see Justin Girod de Chantrons, *Voyage d'un Suisse dans Différentes Colonies d'Amérique*, ed. Pierre Pluchon (Paris: Librairie Jules Tallandier, 1980), 156.

proportional to the crime,” thus emphasizing their lack of reason.³² However, their cruelty grew especially egregious toward those enslaved women who had been the objects of their husbands’ sexual advances. However, he noted that the most “frightening scenes” of vengeance that followed such discoveries were “very rare,” and becoming less frequent every day. For, in Saint Domingue white creole women were undergoing a “happy revolution” that made them more compassionate and even maternal toward their slaves. He claimed that these women had begun to “lavish” attention on their slaves’ infants, a practice they “would have scorned in the past”; they had also begun caring for the sick in plantation hospitals, and “[s]ometimes even their delicate hands prepare the medicines, while a persuasive softness makes consolation flower from their mouth[s].” As the nurturing plantation mistress, the white creole woman was regaining control over her own temper, and thereby her slaves. Indeed, Moreau remarked that plantation slaves whose lives had been “soften[ed]” by these women were more obedient.³³

The cause of such this supposed transformation remained ambiguous in Moreau’s lecture. His positivistic assessment—claiming that these changes were already underway—suggests a view of planter society similar to that of the Sénéchaussée: Saint Domingue’s planters were gradually becoming more “civilized,” and the domesticity of white creole women served as both the proof and the spur for that reform. Sending young women and girls to France during their formative years seems to be another cause. At least, Moreau predicted that women’s compassion for their slaves would continue to grow stronger if they were removed from the negative influence of slavery in their youth

³² M. Moreau de Saint Méry, "Fragment Sur Le Caractère des Créoles de Saint-Domingue, Tiré de l'Ouvrage des Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Françoises de l'Amérique Sous le Vent, Etc. ," in *Mémoires du Musée de Paris* (Paris: Chez Moutard, 1785), 39-40.

³³ *Ibid.*, 40.

and encouraged to read “philosophical writings that plead the cause of humanity.”³⁴

Although preventing white creole brutality required metropolitan education, at least it did not require official metropolitan interference.

Thus Moreau’s May 1784 lecture anticipated the December 1784 regulations policing the treatment of slaves, offering an alternative to legislation imposed from France. But those regulations attempted not only to prevent violence and poor treatment of slaves in order to prevent revolt and maronnage. They also aimed to increase the enslaved population through natural reproduction. The Caribbean slave labor force had never been able to reproduce itself, so that planters were forever dependent upon the vicissitudes of the slave trade to replenish their supply of workers. And in the late eighteenth century, the possibility of the slave trade’s abolition certainly loomed large in the minds of colonial administrators as well as colonists. Several British North American colonies passed gradual abolition laws in the 1780’s (Pennsylvania in 1780; Connecticut and Rhode Island in 1784), and the British abolitionist movement was growing more vocal at this time as well.³⁵ Developing a self-sustaining slave labor force would be essential if the slave trade was threatened.

The 1784 regulations included provisions designed to limit the amount of work for which pregnant slaves and wetnurses were responsible, and to encourage enslaved women to reproduce. Specifically, pregnant women and wetnurses were not to work before sunrise, after sunset, or during the hottest part of the day, from 11:00 to 3:00. One year after having six children, enslaved mothers were exempted from one day of work

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848* (London: Verso, 1988), 117-118, 131-160.

per week in the garden; after two years she could have two days per week, and after three years she could have three days until she was entirely exempted. She would keep these exemptions as long as none of her children died before the age of ten due to her neglect.³⁶ Although these decrees were probably never enforced, the point is that the Colonial Ministry was concerned about improving enslaved women's reproductive capacities. Similar laws were also passed in the British slave colonies during this period, part of the "age of amelioration" when increasing prices for slaves made investment in the preservation and reproduction of the existing slave population more economical than the continual purchase of new slaves.³⁷ Thus the French Colonial Ministry, like local British West Indian legislatures, implemented pronatalist laws in an effort to grow the slave population, much as some individual planters in Saint Domingue already employed on their plantations.³⁸

Arlette Gautier has included this portion of the 1784 regulations as part of the same pronatalist movement that motivated planters.³⁹ The Colonial Ministry and Saint Dominguan planters certainly shared concerns about increasing "natural" reproduction of the enslaved labor force; however, it mattered a great deal to planters and magistrates that such policies not be imposed by French authorities. Moreau probably sought to avoid such regulation by encouraging a voluntary type of "amelioration," one overseen by the white creole woman. Who better, after all, than a woman born in the new world, and

³⁶ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Françoises de l'Amérique Sous le Vent*, 6: 659.

³⁷ Hilary McD Beckles, *Centering Woman: Gender Discourses in Caribbean Slave Society* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1999), 159; Edward Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 293; Kathleen Wilson, "Empire, Gender and Modernity in the Eighteenth Century," in *Gender and Empire*, ed. Philippa Levine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

³⁸ See Chapter Four.

³⁹ Arlette Gautier, *Les Soeurs de Solitude: la Condition Féminine dans l'Esclavage aux Antilles du XVIIIe au XIXe Siècle* (Paris: Editions Caribéennes, 1985), 107-108.

who was therefore naturally more fertile (and, it follows, more maternal) than her old world counterparts.⁴⁰ Further, as a member of the most “civilized” colonial group, her maternal instinct would not spill over into irrationality but would rather be tempered by a philosophical education. As the queen mother of the plantation, she could encourage the natural reproduction of the slave labor force as well as its obedience. Moreau’s vision dismissed the need for the Colonial Ministry to police the colonial slave regime while it offered a solution to the problem of the low rate of slave reproduction.

As importantly, Moreau provided a corrective to the white creole plantation mistress’ reputation for tyrannical treatment of her slaves. When properly educated, he claimed, she could be the model of nurturing feminine domesticity. Further, Moreau removed some culpability for the violence of white creole women by explaining that it was often born out of jealousy and, this passage suggests, her tremendous love for her husband. Collectively, Moreau, Dubuisson and the Sénéchausée magistrates distanced the problem of slave abuse from white elites altogether. Since such violence occurred only when its perpetrators lacked self-control, white elites—especially men—could not be guilty of it, they suggested. Instead, they blamed such violence on lower-class colonists, allowing elites to appear the most rational, “civilized” members of society. As such, they appeared capable of self-regulation.

Punishing the Insolence of *Gens de Couleur*

Although planters, magistrates and administrators wrestled over who held jurisdiction over the disciplining of slaves, it was generally accepted that acts of

⁴⁰ See Chapter Four.

aggression between free people should be settled in local courts. This is not to say that all such disputes went before a judge; certainly whites and *gens de couleur* settled some disputes out-of-court, and surely many victims of violence preferred not to pursue a lawsuit out of fear of reprisal. But according to the Code Noir, *gens de couleur*, even *affranchis*, had legal equality with whites. As we have seen, the Colonial Ministry and colonial administrators chipped away at that legal equality with a series of discriminatory laws largely aimed to prevent the social mobility of *gens de couleur*. Yet the law still protected *gens de couleur* from acts of violence and defamation in the same way that it protected whites.

However, the letter of the law and its practice often differ, and in Saint Domingue magistrates sometimes decided cases in ways that reinforced the social and legal inferiority of free people of color. Gene Ogle has shown that Saint Domingue's courts sentenced whites differently than *gens de couleur* for insulting or committing violence against other whites. When whites were involved in disputes with one another, courts acted (as they did in France) to restore the honor of the offended party. The typical punishment for such offenses was the *amende honorable*. However, when people of color insulted or committed acts of violence against whites, court-ordered punishments sought to restore not honor but racial order and deference. They did this through the public humiliation of the offending person of color in an array of afflictive punishments that looked nothing like the more staid "reparation of honor." Clearly, such punishments were intended to publicly enforce white privilege by fixing the social status of free people of color as the subordinates of whites. Thus, as Ogle has argued, honor--so central within Old Regime France to define social relations and social status--became racialized in Saint

Domingue through the differentiated system of sentencing. By excluding people of color from punishments strictly intended to restore the honor of the victim or detract from the honor of the accused, colonial courts denied *gens de couleur* of honor altogether.⁴¹ Due to their color, they existed outside the inherently relational system of honor. Thus colonial courts continued the earlier efforts of colonial administrators to degrade the free population of color through statute law by sentencing free colored insults and violence toward whites with defamatory and corporal forms of punishment, rather than the less public forms of punishments received by whites guilty of similar crimes.

Similarly, Dominique Rogers has noted that, in cases of violence, courts exercised “flagrant” discrimination against *gens de couleur*. She also suggests, however, that courts punished *gens de couleur* with less severity by the mid-1780’s than they had previously—a sign that their status was in fact improving. While punishments may have become less severe, the paucity of surviving court records make such assertions regarding change over time difficult to make. However, my argument rests not on the relative severity of the punishment but rather the meaning such punishments conveyed. Spectacular, corporal forms of punishment continued to be used against free people of color during the 1780’s, and by studying the meaning of those punishments in the colonial context we can begin to understand how they shaped ideas about race.⁴²

⁴¹ Gene E. Ogle, "Natural Movements and Dangerous Spectacles: Beatings, Duels, And "Play" In Saint Domingue," in *New World Orders: Violence, Sanction and Authority in the Colonial Americas*, ed. John Smolenski and Thomas Humphrey (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 239; Gene E. Ogle, "'Propos Injurieux': Rumor, Honor and Race in Eighteenth Century Saint Domingue," *Bulletin de la Société d'Histoire de la Guadeloupe* Numéro spécial, no. November (2006): 28, 32.

⁴² Dominique Rogers, "Les Libres de Couleur dans les Capitales de Saint-Domingue: Fortune, Mentalités et Intégration à la Fin de l'Ancien Régime (1776-1789)" (Université Michel de Montaigne, Bordeaux III, 1999), 368-371.

The punishments meted out to *gens de couleur* did more than deny them of honor. Such punishments were designed to remind everyone of their proximity to slavery. Indeed, often those punishments jeopardized the freedom of the accused, demonstrating just how fragile the freedom of free people of color was. In 1784, a black man who claimed to be free, named Jean-Baptiste Firmin, was found guilty of directing “insolent and threatening comments” at a white watchmaker who had been standing in front of his shop with some other whites. The court also convicted a slave, also named Jean-Baptiste and belonging to someone else, for “inappropriately striking the dog” of one of the whites. The *Conseil Supérieur* of Le Cap sentenced both men to be whipped by the executioner “in all the customary places and intersections” in the town. Assuming the men were punished as they were sentenced—that is, together—would onlookers have known, at first glance, that Firmin was a free man? Even for those who knew and recognized Firmin as free, seeing him whipped alongside a slave would have suggested that his status was close to that of a slave. But the court’s ruling went beyond mere suggestion: it ordered Firmin imprisoned until he could provide legal proof of his freedom. A third participant in the incident received three years on the chain gang. This was Michel, a free mulatto sailor (*caboteur*) who the court convicted for throwing a rock at one of the whites, causing the white man’s chair to break and him to fall. Michel’s legal freedom was not questioned, perhaps because his employment was known. Yet he, too, lost his freedom for a temporary period.⁴³ Unfortunately, we cannot know the context in which this dispute took place. Did the shopkeeper and his friends first threaten Firmin and Michel? Did they tell the dog to attack, in which case Jean-Baptiste the slave may

⁴³ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de L'Amérique Sous le Vent*, 6: 492.

have acted in a defensive gesture? The court decision does not provide such details.

What seems clear is that the privilege of white men had been threatened, and the court needed to shore it up through a public display of degradation.

If public whipping was one way to associate criminals with slaves, being displayed in the iron collar, or *carcan*, was another. *Gens de couleur* who threatened whites with violence often received the iron collar as punishment. Such offenses were typically depicted as “insolence” by colonial courts, who literally spelled out the offense on a placard worn on the body of the convicted. On November 24, 1784, the *Conseil Supérieur* of Cap Français found a free mulatto guilty of impersonating a *maréchausée* officer while trying to arrest a slave he encountered along a road. Apparently, the overseer from the slave’s plantation attempted to stop the arrest, at which point the mulatto threatened him. Thus the court sentenced him to three days on display in the Clugny market, in the *carcan*, with the phrase “Free Mulatto, falsely taking the quality of *Cavalier de maréchausée*; and insolent toward Whites.” After three days in the market, he was sentenced to spend the rest of his life as a galley slave.⁴⁴ When, on February 17, 1785, the *Conseil du Cap* found a free black man guilty of brandishing a knife against a group of whites, and of insulting them, he was sentenced to the *carcan* in the Clugny marketplace with a placard reading “free Black insolent toward Whites.” Once free from the *carcan*, he was to spend a year on the chain gang. Thus in both of these cases, these presumably free men lose their freedom—although temporarily, in the second case—as a result of their “insolence.”⁴⁵ Moreover, being displayed in the heavily trafficked public

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 6: 646.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 6: 713.

market, shackled to a pole by the neck, surely reminded onlookers of the shackles of slaves.

The insubordination of *gens de couleur* was not the only threat to Saint Domingue's seemingly unstable social structure. In fact, colonial administrators were also concerned about the "insolence" of lower class whites toward white planters. When, in September 1780, a white planter fired a white employee on his plantation, the worker was found guilty of having "dared to provoke" his former boss and thrown in prison. Having heard about the incident, the Colonial Minister wrote to the colonial governor to voice his approval of such a sentence, explaining that "it is necessary to suppress the insolence of overseers, workers, and other employees, who dare to carry themselves to excesses toward Planter-Proprietors...." Moreover, the Minister explained that in the future such cases should be handled with an "even greater severity."⁴⁶ Six months later, when a plantation manager threatened the planter of another plantation, he received not jail but a combination of defamatory punishments. In addition to a 1500L fine, the overseer was sentenced to proceed to the court clerk's office, where he would declare before three people chosen by the planter that he had "cruelly and in poor judgment committed excessive acts of violence and battery...; and that he repents, and asks [the planter] for pardon." Moreover, he was to be warned that another similar offense would receive harsher punishment in the future. Finally, the court ordered 100 copies of the decision printed and posted "wherever needed, and especially at the door of the parish

⁴⁶ Ibid., 6: 58. In France, imprisonment was not supposed to be used as a punishment. Rather, courts used prisons to house those suspected of guilt while evidence against them was gathered, a legal maneuver referred to as "plus amplement informé." Andrews argues, however, that old regime courts used the jails to serve both purposes, and as such they were early penal institutions of the type described by Foucault. It is unclear from this document under what pretense this particular man was imprisoned, but the Colonial Minister clearly viewed it as a form of punishment. Andrews, *Law, Magistracy, and Crime in Old Regime Paris, 1735-1789*, 374-375.

church of Dondon,” presumably the parish in which the offense occurred.⁴⁷ Thus, white “insolence” toward one’s social superiors did not receive corporal punishment, but it did warrant a public shaming, both in person and on paper. Although colonial officials attempted to clarify social rank among whites by punishing the “insolence” of *petits blancs*, they sentenced such insolence—and thereby defined it—differently than the insolence of *gens de couleur*.

Occasionally, courts convicted and punished whites for violence against free people of color. However, in such cases, they limited punishments to fines, foregoing the ritual public humiliation inflicted on people of color.⁴⁸ In January 1783, the *Conseil Supérieur* of Cap Français sentenced a white resident named Sieur Chance to pay a hefty 3000L in damages for having struck a free mulatto tailor, Charles Mancombre. The *Conseil* had in fact raised the fine set by a lower court from 1000L, perhaps because of the severity of the violence: Mancombre had almost lost his eye as a result of Chance’s attack.⁴⁹ Likewise, in October of the same year, the same court sentenced two white, married shopkeepers to pay 300L in compensation to a free black woman (*négresse libre*) whom they had severely beaten.⁵⁰

Thus, while colonial courts worked to control violence committed against all of the colony’s free residents, the nature of the sentences depended a great deal on the racial

⁴⁷ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de L'amérique Sous le Vent*, 6: 116.

⁴⁸ Ogle, "Natural Movements and Dangerous Spectacles: Beatings, Duels, And "Play" In Saint Domingue," 234; Ogle, "Policing Saint Domingue: Race, Violence and Honor in an Old Regime Colony", 321.

⁴⁹ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de L'amérique Sous le Vent*, 6: 295.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 6: 370. The decision listed just above this one sentenced a former officer for “insulting and mistreating” a tailor. Both of these men seem to have been white. The former officer was sentenced to the same fine as the two marchands (300L), but the court also ordered him not to do it again or else risk corporal punishment. Thus, the sentence was a bit more ominous for the white-on-white crime.

category attributed to the victim and the accused. When whites committed acts of violence, particularly against people of color, court sentences were comparatively light. Free people of color who insulted, threatened or hurt whites faced the most severe sentences, including corporal punishments, public humiliation, imprisonment, forced labor, or even re-enslavement. Indeed, such punishments worked to associate the guilty party with slavery, reminding those in the Clugny market and “all the customary places” that people of color should never lose the “stain of slavery,” as the Colonial Minister had argued in 1776. The visual spectacle of court-ordered whippings and iron collars left nothing to the imagination of those gathered to watch the punishment: the crime being punished was “insolence,” and the punishment would correct any attempt by the guilty party to forget their lowly status.

The Insolent *Mulâtresse*

Colonial courts also found free women of color guilty of “insolence” toward whites. One particularly well-documented case illustrates some of the social tensions that produced such charges. The incident that provoked the case happened in December 1779, on one of Cap Français’ busiest streets, the rue Espagnole. There, perhaps just a block from the Clugny market, three women got into a fight. One was a white woman, identified as “la femme Castillon, wife of Herpin, Artillery Corporal.” As the wife of a lowly corporal, Herpin was not a member of the colony’s elite. The two other women, named Françoise and Marie Anne, were identified as “*mulâtresses affranchies*,” meaning that they were “mixed,” and that they had been born slaves. While the record reveals very little about either of these women, it does indicate that Marie-Anne typically resided

in Port-au-Prince, and that she owned at least several slaves. Thus, it seems likely that at least one of the mulatto women was of a higher economic status than Herpin.

According to the Conseil's decision, the scene unfolded as follows: Françoise shouted "*houras*" to Herpin, in an attempt to get her attention. In response, Herpin asked Françoise if this shout was directed at her. Françoise replied, "with the intent of insulting her," by saying "Yes, soldier's woman (*femme à Soldat*)." Why did Herpin and the court consider this phrase an insult? First, because militia and military service was so reviled among colonial whites, white soldiers were among the lowest of the white social hierarchy, sometimes referred to as "slaves of the state."⁵¹ Emphasizing Herpin's relation to a "soldier" would therefore have emphasized her low social status. Furthermore, by using the possessive "à" rather than "de" (*femme à Soldat*), Françoise suggested that Herpin was the lover, rather than the wife, of the corporal. Thus Françoise stripped her of both status and respectability. Moreover, and perhaps more to the point, the phrase "soldier's woman" was a slang term for a prostitute.⁵² However Herpin understood the slur, she reacted violently, throwing some rocks at Françoise. A brawl ensued, at which point Marie-Anne jumped in on the side of Françoise, hitting Herpin. Sometime after the incident, Marie Anne was imprisoned. In all likelihood, Françoise joined her in prison. However, we can only be sure of Marie-Anne's imprisonment because the record indicates that she soon managed to escape the jail, aided by two enslaved black prison guards.

⁵¹ John D. Garrigus, "Catalyst or Catastrophe? Saint-Domingue's Free Men of Color and the Battle of Savannah, 1779-1782," *Revista/Review Interamericana* 22, no. 1-2 (1992): 112.

⁵² See the entry "Soldat," in *Le Trésor de la Langue Française Informatisé*, <http://atilf.atilf.fr/>.

When a lower court originally ruled on the case, Marie-Anne and Françoise received punishments typically reserved for whites: specifically, it condemned Marie-Anne and Françoise to admonishment in court, along with a fine of 1500L to be paid to the charity hospital. Thus, had this sentence been upheld, the two women could have paid their fine, received their admonishment, and been on their way. However, upon appeal, the superior court determined this earlier decision insufficient and therefore condemned the women to a much harsher sentence replete with public shaming. The 1500L fine ordered by the lower court remained the same, and would be acquired by selling Marie-Anne's slaves. Both women were banished from the court's jurisdiction for ten years. Furthermore, Marie-Anne and Françoise were to be displayed in the Clugny market from 7-10 in the morning, wearing the *carcan*. Before them on a placard would be written the words "MULATRESSE INSOLENT TOWARD WHITE WOMEN." This punishment clearly relayed the court's message: although they were free, and although at least one of them had some property in slaves, they remained the social subordinates of all white women. However, the sentence could not be carried out exactly as prescribed, since both Marie-Anne and Françoise appear to have escaped. Lacking the physical presence of the accused, the court ordered that the sentence be carried out "in effigy, in a painting on which the sentences will be transcribed, [and] which will be attached by the High Executioner to a pole...in the Clugny Square...."⁵³

⁵³ Moreau de Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Francoises de L'Amérique Sous le Vent*, 6: 30-32. It was quite common for French courts to carry out sentences in effigy when the condemned parties successfully avoided capture. Ruff notes that 1/3 of the capital sentences ordered by the Libourne and Bazas Sénéchaussées (lower courts) were performed on effigies of the condemned, who had managed to escape. Ruff, *Crime, Justice and Public Order in Old Regime France: The Sénéchaussées of Libourne and Bazas, 1696-1789*, 60-61.

Why did the Conseil so dramatically alter the sentence imposed by the lower court? The Conseil Supérieur acted to clarify the ambiguities of class and race revealed by the fight. Françoise challenged Herpin's economic status, sexual virtue, and her gentility in a very public place, thereby calling into question the worth of white femininity. Moreover, by physically assaulting a white woman, Françoise and Marie-Anne transgressed sanctioned forms of violence in the colony. In Saint Domingue, whites had almost unlimited access to non-white bodies; physical violence could only be punished lightly if a white committed it against a *gen de couleur* or a slave. Françoise and Marie-Anne's acts had to be corrected publicly, so that the colonial public would know that racial hierarchy, and the "economy of violence" that both reinforced it and grew out of it, had been maintained.

Six years later, the same court tried two other free "mulatto" women for a similar offense. The details of the case remain a bit unclear, but we can reconstruct some illuminating parts.⁵⁴ A lower court had convicted Sophie and Claire, identified as "ML," or *mulâtresses libres*, for insulting a white man named Sieur Agnés dit Ste. Colombe. As a *marchand pacotilleur*, Agnés belonged to the lower ranks of the merchant community, a distinction which is emphasized in the record by the appellation "dit Ste. Colombe," rather than simply "Ste. Colombe" or "de Ste. Colombe." While the document divulges virtually nothing about Sophie or Claire, we know that both women were probably free at birth since the court recognized them as "libre" rather than "affranchie."

It is not clear where the offense took place, but at least several white men and an enslaved woman witnessed it. Two of these men testified, presumably against Sophie

⁵⁴ The following case is detailed in CAOM C/9a/165, 13 juillet 1786.

and Claire, and another, a ship captain named Duramier, was found guilty for insulting Agnés by taking the side of Sophie and Claire in the dispute. When Sophie attempted to refute the testimony of the two men, the court ruled her attempts “not pertinent and inadmissible.”

The lower court therefore sentenced the women to the *carcan* for two hours in the Clugny market, with “*mulâtresses* insolent toward whites” written on a placard before them. In addition they were to pay a fine of three livres to the King, and were banished from the court’s jurisdiction for five years. For his complicity, Duramier was sentenced to admonishment in court. Françoise and Marie-Anne had been sentenced similarly—albeit more harshly—for insults and real violence. What kind of insult warranted a sentence so reminiscent of Françoise and Marie-Anne’s? Sophie’s and Claire’s insult consisted of an accusation that Agnés “had been whipped and branded in France.” To make matters worse, Claire threatened Agnés, perhaps as she was being arrested, warning him that she would “have him beaten with a stick, when she gets out of prison.”

In France, whipping and branding were punishments that dishonored as they inflicted physical pain. Whipping created a public performance of penitence and humiliation on the part of the condemned. Branding insured that such dishonor would forever remain with the condemned, having become a permanent physical feature on the body. But in the colonies, these practices had a much more humiliating referent. If whipping was the punishment most associated with slaveowners’ power and slaves’ submission, branding was the practice that ensured slaves’ possession. Enslaved men and women imported from Africa were first branded by slave traders. Upon arrival in the colony, owners then typically applied a second brand, usually with their initials, and

sometimes with their full names, to indicate ownership.⁵⁵ Fugitive slave notices almost always indicated the letters burned onto slaves' bodies in order to aid efforts to hunt them down. Sophie and Claire, by making this claim—which is never disputed as a lie but is instead termed an “insult”—evoked the lowly status of Agnés by associating him with two of the most emblematic practices of slave discipline. Such an accusation was bad enough when it issued from Duramier, but when women of color asserted it, it became “insolent.” By placing Sophie and Claire in the *carcan*, the court sought to restore the hierarchy that these women had challenged.

We cannot know what transpired between Agnés, Sophie and Claire prior to the “insult.” Did Agnés launch the first insult, calling into question their status or virtue? Or, did Agnés disagree with one of the women over the price of an item for sale, which then provoked a battle of insults? However the incident began, it seems likely that Sophie and Claire were aware of the implications of their assertion. In fact, as free-born women of color, they were no doubt keenly aware (and probably resentful) of official efforts to mark them with the “stain” of slavery. By publicly claiming that a white man of the lower order had been the target of punishments most associated with slaves, Sophie and Claire called into question the logic of racial hierarchy.

Curiously, the *Conseil Supérieur* of Cap Français amended the lower court's sentence, largely stripping the women's punishment of its spectacular characteristics. Instead, the Conseil sentenced the women to a month in prison and admonishment in court, where they would be warned to behave with “the greatest respect toward all whites in general, at risk of being punished according to the rigor of the ordinances, even by the

⁵⁵ Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution*, 39.

loss of liberty....” It appears that the court lessened the severity of the sentence due to whatever challenges Sophie had raised against the testimony of the witnesses. Thus the women did not face banishment or the humiliation of the *carcan*. Still, the court made their precarious position quite clear: as women of color, they owed “all whites,” even *petit blancs*, respect. Their next act of “insolence” could get them re-enslaved.

Thus racism against free people of color was not merely a product of colonial law. Colonial whites had other methods of constructing and enforcing racial hierarchy. Defining particular practices in racial terms allowed them to buttress the hierarchy that administrators had attempted to impose prior to 1780. This chapter has argued that colonial courts used racialized forms of punishments in order to associate free people of color with the “stain of slavery.” In the 1780’s, even as colonial administrators considered ameliorating the position of the free people of color, colonial courts drew on colonial understandings of racialized punishment to ensure the continued degradation of this group.

Conclusion

Efforts to define “creole citizenship” continued in the revolutionary period, as the issue of the rights of the *gens de couleur* became entangled with the issue of colonial legislative autonomy. As during the colonial period, white Antillean jurists argued that the climate and customs particular to the colonies meant that the laws of France could not simply be transferred there. Asserting that the new legal regime taking hold in France should not be universally applied in its colonies—particularly the principle that political rights be granted to men based on property ownership rather than inherited privilege—Moreau and other colonial jurists grounded their desire to preserve racial privilege and slavery in longstanding legal arguments.¹ Meanwhile, emboldened by the changes underway in France, Raimond argued for citizenship rights for the wealthiest *gens de couleur* in pamphlets and revolutionary newspapers as well as before the French National Assembly. He joined Brissot’s Society for the Friends of the Blacks (the *Amis des Noirs*), and convinced its members to table the more contentious issue of abolition in order to advocate for free colored citizenship instead. Moreau argued against Raimond in

¹ This argument would be adopted by the French National Assembly when it proclaimed on March 8, 1790 that “it never intended to include them in the constitution that it has decreed for the kingdom or to subject them to laws which might be incompatible with their particular, local proprieties.” However, as Malick Ghachem explains, the argument for colonial particularity was in tension with the centralizing, universalist tendencies of the revolution. Colonial jurists attempted to argue that the colonies required different laws, yet at the same time they deserved equal representation in France before the National Assembly just like other French provinces. In the end, particularism would lose out to universalism, and both race privilege and slavery were outlawed as a result. Malick Walid Ghachem, “Sovereignty and Slavery in the Age of Revolutions: Haitian Variations on a Metropolitan Theme” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 2001), 251. See Ghachem’s Chapter Six for the elaboration of his argument on the revolutionary period.

his own pamphlets, and he helped organize a group of white absentee planters into a powerful lobbying group known as the Club Massiac.²

As other scholars have elaborated, the “colonial question” forced French revolutionaries to consider just how far they were willing to take their revolutionary principles.³ Did liberty, equality and fraternity extend to the colonies, and if so, to which colonial residents? Would political rights be open to all colonial men, even the *gens de couleur*? The newly revived representative body in Paris, the Estates General, voted in May 1789 to accept illegally elected representatives from the colonies without much debate. Needless to say, all of those representatives were white. However, more radical members of the assembly quickly questioned exactly whom these colonists represented. Most famously, the Comte de Mirabeau complained that neither free men of color nor enslaved men had been permitted to vote on the colonial representatives.⁴ Eventually, French assembly members would be moved by revolutionary fervor and, as importantly, wartime exigencies—namely the need to suppress the massive slave revolt in Saint Domingue—to vote in favor of citizenship rights for the *gens de couleur* (1792) and the abolition of slavery (1794).⁵ However, a truly universal application of the Rights of Man,

² Gabriel Debien, *Les Colons de Saint-Domingue et la Revolution: Essai sur le Club Massiac (Aout 1789-Aout 1792)* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1953); John D. Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 235-263; John D. Garrigus, "Opportunist or Patriot? Julien Raimond (1744-1801) and the Haitian Revolution," *Slavery and Abolition* 28, no. 1 (2007); David Geggus, "Racial Equality, Slavery and Colonial Secession During the Constituent Assembly," *American Historical Review* 94, no. 5 (1989).

³ Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848* (London: Verso, 1988); Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2004); Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Geggus, "Racial Equality, Slavery and Colonial Secession During the Constituent Assembly."

⁴ Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848*, 173-174.

⁵ For the argument that slave revolt forced the hand of French assembly members in both instances, see *Ibid*; Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution*; Carolyn E. Fick, *The*

one that freed slaves and enfranchised all men, was hardly a given in the early days of the French Revolution. Moreover, once achieved, those reforms proved remarkably fragile; newly freed slaves were still denied equality in the French Antilles, and Napoleon reinstated slavery throughout the French empire in 1802.⁶ In short, those who propelled the Haitian Revolution—white colonists, *gens de couleur* and, most importantly, rebel slaves—revealed and then pushed at the limits of French republicanism. As Laurent Dubois has argued, “if we live in a world in which democracy is meant to exclude no one, it is in no small part because of the actions of those slaves in Saint-Domingue who insisted that human rights were theirs too.”⁷

This dissertation maintains that revolutionary-era arguments over who would be included in this new category of legal citizenship rested in part on cultural definitions of the citizen forged in Saint Domingue and France during the pre-revolutionary period. During those years, white colonial elites sought to prevent the legal and social assimilation of upwardly mobile *gens de couleur* with whites by promoting the image of the “creole citizen,” who was by definition white. Drawing on discourses circulating throughout the eighteenth-century Atlantic World, such as climate theory, gendered republicanism, and the image of the noble savage, their articulation of the “creole citizen” allowed them to assert their own civic virtue while denying that of colonial people of color.

Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990); Geggus, "Racial Equality, Slavery and Colonial Secession During the Constituent Assembly." For an argument that abolition was inevitable, given the radical turn of the French Revolution, see Florence Gauthier, "The Role of the Saint-Domingue Deputation in the Abolition of Slavery," in *The Abolitions of Slavery: From L.F. Sonthonax to Victor Schoelcher, 1793, 1794, 1848*, ed. Marcel Dorigny (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003).

⁶ Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804*.

⁷ Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution*, 3.

Saint Dominguans defined creole citizenship through their discussion of, and participation in, particular social practices. This dissertation has focused on practices central to discourses of citizenship in France and Saint Domingue, including print culture, marriage, luxury consumption, and violence. Early modern print culture, and especially newspapers, are often interpreted as agents of enlightened change and even democratic reform. However, through their interactive readership and production of the local newspaper, elite white men in Saint Domingue attempted to limit participation in the colonial public sphere. The *Affiches Américaines* constructed an “imagined community” of enlightened colonial citizens, one that denied that men of color and all women were capable of participating in its scientific, intellectual, and civic pursuits. Similarly, they claimed that people of color were incapable of being good republican husbands or wives; in particular, they advocated that white men marry only white women. White creole women, they suggested, made ideal wives and mothers due to their naturally docile and nurturing femininity, whereas women of color—and especially “mixed” women—should serve only as mistresses to white men. Meanwhile, white men, and some white women, understood that the true creole citizen consumed luxury goods in particular, gendered ways. Virtuous men, they proposed, dressed comfortably but humbly, while virtuous women used fashion to accentuate their natural beauty. By contrast, by dressing ostentatiously, men of color revealed their effeminacy and women of color their sexual immorality. Finally, white elites defended themselves against accusations of extraordinary violence toward their slaves by displacing such acts on lower-class whites. Excessive abuse of the enslaved could endanger the slave system by spurring slave revolt. But white elites, they claimed, could control their violent urges. Such control was

necessary in order to convince metropolitan officials that colonists were capable of the reason necessary to legislate. Meanwhile, all-white colonial courts sentenced free people of color to spectacular forms of punishment that recalled the disciplinary violence of the plantation, thereby publicly associating convicted *gens de couleur* with the enslaved.

Yet white elites were certainly not the only colonial residents defining categories of race and citizenship in the colony. Saint Domingue's diverse populations of free and enslaved people of color, as well as non-elite whites, expressed their own understandings of race and citizenship, often exposing the fluidity of those categories in daily life. As noted throughout this dissertation, Julien Raimond eventually used print culture to counter the arguments of white elites directly, although his pamphlets were published only in revolutionary France and not in Saint Domingue. During the colonial period, however, he fractured the premise of an all-white colonial public sphere suggested in the *Affiches Américaines* by responding to the paper's call for patriotic wartime contributions. Free people of color challenged the supposed white monopoly on loving marriages as well, sometimes using the language of affectionate marriage to defend their own freedom. Likewise, poor whites and their wives of color disregarded elite white admonitions of interracial marriage, choosing to legitimate their children and legally secure their children's inheritance, however modest. Regarding "*luxe*," free women of color flaunted white colonists' (and white administrators') association of ostentatious dress with immorality and colonial social disorder by wearing diamonds on their sandals and feathers in their hair. But while white elites condemned the luxury consumption of *gens de couleur* on the grounds that it jeopardized colonial stability, they also realized that the colonial economy relied on it.

Admittedly, the notion of the “creole citizen” examined in this dissertation relies heavily, and disproportionately, on the perspectives of elite white men. Much more research remains to be done on the lives of non-elite women and men, including free people of color, the enslaved, and whites. Such research will permit a better understanding of the contested nature of creole citizenship as it was lived by all colonial residents. So many questions persist regarding their participation in the social practices considered by this dissertation. For example, we know very little about the ways in which these groups contributed to the colonial public sphere. How literate were they, and exactly what kind of access did they have to colonial and overseas journals? How did they read? As importantly, how did these actors contribute to the discourse of citizenship in alternate public spheres like the colonial theater? Such questions can only be answered through creative archival investigation.

Thus expanding our knowledge of the quotidian will better reveal the ways in which Saint Domingans negotiated definitions of race and citizenship. But looking outward from Saint Domingue toward other new world colonies will also illuminate these local debates. Certainly Saint Domingue was not the only colony struggling to define its relationship to the metropole and its creole identity in the late eighteenth century. British North American and Caribbean whites rejected the label “creole.” The North American colonists, of course, took on the label “Americans” in order to mark their distinctiveness from the English as well as their superiority to Caribbean or Latin American creoles.⁸ Barbadians proudly announced that they were “neither Carib, nor Creole, but true

⁸ Joyce E. Chaplin, “Creoles in British America: From Denial to Acceptance,” in *Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory*, ed. Charles Stewart (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2007); Ashli White, *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early U.S. Republic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, forthcoming), Chapter One.

Barbadian,' while simultaneously asserting their allegiance to England.⁹ Nor was Saint Domingue the only colony to reconsider the position of free people of color. In the Spanish Americas and in the British Caribbean, some free people of color were in fact granted the status of "whites," as the French Colonial Ministry and Raimond had proposed in Saint Domingue.¹⁰ Comparing such similar debates will illuminate not only the broader historical processes at work in the late-eighteenth century Atlantic World but also the particularity of local contexts. After all, Saint Dominguans—including non-elites like the "clever" enslaved *mulâtresse*, Marie Anne, who married her white owner on his deathbed, and the white fashion merchant Dame Durrect, who was sued by her *mulâtresse* client, as well as Moreau and Raimond—shaped the meaning of citizenship both throughout the Atlantic World and on the streets of Saint Domingue.

⁹ David Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity During the Age of Abolition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 103.

¹⁰ Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, 6-7; Ann Twinam, "Racial Passing: Informal and Official "Whiteness" In Colonial Spanish America," in *New World Orders: Violence, Sanction and Authority in the Colonial Americas*, ed. John Smolenski and Thomas Humphrey (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

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