

ATLANTIC CROSSINGS: RACE, GENDER, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF
FAMILIES IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY LA ROCHELLE

By

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Dedication

For Amy... still shining.

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List of Abbreviations

CAOM- Cahiers d'Archives d'Outre Mer

ADCM- Archives Departementales de la Charente Maritime

AMLR- Archives Municipales de La Rochelle

Abstract

This dissertation shows that French families, faced with the contingencies brought on by colonialism and the presence of slaves and free people of color in France, demonstrated flexibility in modifying traditional strategies of parentage, godparentage, marriage, and inheritance to delineate whom they included as members. Positioning the family at the center of analysis demonstrates how slavery shaped gender roles and how both women and men in Saint-Domingue and La Rochelle manipulated the categories of race and gender for their own benefit. Ultimately, this dissertation argues that slavery and colonialism shaped family not only in France's colonies, but in France itself.

This project makes three main historiographic and methodological contributions. First, it demonstrates that transatlantic trade and the movement of people and goods back and forth across the Atlantic shaped people's daily lives and experiences in France as well as in the colonies. Considering this circulation contributes to historical understanding of the French empire, but also Old Regime France. Second, it shows that family relationships shaped transatlantic commerce, slavery, and the relationships between blacks and whites. The intimate therefore had far-reaching implications for France and its empire, and in order to understand French history broadly it is important to understand intimate relationships that played out within the family or household. Intimacy is a methodological point as well. Drawing

on close readings of a wide base of archival sources that include passenger lists, parish records, family papers, notary records, and royal and municipal records enables me to suggest the range of relationships negotiated between whites and enslaved and free people of color, whether they lived under one roof or were separated by the ocean. Third, employing both visual and archival texts deconstructs the line often drawn between text and image, and highlights the implications of expanding the historical source base to include visual images. Pulling images apart to consider the circumstances and meaning of their production and evaluating them in partnership with archival documents emphasizes the necessity of considering both artistic cultural production and the lived experiences of historical actors in cultural analyses of race and gender.

Introduction

On 13 May 1721, the ship *L'Amable Marie* arrived in the port of La Rochelle from the town of Cap Français, in the French colony of Saint-Domingue. The passengers on this ship included a family group that consisted of one Sieur de Linier, his children, and his slaves Toyay and Magdelen.

This dissertation focuses on the slaves who came to France, merchants or planters who had ties on both sides of the Atlantic, and their families. By positioning the family at the center of my analysis I demonstrate how slavery shaped gender roles and how both women and men manipulated the categories of race and gender for their own benefit. The entry of slaves and free people of color into their households challenged and ultimately changed French families. Faced with the contingencies brought on by French colonialism and the presence of slaves in France, families demonstrated remarkable flexibility in modifying traditional strategies of patronage, godparentage, marriage, and inheritance to delineate who they included as members. Ultimately, this dissertation argues, slavery and colonialism shaped family and patronage in the vibrant Atlantic port town of La Rochelle.

The Atlantic seaport of La Rochelle and the French Caribbean colony of Saint-Domingue were separated by a four thousand-mile voyage that often took two

or even three months.¹ Everyone aboard a ship such as *L'Amable Marie* must have looked forward to fresh water, food, and, if they were lucky, the comfort of a bed by the time the coast's barrier islands came into view. The ship, after navigating around the Ile d'Oléron and the Ile de Ré, may have had to wait several days at the end of the narrow channel that led into the famous harbor, either for other ships to unload or for the silt that plagued the port to be dredged, leaving the way free. The ship would have made its way past the point of Les Minimes, mostly farmland in the eighteenth century, from where what was left of the city walls and the three medieval towers along them would have been clearly visible. At night, the light from the Tour de la Lanterne (now commonly known as Les Quatre Sergents) would have warned the ship to wait until dawn, when the massive chain that hung between the two towers would be retracted. In the daytime, the distinctive local stone used to construct buildings and streets would have glowed golden in the sunlight. As the ship glided between the Tour Saint Nicolas and the Tour de la Chaîne, the hustle and bustle of the harbor would have come into view. To the left sat the fish market on the corner of the Rue Saint Jean. Straight ahead was the Grosse Horloge, a clock tower that was all that remained of the inner city walls, destroyed by Cardinal Richelieu's troops after the siege of the town by royal forces from 1620-1621. Beyond it they may have even seen the spires of the city hall, the Protestant stronghold during the siege, and the solid roof of the Chamber of Commerce, where the city's wealthiest men discussed trade. In the distance, the spire of the Tour Saint-Barthélémy, the former bell tower of a Protestant church which had been dismantled to reinforce the city walls during

¹ Marcel Delafosse, ed., *Histoire de La Rochelle* (Toulouse, 1985), p. 166. Delafosse puts the average crossing time at 50 days.

the Great Siege, may have peeked above the roofs. By the eighteenth century, the tower was attached to a Catholic parish church of the same name, and then to the cathedral, which was completed in 1782.

As the ship pulled into port, a flurry of activity would have taken place along the banks. Dockhands, many of whom lived in the *quartiers* Saint Jean and Saint Nicolas situated on either side of the port, would have swung into action to help dock and perhaps unload the ship. Spectators from the ship's deck also may have seen artisans or shopkeepers hurrying along the banks, wives of sailors eagerly hoping for their husbands' return, and perhaps even wealthy merchants eager to investigate the goods that had arrived from abroad. Finally the passengers would have disembarked; any slaves among their number would have set foot on French soil for the first time.

Slaves such as Toyay and Magdelen were a relatively common sight in La Rochelle in the eighteenth century. In 1716, a royal edict gave official sanction to owners to bring slaves to France.² This practice, already common among white colonists returning to the metropole for business or pleasure, had brought legal confusion in the preceding decades, particularly following a 1696 decision that slaves who were brought to France automatically received their liberty.³ The 1716 Edict explicitly legalized slavery in the metropole, foreclosing the possibility that slaves could automatically be freed once they stepped on French soil. However, the edict did not give *carte blanche* to slave owners. Rather, it stated that colonists could only bring slaves to France "to confirm them in the instruction and exercise of our religion,

² "Edit concernant les esclaves nègres des colonies," 25 October 1716. Isambert, Decrusy and Taillandier, *Recueil Général des Anciennes Lois Françaises, depuis l'an 420 jusqu'a la Révolution de 1789* (Paris, 1830), Vol. XXI, pp. 122-126.

³ Sue Peabody, *"There are No Slaves in France": The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien Régime* (New York, 1996), pp. 12-15.

and to have them learn at the same time some trade or craft,” or, alternatively, to serve their owners as domestic servants on the voyage.⁴ If owners violated these stipulations, slaves could have the possibility to win their freedom and remain in France as free men and women. Whether slave owners actually provided either of these required trainings to their slaves is highly questionable, although the majority of slave owners who registered their slaves at least stated a vague intention to do so. Of the 127 slaves registered with the Admiralty as entering La Rochelle from mid-August 1719 to the end of Feb 1724, only twenty-six registrations do not mention this obligatory training; nearly all of these twenty-six slaves were registered instead as domestic servants or caregivers to children, brought to France to aid their masters on the voyage.⁵ Of the 201 slaves registered from the end of July 1729 through mid-October 1737, only twenty-five were not listed as coming to France to receive religious or artisinal training; of these, an additional eighteen were listed as personal servants for their owners or family members.⁶

Subsequent legislation further restricted opportunities for slaves to find freedom in France. The Declaration of 1738 limited to three years the amount of time slaves could stay in France. It stipulated further that if owners exceeded this time

⁴ "Edit concernant les esclaves nègres des colonies." Isambert, *Recueil Général des Anciennes Loix Françaises*, Vol. XXI, p. 123. "...pour les confirmer dans les instructions et dans les exercices de notre religion, et pour leur faire apprendre en même temps quelque métier ou art."

⁵ "Registre de la majesté du siege de l'amirauté de La Rochelle commancé le dix septieme 7, mil sept cent dix neuf a finy le 7 may 1729," B 224, ADCM.

⁶ "Registre de la Majeste Commance (*sic*) le 11e may 1729 et finy le 16 octobre 1737," B 225, ADCM. Of the remaining seven slaves, one had died on the voyage, one had already been sent back to the colonies, one was listed as "malade," two gave no information about the purpose of their visit in France, and two apparently came as stowaways. The merchant François Pierre Dupas of La Rochelle made their Admiralty declaration on behalf of himself and the other proprietors of the ship L'Angelique, and said that the slaves had come to La Rochelle although he had explicitly instructed the captain to sell all his 'cargo' in Saint-Domingue. He promised to have them baptized, and to send them back to Saint-Domingue as soon as possible. "Declaration de 2 Nègres" in the same register, 12 June 1730.

limit, slaves would not be freed to live in France, as provided in the 1716 edict, but would be confiscated and sold in the colonies “to the profit of the king.” The 1738 declaration also placed restrictions on slaves’ freedom to marry and stipulated that owners could only free slaves by testament.⁷ The next law aimed at limiting slavery in France, the *police des Noirs* legislation of 1777, explicitly prohibited all slaves from setting foot on French soil. Although the law acknowledged colonists’ right to travel with slaves, it required them to remain in depots established at each port city, and to be sent back to the colonies on the next ship. Further, the law required all people of color, slave or free, who were already in France to register with the police. This racial legislation marked a turning point in French law, as it was based explicitly on skin color, not slave or free status.⁸

Of the approximately twenty to twenty-five slaves brought into La Rochelle each year, some undoubtedly accompanied their owners to other parts of France, especially Paris; for them, La Rochelle was simply their port of entry. Some returned to the colonies, most particularly those who accompanied colonial administrators to France for short official visits. But some stayed in the seaport, and many lived there for many years. Some remained slaves, but some received their freedom and worked as domestic servants or day laborers. Some even married and had families.

This small but highly visible population attracted an attention disproportionate to its numbers. Most historians agree that a steady population of about four thousand to five thousand people of color, free or slave, lived in France in the eighteenth

⁷ "Déclaration concernant les nègres esclaves des Colonies," 18 November 1738, Isambert, *Recueil Général des Anciennes Lois Françaises*, Vol. XXII, pp. 112-115. Also see Peabody, *There are No Slaves in France*, Chapter 3.

⁸ "Déclaration pour la police des Noirs," 9 August 1777, Isambert, *Recueil Général des Anciennes Lois Françaises*, Vol. XXV, pp. 81-84, and Peabody, *There are No Slaves in France*, Chapter 7.

century.⁹ Recent work, however, has begun to suggest that this number falls short of the actual population. For example, Dwain Pruitt convincingly argues that slave owners had good reason to obfuscate the actual numbers of slaves brought into France, and he puts the number of slaves in the predominant slave port of Nantes much higher than previous scholars have maintained.¹⁰

La Rochelle, Protestantism, and Trade

La Rochelle had much more in common with its sister port of Nantes than it did with Paris. Both Atlantic ports had a long history of Protestantism and of resistance to royal authority; both had strong trading ties, first with other parts of Europe, and by the eighteenth century around the Atlantic basin; both relied economically on slavery and the slave trade.¹¹ In short, they shared many

⁹ The *Causes célèbres*, in reporting on the case of Jean Boucaux, puts the number of people of color in France at 4,000 in 1738. François Gayot de Pitaval, *Causes célèbres et intéressantes avec les jugemens qui les ont décidées* (Paris, 1734-1754), vol. 13, p. 537. Shelby McCloy says that police in the eighteenth century put the number at 5,000, but McCloy considers that number too high. He bases his conclusion on his investigation of the *Police des Noirs*, a police survey of all people of color in France in 1777-1778; his research identified less than 1,000 people of color in France at that time. Shelby Thomas McCloy, *The Negro in France* (Lexington, KY, 1961), p. 5. Léo Elisabeth identified 3,242 slaves and 358 free people of color who passed through Bordeaux in the eighteenth century. Léo Elisabeth, "The French Antilles," in *Neither Slave nor Free: The Freedman of African Descent in the Slave Societies of the New World*, ed. David W. and Jack P. Greene Cohen, (Baltimore, 1972). Sue Peabody puts the number at 4,000-5,000. Peabody, "There are No Slaves in France", p. 5.

¹⁰ Dwain Pruitt, "'The Opposition of the Law to the Law': Race, Slavery, and the Law in Nantes, 1715-1778," *French Historical Studies* 30, no. 2 (2007):147-174, esp. pp. 169-174, where Pruitt demonstrates some ways slave owners prevented Admiralty officials, acting on the orders of the king, from confiscating their slaves.

Pruitt puts the number of slaves in Nantes over the course of the 'long' eighteenth century (in his case, 1694-1843) at 1424. See Dwain Pruitt, "Nantes Noir: Living Race in the City of Slavers" (Emory University, 2005), p. 161.

¹¹ The vast majority of scholarship on Nantes addresses the slave trade; Pruitt's work provides a different take on this established focus by considering slavery in the "city of slavers" itself. See, for example, Gaston-Martin, *L'ère des négriers (1714-1774)* (Paris, 1993), Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau, *Nantes au temps de la traite des Noirs* (Paris, 1998), Armel de Wismes, *Nantes et le temps des négriers* (Paris, 1992), Jean Meyer, *L'Armement Nantais dans la deuxième moitié du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1969), and Robert Louis Stein, "The Profitability of the Nantes Slave Trade, 1783-1792," *Journal of Economic History* 35, no. 4 (1975):779-793. Historiography that does not address the

commercial interests, and residents of both cities built personal and business networks that extended to France's colonies. Often, such ties were built on shared religious beliefs. La Rochelle's long history of religious dissent provided a familiar framework for subsequent conflicts with the crown on the matter of slavery.

With its excellent natural harbor, protected from the stormy Atlantic by sandy islands off its shore, La Rochelle was an important strategic base, instrumental in medieval conflicts among the English, Spanish, and French. Surrounded by marshland, a network of swampy rivers connected the city to the interior of western France; it exported local products, particularly salt, spirits, and cloth, to northern Europe, southern Europe, and later Africa and the Americas. At the heart of a trading network and an integral element in the system of defensive structures lined up along the Atlantic coast, from an early date La Rochelle was a key city for any ruler who wanted to control the west coast of France.¹²

This key position in lines of defense and networks of trade meant that rulers always were willing to make concessions to the city, and it enjoyed an unparalleled amount of freedom. Guillaume, duke of Aquitaine, gave La Rochelle its first privileges as early as 1131. Little is known about these first privileges, which were confirmed by Louis XII, king of France, and Henry II, king of England, Aquitaine's next two rulers, both sons of Eleanor of Aquitaine. After the death of Louis and Henry, the province and its crown city reverted to Eleanor, daughter of Guillaume

eighteenth century continues to focus on Nantes' maritime character, as, for example, Anne Vauthier-Vézier, *L'estuaire et le port: l'identité maritime de Nantes au XIXe siècle* (Rennes, 2007) and Serge Daget, *La répression de la traite des Noirs au XIXe siècle: L'action des croisières françaises sur les côtes occidentales de l'Afrique, 1817-1850*. (Paris, 1997).

¹² A number of authors interpret La Rochelle's geographic situation as an active factor in shaping its politics, culture, and religion. Among these are Kevin C. Robbins, *City on the Ocean Sea: La Rochelle, 1530-1650* (New York, 1997), Delafosse, ed., *Histoire de La Rochelle*, Claude Laveau, *Le Monde rochelais des Bourbons à Bonaparte* (La Rochelle, 1988).

and mother of the two kings. She gave the city its first charter in 1199, making it independent of royal or aristocratic control, with its own elected mayor, aldermen, and town council. Civil liberties and economic ones went hand in hand, and La Rochelle was exempt from the majority of royal taxes, including the hated *taille*, a direct tax that weighed most heavily on peasants and brought revenues straight to the French crown. Other privileges allowed the Rochelais freedom to trade freely with many states, including those with which France was at war. La Rochelle successfully guarded and even extended these privileges through the centuries, accumulating even more privileges and autonomy up until the French wars of religion.¹³

A cosmopolitan city with long-standing trading links to the British Isles, Scandinavia, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, and North Africa, even in the sixteenth century the city had a cosmopolitan character and a polyglot community. Home to several printing presses, La Rochelle became a center for the dissemination of vernacular Protestant texts. Travelers brought new ideas, and Calvinism, in particular, spread in an atmosphere of toleration; even after the beginning of the wars of religion in 1562, Catholics and Protestants continued to share the churches of Saint-Barthélemy and Saint-Sauveur in La Rochelle. When the city finally entered the war in 1568, it was not merely in support of the Huguenots, but primarily in protest of King Charles IX's attempt to garrison troops in the fortified city, in violation of their customary privileges.¹⁴ From that point on, La Rochelle became a refuge for Huguenot leaders and the core of the Protestant resistance. After defeating

¹³ Several general works address the early history of La Rochelle. They include Delafosse, ed., *Histoire de La Rochelle*, Laveau, *Monde rochelais*, Mickaël Augeron et al, *La Rochelle: Capitale Atlantique, Capitale Huguenote* (Paris, 1998).

¹⁴ Mickaël Augeron, *La Rochelle: Capitale Atlantique, Capitale Huguenote*, p. 33.

royal troops in the first siege of La Rochelle from 1572-1573, the city became a symbol of the freedoms they hoped to achieve to Protestants throughout Europe. The ensuing peace of 1576 offered major concessions to Protestants, and particularly to La Rochelle, which was exempted from having a royal governor.¹⁵ A further peace agreement named La Rochelle as one of four places of safe refuge for Protestants.¹⁶ The city remained completely independent from Royal control until the Edict of Nantes provided religious toleration to all Protestants in 1598.

Cardinal Richelieu, principal minister during the regency of Louis XIII, worked during his tenure (1624-1642) to consolidate state authority. La Rochelle's special privileges, accorded to it by monarchs over hundreds of years, threatened this push towards centralization at least as much as the religious dissent presented by the Huguenots. In 1627, Richelieu turned his attention toward the city on the sea, laying siege to it for over a year. After the death of over 15,000 people, more than two-thirds of its population, the city finally capitulated. Following its defeat, the city council was abolished, the privileges revoked, and the strong defensive city walls largely razed. Although the city was accorded amnesty and allowed to continue its exercise of religious freedoms, its civil privileges and independence were gone.¹⁷

¹⁵ The Edict of Beaulieu, also known as the "paix de Monsieur."

¹⁶ Edict of Saint-Germain in August of 1570.

¹⁷ The majority of scholarly literature on La Rochelle addresses its role as a Huguenot stronghold in the wars of religion. See, for example, Guy Martinière, ed., *Coligny, les Protestants et la Mer* (La Rochelle, 1996), Judith Pugh Myer, *Reformation in La Rochelle: Tradition and Change in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1568* (Geneva, 1996), Pascal Rambeaud, *La Rochelle fidèle et rebelle* (Paris, 1999), Robbins, *City on the Ocean Sea*. As its title suggests, Martinière's volume focuses on Protestants and their involvement in the maritime world. It touches on cartography, navigation, the fortification of towns, and pirates. Meyer privileges political reasons for the successful spread of Protestantism in La Rochelle, positing that once power was in the hands of a few powerful Protestants, many people began to convert. Robbins traces how personal connections, including family relations and godparentage, shaped the ruling structures of the city and determined the relationship between royal and local authority. Rambeaud follows Robbins in focusing his study on personal relationships

The population of Protestants in La Rochelle continued to be strong after the siege, but the royal imposition of Catholic control over important offices created permanent rifts between the two groups. The largely Protestant merchants and the primarily Catholic artisanat coexisted uneasily. The Protestant population remained steady, however, in spite of the strictures and persecution that marked the century between the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, which once again outlawed Protestantism, and the Edict of Toleration in 1787, which provided for toleration of different religions in France. Although during this period Protestantism was, strictly speaking, clandestine, estimates of the Protestant population in the eighteenth century average 2-3,000 believers, roughly 10-15% of the population.¹⁸ Many Huguenots had emigrated to the Americas in search of religious freedom, and others had converted to Catholicism in the wake of the Catholic Reformation. However, estimates may not take into account the *nouveau convertis*, Protestants who professed the Catholic religion although they did not actually practice it. Further, by 1764, thirty-six Protestant worship groups met regularly, some with more than fifty people each, suggesting the persistent and powerful influence of the dissenting religion.¹⁹ These dissenters, though small in number, were great in influence and wealth: they comprised the most prominent merchants in the city, and they exerted a disproportionate amount of influence. Most of the powerful Rochelais families, including the Carayon, Perry, Rasteau, Garesché, Bonneau, Admyrault, Vivier, and

and connections, but gives much more credence to the influence of Radical Protestants and religious beliefs in general in shaping the city government.

¹⁸ Francine Ducluzeau, ed., *Histoire des protestants charentais (Aunis, Saintonge, Angoumois)* (Paris, 2001). In contrast, at the end of the sixteenth century, the city was 95% Protestant.

¹⁹ Nicole Vray, *La Rochelle et les Protestants du XVIIe au XXe siècle* (La Crèche, 1999). This in spite of the fact that such groups were made expressly illegal by Article II of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, 22 October 1685.

Fleuriau families, all counted themselves Protestants.²⁰ Many of these same families also owned slaves.

La Rochelle and Slavery

Unlike Nantes, the slave trade was never La Rochelle's primary industry. Although second only to Nantes in terms of the number of slave voyages departing from the city until passed by Bordeaux in the 1790s, La Rochelle never depended only on the slave trade.²¹ While merchants in Nantes outfitted a startling 1427 slave ships from 1707-1793, in roughly the same period 427 slave ships departed from La Rochelle. Although La Rochelle's economy, like that of Nantes, relied primarily on transatlantic trade, its merchants also engaged extensively in direct trade with France's overseas colonies. For most of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the city was the primary French port for the direct trade with Nouvelle France, to which it exported its traditional goods, salt and wine, in exchange for Canada's sought-after furs.²²

As the French Antilles gained commercial importance at the beginning of the eighteenth century, however, Rochelais merchants began to turn their attention

²⁰ Carolyn Chappell Lougee considers the challenges this confluence of religious dissent and commercial success posed for the intendants of La Rochelle. Pierre Arnoul, Intendant of La Rochelle from 1683-1688, faced difficulty in exercising royal decrees to force all Protestants to convert to Catholicism, when doing so would cause wealthy merchants to flee to Protestant nations and take their commerce and prosperity with them. Carolyn Chappell Lougee, "Cross Purposes: The Intendant of La Rochelle and Protestant Policy at the Revocation," in *Tocqueville and Beyond. Essays on the Old Regime in Honor of David D. Bien*, ed. Robert M. Schwartz and Robert A. Schneider, (Newark, 2003).

²¹ Jean Mettas, ed., *Répertoire des expéditions négrières françaises au XVIIIe siècle*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1978 and 1984). (After Mettas' death, both volumes were edited by his student Serge Daget.) Nantes, La Rochelle, Le Havre, and Bordeaux were the French ports most heavily involved in the slave trade. From 1710-1792 427 slave ships left from La Rochelle; from 1713-1793 399 ships departed from Le Havre; the first slave ship did not leave Bordeaux until 1724, and from 1724-1792 393 slave ships left from that port.

²² Delafosse, ed., *Histoire de La Rochelle*, pp. 162-164.

southward.²³ Once the sugar giant Saint-Domingue became a focus of French trade, it became “the preferred colony of the Rochelais,” in the words of historian Claude Laveau, not only for trading purposes but also as the focus of their own endeavors as colonial planters.²⁴ Merchants and prospective land owners flocked to the island, especially coming from France’s Atlantic coast.²⁵ A century later, on the eve of the Haitian Revolution, Saint-Domingue produced 40 percent of the world’s sugar and 60 percent of its coffee, as well as indigo, liquors, leather, and wood. On the whole, one out of eight people who lived in France made their living in ways directly or indirectly related to trade with Saint-Domingue.²⁶ By 1700, about 4,560 whites lived in the colony, with 9,082 blacks. By 1715, the numbers had increased to 6,668 whites and 35,451 blacks; fifteen years later, they had increased again to 10,449 whites and about 79,545 blacks.²⁷ More than three-fourths of all French slaving voyages had Saint-Domingue as their destination; at least 80 percent of slaves transported by French vessels were sold in this single colony.²⁸ Almost 675,000 slaves arrived in Saint-Domingue over the course of the slave trade; about sixty-three percent of these slaves were male.²⁹

²³ Delafosse claims that during Colbert’s ministry (1665-1683), La Rochelle was the primary trading port with the Antilles. Ibid., p. 166-168. In this he writes against Stewart Mims, *Colbert’s West India Policy* (New Haven, 1912).

²⁴ Laveau, *Monde rochelais*, p. 87.

²⁵ Jacques de Cauna, *L’Eldorado des Aquitains: Gascons, Basques et Béarnais aux Iles d’Amérique (XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles)* (Biarritz, 1998), p. 13.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 19.

²⁷ James Pritchard, *In Search of Empire: The French in the Americas, 1670-1730* (New York, 2004), Appendix I: “Estimated Population of French America by Race and Region, 1670-1730,” p. 424.

²⁸ David Geggus, “The French Slave Trade: An Overview,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (2001).

²⁹ Ibid., Table IV.. Geggus points out that the slave trade ended in Saint-Domingue in 1793; it went on in other French colonies well into the 19th century. In spite of this, Saint-Domingue still imported the vast majority of slaves.

In other words, the colonial economy was booming and people in the ports, in particular, rushed to take advantage of this economic opportunity. Many French men made their way to the colonies, hoping to get rich relatively quickly by growing and trading colonial products, particularly sugar, a “populuxe” good that made its way to most French tables.³⁰ Some were wildly successful. Aimé-Benjamin Fleuriau, for example, whose father died bankrupt, returned to La Rochelle in a blaze of wealth and glory in 1755 after spending more than twenty years on his plantation in Saint-Domingue.³¹ In the changing social order of the Old Regime, where entering into the growing state bureaucracy proved one route to ennoblement, colonial trade provided another.³² Although Fleuriau himself never received a coveted title, his children were indeed ennobled.³³

In contrast to the British colonies, many whites who came to the French colonies intended to return home once they had made enough money to do so profitably.³⁴ When such fortune-seekers set off for Saint-Domingue, they remained

³⁰ On popular luxury goods and the French consumer revolution, see Cissie Fairchilds, "The Production and Marketing of Populuxe Goods in Eighteenth-Century Paris," in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. Roy and John Brewer Porter, (New York, 1993).

³¹ Jacques Cauna, *Au temps des isles à sucre: Histoire d'une plantation de Saint-Domingue au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1987), p. 26.

³² On officeholding as a path to ennoblement, see Guy Chaussinand-Nogaret, *The French Nobility in the Eighteenth Century: From Feudalism to Enlightenment* (Cambridge; New York, 1985), pp. 25-31. Chaussinand-Nogaret also says that many nobles were financially involved in overseas trade, particularly after 1770. He finds that this involvement both on the part of the ‘new’ nobility, ennobled through officeholding since 1700, and the longer-established nobility. Chaussinand-Nogaret, *French Nobility*, pp. 94-101.

³³ Fleuriau did try, unsuccessfully, to be ennobled himself. Cauna, *Au temps des isles à sucre*, pp. 45-50. This was a common path for wealthy merchants. On the common interests of wealthy merchants and wealthy nobles and merchant’s desire to and success at being incorporated into the nobility, see Chaussinand-Nogaret, *French Nobility*.

³⁴ Peter Moogk argues that this was the case for French emigrants to Canada. Peter Moogk, "Reluctant Exiles: Emigrants from France in Canada before 1760," *William and Mary Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (1989):463-505. James Pritchard suggests that this also could have been true of emigrants to the French Antilles. Pritchard, *In Search of Empire*, p. 28. My own research bears out this conjecture; I have found that wealthy emigrants to the colonies, at any rate, were very likely to return to France unless they died in an untimely manner.

bound to their *patrie* by ties of family, friendship, and business. Protestants, in particular, had long relied on family and religious networks to facilitate their trade transactions. The foundations of these networks had been laid in the seventeenth century, as Atlantic trade began to burgeon. The crisis brought on by the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 only strengthened these networks, as French Protestants drew upon business connections to facilitate their refuge in other Huguenot centers. In turn, however, the refuge strengthened trade networks, both between France and its colonies and among the various Huguenot centers around the Atlantic. In the eighteenth century, even once the immediate impact of the Revocation had begun to fade, wealthy Protestants continued this practice of cementing business connections with ties of family and religion. For the wealthy merchants of La Rochelle, particularly Protestants, sending family members to establish and maintain trading contacts in foreign ports came almost as a matter of course.³⁵

In many families, particularly large ones, multiple members established and maintained trading contacts at various Atlantic ports, working together for the

³⁵ According to Cauna, the overlap between La Rochelle's merchants and Protestants makes it "difficult... to rule out religious causes from the likely source of this robust departure movement of the Aquitains." ("Il paraît difficile, dans ces conditions, d'écarter les causes religieuses des probabilités d'origine de ce fort mouvement de départs aquitains.") Cauna, *L'Eldorado des Aquitains: Gascons, Basques et Béarnais aux Iles d'Amérique (XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles)*, p. 34. On Protestantism among émigrés, see especially pp. 34-38. I suggest that had religious freedom been the primary goal of these migrations, entire families would have gone to the colonies and stayed there. Instead, migrations tended to be concentrated among men, and many men, especially from merchant families, returned to La Rochelle after spending a number of years in the colonies. John Butler points out the waning cohesiveness of Huguenots in the British North American colonies, and their proclivity towards assimilation. John Butler, *The Huguenots in America: A Refugee People in a New World Society* (Cambridge, MA, 1983). This very tendency suggests the importance of constantly renewing trans-Atlantic ties. In prominent La Rochelle Protest merchant families, it was not uncommon for at least one family member per generation to emigrate to Saint-Domingue or another Caribbean colony to oversee business matters on the colonial end. Another family member of the subsequent generation would go and learn the business from his older relative before taking over.

betterment of the family as a whole.³⁶ Younger brothers joined older ones in the colonies, nephews went to stay with uncles, cousins and brothers partnered with each other, and sometimes fathers and sons left mothers and sisters in France as they crossed the ocean in an effort to build their family businesses. In prominent La Rochelle Protestant merchant families, it was not uncommon for at least one family member per generation to emigrate to Saint-Domingue or another Caribbean colony to oversee business matters on the colonial end. Another family member of the subsequent generation would go and learn the business from his older relative before taking over. This practice had the advantage of ensuring that merchants could do business with someone they trusted, and that partners on both sides of the Atlantic had a stake in success; further, any profits would stay in the family, and losses would be spread out among family members. In an economy where so much depended on transactions that took place several thousand miles away, it behooved parties on both sides of the ocean to choose trustworthy business partners with similar interests. By the eighteenth century, many migrants to Saint-Domingue from La Rochelle had roots in the wealthy merchant class of the city. Their bicultural knowledge and experiences of slave societies helped shape French ideas about slavery and race.³⁷

³⁶ Cauna, *L'Eldorado des Aquitains*, p. 35. Bertrand Van Ruymbeke also points out that family ties played an important role in commercial endeavors. Bertrand Van Ruymbeke, "Minority Survival: The Huguenot Paradigm in France and the Diaspora," in *Memory and Identity: the Huguenots in France and the Atlantic Diaspora*, ed. Bertrand Van Ruymbeke and Randy J. Sparks, (Columbia, SC, 2003), p. 10. In the same volume, Carolyn Lougee Chapell also points out that the Huguenot diaspora should be conceptualized as layers of superimposed networks that cut across local and national boundaries. Carolyn Lougee Chapell, "Family Bonds Across the Refuge," in *Memory and Identity: The Huguenots in France and the Atlantic Diaspora*, ed. Bertrand Van Ruymbeke and Randy J. Sparks, (Columbia, SC, 2003), p. 183. On Huguenots and their networks, also see Bertrand Van Ruymbeke, *From New Babylon to Eden: The Huguenots and their Migration to Colonial South Carolina* (Columbia, South Carolina, 2006).

³⁷ Pierre H. Boulle, "'In Defense of Slavery': Eighteenth-Century Opposition to Abolition and the Origins of Racist Ideology in France," in *History from Below: Studies in Popular Protest and Popular Ideology*, ed. Frederick Krantz, (Montreal, 1985).

But these merchants did not shape the Atlantic community alone. Although expectations of French femininity limited French women's circulation around the Atlantic basin, even women who remained in La Rochelle while their fathers, brothers, cousins, or husbands ventured off to the colonies were very much engaged in the Atlantic world. Wives, including Madame Regnaud de Beaumont, whom I discuss in Chapter 3, spent years overseeing family and business affairs while their husbands were on the other side of the ocean. Daughters, including Marie-Adélaïde Fleuriau, inherited interests in colonial plantations from their fathers. Slaves, both male and female such as Toyay and Magdelen, arriving in La Rochelle for the first time, also brought with them knowledge of a broader world gained through their experience of slavery.³⁸

A Frenchman or woman who had never been to the colonies may have had a mental picture of slavery that resembled Louis-Nicolas Van Blarenberghe's peaceful colonial landscape painting, *La ville du Cap Français à Saint-Domingue vue de la colline* (1778, Musée du Nouveau Monde, La Rochelle) (Fig. 1). Slaves amble along the ridges in the landscape, which is also dotted with white inhabitants of the colony. The scanty clothing of the black slaves distinguishes them from the fashionably-dressed whites, and implies the labor of the former group in contrast to the leisure of the latter. The slaves work the land, as suggested by the hoes, baskets, and other implements of agricultural labor many of them carry, while the whites enjoy it as a site for picnics or social encounters. In contrast, a slave arriving in La Rochelle from

³⁸ Ira Berlin suggests that the people he classifies as "Atlantic Creoles," people of African descent who had a broad knowledge of the workings and cultures of the Atlantic world, were "familiar with the commerce of the Atlantic, fluent in its new languages, and intimate with its trade and cultures." Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2003), p. 23.

Saint-Domingue brought experience in colonial plantation society with her or him.³⁹ The subtleties of the complex colonial social hierarchies based on skin color as well as social status may have eluded an artisan, laborer, or shopkeeper, for example, whose life was firmly rooted in La Rochelle. However, even if a slave did not know the specific terms denoting degrees of racial mixing delineated by colonial jurist Moreau de Saint-Méry, the sexual violence of such mixing and the way it affected daily life would have been familiar.⁴⁰

Slaves who were brought or sent to France walked into a complicated, messy society with its own social and cultural conventions. If the colonies were never the *tabula rasa* sometimes envisioned by European colonizers, neither was France for those who had newly arrived. France had its own social hierarchies, ways of negotiating relationships, and gender roles; newly-arrived slaves had to be adept at navigating all these if they were to take advantage of the potential freedoms the French associated with their homeland. This study focuses on these negotiations and navigations, undertaken by slaves and free people of color connected with La Rochelle.

³⁹ Experience as a valid way of knowing has been a major component of feminist scholarship. On how the embodied experience of gender has shaped experience in European historical contexts, see Kathleen Canning, "The Body as Method? Reflections on the Place of the Body in Gender History," *Gender & History* 11 (1999):449-513, and Laura Lee Downs, "If "Woman" is Just an Empty Category, Then Why Am I Afraid to Walk Alone at Night? Identity Politics Meets the Postmodern Subject," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35, no. April (1993):414-451. Joan Scott points to the limitations for historians of relying on the experience of historical subjects in Joan Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1991):773-797.

⁴⁰ Médéric-Louis-Elie Moreau de Saint-Méry, *La description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de Saint-Domingue*, 3rd ed. (Saint-Denis, 2004), pp. 86-100.

Historiography and Methodology

In recent years, historians have begun to turn their attention to slavery in France. Following an early broad-sweeping work by Shelby McCloy, Sue Peabody pioneered this research with her monograph, *"There Are No Slaves in France": The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien Régime* (1996).⁴¹ Her groundbreaking study focuses on the legal loophole left open when the Parlement of Paris refused to register the edicts of 1716 and 1738, which allowed some slaves, aided by their allies, to gain their freedom. Through her investigation of cases contesting French slavery in the Admiralty Court, Peabody argues that the Parlement's failure to legislate on slavery in the metropole eventually led the monarchy to adopt explicitly racial terminology.⁴² In a recent dissertation, Dwain Pruitt builds on Peabody's work, but shifts the focus from Paris to the provinces. He situates his analysis in Nantes, arguing that the city's dominant role in the slave trade and its vested interest in influencing royal policy on the matter makes it an important site for studies of slavery in France.⁴³ In the first part of his dissertation Pruitt, like Peabody, focuses on legal sources, but he argues that Nantes, not Paris, played a primary role in shaping royal policy to protect the property rights of slaveholders who returned to France over the human rights of slaves.⁴⁴ In the second part of his dissertation Pruitt switches his focus to the community of people of color who lived in Nantes over the course of the long eighteenth century. Drawing on Nantes' parish records, Pruitt engages in a

⁴¹ McCloy, *The Negro in France*, Peabody, *"There are No Slaves in France"*. McCloy's work addresses people of color throughout France from the sixteenth through the twentieth centuries, and the scope of his project necessarily limited its depth.

⁴² Peabody, *"There are No Slaves in France"*, p. 8 and Chapters 7-8.

⁴³ Pruitt, "Nantes Noir: Living Race in the City of Slavers", pp. 33-39.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Part 1 (Chapters 1 and 2).

cohort analysis to track demographic changes among the population of people of color. Here, Pruitt frames Nantes in the context of the Atlantic world rather than France. He argues that “Nantes’ character is best described as Atlantic and American,” and that people of color occupied a marginal position within this Atlantic city.⁴⁵

My dissertation builds on the work of both Peabody and Pruitt by situating the experiences of slaves and slavery in France within the context of French Atlantic culture, but I shift the focus from the courtroom to the household. In doing so, I aim to contribute to our understanding not only of slavery, but of the history of the family in France and the French Atlantic. Individuals, business syndicates, and families in port towns including La Rochelle often viewed themselves as having more shared interests with the colonies than with Paris. These links between port cities and colonies often were cemented with kinship ties. Through maintaining focus on these private, familial connections, I demonstrate how people in France, including women, were connected to and played a role in French colonialism.

Much early scholarship on the family in France came out of the social history movement and focuses on demographic questions, including, for example, fertility rates, age at marriage, and family structures.⁴⁶ Scholars including François Lebrun, James Traer, and Robert Wheaton and Tamara Hareven have used such data to draw conclusions about family roles and practices. Recently there has been a

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 43; also see Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.

⁴⁶ See, for example, François Lebrun, *La Vie conjugale sous l'ancien régime* (Paris, 1975), James F. Traer, *Marriage and the Family in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, NY, 1980), Robert Hareven and Tamara K. Wheaton, eds., *Family and Sexuality in French History* (Philadelphia, 1980). For a comparative analysis of Medieval Europe, see Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (New York, 1983) and Jack Goody, *Production and Reproduction: A Comparative Study of the Domestic Domain* (New York, 1976). For Britain, see Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York, 1979).

historiographical return to the family, particularly among French scholars. André Burguière began this resurgence, offering an overview of the variety of family arrangements in France and putting scholarship on the family in dialogue with other major themes in French historiography.⁴⁷ Maurice Daumas has written about the changing position of love in the family, particularly between spouses but also the love that parents had for children. He argues that historians have been too quick to dismiss love as irrelevant or inapplicable in Old Regime families, and that by the eighteenth century love was considered a primary reason to marry.⁴⁸ Dominique Godineau also emphasizes the cultural weight of marital love in the century of the Enlightenment, particularly the social implications of the emerging ideal of companionate marriage for women.⁴⁹

Scholarship on women and gender has also contributed to historical understandings of the French family. Among American feminist scholars especially, the study of the family in eighteenth-century France has gradually shifted toward examining the political, social, and cultural impact of what was previously dismissed as ‘merely’ private. For example, Sarah Maza shows how private discourse pervaded and influenced public life, and how public discourses of gender affected perceptions of how individuals should perform their gender roles.⁵⁰ Similarly, Christine Adams demonstrates the importance of the family as a site for social and cultural analysis through her in-depth reading of the family papers of the Lamothe family in

⁴⁷ André Burguière, "Les fondements d'une culture familiale," in *Les Formes de la culture*, ed. André Burguière, (Paris, 1993).

⁴⁸ Maurice Daumas, *Le Mariage amoureux: Histoire du lien conjugal sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris, 2004), p. 10 and pp. 259-263.

⁴⁹ Dominique Godineau, *Les Femmes dans la société Française, 16e-18e siècle* (Paris, 2003), Chapter 8 and especially p. 174.

⁵⁰ Sarah Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs: The Causes Célèbres of Prerevolutionary France* (Berkeley, 1993).

Bordeaux.⁵¹ Lynn Hunt offers a slightly different spin on this theme by arguing that family relations structured politics.⁵² Suzanne Desan takes the family as the direct focus of her research by questioning how family strategies allowed accommodation for individuals, especially female individuals. She finds that natural rights discourse opened up challenges to patriarchy, led to dramatic changes in gender relationships, and challenged assumptions about women and gender roles.⁵³ Taken together, this scholarship has brought women, gender, and the family to the center of French cultural, social, and political history.

In contrast, scholarship on France's colonies only rarely addresses questions of gender or the family. Following Michel Trouillot's call for scholarly attention to the Haitian Revolution, a number of academics have turned their attention to both the Revolution and France's Caribbean colonies more generally.⁵⁴ Recent works, notably by Stuart King, John Garrigus, David Geggus, and Laurent Dubois, have made important contributions to understanding the position of free people of color in Saint-Domingue society, the events and impact of the Haitian Revolution, and the relationship between the Haitian and French Revolutions.⁵⁵ However, with few

⁵¹ Christine Adams, *A Taste for Comfort and Status: A Bourgeois Family in Eighteenth-Century France* (University Park, PA., 2000).

⁵² Lynn Avery Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley, 1992).

⁵³ Suzanne Desan, *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France* (Berkeley, 2004).

⁵⁴ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, 1995).

⁵⁵ Stuart King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig: Free People of Color in Prerevolutionary Saint-Domingue* (Athens, 2001), John Garrigus, "A Struggle for Respect: The Free Coloreds of Pre-Revolutionary Saint Domingue, 1760-1769" (Johns Hopkins University, 1988), John 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):233-263, John Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue* (New York, 2006), David Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Bloomington, IN, 2002), Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), Carolyn Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville, 1990); David Gaspar and David Geggus, ed., *A Turbulent Time: The French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean* (Bloomington, 1997), and Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804* (Chapel

exceptions, this new wave of scholarship has not engaged with questions of gender.⁵⁶

Scholars who have focused on gender usually address the British colonies or the eighteenth-century Caribbean more broadly.⁵⁷ Similarly, gender has not been a focus of recent historiography on the Atlantic World.⁵⁸ Further, historians of the French Caribbean generally have not considered the profound interconnectedness between France and its colonies.⁵⁹

Hill, 2004). Dubois argues that slave insurgents in Guadeloupe transformed the French political culture of republicanism. His analysis had broad implications for the relationship between France and its colonies in general.

⁵⁶ One notable exception is the work of Elizabeth Colwill, which focuses on the Haitian Revolution. See, for example, Elizabeth Colwill, "Sex, Savagery, and Slavery in the Shaping of the Body Politic," in *From the Royal to the Republican Body: Incorporating the Political in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century France*, ed. Sara E. Melzer, and Norberg, Kathryn, (Berkeley, 1998). Dubois briefly discusses how slave or ex-slave women worked to transfer property from one generation to the next. Dubois, *Colony of Citizens*, pp. 246-248 and Chapter 9.

⁵⁷ See, for example, David Barry Gaspar, Jr., John McCluskey, and Darlene Clark Hine, eds., *More than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas* (Indianapolis, 1996), which includes several chapters on Saint-Domingue, Arlette Gautier, *Les Soeurs de Solitude: La condition féminine dans l'esclavage aux Antilles du XVIIe au XIX siècles* (Paris, 1985), and Bernard Moitt, *Women and Slavery in the French Antilles, 1635-1848* (Bloomington, 2001). Marietta Morrissey, *Slave Women in the New World: Gender Stratification in the Caribbean* (Lawrence, 1988) offers a broad overview of the Caribbean. On the British Caribbean, see Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650-1838* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1990), and Hilary McD. Beckles, *Centering Women: Gender Discourses in Caribbean Slave Society* (1999). Beckles in particular points to the gap in scholarship on women in Caribbean slave societies. Introduction, especially pp. xiii-xvi.

⁵⁸ Recent historiography on the pan-Atlantic and circum-Atlantic includes Bernard Bailyn, *The Peopling of British North America* (New York, 1986), Leslie Choquette, *Frenchmen into Peasants: Modernity and Tradition in the Peopling of French Canada* (Cambridge, MA, 1997), Alison Games, *Migration and the Origins of the English Atlantic World* (Cambridge, MA, 1999), Ian Steele, *The English Atlantic, 1675-1740: An Exploration of Communication and Community* (New York, 1986). None of these authors discuss gender at length or in depth. A few exceptions exist to this general trend. Although Jane Harrison focuses her study on Canada, she does consider the ebb, flow, and ramifications of transatlantic communication. Jane Harrison, *Until Next Year: Letter Writing and the Mails in the Canadas, 1640-1830* (Waterloo, Ontario, 1997). Also see Margaret Creighton and Lisa Norling, ed., *Iron Men, Wooden Women: Gender and Seafaring in the Atlantic World, 1700-1920* (Baltimore, 1996), Richard Trexler, *Sex and Conquest: Gendered Violence, Political Order, and the European Conquest of the Americas* (Ithaca, 1995).

⁵⁹ Dubois comes closest to considering the relationship between France and its colonies in his argument that the ideas emanating from the slave uprisings in Guadeloupe influenced the Enlightenment ideas of the French *philosophes*. Dubois, *Colony of Citizens*, especially Chapter 1. Also see Harrison, *Until Next Year*. Historians of the British Atlantic have studied the relationship between Britain and its overseas empire. See in particular Bailyn, *The Peopling of British North America*, Steele, *The English Atlantic*, and Games, *Migration and the Origins of the English Atlantic World*, and Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven, 1992).

If the family is the site of my investigations, the lived concepts of gender and race provide the analytic frame. The relationship between gender and race is a well-established field of inquiry for scholars of North America.⁶⁰ Following the calls of Evelyn Brooks Higgenbotham and Joan Scott to use race and gender as categories for analysis, feminist historians have turned to questions of identity formation.⁶¹ In particular, they have emphasized the importance of intersectionality, which sociologist Patricia Hill Collins defines as “particular forms of intersecting oppressions, for example, intersections of race and gender, or of sexuality and nation.”⁶² Intersectionality as a framework for analysis, however, has its limits, particularly when it leads to over-reliance on categories of identity that are at best imprecise, and at worst essentializing. Higginbotham warns that the idea of intersectionality suggests that black women (and other ‘Others’) can be separated into discrete identities. Rather, she argues, multiple identities work to constitute and reinforce each other.⁶³

The result of these calls to examine identity has been increased scholarly attention to discourses of race and gender, on the one hand, and to personal experience, most pertinently the experiences of enslaved women, on the other. These categories are by no means absolute and many scholars rely on both in their work.

⁶⁰ Although most of this literature has focused on the American colonies or the United States, scholars are also beginning to turn their attention to slavery in New France and Canada. See in particular Afua Cooper, *The Hanging of Angélique: The Untold Story of Canadian Slavery and the Burning of Old Montréal* (Toronto, 2006), Maureen Elgersman, *Unyielding Spirits: Black Women and Slavery in Early Canada and Jamaica* (New York, 1999), and Robin Winks, *The Blacks in Canada* (Montréal, 1997).

⁶¹ Joan Scott, "Gender as a Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91 (1986), and Evelyn Brooks Higgenbotham, "African-American History and the Metalanguage of Race," *Signs* 17, no. 2 (1992):251-274.

⁶² Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2 ed. (New York, 2000), p. 18.

⁶³ Higginbotham, "African-American History and the Metalanguage of Race," p. 273.

However, examining how scholars deploy discourse and experience in isolation from each other nonetheless provides a useful entry point in discerning broader scholarly trends. On the side of discourse, Kathleen Brown frames hierarchical gender relations as the model on which race relations were built in colonial Virginia. She argues that naturalizing gender differences by making them seem biological rather than socially or culturally constructed helped to naturalize race differences, that the “gender ideal [was] a powerful metaphor for other social relationships in which power was unevenly distributed,” and that the gender hierarchy was used to naturalize other hierarchies.⁶⁴ Kirsten Fischer, Hannah Rosen, and Laura Wexler all follow Brown in arguing that race, gender, and other identity categories are discursively entwined.⁶⁵ A new wave of scholarship renews interest in individual experience as a useful means of opening up questions about gender and race.⁶⁶ Jennifer Morgan brings together these two strands of thought in her study of physical and cultural reproduction.⁶⁷ “Placing women’s lives at the center of social-historical studies of slavery only partly explicates gender in early American slave societies,” writes Morgan. “Images of black women’s reproductive potential, as well as images of their voracious sexuality, were crucial to slaveowners faced with female laborers.”⁶⁸ I

⁶⁴Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1996), p. 1.

⁶⁵ Kirsten Fischer, *Suspect Relations: Sex, Race, and Resistance in Colonial North Carolina* (Ithaca, 2002), Hannah Rosen, “The Gender of Reconstruction: Rape, Race, and Citizenship in the Postemancipation South” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1999), Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill, 2000).

⁶⁶ These works include Tiya Miles, *Ties That Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2005), Kent Anderson Leslie, *Woman of Color, Daughter of Privilege: Amanda America Dickson, 1849-1893* (Athens, 1995), Cooper, *The Hanging of Angélique: The Untold Story of Canadian Slavery and the Burning of Old Montréal*, Jennifer Fleischner, *Mastering Slavery: Memory, Family, and Identity in Women's Slave Narratives* (New York, 1996).

⁶⁷ Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia, 2004).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

follow Morgan's lead by examining discourse alongside experience as a method of examining how gender and slavery structured people's daily lives.

In doing this, I draw on a body of art historical scholarship that considers artistic representations of race and gender. Sustained consideration of race as a category for visual analysis began with Hugh Honour's extensive compilation *The Image of the Black in Western Art* (1976).⁶⁹ Although few full-length monographs on images of blacks in the eighteenth century have followed, a recent resurgence in interest in eighteenth-century portraiture has included some scholarship on portraits of blacks.⁷⁰ Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, Thomas Crow, and Tony Halliday offer analyses of Anne-Louis Girodet's *Citizen Jean-Baptiste Belley, Ex-Representative of the Colonies* (1797, Versailles), while Grigsby and Helen Weston have asked how Marie-Guillemine LaVille-Leroulx Benoist's *Portrait of a Negress* (1800, Louvre) complicates notions of femininity and portraiture.⁷¹ However, although eighteenth-century portraiture has become a locus for feminist analysis, this body of scholarship

⁶⁹ Hugh Honour, ed., *The Image of the Black in Western Art* (Boston, 1976).

⁷⁰ Full-length monographs on blacks in eighteenth-century European art include David Bindman, *Ape to Apollo: Aesthetics and the Idea of Race in the 18th Century* (London, 2002), and David Dabydeen, *Hogarth's Blacks: Images of Blacks in Eighteenth-Century English Art* (Kingston-upon-Thames, England, 1985). Most other scholarship on representations of blacks in European art has focused on the nineteenth century. See Albert Boime, *The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, DC, 1990), Sander Gilman, "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature," in *"Race," Writing and Difference*, ed. Jr. Henry Louis Gates, (Chicago, 1986), James Smalls, "Esclave, Nègre, Noir: The Representation of Blacks in Late 18th and 19th-Century French Art" (Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1991), Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, *Extremities: Painting Empire in Post-Revolutionary France* (New Haven, 2002).

⁷⁰ Sander Gilman, "Black Bodies, White Bodies," pp. 223-224.

⁷¹ Grimaldo Grigsby, *Extremities*, Chapter 1 and pp. 42-46; Thomas Crow, *Emulation: Making Artists for Revolutionary France* (New Haven, Connecticut, 1995), p. 228; Tony Halliday, *Facing the Public: Portraiture in the Aftermath of the French Revolution* (New York, 1999), pp. 109-112; Helen Weston, "'The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover,'" in *Work and the Image I: Work, Craft and Labour*, ed. Valerie Mainz and Griselda Pollock, (2000).

has not taken into consideration portraits that merely include blacks.⁷² In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, many portraits painted of and commissioned by women included black figures. Similarly, scholars have shown little interest in the proliferation of landscapes of France's colonies in the late eighteenth century, many of which were peopled by blacks.⁷³ By expanding the field of study of visual representation to include these less-studied works, I also enlarge the field of discourse about slavery that can be put into dialogue with the experiences of slaves and free people of color in eighteenth-century France.

I situate my scholarship in the interdisciplinary field of Women's Studies, motivates my engagement with multiple fields. Feminist scholars have pointed to intersectionality as a useful theoretical and methodological tool that enables the crossing of boundaries, including disciplinary boundaries.⁷⁴ In my work, I take intersections as my starting points. This project grows out of intersections: the conceptual intersection of race and gender, the historiographic intersection of French history, family history, and the history of slavery, the disciplinary intersection of history and art history, the intersection of representation and experience, and the

⁷² Recent work on gender and portraiture in eighteenth-century France includes and Melissa Hyde, *Making Up the Rococo: François Boucher and His Critics* (Los Angeles, 2006), Melissa Hyde, *Making Up the Rococo: François Boucher and His Critics* (Los Angeles, 2006), Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, *Necklines: The Art of Jacques-Louis David after the Terror* (New Haven, 1999), Melissa Hyde and Jennifer Milam, ed., *Women, Art and the Politics of Identity in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Burlington, VT, 2003). This volume includes an essay by Kathleen Nicholson that discusses Jean-Marc Nattier's 1733 portrait of Mademoiselle de Clermont, in which the sitter is depicted surrounded by slaves of varying skin tone. Nicholson omits any discussion of the slaves. Kathleen Nicholson, "Practicing Portraiture: Mademoiselle de Clermont and J.-M. Nattier," in *Women, Art and the Politics of Identity in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Melissa Hyde and Jennifer Milam, (Burlington, VT, 2003).

⁷³ One exception to this is Jill H. Casid, *Sowing Empire: Landscape and Colonization* (Minneapolis, 2005).

⁷⁴ Jayati Lal, "Situating Locations: The Politics of Self, Identity, and 'Other' in Living and Writing the Text," in *Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork*, ed. Diane L. Wolf, (Boulder, CO, 1996), especially pp. 104-105. Also see Patricia J. Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights: Diary of a Law Professor* (Cambridge, MA, 1991), p. 256.

intersections among the lives of the people who lived in La Rochelle and Saint-Domingue in the eighteenth century. By moving from the generalized to the particular I engage with the racial discourses prevalent in eighteenth-century France while also bringing to light the lives and experiences of people of color and those with whom they associated.

I also draw on Elsa Barkely Brown's notion that relationships are useful sites for historical analysis, and that telling different stories simultaneously helps connections become evident.⁷⁵ Examining relationships between whites and people of color in France and its Caribbean colony Saint-Domingue suggests the variety of ways in which emerging notions of race and gender shaped the everyday experiences of individuals, and how individuals shaped and negotiated these categories in their daily lives.

By engaging with paintings alongside archival documents I provide a different lens through which to understand both imagined and lived relationships between whites and people of color. Images offer a very different view of race in France from archival documents, often depicting it in terms of generalities and stereotypes; such representations become what Sander Gilman has termed "icons," powerful, ideologically-charged fictions that are easily transferable from one setting to another.⁷⁶ The paintings I consider are the products of the dominant culture, painted under specific historical circumstances and often for specific reasons. Consequently, they offer potent and important sites for analysis of contemporary ideas on race and gender. Yet historians in particular often have taken these images at face value, as

⁷⁵ Elsa Barkley Brown, "'What Has Happened Here': The Politics of Difference in Women's History and Feminist Politics," *Feminist Studies* 18, no. 2 (1992):295-312, pp. 297-298.

⁷⁶ Gilman, "Black Bodies, White Bodies," especially pp. 223-224.

illustrations of the world they seek to understand. The danger in using such representations as illustration is that scholars can fall into the trap of reproducing the very icons they aim to critique. By pulling images apart to consider the circumstances and meaning of their production and by evaluating them in partnership with archival documents, I aim to emphasize the necessity of considering both artistic cultural production and the lived experience of historical actors in cultural analyses of race and gender.

Chapter Overview

I begin this history of slavery in France with paintings. In Chapter 1, “Imagining Colonialism and Race: Viewing Saint-Domingue from the Metropole,” I analyze Louis-Nicolas Van Blarenberghe’s 1778 and 1779 landscape views of Saint-Domingue. The artist foregrounds race and slavery in these paintings, suggesting that these elements marked the space as particularly colonial. His depictions reveal little of the complexity of colonial social relations; rather, he suggests clear demarcations between blacks and whites, slaves and free, with the two groups neatly aligned. This painting opens up questions about how people in France perceived race, and about how social relationships between blacks and whites compared to these perceptions. Chapter 2, “Constructing a Discourse of Race, Slaver and Gender in France,” begins to address these questions by focusing on a single portrait painted of and for the granddaughter of Louis XIV. Jean-Marc Nattier’s *Mademoiselle de Clermont, Princess of the Blood... as a Sultana emerging from the Bath, served by some Slaves* (1733, Wallace Collection) fits into a sub-genre of portraits of aristocratic French

women painted in the company of young black boys. Such paintings emphasized the women's power, wealth, and beauty, made especially evident in reference to the black slaves who attended them. In surrounding herself with slaves and exotic objects, Mademoiselle de Clermont draws on an iconography of beauty while at the same time using the developing visual language of race and colonialism to make new arguments about gender, race, empire, and power. These paintings, representations intended for visual consumption beyond their immediate owners, open up questions about the discursive valences of race and gender in French society, and how interactions between these categories were imagined. But slavery and colonialism also shaped the lives of real people living in France and the French colonies, who experienced the social categories of race and gender in sometimes-unexpected ways. To fully explore how these categories affected individuals' daily lives, I shift my analysis to the town of La Rochelle. Here, I draw on family papers, municipal records, parish registers, and royal documents to fill out the intimate details of how slavery affected French families. In Chapter 3, "Journeys, Contracts, and the Family," I explore how France's overseas empire challenged juridical notions of the family in France. Many men left France to seek their fortunes in the Caribbean colonies. This distance changed their relationships with family members they left behind in France, who had to devise new ways of apportioning family roles and resources. In particular, strategies of marriage and inheritance, both instrumental in transferring wealth from one generation to the next, proved ineffective as people struggled to define what family meant in the context of slavery and colonialism. Chapter 4, "Slaves and Owners, from Saint-Domingue to La Rochelle," investigates how distance shaped relationships as both

slaves and their owners moved between France and Saint-Domingue. Slaves could sometimes have the opportunity to forge new types of relationships with absentee landowners, ones that recalled the patron-client relations of the old world more than the master-slave hierarchies of the new. Conversely, slaves who were brought or sent to France were thrust into a new set of circumstances, with a different set of laws determining the authority owners had over them. Faced with these new conditions, some slaves failed to live up to their owners' expectations of appropriate behavior. The final chapter, "People of Color in France: Establishing and Subverting Hierarchy," addresses how slaves, free people of color, and slave owners tapped into traditional French methods of community building. Owners worked to further solidify their control over their slaves, while slaves and free people of color situated themselves firmly within the context of the broader community. As men of color in particular asserted their belonging in the city on the sea, they drew on traditional French gender norms to justify their claims.

This project aims to position race and gender at the center of our understandings of the French family and French history. Yet the intersections of race and gender extend far beyond the physical boundaries of France. Locating these intersections at the core of my analysis suggests the profound interconnectedness of the French Atlantic and the extent to which people seemingly on the margins shaped French society. Examining intersections demonstrates sometimes-surprising connections: between colony and metropole, slave and owner, family and slavery, and representation and experience. Examining these intersections suggests the far-

reaching range of possibilities, both for individual agency and discursive manipulation, open to women and men, blacks and whites, in eighteenth-century France.

Chapter 1:

Imagining Colonialism and Race: Viewing Saint-Domingue from the Metropole

Introduction

In the second half of the eighteenth century, a new sub-genre of landscape painting emerged in France: artists began to paint recognizable *vues*, scenes of everyday life that purported to document real people in real places. The highest offices of the royal administration had a stake in such representations; the Admiralty, also known as the Department of the Marine, which had jurisdiction over both the administration of France's colonies and all transatlantic trade, commissioned and oversaw the completion of many such *vues*.¹ The Admiralty's interest in these artworks was distinctly strategic. They commissioned artists to paint ports, both in metropolitan France and in its colonies, usually specifying with exactitude the

¹ The Admiralty was founded (or some might say revived) by Colbert in the late seventeenth century to challenge British and Dutch naval supremacy. In order for Louis XIV to rule as an absolute monarch on land, he determined, he had to reign over the seas as well. He worked to restore the navy created by Richelieu, and in 1661 Colbert was officially named "counselor of the State, Intendant of finances including the department of the Marine." ("Conseiller d'État, intendant des finances ayant le département de la marine.") A few years later, in 1669, the department of the Marine came under royal control and Colbert created the office of Secretary General of the Admiralty to oversee its administration. As the colonies grew in population and in commercial importance, royal bureaucrats were appointed to oversee them. Again following Richelieu's lead, Colbert appointed an Intendant of Canada in 1663 who joined ranks with the office of the Intendant of the French Islands of America, a post created by Richelieu in 1642. Michel Vergé-Franceschi, *La Marine Française au XVIIIe siècle: Guerres- Administration- Exploration* (Paris? 1996), pp. 34-37.

elements the artist should include in the landscape, and even the perspective from which it should be painted.

Although critics accepted these *vues* as credible representations of daily life, such paintings in fact reveal more about contemporary French attitudes toward the places they represent than they do about the places themselves. This fissure became particularly evident in *vues* of the French colony Saint-Domingue, painted by Admiralty artist Louis-Nicolas Van Blarenberghe, *La ville du Cap Français à Saint Domingue, vue de la Colline* and *La Ville du Cap Français à Saint Domingue, vue de la Mer* (Figure 1.1 and Figure 1.2) (1779 and 1778, both in Musée du Nouveau Monde, La Rochelle).² Although prints depicting France's Caribbean colonies abound, Van Blarenberghe's paintings of Cap Français, one painted from the land and the other from the sea, are some of the only landscape paintings of the colony in existence.³ As such, they offer valuable insights on French attitudes toward and ambivalence about colonialism.

Van Blarenberghe drew heavily on the techniques of his contemporary Joseph Vernet, the master of port painting. Vernet instituted a number of innovations in the genre that made his works both valuable to the Admiralty and interesting to viewers.

² The Musée du Nouveau Monde in La Rochelle, which owns these two paintings, attributes them to Louis-Nicolas Van Blarenberghe in the museum plaques, all their literature, and in their archives. Monique Maillet-Chassagne rather inexplicably attributes them to his son, Henri-Joseph Van Blarenberghe, an artist in his own right. She gives neither reason nor explanation for this attribution, in spite of a lengthy section in which she explains the difficulties of distinguishing the works painted by each member of the Van Blarenberghe "dynasty." Monique Maillet-Chassagne, *Une dynastie de peintres lillois, les Van Blarenberghe* (Paris, 2001), plate XXIX and fig. 96, p. 197. For her analysis of attributions, see pp. 51-58, especially pp. 52-57. She also misidentifies these two scenes as portraying the administrative capital Port-au-Prince, rather than the commercial capital Cap Français. Contemporary descriptions and visual sources confirm, however, that the scenes Van Blarenberghe portrays are actually views of Cap Français, its harbor dominated by its distinctive cape.

³ In fact, the only other painting of which I am aware is the "Veue (*sic*) en Perspective du Cap François," 1717, an anonymous watercolor in the collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale. Several prints of the colonies note that they are based on paintings; however, I have not found the originals to which they refer.

Following Vernet, Van Blarenberghe depicted social interactions that both perpetuated and created fictions of how relationships unfolded among the different orders who inhabited his ports. While Vernet glosses over the disparities among figures of different social strata, Van Blarenberghe romanticizes the brutal hierarchies of slavery. By hiding these fictions behind verisimilitude, both artists masked elements which might have made their viewers uncomfortable or caused them to question the order they portrayed.

The interstices between fiction and verisimilitude in Van Blarenberghe's work in particular reveal the tensions that surrounded colonialism. In France, moral ambivalence toward slavery was coupled with a strong desire for the products produced by slave labor; this central tension colored all French encounters with the colonies, their people, and their goods. By sanitizing the harsh realities of plantation slave labor, the artist makes what is different and uncomfortable seem familiar and comforting. Most people who viewed these paintings, including the king and many Admiralty officials, never visited the colonies. Further, although writings on the colonies abounded, visual representations of them were rare. In this context, Van Blarenberghe's persuasively realistic *vues* played an active role in shaping colonialism and how it was viewed by people in France.

Vernet's Ports: Establishing Conventions of Port Painting

In 1753, Joseph Vernet received a commission from the minister of the Admiralty to paint a series on the ports of France. This huge commission came with a price: the Marquis de Marigny, the Surintendant of the king's building projects

(*bâtiments du roy de France*), furnished the artist with a detailed explication of the views he was to paint of each port, the elements he had to include in each, and even the size of each canvas: eight feet long by five feet wide.⁴ Vernet had to work within these strictures, pitting his well-known creativity, the hallmark of a good artist, against the confines of administrative control. Vernet masterfully rose to the occasion, creating canvases that played within the set limits by painting realistic and compelling scenes that viewers wanted to join.

However, contemporary viewers did not immediately perceive the artfulness of these paintings, and instead considered landscapes and seascapes commissioned by the Admiralty as faithful documentary representations of scenes viewed and recorded by the artist. The Admiralty's own position on the matter did nothing to dissuade this view: they sent artists to far-flung ports because their presence, so the thinking went, ensured a true-to-life representation. This rationale heeded not only the Admiralty's need for paintings that depicted ports, their environs, and even their industries with precision, it also followed Enlightenment luminary Jean-Jacques Rousseau's call for artists and men of letters to travel. Rousseau argued that understanding of far-off places and things came only through experience:

I can hardly conceive how it is, that in an age wherein useful and polite literature are so much affected, there are not two men properly connected and rich, the one in money and the other in genius, both fond of glory and aspiring after immortality; one of which should be willing to sacrifice twenty thousand écus of his fortune, and the other ten years of his life, to make a justly celebrated voyage round the world: not to confine their observations, in such voyage, to plants and minerals, but for once to study men and manners.⁵

⁴ Laurent Manoeuvre and Eric Reith, *Joseph Vernet, 1714-1789: Les Ports de France* (Arcueil, France, 1994), p. 22. For the size of the canvases, see p. 13.

⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité* (Paris, 1965), p. 174, note 10. "J'ai peine à concevoir comment dans un Siècle où l'on se pique de belles connoissances, il ne se trouve pas deux homes bien unis, riches, l'un en argent, l'autre en genie, tous deux aimant la

Embedded in Rousseau's injunction is an assumption also fixed in the Admiralty's rationale in commissioning port paintings: that on-the-spot observation and the artist's presence in the place he depicted meant that the paintings would be literal transcriptions of what the artist saw. By experiencing the scene, so the thinking went, the artist would paint it as it really was, not an imagined or idealized artistic re-creation.⁶ Neither Rousseau, nor the Admiralty, nor even the critics recognized that these detailed paintings were as much a fabrication as the most elaborate Rococo fantasies with which they were contrasted.

Vernet ultimately painted fourteen of the twenty-six commissioned paintings, the first four of which were exhibited at the Salon of 1755 to mixed reviews.⁷ Although Vernet's earlier work had enjoyed critical acclaim, art critics, including Denis Diderot, responded unfavorably to the paintings commissioned by the Admiralty.⁸ Critics claimed that, in contrast to Vernet's earlier works depicting fictional shipwrecks and storms, the strictures placed on the artist by the Admiralty rendered them chaotic and lacking pictorial unity. Because they were interpreted as realistic views painted from life, they were seen as deficient in the creativity and

gloire et aspirant à l'immortalité, dont l'un sacrifie vingt mille écus de son bien et l'autre dix ans de sa vie à un célèbre voyage autour du monde; pour y étudier non toujours des pierres et des plantes, mais une fois les homes et les moeurs,"

⁶ In contrast, artists such as Watteau, François Boucher, and Boucher's student Jean-Honoré Fragonard received heavy criticism for painting scenes that incorporated elements of fantasy. See in particular Mary Sheriff, *Fragonard, Art, and Eroticism* (Chicago, 1990), Introduction, on Fragonard.

⁷ Jean de Cayeux, *Le Paysage en France de 1750 à 1815* (Saint-Rémy-en-l'Eau, France, 1997), p. 22. Also see Reith, *Joseph Vernet, 1714-1789: Les Ports de France*. The four paintings Vernet exhibited in 1755 were: *L'intérieur du Port de Marseille* (1754); *L'entrée du Port de Marseille* (1754); *Le Port neuf ou l' Arsenal de Toulon* (1755); *La Pêche au Thon à Bandol* (1754). This last was exhibited at the Salon under the title *La Madrague, ou la Pêche au Thon*. M. Tourneux, ed., *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critiques par Grimm, Diderot, Raynal, etc.* (Paris, 1877-1882), (originally published September, 1755) Vol. 3, p. 93.

⁸ Ibid.

genius that distinguished great artistic works. The *Correspondance littéraire*

reported:

These paintings, which have an immense amount of detail and a prodigious execution, nevertheless have not met with great success. Connoisseurs have found little harmony of light and its effects; they have found too much confusion in the large number of figures who are placed in the foreground of the paintings. The art of making happy groupings does not seem too familiar to M. Vernet; he is not at ease in making paintings where there is too much movement without unity of action. The great secret of painting consists therefore in representing chaos and confusion without confusion.⁹

Although a few critics stressed the usefulness of Vernet's compositions, the majority bemoaned the artist's lack of control over the subject matter and the ensuing loss of creativity it implied.¹⁰

In 1757, critics went even further in lamenting what they interpreted as

Vernet's wasted artistic efforts. Again the *Correspondance littéraire* says,

I swear that I do not see M. Vernet engaged in this work [of painting ports for the king], which will still last for quite some time, without regret. To imitate nature is to become a copyist, and after having been a history painter, it is [like] painting portraits; because there is a great difference in following one's genius, obeying one's imagination, to arrange, create, and subject oneself to copying exactly what one sees. This latter work must overcome the imagination, and cut from it little by little the force and the fire of which it has need: the happiest fate therefore for M. Vernet, would be to find it at the end of his work that which he had previously; that way he will have nothing to regret except wasted time.¹¹

⁹ Ibid. "Ces tableaux, d'un détail immense et d'une exécution prodigieuse, n'ont pas eu un très-grand succès. Les connoisseurs y ont trouvé peu d'entente de la lumière et de ses effets ; ils ont trouvé trop de confusion dans le grand nombre de figures qui sont sur le devant de ses tableaux. L'art de grouper heureusement ne paraît pas trop familier à M. Vernet ; il n'est pas aisé de faire des tableaux où il y ait beaucoup de mouvement dans unité d'action. Le grand secret du peintre consiste alors à rendre le chaos et la confusion sans confusion."

¹⁰ Ian J. Lochhead, *The Spectator and the Landscape in the Art Criticism of Diderot and His Contemporaries* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1982), pp. 35-38. On Vernet's port scenes more broadly, see pp. 34-45.

¹¹ Tourneux, ed., *Correspondance littéraire*, Vol. 3, p. 432. "J'avoue que je ne vois pas sans peine M. Vernet engagé dans ce travail, qui durera encore quelque temps. D'imitateur de la nature qu'il était il est devenu copiste, et après avoir été peintre d'histoire, il s'est fait peintre de portraits ; car il y a une grande différence entre suivre son génie, obéir à son imagination, arranger, créer, et s'assujettir à copier exactement ce qu'on voit. Ce dernier travail doit dominer l'imagination, et lui ôter peu à puer la force et le feu dont elle a besoin : ce qui peut donc arriver de plus heureux à M. Vernet, c'est de la retrouver à la fin de son travail telle qu'elle avait été auparavant ; alors il n'aura à regretter que le temps perdu."

In the author's view, Vernet's contract with the Admiralty which bound him to portray certain aspects of the ports removed his "genius," thus rendering him unable to paint as he wished, and, indeed, the author asserts, as he would were the monarchy not hovering over him, evaluating his every brushstroke, not for its artistic qualities, but simply for its representational efficacy.¹² Embedded in this criticism, however, was the assumption that Vernet was simply recording the scenes he observed; critics did not yet acknowledge the artist's role in *creating* the landscape he presented.

At last Vernet's efforts to enliven his prescribed scenes with local and color and personal vignettes clicked into place in the minds of the critics, who, in a dramatic reversal, began interpreting his work as a triumph of creativity over bureaucratic control. In this light, they pointed to the continuity between Vernet's earlier, undictated works and his port scenes. Diderot wrote, "We have had a multitude of Vernet's marine scenes; some local, others idealized; and in all there is the same imagination, the same fire, the same wisdom, the same color, the same details, the same variety."¹³ Critics finally recognized the artist's efforts to bring unity to each potentially chaotic scene by focusing the action on a particular activity that expressed the specific character of that particular port. In Vernet's *Le Port de Bandol*, also called *La Madrague* or *La Pêche au thon* (1754, Musée de la Marine, Paris), for example, all the action of the scene centers on the distinctive process used

¹² For further contemporary criticisms of Vernet's early port scenes, also see Lochhead, *The Spectator and the Landscape in the Art Criticism of Diderot and His Contemporaries*, pp. 33-45. Also see Ann Bermingham, *Learning to Draw: Studies in the Cultural History of a Polite and Useful Art* (New Haven, 2000), especially chapters 2 and 5, on how different artistic styles contributed to gender and class formation in eighteenth-century England. In this light, accusing Vernet of being a "copyist" attacks his masculinity as well as his artistic ability.

¹³ Denis Diderot, *Salons* (Oxford, England, 1975), vol. I, p. 67. "Nous avons eu une foule de marines de Vernet ; les unes locales, les autres idéales ; et dans toutes c'est la même imagination, le même feu, la même sagesse, le même coloris, les mêmes détails, la même variété."

by fishermen of that region to catch tuna at certain times of the year, turning this local tradition into high drama.

By October 1779 critics were interpreting Vernet's work in a wholly positive light. The *Correspondance littéraire* extolled, "Our great Vernet is always the same. He never ceases to make beautiful *Moonlights*, beautiful *Sunrises*, superb *Storms*, and the public never ceases to admire them." With a new appreciation for the realism of recognizable *vues*, the report continued its rapture over the landscape of a waterfall on the Rhine,

No one has ever approached the verity with which these two views represent the waterfall of the Rhine viewed from two different sides. . . . The impetuosity of this deafening plunge is above all that which imprints to its aspect a horror so sublime and majestic, and to give an idea, it is not enough to have the one moment a paintbrush can depict.¹⁴

Critics thus moved from criticizing that Vernet's landscapes of recognizable subjects were too disparate and quotidian to be engaging, to praising their exemplary verisimilitude and unity of action, which made the viewer feel an actual part of the scene.

Vernet drew upon the techniques of other eighteenth-century artists to foster this feeling of familiarity and participation in viewers. In contrast to his earlier

¹⁴ Tourneux, ed., *Correspondance littéraire*, Vol. 12, p. 327. "Notre grand Vernet est toujours le même. Il ne se lasse point de faire de beaux *Clairs de lune*, de beaux *Levers du soleil*, de superbes *Tempêtes*, et le public ne se lasse point de les admirer. Voici une *marine* couverte d'un léger brouillard dont la magie est incomparable : et le *Paysage* qui lui sert de pendant nous, offre le site le plus heureux. Voyez comme ces petites baies s'enfoncent agréablement dans le terrain ! que ce ciel est beau ! que ces eaux sont transparentes ! On n'a jamais approché de la vérité avec laquelle ces deux tableaux représentent la cataracte du Rhin vue des deux côtés opposés. Si leur effet ne remplit pas entièrement l'idée que l'imagination se fait de ce merveilleux spectacle, c'est qu'il n'est pas, c'est qu'il ne sera jamais au pouvoir de la peinture d'exprimer toute la rapidité, toute la violence du fleuve, encore moins le long bruissement avec lequel il bouillonne en écume du haut des rochers jusqu'au pied de l'abîme. L'impétuosité de cette chute bruyante est surtout ce qui imprime à son aspect une horreur si sublime et si majestueuse, et pour en donner l'idée, il ne suffit pas du seul instant que le pinceau peut saisir. M. Vernet a rapporté du voyage qu'il vient de faire en Suisse un grand nombre d'études qui ont renouvelé son goût pour le paysage, et la fécondité de son talent nous laisse espérer que nous en profiterons. Il prétend que l'Italie même n'offre pas une aussi grande variété de sites pittoresques que la tranquille enceinte des murs helvétiques."

works, which were full of harrowing drama, billowing clouds, and precariously tilting ships,¹⁵ the charm of Vernet's port scenes lies in the seemingly casual groupings of figures that are more indebted to the *fêtes galantes* of Watteau and Fragonard. For example, Jean-Antoine Watteau's *Pilgrimage on the Isle of Cythera* (1717, Louvre), his reception piece to the Academy, depicts a party of aristocrats grouped in an idyllic landscape. As in much of Watteau's work, the figures engage in dialogue; they incline their heads, avert their eyes, or move their hands, inviting the viewer to speculate on the subjects of their conversations.¹⁶ Even the apparently informal and "artless" composition of the painting itself mimicked qualities praised in the socially important art of conversation.¹⁷ Like Watteau, Vernet clustered his figures in conversational groupings, but transported them from rural idylls to bustling urban settings. This crucial change may have made the scene seem even more familiar to viewers; most, after all, would have lived in cities, as the painting itself remained in Paris, and prints after it circulated in both the capital and provincial towns.¹⁸

By bringing the conversational groupings of the *fêtes galantes* into the city, Vernet united what critics had attacked as the overt fantasy of the *fêtes galantes* with

¹⁵ See, for example, *Nauffrage: Midi* (1750, Musée de la Marine, Paris).

¹⁶ Mary Vidal, *Watteau's Painted Conversations: Art, Literature, and Talk in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century France* (New Haven, 1992), Chapter 1, especially p. 29.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 65. Christopher Johns also suggests that Watteau and other painters of *fêtes galantes* helped "to undermine existing academic hierarchies that privileged textually based, narrative subjects." Christopher M.S. Johns, "An Ornament of Italy and the Premier Female Painter of Europe: Rosalba Carriera and the Roman Academy," in *Women, Art and the Politics of Identity in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Melissa Hyde and Jennifer Milam, (Burlington, VT, 2003), p. 27.

¹⁸ Prints may have been particularly popular in the provincial ports they portrayed. For example, multiple copies of the print made after Vernet's *Port de La Rochelle* can still be found in La Rochelle's Archives Municipales. *Le Port de La Rochelle, Vu de la petite Rive. Gravé d'après le Tableau Original appartenant au Roy, et faisant partie de la Collection des Ports de France, ordonnée par Mr le Marquis de Marigny, Conseiller du Roy en ses Conseils, Commandeur de ses Ordres, Directeur et Ordonnateur General de ses Bâtiments, Jardins, Arts, Academies, et Manufactures Royales. Peint par J. Vernet de l'Academie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture. C.N. Cochin fileus (illegible) et J. Ph Le Bas socis Sulpserant (illegible) 1767 A.P.D.R.*

the apparent realism of the cityscape. In doing so, he circumvented criticisms of frivolity; indeed, critics swung in the other direction and accused him of being a mere copyist. But this critical acceptance of Vernet's port scenes as true-to-life representations had important ramifications for his work and the work of other Admiralty artists who succeeded him. This acceptance of the painting as documentary evidence, an assumption that went unchallenged even as critics revised their assessments of the artistic merits of Vernet's work, made the social relationships encoded within the painting seem natural.

Take, for example, Joseph Vernet's *Vûe du Port de la Rochelle, prise de la petite Rive* (Figure 1.3) (1762, Musée de la Marine, Paris). Vernet depicts a bustling port, site of transatlantic commerce, filled with massive ships, workers engaged in dockyard trades, and people gathering at high tide to watch the hustle and bustle that accompanied it while chatting with neighbors. Above the lively city, even the clouds seem in motion as the sun sets. Only the water is still, but that, too, will soon start to move as the tide begins to rush out. Ships line the far bank of the bay; upwards of twenty await loading or unloading. On the near bank, Vernet suggests the industries of the town. Several barrels fill the lower right corner of the canvas: a man leans against one, a horse draws another on a sledge, and men roll barrels on the left, perhaps moving them from the light ship on the shore which could have brought them from a larger vessel outside the harbor. The barrels could contain eau-de-vie, wine, or cognac, some of La Rochelle's major exports since the middle ages, destined for European or colonial trade. Or they could contain sugar, the 'white gold' brought

from France's Caribbean islands, a possible hint of the connections that bound the port of La Rochelle with the far-away colony.

Set apart by the brilliance and fineness of their clothing, the ladies and gentlemen in Vernet's painting of La Rochelle engage only in conversation, just as similar figures do in Watteau's mythical Cythera. In contrast, the women and men of lower social stature work, or pause in their labors for a conversational respite that will soon end. Thus, the women in the center of the canvas, dressed in brilliant pink and blue dresses and accompanied by an elegant man in knee breeches, are completely absorbed in their conversation and seem not even to notice the three women and two children on the left. This second group, on the other hand, converses merely in passing. The large basket held by the woman in blue on the far left indicates she is about to pick up or deposit a load, while the turned head of the seated woman in red suggests that she has called out to her companions as they passed. A clear line demarcates the temporary repose of the group on the left from the more permanent leisure of the group on the right. Vernet makes this social difference visible through the clothing and activities of each of the figures.

Viewers particularly noted the unity of conversational exchange with apparently true-to-life detail in Vernet's painting of La Rochelle. Mathon de La Cour, in his commentary on artworks exhibited at the 1765 Salon, observed that in this particular painting, "his figures are drawn with spirit, all their attitudes are expressive.... The magic of the perspective, the action and the movement of the figures, the agreement that one finds among the different groups, the unity and the

harmony of the whole, the precision of the details” all contribute to make the painting an exciting and harmonious whole.¹⁹

The *Mercure de France* seconded this assessment of the La Rochelle painting, and also voiced its approbation of the verisimilitude that the manual labor. It said, the ungratefulness of repetitive work and in a manner of speaking rhymed (?), that is found in these ports, is so ingeniously redeemed by the artful use of lights, that they become beauties who one cannot refuse, and from whom one can hardly wrest one’s gaze.²⁰ According to this criticism, the variety in the occupations and statuses of its figures added an essential element of veracity to the port that was only intensified by the realistic depiction of the port itself. The *Mercure* continues,

Each particular object is of such exact verity, that it is not imitation, but nature itself who binds us to it: and the ensemble of these objects is so artistically united, so well linked by the art of the painter, that nothing disturbs the *vue*, which satisfies equally the Connoisseur and the uninformed.²¹

But the real magic in Vernet’s paintings was that they seemed to offer the viewer not just a vista, but an *experience* of the port they portrayed.

¹⁹ Charles Joseph Mathon de la Cour, *Lettres à Monsiur ** sur les peintres, les sculptures et les gravures, exposées dans le Salon du Louvre en 1765* (Paris, 1765), letter 2, pp. 43-45. “La vue du Port de la Rochelle est prise de la petite rive. M. Vernet y a peint des Rochelloises, des Poitevines, des Saintongeaises & des Ollonnoises ; cela jette dans l’habillement des figures, une variété fort agréable. La mer est haut, & l’heure du jour est au coucher du soleil. M. Vernet est asservi dans ces sortes d’ouvrages comme on l’est dans les Portraits, pour rendre fidèlement ses modeles. Cependant l’effet de cet esclavage ne se fait point sentir. Il choisit si adroitement ses points de vue, qu’on prendroit ses Tableaux pour des chefs-d’œuvres de l’imagination la plus heureuse. Son coloris est vrai & brillant, ses figures sont dessinées avec esprit, toutes ses attitudes sont expressives ; on retrouve par-tout la nature. Il paroît que cet Artiste en a fait une étude singuliere. Il se plaît à en exprimer les beaux effets. Ses ciels sont admirables. ... Dans la vue de la Rochelle, l’Auteur a exprimé d’une maniere plus piquante encore, & qui lui est plus particuliere, le moment où le soleil en se couchant dore le Ciel de ses rayons. La magie de la perspective, l’action & le mouvement des figures, l’accord qui se trouve entre les différens groupes, l’unité & l’harmonie de l’ensemble, la précision des détails, toutes ces parties se trouvent réunies chez M. Vernet.”

²⁰ "Description des Tableaux exposés au Sallon du Louvre, avec des Remarques, par un Société d'Amateurs," *Extraordinaire du Mercure [de France]* (1763), pp. 41. “L’ingratitude des Fabriques répétées & pour ainsi dire *rimées*, qui se trouvent dans ces Ports, est si ingénieusement sauvée par l’artificieux emploi des lumières, qu’elles deviennent des beautés auxquelles on ne peut se refuser, & d’où les regards ont peine à s’arracher.”

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42. “Chaque objet particulier est d’une si exacte vérité, que ce n’est point l’imitation, mais la nature même qui nous y attache : & l’ensemble de ces objets est si artistement fondu, si bien lié par l’art du Peintre, que rien ne heurte la vue, & que tout satisfait également celle du Connoisseur comme celle du Vulgaire.”

The spectator distinguishes each part of these admirable compositions; he walks on the paths that are drawn there; he is ready to go on board with the sailors; he looks through the workshops, seeing the different maneuvers, he talks with the characters, the figures of which who, ingeniously grouped, give life and movement to [this] masterpiece of Art.²²

The incredible detail in Vernet's work ironically made it seem unstudied and so realistic that a viewer of the painting could imagine him or herself stepping into it. Each element of the scene seemed, in short, natural.

Two aspects of Vernet's port scenes, then, made them both useful to the Admiralty and interesting to viewers. First was his realistic portrayal of specific ports, with attention to the particular aspects of commercial life that made each port unique. Second was his emphasis on making these unique yet quotidian characteristics part of the central action of the painting, concentrating them in the foreground in a way that drew the attention of viewers and made them part of the scene. It is not surprising that these techniques influenced Van Blarenberghe, his successor as painter for the Admiralty, especially as they had, in the end, met with such critical acclaim. But Van Blarenberghe embedded in his work another of Vernet's techniques as well: by combining the apparently realistic views of the working port with more whimsical vignettes of human interaction and conversation, Van Blarenberghe suggested that the social interactions he depicted in the colonies were as real and natural as critics hailed the vistas themselves to be.

²² Ibid., pp. 41-42. "Le spectateur distingue chaque partie de ces admirables compositions ; il marche [42] dans les chemins qui y sont tracés ; il est prêt d'aller à bord avec les Matelots ; il parcourt les Ateliers, voit les différentes manœuvres, il converse avec les personnages dont les Figures, ingénieusement groupées, donnent de la vie & du mouvement à ces chefs-d'œuvre de l'Art."

The Unconventional Career of Louis-Nicolas Van Blarenberghe

The Lillois painter Louis-Nicolas Van Blarenberghe followed an unconventional path to the halls of Versailles. Son of a painter himself, his training had been primarily in his father's workshop. When he arrived in Paris in about 1751 at the relatively advanced age of thirty-five, the artist had already made a name for himself in Lille. Like his father, he was a member of the Lille painter's guild, and he had achieved some notoriety as a painter of battles: during the War of Austrian Succession, he had most likely followed Louis XV on the battlefields of Flanders.²³ Van Blarenberghe had not gone through the training that had become virtually obligatory for most artists in Paris, however. He had not been to Italy, he never became a member of the Académie royale, or even the painter's guild the Académie de Saint-Luc.²⁴ He lacked formal training, and he specialized in miniatures and genre scenes painted in gouache (a water-based paint), three counts against him in the eyes of the Academy, which favored large-scale history paintings conducted in oils. It was perhaps this outsider status that motivated him to follow in the footsteps of the successful Vernet.

Louis-Nicolas toiled in obscurity for ten years before receiving the commission that would provide him with his entrée into royal society. In 1761, Peter III of Russia asked him to paint a snuffbox; this was followed by private commissions from Catherine the Great, Madame de Pompadour, the duc de Choiseul, and the

²³ Maillet-Chassagne, *Une dynastie de peintres lillois, les Van Blarenberghe*, p. 38; Xavier Salmon, *Louis-Nicolas van Blarenberghe à Versailles* (Paris, 2005), p. 7. The War of Austrian Succession lasted from 1740-1740; Van Blarenberghe likely followed the war from 1743-1748. Although his participation as a painter of battles remains uncertain, Maillet-Chassagne points to several persuasive suggestions of his presence, which include a watercolor dating from 1746, a pen and ink drawing from 1745, a drawing of the siege of Anvers, and his highly detailed painting *L'entrée de Louis XV à Mons* (1783, Versailles), p. 21.

²⁴ Maillet-Chassagne, *Une dynastie de peintres lillois, les Van Blarenberghe*, p. 22; p. 38.

cardinal de Rohan.²⁵ When in 1769 the duc de Choiseul offered the artist the opportunity for a more secure living that was not dependent on the whims of wealthy patrons, Van Blarenberghe took it. He became the official painter of battles. Although he lost this post the next year upon Choiseul's fall from power, thanks to the intervention of the king's sister Madame Adélaïde he obtained a position at the ministry of the Marine, where he was charged with painting several views of the town and port of Brest.²⁶ Other well-known artists had contributed to the Marine's ongoing project to record all the ports of France, notably Romeyn de Hooghe, Nicolas Ozanne, Jean-Baptiste de La Rose, and, of course, Vernet. In 1778 Van Blarenberghe was again named official painter of battles, and he began work on a large series of paintings of the War of Austrian Succession to decorate Louis XV's private apartments at Versailles, the culmination of his successful career.²⁷

In addition to making court contacts in his early years in Paris, however, the young artist also made the acquaintance of Joseph Vernet, then the official painter of the Admiralty.²⁸ The Lillois painter's captivation with Vernet's port scenes was evident from the moment Vernet exhibited the first four paintings he had executed for the Admiralty at the Salon of 1755. He even copied four of Vernet's scenes, making

²⁵ Ibid., p. 23; Salmon, *Louis-Nicolas van Blarenberghe à Versailles*, p. 7.

²⁶ Maillet-Chassagne, *Une dynastie de peintres lillois, les Van Blarenberghe*, p. 25. On Madame Adélaïde as a royal patron of the arts, see Jennifer Milam, "Matronage and the Direction of Sisterhood: Portraits of Madame Adélaïde," in *Women, Art and the Politics of Identity in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Melissa Hyde and Jennifer Milam, (Burlington, VT, 2003), pp. 115-138, and Melissa Hyde, "Under the Sign of Minerva: Adélaïde Labille-Guiard's Portrait of Madame Adélaïde- Melissa Hyde," in *Women, Art and the Politics of Identity in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Melissa Hyde and Jennifer Milam, (Burlington, VT, 2003), pp. 139-163.

²⁷ Salmon, *Louis-Nicolas van Blarenberghe à Versailles*, p. 7.

²⁸ Vernet had Van Blarenberghe's address in Paris, the "Reine de France rue Saint-Honoré," written in his address book. Maillet-Chassagne, *Une dynastie de peintres lillois, les Van Blarenberghe*, pp. 22-23.

him the only artist whose work Van Blarenberghe ever copied.²⁹ Van Blarenberghe had seen what critics realized only decades later: that the verisimilitude of the scene was partly constituted out of its seeming chaos, lending an immediacy to the canvas that made the viewer feel like an observer or even part of the action, and a charm that would make them want to be included. Van Blarenberghe also surely would have remarked the new critical acclaim for the realism of Vernet's recognizable *vues*. Thus, when the Lillois received his own appointment as an artist for the Admiralty, he drew upon Vernet's techniques of using action and local color to create a sense of immediacy, and combined it with his own skill as a miniaturist in his landscape paintings of Saint-Domingue.

By the time Van Blarenberghe painted his scenes of Cap Français (Figure 1.1 and Figure 1.2), thanks to Vernet the genre of port painting had become well enough established to have developed certain conventions of its own: the heavy labor of ports was aestheticized, the social relations of a hierarchical society embedded, the distinctiveness of each locale highlighted. Van Blarenberghe used these conventions in his depictions of Saint-Domingue to convey ideas about people of color, slavery, and the relationship between colonies and metropole. Just as Vernet focused attention on the distinctive fishing methods in Bandol, for example, Van Blarenberghe made what he considered the unique characteristics of the colony the

²⁹ Ibid., p. 49. According to Maillet-Chassagne, Van Blarenberghe copied Vernet's *Régates devant le château Saint-Ange* (1754), *Port de Toulon* (1757), *Port de La Rochelle* (1762), and *Port de Bordeaux* (1772). A snuffbox by Van Blarenberghe depicting the Port of La Rochelle, dated 1762, is currently in the Rothschild Collection at Waddesdon Manor. It is unclear if this is the 'copy' of Vernet Maillet-Chassagne refers to, as there are considerable differences between the two works. It is possible that the snuffbox was made from drawings made on the spot, as either Louis-Nicolas or his son Henri-Joseph probably visited the southwest of France. Kristin Aschengreen Piacenti Serve Grandjean, Charles Truman, and Anthony Blunt, *The James A. de Rothschild Collection at Waddesdon Manor: Gold Boxes and Miniatures of the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 7 (London, 1975), p. 261.

central focus of the painting, concentrating them in the foreground in a way that drew the attention of viewers and made them a central part of the scene. The distinctive elements he chose to highlight were transatlantic trade and slavery.

In spite of the Admiralty's emphasis on verisimilitude and first-hand observation, Van Blarenberghe never actually visited Saint-Domingue. Instead, he likely drew on maps, eyewitness accounts, and published descriptions in creating a plausible and compelling scene of life in the colony.³⁰ The artist had previous experience with this technique; as the painter of battle scenes under Choiseul, he had decorated the *Hôtel des Affaires étrangères* at Versailles with scenes of European capitals, all of which he certainly had not visited.³¹ For his Saint-Domingue canvases, Van Blarenberghe turned to two distinct sources which each offered their own compelling portrait of the colony: maps drawn by the *ingénieurs-géographes*, the official surveyors of the king, and published travel narratives recounting journeys to the French Antilles.³²

Surveying and Territorial Conquest

In the eighteenth century, surveying went hand in hand with territorial conquest and colonial ambitions, as recording the land itself became a way to portray

³⁰ Maillet-Chassagne suggests that he relied on these types of sources when he painted his famous battle scenes. Maillet-Chassagne, *Une dynastie de peintres lillois, les Van Blarenberghe*, p. 82.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

³² In making his painting, the artist likely drew on contemporary accounts, or even interviewed people who knew Saint-Domingue well. Van Blarenberghe employed this technique later, when he painted battle scenes. *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

political domination and control.³³ As early as 1624, *ingénieurs-géographes* accompanied troops into battle. They began as a rather informal body, without central organization, and they often used varying methods.³⁴ Although their function was not formalized until 1748, by the beginning of the eighteenth century they were charged particularly with surveying the land and designing and building fortifications.³⁵ Surveying exploded in the early decades of the century, both as a result of Louis XIV's wars and the increasing attention given to the colonies.³⁶ This activity continued under Louis XV, and during the War of Austrian Succession (1740-1748), the *ingénieurs-géographes* were particularly active in Flanders, especially around the city of Lille, Louis-Nicolas Van Blarenberghe's home town. Van Blarenberghe might even have worked among the surveying corps himself, either as a surveyor and mapmaker or as a painter of battle scenes.³⁷ The *ingénieurs-géographes'* distinctive methods of recording the landscape after its conquest proved influential on the artist's later depictions of the colonies.

It was in the Flanders campaign that the surveyors first used the technique of triangulation, to great effect; this enabled them to measure distances and topography more exactly by taking measurements from several different points, a way of recording the land that gave surveyors a three-dimensional sense of the landscape.³⁸ Triangulation emphasized elevation and perspective as important elements in

³³ Jill Casid, for example, argues that not only slavery, but "the plantation system's ordering and arrangement of the forcibly relocated and 'intermixed' plants and people" were part of the colonial landscape. Casid, *Sowing Empire*, p. 12.

³⁴ H.M.A Berthaut, *Les Ingénieurs-géographes militaires, 1624-1831*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1902), pp. 3-5.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-13 on the Wars of the League of Augsburg and Spanish Succession; pp. 16-17 on the colonies. The army sent surveyors to the colonies from about 1719; the first topographical map of Saint-Domingue was drawn in 1731 by Broussard (pp. 16-17).

³⁷ Maillet-Chassagne, *Une dynastie de peintres lillois, les Van Blarenberghe*, p. 21. See footnote 22.

³⁸ Berthaut, *Les Ingénieurs-géographes militaires, 1624-1831*, p. 22, p. 81.

depicting and understanding landscape, elements which in turn influenced artists.³⁹

This technique enabled surveyors to impose a unified, consistent visual order on sometimes chaotic countryside.⁴⁰ When the Admiralty commissioned its artists to paint views of the same port from different points of view it was employing this same method in an effort to record a more comprehensive and realistic sense of each port.⁴¹

After the Seven Years' War (1756-1763) the *ingénieurs-géographes*, by this time operating under the auspices of the Ministry of the Marine, redoubled their efforts to survey and map France's colonies comprehensively, underscoring the relationship between surveying and colonialism.⁴² Their commissions in Saint-Domingue included making partial maps of the whole colony, drawing up detailed maps of the coasts, surveying and charting the border between French and Spanish territories, and mapping the cities and surrounding areas of Port-au-Prince, Fort-Dauphin, and of course Cap Français.⁴³ Charged with producing "city maps, geographical maps, panoramas, terrestrial and maritime surveys, and costal maps," the *ingénieurs-géographes'* products flowed back into France.⁴⁴ As an official artist

³⁹ Ibid. pp. 22-24 and pp. 119-120. Also see Susan Siegfried, "Naked History: The Rhetoric of Military Painting in Postrevolutionary France," *The Art Bulletin* 75, no. 2 (1993):235-258, pp. 240.

⁴⁰ Susan Siegfried suggests that the battle painter Louis-François Lejeune, who had been trained as an *ingénieur-géographe*, painted battle scenes that imposed order on the chaotic action of the battle in a way that "composed an image of action, order, and control, offering a reassuring picture of war that allowed his audience to forget about the carnage and emotional cost of combat and concentrate instead on a glorious adventure of national victory." Siegfried, "Naked History," p. 248. I suggest that Van Blarenberghe did the same.

⁴¹ See, for example, Van Blarenberghe's views of Brest or Vernet's views of Bordeaux or Marseilles. Van Blarenberghe, *La Ville de Brest* (1774, Brest, Musée des Beaux-Arts), *Le Port de Brest, vue générale* (18th c., Louvre), *L'avant-port de Brest* (18th c., Louvre), his two different *Batteries du port de Brest* (18th c., Louvre), and his different views of *La Rade de Brest* (18th c., Louvre, Gouache and ink); Vernet, *Première vue du port de Bordeaux, prise du côté des salinières* (1759, Musée de la Marine), *Deuxième vue du port de Bordeaux, prise du château trompette* (1759, Musée de la Marine).

⁴² Berthaut, *Les Ingénieurs-géographes militaires, 1624-1831*, pp. 37-38.

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 38-39.

⁴⁴ "Il [the surveyor Gautier, who was sent to survey Saint-Domingue] fit les plans, cartes, vues, reconnaissances terrestres et maritimes, et les plans côtiers." Ibid., p. 38.

of the Marine in France, Van Blarenberghe surely would have had access to these drawings.⁴⁵

In the *Plan de la Plaine du Cap François* (Figure 1.4), for example, engraved in 1786 by René Phelipeau after earlier maps made by *ingénieurs-géographes* who surveyed the land in Saint-Domingue, the draftsman pays great attention to the elevation and folds of the landscape.⁴⁶ We see the straight lines of the streets in the town and the clean sweep of the harbor on which the town was built. Around the town, the commercial capital of Saint-Domingue, flourish the same landscape features Van Blarenberghe included in his work: a triangular-shaped plateau abutting the city, which gives way to dramatic ridges of ever-increasing elevations, reaching in finger-like folds towards the city. The mapmaker carefully demarcated elevation through shading, almost suggesting shadows cast upon the landscape; Van Blarenberghe used a similar technique, making the dramatic mountain on the right of the canvas, in particular, much darker than the surrounding plain. Van Blarenberghe employs lines similar to those that so prominently demarcate different elevations in surveyors' topographical maps, and he depicts the variations in the land with a clarity that attests to his skill as a miniaturist.⁴⁷ The visual congruence between the two

⁴⁵ Van Blarenberghe's connection with the *ingénieurs-géographes* goes beyond the conjectural; his son, Henri-Joseph, likely was a student at the bureau des *ingénieurs-géographes*. Further, as an artist for the Marine, Van Blarenberghe worked under the same administration as the surveyors. Maillat-Chassagne, *Une dynastie de peintres lillois, les Van Blarenberghe*, p. 30. See also pp. 81-82.

⁴⁶ René Phelipeau, "Plan de la Plaine du Cap François en l'isle St. Domingue, rédigé d'après les derniers Opérations Géométriques des Ingénieurs du Roy. Par René Phelipeau, Ingénieur Géographe," (Paris: 1786). In the Willaim Clements Library at the University of Michigan. The earliest topographical map of Saint-Domingue was made in 1737 by an *ingénieur-géographe* named Brossard. Subsequent maps often drew on earlier versions.

⁴⁷ Nicolas Ponce's *Vue du Cap François, Isle St. Domingue*, included as an engraving in Nicolas Ponce, *Recueil de vues des lieux principaux de la colonie Française de Saint-Domingue, gravées par les soins de M. Ponce, Président du Musée de Paris, des Académies des Sciences et Belles-Lettres de Rouen, la Rochelle, Orléans, Bayeux, Cap-François, &c., accompagnées de Cartes et Plans de la Même Colonie, gravés par les soins de M. Phelipeau, Ingénieur-Géographe* (Paris, 1791), which was

works is so pronounced it almost seems that Van Blarenberghe portrays the same scene from a slightly different perspective, simply adding the ships and figures that bring his landscape to life.

This similarity is no coincidence: both surveyors and artists were attachés of the Admiralty, whose very *raison d'être* was overseeing the colonial project. However, what is left out of these images as much as what is included suggests the tension and uneasiness that surrounded the colonial project, even at the heart of the Admiralty. Although the Phelipeau map meticulously outlines the boundaries of plantations outside the city, it includes no sign of the slaves who worked those plantations. And although Van Blarenberghe's landscape is peopled with slaves, he omits the plantations they work. Both images fail to represent the colonial products produced for consumption in France, the reasons for the colonies' economic importance in the first place. No sugar, indigo, or coffee plants appear anywhere in either image. This lack of acknowledgement of the primary bond that tied France to the Caribbean begins to suggest the extreme anxiety and ambivalence the French had toward the colonial way of life, and reveal the fictions used to mask it.

Travelers' Accounts of Saint-Domingue: Sugar, Indigo, and Slavery

When Van Blarenberghe sought to portray social relations in the colonies, as Vernet had so effectively done in his port scenes, he had to turn to sources besides the topographical maps made by the *ingénieurs-géographes*. By the late eighteenth

published alongside Moreau de Saint-Méry's *La description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de Saint-Domingue*. This engraving offers a view of the city so similar to Van Blarenberghe's that it might even be based on it.

century, when Van Blarenberghe painted his works, published descriptions of travel to the Caribbean had been circulating for at least 150 years.⁴⁸ Indeed, even as early as 1709, the author Gautier du Tronchoy wrote, “the voyage to the French Islands in America is presently so common; and one seems to see so many accounts, that the reader might be surprised that I dare to give this Journal to the public.”⁴⁹ In their writings on Saint-Domingue, many authors gave elaborate descriptions of social relations in the colony. In doing so they created their own fiction of Saint-Domingue on which Van Blarenberghe drew, one that positioned slavery as a natural and expected part of colonial life.

Through the seventeenth and much of the eighteenth century, most of the authors who wrote about Saint-Domingue and France’s other Caribbean colonies were scholarly priests, sent to the colony to convert its inhabitants to Catholicism and to study the local flora and fauna. Under this rubric of natural history fell not only descriptions of plants, animals, and often people native to the islands; writers also described sugar, indigo, and African slaves, all brought to the Caribbean by

⁴⁸ Books describing voyages to the Caribbean were published in many European countries. A few examples of such works not discussed here include: Guillaume Coppier, *Histoire et voyage des Indes Occidentales: et de plusieurs autres maritimes, & esloignées* (Lyon, 1645); Thomas Tryon, *Friendly Advice to the Gentlemen-Planters of the East and West Indies, in Three Parts* (London, 1684); Domingo Gonzales Carranza, *A geographical description of the coasts, harbours, and sea ports of the Spanish West-Indies; particularly of Porto Bello, Cartagena, and the island of Cuba. With observations of the currents, and the variations of the compass in the Bay of Mexico, and the north sea of America. Tr. from a curious and authentic manuscript, written in Spanish by Domingo Gonzales Carranza, His Catholick Majesty’s principal pilot of the flota in New Spain, anno 1718.* (London, 1740); Sir William Young, *Considerations which may Tend to Promote the Settlement of our New West-India Colonies, by Encouraging Individuals to Embark in the Undertaking* (London, 1764); *Authentic Papers Relative to the Expedition against the Charibbs, and the Sale of Lands in the Island of St. Vincent,* (London, 1773).

⁴⁹ Gautier du Tronchoy, *Journal de la Campagne des Isles de l’Amerique, qu’à fait Monsieur D ***. La prise & la possession de l’isle Saint Christophe, avec une description exacte des Animaux, des Arbres, & des Plantes les plus curieuses de l’Amerique. La maniere de vivre des Sauvages, leurs meurs, leur Police & Religion. Avec la Relation de la surprise que voulut faire la Garnison de Fribourg sur les deux Brissack.* (Troyes, 1709), p. 7. “Le voyage des Isles François de l’Amerique est presentement si commun; & l’on en voit paroître tant te relations, que l’on sera peut-être surpris que j’ose donner ce Journal au public.”

Europeans. The Dominican Jean-Baptiste Du Tertre was one of the first to write extensively about his experiences in the Antilles, where he lived and worked from 1640-1658. Prominent in his writings are his descriptions of growing and producing indigo and sugar, the crops that were already making the Antilles an important part of the French empire; these descriptions were echoed in virtually every work on the Antilles for the next century.⁵⁰ Du Tertre's description of these crops and the manner in which they were produced included elaborate illustrations of both an *Indigoterie* and a *Sucrerie* (Figure 1.5 and Figure 1.6).⁵¹ These and numerous other illustrations included with the text helped to set a visual iconography for the depiction of Caribbean plantations and the slaves who worked them. These two engravings have many common elements which would become part of the visual vocabulary of

⁵⁰ R.P. Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale des Antilles habitées par les François, devisée en deux tomes, et enrichi de Cartes & de Figures*. (Paris, 1667), Vol. 2; on indigo, see pp. 107-110; on sugar, see pp. 122-125. Such a description was offered by many authors of travelogues or natural histories. Also see, for example, Tronchoy, *Journal de la Campagne des Isles de l'Amerique, qu'à fait Monsieur D ***. La prise & la possession de l'isle Saint Christophe, avec une description exacte des Animaux, des Arbres, & des Plantes les plus curieuses de l'Amerique. La maniere de vivre des Sauvages, leurs meurs, leur Police & Religion. Avec la Relation de la surprise que voulut faire la Garnison de Fribourg sur les deux Brissack.*, pp. 73-74; and Pierre-François-Xavier de Charlevoix, *Histoire de l'Isle Espagnole ou de S. Domingue. Ecrite particulièrement sur des Memoires Manuscrits du P. Jean-Baptiste de Pers, Jesuite, Missionnaire à Saint Domingue, & sur les Pieces Originales, qui se conservent au Dépôt de la Marine*. (Paris, 1730); on sugar production, see pp. 329-333. The most extensive description of sugar production can be found in Jean Baptiste Labat, *Nouveau voyage aux isles de l'Amerique: contenant l'histoire naturelle de ces pays, l'origine, les moeurs, la religion & le gouvernement des habitans anciens & modernes: les guerres & es evenement singuliers que y sont arrives pendant le long sejour que l'auteur y a fait: le commerce & les manufactures qui y sont établies, & les moyens de les augmenter: avec une description exacte & curieuse de toutes ces isles: ouvrage enrichi de plus de cent cartes, plans & figures en tailles-douces*. (Paris, 1722), Vol. 3, Chapter 5, pp. 144-528. Labat devoted much of his time in the Antilles to revamping the sugar industry. He describes at great length different types of sugar, how it was grown and processed, the additional products of sugar plantations, such as rum, and, most importantly, the resources necessary to maintain a sufficient number of slaves, and the types of work in which they engaged. Other writers, including Charlevoix, tended to follow Labat's lead in omitting detailed descriptions of either slaves or plantations, referring instead to Labat's work. See, for example, Pierre-François-Xavier de Charlevoix, *A Voyage to North-America: Undertaken by Command of the Present King of France. Containing the Geographical Description and Natural History of Canada and Louisiana*. (Dublin, 1766), p. 283. "What I have found here most curious, were the Sugar Mills. I shall say nothing of them, because Father Labat has described them much better than I can."

⁵¹ Both images are located in Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale des Antilles* Vol. 2. *Indigoterie* is located after p. 106, *Sucrerie* after p. 122. No engraver's name can be found on the plates.

slavery: both include detailed drawings of the equipment necessary to process the crop along with numbers identifying important tools; both show semi-clothed black people at work; both include a white overseer, set apart from the other figures by his dress and his possession of a stick; and both situate the scene amongst the exotic flora of the island, also identified with labels corresponding to numbers included in the engraving.

Like the descriptive text that accompanies them, these prints situate plantation slave labor as an expected and inevitable part of Caribbean life. By labeling mills for extracting juice from sugar cane and cauldrons for boiling it alongside “large coconut trees” and “Caribbean cabbage,” the engraver makes plantation apparatus and indigenous plants seem equally innate aspects of the landscape. In the *Indigoterie* engraving, the engraver also identifies the work in which some of the slaves are engaged, such as the “*Nègres* carrying the indigo to the caisson [a weatherproof structure] to dry it.” This situates their labor as part of the landscape as well, making it seem a natural and even indigenous part of the colonial landscape.

In marked contrast, neither print identifies the overseer; his role is signaled visually rather than textually. This lacuna emphasizes the hierarchical gap between white overseer and black slaves. Through this means, the artist works to invoke the familiarity and inevitability of hierarchy in an otherwise unfamiliar landscape. Implicitly, this hierarchy is so natural and familiar to European viewers that it does not need to be named. His dress, complete with knee breeches and hat, differentiates him from the partially clothed blacks who work around him. His stick also marks his authority, as he uses it to direct the workers at the *sucrerie*. Du Tertre writes that

“overseers usually carry in their hand” such an instrument, which they used to punish sloth or incite slaves to work.⁵² Although such rods often were used as instruments of slave punishment, here no overt form of coercion is visible: there are no chains, whips, or other instruments of torture. Rather, the slaves seem to work on their own accord, though under the overseer’s watchful direction. The overseer’s posture also sets him apart; in both images, he is standing still in a landscape where everyone else is moving. The overseer on the *indigoterie* even adopts a posture of leisure, leaning on his stick, situated in the middle of the image, inspecting his territory as might a lord of a manor. His is the most elevated figure in the image, further emphasizing the implicitly familiar hierarchy between black and white, but obscuring the instruments of coercion whites used to enforce it.

As Du Tertre elaborates his discourse on African slavery, he makes it clear that work, in his view, suited slaves best, thus implying that their plantation labor was not only beneficial to them, but also largely voluntary. “They suffer almost no fatigue,” he says, and, like animals, they respond to the treatment their owners accord them.⁵³

When they are treated with gentleness, and when they are fed well, they consider themselves the happiest people in the world, they do everything, and one sees on their faces and in their actions, certain marks of the satisfaction of their spirit. On the contrary when one treats them with strictness, one soon sees that melancholy corrodes them.⁵⁴

Slaves who worked, according to Du Tertre, were content, and their contentment stemmed directly from the treatment they received from their masters. The overseer

⁵² Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 530. He refers to a “lianne, que le Commandeur porte ordinairement à la main.”

⁵³ Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 493. “Ils ne souffrent presque rien de la fatigue.”

⁵⁴ Ibid., Vol 2, p. 496-497. “Quand on les traite avec douceur, & qu'on les nourrit (p. 497) bien, ils s'estiment les plus heureuses gens du monde, ils sont à tout faire, & on voit sur leurs visages & dans leurs actions, des marques certaines de la satisfaction de leur esprit. Au contraire quand on les traite avec rigueur, on s'aperçoit bien-tost que la melancolie les ronge.” Later authors, including Bourgeois, echoed this sentiment.

who appears in the prints, therefore, is portrayed as a “good” master, not because of any actions or lack thereof on his part, but because of the actions of his slaves; they work obediently, seemingly voluntarily, submitting to his direction willingly and making coercion unnecessary.

By the end of the eighteenth century, authors were legitimizing their actions even further by claiming that slaves actually preferred servitude to liberty. Nicolas-Louis Bourgeois perhaps expressed this idea most explicitly when he asserted that “if these poor slaves fall in the hands of a good Master, who does not treat them with too much strictness, they prefer their servitude to their original liberty.”⁵⁵ Such an attitude has its roots in the writings of Du Tertre, who claimed that slaves’ gaiety motivated them to sing even as they work, while their loyalty to and affection for their master would inspire slaves “to cut themselves into pieces for him.”⁵⁶ Such myths of slaves’ contentment, and even affection toward their masters, helped to position slavery as a natural and supposedly beneficial part of colonial social order.

Many authors, however, voiced outright reprobation for slavery, although couching this disapproval in somewhat formulaic terms. Gautier du Tronchoy says, there is nothing comparable to the miserable condition of these unfortunate ones, who are sold and trafficked like horses; they are born slaves, they hardly have the power to

⁵⁵ Nicolas-Louis and Pierre-Jean-Baptiste Nougaret Bourgeois, *Voyages intéressants dans différentes colonies françaises, espagnoles, anglaises, etc. Contenant des observations relatives à ces contrées et un mémoire sur les maladies les plus communes à Saint-Domingue, leurs remèdes, etc. Let tout mis au jour d'après un grand nombre de ms. par M.N.* (Paris, 1788), p. 321. “Si ces pauvres Esclaves tombent entre les mains d'un bon Maître, qui ne les traite pas avec trop grande rigueur, ils préfèrent leur servitude à leur premier liberté.” Nougaret composed this text from Bourgeois’ extensive manuscripts on his voyage to Saint-Domingue. Nougaret was born in La Rochelle, so probably knew about at least some aspects of the transatlantic trade first hand.

⁵⁶ Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale des Antilles*, p. 497-498. “Ils se mettoient en pieces pour luy.” Similarly, Labat relates, “Pour peu qu'on leur fasse du bien, & qu'on le fasse de bonne grace, ils aiment infiniment leurs Maîtres, & ne reconnoissent aucun péril, quand il s'agit de lui sauver la vie, aux dépens même de la leur. Outre plusieurs exemples que j'ai de leur fidélité, & dont on pourroit faire de gros volumes.” Labat, *Nouveau voyage aux isles de l'Amérique*, Vol. 4, p. 148.

move their [own] arms, they are made to work the earth and to perform all sorts of work like beasts.⁵⁷

This condemnation of slave owners and pity for the slaves who served them offers a valuable counterpoint to representations of slavery as an unquestioned part of the colonial order by revealing the contention and anxiety that surrounded the issue.

Although some authors portrayed slavery as the inevitable result of colonialism, some (and occasionally even the same ones) revealed a profound sense of discomfort with the issue.

Du Tertre, in slight contrast, particularly targeted the greed of colonists that motivated them to exploit slaves rather than condemning the institution of slavery itself. “One can easily judge the rigor of their [the slaves’] work, by the strong passion that our inhabitants attest for amassing goods,” he says. “Because as they do not come to the Islands except for this, they force their *Nègres* to every service they can.”⁵⁸ This formulation distances the author from his fellow countrymen who owned and exploited slaves. This was a precautionary measure more than anything else: by presenting slavery as part of a natural order, he circumvented the necessity of portraying Europeans as slave drivers. Du Tertre, the consummate friar, went on to offer a biblical justification for the enslavement of Africans: “If the work in which God engaged the first man, was a punishment for his rebellion; and if his vengeful justice so obliged the unhappy children of this guilty father, ... one can say that the

⁵⁷ Tronchoy, *Journal de la Campagne des Isles de l’Amerique, qu’à fait Monsieur D ***. La prise & la possession de l’isle Saint Christophe, avec une description exacte des Animaux, des Arbres, & des Plantes les plus curieuses de l’Amerique. La maniere de vivre des Sauvages, leurs meurs, leur Police & Religion. Avec la Relation de la surprise que voulut faire la Garnison de Fribourg sur les deux Brissack*, p. 47. “Il n’y a rien de comparable à la miserable condition de ces malheureux, que l’on vend & trafique comme des chevauz; ils naissent esclaves, à peine ont-ils la force de remuer les bras, qu’on les fait travailler à la terre & à toutes sortes d’ouvrages comme des bestes.”

⁵⁸ Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale des Antilles*, p. 523. “Car comme ils ne viennent dans les Isles que pour cela, ils tirent de leurs Nègres tout le service qu’ils peuvent.”

Nègres suffer the most rigorous grief for this revolt.”⁵⁹ By positioning slavery as part of the divine order, he also naturalizes it as an inevitable part of the human order.

Above all, fear of slave revolt underlay anxieties surrounding slavery. Even as authors urged readers to pity slaves, they also cautioned against treating them leniently, for “if they [whites] treat them [blacks] more gently they would surely revolt against them as they have already done” in some of the islands.⁶⁰ Slavery therefore implicitly posed its most severe threats not to slaves, but to their owners. Although this danger was acute and constantly present, authors warned, whites may not detect it because of slaves’ skillful dissimulation. Slaves’ apparent happiness and contentment, Du Tertre cautioned, may be only skin deep, “because they carry a secret hate for those who mistreat them, & it is only helplessness to avenge themselves, that stifles a part of their resentment.” However, in some cases this resentment broke to the surface, as happened with the slaves of Sieur and Dame de la Planche of Martinique, whose slaves “execute[d] their vengeance against their Master and Mistress” when they “entered the Master’s house, and reproached them with the horrible treatment they had received, they cleaved them both with an iron ax: and after this cruel murder, these furies began to cry that they did not care any more if they died, now that they had avenged the cruelties that had been exercised over

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 523. “Si le travail auquel Dieu engagea le premier homme, est un chastiment de sa rebellion; & si sa justice vangeresse y a tellement obligé les mal heureux enfans de ce Pere coupable, que Job assure qu’il ne leur est pas moins naturel, que le vol à l’oyseau: on peut dire que les Nègres souffrent la plus rigoureuse peine de cette revolte.”

⁶⁰ Tronchoy, *Journal de la Campagne des Isles de l’Amerique, qu’à fait Monsieur D ***. La prise & la possession de l’isle Saint Christophe, avec une description exacte des Animaux, des Arbres, & des Plantes les plus curieuses de l’Amerique. La maniere de vivre des Sauvages, leurs meurs, leur Police & Religion. Avec la Relation de la surprise que voulut faire la Garnison de Fribourg sur les deux Brissack*, p. 48. “que s’ils le traitaient plus doucement ils se revolteroient surement contre eux comme ils avoient déjà voulu faire.”

them.”⁶¹ This alleged tendency towards vengeance in turn justified harsh treatment of slaves, and authors counseled the use of violence to contain violence, not only for the good of the owners, but for that of the slaves as well.

Although Spain did not officially cede Saint-Domingue to France until 1697, even early travelers’ accounts acknowledged the colony as a jewel of the Caribbean.⁶² One observer reported, “one can assert, strictly in comparison with the French ones, that it is the most flourishing colony in the New World. The terrain is in general excellent.”⁶³ Visitors agreed that “the largest town in the French part of Hispaniola is Cape Francoise (*sic*), which is situated on the Northern part of the island upon a very fine harbour. It is well built, and contains about eight thousand inhabitants blacks and whites.”⁶⁴ It was this flourishing terrain of the most commercially important city in the French Caribbean that Van Blarenberghe, in 1779, was commissioned to paint. As the Admiralty requested, he painted the same scene from two perspectives, one from the land, the other from the sea. These different views jointly emphasize the strengths of the colony and the reason for its importance to France: the twin pillars of agriculture and commerce made the colony both a producer of luxury agricultural

⁶¹ Du Terte, *Histoire Generale des Antilles*, Vol. 2, p. 499. “...car ils portent une haine secrete à ceux qui les mal-traient, & il n'y a que la seule impuissance de s'en vanger, qui estoufè une partie de leur ressentiment.” ... “executer leur vengeance contre leur Maistre & leur Maistresse; ils ventent effrontément en pleun midy, entrerent dans la Case, & leur ayant reproché les traitemens sascheux qu'ils en avoient receus, leur fendirent la tous deux, à coups de ferpe: & apres ce cruel assassinat, ces fureiux se mirent à crier qu'ils ne se soucioient plus de mourrir, puis qu'ils s'estoient vangez des cruantez qu'on avoit exercé sur eux.”

⁶² Spain ceded the western third of the island of Hispaniola to France in the Treaty of Ryswick, which ended the War of the League of Augsburg.

⁶³ Bourgeois, *Voyages intéressants dans différentes colonies françaises, espagnoles, anglaises, etc. Contenant des observations relatives à ces contrées et un mémoire sur les maladies les plus communes à Saint-Domingue, leurs remèdes, etc. Let tout mis au jour d'après un grand nombre de ms. par M.N.*, p. 66. “On peut avancer, par rapport aux Français uniquement, que c'est la plus florissante colonie du Nouveau Monde. Le terrain y est en général excellent.”

⁶⁴ Charlevoix, *A Voyage to North-America: Undertaken by Command of the Present King of France. Containing the Geographical Description and Natural History of Canada and Louisiana.*, Vol. 2, Appendix (no page number given).

goods and a consumer of French commodities. Both these pillars were supported on the backs of slaves, and slaves play a major role in Van Blarenberghe's representation of the colony.

Representing Ships and the Colonies

Van Blarenberghe's seascape *La Ville du Cap Français à Saint-Domingue, vue de la mer* shows a small strip of the island floating on the sea, almost overshadowed by a flotilla of oceangoing vessels nearly as massive as the land itself. The city of Cap Français is a blur of red roofs beyond the masts, and the rugged hills beyond serve partially to emphasize the height of the ships' masts. Sketchy cloud formations, apparently painted very quickly, swirl over his highly detailed foreground and midground. These formations, which also appear in his landscape view of Cap Français, help to imply Van Blarenberghe's own presence in the landscape he never saw as its viewer and recorder; their sketchiness, rather than detracting from the detail, added verisimilitude by suggesting that the artist painted the scene quickly in order to capture even the ephemeral clouds truthfully. This sense of immediacy adds an authority to the artist's painted accounts of life in Saint-Domingue, which Van Blarenberghe underscored by introducing motion into the scene. The ship in the middle foreground has its sails almost raised and half-filled with wind, and people rowing a small boat on the left emphasize the size and might of the ships. Birds hover above the horizon, caught mid-flight by the artist's brush. Such details add to the awe inspired in viewers at seeing the massive French fleet floating on the waves.

Ships fill both of Van Blarenberghe's paintings; indeed, practically every image of Saint-Domingue made before the 1790s bristles with masts.⁶⁵ Yet this preponderance of seafaring vessels played a somewhat contradictory role by highlighting both the colonies' dependence on France for military, commercial, and cultural needs, and also France's dependence on its colonies. The motion of the slowly-unfurling sails of the two largest ships in the foreground of Van Blarenberghe's *Cap Français, vue de la mer* visually emphasizes this connection, suggesting that the ships are at the beginning of the long ocean voyage that will carry them back to France, laden with colonial goods. Ports and ships provided the kingdom's economic lifeblood by transporting goods to and from the colonies, and slaves from Africa to the Caribbean to work in the sugar fields. Ships connected far-flung branches of the empire in other ways as well: they transported letters back and forth, they carried important documents, they brought news, and they brought travelers. Vernet's port scenes make this connection visually manifest through their emphasis on ships outfitted for the transatlantic trade, an emphasis that Van Blarenberghe carried into his representations of Cap Français.⁶⁶ But in spite of Saint-

⁶⁵ Beginning in the 1790s, landscape was no longer the dominant way of representing colonial life. Images of free people of color began to circulate, as did representations of the Haitian Revolution and abolitionist images. See, for example, the series of paintings of free people of color in Dominica by Augustin Brunias, the engravings of which circulated broadly in France as well as England. These include: *Natifs Libres de Dominique*, *La danse du mouchoir à l'île de Saint-Domingue*, *Blanchisseuse des Indes Occidentales*, *Fille mulâtre de la Barbade*, and *Bataille entre un Nègre François et un Nègre Anglois dans l'Isle St. Dominique*. All were engraved by Louis-Charles Ruotte, probably between 1785-1790. Well known images of the Haitian Revolution include: J.B. Chapay, engraved after J.L. Boquet, *Vue des 40 jours d'incendie des Habitations de la Plaine du Cap Français* (1791, Paris), G. 29484, Histoire GC VII, Musée Carnavalet; and *Revolte des Negres à St. Domingue* (1791, Paris?), G. 23671, Histoire PC 15 Bis folder C, Musée Carnavalet.

⁶⁶ All of Vernet's port scenes include ships. In keeping with his commission to represent the ports with verisimilitude, the artist painted types of ships particular to different parts of France. The Atlantic port scenes of La Rochelle and Bordeaux, in particular, highlight the types of vessels that undertook transatlantic trade. See Vernet, *Le Port de Bordeaux, vue du côté des Salinières* (1759, Musée de la

Domingue's geographic isolation, the island played an essential role in the empire, a role made possible by the transatlantic vessels that filled its harbors. As the contemporary author Bourgeois pointed out, "its commerce is immense; it contributes each year to the importation or exportation of more than 400 merchant ships departing from the ports of France, and pours in riches that the whole kingdom feels."⁶⁷ These riches, in the forms of sugar, indigo, coffee, and other colonial products, gave the island a significance disproportionate with its size or population, the implications of which the metropole could not ignore.

The military might connoted by the presence of ships was especially significant in the midst of decades-long conflicts with Britain, many of which were fought in colonial arenas. The recent partitioning of its colonial empire at the end of the Seven Years' War in 1763 meant that for France, military might and economic prowess went hand in hand. In the late 1770s, when Van Blarenberghe painted these views, France had recently ceded its vast Canadian territories to Britain and Louisiana to Spain. In exchange, however, it regained its Caribbean colonies Martinique and Guadeloupe, and retained the sugar giant Saint-Domingue. The economic importance of the colony was widely recognized: "Sugar, indigo, cotton, coffee, and many other commodities that they harvest in abundance, make their colony of Saint-Domingue a useful establishment to its Metropole, and must be protected as the best and most

Marine, Paris); *Le Port de Bordeaux, vue du Caâteau-Trompette* (1759, Musée de la Marine, Paris); and *Le Port de La Rochelle* (1762, Musée de la Marine, Paris).

⁶⁷ Bourgeois, *Voyages intéressants dans différentes colonies françaises, espagnoles, anglaises, etc. Contenant des observations relatives à ces contrées et un mémoire sur les maladies les plus communes à Saint-Domingue, leurs remèdes, etc. Let tout mis au jour d'après un grand nombre de ms. par M.N.*, p. 70. "Son commerce est immense; il fournit chaque année à l'importation & à l'exportation de plus de 400 navires marchands partis des ports de France, & qui y versent des richesses dont le royaume entier se ressent."

essential of its colonies,” commented one contemporary observer.⁶⁸ By emphasizing the connection between colonies and metropole, the surfeit of ships depicted in colonial harbors also stressed both the island’s status as a French possession and France’s military prowess.

Van Blarenberghe was not the only artist to portray colonial ports filled with transatlantic trading vessels. Other images include the prints of Jeanne Ozanne and Nicolas Ponce. The prevalence of this iconography suggests that this visual vocabulary relating the colonies to the metropole was widely understood. Ozanne’s *Le Port au Prince* (1780) (Figure 1.7), engraved after a painting by her brother Nicolas Ozanne, literally centers dozens of ships in the midground of her engraving, thereby highlighting their importance to the colony.⁶⁹ These ships are flanked by the ordered streets of the colony’s capitol on the right, and yet more ships on the left. But even the town itself is far overshadowed by the massive ships in the foreground, to which the eye is immediately drawn. This series of ships dominating the right side of the engraving suggest the motion of the seafaring vessels as they enter and exit the harbor. The farthest boat on the right, small by comparison, gives way to a slightly larger one, implying the graceful movement of a ship gliding into harbor. The largest ship, depicted in direct profile, is impressive in its grandeur and scale, which is

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 68. (Page misnumbered in volume as 86.) "Le sucre, l'indigo, le coton, le café & plusieurs autres denrées qu'ils recueillent abondamment, font de leur colonie de Saint-Domingue un établissement utile à sa Métropole, qui en doit être protégée comme la meilleure & la plus essentielle de ses colonies."

⁶⁹ One version of this engraving appears in N. Ponce, *Vues des Principaux Ports et Rades du Royaume de France et de ses Colonies, dessinées par Ozanne, et gravées par Gouaz, Avec un texte descriptif, géographique et statistique par N. Ponce* (Paris, 1819). The original engraving must have been completed at least by 1786, however, when Jeanne Ozanne died. The 1819 version of the engraving says, "Le Port Au Prince Dans l'Isle De St. Domingue, Vu du Mouillage, Tire' d'un Recueil de differens Ports dea Islea Antilles dessinee en 1780. Reunie a la Collection dea Pora de France, Gravee par le Sr. Gouaz, A Paris Chez le Gouaz Graveur, rue St. Hyacinthe, la 1ere Porte Cochere a gauche en entrant par la Place St. Michel. N. Ozanne del. Jeanne Fe. Ozanne sculp." The original engraving probably therefore was completed in 1780.

emphasized by the tiny figures on the deck and the small skull beside it. The smaller boat just to its left, sails puffed in the wind, begins to turn towards the town, approaching its destination at last. Finally, the large ship just to the left of the center glides into the harbor to take its place among the dozens of other ships already waiting to load or unload their cargoes. Ozanne's engraving of *Le Cap Français*, which contains the same familiar landscape formations depicted in Van Blarenberghe's work, also shows ships in motion, as if to emphasize the continuous passage of vessels across the Atlantic. Such ships carried the goods that were the economic lifeblood not only of the colonies, but of France itself.

Nicolas Ponce's perhaps more widely circulated engravings, which accompanied Moreau de Saint-Méry's comprehensive text *Le description... de Saint-Domingue*, also incorporate ships as primary visual elements. Many of Ponce's *vues*, like those of Ozanne, are taken from the sea. *Vue de Port au Prince*, *Vue de la Ville du Petit-Goave*, and *Cap et Mole St Nicolas* all place ships in the foreground, and they dwarf the comparatively insignificant land masses along the horizon behind them. Other views, including *Vue de Cap Francois*, *Le Port de Nippe*, and *Vue de la Rade de Léoganne*, sandwich water between fingers of land, literally positioning the sea at the center of colonial life. Such images which foreground the land also foreground slavery, the institution which made the land profitable for French colonists and Creoles alike.

Representing Slavery

Nicolas-Louis van Blarenberghe's gouache painting *La ville du Cap Français à Saint Domingue, vue de la Colline* (Figure 1.1) shows a serene landscape touched in soft pastel colors. Hills recede to the rooftops of the city whose red-tinged color echoes the ruddy cliffs. The city itself dissolves into the sea, which blends into the sky. The reflected sun on the clouds again picks up the red tones of the land, and of the buildings made by those who live there. Ships float on the water, emphasizing that the view is of an island, but also suggesting the economic importance of this "pearl of the Antilles," the largest sugar producer in the world. People dot the foreground. In the center, a group that could be a family of slaves makes its way down the hill. A man holding a hoe pauses, allowing a woman carrying a basket on her head to pass. Another woman carries a baby on her back; two children follow her, carrying a basket suspended from poles between them. Further down the hill walks a party of European ladies and gentlemen, dressed, in contrast to the blacks, in fashionable clothes made of rich fabrics. A black boy wearing a turban carries a parasol over the head of one of the women. More people, both blacks and Europeans, walk behind them, suggesting the hubbub of this port city. On the left side of this image, a more sedate group picnics in a small clearing. Finely dressed women and men, apparently of European descent, gather amongst the trees, while blacks hover on the edge of their party. Van Blarenberghe paints a bucolic picture of colonial life, one in which blacks and whites are easily identifiable, and separated by their clothing, occupations, and skin color.

In Van Blarenberghe's landscape view, the artist blends landscape forms gleaned from surveying maps with descriptions of slavery from published accounts of colonial society in a way that literally foregrounds race and relations of slavery. In making these categories so central to his work, the artist encountered a difficulty that had plagued other artists, authors, local officials, and even lawmakers: how, exactly, to figure the relationship between the two. The central position of six black figures in the painting call attention to race as a distinguishing feature of the port of Cap Français in a matter-of-fact sort of way, as, for example, Vernet highlights rope manufacture in Rochefort or the brisk trade in mutton in Bayonne.⁷⁰ This foregrounding of race highlights the colonial port's difference from ports in France, and makes the colonial setting evident to viewers.⁷¹

Van Blarenberghe may or may not have been aware of the sizeable population of free blacks in France's Antillean colonies, the very existence of which disrupted facile correlations between color and status. However, he was well aware of the artistic challenges in visually differentiating French people of diverse social strata. He drew on many techniques that had been used by Vernet, employing styles of dress, fabrics, and occupations to demarcate people of various stations. But whether the

⁷⁰ In Rochefort, home of the royal ropeworks, men roll giant coils of thick rope; in Bayonne, sheep cluster in the foreground, highlighting the port's brisk export trade in mutton. Joseph Vernet, *Le port de Rochefort* (1762, Musée de la Marine, Paris); Joseph Vernet, *Port de Bayonne, vue de glacis de la Citadelle* (1761, Musée de la Marine, Paris). Reith, *Joseph Vernet, 1714-1789: Les Ports de France*, p. 100.

⁷¹ In spite of the presence of people of color in French ports, Vernet seldom portrayed them. There are two examples to this general rule of which I am aware. Several turbaned Moors, wearing long, brightly-colored robes, walk along the bank in his *Port de Marseille, vû du Pavillon de l'Horloge du Parc* (also called *Intérieur du port de Marseille*, 1754, Musée de la Marine, Paris). Their exotic appearance emphasizes the flourishing trade between Marseille and North Africa. Second, Vernet depicts a black man carrying a barrel in almost the exact foreground center of his *Le Port de Toulon, La Vielle Darse* (also called *Première vue du Toulon, vue du pont-neuf prise à l'angle du parc d'artillerie*, 1755, Musée de la Marine, Paris). This intriguing figure, to whom one of the gentlemen next to him gestures, may be Vernet's nod towards including the many people of color who lived in the ports he painted.

artist realized it or not, grafting these signifiers onto race brought the very instability between race and status to light. In the colonies, status meant more than a matter of money or position: it was the difference between slavery and liberty. By glossing over this essential distinction by portraying the line between slavery and freedom as resting on dress and skin color rather than violence and force, Van Blarenberghe depicted slavery as part of the natural order of the colonies. In doing so, he highlighted one of the most pervasive fictions of colonial life.

By using skin color as the most evident way to differentiate people, Van Blarenberghe visually equated race and status. Figures are either black or white in his landscape; no tonal variations exist between these two polarities. By portraying race as dichotomous, Van Blarenberghe collapsed the complexities of race and status into a single signifier. He circumvented the difficulties of visually portraying status by allowing skin color, relatively easy to paint and familiar to a skilled artist, to indicate it. The artist reinforced this demarcation by portraying blacks and whites in separate spaces, wearing different clothing, and engaging in different activities. By making racial difference obvious and evident, Van Blarenberghe also made slavery seem a natural part of the colonial landscape and experience.

The physical space separating blacks from whites highlights their distinction. Few of the many groupings of figures in the painting contain people of both races. The primary group of blacks in the foreground, just to the right of center, stands alone. Although the closest figures on the right in terms of pictorial space are the white gentlemen in the midground, the nearest in terms of physical space are the two black figures on the hill. On the left of this central group, a black woman walks

alone, also serving to buffer the family-like assembly from the three officers further to her left. Further away, on the right side of the painting other groups made up exclusively of blacks climb the hill, carrying loads on their heads and in their arms. Two large groups of whites gather as well. Ladies and gentlemen engage in conversation just down the hill from the central group of blacks; a black boy dressed in a turban holds an umbrella to shade the fair complexion of one of the white women. Another group of whites picnics at the left of the picture, flanked on either side by blacks. On their left, a black man passes the group carrying a hoe, while a black woman restrains a white child from disrupting the activity. On the right of this group, a black boy wearing a turban, seemingly engaged in conversation with another black boy, holds what seems to be a fan, ready to cool his master or mistress should the need arise. These groupings of blacks and whites alternate in the picture plane, if not in perspectival space. Thus, although they inhabit the same landscape, the two groups remain distinct.

Van Blarenberghe further demarcates blacks from whites through their clothing. The white women and men wear elegant clothing in the fashion of the day. Men are dressed in tight knee breeches and waistcoats, while women wear low-cut dresses with full skirts topped with elaborate hats. The light colors of their clothing draw attention to the fairness of their complexions. In contrast, most blacks in the painting, both men and women, are in varying states of partial dress, and in many cases their dark coverings blend into their dark skin. The black boys who attend the groups of whites on each side of the canvas are exceptions to this general rule: both are dressed in orientalized costume, including a plume-topped turban. Their dress

clearly marks their difference from the whites they attend, but also from the other, more rudely-clad, blacks. Their appearance is, however, consistent with that of the black boys who were depicted in portraits alongside elegant, wealthy French women who used these portraits as means of highlighting their own wealth, power, and beauty. Although the appearance of the other blacks in the painting is consistent with written descriptions of slave attire, these boys are more visually congruent with blacks who are depicted in a European context.⁷² Rather than representations of race being taken from the colonies to Europe, Van Blarenberghe was superimposing continental French concepts of race and slavery on the colonies. This seemingly simple flourish highlights the extent to which prevalent ideas about race were generated in France.

As in Vernet's port scenes, occupation as well as appearance demarcates figures of different statuses. The varying occupations in which the figures are employed clearly suggest specific relationships to the land they all occupy. For whites, the landscape is a place of recreation, where they can gather and enjoy pastoral bliss. Groups of whites congregate in specific spots in the landscape, pausing in conversation or repose. In contrast, blacks in the landscape are in motion, coming from someplace and passing through it on their way to somewhere else, carrying loads of goods or tools in their arms, on their heads, or on their backs. Although their actual cultivation of the land is missing from the scene, the loads they carry clearly imply it. This omission of agricultural labor is significant: no sugar, cotton, indigo, or coffee plants are in sight. While the town is prominent no

⁷² On the dress of slaves, see Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale des Antilles*, Vol. 3, Chapter VIII, "De la façon qu'on habille les Nègres, & des Ornemens dont ils se parent."

plantations are visible, and in fact none were located in this immediate area. Van Blarenberghe likely would have known this from the maps of the *ingénieurs-géographes*. The preponderance of people of color in the landscape, then, highlights that their presence is an artistic fiction that nonetheless sent clear messages to viewers: it signals not only the gulf between the leisure of whites and the labor of blacks, but also the difference between colony and metropole. The labor of people of color marks this landscape as a colonial space. At the same time, it masks the colonial experience, reducing this port scene into one familiar to European viewers.

However, although Van Blarenberghe makes his representation of race quite evident, he introduces some ambiguity into how viewers should interpret his depiction of slave labor. For example, the group of slaves sitting on the hill on the left seems to have made the choice to stop and rest, unconstrained by the demands of a taskmaster driving them on. Their rest mimics the leisure of the whites. Although rest, unlike leisure, is a temporary state, the artist glosses over this crucial difference by transforming the forced labor of the blacks into voluntary work. Their apparent willingness to work without the whip of an overseer or any other type of coercive instruments in sight implies that they are content with their lot, and that they enjoy some freedom in spite of their bonded state. This recalls the *Indigoterie* print, published in Du Tertre's book a century earlier, where the mere presence of a white overseer impels the slaves to work. Van Blarenberghe takes this a step further by eliminating the overseer altogether. The blacks seem to work, or rest, of their own volition. This formulation is particularly insidious in that by drawing on

Enlightenment formulations of free will, it positions the blacks as complicit in their own enslavement while not portraying Europeans as coercive slave drivers.

Further, the apparent docility of the blacks and their willingness to engage in labor offers an interpretation of slavery as a benign if not civilizing institution. The slaves in the foreground even exhibit the civility of court life, again bringing to mind the *fêtes galantes* in Watteau and Fragonard. The black man in the center, his left foot forward, delicately positions his hand in a graceful motion and bows to allow the woman to pass him, while the woman elegantly twists to acknowledge him. The temporality of this fleeting gesture echoes Vernet's woman in red in his La Rochelle painting; the momentary action of each of these figures suggests that the artist caught specific scenes on canvas. Although the color of their skin and the accoutrements of their labor and servility bring the viewer back to Saint-Domingue, these figures suggest the civilizing capacity of French colonization. Although the blacks' 'savagery' remains near the surface, as implied by their partial nudity, the scene seems to imply that the French influence has turned them into socialized, hardworking individuals. Through French might, the painting seems to say, a wilderness has been turned into a town, wild people have been tamed, and everyone in the clearly hierarchical society goes about their work in a way that reinforces that hierarchy.

Van Blarenberghe maintains this emphasis on the civilizing potential of French colonization in his strict delineation between the town and nature beyond. The town of Cap Français, with its neat houses and parallel streets, is demarcated clearly from the surrounding countryside by low walls and a dirt road that runs along

its perimeter. Inside the walls, people walk down straight streets and houses cluster neatly together. Outside the town, the ordered streets and houses give way to a pastoral landscape of rolling pasture and artfully-grouped trees. This, clearly, is no wilderness. Straight paths gently cross the well-groomed pasture, and the figures roaming the countryside do not stray from them. Blacks and whites inhabit both the town and the country, but the slaves in the foreground of the painting emphasize the commonplace identification of blacks with nature. The natural-but-tamed countryside, peopled with blacks, suggests that slavery, too, was a natural and organic part of this idyllic colonial landscape.

In depicting this strict demarcation between town and the land beyond, Van Blarenberghe was following a well-established precedent. Even the earliest published maps of the town, such as that that appeared in Charlevoix' *Histoire de l'Isle Espagnole*, clearly bounded the town with heavy topographical lines.⁷³ This tendency to separate town from the surrounding countryside was even more pronounced in Nicolas Ponce's engraving *Vue de Bombardopolis* (1791) (Figure 1.8).⁷⁴ Moreau St-Méry, in whose work the engraving is included, called particular attention to the distinctive appearance of the town by emphasizing its boundaries. "The parish of Bombarde has," he says, "in the north, that of Môle-Saint-Nicolas; in the east and the south, the parish of Jean-Rabel and that of Port-à-Piment, from which it is separated by the Gallet ravine and by the right bank of the Henne river until its

⁷³ *Plan de la Ville du Cap, à la Côte Septentrional de Saint Domingue* (1731, Paris), in Charlevoix, *Histoire de l'Isle Espagnole ou de S. Domingue*. No engraver's name appears on the map.

⁷⁴ Nicolas Ponce, *Vue de Bombardopolis ou vulgairement Bombarde, Isle St. Domingue*, engraving, in Ponce, *Recueil de vues des lieux principaux de la colonie Française de Saint-Domingue*.

mouth; and in the west the sea.”⁷⁵ The engraver likewise shows an abrupt meeting of land with sky, the straight line of the horizon interrupted only by the fronds of two palm trees in the foreground. Strong lines heavily demarcate the foreground, middle ground, and background. The foreground, with its rolling hills and leafy tropical flora framing the figures seems disorderly in contrast to the neat central square and rows of houses in the town. Race and slavery enter only obliquely into this image, as its medium makes the race of the figures difficult to discern. The three men, possibly soldiers, in the center foreground could be either white or black, as could the figures strolling along the almost deserted streets of the town. The people in the clearing on the right, however, are clearly marked as blacks, their race suggested as much by their vigorous activity as by the strong shading on their hands and limbs.

Both artists and authors emphasized how recreation, particularly dancing, offered blacks liberty even within the context of their servitude. “They are not less joyful in their servitude,” Du Tertre says, “because they are perfectly free; because they sing, dance, and amuse themselves often better than their Masters, and than those who command them.”⁷⁶ This liberty in no way implied resistance to their enslaved status; rather, it was a manifestation of their satisfaction with their lot and their supposedly inherently simple nature. In the painting *Ile de Saint-Domingue: vue du Cap de la Fossette* (18th century, location unknown) (Figure 1.9), blacks and whites “amuse themselves” in very different ways, which underline their inherent

⁷⁵ Moreau de Saint-Méry, *La description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de Saint-Domingue*, Vol. 2, p. 752. “La paroisse de Bombarde a, dans le Nord, celle du Môle-Saint-Nicolas; dans l’Est et le Sud, la paroisse de Jean-Rabel et celle du Port-à-Piment, don’t elle est séparée par la ravine à Gallet et par la rive droite de la rivière de Henne jusqu’à son embouchure; et dans l’Ouset la mer.”

⁷⁶ Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale des Antilles*, p. 526. “Ils ne sont pas moins joyeux dans leur servitude, que s’ils est oient parfaitement libres; car ils chantent, dansent, & se divertissent bien souvent mieux que leurs Maistres, & que ceux qui leur commandent.”

differences. On the left, three white people relax in the bucolic setting; the man, woman, and child make an idyllic family grouping. The man reaches out a hand to the woman, possibly to help her rise. This courtly gesture of *politesse* emphasizes their French civility, which persists in spite of their colonial surroundings. In contrast to this emphasis on the social rules which regulate polite behavior, the group of blacks claps their hands, pound their instruments, and gyrate to the music, their bodies manifestly not governed by the rules of polite society. Du Tertre emphasizes, “they make postures so contrary, and bodily contortions so violent in dancing, that I am often surprised, how they can move themselves, after having ceased this distressing exercise.”⁷⁷ This dance, echoed in the *Vue de Bombardopolis*, emphasizes the connection between the wilderness outside the bounds of the orderly city and the blacks who people it. Like the land, they are wrested from savagery by the civilizing influence of the French. Although still on the margins of civilization, these images suggest that enslaved blacks not only accepted these social boundaries, they were content with them.

Conclusion

Revealing the fictive elements that constitute ‘verisimilitude’ in colonial *vues* suggests that these paintings have at least as much to say about the institution of colonialism itself as they do about the individual colonies they represent. These fictions—not the truths—signpost French notions of slavery, ‘civilization,’ and hierarchy. By legitimizing French colonial rule, they participated in embedding ideas

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 526. “Ils font des postures si contraintes, & des contorsions de corps si violents en dansant, que je me suis souvent étonné, comme ils pouvoient se remüer, apres avoir cessé ce penible exercice.”

about race in European minds and cultures. Artists played an important role in this process for they made colonial hierarchies and race relations visually evident and obvious, apparently as natural as the landscapes in which slaves appeared. Joseph Vernet developed the painterly techniques that made Van Blarenberghe's later landscapes visually legible, even to viewers who had never been in the colonies. By portraying colonialism and slavery within the recognizable visual vocabulary of Vernet's avowedly true-to-life port scenes, Van Blarenberghe and other artists made these constructs seem natural and familiar to French viewers.



Figure 1.1: Louis-Nicolas Van Blarenberghe, *La ville du Cap Français à Saint Domingue, vue de la Colline* (1779, Musée du Nouveau Monde, La Rochelle).



Figure 1.2: Louis-Nicolas Van Blarenberghe, *La Ville du Cap Français à Saint Domingue, vue de la Mer* (1778, Musée du Nouveau Monde, La Rochelle).



Figure 1.3: Joseph Vernet, *Vue du Port de la Rochelle, prise de la petite Rive* (1762, Musée de la Marine, Paris).



Figure 1.4: *Plan de la Plaine du Cap François en l'isle St. Domingue, rédigé d'après les derniers Opérations Géométriques des Ingénieurs du Roy.* By René Phelipeau, Ingénieur Géographe (1786, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan).

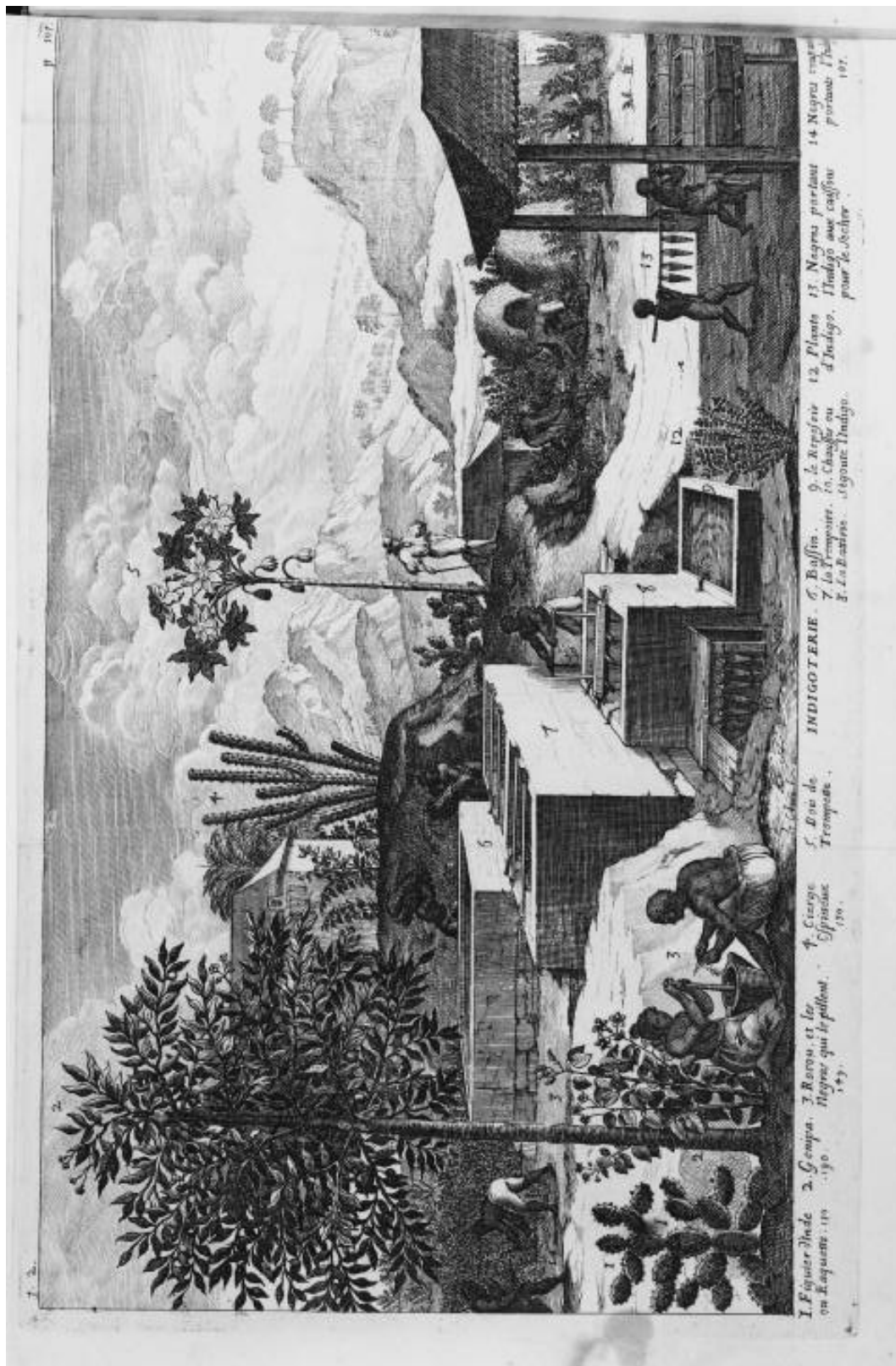


Figure 1.5: *Indigoterie* (1667, published in Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale des Antilles habitées par les François*). The John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.

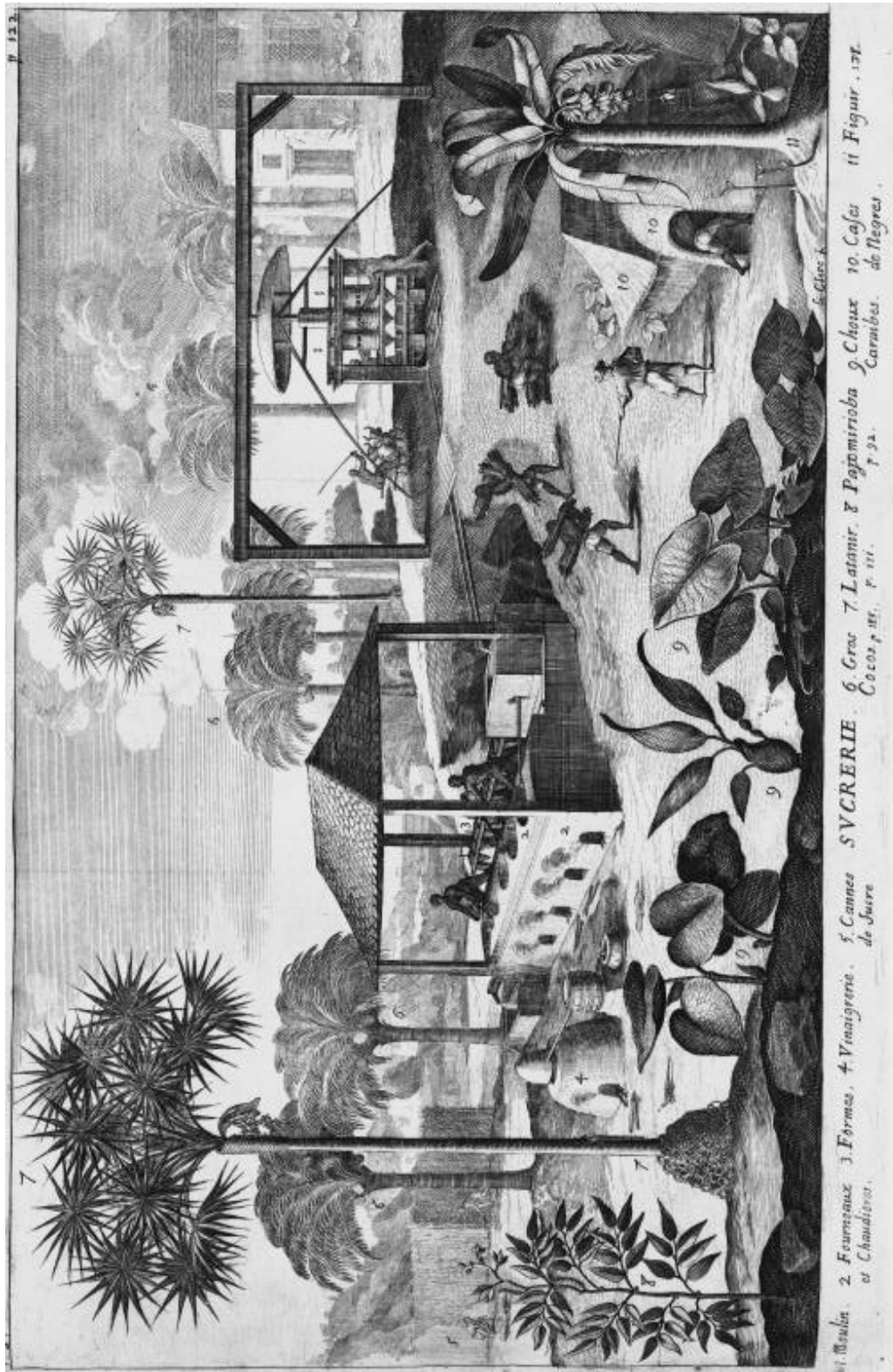


Figure 1.6: *Sucrierie* (1667, published in Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale des Antilles habitées par les François*). The John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.



Figure 1.7: Jeanne Ozanne, *Le Port au Prince* (1780, after a painting by Nicolas Ozanne, in the collection of the Musée du Nouveau Monde, La Rochelle).

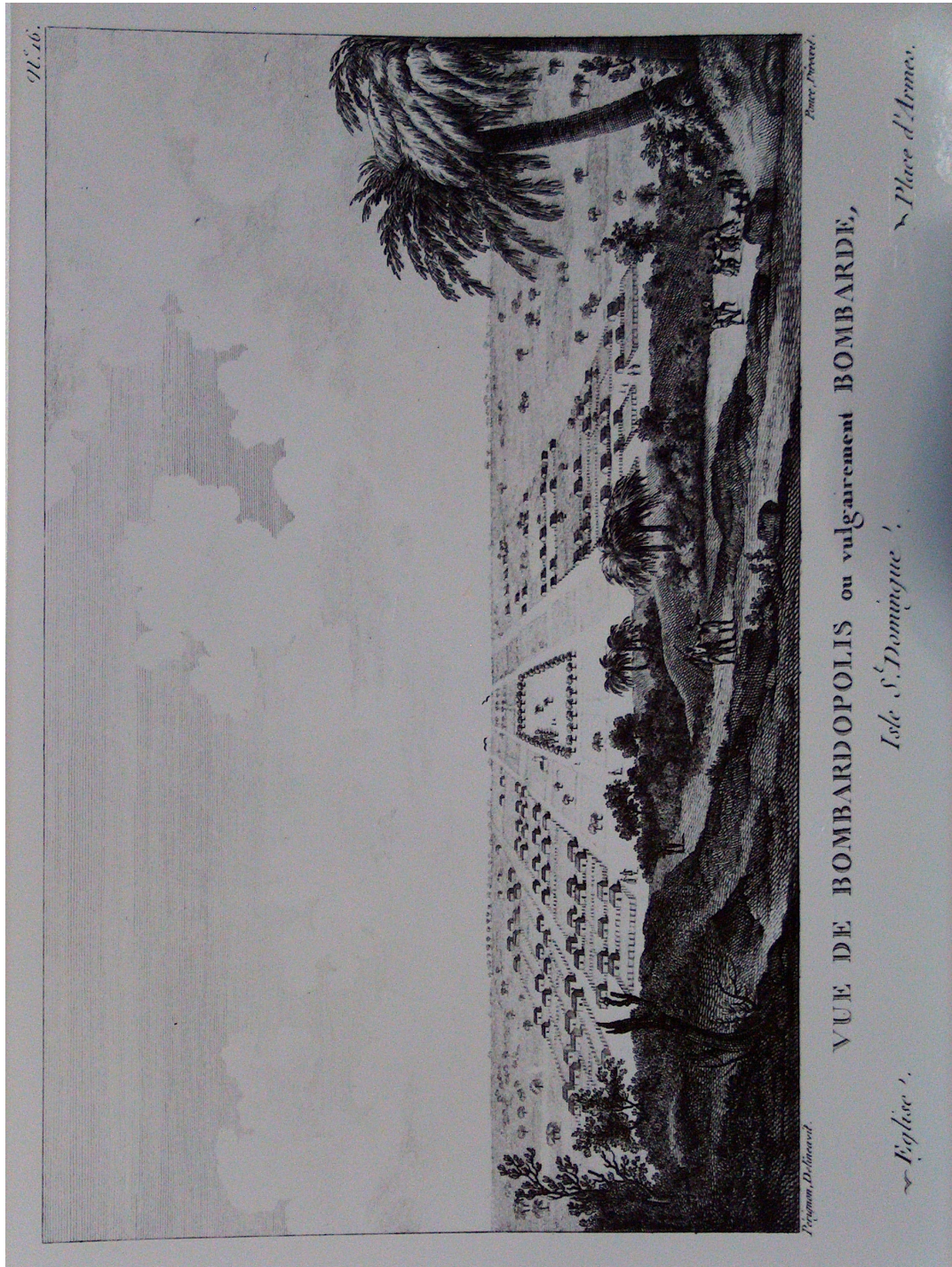


Figure 1.8 : Nicolas Ponce, *Vue de Bombardopolis ou vulgairement Bombarde, Isle St. Domingue* (published 1791 in *Recueil de vues des lieux principaux de la colonie Française de Saint-Domingue*, the engravings accompanying Moreau de Saint-Méry's *La description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de Saint-Domingue*). The John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.

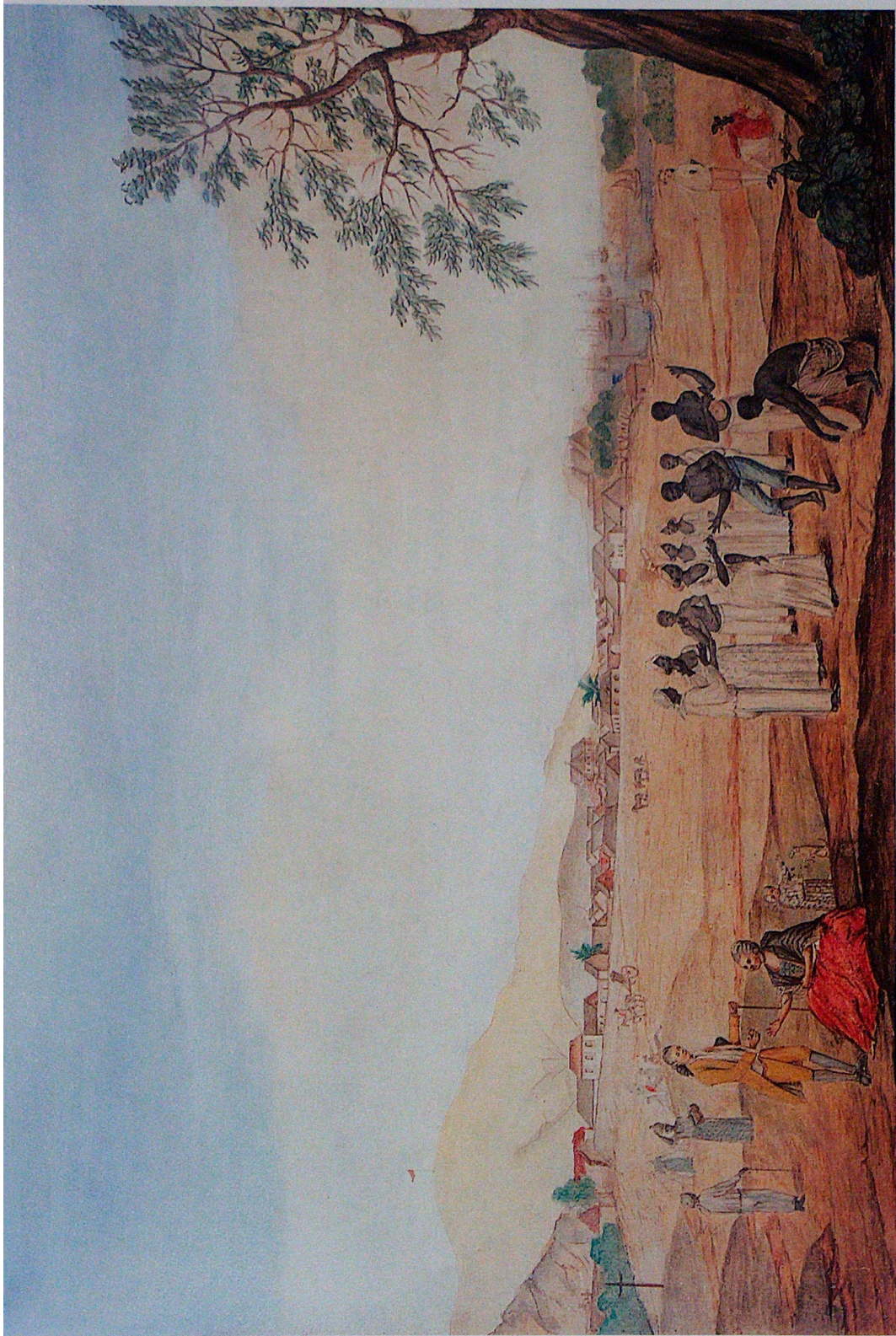


Figure 1.9: Unknown Artist, *Ile de Saint Domingue : Vue du Cap de la Fossette* (18th century, sold 1999, location unknown).

Chapter 2:

Constructing a Discourse of Race, Slavery, and Gender in France: The Power of Portraiture

Introduction

In the Salon of 1742, the painter Jean-Marc Nattier exhibited the portrait *Mademoiselle de Clermont, Princess of the Blood... as a Sultana emerging from the Bath, served by some Slaves*, originally painted in 1733 (London, Wallace Collection) (Figure 2.1).¹ Born into the highest of high nobility, Anne-Marie de Bourbon, known as Mademoiselle de Clermont, inherited aristocratic privilege as her birthright. The daughter of Louis III de Bourbon, the prince of Condé, and Louise-Françoise de Bourbon, called Mademoiselle de Nantes, herself the daughter of Louis XIV and Madame de Montespan, Mademoiselle de Clermont was the cousin of King Louis XV, and was frequently the monarch's companion.² Mademoiselle de Clermont occupied the post of head lady in waiting (*Surintendante*) to Queen Marie Leszczyńska, wife of Louis XV, and she often accompanied the Queen and even acted as her stand-in at official functions which her Majesty declined to attend.³ She

¹ The full exhibition title was "Un Tableau représentant le Portrait de feuë Mademoiselle de Clermont, Princesse du Sang, Surintendante de la Maison de la Reine, représentée en Sultane, surtant du bain, servie par des Esclaves." *Explications des Peintures, Sculptures, & d'autres Ouvrages de Messieurs de l'Académie Royale*, vol. 63 (Paris, 1742), p. 15.

² To be precise, she was the King's half-first cousin once removed. Her mother, Mademoiselle de Nantes, and Louis XV's grandfather, Louis the Grand Dauphin, were half-siblings, both children of Louis XIV.

³ Philippe Renard, *Jean-Marc Nattier (1685-1766): Un artiste Parisien à la cour de Louis XV* (Saint-Rémy-en-l'Eau, 1999), p. 233, fn 15.

was appointed to this post by her brother, the one-time prime minister to the King, and occupied it from 1724 until her death in 1741.⁴

A princess of the blood and daughter of the scandal-plagued house of Bourbon-Condé, Mademoiselle de Clermont wielded considerable political power. She had access to the monarchs, a well-placed office, and the honor of stepping in to represent the face of the monarchy on certain occasions.⁵ She seems to have remained untouched by the political and social scandals that plagued her brother and sister. In fact, she had a reputation for aloofness.⁶ Although a reputed beauty, she remained unmarried; husbands of suitable rank were difficult to come by for such high-ranking women.⁷

In spite of the singularity of her particular royal position, Mademoiselle de Clermont faced some of the same challenges as other well-to-do French women in the first half of the eighteenth century, including how to assert her own and her family's cultural and social position. Mademoiselle de Clermont met this challenge with a cultural weapon widely understood and deployed by wealthy women: portraits. The subject of numerous portraits painted since her childhood, she was well aware of the power of art to shape and project what art historian Kathleen Nicholson calls a "social

⁴ Louis Henri, Duc de Bourbon, served as Louis XV's Prime Minister from 1723-1726.

⁵ See Joan Landes' discussion of the informal personal power culled by well-placed women in the Old Regime from the personal and sexual relationships they developed with powerful men. Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, 1988), especially Chapter 1.

⁶ Nicholson, "Practicing Portraiture," p. 71.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 67. Nicholson discounts the story related by Madame de Genlis in her *Mademoiselle de Clermont, Nouvelle Historique*, published in 1802. Genlis relates the "true" story of a secret love affair and a clandestine marriage between Mademoiselle de Clermont and the Duc de Melun, a man well below her in rank. The bridegroom allegedly died in a hunting accident shortly after the nuptials. According to Nicholson, "the literary fiction passed into 'history' when it was subsequently recounted in a footnote in P.-E. Lémoney, *Histoire de la Régence de la Minorityé de Louis XV jusqu'au ministère de Cardinal Fleury* (Paris: Paulin Libraire, 1832), 2 vols., 2: 136." She says that the historian bases his story of the marriage on the novel, and claims that no eighteenth-century sources support it, p. 85, fn 3.

persona.”⁸ She carefully crafted the two portraits she commissioned from Jean-Marc Nattier to assert her own and her family’s power and position by identifying herself with the iconography of absolute royal authority. At the same time, she drew on an emerging visual iconography of racial difference to highlight her power and position as a white European woman.

Mademoiselle de Clermont’s position as a princess of the blood most certainly affected the amount of control she exercised over her representation. Although a woman, as a patron Mademoiselle de Clermont held the cards in any patron-client relationship: she was a powerful court figure and Nattier an artist itching to make court contacts.⁹ In 1729 Mademoiselle de Clermont commissioned the first portrait Nattier painted of her, apparently the first he painted at the French court.¹⁰ As a well-placed patron, she provided Nattier with ingress to the court as well as sizable commissions. The royal princess, then, did not simply sit for the portrait, passively accepting any representation the artist wished to bestow on her. Rather, she actively crafted the iconography of her images, participating in the creative process of the production of art.¹¹ She must have been pleased with the finished product,

⁸ Ibid., p. 64.

⁹ Art historian Ewa Lajer-Burcharth figures the relationship between the artist and the patron as central to the process of portraiture, and criticizes interpretations of the artist as the sole ‘creator’ of an image, particularly the image of a powerful patron. *Lajer-Burcharth, Necklines: The Art of Jacques-Louis David after the Terror*, p. 236-305. Colin Bailey also refers to the amount of control patrons had in dictating the content of commissioned images, although his exploration is in much less depth. Colin B. Bailey, “Surveying Genre in Eighteenth-Century French Painting,” in *The Age of Watteau, Chardin, and Fragonard: Masterpieces of French Genre Painting*, ed. Colin B. Bailey, (New Haven, CT, 2003), pp. 13-18.

¹⁰ Nattier was not an unknown artist at this time; he was an academician, and had painted a portrait of Peter I of Russia in 1717, while both were visiting Amsterdam. Renard, *Jean-Marc Nattier (1685-1766)*, p. 40.

¹¹ Melissa Hyde and Jennifer Milam argue that “when a painter makes a work for a patron... the finished work belongs to, and takes on meanings for and about, the patron.” They emphasize the power wealthy patrons held in shaping their portraits. Melissa Hyde and Jennifer Milam,

Mademoiselle de Clermont as a Goddess of the Waters posed in front of the Pavilion of Mineral Waters of Chantilly (1729, Chantilly, Musée Condé) (Figure 2.2), as she soon commissioned two more portraits from him, one of each of her sisters.¹² These paintings set off a great demand for Nattier's allegorized portraits; he produced at least four of court women by 1731, and *Mademoiselle de Clermont* herself commissioned a second portrait in 1733.¹³ In doing so, she helped to delineate an iconographic style of allegorical portraits that remained the vogue for representations of powerful women until the 1770s.¹⁴

Mademoiselle de Clermont introduced contemporary elements into her two portraits that appear in virtually none of Nattier's other works, and drew on contemporary trends, such as the fad for *turquerie*, current politics, particularly the position of her family at the court, and current social issues.¹⁵ Nattier's first portrait of *Mademoiselle de Clermont* highlights her family's power position by depicting their family estate. The princess herself sits amid the famous Chantilly waters that noble men and women were beginning to flock to for health reasons. She appears in allegorized mode, draped in semi-classical garb while the ladies and gentlemen in the background appear in contemporary dress, clustered around the pavilion that actually

"Introduction," in Milam, ed., *Women, Art, and the Politics of Identity*, p. 13. Their entire volume considers the roles of women as patrons in the production of art.

¹² Renard, *Jean-Marc Nattier (1685-1766)*, p. 55. The first portrait of *Mademoiselle de Clermont* was exhibited in the Salon of 1737.

¹³ The four paintings of 1731 are portraits of *Mesdemoiselles de Sens, de Charolais, de Beaujolais and de Chartres*. Ibid., p. 177.

¹⁴ Melissa Hyde says that the "disguised portrait" of a sitter in the guise of an allegory had been popular in the seventeenth century, and remained so until the 1770s. Hyde, "Under the Sign of Minerva: Adélaïde Labille-Guiard's Portrait of Madame Adélaïde," p. 155.

¹⁵ Such modern elements were not unprecedented in Nattier's oeuvre. Xavier Salmon points to elements of modernity that appear in Nattier's portrait of *Mademoiselle de Lambesc, sous la figure de Minerve, armant et destinant M. le comte de Brionne, son frère, au métier de la guerre* (1732, Louvre, on permanent loan to Musée des Beaux Arts de Lille). Xavier Salmon, *Jean-Marc Nattier, 1685-1766* (Paris, 1999), p. 80.

existed on her estate at Chantilly; the symbolic is foregrounded, but contemporary elements also form an important part of the composition. Both the scale and the allegorical overtones nudge it closer to the genre of history painting, considered by the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture to be the highest level of art.¹⁶ The artistic choices made in the painting, then, make a political statement about the importance and position of the sitter, in a way that incorporated both the cultural cachet of allegory and concrete, contemporary evidence of her political and social position.

Nattier's portrait of *Mademoiselle de Clermont as a Sultana*, intimate in theme and of a scale the artist more often used to paint bust-length rather than full-length figures, shows Mademoiselle de Clermont in a racy pose, exposing a titillating expanse of her alabaster thigh. Her slaves surround her, framing her white skin with their darkness. The image evokes a harem scene and the contemporary craze for *turquerie*, fed by the publication of Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* in 1721. The specific identification of Mademoiselle de Clermont as a sultana in the title, the sumptuous Oriental carpet, and the abundance of feminine and feminized figures all suggest the imaginary eroticized space of the seraglio. But although the portrait is meant to evoke the mysteries and attractions of the near east, the slaves are African.

The prevalence of images of white women and their slaves in eighteenth-century France coincided with an unprecedented influx of slaves and free people of color into France. Portraits that appeared at the popular *Salon*, fashion plates that urban populations avidly pursued, and prints bought by well-off consumers all drew on a visual trope that associated wealthy white women with black figures, often

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 78.

young boys dressed as pages or in Oriental costume. The titles of these works sometimes specifically identified these pages as slaves. The portrait of *Mademoiselle de Clermont as a Sultana* was painted at the pinnacle of popularity of this type of representation, at a time coterminous with La Rochelle's involvement in colonial trade and at the height of the entry of slaves into this and other Atlantic port cities.¹⁷

In this context, paintings became a valuable *milieu* where elite women could offer one vision of race and gender relations. As patrons of the arts and arbiters of taste, wealthy women exercised considerable control over their own representations. In their own portraits, they drew on tropes of power to visually demonstrate their influence. By the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, having themselves painted in juxtaposition with a black slave or servant had evolved into one of these tropes; in other words, many elite women specifically chose to have themselves portrayed with slaves in order to shape a particular identity for themselves. The slave economy prompted the establishing of new hierarchies based on race, which white women could actively exploit. Images of women with their black slaves highlighted their wealth, but also underscored a social and cultural hierarchy based on skin color.¹⁸ In helping to fashion and propagate these images, elite white women drew

¹⁷ About 25 slaves per year entered La Rochelle by legal channels, with official paperwork fully completed on them by their owners, in the 1720s and 1730s. After the Declaration of 1738 placed further restrictions on owners bringing their slaves into France and made the process much more difficult, the numbers declined by about half in the ensuing decade. B 224-B 228, all of which are *Registres de sa Majesté*, Admiralty Records, Archives Departementales de la Charente Maritime. The numbers of slaves illegally brought into France likely were much higher both before and after the Declaration, before because port officials had little incentive to enforce the declaration of slaves, and after because owners had great incentives to evade the legislation

¹⁸ As several commentators have noted, the primary function of images of blacks was to highlight their owners' wealth, power, or beauty by posing elements of contrast. See, for example, Smalls, "Esclave, Nègre, Noir." Smalls asserts that "blacks, when they are represented in this art, are lumped in with sensuous objects and ornamental pieces for decoration, and represent displays of wealth which were dependent on colonial commerce and the slave trade," p. 17. Gen Doy also suggests that portraits of slaves or servants display the wealth or beauty of their masters. Gen Doy, *Women and Visual Culture*

on newly emerging categories of race to preserve their own cultural and social positions.

However, in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, social meanings of race were still very much in flux. Portraits of elite women and their slaves offered one powerful version of the relationship between the categories of race and gender, but other images suggested more complex relationship between women and their slaves. Paintings such as Nattier's *Mademoiselle de Clermont as a Sultana* move beyond the bounds of portraiture, and begin to hint at the complicated and sexually-fraught relationships between master or mistress and slaves brought about by colonialism and slavery.

Race, Blood, and Paint: Blacks in the French Court

In the context of French explorations of Africa, increased involvement in the African slave trade, and the influx of luxury colonial products to the court, Africans were subjects of both fascination and revulsion.¹⁹ The visits of African princes set

in Nineteenth-Century France, 1800-1852 (London; New York, 1998), p. 214; Giles Waterford asserts that the same was true in eighteenth-century England, Giles Waterford, "Black Servants," in *Below Stairs: 400 Years of Servants' Portraits*, ed. Anne French Giles Waterfield, with Matthew Craske, (London, 2003), pp. 139-151, especially pp. 139-143.

¹⁹ Contemporaneously published accounts of journeys to Africa include Nicolas Villault, Sieur de Bellefond, *A Relation of the Coasts of Affrick called Guinee, with A Description of the Countreys, Manners and Cultures of the Inhabitants; of the productions of the earth, and the Merchandise and Commodities it affords; with some Historical Observations upon the Coasts: Being Collected in a Voyage made by the Sieur Villault. in the years 1666 and 1667: written in French and faithfully Englished.* (London, 1670), published in Paris in 1669. On French involvement in the slave trade, see Robert Louis Stein, *The French Slave Trade in the Eighteenth Century: An Old Regime Business* (Madison, 1979). For an analysis of the significance of luxury goods in relation to colonialism, see Madeleine Dobie, "Orientalism, Colonialism and Furniture in Eighteenth-Century France," in *Furnishing the Eighteenth Century: What Furniture Can Tell Us about the European and American Past*, ed. Dena Goodman and Kathryn Norberg, (New York, 2006). On luxury in the court of Louis XIV, also see Joan DeJean, *The Essence of Style: How the French Invented High Fashion, Fine Food, Chic Cafés, Style, Sophistication, and Glamour* (New York, 2005).

the court abuzz, and it became all the rage to keep a small black page boy in one's retinue. From 1675 to 1740, images abound of elegant French women depicted next to their black attendants. The repetitions on this theme, with no variations of men depicted with their slaves, suggest that the images represent more than just a fad.²⁰ Although a dark-skinned page certainly showed off the luster of an alabaster beauty's skin, the recurrence of images of lavishly dressed French women next to their small and often almost caricatured African slaves suggests that this trope also worked to establish a visual hierarchy based on race rather than gender.²¹

In the late seventeenth and eighteenth century, as understandings of women shifted and ideas about race as a social category emerged, established hierarchies of race and gender collided. The Great Chain of Being, a ladder of living things

²⁰ I have only identified one French man who had a slave included in his portrait, an army commander stationed in Saint Domingue, far from the French homeland. Jean François Gilles Colson and Pierre Charles Levesque, *Jean-François Balland d'Augustebourg, Marquis de Varambon*, 18th century, engraving. Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon, Versailles, France. In contrast, it was more common for English men included slaves in their portraits. For example, see Joshua Reynolds, *First Lieutenant Paul Henry Ourry*, c. 1748, oil on canvas. The National Trust, Saltram House, Devon; and William Hogarth, *Lord George Graham in his Ship's Cabin*, c. 1742, oil on canvas. The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. It was more common for French men to have their portraits painted with their servants, although most of these seem to predate the eighteenth century. See, for example, Charles Le Brun, *Equestrian Portrait of the Chancellor Séguier* (before 1661, Louvre).

²¹ Scholars have wrestled to understand visual representations of blacks in European art. While most agree that their presence invokes the wealth and status of their owners, readings of the figures of blacks themselves have oscillated between critiquing artists for portraying blacks as objects and congratulating them for depicting blacks at all. The influential work of David Dabydeen takes the view that any inclusion of blacks in paintings at all suggests that the artist portrayed them as sympathetic figures. Dabydeen, *Hogarth's Blacks: Images of Blacks in Eighteenth-Century English Art*, p. 131. This interpretation is in line with early scholarship on the philosophes and race. See, for example, Claudine Hunting, "The Philosophes and Black Slavery: 1748-1765," *Journal of the History of France* 39, no. 3 (1978):405-418. David Bindman explicitly writes against this view, and critiques Hogarth for portraying blacks as objects. David Bindman, "A Voluptuous Alliance between Africa and Europe," in *The Other Hogarth: Aesthetics of Difference*, ed. Bernadette Fort and Angela Rosenthal, (Princeton, NJ, 2001), pp. 260, 265-266. Waterfield and Smalls focus solely on blacks in relation to their owners. In the catalogue for an exhibition of British servants' portraits, Giles Waterfield groups such images into four main categories, including portraits of illustrious people with their attendants, the category into which most paintings that include blacks fall. Giles Waterfield, "Introduction," in *Below Stairs: 400 Years of Servants' Portraits*, ed. Giles Waterfield, Anne French and Matthew Craske, (London, 2003) pp. 6-19, pp. 15-17. Waterfield suggests that the appearance of blacks in portraits in the eighteenth century indicated the wealth of their owners in Chapter 8, "Black Servants," pp. 139-140. See also Smalls, "Esclave, Nègre, Noir," especially Chapter 1, pp. 1-14.

stretching from the lowliest worm all the way up to the most exalted archangel, emphasized hierarchy, with man occupying the highest earthly position. It thus naturalized social difference, and could easily justify inferiority or superiority based on race, simply by placing blacks lower on the Chain than whites. Indeed, scientists debated whether Africans might be the “missing link” on the Great Chain between humans and apes, even speculating that Africans and Europeans were different species.²²

At the same time, a major conceptual shift in understandings of relations between the sexes was well underway: a movement from hierarchical to complementary theories of gender difference, whereby men and women filled opposite but harmonizing roles.²³ This posed a conundrum to proponents of the Great Chain. As historian of gender and science Londa Schiebinger points out, this created a problem of “where to fit women.”²⁴ Scientific racism, as exemplified by the Chain of Being, was at odds with scientific sexism, which depended on biological gender difference. These theories, hotly debated by scientists, had specific, concrete implications for elite white French women, particularly as the French encounter with Africans moved to metropolitan soil: their social and cultural identities were at stake. Well-to-do women appropriated blacks into one area where they held undisputed sway: fashion. Blacks became accessories. This was a much more visible and accessible statement of racial hierarchy than that laid out in any scientific treatise.

²² Londa Schiebinger, *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* (Boston, 1993), p. 5.

²³ Thomas Laqueur, "Orgasm, Generation, and the Politics of Reproductive Biology," *Representations* 0, no. 14 (1986):1-41. Also see Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: The Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Boston, 1990), especially Chapter 5, pp. 149-192.

²⁴ Schiebinger, *Nature's Body*, p. 146; also pp. 145-150.

Although portraits of beautiful European women flanked by Africans had appeared in allegorical and history paintings since at least the early seventeenth century, such images became a virtual sub-genre in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, particularly for prominent women at the court. Portraits were luxury items consumed by an elite few, but they also had considerable political power; a portrait could help to promote a public image.²⁵ Representations with black servants or slaves became part of the arsenal of iconography powerful women used to assert their own power.

The portraits of the Duchesse d'Orléans (François de Troy, *Charlotte-Elisabeth de Bavière, Princess Palatine, Duchesse d'Orléans*, 1680, Versailles) (Figure 2.3), Mademoiselle de Blois and Mademoiselle de Nantes (Claude-François Vignon, *Françoise-Marie de Bourbon, "Mademoiselle de Blois," et Louise-Françoise de Bourbon, "Mademoiselle de Nantes," Filles légitimées de Louis XIV et de la Marquise de Montespan*, reign of Louis XIV, Versailles) (Figure 2.4), and the Princess of Monaco (French School, *Louise-Hippolyte Grimaldi, Princesse de Monaco, Duchesse de Valentinois*, eighteenth century, Versailles) (Figure 2.5) all draw on formal French traditions of court portraiture while at the same time portraying the sitters in quasi-intimate settings. The sitters, elegant in court dress, all sit before rich curtains which are drawn back to reveal glimpses of neoclassical exteriors and dramatic cloud formations. Both natural and formal, the direct gazes of the sitters draw the viewer into the portrait and establish an intimate tone in spite of

²⁵ See Milam, ed., *Women, Art, and the Politics of Identity*, especially Chapter 4, Kathleen Nicholson, "Practicing Portraiture: Mademoiselle de Clermont and J.-M. Nattier," pp. 64-90, and Chapter 6, Jennifer Milam, "Matronage and the Direction of Sisterhood: Portraits of Madame Adélaïde," pp. 115-138.

the formal settings. The women's relaxed postures also add to this tenor; we view them at elegant leisure, reaching for flowers, playing with pets, or casually leaning against furniture or architectural details.²⁶

But the presence of the pearl-adorned, richly dressed black attendants sets these paintings apart from other portraits. Within the paintings themselves viewers find cues that reveal the status of the black figures and their relationships with the white women they accompany. Their size gives the first indicator of their role in the portraits; the black figures are all markedly smaller than the white women. Although they occupy prominent positions in the picture plane, even the very center of the joint portrait of Mademoiselle de Nantes and Mademoiselle de Blois, the attendants are not the main focus of the painting. Although the clothing of the black attendants is made of rich cloth, it is markedly less elaborate in style and adornment than the gowns of the principal sitters. In each case, the black attendant gazes adoringly at the white mistress, suggesting that their great beauty inspired devotion or even "tamed their natural savagery."²⁷ Other cues about the status of the attendants lie in their activities. Each one holds something for his or her mistress. The two boys hold bowls of flowers, with which the white hands of the royal women toy. The young black woman holds jewelry, either taking it out to adorn her mistress' throat, or

²⁶ Other contemporary images of women and black attendants include: Jean Belin called Blain de Fontenay, *Jeune fille dans une guirlande de fleurs* (17th century, Caen, Musée des Beaux-Arts); follower of Jacques François Courtin, *Portrait de femme avec son serviteur noir* (17th century, location unknown). Raymond Gaudriault identifies at least eighteen images of wealthy European women attended by black boys in his catalogue of French fashion plates from 1610-1815. All were produced from 1650-1750. Only three of these plates include figures apart from the woman and the boy. Raymond Gaudriault, *Répertoire de la gravure de mode française des origines à 1815* (Paris, 1988).

²⁷ Bindman, "A Voluptuous Alliance," p. 264. Bindman discusses representations of slavery in London, and suggests that such depictions of devotion draw on Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, where Friday is inspired to serve Crusoe after being impressed by his greatness. Bindman suggests that beauty was the feminine analogy to "force of personality" that supposedly inspired people of African descent to serve men.

putting it away after a day of use. Either scenario suggests an element of titillating dishabillé, emphasized by the long locks of loose hair snaking their way over the princess's shoulder.²⁸

The hierarchies established in these portraits, therefore, do not only depend on differentiation of skin tone; they also emphasize other contrasts, including black to white, large to small, young to mature, server to served, powerless to powerful. This contrast could show off the women to greater advantage; the darkness of their black attendants highlighted the whiteness of their skin. Aesthetics, in fact, was an organizing principle in interpretations of race, and some races were considered more beautiful than others.²⁹ However, white women also had an interest in creating a visual hierarchy based on the aesthetics of skin color. In comparing themselves favorably to people of color, white women emphasized their dominance and authority over racialized and exoticized others.³⁰ Because such portraits included people of color who were male, female, and even eunuchs, the hierarchies within them do not merely set up a reversal of male and female gender roles. Rather, they deny gender as a category altogether, and propose the use of race in its stead.

²⁸ Sander Gilman argues that visual representations of black women came to stand for sexuality in general in nineteenth-century art. Sander Gilman, "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late 19th-Century Art, Medicine and Literature," *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. Fall (1985). Paintings of white women with black attendants suggest that this process began much earlier, as early as the seventeenth century.

²⁹ David Bindman argues that the aesthetic was a major organizing principle in eighteenth-century conceptualizations of race. Bindman, *Ape to Apollo*, especially Introduction, p. 11-21. Londa Schiebinger demonstrates how gender also shaped such categorizations, pointing out that early cross-cultural anthropological comparisons of women "centered on sexual traits," including beauty. Schiebinger, *Nature's Body*, p. 156.

³⁰ Deborah Cherry explores how British women compared themselves favorably to Algerian women in the late nineteenth century. Through visiting, depicting, and commodifying Algeria and Algerian women, Cherry argues, British women were instrumental in shaping empire. Deborah Cherry, *Beyond the Frame: Feminism and Visual Culture, Britain 1850-1900* (New York, 2000), especially Chapter 2.

In the early eighteenth century, however, the significance of the term “race” was not at all fixed; it oscillated between two meanings in these portraits. The servants are marked by race because of their black skin; however, their mistresses are also marked by race because of their noble blood. Although ‘race’ in the modern sense had appeared as an organizing principle by 1735 in Carl Linnaeus’ *Systema naturae*, in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries it was primarily conceived as pertaining to one’s lineage.³¹ The first edition of the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* of 1694 defines ‘race’ as “offspring, lineage, extraction, all those who come from the same family.”³² The dictionary’s first examples include, “He is of good race, of an illustrious, old race, he comes from, he is descended from a noble race.”³³ In these paintings, race establishes hierarchy, and race as lineage places the noble women above their attendants. However, race could denigrate individuals as well as elevate them. “Race also indicates,” the Dictionary says, “domestic animals, like dogs, horses, and horned beasts.”³⁴ The intent gaze shared between the wide eyes of the dog and the young black boy in the portrait of Mademoiselles de Nantes and de Blois, and virtually identical color palates the artist used to depict them, suggests that they are of one ‘race.’ The two dark figures are separated from the sisters by a wide gulf that encompasses lineage and status, which is inscribed in the painting through their skin color.

By the end of the seventeenth century skin color was becoming an increasingly prevalent category, even gaining precedence over the question of

³¹ Bindman, *Ape to Apollo*, p. 17. See also Carl Linnaeus, *Systema naturae, sive Regna tria naturae, systematice proposita per classes, ordines, genera, & species* (Lugduni Batavorum, 1735).

³² *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française*, 1 ed. (Paris, 1694), p. 364.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 364.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 364.

lineage. In his celebrated memoirs detailing the court life at Versailles during the reign of Louis XIV, the Duc de Saint-Simon suggested that the vacillation in understandings of race and lineage could touch even the issue of the Sun King himself. Saint-Simon reported that an unknown Mooress took vows at the small and obscure convent of Moret. According to rumor, the king's valet paid her dowry to the convent, along with a large pension, and he took care that this mysterious woman lacked for nothing. The Duc recounted that both Madame de Maintenon and the queen went often to the convent, where they never made themselves known to the woman, but all the same carefully oversaw her well-being "with more attention and care than to the most well-known and distinguished person."³⁵ Rumors circulated in the court that "she was the daughter of the King and Queen, but that her color had caused her to be hidden away, and put it about that the Queen had had a miscarriage."³⁶

In spite of the Mooress' allegedly noble lineage, the child's skin color clearly rendered her unsuitable for life at court, and her acknowledgement by the royal family was out of the question. However, her protectors were not quite ready to abandon faith in her lineage altogether, and observers reported how the child's noble blood and high birth continued to shine through in her manners in spite of the ignoble life to which she was consigned. The girl seemed aware of her nobility; Monseigneur the Dauphin visited the convent once or twice with his children to ask after her.

³⁵ Louis de Rouvroy Saint-Simon, duc de, *Mémoires (1691-1701): Additions au Journal de Dangeau*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1983), p. 447. "Elle était là avec plus de considération que la personne la plus connue et la plus distinguée."

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 447. "...qu'elle étoit fille du Roi et de la Reine, que sa couleur l'avait fait cacher et disparaître, et publier que la Reine avait fait une fausse couche, et beaucoup de gens de la cour en étoient persuadés."

These visits, together with the incredible care that was taken of her, made her wonder about the secrets of her own parentage.³⁷ Noble blood and black skin came directly into conflict in the case of the black princess: the former suited her for a life that the latter absolutely precluded. Ultimately, her dark skin overrode her nobility. Her exile to the convent preserved the social and racial order.³⁸

Dangerous Associations

However, at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries, a racial hierarchy was by no means clear. Some paintings drew upon the ambiguity of this relationship to explore other possible relationships between the races, at the same time playing with the conventions of portraiture that had cast blacks in subordinate roles.

Antoine Coypel's *Young Black with Girl Caressing a Dog* (c. 1682?, Louvre) (Figure 2.6) brings sensual pleasure into the picture plane, which overflows with fruit, flowers, and fabric. A waterfall cascades in the background, suggesting the lush

³⁷ Ibid., p. 1074. "Monseigneur y a été une fois ou deux, et les princes ses enfants, et l'ont demandée, et elle-même se prévalait fort du mystère de ce qu'elle était, joint aux soins qu'on prenait d'elle." This appears in Saint-Simon's « *Additions* » au *Journal de Dangeau*, the extensive text of which preceeded the *Mémoires*. The text in the *Mémoires* differs slightly: "Monseigneur y a été quelquefois, et les princes ses enfants une or deux fois, et tous ont demandé et vu la Moresse avec bonté. Elle était là avec plus de considération que la personne la plus connue et la plus distinguée, et ses prévalait fort des soins qu'on prenait d'elle et du mystère qu'on en faisait." Ibid., p. 447.

³⁸ Lynn Hunt explores the literary relationship in novels between foundlings or orphans and social mobility. In the popular and influential novels *La Vie de Marianne*, *Paul et Virginie*, *Lolette et Fanfan*, and *Alexis*, children live without the protection of fathers. In these novels, the children generally discover that they are of noble birth, and their families are reconstituted. (*Paul et Virginie* provides a counterpoint to this trope: family ties pull the island family of Paul and Virginie apart at the seams, when Virginie returns to France in order to become the heir of her great-aunt. Not only does her aunt disinherit the unfortunate girl for refusing to marry the man she chooses, Virginie dies in a shipwreck on the way back to the Ile de France, where she had lived happily with Paul.) Hunt, *Family Romance*, pp. 28-34; J.-H. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie* (Paris, 1965); Pierre Carlet de Chamblain de Marivaux, *La Vie de Marianne, ou les aventures de Madame la Comtesse de **** (Paris, 173101745); M. Ducray-Duminil, *Lolotte et Fanfan: ou, Les aventures de deux enfans abandonnés dans une isle déserte* (Paris, 1788), M. Ducray-Duminil, *Alexis, ou, La maisonnette dans les bois* (Paris, 1789).

climate of the Caribbean or Africa. The young blonde woman casts a speculative glance at the figure of the black boy as she caresses her small dog, suggestively placed near her breasts. The boy, sporting a bejeweled and beplumed turban, carries a basket overflowing with fruit and flowers, hinting at enjoying the fruit of sexuality or plucking the flower of virginity. A small animal, possibly a lemur, perches on his shoulder as if whispering something into his ear, while a monkey, sitting on the opulent fabric that frames the scene, reaches for the basket. The profusion of animals surmounted by the head of the boy has led art historian James Smalls to interpret the black servant as the equivalent of a household pet. The young woman, he suggests, surveys all her possessions with proprietary pride.³⁹ The central positions of both the lemur and the monkey support this view, as scientific texts hotly debated the positions of the relative positions of monkeys, apes, and their relatives to Africans on the Great Chain of Being.⁴⁰

However, in many ways the white mistress and the black slave have an equivalent presence in Coypel's painting; their bodies are about the same size and their heads are on the same level, which suggests a much more erotic connection between the two figures. This is in marked contrast with contemporary portraits that included representations of blacks, such as de Troy's *Charlotte-Elisabeth de Bavière, Princesse Palatine* (1680) (Figure 2.3). Coypel's painting thus proposes a titillating alternative to the strict racial hierarchy found in portraits by hinting that race relations were worked out through sexual liaisons as well as through displays of power and

³⁹ Smalls, "Esclave, Nègre, Noir," p. 22.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 21. For example, the naturalist Buffon discusses blacks as an intermediary between Europeans and apes. Georges Louis Leclerc Buffon, comte de, *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière, avec la description du cabinet du roi* (Paris, 1749), Vol. 9, p. 121.

wealth. Moreau Saint-Mery, a native of the colonies who lived in France, suggested that the specter of sexual relationships between black men and white women threatened white men's masculinity more than white women's purity. He warns that due to "the advantages which nature, or the use of palm wine, has given to the Negro men over other men in that which constitutes the physical agent of love," women might prefer them as sexual partners. In this regard, Moreau warned, "the white is only a puny competitor."⁴¹ Coypel's painting therefore arouses the specter of an interracial liaison in a way that suggests the young woman's sexual desire.

The presence of this desire eroticizes the painting and the woman in it. However, her desire is not only for sexual encounters but also for material goods. The overflowing of bounty in Coypel's painting, from the basket of fruit and flowers, to the luxurious drapery, to the coursing waterfall in the background, implies the abundance attributed to the French Caribbean colonies, and the changes in consumption patterns that colonial goods brought about in Europe.⁴² In this context, we could interpret the desire with which Coypel's young woman looks at the boy as the desire for an object, a slave, rather than a subject. The presence of this desire turns the woman in the painting from an awe-inspiring icon into a desiring subject. Mademoiselle de Clermont draws upon this desire in her portrait as a sultana.

⁴¹ Moreau de Saint-Méry, *La description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de Saint-Domingue*, Vol. 1. p. 58. In explaining why women born in Africa preferred black men to white men as sexual partners, Moreau says, "Peut-être aussi (et j'ai entendu plusieurs négresses l'avouer) l'avantage que la nature, ou l'usage du vin de palme a donné aux nègres sur les autres homes dans ce qui constitue l'agent physique de l'amour, a-t-elle une grande influence dans ce choix pour lequel le Blanc n'est qu'un chétif concurrent."

⁴² Victoria de Grazia, Introduction to Part 1, in Victoria and Ellen Furlough de Grazia, ed., *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley, 1996). De Grazia relates shifting ideas about consumption, from a vice to a constructive or at least justifiable activity, to increasing cross-Atlantic trade.

Portraits: A Legacy of Power

The tradition of representing members of the French royal family in the guise of deities had roots in the seventeenth century.⁴³ French kings appropriated such imagery, particularly linking the monarchy with Apollo, the sun god, through the arts.⁴⁴ Louis XIV brought this imagery to its apogee, placing his famous portrait by Hyacinth Rigaud (Louvre, 1701) (Figure 2.7) in the Apollo Drawing Room at Versailles, which also acted as the throne room. The ceiling of the room was adorned by a painting of *Apollo in his Chariot Accompanied by the Seasons* (Charles de la Fosse, Versailles), making explicit the connection between the Sun King and the Sun God, whose images were displayed in such close conjunction, and suggesting the far-flung territorial ambitions of the monarch. However, in spite of its clear allegorical overtones, Louis XIV's famous state portrait also can be read without reference to allegory. His status and stature as king, a solitary figure who stands alone and without equal, come through unmistakably in the painting. He wears contemporary dress, and stands before his throne which was surmounted by a hanging canopy, atop a rug with a gold background, in an architectural space that evokes the great palace of Versailles.

⁴³ See, for example, Peter Paul Rubens' twenty-one canvas Marie de Medici cycle for the Luxembourg Palace now in the Louvre (1621-1625, Louvre). Jupiter and Juno hover above all the scenes in the cycle, making explicit connections between the allegorical and historical content of the paintings. Also see Jean Noret, *The Family of Louis XIV depicted in Mythological Dress* (1670, Chateaux de Versailles et de Trianon); Gilbert de Steve, *Portrait of Anne of Austria, Queen of France, as Minerva* (late seventeenth century, Chateaux de Versailles et de Trianon).

⁴⁴ Philippe Le Leyzour, "Myth and Enlightenment: On Mythology in the Eighteenth Century," in *The Loves of the Gods: Mythological Painting from Watteau to David*, ed. Colin B. and Carrie A. Hamilton Bailey, (Fort Worth, 1992), p. 20. Peter Burke argues that the representation of Louis XIV as a king was a "collective production" (p. 45), and that a vast "organization of culture" (50) worked as a body to promote the magnificence and power of the king. Later in his reign, symbolic representations lost "an important part of what Pierre Bourdieu would call their symbolic capital" (129) and more "direct" representations of the king appeared, as well as unauthorized critical images (131; 135). Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven, 1992).

The shadow cast by this portrait literally hung over later kings: eighteenth-century custom held that the portrait of the reigning king should hang opposite it. It also set iconographic expectations, however, that shaped portraits of later French kings: Antoine-François Callet's *Louis XVI, King of France and of Navarre* (1779, Chateaux de Versailles et de Trianon) clearly references the portrait of the Sun King through Louis XVI's pose, dress, sword, the crown placed on the stool at his side, and the heavy drapery hanging before the column in the background.⁴⁵ But the monarchy was by law a masculine institution, and the iconography of kings left little room for feminine appropriation. However, Mademoiselle de Clermont successfully drew on the visual language of kings, using it in her portrait to emphasize her membership in the royal dynasty rather than the feminine attributes that make her a carrier of it. In doing so, she employed not only the trappings of dynasty, but also those of empire.

Through Nattier's portraits, Mademoiselle de Clermont appropriates the commanding masculine royal iconographic tradition in a singularly feminine way that emphasizes both her power and her beauty, which she accomplishes through the selective display of her body.⁴⁶ Given her high court position and her reputation for *froidueur*, Mademoiselle de Clermont's unexpected exposure of her legs in both portraits seems particularly surprising. This emphasis is unparalleled in Nattier's work: in cases where he depicts women's legs at all, he usually enables the viewer

⁴⁵ Rigaud also painted a portrait of the young Louis XV at the age of five, when he had just ascended the throne (1715, Chateaux de Versailles et de Trianon). He seems to be wearing the same ermine robe that his great-grandfather had worn in his portrait, painted fifteen years previously.

⁴⁶ On gender and nudity, also see Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, "Nudity à la grecque in 1799," *Art Bulletin* (1998):311-335, especially p. 324-325, where Grigsby suggests that the nudity of women was interpreted as a feminine bid for power of the *ancien régime* lost during the Revolution.

just a glimpse of fair ankle.⁴⁷ Further, the prominence of her legs and feet in particular is striking as the court costume for women completely hid this part of the body, calling attention instead to the waist, chest, and breasts.

In her first portrait, as goddess of the waters of Chantilly, Mademoiselle de Clermont began exploring the iconographic possibilities in exposing parts of her body. Much of her bosom is bare, including just a glimpse of shoulder, although her upright posture recalls the strictures of the rigid paneling of women's eighteenth-century court dress, and is in marked contrast to the lolling nymph who serves her water. Her arms gracefully emerge from their sleeves, gesturing toward her domain, and one foot and calf are carefully delineated in the foreground. Her thighs, too, are emphasized even though draped; the white of her shift and the blue of her wrap outline her legs and envelop them in soft folds. In *Mademoiselle de Clermont as a Sultana*, the sitter takes this pose even further, daringly baring her legs all the way up to her thighs and crossing her legs at the knee in a downright risqué pose, suggesting the groin area hidden between them. Her right foot, resting on the floor, and calf are silhouetted in a manner almost exactly like that of her previous portrait, while her other foot, almost as white as the drape it rests on, draws the viewer's gaze gradually up her legs. Her hand seems to inch her chemise even further up her thigh, her direct gaze both inviting and challenging the viewer.

It is through the display of her legs that Mademoiselle de Clermont appropriates and transforms the iconography of rule used by her grandfather Louis XIV. Hyacinthe Rigaud's *Portrait of Louis XIV* places great visual emphasis on the

⁴⁷ See, for example, *Madame Henriette sous la figure de Flore* (1742, Versailles, Musée national des châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon), in which the sitter displays only her feet and ankles.

muscular, finely-shaped legs of the aging king.⁴⁸ His ermine-lined cloak embroidered with the royal fleur-de-lis swirls back from his shoulders leaving his legs exposed, even though the robe enswathes the rest of his body. In a three-quarters pose, one of the king's legs is outlined in profile against the elegant ermine of his robe, while the other, crossed in front of it, projects toe-forward towards the viewer. Were the two portraits placed next to each other, they might even appear to be pendants:

Mademoiselle de Clermont would be facing her grandfather, echoing the pose of his legs.

Other similarities between the two portraits also appear. As in the later portrait of his granddaughter Mademoiselle de Clermont, Louis appears on a raised dais covered by an opulent carpet or fabric, the edges of which reach almost to the edge of the painting. Her portrait adopts her grandfather's ermine-trimmed robe, the drapery hanging in the background, and the sense of a vast palatial space just behind the sitter. Her painting even includes an upholstered blue chair, itself redolent of noble privilege, which recalls the blue and gilt throne of the Sun King. At Versailles, only the royal family had the privilege of sitting in an armchair, and only the highest of high nobility could claim even a footstool.⁴⁹ In this context, Mademoiselle de Clermont's chair becomes a sign of her position and privilege as well as a physical means of elevating her above the other figures in the painting. Rigaud's portrait positions the king as self-sufficiently, eternally virile, without the need of props (like

⁴⁸ Abby E. Zanger, "Lim(b)inal Images: "Betwixt and Between" Louis XIV's Martial and Marital Bodies," in *From the Royal to the Republican Body: Incorporating the Political in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century France*, ed. Sara Meltzer and Katherine Norberg, (Berkeley, CA, 1998), p. 35. See also Gary Kates, *Monsieur d'Eon is a Woman: A Tale of Political Intrigue and Sexual Masquerade* (New York, 1995).

⁴⁹ Madeleine Dobie, *Foreign Bodies: Gender, Language, and Culture in French Orientalism* (Stanford, California, 2001), p. 91.

women) to emphasize his sexuality or the strength of his rule.⁵⁰ His granddaughter's portraits draw on much of this iconography, while transforming it into a broad-reaching feminine display of power.

The granddaughter of one king and cousin, companion, and advisor of another but not in the line of succession herself, Mademoiselle de Clermont usurps the place of the king as the center of the portrait. In the guise of a sultana, she occupies a metaphorical, if not actual, throne. Because of French Salic Law, women could not rule in their own right but only as regents—as mothers of future kings in the names of their minor sons.⁵¹ However, Mademoiselle de Clermont was neither wife nor mother, which is why her race became the crucial element in the painting. Although the exposure of her flesh is exciting, her self-presentation as a sultana emphasizes her political and social more than her sexual power. The emphasis on the display of her body highlights her connection with the king, her physical, social, and political proximity that was cemented by ties of blood; she was both visually and literally connected to the body of her grandfather Louis XIV, as portrayed in their portraits.

Portraits, Allegories, and Power

In her portrait as a sultana, Mademoiselle de Clermont drew on a range of iconographic traditions in shaping her own self-representation. Foremost among these were paintings that juxtaposed white women with blacks. Her portrait includes

⁵⁰ Zanger argues that the strength of the state was portrayed through images of the body of the king. Zanger, "Lim(b)inal Images," pp. 58-60. Also see Abby E. Zanger, *Scenes from the Marriage of Louis XIV: Nuptial Fictions and the Making of Absolutist Power* (Stanford, CA, 1997), pp. 32-33.

⁵¹ See Lynn Hunt on the question of what to do with the queen after the king had been executed in the French Revolution. Hunt, *Family Romance*, Chapter 4.

elements of traditional court portraits of noble women who seemed to inspire devotion and awe in their slaves, as in de Troy's portrait of *Charlotte-Elisabeth de Bavière*; the feminine figure on the far right of Nattier's painting gazes at Mademoiselle de Clermont reverently. The work also hints at illicit desire, as in Coypel's painting, which here is introduced by the figure in the middle peeping around the wall. The proximity of Mademoiselle de Clermont's head with that of the black youth, his light-colored turban, and even the slide of his eyes toward the white woman all strikingly recall Coypel's grouping of the white and black figures. Mademoiselle de Clermont incorporates the emotions awe and desire into the painting, and draws on traditions of both allegorical painting and portraiture, especially of highly-placed women, to elaborate her own position. In this complex representation, the strikingly contemporary element of the slaves is essential in framing her as both a powerful woman and a desiring subject.

In *Mademoiselle de Clermont as a Sultana*, the princess uses a similar mix of the contemporary and the allegorical to present her own vision of the relationship between race and gender. The fanciful harem setting speaks to the contemporary taste for all things Oriental, while the cluster of slaves around her suggests the darker reality of colonialism and slavery. Although the princess clearly dominates the painting, the woman who holds a length of cloth on the right of the canvas provides a strong counterpoint to her, the only dark-skinned person who looks out of the painting as Mademoiselle de Clermont does, rather than focusing her gaze on her mistress. The two figures in many ways mirror each other. Both hold a three-quarter position and hold their arms slightly back. Mademoiselle de Clermont's legs contrast with her

slave's exposed chest. One has skin of alabaster, the other skin a dusky honey color, suggestive of the colonial practice of men taking lighter-skinned slaves as mistresses. This relationship between the two women emphasizes their common femininity, further highlighted by the exposed breast of the slave. However, Mademoiselle's size and position within the picture plane make her its clear focal point, and her contrast with the other figures underlines that racial differences, not gender similarities, are the foci of the painting.

In this painting, slavery is a decorous encounter in which the violence of slavery and the slave trade belongs outside the picture plane. Implicitly, it is relegated to a masculine world that is an invisible counterpoint to the feminized interior space dominated by Mademoiselle de Clermont. In this portrait, men are literally outside the frame; they do not enter the harem-like world comprised of the woman as sultana and her slaves, whose femininity is further emphasized by the presence of adolescent boys, such as the figure in the back, and eunuchs, such as the highest figure on the left. This feminized space and the absence of a strong male presence evacuates any potential challenge to Mademoiselle de Clermont's authority. In having herself portrayed sitting above a group of darker-skinned women, boys, and eunuchs, Mademoiselle de Clermont capitalizes on the hierarchy of race over gender.

Mademoiselle de Clermont's portrait, showing her in graceful dishabille, also falls into a tradition of historical and mythological portraits that used the occasion of the bath to depict the female nude. But like other portraits of real women portrayed in the guise or tradition of allegories, this image lent instability to representations of femininity, and opened up a window through which different femininities could be

accessed. By adopting the persona of allegorical figures, real women could associate themselves with the attributes of those figures. Having one's portrait painted as Minerva, goddess of wisdom, could have very different connotations from a similar representation of Venus, goddess of love and beauty. The vogue for allegorical portraits in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries therefore offered women valuable opportunities to shape their public personae. Women could represent allegories in their portraits, either specifically through their dress, accessories, and title of their likenesses, or more generally through artistic allusions like the posture of the sitter, colors of the paint, or activities in which figures engaged. These references opened up alternative ways viewers could read the "social persona" of the sitter outside the boundaries of beauty and fertility. Mademoiselle de Clermont took advantage of this fissure to emphasize her power as well as her beauty, both of which were bound up with her race.

Mademoiselle de Clermont's striking display of her legs adds an unexpectedly racy element to her portrait, rarely found in a painting of a member of the royal house. This exposure had a dual reference: to rituals at Versailles in which the body of the king played an important role in daily life and in maintaining the hierarchy of power, and to history paintings of women engaged in bathing. Public observances of the king's body engaged in intimate acts became a focus of court life, as these private-turned-public moments could provide loyal courtiers with a moment to drop a word in the king's ear.⁵² However, bathing does not seem to have been part of these

⁵² Norbert Elias, *The Court Society*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford, England, 1983), Chapter 5, especially pp. 82-86; Burke, *Fabrication of Louis XIV*, pp. 87-91.

rituals of power, perhaps because keeping oneself properly covered was integral to modesty.⁵³ One book of manners admonished,

it is a part of decency and modesty to cover all parts of the body except the head and hands. You should care, so far as you can, not to touch with your bare hand any part of the body that is not normally uncovered.... It is far more contrary to decency and propriety to touch or see in another person, particularly of another sex, that which Heaven forbids you to look at in yourself.⁵⁴

However, a caveat existed to this rule: it was acceptable and even a sign of favor to expose your body to someone of lower social status. For although “one should not... raise a thigh so high that the members of the human body, which should properly be covered with clothing at all times, might be exposed to view,...this and similar things” could be done “among people before whom one is not ashamed. It is true that a great lord might do so before one of his servants or in the presence of a friend of lower rank; for in this he would not show him arrogance but rather a particular affection and friendship.”⁵⁵ The occasion of the bath, then, firmly establishes a hierarchy between the black slaves and the white mistress; even as through it she shows them favor by exposing her body, it is a favor shown only to an inferior.

For centuries, the mythological subject of Venus and the biblical subject of Bathsheba had provided artists with the opportunity to paint women’s bodies within the genre of history painting. Although in some ways *Mademoiselle de Clermont* specifically positions her portrait outside this tradition, it still has resonances that recall such paintings, particularly the focus on the bath and the female body.

However, the similarities lie more in the trappings common to such portraits, rather

⁵³ Norbert Elias points out that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the public/private rituals of court life were at their zenith, people bathed less frequently than they had previously, especially among the upper classes. Elias places this in the context of the plague: disease was easily transmitted at bath houses. Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (Malden, Mass, 2000), p. 531, fn 124.

⁵⁴ Jean Baptiste de La Salle, Saint, *Les regles de la bien seance de la civilité chrétienne: divisé en deux parties, à l’usage des écoles chrétiennes* (Troyes, 1711), p. 45, in Elias, *Civilizing Process*, p. 112.

⁵⁵ Giovanni della Casa, *Galateo* (Geneva, 1609), p. 92, in Elias, *Civilizing Process*, p. 117.

than in the presentation of the women themselves. Her many attendants, the white fabric that wraps her almost whiter flesh, and the contrast between black and white all contribute to interpretations of Mademoiselle de Clermont in the tradition of the goddess of love and the irresistible adulteress. The portrait of Mademoiselle de Clermont draws on this tradition, while also exploiting the specific historical circumstances of colonialism and race-based slavery to demonstrate her power.

A forerunner in many ways to Mademoiselle de Clermont's portrait, Peter Paul Rubens' *Venus before a Mirror* (1614-1615, Collection Fuerst von Liechtenstein, Vaduz, Liechtenstein) (Figure 2.8) also emphasizes racial contrast, feminine desirability, and the female body. The painting shows a blond beauty, nude but with a light white drape, gazing into a mirror held by a single putto. A black female attendant stands next to her and runs her hands through Venus' hair, possibly helping to dry it or style it, but also emphasizing the difference between the spun-gold hair of Venus and the matte black skin of the attendant, who wears a turban and a necklace of pearls. Venus looks at the viewer, although indirectly, through her reflection in the mirror.

Nattier's portrait contains many of these same elements, and draws on this established method of signifying beauty through the contrast between two women of different races. Unlike Rubens' nameless model, Mademoiselle de Clermont had a name and a history that the viewer could know. Nevertheless, the echoes of Rubens' portrait, which Nattier very well might have seen in his travels through Flanders and the Netherlands, suggest that Mademoiselle de Clermont referenced a well-

established iconography for the portraits of beautiful women.⁵⁶ However, the portrait of Mademoiselle de Clermont also emphasizes the sitter's power through the plethora of her attendants, her rich clothing, and her direct gaze. The mulatta attendant waits to wrap her mistress in a length of fine white cloth. Pearls dot the painting, from the beautiful necklace held by the slave in the left foreground to the bracelet and earring worn by the attendant pouring the water, and most of the black women wear head wraps. Mademoiselle de Clermont herself takes the position of Venus, center of the composition and awaiting the ministrations of her servants as she looks directly at the viewer. However, in contrast to most European depictions of Venus from the Renaissance through the eighteenth century, she is clothed. Although her clothing recalls Venus' drapes, it also works with her direct gaze to disrupt this association and emphasize the painting's status as a portrait, not an allegory.

Notable precedents exist for mixing allegory with references to contemporary culture, particularly in portraits of women; this potent combination enabled sitters to access authority not usually attributed to women by associating them with the powers of the gods, while giving these powers real meaning in a contemporary context.

Gabrielle d'Estrées at her Bath (anonymous of Fontainebleau School, c. 1599, Chantilly, Musée Condé) (Figure 2.9) portrays the mistress of Henri IV with reference to the goddess of love. Gabrielle d'Estrées sits in a bathtub which is partially draped by a white cloth, dressed in nothing but pearls. The wet- nurse

⁵⁶ Nattier was summoned to Amsterdam in 1717 by Peter I (the Great) of Russia, where he painted the portraits of several members of the king's court during their sojourn there. He also stopped in The Hague, where he painted the portrait of Catherine the Great, and in Amsterdam, where he painted the *Battle of Poltava*. During his trip he may have seen Rubens' work. He definitely was familiar with Rubens, particularly his cycle depicting the life of Marie de Medici, which was installed in the Luxembourg Palace in Paris. Nattier produced drawings for at least two engravings depicting this cycle, which he presented to the Academy on 29 November, 1705. Salmon, *Jean-Marc Nattier, 1685-1766*, p. 299. Salmon cites the *Proces Verbal* (of the Academy?), vol. IV, 1881, p. 18.

feeding the child calls attention to d'Estrées own beautiful breasts through the marked contrast she provides; unlike the nurse, d'Estrées' breasts are objects of sexual pleasure rather than nutrition. The contrast between the figures of the two women in the foreground highlights the differences in their status; an aristocrat displays her breasts while a servant nurses with hers, and function literally forms a backdrop for beauty. The painting takes place in a clearly contemporary setting, filled with the trappings of everyday life. The two servants, the wet-nurse feeding the baby and woman in the background holding a large jug, possibly water heated on the hearth for the bath, both wear contemporary dress. The room in the background includes a large hearth, of a type customary in sixteenth-century chateaux. The mullioned windows and the bowl of fruit, which the child reaches toward mischievously, also inject contemporary elements.

Including servants in such portraits demonstrates both the real and the symbolic power of the sitter, and slaves intensify this effect even further. Servants pose a point of contrast to the beautiful women highlighted in the paintings, accenting their mistresses' beauty and charms. The black servant in Rubens' painting contrasts with the lightness of Venus, whose figure the artist delicately touches with luminosity. Even the putto holding Venus' mirror is shadowed, his hair coarser, his features heavier than hers. Likewise, Gabrielle d'Estrées' nurse has skin that seems darkened, particularly in contrast to the royal mistress' alabaster pallor or even the delicate white tint of the children. Her eyes are beadier, her mouth less fine than those of her mistress. In the same vein, Mademoiselle de Clermont's attendants range in hue from golden to ebony, but none approach her brilliant whiteness. The

attendants, then, show off her feminine beauty, but also her status, power, and wealth; they gaze at her, turn towards her, and seem ready to aid in her toilette. In a culture where idle servants conspicuously demonstrated the wealth of their masters, they all attend her, most gazing at her as if literally waiting for her next instruction.⁵⁷

Mademoiselle de Clermont uses the servants more than any other element in the painting to iterate and reiterate her power by depicting them as the human resources she has at her command.

In contrast to Mademoiselle de Clermont, a direct descendent of the most powerful of absolute kings, Gabrielle d'Estrée's power came from her sexuality. She and Henri IV were openly affectionate, and their plans to marry pending the king's divorce were inhibited only by her death. The couple had three children together, all of whom were acknowledged by the king; possibly the two eldest, César de Bourbon, Duke of Vendôme, and Alexandre de Bourbon, appear in the painting. Significantly, the main attendant in the painting, the wet-nurse, waits not on the mother, but on the children. Because of the prominence of the children, the painting of Gabrielle d'Estrées at her bath not only suggests Venus, goddess of romantic love, but also Bathsheba, the biblical adulterous lover and later wife of David, King of Israel. The king was smitten with the beautiful wife of a soldier as she bathed, and Renaissance artists, in particular, used the occasion of this toilet to represent the female nude, as in Rubens' *Bathsheba at the Fountain* (Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden, 17th century) (Figure 2.10). Rubens' representation also includes two servants, a light-skinned woman assisting with her ablutions, and a black servant, who hands

⁵⁷ Cissie C. Fairchilds, *Domestic Enemies: Servants and their Masters in Old Regime France* (Baltimore, 1984), p. 6-10. Sarah Maza, *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France: The Uses of Loyalty* (Princeton, NJ, 1983), p. 201-206.

Bathsheba the summons from King David. Eventually, David makes Bathsheba's son Solomon his heir. Through this painting, Gabrielle d'Estrées claims dynastic legitimacy for her children even as she reminds viewers of her place in the king's heart as his goddess of love.⁵⁸ Through the medium of the allegory, she associates herself with the power of the king and portrays herself as the mother of the children of France. Gabrielle d'Estrées had her power depicted in a particularly feminine way by emphasizing her role as the lover and mother of kings. However, the painting acquires political meanings through expanding its focus beyond women's influence through beauty to include political and dynastic power.

By the eighteenth century, the vehicle of allegory offered women a new way of depicting their power. An overview of Nattier's work as a much-demanded painter in the court of Louis XV reveals that the majority of the subjects recorded by his brush were women, many of whom he painted in the guise of goddesses.⁵⁹ In contrast, he only painted one man in allegorical garb.⁶⁰ This striking difference in

⁵⁸ Pierre Bertrand makes a complementary argument, contending that the bath signifies maternity and fecundity because doctors recommended regular baths for pregnant women and new mothers. Pierre Bertrand, "Le Portrait de Gabrielle d'Estrées au Musée Condé de Chantilly ou la Gloire de la Maternité," *Gazette de Beaux-Arts* 122 (1993):73-82.

⁵⁹ See, for example, *Portrait of Madame Adélaïde de France as Diana* (1745, Versailles), *Portrait of Mme de Sombreval represented as Erato, muse of lyric poetry* (1746, Louvre), and the series *La Terre* (*Portrait of Madame Louise-Elisabeth, Duchess of Parme (Madame Infante)*) (1750, São Paulo), *Le Feu* (*Portrait of Madame Henriette de France*) (1751, São Paulo), *L'Air* (*Portrait of Madame Adélaïde*) (1751, São Paulo), and *L'Eau* (*Portrait of Madame Victoire*) (1751, São Paulo), all portraits of the daughters of Louis XV. Jennifer Milam discusses how this and other groups of the portraits of the five sisters were meant to be viewed together. She also argues that the way the women were portrayed changes throughout their lives, especially as their father stopped pursuing marriage as a viable option for all of his daughters. These particular portraits were painted when the princesses were quite young and still on the marriage market. Milam emphasizes the role played by Madame Adélaïde, the oldest of the unmarried sisters, in fashioning the portraits. Milam, "Matronage and the Direction of Sisterhood: Portraits of Madame Adélaïde," pp. 117-119.

Although this type of mythologized portraiture by no means formed the totality of Nattier's oeuvre, it comprised a considerable portion of it. Further, women sitters dominated this particular type of portraiture, which blurred the lines between portraits and history paintings.

⁶⁰ Nattier's only mythologized portrait of a male sitter of which I am aware is the *Portrait of the Duc of Chaulnes represented as Hercules* (1746, Louvre). In contrast, he tended to paint male sitters dressed

how Nattier approached portraits based on the gender of the sitters suggests that by the 1730s allegory itself had acquired a gendered dimension.⁶¹ Women patrons could demonstrate their power by allegorizing themselves in portraits, emphasizing the attributes they selected through their choice of goddess, thereby setting up a new visual framework for the depiction of femininity that lay outside the lenses of sexual desirability, wifhood, and motherhood, and more allied to political power and the designs of empire. Mademoiselle de Clermont's portrait, for example, emphasizes her beauty, but neither her radiance nor wifhood or motherhood is the primary locus for her power; rather, she expands and lays further claim to her own power as a European woman through the lenses of empire and race.

Race, Gender, and the Harem

Mademoiselle de Clermont's portrait also, however, was painted in the context of the craze for all things Oriental, set off by the publication of Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* in 1721.⁶² In choosing to have herself portrayed as a sultana in the context of a harem, Mademoiselle de Clermont expressly engaged with

in contemporary garb in the traditional manner of portraits, as in the *Portrait of Guillaume Joseph de L'Épine* (1745, Paris, Museum of the History of Medicine).

⁶¹ Other authors have discussed at length the implications of representing women as allegories. Notably, Lynn Hunt suggests that feminine allegories implied rejection of the patriarchal power of the king. Lynn Avery Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley, 1984), pp. 33; 61-66; Chapter 3. Likewise, Madelyn Gutwirth claims that the increasingly gendered representation of allegories had political and social consequences for real women. She argues that during the French Revolution women's visual prominence as allegories superseded and precluded their roles as political actors. Madelyn Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1992), especially Chapter 7.

⁶² Marianne Roland Michel notes different exoticisms popular in France during the eighteenth century. Exotic paintings depicted people of Turkish, Chinese, Polish, Levantine, American, Russian, and Spanish descent. Of these, the popular imagination was most captured by representations of the Levant. Marianne Roland Michel, "Exoticism and Genre Painting in Eighteenth-Century France," in *The Age of Watteau, Chardin, and Fragonard: Masterpieces of French Genre Painting*, ed. Colin B. Bailey, (New Haven, CT, 2003), pp. 109-110.

contemporary Enlightenment culture. Her interest in Montesquieu's work went beyond that of an avid reader: a personal connection also existed between the princess and the author. Mademoiselle de Clermont's beauty and grace reportedly made her a favorite in court circles, and she drew the aspiring writer's attention as well. Upon hearing the rumor of her impending marriage to a Spanish prince, Montesquieu wrote her a letter in which he praised her beauty and even suggested that he might love her if he had the courage.⁶³ He also wrote *Le Temple de Gnide*, the first work he published after the *Persian Letters*, for her amusement.⁶⁴ Later in his career her sister, Mademoiselle de Charolais, became his patron, and he occasionally visited Chantilly, their family estate.⁶⁵ The resonances between Montesquieu's epistolary masterpiece and Nattier's portrait extend beyond symbolic references to a patron-client relationship, however. Instead, Mademoiselle de Clermont draws upon the ambiguous eroticism of the harem to position herself as a desiring subject.

Purportedly the letters sent and received by the Persian noblemen Usbek and Rica during their nine-year sojourn in France, the epistles in the *Persian Letters* comment incisively on French manners, morals, government, and religion while also offering readers a tantalizing glimpse of another society. This narrative device

⁶³ Robert Shackleton, *Montesquieu: A Critical Biography* (London, 1961), p. 51. (Shackleton cites Montesquieu to Mlle XXX, 1724, in Montesquieu, André Masson, ed., *Oeuvres complètes de Montesquieu* (Paris, 195-, 1953, and 1955), p. 770-772.

⁶⁴ J. Fr Michaud and Louis Gabriel Michaud, *Biographie universelle, ancienne et moderne; ou, Histoire, par ordre alphabétique, de la vie publique et privée de tous les hommes qui se sont fait remarquer par leurs écrits, leurs actions, leurs talents, leurs vertus ou leur crimes: ouvrage entièrement neuf* (Paris, 1811), Vol. 29, p. 84; and Shackleton, *Montesquieu: A Critical Biography*, p. 51. Several other authors identify Mademoiselle de Clermont with Thémire, the love interest of the hero. See Louis Vian, *Histoire de Montesquieu, sa vie et ses oeuvres d'après des documents nouveaux et inédits* (Paris, 1878), p. 75; François Gebelin, *Correspondance de Montesquieu* (Paris, 1914), Vol. 1, p. 62, FN 1. According to Shackleton, this claim "that she is its central figure [has] not been decisively refuted" (p. 51, FN 6).

⁶⁵ Shackleton, *Montesquieu: A Critical Biography*, p. 171. Shackleton dates the patronage of Mademoiselle de Charolais to the mid-1730s, after Montesquieu returned to Paris from London.

facilitated readers' criticism of French society by enabling them to compare their own experiences to those described by the Persian noblemen.⁶⁶ Montesquieu presents the Persian seraglio as one point of comparison, home of Usbek's many wives, whose virtue is carefully watched over and protected by black and white eunuchs and slaves. Montesquieu portrays the harem as full of contradictions: the women within its walls are simultaneously safe and dangerous, chaste and erotic, obedient and rebellious, mistresses and slaves. But a different group of its inhabitants pose one of the most glaring contradictions and raise some of the most intriguing questions in Montesquieu's harem: the black slaves who live in the Orient and act as both the servants and the guardians of Usbek's wives.

This duality in the black eunuchs' roles echoes the broader cultural uncertainty about the relationship between race and gender hierarchies. Literary critic Madeleine Dobie persuasively argues that a strong correlation existed between the eighteenth-century craze for Orientalism and emerging formulations of femininity.⁶⁷ But the association Dobie points out between Orientalism and colonialism also opens room to examine the relationship between femininity and race. Soon after he leaves Persia, Usbek writes to the First Black Eunuch, "You are in charge of my wives, and you obey them. Blindly, you carry out their every desire, and, in the same way, make them carry out the laws of the harem. You glory in doing the most degrading services for them... But their power is transferred, and you are master like myself."⁶⁸ He

⁶⁶ Dena Goodman, *Criticism in Action: Enlightenment Experiments in Political Writing* (Ithaca, 1989), Chapter 1. In the words of historian Robert Darnton, "it took the reader outside the law into a fluid zone, where he could play with the notions of a different social order." Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Bestsellers of Pre-Revolutionary France*, 1st ed. (New York, 1995), p. 114.

⁶⁷ Dobie, *Foreign Bodies*, esp. p. 2.

⁶⁸ Charles-Louis de Secondat Montesquieu, Baron de Brède et de, *Persian Letters*, trans. C.J. Betts, 2 (trans. orig. pub. 1973) ed. (New York, 1993), Letter 2, Usbek to the First Black Eunuch, p. 42. "Tu

thereby simultaneously gives power and takes it away, offering the eunuchs the masculine authority that he possesses, but also reminding them that their race and their de-masculinization make them subject to the women. Usbek's order makes clear his own authority over both the women and the slaves, but also leaves the exact relationship between the two open to negotiation: sometimes the black eunuchs can draw on masculine power and authority to rule over the women, but sometimes their race and status as slaves renders them subject to the women's every whim.

As the *Persian Letters* unfolds, this tension between the Oriental wives and their black guardians escalates. Each group vies for privileges and authority, sometimes appealing their cause to Usbek, whose word is law. The First Eunuch writes about his simultaneous desire for and hatred of the harem women, who tease him mercilessly, making explicit that power is the ultimate prize in this battle for race or gender supremacy. "I never forget that I was born to command over them," he says,

and it is as if I become a man again on the occasions when I now give them orders.... Although I keep them for another man, the pleasure of making myself obeyed gives me a secret joy. When I deny them everything, it is as if I was doing it on my own behalf, and indirectly I always derive satisfaction from it. The seraglio for me is like a little empire, and my desire for power, the only emotion which remains to me, is to some extent satisfied.⁶⁹

leur commandes, et tu leur obéis; tu exécutes aveuglément toutes leur volontés et leur fais executer de même les lois du seraglio. Tu trouves de la gloire à leur rendre les services les plus vils ; tu te soumets avec respect et avec crainte à leurs ordres légitimes ; tu les sers comme l'esclave de leurs esclaves. Mais, par un retour d'empire, tu commandes en maître comme moi-même, quand tu crains le relâchement des lois de la pudeur et de la modestie." Charles-Louis de Secondat Montesquieu, "Lettres Persanes," in *Montesquieu: Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Roger Caillois, (Paris, 1949), p. 134.

⁶⁹ Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, Letter 9, First Eunuch to Ibbi, pp. 50-51. "Je me souviens toujours que j'étois né pour les commander, et il me semble que je redeviens home dans les occasions où je leur commande encore. Je les hais depuis que je les envisage de sens froid, et que ma raison me laisse voir toutes leurs foiblesses. Quoique je les garde pour un autre, le plaisir de me faire obéir me donne une joie secrète : quand je les prive de tout, il me semble que c'est pour moi, et il m'en revient toujours une satisfaction indirecte. Je me trouve dans un petit empire, et mon ambition, la seule passion qui me reste, se satisfait un peu." Montesquieu, "Lettres Persanes," pp. 142-143.

The First Eunuch, who was not black, makes explicit in this passage that his quest for power in the harem is also a quest for his lost masculinity. As time goes on, the conflict between the eunuchs and the women intensifies as the women begin making their rebellion more public. The Chief Eunuch writes to Usbek describing his wives' perfidy.

Things have come to such a pass that it is no longer to be endured. Your wives have come to think that your departure meant complete impunity for them. What is happening here is dreadful; I myself tremble at the brutal account that I am about to give you. Zelis, a few days ago, on her way to the mosque, dropped her veil and was seen by the people with her face almost uncovered. I found Zashi in bed with one of her slaves, which is so strictly forbidden by the laws of the seraglio.⁷⁰ He appeals to Usbek for "entire discretion with these women," which Usbek bestows.

In their turn his wives complain about the "horror, darkness, and dread" that "rule the seraglio," and the "deepest humiliation" inflicted upon them by the eunuchs.⁷¹ In the end, Roxane, Usbek's most beloved and trusted wife, escapes this abuse not by successfully asserting her race-based authority over the eunuchs, but by making a final, desperate bid to defend her individual subjectivity through suicide.

Mademoiselle de Clermont's portrait also evokes tensions between masculine authority and white racial supremacy. Although some of the slaves are unambiguously feminine, the figure in the doorway, the light-skinned figure in blue, and the figure in the foreground dressed in yellow all lack clear gender identification. Not clearly men or women, they could be boys or eunuchs. All these figures watch

⁷⁰ Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, Letter 147, Chief Eunuch to Usbek, p. 270. "Les choses sont venues à un état qui ne se peut plus soutenir : tes femmes se sont imaginé que ton départ leur laissoit une impunité entière. Il se passe ici des choses horribles. Je tremble moi-même au cruel récit que je vais te faire. Zélis, allant il y a quelques jours à la Mosquée, laissa tomber son voile et par un presque à visage découvert devant tout le peuple. J'ai trouvé Zachi couchée avec une de ses esclaves : chose si défendue par les lois du sérail." p. 362.

⁷¹ Ibid., "Si tu ne mets toutes ces femmes `a ma discrétion, je ne te répons d'aucune d'elles," p. 363 ; Letter 157, Roxane to Usbek, p. 276, "L'horreur, la nuit et l'épouvante règnent dans le sérail." Montesquieu, *Lettres Persanes*, p. 369; Letter 158, Zachi to Usbek, p. 277, "ce châtimeut qui met dans l'humiliation extrême," Montesquieu, "Lettres Persanes," p. 369.

her, as Usbek instructs his eunuchs to carefully surveil his wives, their gazes standing in for the gaze of the master and all the masculine authority it implies. Montesquieu's eunuchs, after all, although "agent[s] of modesty," also had the authority to examine and judge all of the wives' charms, and to control the women by using the power bestowed by their mutual master.⁷² Further, Mademoiselle de Clermont engages in ablutions as if preparing to receive an absent lover, just as Usbek's wives prepared themselves to compete in beauty, mustering "every kind of ornament or embellishment," anointed themselves with "the most gorgeous scents," and "[made] a habit of being attractive" in spite of his absence.⁷³ Mademoiselle de Clermont's figure therefore seems to invite the masculine gaze and to set up a sexualized gender hierarchy.

However, the very presence of the slaves who surround her makes race, rather than gender, the focus of the painting. In direct contrast to Montesquieu's book, where the eunuchs viciously suppress the women's bid for control with violent and humiliating abuses, Mademoiselle de Clermont's portrait focuses on white women's power, rather than on their segregation and control. She clearly asserts her significance in the scene by her visual domination of the picture plane, but also emphasizes her power through her juxtaposition with women of color. The focus on Mademoiselle de Clermont suggests European dominance over colonial 'others,' and the visual contrast between her and her attendants highlights the importance of her

⁷² Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, Letter 80, First Eunuch to Usbek, p. 158. Montesquieu, *Lettres Persanes*, "ministre de la modestie," p. 251.

⁷³ Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, Letter 3, Zachi to Usbek, p. 43, "Nous nous présentâmes devant toi après avoir épuisé tout ce que l'imagination peut fournir de parures et de ornements," Montesquieu, *Lettres Persanes*, p. 135; Letter 7, Fatme to Usbek, p. 47, "Je cherche cependant à m'entretenir dans l'habitude de plaire. Je ne me couche point que je ne me sois parfumée des essences les plus délicieuses." Montesquieu, *Lettres Persanes*, p. 139.

race, including her whiteness as well as her noble background, over her gender. Her whiteness allows her to shine as the central figure of the painting. In contrast, the eunuch-like figures clustered to the left of the picture plane are all small, shadowed, and, with the exception of the figure in yellow, incomplete, like the eunuchs themselves, their lower limbs all hidden from view. The figures on the right, both unambiguously female, pose a stronger counterpoint to the seated princess. Because of their gender, it is in these figures that cross-racial comparisons become most evident.

In this case, such comparisons rely on the exposure of women's bodies. Typically, according to Londa Schiebinger, "females were rarely compared across racial lines in the eighteenth century; or, if they were, it was commonly in relation to their sexual parts."⁷⁴ Here, Mademoiselle de Clermont's legs and her mulatta attendant's breast highlight the differences between the two women. Mademoiselle de Clermont pulls back her skirt to reveal her shapely legs, and in doing so her foot literally steps on her black servant, emphasizing the black woman's slave status. Her hand tugs at her dress, highlighting her own agency in deciding how she is revealed, both in her image as a figure in the painting, and in the painting as a representation constructed by her as a patron. In contrast, her slave's breast tumbles from her bodice seemingly of its own accord, without any of the control over self-representation that Mademoiselle de Clermont's hand on her hem implies. Her bare breast emphasizes her status as a sexual object rather than a sexual agent, particularly as women's breasts were one of the main sex traits scientists used to compare them across lines of

⁷⁴ Schiebinger, *Nature's Body*, p. 147.

race.⁷⁵ Mademoiselle de Clermont herself exhibits an expanse of fair bosom, but the swell of her breast, areoles, and nipples remain hidden. This deflects a comparison between the two women, an important goal if Mademoiselle de Clermont wanted to emphasize racial differences over gender similarities, while at the same time displacing eroticism onto the figure of the mulatta woman.⁷⁶

Mademoiselle de Clermont's intentional display of her body, both within the context of the harem scene and in a painting displayed very publicly at the Salon, repositions the harem from a site of masculine sexual fantasy to a site of a feminine desire for power based on racial difference. The deliberate display of her body in a painting of the interior of a harem emphasizes her choice in making herself visible to viewers, in contrast with Usbek's plan to keep his wives hidden behind the seraglio walls. Like Zelis, who drops her veil in the marketplace, Mademoiselle de Clermont's conscious display of her body emphasizes her control over her own sexuality and her own image.⁷⁷ She becomes a desiring subject as well as a desired object: desire circulates in the painting, from the plethora of goods that seem to spill from it, to the eyes of the slaves who look on her with longing or awe, to her own direct gaze aimed straight at the viewer. Mademoiselle de Clermont successfully wields power and agency by emphasizing the importance of race in determining social and cultural hierarchies, a factor that takes precedence over patriarchal control. However, she also exploits the ambiguity of race to introduce elements of desire into

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 156.

⁷⁶ Sander Gilman convincingly argues that the figures of black women sexualize figures of white women in the same paintings. Gilman, "Black Bodies, White Bodies."

⁷⁷ Diana Schaub argues that by dropping her veil, Zélis exposes herself "as an individual" in a manner that is "anti-sexual;" that is, by exposing her face, Zélis wants to see and be seen as a person, not as a symbol of eroticism and sex. Diana J. Schaub, *Erotic Liberalism: Women and Revolution in Montesquieu's Persian Letters* (Lanham, Maryland, 1995), pp. 53-54.

the painting, and to position herself as a subject whose own desire for power and desirability are based on racial difference.

The Painted Legacy of Black and White

Including slaves in portraits of elite women remained a powerful trope well after the painting of *Mademoiselle de Clermont*. Both the Marquise de Pompadour and the Duchesse du Barry, each in turn the official mistresses of Louis XV, had their portraits painted in the company of slaves who served them coffee (*Madame de Pompadour as a Sultana*, Carle Van Loo, 1755, Hermitage (Figure 2.11); *Madame du Barry à sa toilette à laquelle Zamour présente une tasse de café*, Jean-Baptiste-André Gautier d'Agoty, 1771, Versailles (Figure 2.12)). In both paintings the slaves wear orientalized garb, and the women sit at their leisure in intimate spaces wearing informal, flowing garments. In both paintings, too, the women put their own identity construction in dialogue with figures of slaves.

On first glance, the two figures in Madame de Pompadour's portrait have a strong visual equivalency. They are of similar sizes, and occupy similar positions in the picture plane, with Madame de Pompadour only slightly larger and more centered. The dark folds of the drapery in the background clearly silhouette the royal mistress' white profile, while the black figure stands out against the diffused light entering through the window. A pronounced mirroring is effected between the two women. One has her knee bent up, the other to the side. Both have hands on the delicate porcelain coffee cup, one reaching out for it, the other relinquishing it. They look steadily at each other. Their clothing is very similar, both wearing flowing long-

sleeved white shifts over full skirts, topped by long jackets, one red, the other blue; their skirts invert this color scheme. Both wear pearls and turbans, the Marquise's adorned by her signature rose; the dark woman's pearls encircle her neck, while Madame de Pompadour's hang at her ears, wind around her neck, and twine through her hair. They are basically on the same level in the picture plane, although the black woman's head hovers above Madame de Pompadour's. Only a few elements hint at the hierarchical relationship between the women: the Marquise's slightly more central position on the canvas, the light that suffuses her features while leaving those of her attendant in the shadows, and the steaming coffee pot the black woman holds, indicating that she has just poured coffee for her mistress. Madame de Pompadour clearly is at her leisure, reclining back on cushions and holding her exotic long-handled pipe, while her attendant kneels to serve her. The folds of the Marquise's dress are delineated with exquisite attention, while the drapes of her attendant's clothing are lost. Although these fine points make clear the racial hierarchy and emphasize Madame de Pompadour's status, the subtlety of these hints and even the possibility of presenting the figures on almost equal visual terms presumes that the viewer already understands the race-based hierarchy between the two women.

Whereas earlier paintings such as *Mademoiselle de Clermont as a Sultana* had to work to make racial hierarchy visual obvious on the canvas, the later work *Madame de Pompadour as a Sultana* used the already-naturalized race binary to explore feminine power through eroticism. The two paintings are very similar in their subject matter, their conflation of colonial and Oriental, and even in their use of certain formal elements, such as windows in the background, drapery, splendid

Oriental rugs, and the light shift-like garments that each woman wears. In both paintings, black slaves act as attendants. However, because of the visual equivalency given to the two figures in the portrait of Madame de Pompadour, race plays a different role. Madame de Pompadour's mastery of self-presentation gives weight to this choice to put her figure in dialogue with that of her slave.⁷⁸ While Mademoiselle de Clermont figures herself as a ruler, akin to Louis XIV, Madame de Pompadour instead portrays herself as a royal mistress—but one firmly ensconced in her own domestic space. In this context, the black attendant acts more as an emblem for luxurious retreat into privacy. However, the harem also held powerful connotations of beauty, luxury, and charged sexual availability. The shadowy black attendant therefore also provides a marked visual contrast to the luminescence of Madame de Pompadour, and the juxtaposition of the two women, one pampering the other, emphasizes the eroticism of the painting.

The beauty of harem women became legendary. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who visited Turkey with her husband and whose letters were widely circulated throughout Europe, commented on the “Balm of Mecca,” a powerful unguent used in the harem which supposedly smoothed and whitened the skin.⁷⁹ In Montesquieu's fictional harem, Usbek praises Roxane for “reveal[ing] the clarity of

⁷⁸ On Madame de Pompadour's mastery at self-presentation, see Melissa Hyde, "The "Makeup" of the Marquise: Boucher's Portrait of Pompadour at her Tiolette," *Art Bulletin* 82, no. 3 (2000):453-475, Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, "Pompadour's Touch: Difference in Representation," *Representations* 73 (2001):54-88, Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, "A Woman's Worth," *Art in America* 91, no. 4 (2003):100-107; 152. Sonja Boon makes a compelling argument that in the Bellevue paintings Madame de Pompadour identified herself with Scheherazade, the storyteller in Antoine Gallande's French version of *Les Mille et une nuits*. Sonja Boon, "The Marquise Takes the Veil: Madame de Pompadour and the Harem Paintings at Bellevue," in *American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies* (Montreal: 2006).

⁷⁹ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *Letters of the Right Honourable Lady M--y W---y M-----: written, during her travels in Europe, Asia and Africa, to persons of distinction, men of letters, &c. in different parts of Europe. Which contain, among other curious relations, accounts of the policy and manners of the Turks* (London, 1763), Vol. 2, p. 132.

[her] complexion with the most beautiful colors.”⁸⁰ He contrasts this use of cosmetics to enhance natural beauty to what he portrays as European women’s practice of using cosmetics to mask their faces. He asks, “what can I think of these European women? The art of composing their complexions, the ornaments with which they adorn themselves, the cares they take over their appearance, the continual desire to please that occupies them are stains on their virtue and outrages against their husbands.”⁸¹ Cosmetic makers appropriated this disjunction to promote cosmetic use in France, marketing makeup as a product of the East.⁸²

Mademoiselle de Pompadour used makeup as an artistic device to demonstrate her own self-fashioning and her authorial role in her portraits.⁸³ However, the royal mistress adjusted her image in portraits as her role at court changed.⁸⁴ When Van Loo painted *Madame de Pompadour as a Sultana*, she was at the height of her power. Even though her sexual relationship with the monarch was waning by the late 1740s, her influence over him continued to grow, and she became his trusted friend and advisor. As a token of his love and esteem, in 1750 the king built her the grand house she named Bellevue. The Marquise commissioned several works from Van Loo to

⁸⁰ Charles-Louis de Secondat Montesquieu, *Lettres Persanes*, Ed. Paul Vernière ed. (Paris, 1960), Letter XVI, Usbek to Roxane, p. 60. “Quand vous relevez l’éclat de votre teint par les plus belle couleurs;...”

⁸¹ Ibid. Letter XVI, Usbek to Roxane, p. 61. “Mais que puis-je penser des femmes d’Europe? L’art de composer leur teint, les ornements dont elles se parent, les soins qu’elles prennent de leur personne, le désir continuel de plaire que les occupe sont autant de taches faites à leur vertu et d’outrages à leurs époux.”

⁸² Morag Martin, "French Harems: Images of the Orient in Cosmetic Advertisements, 1750-1815," in *Western Society of French History*, ed. Carol Harrison and Kathryn Edwards (Newport Beach, CA: Scholarly Publishing Office, University of Michigan Library, 2003).

⁸³ Hyde, "The "Makeup" of the Marquise: Boucher's Portrait of Pompadour at her Tiolette."

⁸⁴ Katherine Gordon posits that when Madame de Pompadour’s relationship with the king shifted from mistress to trusted friend and advisor, the Marquise emphasized her new status through representations of friendship. Figures of Friendship became a “symbolic celebration of love which has been elevated to a supra-sensual plane” (p. 252). *Amitié* became a symbol for Pompadour that was used until her death (pp. 258-259). Katherine K. Gordon, "Madame de Pompadour, Pigalle, and the Iconography of Friendship," *Art Bulletin* 50, no. 3 (1968):249-262.

decorate her new chateau, including her portrait as a sultana. With its pendant *Two Odalisques Embroidering* (Van Loo, 1755, Hermitage) and the smaller *Odalisque Playing a Stringed Instrument*, the painting lent a decidedly exotic feel to Madame de Pompadour's bedchamber, known as the *chambre à la turque*.⁸⁵ By figuring herself as a sultana, *la favorite* emphasized her role as the official mistress and the king's continued confidante, even though his libidinous attentions drifted elsewhere.⁸⁶ Her black attendant drives home this exoticism while also emphasizing the Marquise's role as a powerful tastemaker and consumer of fashionable goods.⁸⁷

In contrast, except for her fashionable *robe volante* and her seductive dishabille, the Duchesse du Barry's portrait by Gautier d'Agoty is a throwback to the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century portraits of noble women and their slaves. The boy's small size and peripheral position emphasize his primary function as a foil for the king's mistress. He is shown in the act of serving her, further underscoring his inferiority. Although the dark-skinned women who appeared in the portraits of Madame de Pompadour and Mademoiselle de Clermont very well could have been painted from black models, as many people of African descent lived in

⁸⁵ *Madame de Pompadour as a Sultana* and *Two Odalisques Embroidering* were hung facing each other over opposite doors to the room. *An Odalisque playing a Stringed Instrument* was hung over a mirror between the two windows in the room. The furnishings, carpets, wall coverings, fabrics, and porcelains placed in the room also were chosen to evoke Oriental luxury. See Perrin Stein, "Madame de Pompadour and the Harem Imagery at Bellevue," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 123, no. 1500 (1994):29-44, pp. 30-31. These paintings were all exhibited to great acclaim in the Salon of 1755. The two overdoor paintings were originally rectangular; the canvasses were cut down to their present shape to fit their location at the Hermitage, where they were sold after Madame de Pompadour's death.

⁸⁶ Ibid, Perrin Stein, "Exoticism as Metaphor: *Turquerie* in Eighteenth-Century French Art" (New York University, 1997), pp. 188-189. Ewa Lajer-Burcharth points out that in spite of the contemporaneous craze for allegorical portraits, Madame de Pompadour never had a portrait painted in the guise of an allegory. Lajer-Burcharth, "Pompadour's Touch," p. 66 and fn. 36, pp. 84-85.

⁸⁷ Adrienne Childs calls figures of blacks in paintings and decorative arts "marker[s] of exotic servitude," and emphasizes the connection between exoticism and slavery in the fad for *Turquerie* which she specifically associates with the *ancien regime* nobility. Adrienne L. Childs, "The Black Exotic: Tradition and Ethnography in Nineteenth-Century Orientalist Art" (University of Maryland, 2005), pp. 79-81.

France at the time, Madame du Barry's slave actually belonged to her. Zamour had been brought to the duchess' household as a young boy, and would have been about nine years old in 1771 when the portrait was painted.⁸⁸ She dressed him in lavish costumes made from rich fabrics, paid for from the royal treasury.⁸⁹ In short, although an Oriental-inspired turban tops his sharp livery, he seems more akin to the collared page holding the vessel of flowers in Vignon's portrait of Mademoiselle de Blois and Mademoiselle de Nantes, painted three-quarters of a century earlier, than the dark-skinned figures in the portraits of Mademoiselle de Clermont or Madame de Pompadour.

However, Madame du Barry lacked both the impeccable pedigree of Mademoiselle de Clermont and the political astuteness of her predecessor as the king's official mistress; she therefore needed to display her power and authority in different ways. An illegitimate child, her beauty caught the attention of nobleman Jean du Barry when she was working as a milliner's assistant, and she became his mistress. After marrying du Barry's brother, she was presented to the king in 1769.⁹⁰ In spite (or perhaps because) of the great indulgence and extravagant gifts the king offered her, most of the court shunned or despised her. Her relationship with the Dauphine Marie Antoinette was particularly contentious, and after the king's death she was exiled from the court. Under these circumstances, the Duchesse had a strong incentive for displaying herself in a position of power. Her portrait with Zamour

⁸⁸ Perrin Stein, "Amédée Vanloo's Costume Turc: The French Sultana," *Art Bulletin* 78 (1996):417-438, p. 420.

⁸⁹ Olivier Bernier, *Louis the Beloved: The Life of Louis XV* (Garden City, NY, 1984), p. 243.

⁹⁰ Robert Darnton relates the history of du Barry as recounted by the bestselling *Anecdotes du Mme le Comtesse du Barry* (1775). He argues that the book's allegedly true story of du Barry's life gave readers an inside view of life and politics in Versailles. Darnton, *Forbidden Bestsellers*, Chapter 5, pp. 137-166

emphasized her wealth, privilege, and beauty, while the rumpled intimate interior setting with the gauzy dressing table and delicate chair clearly intimated her sexual relationship with the king. At the same time, her recourse to this type of image has a slightly desperate air. Coming on the heels of the complex self-presentations of Mademoiselle de Clermont and Madame de Pompadour, her appropriation of a slave as a literal signifier of her wealth and position smacks of the obvious vulgarity of a commoner who was frantically striving to legitimize her new position at court by showing a modicum of power, even if only over her slave.

Conclusion

Paintings were one venue where elite women, as patrons, could engage in constructing discourses of race and gender. Paintings that contrasted rich, beautiful, and powerful white French women with their slaves emphasized the importance of racial hierarchy, but this was only one version of how race and gender identities were formed and interacted. Slaves and the colonial or Oriental goods that so often were portrayed as their trappings also introduced elements of desire into paintings: desire for both people and things. Some paintings, such as that of Mademoiselle de Clermont, could harness this desire to emphasize the subjectivity of the sitter. In this formulation, however, as in that of earlier paintings of women and their slaves, the slaves are instruments used in shaping the woman's self-presentation. They cannot become desiring subjects themselves.



Figure 2.1: Jean-Marc Nattier, *Mademoiselle de Clermont, Princess of the Blood, as a Sultana, Served by some Slaves* (1733, London, Wallace Collection).



Figure 2.2: Jean-Marc Nattier, *Mademoiselle de Clermont as a Goddess of the Waters Posed in front of the Pavilion of Mineral Waters of Chantilly* (1729, Chantilly, Musée Condé).



Figure 2.3: François de Troy, *Charlotte-Elisabeth de Bavière, Princesse Palatine, Duchesse d'Orléans* (1680, Versailles).



Figure 2.4: Claude-François Vignon, *Françoise-Marie de Bourbon, “Mademoiselle de Blois,”* (future Duchesse d’Orléans) et *Louise-Françoise de Bourbon, “Mademoiselle de Nantes,”* (future Princesse de Condé) : Filles légitimées de Louis XIV et de la Marquise de Montespan (Reign of Louis XIV, Versailles).

Note : Mademoiselle de Nantes was Mademoiselle de Clermont’s mother.



Figure 2.5: French School, *Louise-Hyppolyte Grimaldi, Princesse de Monaco, Duchesse de Valentinois* (18th Century, Versailles).



Figure 2.6: Antoine Coypel, *Jeune Noir tenant une corbeille de fruits et jeune fille caressant un chien* (about 1682, Louvre).



Figure 2.7: Hyacinthe Rigaud, *Portrait of Louis XIV* (1701, Louvre).



Figure 2.8: Peter Paul Rubens, *Venus before a Mirror* (1614-1615, Collection Fuerst von Liechtenstein, Vaduz, Liechtenstein).



Figure 2.9: Anonymous of Fontainebleau School, *Gabrielle d'Estrées at her Bath* (c. 1599, Chantilly, Musée Condé).



Figure 2.10: Peter Paul Rubens, *Bathsheba at the Fountain* (Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden, 17th century).



Figure 2.11: Carle Van Loo, *Madame de Pompadour as a Sultana* (1755, Hermitage).



Figure 2.12: Jean-Baptiste-André Gautier d'Agoty, *Madame du Barry à sa toilette à laquelle Zamour présente une tasse de café* (1771, Versailles).

Chapter 3:

Journeys, Contracts, and the Family

Introduction: Men's Journeys and Women's Contracts

The existence of France's overseas colonial empire challenged juridical notions of the family. Many men from La Rochelle made their way to the French Caribbean colonies to seek their fortunes, particularly the wake of the sugar boom that enabled France's colonies to produce all the sugar consumed in the metropole by the end of the seventeenth century, and to become the world's largest producer and exporter of sugar by the end of the Old Regime.¹ This transatlantic voyage often proved a defining passage in their lives, changing forever their family relationships with those they left behind in France. The distance between family members separated by the Atlantic meant that they had to devise new ways of apportioning family roles and family resources.

Attracted by what historian Jacques Cauna calls "this new El Dorado," men who emigrated to the colonies came from all walks of life: some, lacking the resources to pay their own way, went as indentured servants, with the hope of acquiring cheap land and getting rich quick after their term of service had ended; some came from wealthy merchant families with business contacts already well

¹ Robert Louis Stein, *The French Sugar Business in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1988), pp. 4, ix.

established around the Atlantic basin; some were forced into exile as punishment for committing a crime.² Although the ratio of men to women in the Antilles remained well skewed in favor of the masculine, women also emigrated to the colonies as the wives or daughters of adventurers.³ A good number of women were also forced émigrés; arrested as criminals, they were sent from port cities to the colonies, destined to be the housekeepers, cooks, seamstresses, wives, or prostitutes of men they had never met in places they had never seen.⁴ However, men who traveled to the colonies always greatly outnumbered women.

Although this gender imbalance affected the development of society in the colonies, it also shaped social practices in the metropolitan cities where the male fortune-seekers had often left their mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters. In a society where women's roles were largely shaped and defined through their relation to men, the absence of their closest male relatives offered some women opportunities to enter into the largely masculine arena of transatlantic commerce. Time and distance alter relationships, and when husbands left their wives behind in France, wives often took on new responsibilities as the heads of families and businesses. As businesswomen, some corresponded with large networks of contacts, often in several

² Jacques Cauna, *Au temps des îles à sucre: Histoire d'une plantation de Saint-Dominique au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1987), p. 12. Gabriel Debien traces people who left France for the French Antilles under contracts of indenture. He identifies 1,740 such contracts made from 1666-1714, with at least 110 of the men making these contracts being from La Rochelle proper. In comparison, he found only 71 such contracts made in Paris, 24 in Nantes, and 29 in Bordeaux. Gabriel Debien, *Le Peuplement des Antilles Françaises au XVIIe siècle: Les Engagés partis de La Rochelle* (Cairo, 1942), pp. 3, 193-205.

³ Arlette Gautier puts the ratio of white men to white women a 2:1 in Martinique from 1678-1687; 2.5:1 in Guadeloupe in 1671 and 1.5 in 1687; and 8:1 in Saint-Domingue in 1681, 4.4:1 in 1686, and 2:1 in 1700. She attributes the increase in white women primarily to the birth rate. Arlette Gautier, *Les Soeurs de Solitude: La condition féminine dans l'esclavage aux Antilles du XVIIe au XIX siècles* (Paris, 1985), p. 33.

⁴ List of passengers departing from La Rochelle for the colonies, 1719, F⁵B⁵⁷, CAOM. The lists for this year, the only one for La Rochelle that is housed in the archives, included 96 "filles" forced to emigrate from Paris at the order of the king.

French port cities, Paris, and the colonies. Some even became the heart of networks on which the wealth of their families was based. Husbands and wives engaged in careful strategies for family prosperity that often were defined explicitly in their marriage contracts, and wives who stayed in France while their husbands sought riches in the colonies played an integral role in carrying out these plans.⁵

If transatlantic journeys shaped the lives of French men who went to the colonies, contracts shaped the lives of the women they left behind. Even during the extended absence of a husband, bills had to be paid and goods bought; the survival of the household depended on it. However, wives lacked this type of purchasing power without their husbands' explicit consent, which those husbands generally bestowed through powers of attorney. Legally empowered by their husbands through powers of attorney, such women entered into contracts, engaged in business correspondence, pressured recalcitrant agents, bought and sold property, and brought lawsuits, all in their own names, although perhaps on their husbands' behalf. Concentrated in port cities such as La Rochelle, these women often entered into transatlantic trade. In doing so, they melded women's traditional obligations to guard, preserve, and augment the family estate for their children with more modern ideas about expanding wealth through engaging in commerce.

⁵ Other studies that address gender, family, and inheritance law include Margaret H. Darrow, *Revolution in the House: Family, Class, and Inheritance in Southern France, 1775-1825* (Princeton, NJ, 1989), and Suzanne Desan, *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France* (Berkeley, CA, 2004). Both Darrow and Desan focus on the Revolutionary period, when inheritance laws applying to all of France mandated equal inheritance among all heirs. Darrow considers the assumption that changing inheritance law changes family behavior; she finds that in Montauban, elite families often engaged in similar inheritance practices, favoring the oldest male heir, before and after the Revolution. Desan argues that the Revolutionary debates over family law opened up spaces for women to enter into debates about citizenship. Both authors frame the family as a political institution, and as a site where women contested political and cultural gender norms.

When an ocean lay between husband and wife, traditional nuclear family relationships began to change. Spouses formed other attachments and priorities shifted. Many men in the colonies were less constrained by conventions of sexual propriety than women, and entered into long-term relationships with women of color. Women, usually left behind in France, fostered connections with family members in the metropole. However, these two worlds never were as separate as they seemed. Men brought or sent their mixed-race children to France, and wives often had to watch sizeable annuities dispensed from their husbands' estates to illegitimate children in the colonies. Even with the careful preparation that families put into planning marriage and inheritance, provisions such as these often came as a surprise.⁶

This chapter will consider the inheritance strategies employed by different members of two Rochelais families with ties to the colonies, the Regnaud de Beaumont and the Fleuriau families. Jean Severin Regnaud de Beaumont married Marie-Madeline Royer, a wealthy heiress who stood to inherit a colonial plantation from her parents. The couple spent much of their married life apart, he in Saint-Domingue managing their colonial holdings, and she in La Rochelle, supervising their family affairs and monitoring the merchants who sold the goods that arrived from their plantation. They planned their family strategy carefully before their separation: Beaumont gave his wife his power of attorney so she had the legal authority to oversee his affairs, and they agreed that their children should inherit their estates in equal portions after their deaths. Several events upset the careful legal categories within which they had written their contracts, however: the arrival of a

⁶ Linda Lewin, *Surprise Heirs* (Stanford, CA, 2003).

slave in France, sent by Beaumont in the colonies to his wife, and the birth of Beaumont's two natural *mulâtre* daughters.⁷

In contrast, the family of Aimé-Benjamin Fleuriau included people of different races from its very beginning. While in the colonies, the young man engaged in a long-term sexual relationship with one of his former slaves, by whom he had several children. Two of these children, both girls, returned with their father to La Rochelle where he remarried, this time to a French woman. Upon his death, Fleuriau recognized his natural children in his will, although he left them inheritances far smaller than the estates he bequeathed to the children born within his marriage. However, these legacies had consequences that the merchant perhaps did not intend: his natural children used them to reinforce their own family ties and to set up their own successions, independent from that of their white father.

Marriage and Inheritance in Customary Laws and Contracts

In the eighteenth century, women's family relationships shaped their social and legal positions. As daughters, women were subjected to the authority of their fathers. As wives, they could not own property or form contracts or any other legal agreements without the explicit consent of their husbands.⁸ As widows, women

⁷ The *Dictionnaire de L'Académie française* says that "one calls children that are not born of legitimate marriage *natural children* ("enfants naturels")." *Dictionnaire de L'Académie française*, 4 ed. (Paris, 1762), p. 198. I intend the term "natural children" also to indicate that the children have been acknowledged by their fathers, in distinction to illegitimate children, whose paternity was either not known or not acknowledged. In both the cases I examine here, white fathers acknowledged their mixed-race offspring.

⁸ Gabriel Lepointe, *Droit Romain et ancien droit Français: Régimes matrimoniaux, libéralités, successions* (Paris, 1958), pp. 420-421. Married women did have the right to make their wills; the document would take effect only after the wife's death, which would also mark the dissolution of the marriage (p. 420). In some cases married women could own inherited property in conjunction with

inherited the legal authority that had belonged to their husbands, and could form contracts, contract debts, testify in court, sue and be sued, and dispose of their estates as they wished. However, they still lacked elements of the social and cultural authority conferred by masculinity.

Customary laws offered specific guidelines over transitions in women's marital, thus familial, state. Giant law books chart the changing rights, privileges, and restrictions on wives, daughters, and widows, and laws particularly concerned themselves with the flowing of property from one generation to the next. As child bearers, women played especially important roles in the transmission of property. As women passed through the different stages of their lives—from being daughters to wives, wives to mothers, wives to widows—customary laws shaped their rights. However, sometimes the dictates of common law went against what families perceived as their best interest. In such cases, some families self-consciously used contracts to override customary practices, with the overall goal of preserving the wealth and well-being of their members.

This was especially true in wealth- and lineage-conscious La Rochelle, where customary law facilitated the linear passage of wealth from parents to children, in contrast to lateral inheritance by marriage. Wealthy families worked to ensure that even daughters, who in some parts of France were considered a drain on family resources and whose marriages represented an irrevocable loss of family capital, were well provided for and that family wealth flowed from one generation to the next intact. Their use of marriage contracts and wills to safeguard family wealth opened

their husbands. In these cases, men could not sell or alienate their property without their wives' consent.

up financial opportunities for some women, and at the same time subtly shifted women's position within the family.

For wealthy families who engaged in colonial trade, strategies of marriage and inheritance had particular significance. Possessors of immense resources and often poised on the brink of entry into the nobility, they yet were not allowed aristocratic exemptions to inheritance law, which enabled members of the second estate to pass property intact to a single son. Further, the transatlantic trade itself posed significant challenges to family life. It entailed the long, often permanent absence of family members, and other family members stepped in to fill roles vacated by those who were gone. Trading families contemplating the marriage of one of their members, then, would have carefully considered not only how to best preserve their family patrimony, but also how to best enable new spouses to fulfill flexible roles within the structure of the family, a necessary step given the protracted absence of a marriage partner.

Families carefully considered how the marriage of a daughter could advance their overall family strategy. For daughters, the dowry often formed a significant amount of their overall portion of their share of their parents' joint estate.⁹ A daughter's marriage, then, meant that a family had to muster its resources, and decide how much could be diverted from other family investments. The larger the dowry the better the match a daughter was likely to make, so the family had an interest in dowering their daughter as well as they could. In La Rochelle, particularly among the

⁹ For more information on the legal role of and restrictions on dowries, see *Ibid.*, pp. 402-408. According to Lepointe, the customary law of La Rochelle allowed a conventional or prefixed dowry (*douaire conventionnel ou prefix*), p. 403. This meant that a woman had to choose at the time of her marriage if she would have use of a fixed amount of the joint estate if her husband predeceased her, or if she would inherit half of their joint estate, as specified in customary law.

merchant class who engaged in transatlantic colonial trade and owned colonial properties, preparing for the future at the time of marriage included considering a wife's role in this business. Although for centuries women had played important roles in managing family businesses, participating in both the production of goods and their distribution, since the Middle Ages, marriage contracts and wills very rarely gave women credit for playing an equal role in the production of goods or wealth by leaving them full control of their connubial estate at their husband's death.¹⁰ Instead, in western France in particular, provisions were made for the widow's care in her old age or to enable her to run the business in the name of her children during their minority, but very rarely to give her full control in her own right. Marie-Madeline Royer, with the help of her family, used her marriage contract to circumvent limitations customary laws placed on women's roles. She thereby also shifted her position and power within her new family.

Marie-Madeline Royer was a catch for the young trader Jean Severin Regnaud de Beaumont; the only child of wealthy parents, she stood to inherit a vast colonial plantation and all the commercial possibilities it promised. As her husband, Beaumont would have complete authority over and enjoyment of her holdings for the duration of their marriage. When Beaumont married Marie-Madeline Royer, he likely knew that she was an astute businesswoman with experience in colonial trade and an insider's knowledge of Saint-Domingue.¹¹ Although she spent her early life

¹⁰ Martha Howell, *The Marriage Exchange: Property, Social Place, and Gender in Cities of the Law Countries, 1300-1550* (Chicago, 1998)

¹¹ Other authors also discuss the importance of women's roles in the success of their husbands' businesses. For example, Clare Crowston discusses the role wives played in tailors' businesses. Clare Crowston, "Engendering the Guilds: Seamstresses, Tailors, and the Clash of Corporate Identities in Old Regime France," *French Historical Studies* 23, no. 2 (2000):339-371, p. 351-353.

in La Rochelle, her parents lived on a plantation in Cul-de-Sac, Saint-Domingue, a parish of the town of Croix-des-Bouquets, not far inland from the capital, Port-au-Prince. The economy of this area of Saint-Domingue had expanded rapidly during the sugar and coffee booms of the eighteenth century, and colonists cleared land to make way for vast plantations. Sugar cultivation, in particular, expanded in this area, and Croix-des-Bouquets held some of the largest plantations in the colony.¹² Land in this region was extremely valuable, leasing for up to twice the cost of similar plantations on other parts of the island.¹³ This area also was an enclave for Rochelais merchants and planters; Aimé-Benjamin Fleuriau owned a sugar plantation, the pearl of his commercial empire, nearby in Cul-de-Sac, and he had dealings with Marie-Madeline's parents.¹⁴

Because Marie-Madeline Royer's widowed mother lived in Saint-Domingue, far from her only daughter in La Rochelle, the marriage required particularly careful planning. Terms of a marriage contract could go well beyond the amount of a dowry, to include provisions for a woman's widowhood, the distribution of her estate after her death, both if the marriage produced children or did not, or even to place limits on the couple over their inheritance of their parents' estates. Parents also had to give

¹² Stuart King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig: Free People of Color in Pre-Revolutionary Saint-Domingue* (Athens, GA, 2001), p. 133.

¹³ Stuart King puts the colony-wide average in the eighteenth century at 23,970 livres, less than half as much as the 65,636 livres average for Croix des Bouquets. He does not specify if the plantations in and around Croix des Bouquets were larger than those elsewhere, although he suggests earlier that they were (see fn. 5). *Ibid.*, p. 138.

¹⁴ Veuve Royer, presumably to her daughter Marie-Madeleine Royer Regnaud, 4 August 1735, E 513, ADCM. The widow explains, "I was obliged to send it [a letter] at the expense of Monsieur Fleuriau at Léogane... that is to say, the first envelope in order to equalize this next one and to pay to put another envelope and your address." (C'est que j'ai été obligée de l'envoyer au frais de Mr Fleuriaux a Léoganne... C'est a dire, la première envelope pour faire egallizer cette prochainement et payé de mettre une autre envelope et votre adresse.) Although she refers to Fleuriau in Léogane, a town not far to the south of Port-au-Prince, it is possible that she simply misspoke. Her letter also could have been sent by way of Léogane, which was a port town, while Croix-des-Bouquets was landlocked.

their consent to marriages if the children had not yet reached the age of majority, 25 for women and 30 for men.¹⁵ As Marie-Madeline's father had passed away in Saint-Domingue and her mother still lived on the island, this legal requirement posed challenges to the bride's side of the family. Although the bridegroom's father attended the ceremony and gave his consent to the marriage, only the bride's aunt stood at her side when the contract was signed. In an attestation to the careful planning that went with entering into a marriage, the previous November the mother of the bride, still in Saint-Domingue, had sent a power of attorney to her sister in La Rochelle, which authorized the marriage and gave the bride's aunt the authority to make the contract in her mother's stead.¹⁶

Their marriage contract states that Marie-Madeline Royer, native of the La Rochelle's wealthiest parish of Saint-Barthélemy, daughter of a wealthy merchant and sole heiress to a considerable colonial fortune, married Jean Severin Regnaud de Beaumont on the 15 March, 1735. The bridegroom also was a native of the same parish, the son of an official of the king at the Admiralty of La Rochelle. The couple acknowledged in their marriage contract that they "will be one," and that "all the goods that they possess on the day of their nuptial blessings, and all the other personal

¹⁵ The Edict of 1556 aimed to discourage clandestine marriage by raising the age of majority to 25 for women and 30 for men. Paul Ourliac, and Jehan de Malafosse, *Le Droit familial*, vol. 3 (Paris, 1968), pp. 204-205. Because the Catholic Church had jurisdiction over marriage the crown could not interfere with it directly; however, by enabling parents to disinherit children who contracted clandestine marriages the Edict offered a powerful disincentive. James Traer puts this Edict in the context of a continuing battle for authority between the Church and the King; marriage was an important battleground, and the king gradually gained more and more authority over the sacrament. By the eighteenth century, marriage was considered a contractual relationship more than a sacramental one. James Traer, *Marriage and the Family in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, NY, 1980), pp. 31-47, esp. p. 33; on the philosophes and their use of contract theory to challenge the indissolubility of the marriage bond, see p. 52.

¹⁶ "Procuration," between Marie Douteau, veuve Royer, and Demoiselle Ester Douteau, 10 November 1734, E 516, ADCM.

property acquired during their future joint estate” would be held jointly, according to common law.¹⁷

In uniting her estate with her husband’s Marie-Madeline Royer also surrendered to him full control over her holdings, both present and future. He could sell or mortgage her property as he wished, with the sole exception of her dowry, which was intended to support her in the case of her widowhood, and pass directly to her children. Marriage gave men full civil power to form contracts while at the same time expressly curtailing the rights women had over property. The *Coutumier General*, which recorded the customary laws of all the regions in France, specified that in La Rochelle, “every man who marries is outside of his father’s power, and can contract, pursue, and defend his rights, as if his father had expressly emancipated him” from paternal authority, even if under the age of thirty.¹⁸ On the other hand, “every married woman is in the power of her husband.” She could not form contracts, sell or give away property, appear at court, or engage in business. Further, as the “master of the goods and acquired real estate of the joint estate that is between him and his wife,” the husband could “sell them, transfer them, or mortgage them...at his will, without the consent of his wife.”¹⁹ Although a husband could not cut his

¹⁷ “Contrat de mariage,” verified 29 March 1735, E 513, ADCM. American historian Amy Dru Stanley considers the particular nature of marriage contracts in the context of the first-wave feminist movement in the United States. Contemporary legal theorists viewed the marriage contract as different from other contracts, she argues, because unlike a contract of sale or a labor contract, it created a hierarchy of status. Feminists, on the other hand, “invoked contract as a model for equality in marriage, counterposing it to bondage.” Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (New York, 1998), Chapter 5, especially p. 180; p. 184.

¹⁸ Charles A. Bourdot de Richebourg, *Nouveau Coutumier General, ou corps des coutumes generales et particulieres de France, et des Provinces*, vol. 4 (Paris, 1724), p. 856.

¹⁹ “Le mari est maître des meubles & conqués immeubles de la Communauté de biens qui est entre lui et sa femme. Il peut les vendre, aliéner, ou hypothéquer, & en faire & disposer à sa volonté, sans le consentement de sa femme, par donations ou autres dispositions entre-vifs, pourvu que les donations soient faites à personnes capables, & sans fraude.” Langloix, *Principes Généraux de la Coutume de*

wife out of his will, he had the sole right to dispose of any assets she brought to the marriage, without her consent.²⁰

These limitations were in line with what women throughout France could expect upon marriage: married women were legally incapacitated from the moment they entered into wedlock.²¹ This did not mean that women had absolutely no rights, and safeguards existed to protect wives from fortune-hunting or spendthrift husbands. For example, although husbands could manage dotal properties and incomes, they could not sell them. Common law stated that the dowry “was to give the woman a means to subsist more honestly after the dissolution of the marriage, and to assure the children a certain right over the assets of their father,” as the dowry theoretically took care of all a woman’s needs in her widowhood, and prevented her from laying claim to further portions of her husband’s estate.²² Often comprised of the assets the wife brought to the marriage, the dowry was intended to last beyond the union, for the widow’s lifetime and beyond. Most customary laws governing marriage, then,

Paris, Où les Articles du Texte, & les Ordonnances qui y ont rapport, sont rangés dans un ordre méthodique, pour en faciliter l'usage, 3 ed. (Paris, 1746), p. 188. On the rights of the husband over the wife’s property, also see François Jean Marie Olivier-Martin, *Histoire de la coutume de la prévôté et vicomté de Paris*, vol. 2 part 1 (Paris, 1926), p. 237.

²⁰ Langloix, *Principes Généraux de la Coutume de Paris*, p. 189. The only exception to this rule is the *immeubles propres* the wife brought to the marriage, which might include land, for example, or other assets that were not transportable. The husband could not dispose of such assets without his wife’s consent (p. 189). However, she also could not dispose of it without her husband’s consent. She was merely a sort of custodian, who made sure the land remained in the family until it could be passed to her children.

²¹ See 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 and Susan Staves Brewer, (New York, 1995), p. 175. Diefendorf argues that “married women were legally incapable because they were married and not because they were women.” However, because only women were legally incapacitated, I would argue instead that their incapacity had everything to do with their gender. According to early twentieth century legal historian François Jean Marie Olivier-Martin, this conjugal community governed by customary law was “the normal regime between spouses” and the “necessary consequence of marriage.” The marital community comprised all the “liquid assets and debts of each of the spouses from the moment of the marriage.” François Jean Marie Olivier-Martin, *Histoire de la coutume de la prévôté et vicomté de Paris*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1922), pp. 225 and 227.

²² Langloix, *Principes Généraux de la Coutume de Paris*, p. 143.

viewed women as carriers or custodians of wealth. Their role within the family often contributed to the expansion of their husbands' estates, which his children or other kin would eventually inherit; most married women lacked the legal capacity to devote their labors to expanding their own fortunes.²³ Married women even had limited access to their dowries, which their husbands oversaw until their deaths, although these funds were, in theory, in women's name alone. These precautions helped to keep property intact to pass to future generations.

However, the customary law of the west, from Normandy south through the Aunis and Angoumois, conceptualized family slightly differently from the rest of France.²⁴ In La Rochelle and the rest of the west, the family of birth took precedence over the family of marriage, and property flowed through wives' families as well as

²³ An exception to this rule was *marchandes publiques*, who had the legal right to enter into contracts in their own names. On the *marchandes publiques* and the guilds, see Daryl Hafter, "Female Masters in the Ribbonmaking Guild of Eighteenth-Century Rouen," *French Historical Studies* 20, no. 1 (1997):1-14, Carol Loats, "Gender, Guilds, and Work Identity: Perspectives from Sixteenth-Century Paris," *French Historical Studies* 20, no. 1 (1997):15-30, William Sewell, "Social and Cultural Perspectives on Women's Work: Comment on Loats, Hafter, and DeGroat," *French Historical Studies* 20, no. 1 (1997):49-54.

²⁴ Jean Yver presents the customary laws in different regions of France in great depth. Although he differentiates each specific region, he basically finds that the south of France relied on written Roman law, which tended to give absolute control to the father in terms of determining inheritance, and to the husband over his wife's property. In the center around Paris, parents exercised the option of either dividing their estate equally among children or advantaging one heir over the others. Although the husband controlled his wife's property, some safeguards existed to prevent him from alienating her dowry, which was intended to provide for her in her widowhood. In general, after one spouse died, the survivor inherited most of their wealth. In the east, including La Rochelle, parents had no choice but to divide their estate equally among all heirs, boys and girls. (In other parts of France that practiced this regime of strict equality, such as Normandy, only boys were considered.) Spouses' property remained quite separate, and they left it to their blood relations, rather than their marriage relations. Jean Yver, *Égalité entre héritiers et exclusion des enfants dotés: Essai de géographie coutumière* (Paris, 1966). Also see Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, "Family Structures and Inheritance Customs in Sixteenth-Century France," in *Family and Inheritance: Rural Society in Western Europe, 1200-1800*, ed. Joan Thirsk Jack Goody, and E.P. Thompson, (Cambridge, 1976), who offers a synthesis of Yver's work. Other scholars, including Barbara Diefendorf and David Sabean, have nuanced these interpretations, arguing for the importance of not only the law, but also how the law is practiced. See David Sabean, "Aspects of Kinship and Property in Western Europe before 1800," in *Family and Inheritance: Rural Society in Western Europe 1200-1800*, ed. Joan Thirsk Jack Goody, and E.P. Thompson, (Cambridge, 1976), Diefendorf, "Women and Property in *Ancien Régime* France," and Barbara B. Diefendorf, "Widowhood and Remarriage in Sixteenth-Century Paris," *Journal of Family History* 7, no. 4 (1982):379-395.

husbands'. In this tradition of preserving lineage property over conjugal property, husbands' and wives' estates remained largely separate, even once they were married. Often, some property remained outside of the marital community and under the control of the spouse who owned it; for example, although a husband did control his wife's assets, he absolutely could not sell her family property without her consent.²⁵ This system, then, bound generations and branches of families more closely together; grandparents, aunts and uncles, sisters and brothers, parents and children all had a common interest in fostering and preserving family property.²⁶ It had the further effect of shifting women's position within their families of birth and marriage. Wives, supported by their own family connections, could influence husbands' custodial decisions about their family property, while mothers, carriers of property in their own right, could have more direct sway over their children.

In the west, inheritance law also shaped family relations. Upon death of one spouse, the survivor inherited half of their joint liquid assets and the other half passed directly to the children; the survivor's half was distributed to children upon the death of the surviving parent. In the event that the couple remained childless, the wife's half of the estate reverted to her birth family and the husband's half to his.²⁷ That is

²⁵ Richebourg, *Nouveau Coutumier General*. "Le mary peut sans sa femme, poursuivre seul tous meubles & droit de chose non concernant heritage de sa femme, arrerages de rentes & fruits, & tous autres droits & acquests immeubles faits durant leur mariage, & iceux aliener & en disposer sans elle, si elle n'est contrahant & nommée ès lettres des contrats de l'acquisition." Chapter 9, Article XXII, p. 856.

²⁶ As French family historian François Lebrun put it, "Marriage was a thing too serious to result from a personal choice." François Lebrun, *La Vie conjugale sous l'ancien régime* (Paris, 1975), p. 22, and pp. 21-31 on how families went about choosing prospective spouses for their members.

²⁷ Richebourg, *Nouveau Coutumier General*, p. 859, Chapter XVI, Article XLVII states that "L'homme et la femme joints par mariage ensemble, sont communs en biens meubles et acquests immeubles faits entr'eux durant leurdit mariage, et au survivant d'eux deux appartient la moitié, s'il n'y a convenance par traité de mariage au contraire." Chapter XVIII Article L states that "Quand aucun va de vie à trespasement sans hoirs procréés de sa chair *ab intestat*, delaisant plusieurs heritages à luy eschez par succession de diverses branches, les heritiers de chacune desdites branches, luy succedent ès heritages

to say, if a couple got married and one spouse predeceased the other before they had children, his or her property would revert to parents, siblings, or even more distant kin rather than go to the surviving spouse. This system ensured widowed women a certain amount of independence and had the additional advantage of keeping one family's property within that family; the wife's estate, with the exception of her liquid assets, was not wholly absorbed into the husband's.

Further, in La Rochelle, every child, boys and girls, inherited strictly equal portions of the parental estate; parental wishes, as expressed in their wills, had little impact. Gifts given to children during the parents' lifetimes, including dowries, were not permanent; a gift to any child was counted as part of the overall estate. If a dowry comprised less than a daughter's share in her parents' wealth, upon their death she received a further inheritance. If it exceeded her share, however, she had to pay her brothers and sisters the difference. The equal division of parental property worked well in urban port towns such as La Rochelle, where wealth was largely comprised of liquid assets, such as urban property, income from *rentes*, and income generated from transatlantic trade. The diverse holdings of a wealthy merchant or a modest shopkeeper could be divided easily among heirs. Among the rich, the family home usually went to the oldest son, while younger sons inherited less imposing pieces of property, and daughters usually acquired liquid assets.²⁸ Assets flowed from generation to generation, strengthening all branches of the family tree.

advenus au trespasé du costé de la brandont ils font: parce que selon la coustume, lesdits biens et heritages suivent la ligne de la branche dont ils sont venus.”

²⁸ For example, Aimé-Benjamin Fleuriau divided the bulk of his estate into three equal portions which were inherited by his children. His eldest son inherited the family *hôtel particulier* in La Rochelle, his younger son inherited other various properties, while his daughter primarily inherited liquid assets. “Dépôt du testament olographe de M. Aimé Benjamin Fleuriau,” 21 August 1787, in the files of Notary Delavergne fils, 3 E 1698, ADCM.

This common law system, then, offered both advantages and disadvantages to wealthy families. Provisions for equal inheritance among children meant the certain fragmentation of estates, and the possible delaying of the long climb to enter the aristocracy. On the other hand, it meant that family resources always remained within the lineage; the marriage of a child was a temporary alliance designed to facilitate the flow of property from one generation to the next, not an irrevocable loss of capital.²⁹ These were the concerns that the Royer and Regnaud de Beaumont clans would have brought to the table when negotiating the marriage of their two youngest members.

Balancing Common Law and Contracts

From the moment they affixed their signatures on their marriage contract, Marie-Madeline Royer and Jean-Severin Regnaud de Beaumont both gave up some of the protections and circumvented some of the limitations of common law in the city on the sea. The contract took precedence over the *Coutumier*, which made it all the more important that it safeguard the interests of the uniting families.³⁰ For the young heiress, her widowed mother, and her maiden aunt, this meant preserving the entirety of their colonial plantation and the profits it generated.

²⁹ The financial ties between two families built by marriage lasted only as long as the union itself; they thus needed to be constantly renewed, and indeed families who had long-standing trade alliances also had similarly long histories of intermarriage. One example of this practice is the Belin and Seignette families. In 1723, Jean Seignette and Marie Judith Belin baptized a daughter (FF 243). The next year, Samuel Seignette and Jeanne Marie Belin married (GG 250). In 1738, a daughter was born to Jacques Allard Belin and Marie Marguerite Rasteau, whose mother was a Seignette (GG 254). In 1740, Pierre Samuel Seignette and Jeanne Marie Anne Belin baptized their daughter (GG 256). In 1745, Samuel Seignette and Jeanne Marie Anne Belin baptized their daughter (GG 261). All parish records are found in the AMLR.

³⁰ On marriage contracts and their relationship to customary law, see Lepointe, *Droit Romain et ancien droit Français: Régimes matrimoniaux, libéralités, successions*, pp. 372-373.

This goal posed several challenges. First and foremost was the simple difficulty of managing land on the other side of the Atlantic. In general, husbands set out to brave the challenges posed by the sugar islands, while wives remained ensconced amongst their families and communities in France, charged instead with managing family affairs from the metropolitan side of the ocean. Managing colonial holdings could entail years, even decades, of separation of husband from wife, and during this time she would have little sway over his business decisions, even those pertaining to what was technically her property. Further, transatlantic crossings posed many perils, and colonists faced others: hurricanes and disease both claimed many lives in the sweltering tropics. Were the young bride widowed, particularly without children, she could face difficulties managing, or even keeping, her property.

The marriage contract worked to provide for these eventualities by carefully circumnavigating legal traditions, and writing in provisions that ensured that Marie-Madeline Royer would have the greatest amount of authority over her heritage that was open to married, or widowed, women. Consequently, her marriage contract walks a line between the common law of La Rochelle, city of her birth and residence, and the more widespread *coutume de Paris*. This latter tradition differed primarily in the assets over which a wife retained ownership, and in the distribution of an estate upon the death of parents.

Men and women brought two types of property into marriage: personal property (*meubles*) and real estate property (*immeubles*).³¹ This separation ensured

³¹ In La Rochelle and several other parts of France, real property was further divided into property acquired by the fruits of one's own labor (*acquêts*) and inherited property (*propres*). Ralph Giesey offers definitions of *meubles*, *immeubles*, *acquêts*, and *propres*, and points out that *acquêts* passed from one generation to another became *propres*, part of a family "trust for succeeding generations."

that real estate property remained in a family; separating real estate property from other goods ensured that the former remained intact when dividing inheritances among children, and protected it from creditors. Real estate property covered a broad definition of assets, however, including anything inherited from a previous generation. Inherited property, usually comprising land, annuities, and offices, could not be sold or alienated by its possessor; rather, it was kept to pass on to succeeding generations.³² By the eighteenth century, money could also on occasion be considered an *immeuble*, that is, a portion of the estate that could not be divided by testament or in the paying off of debts and dividing of the estate.³³ In the case of the Regnaud de Beaumont marriage contract, Jean Severin Regnaud de Beaumont pledged 10,000 livres to his wife; this was considered an *immeuble* because it was specifically earmarked for their future children.

In La Rochelle, then, a broad variety of assets fell into the category of *immeubles*, the family properties over which a wife retained ultimate control, and which reverted to a widow in their entirety on her husband's death. These included all the property women brought into a marriage, any family properties they inherited, inherited cash or personal property, and half of the joint estate comprised of any assets earned during the marriage. In contrast, Parisian customary law considered inheritance of cash or *meubles* part of community property, or the couple's joint

Ralph E. Giesey, "Rules of Inheritance and Strategies of Mobility in Prerevolutionary France," *The American Historical Review* 82, no. 2 (1977):271-289, pp. 272-273. On the distinction between *meubles* and *immeubles* in Parisian customary law, see Olivier-Martin, *Histoire de la coutume de la prévôté et vicomté de Paris*, p. 202-211.

³² As Giesey argues, during the sixteenth and seventeenth century the definition of *propres* expanded to include annuities and offices. Giesey, "Rules of Inheritance and Strategies of Mobility in Prerevolutionary France," p. 273.

³³ Olivier-Martin, *Histoire de la coutume de la prévôté et vicomté de Paris*, p. 210-211.

estate.³⁴ Further, the wife only had a life interest in her dowry, which ultimately reverted to the husband's heirs, lost to the wife's family forever.³⁵ In spite of these disadvantages, seemingly grave from the point of view of a family intent on preserving their own heritage, Marie-Madeline Royer's marriage contract specified that it would be governed by the laws of the *Coutume de Paris*, rather than those of La Rochelle.³⁶

Despite this seemingly curious provision, the contract proceeded to elaborate the division of the spouses' property in exact accordance with the laws of La Rochelle. The Royer and Regnaud de Beaumont families each possessed considerable assets, and the marriage contract specified that the *immeubles* of the two families remain strictly separate. The bridegroom possessed assets he inherited from his mother and grandmother, previously earned income from his merchant voyages, and a lump sum and an annual income given to him by his father. Only about one-third of these assets entered into community property, to be used to purchase furniture and personal possessions. A similar proportion of the bride's net worth entered into their joint estate, earmarked to purchase the personal and domestic goods necessary in setting up a new household.³⁷ The rest of their assets, including real estate property,

³⁴ Langloix, *Principes Généraux de la Coutume de Paris*, p. 144.

³⁵ The law stipulated that "the dowry, either customary or predetermined, is only for a life interest with regard to the wife, after the death of which the holdings lawfully return to the heirs of the husband, if there is not a stipulation to the contrary in the marriage contract." Ibid., p. 148. If the couple had children, eventually the dowry would belong to the children. Under Parisian common law, however, if all the children died after inheriting the dowry, the money would remain in the husband's family (Langloix, *Principes Généraux de la Coutume de Paris*, p. 150). Under the common law of La Rochelle, however, it would pass back to the wife's. Richebourg, *Nouveau Coutumier General*, p. 859, Ch. XVIII.

³⁶ France's Caribbean colonies had been governed by the *Coutume de Paris* since 1635.

³⁷ "Contrat de mariage," 29 March 1735, E 513, ADCM . 5,000 livres of the groom's individual estate, less than one-third of his total liquid assets, were to enter the couple's joint estate to be used to buy furniture. The bride received a sum of 30,000 livres from her mother, an advance on her inheritance.

prospective inheritances, and lump sums of cash, remained strictly separate.

Although Regnaud de Beaumont would have the use and enjoyment of his wife's family wealth for his lifetime, he absolutely could not sell or alienate it in any way, and had to pass it to her heirs, preferably through their future children, intact. Any profits made from their separate estates would become part of their community property, half of which would pass to the heirs of each spouse upon their deaths.

For wealthy families, the common laws of Paris offered one major advantage over those of La Rochelle: testamentary control. Testators had the option of designating a primary legatee, which meant, for example, that parents could favor one child over others in the distribution of their estates. For Marie-Madeline Royer, following the inheritance laws of Paris also meant that she, as a wife, could inherit her husband's entire estate. Her marriage contract specified that her husband's property would not proceed directly to his heirs upon his death. Instead, she had the choice of retaining control of the entire estate, keeping half the estate and passing the other half immediately to her children, or renouncing the entire estate. These detailed provisions allow the possibility that Marie-Madeline Royer could continue a thriving transatlantic business on her own, as a widow. Her colonial upbringing, her merchant father, her sustained involvement in her mother's continuation of his business made this a very strong possibility.

In fact, throughout her life she played an integral role in her husband's colonial trade. If trade was strong and profits high, this provision offered her the authority to make the decision, based on her own judgment and business sense, about

Again, about one-third of her total assets entered into their joint estate, to be used to purchase personal property, while the remainder was reserved as part of Marie-Madeline's personal estate.

how best to safeguard and augment their children's inheritance after her husband's death. She also could follow the customs of La Rochelle by passing half of a thriving business to her children, and continuing to run it in partnership with them.³⁸ Finally, if the worst happened and her husband's estate was in ruins, she could renounce it altogether, leaving her "free and clear of all debts," thus protecting herself and her family property from creditors, and preserving the assets she had brought into the marriage intact to pass along to her children.³⁹ This option provided a valuable escape clause for a widow who, as a wife, had no formal control over the contracts and decisions made by her husband.⁴⁰ However, if Marie-Madeline Royer had to face her husband's bankruptcy, she evidently intended to do it in style. Her marriage contract specified that if she decided to renounce the estate altogether, giving it to their children before her death, she could keep a furnished room in the family home, along with her jewelry, clothing, personal effects, and the considerable sum of 10,000 livres. Alternately, she could take a sum of 4,000 livres to find her own furnished room if she did not wish to live with her children.⁴¹

As we shall see, Marie-Madeline Royer had good occasion to make use of this escape clause upon her husband's death. In the intervening years between her marriage and her widowhood, however, she crossed the Atlantic twice, bore three children, and played a pivotal role in creating and maintaining the trading networks

³⁸ For example, the widow of Issac Garasché, a *negotiant* in La Rochelle, continued running his business after his death with the help of her extensive and well-connected family in the 1720s and 1730s. 5 J 21, ADCM.

³⁹ "Contrat de Mariage," 29 March 1735, E 513, ADCM.

⁴⁰ As both Barbara Diefendorf and Martha Howell point out, this customary practice enabled women to purposefully avoid financial obligations, sometimes at the expense of other family members. Diefendorf, "Women and Property in *Ancien Régime* France," p. 177; Howell, *The Marriage Exchange*, p. 120. However, it also opened options for women who wanted to safeguard their own family property from their husbands' creditors.

⁴¹ "Contrat de mariage," 29 March 1735, E 513, ADCM.

necessary to make a profit from the sale of colonial goods. She did this largely alone; her husband traveled to Saint-Domingue a few short years after their marriage, and never returned to France. Left at the head of a household, without male relatives in La Rochelle to conduct business in her name or stead, only the *procuration*, or power of attorney, given to her by her husband on their final separation gave her the authority to do something as simple as make a purchase or pay a bill. Armed with the 1743 *procuration*, therefore, Marie-Madeline Royer, femme Regnaud de Beaumont, wielded the same power as her husband to make contracts. She used this authority to consolidate the influence she wielded over other people—including slaves.

Powers of Attorney

Not long after their marriage and the births of their two daughters, Regnaud de Beaumont left his native city of La Rochelle for Saint-Domingue, which was in the midst of a sugar and coffee boom brought on by an increase in European demand for colonial products. There he took over the management of his mother-in-law's plantation, which specialized in the production of indigo, but where he also produced sugar. The planter never returned to France, although his wife did make one final transatlantic journey to Saint-Domingue in the early 1750s; a late-life son was born to them there in 1753, who returned to La Rochelle with his mother in 1755.⁴² With the exception of these few years passed together in the Antilles, Marie-Madeline

⁴² “Extrait des Registres de la paroisse de Saint Rosaire (?) de Léogane Isle et Coste de Saint Domingue.” The child was baptized 11 December 1753, and the copy of the record was made 5 July 1766, E 514, ADCM. She and her son returned to La Rochelle about the 15 or 20 May 1755. Bechade in Bordeaux to Madame Veuve Royer in La Rochelle, 4 July 1755. “J’ai reçu avant hier une lettre de M. Regnaud..., par laquelle il me marquee que Madame son epouse devoit partir pour La Rochelle le 15 or 20 de mai dernier, dans le Navire le Theodore.” E 514, ADCM.

Regnaud de Beaumont wielded her husband's power of attorney from the time of his initial departure for the colonies in 1743, until his death in 1775.⁴³

Holding a husband's general power of attorney gave a woman a considerable amount of legal and fiscal control over her own and her husband's estate, to an extent unparalleled by any other situation in eighteenth-century France. Daughters were subject to their fathers or other male relatives; wives' legal identities and fiscal holdings were subsumed into that of their husbands; even widows, considered to have broad powers over their own estates, usually controlled their own finances only in custody for minor children. By holding her husband's power of attorney, Marie-Madeline Royer Regnaud de Beaumont wielded control over her and her husband's joint estate under the authority of his name, but in her own right. She ran her husband's affairs and her own from her house on the rue des Maitresses in La Rochelle, corresponding with merchants in Nantes, Bordeaux, Paris, and Saint-Domingue, arranging for shipment and dispersal of the indigo and other products sent from her husband's plantation, signing contracts and making business deals, and filing lawsuits to recover profits from sunken ships or crooked deals.

This state of affairs was by no means uncommon in trade-oriented La Rochelle. Many women's husbands left them alone, following the siren song of sugar. Although some men simply abandoned their wives, never to be heard from again and leaving their families to fend for themselves as best they could, others made detailed provisions for their spouses, and gave their wives the legal authority to

⁴³ Copy of power of attorney, prepared by Notaire Delavergne, 5 April 1743. Affixed to a contract for a piece of property she bought on 9 April, 1771, E 513, ADCM.

act in their stead.⁴⁴ The ship's captain Pierre Neau, for example, "on the point of departing for the Island and Coast of Saint Domingue, voluntarily and by the present acts made and constituted by his general and particular power of attorney, Demoiselle Jeanne Henriette Ladouë, his wife, who he authorizes well and duly for all that she does in his absence."⁴⁵ He gave her the power

to govern and administrate their goods and affairs, either in this town, province, or anywhere else, in the manner that she sees fit, to make a lease on their land (*faire baux de ferme*) or to rent their real estate, or otherwise to exploit and defend their interests, make deals and estimated prices that will suit for the reparations between parties; to sell, discontinue, or otherwise alienate the goods that pertain to them.⁴⁶ Similarly, Jacques Bidet, also a ship's captain on the point of departing for a long journey, gave his power of attorney to his wife Susanne Dellissart. By this act, signed and sealed before a notary, he

well and duly authorize[d] her in all that she does, by virtue of the present [notary act], to whom he gives power to appear in court for them both and their agents, to represent [them] before all judges, commissioners, notaries, clerks, and other public and private persons to whom it will appertain, to make decisions, to govern their goods and affairs either in this town, province, or anywhere else in the manner in which she sees fit.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Although by giving his wife his power of attorney a man gave her some measure of authority, I wish to emphasize that this cannot simply be interpreted as a way for husbands to empower their wives by allowing them equal access to power and control over their resources. Because of its temporary nature, the power of attorney in fact emphasizes husbands' power over their wives' civil life or death. In all cases, men controlled the gateway to their wives' civil authority: they could bestow it, but they could also take it away.

⁴⁵ "Procuration M Pre Neau a son epouse, 28 avril 1763," prepared by Notaire Delavergne. 3 E 1674, ADCM. "Lequel etant sur le point de partir pour l'Isle et Coste de St Domingue, a volontairement par ces presentes fait et constitué pour sa procuration general et speciale Dlle Jeanne Henriette Ladouë son epouse qu'il autorise bien et duement pour tout ce qu'elle fera dans son absence."

⁴⁶ Ibid. "Gouverner et administrateur leurs biens et affaires, soit en cette ville, province que partout ailleurs, de la maniere quelle avierera, faire baux a ferme ou a loyer a leurs immeubles ou autrement, les exploiter et vaire valloir, faire les marchés et devis qui couviendront pour les reparations et entretient d'iceux; vendre, arrester ou autrement alierer les biens que leur appartiennent et poussont (possesseront?)."

⁴⁷ "Procuration le Sieur Bidet a Dmille Delissart son Epouse, 1777," prepared by Notaire Delavergne. 3 E 1688, ADCM. « Qu'il autorise bien et duement pour tout ce qu'elle fera en vertu des présentes, a laquelle il donne pouvoir de comparoir pour eux deux et leurs personnes représenter pardevant tous juges, commissaires, notaires, greffiers et autres personnes publiques et particulieres qu'il apartiendra, régir, gouverner leurs biens et affaires soit en cette ville, province que partout ailleurs de la maniere qu'elle avisera. »

Madame Regnaud de Beaumont, then, found herself in the same legal situation as many other women whose husbands undertook the perilous sea voyage, unsure of their return.

Although possessing a power of attorney conferred legal authority on women, cultural limitations circumscribed the ways in which they could use this authority. Although shopkeepers might have willingly set up lines of credit for household accounts, businessmen sometimes proved less amenable to accepting shipments of colonial goods or entering into partnerships to outfit merchant voyages with a woman. In entering the male-dominated arena of transatlantic trade, Marie Madeline Royer ran into difficulties that her husband would have been unlikely to encounter. Her agents forestalled her requests, and her letters of credit were not honored. In spite of the many goods her husband sent to trade from the colonies, she struggled to obtain the necessities required to care for her family.

The power of attorney given to her by her husband, then, gave her the legal authority to act as his representative. However, in spite of her wealth and position, she still lacked some of the cultural clout possessed by a landed gentleman of considerable wealth. As she strove to muster the influence necessary to exercise the legal authority the power of attorney gave her, Madame Regnaud de Beaumont drew on the credibility of men besides her husband to persuade other merchants she was a force with which to reckon. Her main method for doing this was to foster relationships with a far-flung network of merchants, which stretched from the Atlantic ports of Bordeaux to Nantes, and from Paris in the east to the Antillean colonies in the west, with La Rochelle at its center. She mustered these contacts as

she needed them, empowering them, in turn, to act as her representative in situations where her femininity made it difficult to represent herself.

Madame Regnaud de Beaumont's correspondence with the Bordeaux merchant Jacob de Griselles began in 1768. When she encountered difficulty recovering the profits from a ship which she and her husband had helped to finance, she turned to de Griselles to represent her interests. When merchants wanted to engage in the colonial trade, in general several banded together to outfit a ship. In partnership, they would buy a vessel, refit the ship to suit the purposes of the voyage, hire a captain and crew, and gather and load the merchandise to be traded.⁴⁸ If the ship returned, preferably laden with sugar, each partner reaped a percentage of the profits commiserate with the percentage of the capital they had invested in the enterprise. If the ship was lost, each partner lost the money they initially invested. This practice diffused the risk among all the partners; even if they suffered a loss, perhaps it would not be a ruinous one.

When the ship the *Bellone* returned triumphantly to Bordeaux, laden with sugar and other colonial goods, Madame Regnaud de Beaumont eagerly anticipated the returns that would come from the quarter-share she and her husband owned in the ship. However, the funds remained in the hands of just one of the partners, who refused to disburse the proper amount of the profits to the other members of the society. Although her business and family commitments may have kept her in La Rochelle, the difficulties faced by women travelers also likely played a role in Madame Regnaud de Beaumont's decision to hire a lawyer in Bordeaux to file suit on

⁴⁸ Robert Harms, *The Diligent: A Voyage Through the Worlds of the Slave Trade* (New York, 2002), p. 76.

behalf of her and her husband rather than to travel to the southern city to take care of the matter herself.

The initial correspondence between Madame Regnaud de Beaumont and her agent Jacob de Griselles emphasized their personal connections, and touched on the ways in which personal relationships could ease the way towards the judicial close of a case. He assured her, “be very persuaded, Madame, of my zeal and my haste to solicit for myself and my friends the Judgment of the lawsuit that is in our Parlement.” By gathering as much information on the case as he could, he would gain “a familiarity with this affair to be able to act more effectively.”⁴⁹ He further emphasized his own connections with the judges, which he assured his employer would help him settle the case in their favor with due speed. Both parties wrote the gracious news-filled letters of acquaintances rather than the terse correspondences of business associates. For example, Griselles told Madame Regnaud de Beaumont that he had not heard from her husband, but that he understood that he was well and established on his plantation. For two and a half years, he assured her that their case was about to be heard, and that her share of the holdings of the society would be distributed to her.

Finally, after months of such communication without seeing a single sou of the profits, Madame Regnaud de Beaumont seems to have run out of money or patience. In a move that must have been galling to her pride, she asked Griselles for an advance on the profits she knew she was owed, drawing on her business acumen to

⁴⁹ Letter from Jacob de Griselles to Madame Regnaud de Beaumont, 22 October 1768, E 514, ADCM. « Soyez très persuadé, Madame, de mon zele et de mon empressement a solliciter par moi et mes amis le Jugement du process qui est à notre Parlement; il seroit meme boy(?) que j'ai un connoissance de cette affaire pour pouvoir agir plus efficacement.»

sharply insist on her rights. After her pressing, he finally admitted that “I do not know what to think of his [Monsieur Prevost, a partner in their enterprise who lived in the colonies] delay in getting the capital to me, knowing quite well that he has on hand more than one hundred thousand francs in capital of our society concerning the ship the *Bellone*.” He goes on to reveal to Madame Regnaud de Beaumont that Prevost has already paid her husband his quarter share of the profits. However, “I do not know,” he continues, “if he also remitted to him the seven thousand eight livres that I found owed to Monsieur your husband.”⁵⁰ Backpedaling somewhat on his extravagant promises to successfully present her case at the Parlement, he offered his sincere regrets on not being able to advance her any of these funds which she was owed. This was a blow indeed. Madame Regnaud de Beaumont’s special legal rights and privileges came to naught: in spite of her work, her responsibilities, and her best efforts, the hard-earned profits were dispensed directly to her husband, without even a word to her.

At this point, the letters underwent a striking transformation. Perhaps realizing Madame Regnaud de Beaumont’s dire financial straits, or perhaps responding to her increasingly insistent and detailed demands as to the efficacy of his accounting, Griselles abandoned his avuncular tone and went on the defensive. “I can easily prove to you,” he wrote, “that I had in advance for Monsieur your husband from the 25 April 1766 until the 10 February 1767, a sum of more than eleven thousand francs, and from the following 5 October until 5 May 1768 more than

⁵⁰ Letter from Jacob de Griselles to Madame Regnaud de Beaumont, 30 December 1769, E 514, ADCM. “Je ne scavois que penser de son retardement a me faire passer des fonds, sachant très bien qu’il a en caisse plus de cent mille francs des fonds de notre société concernant le navire La *Bellone*. ... Je ne sais pas s’il lui aura aussi remis les sept mille huit livres don’t je me trouve comptable envers M. votre mary.”

sixteen thousand livres.” However, since the agent had overseen and received the profits for the sale of the ship, “I find myself at present his debtor... of seven thousand francs.”⁵¹ He finally agreed to send her a bill of exchange for two thousand francs which she could draw on a firm in La Rochelle.⁵² When she received the bill and took it to the merchant in question, however, he refused to disburse the funds. In Griselles’ next letter, he defended himself against what must have been her bitter recriminations. “I will send [it] to you,” he says, “in spite of the reasons that I had the honor of sharing with you in my preceding [letter], that must by their validity engage you to not hound me as you do.”⁵³

Her letters in turn combined careful business accounts of what she was owed with astringent reproaches of his way of conducting business. She berated him, “my last [letter] of the 5 June has been until the present without response on your part, about which I am very surprised.” She went on to ask, “what [do] you intend to do on the subject of the sum that you must remit me? You complained wrongly, Monsieur that I hound you; but I complain rightly that you lead me on, and you mock me in every way.” Her indignation rests not only on her want or need for the sum of money, however, but also on careful research and calculations on her part. “I received,” she continued, “a letter from my husband, and [another] from M. Prevost,

⁵¹ Letter from Jacob de Griselles to Madame Regnaud de Beaumont, 27 April 1770, E 514, ADCM. “Je puis facilement vous prouver que j’ai été en avance pour M. Votre Mary depuis le 25 Avril 1766 jusqu’au 10 fevrier 1767, d’une somme de plus de onze mille francs, et depuis le 5 Octobre suivant jusqu’au 5 May 1768 de plus de seize mille livres.... Je me trouve à present son débiteur depuis le mois de Decembre dernier de sept mille francs.”

⁵² Letter from Jacob de Griselles to Madame Regnaud de Beaumont, 15 April 1770, E 514, ADCM. A Franc was an administrative unit only, and was equal to the sum of one livre.

⁵³ Letter from Jacob de Griselles to Madame Regnaud de Beaumont, 4 May 1770, E 514, ADCM. “Je vous le ferai passer, malgré les raisons que j’ai en l’honneur de vous faire part dans ma précédente qui ce me semble devoit par leur légitimité vous engager à ne pas me persecuter comme ce que vous le faites.”

who credited me as having received that sum.” She went on to threaten that either he provide her with the sum she asked for—two thousand—or she would withdraw all her accounts with him. After giving him a careful account of any expenses incurred on the lump sum he still held for her, including a bill of exchange he had previously remitted to her, she said, “it still seemed to leave me with 4308 livres.” Further, she refused to pay postage for letters he sent on her behalf.⁵⁴ Her threats worked; with his next letter, he sent her another bill of exchange for two thousand livres.⁵⁵ Having gotten what she wanted, she sent him a very nice note of thanks.⁵⁶

This correspondence suggests that the actual power conferred by the power of attorney was far less sweeping than the text of the document implied. Although Madame Regnaud de Beaumont may have been invested with the same rights, privileges, and legal abilities in a court of law, just getting her case into a courtroom proved to be a trial. Perhaps aware of these difficulties, Madame Regnaud de Beaumont first set out to settle her business disputes in more informal ways that were more easily accessible to women, particularly by fostering and trading on personal relationships. Only when this strategy proved unsuccessful did she bring her considerable business acumen to bear; with the evidence of her cold figures, supported by the accounting of her associates, her claim could not be denied.

⁵⁴ Her copy of letter from Madame Regnaud de Beaumont to Jacob de Griselles, 21 July 1770, E 514, ADCM. (Ma dernier du 5 juin ayant été jusqu’à présent sans réponse de votre part, de quoi je suis très surprise. Je réiténe(?) pour vous demander ce que vous comptés faire au sujet de la somme que vous devez me remettre? Vous vous êtes plaint à tort, Mr, que je vous persécutois, mais je me plains à bon droit de ce que vous me ballotez, et vous moquez de moi dans toutes les formes. ... J’ai reçu encore depuis peu, une lettre de mon mari, et de M. Prévost, qui me compte nantré de cette somme. ... Ce partaint il me revient encore 4308#.)

⁵⁵ Letter from Jacob de Griselles to Madame Regnaud de Beaumont, 3 August 1770, E 514, ADCM.

⁵⁶ Her copy of letter from Madame Regnaud de Beaumont to Jacob de Griselles, 7 August 1770, E 514, ADCM.

While the power of attorney gave her claims muscle, it remained in the background, a last resort, and she used it rather to pass along her husband's authority to others than to appropriate and wield it herself. When at last the case came before the court, she empowered Jacob de Griselles to make her claim. He wrote to her,

I do not fear winning this suit with expenses, if I have merchants for judges, who know all the nuance and force of my presentations; but if it will be magistrates who must judge a question that they do not perhaps consider, as if they were in the place of merchants, in the end we must wait until the time which the judgment is rendered, after which I will sigh heavily.⁵⁷

Madame Regnaud de Beaumont no doubt sighed heavily as well when her delicate correspondence with Griselles came to a close. It had been an exercise in carefully negotiating control, over where the responsibility for her business lay, who had control over her finances, and ultimately the manner in which she lived her life as a woman responsible for a household throughout her husband's long absence. This control was very important in order to maintain the well-being and position of her family. She had the opportunity to exercise it unequivocally when, in 1751 her husband sent her a slave.

Slavery and Contracts

The legal process of bringing or sending a slave to La Rochelle entailed several steps. First, the slave owner made a declaration to the office of the Admiralty immediately upon the slave's arrival. These declarations followed a fairly standardized formula, stating the slave's name and owner's name, the slave's place of

⁵⁷ Letter from Jacob de Griselles to Madame Regnaud de Beaumont, 18 May 1771, E 514, ADCM. "Je ne cranderoit pas de gagner ce process avec depens si j'avois pour Juges des Negociants, qui connoitroient toute l'entendu et la force de mes presencons(?), mais ce sera des Magistrates qui doivent juger une question qui le ne connoiserones peut être pas, comme feroient d'habille Negociants, enfin il faut attendre jusqu'au cu que le Jugement soit rendu, après lequel je soupier ardemment."

origin and age, and the reason the slave had come to France. There were only two acceptable reasons for owners to have slaves in the metropole: to teach them about the Catholic religion, or to teach them a trade. Most owners stated in their declaration that the slaves would be educated in both, and many went so far as to have their slaves baptized by their parish priest upon their arrival.⁵⁸

The protocol for registering a slave at the Admiralty office of La Rochelle was relatively informal; a slave owner, or his or her agent, simply had to appear at the office, where a clerk would ask the questions necessary to prepare the form. The owner would then sign the statement in the presence of the clerk. Though owners were supposed to make this declaration before the slave even disembarked from the ship, in actuality often days, even weeks, went by before the statement was recorded. Further, many owners assigned the task of making this declaration to an agent, rather than making it themselves. Although this may have been a strategy employed by the prosperous to avoid association with the dubious moral and legal position of slave owner, more likely those who had the means preferred to delegate the inconvenient trip to the rough area of the docks, and the hassle of dealing with harried admiralty clerks.

Women slave owners, in particular, usually avoided this responsibility.

Jeanne Henriette Sabatier, Margueritte Gaspard, Ester Rocher, Madame Beaupoil,

⁵⁸ Article II of the Code Noir stipulated that all slaves in the colonies, whether born there or brought from Africa, had to be baptized and instructed in Catholicism. However, in the colonies, religion lacked the weight it carried in France. Many Protestants from La Rochelle and other port cities found ample financial opportunities there, and local authorities even supported the property rights of Jews. This suggests that colonists may not have thought it necessary to comply with the law mandating slave baptism in the colonies, but that those who brought slaves to France may have found it in their best interest to comply with the law. See John Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint Domingue* (New York, 2006), pp. 39 and 151; and Charles Frostin, "Méthodologie missionnaire et sentiment religieux en Amérique française au 17e et 18e siècles: Le cas de Saint-Domingue," *Cahiers d'Histoire* 24, no. 1 (1979):19-43.

and the widow Hertou all deputized a male relative, friend, or associate to declare their slaves for them.⁵⁹ There were additional reasons why women might not have made these declarations on their own. Married women lacked the legal authority to sign the declaration, which after all was a binding contract promising to send the slave back to the colonies within three years. Some women may have lacked the confidence or expertise to attach their signature to the register. Others may have been wary of making their way to the Admiralty offices, which stood near the docks. And some may simply not have wanted the hassle, and used their gender as an excuse to avoid the responsibility, choosing instead to foist it off onto a convenient man.⁶⁰ Of the only four women who made their own declarations of their slaves between January 1751 and March 1753, for example, two were widows, legally responsible for making such arrangements themselves. One was a wife, traveling alone while her husband remained in the colonies. The last was Marie-Madeline Regnaud de Beaumont, who chose to make the trip down to an area frequented by sailors and dockworkers.⁶¹

A married woman without a husband, who held his power of attorney yet struggled to exercise the rights it expressly gave her, Marie-Madeline Regnaud de Beaumont found herself invested with but with a tenuous hold on social, cultural, and

⁵⁹ “Registre de la Majesté commancé le 22 janvier 1751 et fini le 21 mars 1753,” Admiralty Records B 229, ADCM. These declarations took place on 26 July 1751, 27 June 1752, 12 September 1752, 11 August 1752, and 3 October 1752 respectively.

⁶⁰ Similarly, Martha Howell points out how widows could use their gender to avoid responsibility for their late husbands’ debts. Howell, *The Marriage Exchange*, p. 151.

⁶¹ Dame Jeanne Julie, widow of Sr. Jean Theodore Vinveneuve Vinam, renewed a declaration her son had made two years before. Dame Margueritte Suzanne Pruet, widow of Mr. Philippe de Gallifet also renewed a declaration, thus ensuring her slave could remain with her longer in France. Marie Roze le Telletire, wife of François Guitton, an officer in the army in Saint-Domingue, got permission to bring a slave with her to France to serve her on the ship. She presented the admiralty officers with a signed permission from the governor of Saint-Domingue, which her husband had procured, which allowed her to travel with a slave. She merely had to endorse it.

family authority. When the opportunity presented itself, then, for her to form a contractual agreement that would unequivocally demonstrate her particular legal status in an unquestionable way, it was a sensible choice from both a business and a personal point of view: she could bolster her juridical legitimacy by making a contract, which at the same time would confer a certain cultural authority.⁶²

When Tranchemontagne, a slave belonging to Jean Severin Regnaud de Beaumont, arrived in La Rochelle on 15 September 1751, Marie Madeline Regnaud de Beaumont turned up at the admiralty office to make the declaration herself the very next day. Beaumont had sent the slave to his wife in La Rochelle, for the stated purpose of “instructing him in the Roman Catholic and Apostolic religion, and to have him learn a trade.”⁶³ In accordance with the law, she promised that when Tranchemontagne’s education had been completed, she would send him back to her husband’s plantation in Saint-Domingue, where the boy had been born and grown up. Tranchemontagne was only about sixteen years old at the time, and likely had never even ventured far from his plantation home, let alone made a long sea voyage to a strange land. He seems to have traveled alone; no other slaves arrived on the ship on which he made his journey, and there is no mention of him serving a white master or mistress on the voyage. However, something about the boy must have prompted his owner to choose him to make the journey to France: perhaps he was a favorite servant or the son of a favorite, perhaps he was a quick learner, perhaps he was exceptionally

⁶² Several historians have identified ways in which white women claimed political or social rights at the expense of people of color. See, for example, Louise Newman, *White Women's Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States* (New York, 1999), especially Chapter 2.

⁶³ Admiralty Records, Declaration of Slave, 16 September 1751, B229, ADCM.

handsome. It is even possible that Regnaud de Beaumont, who had two natural daughters by a former slave, had fathered the boy.⁶⁴

Once Tranchemontagne entered into her custody in La Rochelle, Madame Regnaud de Beaumont used every means available to her to legally inscribe her ownership over him. As a woman, even one empowered by her husband's authority, her claim to ownership of another human being was shaky at best. However, as the beneficiary of contracts herself, she knew the power of a signature. Following the letter of the law and affixing her own signature to each of the documents recording Tranchemontagne's presence in France, then, served a dual purpose: she both demonstrated her own understanding and mastery of the workings of the law, while simultaneously affirming her own position of social and cultural power by asserting her authority over someone else. Tranchemontagne proved a safe object for this project: as a newly-arrived slave, his position was much more tenuous than hers.

Tranchemontagne reappears in the archives a year after his arrival in France, when his mistress entered him into an apprenticeship contract.⁶⁵ In the intervening year, he likely served as a servant at his mistress's house on the Rue des Maitresses, a stylish address in the expensive Saint-Barthélémy parish, popular among people of means. On 6 November 1752, Marie-Madeline Regnaud de Beaumont fulfilled the legal requirement to train slaves in a trade by entering into a contract apprenticing her

⁶⁴ "Testament du Sr Regnaud de Beaumont homologué le 28 juin 1775," E 513, ADCM. In his will, Regnaud leaves a considerable legacy to his two "filles naturelles."

⁶⁵ According to the king's Edict of 1704, which mandated the registration of apprenticeship contracts, the certification of master status, and other documents related to the guilds, each apprenticeship in every town where guilds were active should have been registered with a royal clerk. René De Lespinasse, *Histoire général de Paris: Les Métiers et corporations de la ville de Paris*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1886), p. 136-137. *Édit du Roi portant creation d'offices de greffiers pour l'enregistrement des brevets d'apprentissage, lettres de maître, elections des jurés et redditions des comptes*, August, 1704. I found no suggestion that Tranchemontagne's apprenticeship was so registered; instead, his contract was made more privately, before a notary.

slave to Suzanne Vinet, widow of Simon St. Marc, master cooper. In it, she bound her slave to a one-year apprenticeship with the widow.

Theoretically, slaves who acquired such specialized skills would put them to use on Caribbean plantations; the law allowing owners to bring slaves to France for such training was designed with just this prospect in mind. A cooper's skills would have been in great demand on a sugar plantation, where great barrels held the refined or partially refined sugar that planters sent to Europe. However, few slaves learned trades in France, and even fewer of these returned to the colonies to exercise their acquired skills. Instead, free blacks who lived in the colonies more often supplied skilled colonial labor, although plantation owners sometimes also turned to white indentured servants.⁶⁶ White tradesmen sometimes worked for plantation owners for a few years in return for the price of passage, and hoped to acquire cheap land in order to cash in on the sugar boom. As part of their indenture contracts, each usually promised to "teach and instruct his trade in the stated time [of engagement] to a *nègre*," thus augmenting the number of skilled laborers in the colonies.⁶⁷

As Madame Regnaud could have apprenticed her slave to any of a number of coopers working in La Rochelle in the 1750s, this choice of mistress was significant.

Few women ran workshops alone. Women who managed to reach the status of

⁶⁶ According to John Garrigus, most free people of color in the South Province of Saint-Domingue worked as artisans, merchants, or farmers. He specifically identifies people of color who engaged in small commerce, operated taverns, engaged in lumber and construction trades, and ranching and leatherwork. Garrigus, *Before Haiti*, p. 72; pp. 72-81. Stuart King, in contrast, found that free people of color in the North Province generally were part of the planter elite or the military. King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig*. Moreau de Saint-Méry classifies Léoganne and Croix-des-Bouquets as part of the West Province, which Garrigus classifies as topographically, culturally, and economically similar to the North Province.

⁶⁷ Contract of indenture of Jean Mesele, 2 July 1733, Notary archives of René Riviere, 1733-1734, 2 Mi 1790-R 17 (3 E 1805), ADCM. In the same file, also see the contract of indenture of François Coiudreau Carron, 7 July 1733. Carron promised to teach his trade of blacksmith to two slaves. Both young men contracted themselves for two years and received their passage, room and board, and a small salary.

masters (or mistresses) in their own right usually were concentrated in female-dominated trades, such as seamstresses.⁶⁸ Widows of master craftsmen typically remarried quickly, although they also had the right to continue running their late husbands' workshops.⁶⁹ As a master's widow, the Widow St. Marc possessed the power and authority to make contracts and agreements, including those pertaining to her late husband's trade.⁷⁰ However, she could not exercise full guild privileges. For example, widows of masters, although they continued to enjoy guild membership themselves, had limited rights to train apprentices or hire journeymen.⁷¹ Nonetheless, Madame Regnaud de Beaumont bound Tranchemontagne to the Widow St. Marc, to serve an apprenticeship of one year. The unusually short tenure of this apprenticeship guaranteed that Tranchemontagne would become a semi-skilled worker at best, and would be unlikely to be able to perform the considerable responsibilities of cooper on a large sugar plantation, which demanded many barrels to transport refined and unrefined sugar, on his own. Further, terms of apprenticeship usually lasted between

⁶⁸ Clare Haru Crowston, *Fabricating Women: The Seamstresses of Old Regime France, 1675-1791* (Durham, North Carolina, 2001).

⁶⁹ Clare Haru Crowston argues that this practice of allowing widows to either continue practicing their late husbands' trades "in limited conditions" or letting them "transmit guild membership through marriage" to new husbands "acknowledged women's stake in the family economy." The guilds thus at least implicitly recognized the important roles women played in contributing to the production of goods. Guilds also acknowledged women's contributions by extending special rights and privileges to female kin of male guild members. *Ibid.*, pp. 183-184; 228. Artisans often chose a spouse from a family engaged in the same profession, thus reinforcing guild ties. According to François Lebrun, 40% of artisans chose a wife whose father had the same profession in the first half of the eighteenth century; this number rose to 54% in the second half of the century. The Widow St. Marc, proprietress of her own workshop, therefore would have been an attractive marriage prospect for unmarried coopers in La Rochelle. Lebrun, *La Vie conjugale sous l'ancien régime*, p. 26.

⁷⁰ As a widow, the Widow St. Marc possessed full authority to enter into contracts. However, women who joined guilds also possessed this right as *marchandes publiques*. Women could become *marchandes publiques* either with the express permission of their husbands, or upon joining a guild, upon which the status was conferred automatically. Hafter, "Female Masters in the Ribbonmaking Guild of Eighteenth-Century Rouen," p. 4.

⁷¹ According to Clare Haru Crowston, widows of masters could only engage one journeyman per year, and even that one had to be approved by guild leaders. Crowston, *Fabricating Women*, p. 84.

four and five years, the time deemed necessary by the guild to gain proficiency in the craft.⁷²

The apprenticeship contract began by emphasizing the source of the authority by which Madame Regnaud entered into the contract. The document specifies that “Demoiselle Marie Magdelaine Royer, wife of Sieur Jean Severin Regnaud merchant, who lives in this town and based on his general power of attorney by which she is of him well and truly authorized,” contracted the apprenticeship of her slave, Tranchemontagne.⁷³ Tranchemontagne, by this point sixteen or seventeen years old, began his one-year term of service to the widow St. Marc on that same day. The widow, who also lived in La Rochelle, agreed to be responsible for his room and board, and even to lodge him in her house. In turn, Tranchemontagne was expected to recognize “the aforementioned Widow St. Marc his mistress, and to obey her and to agree to everything that she commands that is licit and honest.”⁷⁴ Madame Regnaud agreed to pay all his expenses, while the Widow St. Marc guaranteed “to have him learn, be shown, and be taught the trade of cooper by her master journeyman in the manner in which he exercises it daily, without hiding anything from him, and also well and suitably feeding, providing bedding for, laundering, lodging, and nourishing but only in health, the aforementioned apprentice during the

⁷² In his study of apprenticeships in Paris, Steven Kaplan found that on average, they lasted for four years and ten months. Steven Kaplan, "L'Apprentissage au XVIIIe siècle: Le cas de Paris," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 40, no. 3 (1993):436-479, p. 450.

⁷³ “Apprentissage du nommé Tranchemontagne, negre de Made. Regnaud avec La Veuve St. Marc,” 6 November 1752, prepared by Notaries Delavergne and Solleau, E 512, ADCM. “Fut presenter Demoiselle Marie Magdelaine Royer spouse du Sieur Jean Severin Regnaud negotiant, demeurante en cette ville en fondée de sa procuracion generale par laquelle elle est de lui bien et duermant (?) autorisée.”

⁷⁴ “Apprentissage du nommé Tranchemontagne, negre de Made. Regnaud avec La Veuve St. Marc,” 6 November 1752, prepared by Notaries Delavergne and Solleau, E 512, ADCM. “Tranchemontagne “s’est obligé de demeurer actuellement en la maison et au service de la dite Veuve de St. Marc sa maitresse et de lui obeïr et entendre en tout ca q’elle lui commandera de licite et d’honnête.”

specified year.”⁷⁵ In remuneration, Madame Regnaud would pay the widow 250 livres, half upon the signing of the contract and half after six months had elapsed.⁷⁶ The Widow St. Marc made a later addendum to the contract, saying that she had indeed received the second payment on 2 June 1753, about one month after it was due. The widow, Madame Regnaud, and the two notaries who prepared the document affixed their signatures. Tranchemontagne did not; the contract stated that he did not know how to sign his name.⁷⁷

Apprentices entering into training usually owed their masters the same obedience and respects minor sons gave to fathers, and in turn masters were legally invested with fathers’ prerogatives.⁷⁸ Apprentices were expected to obey their masters in all things, and to follow their guidance in matters of religion and morality as well as in their trade.⁷⁹ Most master craftspeople were men, and so the

⁷⁵ “Apprentissage du nommé Tranchemontagne, negre de Made. Regnaud avec La Veuve St. Marc,” 6 November 1752, prepared by Notaries Delavergne and Solleau, E 512, ADCM. “De lui faire apprendre, montrer et enseigner le metier de tonneller par son maître garçon tel et de la maniere qu’il l’exerca journellement, sans qu’il lui en puisse rien cacher, et en outre de nourrir, coucher, blanchir, loger et allimenter en santé seullement, ledit apprentif bien et convenablement pendant ladite année.”

⁷⁶ Steven Kaplan found that it was not uncommon for masters to be paid for training an apprentice: in his sample, 41% of masters were paid, and 59% were not. Kaplan, “L’Apprentissage au XVIIIe siècle: Le cas de Paris,” p. 448.

⁷⁷ “Apprentissage du nommé Tranchemontagne, negre de Made. Regnaud avec La Veuve St. Marc,” 6 November 1752, prepared by Notaries Delavergne and Solleau, E 512, ADCM. “Tranchemontagne déclaré ne scavoir signer.”

⁷⁸ S.R. Epstein, “Craft Guilds, Apprenticeship, and Technological Change in Preindustrial Europe,” *The Journal of Economic History* 58, no. 3 (1998):684-713, p. 691. Also see Robert J Steinfeld, *The Invention of Free Labor: The Employment Relation in English and American Law and Culture, 1350-1870* (Chapel Hill, 1991), and E. Lipson, *The Economic History of England*, 5th ed., vol. 1 (London, 1945-1948), pp. 312-313.

⁷⁹ Clare Crowston argues that members of the tailors’ guild “saw their status as guild masters as imbricated with their role as male heads of household. As masters, they believed, they were entitled to offer employment to their family members and to endow them with the benefits of mastership, including the right of their widows and daughters to work in the trade as long as they did not marry outside it.” In direct contrast, she finds that members of the seamstresses’ guild viewed their trade as a means of financial independence and freedom from patriarchal authority. Crowston, “Engendering the Guilds,” p. 341. Crowston argues that the seamstress’ guild helped to propagate a notion of gender as a principle of social organization in the eighteenth century, although she allows that family relationships with men would have been more important for some women than gender. In the case of the contract between Madame Regnaud and the Widow St. Marc, both principles play a role. The

expectations for fathers and masters dovetailed neatly together, reinforcing paternal authority.⁸⁰ Women seldom entered into guilds in their own right, with the notable exception of the all-women guilds, such as the seamstresses.⁸¹ When the widow St. Marc took on Tranchemontagne as an apprentice, then, she found herself in a slightly unusual situation: a female guild member by virtue of her status as a widow, she promised to train a male apprentice in a male-dominated trade. This inversion of gender authority went against the paternalistic order so favored by the guilds. Guild members' identities as practitioners of a trade and as heads of households were tightly bound together.

However, Tranchemontagne's slave status made him considerably different from other apprentices. The conditions of his entry into France included the promise of his exit; the justification for his training was so he could exercise his trade for his owner on a colonial plantation; his contract stipulated that he would only be trained for a year, so he would certainly not become a master of his trade. He thus posed no competition to guild members and the guild, assiduous in pursuing threats to its members' legal monopoly, could afford to let his training pass.⁸² Further, he was bound, not to the craft or the brotherhood of guild members, but rather to his owner.

widow has taken over her husband's workshop, continuing his craft. However, the contract is made between two women, a circumstance that was most likely a conscious choice on the part of Madame Regnaud.

⁸⁰ Crowston argues, for example, that the tailors' response to challenges by seamstresses' guild was to "elaborat[e] a notion of mastership based on their masculine roles as fathers and husbands" Ibid., p. 343.

⁸¹ Historians have disagreed about how women's guilds fit into the guild structure overall. Margaret Howell argues that women's guilds were restricted because of the gender of their members. Martha Howell, *Women, Production, and Patriarchy in Late Medieval Cities* (Chicago, 1986). On the other hand, Daryl Hafter argues that women were not restricted in guilds because of their gender. They had opportunities to join guilds, become mistresses, and engage in lawsuits on behalf of their guild. Hafter, "Female Masters in the Ribbonmaking Guild of Eighteenth-Century Rouen."

⁸² Clare Crowston traces how both the seamstress' guild used legal methods to defend their privileges. Crowston, "Engendering the Guilds," p. 219-230. Crowston also recounts how the tailors' guild used tactics of humiliation to intimidate the seamstresses, pp. 217-218.

He entered his apprenticeship at her behest and learned the trade at her pleasure. His status as a slave mandated that he follow her commands; free will was not one of his prerogatives. Consequently, an apprenticeship contract seems a bit superfluous; there was no legal need for the contract to state his obligations, as his owner already had full authority to order him to do what she wished.

Binding Tranchemontagne in apprenticeship, then, served less to ensure his training than to consolidate the authority of his owner. In entering into this contract, Madame Regnaud reaffirmed her power over her slave. By explicitly transferring this power to the Widow St. Marc, she effectively claimed that it was hers to give. The contractual nature of this agreement served to legitimize her appropriation of an authority that was usually patriarchal and masculine in nature. The act of passing this power to the Widow St. Marc emphasized Madame Regnaud de Beaumont's absolute hegemony over her slave, but at the same time served to protect it. The widow, whose own position was based on a tenuous privilege offered to the wives of late masters, was unlikely to pose a real challenge to Madame Regnaud's control over her slave. She thus consolidated her authority, based on racial privilege, by removing potential challenges based on patriarchy. She thereby emphasized the importance of race privilege over the potential liabilities conferred by her gender.

Just one week after Madame Regnaud had made the second payment for his apprenticeship, after he had been in France nearly two years, Tranchemontagne was baptized.⁸³ His baptism closed off yet another avenue the slave could have sought for

⁸³ Baptism Register, St. Barthélémy parish, 1753, GG 272, AMLR. The baptism took place in June of 1753, probably on June 9; the date is partially obscured.

alternate authority.⁸⁴ Madame Regnaud de Beaumont's oldest children, Etienne Raimond and Marie Magdelaine, stood as Tranchemontagne's godparents. His induction into the Catholic Church also meant a name change; he became known as Etienne, after his godfather, his owner's son. Madame Regnaud's process of marking him as her own was complete.

Historians of slavery have demonstrated the broad range of behaviors that constituted slave resistance.⁸⁵ These behaviors include slowing down work, breaking tools, and even learning how to read and write against their owners' wishes.

Tranchemontagne, like many other slaves, engaged in some behaviors that suggest his resistance to his status. For example, he destroyed some of the Widow St. Marc's property while living in her home as her apprentice. The Widow submitted a bill of twelve livres to Madame Regnaud, stating that it must be paid in order for the slave to continue living with her for the stated period of the contract.⁸⁶ Although this destruction could be interpreted as adolescent negligence, he also could have been engaging in patterns of resistance he had observed on the Saint-Domingue plantation where he grew up. The young man made his mark, literally, elsewhere in the archives as well. Although he signed neither his admiralty declaration nor his apprenticeship contract, he did make a cross, which often served as the signature of the illiterate, in

⁸⁴ See Chapter 5.

⁸⁵ The study of resistance has been very much a part of the study of slavery since the publication of Kenneth Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York, 1956). Other authors who have addressed slave resistance in their scholarship include John H. Bracey, August Meier, and Elliot Rudwick, ed., *American Slavery: The Question of Resistance* (Belmont, CA, 1971), Michael Mullin, *Africa in America: Slave Acculturation and Resistance in the American South and the British Caribbean, 1736-1831* (Urbana, 1992), Eugene Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World* (Baton Rouge, 1979), Philip Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake & Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1998), Gabor S. Boritt, ed., *Slavery, Resistance, Freedom* (New York, 2007).

⁸⁶ "Apprentissage du nommé Tranchemontagne, negre de Made. Regnaud avec La Veuve St. Marc," 6 November 1752, prepared by Notaries Delavergne and Solleau, E 512, ADCM. Note signed "Veuve St Marcq" appended to Apprenticeship contract.

the baptism register. Among the hundreds of slaves who received the sacrament of baptism in La Rochelle, the ones who made any mark at all number in the single digits. In the context of slavery, Tranchemontagne's act of writing could be interpreted as an act of resistance. In his particular situation, where contracts made by his owner had dramatically shaped his young life, his mark in the baptism register suggests the possibility of his awareness of the importance of a signature. This first appearance of Tranchemontagne's own mark, in a register where very few other slaves had managed to assert their bodily presence, hints at an effort to assert some indicator of his subjectivity in a situation where he had very little control.

Illegitimacy and Inheritance

On the other side of the ocean, Jean Severin Regnaud de Beaumont's interactions with his slaves differed greatly from those between his wife and Tranchemontagne in La Rochelle. When Beaumont died in 1775 in the town of Léogane, Saint-Domingue, he had been physically separated from his wife for more than twenty years; of their forty years of marriage, they had spent scarcely nine on the same side of the Atlantic. However, family life in the colonies was far less tied to civil and religious adjudication of family relationships than in France, and Beaumont had engaged in an extended sexual relationship with one of his former slaves. Two natural daughters were born of the union, illegitimate but acknowledged by their father. White men who lived in the colonies often entered into in long-term sexual relationships with women of color, both slave and free. Sometimes these women lived with their masters and worked as household managers, caregivers, and sexual

partners—wives in all but name. Children were born of many of these unions, and often these mixed-race families lived together for many years. Although white fathers may have had other families back in France, some acknowledged their *mulâtre* children as their own, cared for them, and provided for them. This could include, for example, giving gifts of money, land, livestock, or even slaves, setting them up in business, or providing them with dowries, although there was no legal obligation for them to do so. Beaumont attempted to provide for his natural daughters, Marie Claire and Marie Olive, by leaving them annuities in his will.

Testamentary legacies were a common means for fathers to provide for mixed-race children. France's colonies followed the *Coutume de Paris*, so, as in France, colonial law mandated that men leave the bulk of their estates to legitimate children or kin. *Mulâtre* children could not claim forced inheritance from their white fathers, then, unless their parents married.⁸⁷ However, as long as the bulk of their estates, including land, went to their legitimate children, fathers could leave sizable legacies to other children, in the form of cash, livestock, personal possessions, and annuities. Such legacies contributed to the social and economic power of free colored people in Saint-Domingue.⁸⁸ This practice profoundly subverted both hierarchies

⁸⁷ The Code Noir declared bastards children born of unions not consecrated by Roman Catholic marriage. Article VIII. Further, it declared that children born of the union between slave women and free men would be “confiscated for the profit of the hospital,” and that if free men married slave women in the Church, both the women and their children would be free. Article IX. However, the same article urged men who engaged in sexual relations with their slaves to marry them, by stipulating that if owners married their slaves, the slaves and their children would not be confiscated. They would, however, be freed. John Garrigus demonstrates evidence that some white men did in fact marry women of color. Garrigus, *Before Haiti*, pp. 41, 47-48.

⁸⁸ Although Stewart King and John Garrigus disagree on whether or not free people of color formed a separate and distinct social category, both point to the importance of alliances between European men and free women of color. King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig*, p. 215. King claims that the mulatto children born from such unions eventually formed a distinct race-based class on the island. Garrigus, on the other hand, argues that European men chose their marriage partners based on the wealth, not the

based on color or status, and ideas about family. For men who apportioned their estates to include their natural children, family was based not on legal or religious bonds that ensured the flowing of wealth from one generation to the next, but rather on ties of affection that were chosen and cemented by the bonds of shared experience. This practice wreaked havoc among families in France, who considered themselves denied their legally-established birthright.

Jean Marie Olive Regnaud de Beaumont arrived in Saint-Domingue the year before his father's death, knowing his father was ailing and that someone would need to manage his plantation and his estate. The young Jean Marie would have found in the landlocked Croix-des-Bouquets a town very different from the seaport where he grew up. The town was "one part plain and one part mountainous," and a chain of mountains circled the town.⁸⁹ At the tops of the mountains were "flat plateaus full of the rooting of wild hogs, and trees of an ordinary height covered in moss; wood pigeons, ... and woodpeckers."⁹⁰ The weather was dry, with little rain from October until the middle of April, when a fine rain falls for four or five days on end, brought by northern or southern winds. During the summer months, it rained more or less every day, "between four and ten o'clock in the evening." These rains were followed by horrible storms in September and October, with "lightening and furious claps of thunder."⁹¹ At this time of year, Croix des Bouquets "was subjected to horrible tempests that equaled small hurricanes, coming from the east or southeast,

race, of the women they married, and that race was only one component of status. Garrigus, *Before Haiti*, pp. 45-49.

⁸⁹ Moreau de Saint-Méry, *La description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de Saint-Domingue*, Vol. 2, p. 956, 958.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 963. Moreau de Saint-Méry recounts an expedition that climbed one of these heights. "Ils y ont trouvé un terrain plane rempli de fouilles de cochons marons, et des arbres d'une hauteur ordinaire couverts de mousse; des ramiers, des caleçons rouges, des piverts."

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 963-964.

that flattened the sugar cane, uprooted the trees, and ripped apart and turned over the buildings.”⁹² Moreau de Saint-Méry put the population of the town at “1,000 whites, 700 freed people and 30,000 slaves,” up from only 12,000 slaves in 1765.⁹³ Sugar was the most valuable product of the town, which had 94 sugar plantations. There were also 112 coffee plantations, 20 cotton plantations, 18 rum makers, and 14 lime-kilns.⁹⁴

Jean Marie’s letters to his mother and sisters back in France both invoked the differences between his new colonial existence and his life in La Rochelle and reinvigorated the ties among the transatlantic members of the family. Monsieur Regnaud de Beaumont seldom wrote to his wife, and she tended to pass news to her husband through business associates. When young Jean Marie Olive arrived in Saint-Domingue, therefore, both his father’s poor health and his meager finances came as a surprise. He wrote to his mother,

you would not be able to believe, dear Mother, how my dear Papa is in despair to not have and to not be able to send you any [financial] relief. He has been, and is more than ever, in a dire physical state. He lacks a good number of things, he needs money of which he has been deprived for a long time....

According to his son, Regnaud de Beaumont found himself “in a situation as critical as that in which we all found ourselves in France, and he has had the worst illnesses, passing whole nights without sleeping, and is even persuaded that he is losing his sight, which is irreparable.”⁹⁵ The son complained that even his father’s “linens are already old.”⁹⁶

⁹² Ibid., p. 965.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 969. Moreau de Saint-Méry’s description of Saint-Domingue was originally published in 1797-1798.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 969.

⁹⁵ Jean Marie Olive Regnaud de Beaumont to Marie Madeline Royer Regnaud de Beaumont, 7 May 1774, E 514, ADCM. He did not write his location on the letter. “Vous ne scaves croire, chère Maman, combien mon cher Papa est au desespoir de n’avoir et de ne pouvoir vous envoyer aucun

Surprisingly, Regnaud de Beaumont's estate amounted to very little at the time of his death. While other planters grew rich from the sale of sugar grown by their slaves, his estate, quite large at the time of his marriage, had dwindled to practically nothing.⁹⁷ However, he still had the right and power to make his will. His marriage contract, signed forty years before, had already provided for his wife, and the customary laws of La Rochelle deemed that he had to divide the bulk of his estate equally among his legitimate children; his testament did not and could not stray from these established provisions. But the planter still had the right and power to leave legacies in the form of cash, annuities, or personal effects to others he held dear. In general, these legacies were intended to be small tokens of appreciation or affection. Because the Regnaud de Beaumont fortune had disappeared, however, the legacies Beaumont left in his will actually comprised the majority of his remaining estate. They thereby gained an importance disproportionate to their actual amounts, which, although significant, were by no means considerable.

These legacies also suggest that his emotional connections lay with his family in Saint-Domingue rather than with his legal family in France. In addition to

soulagement. Il a été, et est plus que jamais, dans une impossibilité physique de le faire, manquant lui meme de bien des choses, faute d'argent don't il est dispourvu depuis longtemps et ayant a peine le necessaire, avec cela mon arrive, lui cause, comme vous pouvez le penser quelquel deppente, et l'annuelle sera plus forte que cidevant l'inquietude de vous scavoir dans une situation aussi critique que celle ou nous avons tous été en France, a été la plus grande cause des maladies qu'il a eu, passans les nuits enterées sans dormir, il est meme persuade, que la perte de sa vue, qui est irreparable."

⁹⁶ ADCM E 514. Son to mother, 18 May 1782, from Croix des Bouquets to La Rochelle. "...ne j'ai en qu'une partie de son linge qui étant deja vieux."

⁹⁷ The Regnaud de Beaumont family records in La Rochelle do not make clear why Jean Severin Regnaud de Beaumont died practically broke while others prospered. The papers in the archive were from the estate of Marie Madeline Royer Regnaud de Beaumont, and it is possible that she never knew what happened to her husband's wealth. Indeed, judging from her correspondence with Jacob de Griselles, which suggests that she and her husband were actually competing for dibs on the profits of their commercial ventures, this is in fact quite likely. Sugar profits were never certain, however, and Beaumont's crop could have been flattened by a hurricane, his slaves wiped out by a disease, the ships that carried his sugar lost at sea, or his debts so great they far outweighed his assets.

customary legacies to his parish church and a sum to a local monastic order, he left “a life pension of one hundred livres” to each of his “natural daughters, free mulatresses” Marie Claire and Marie Olive, “daughters of Marie Anne free negress.”⁹⁸ They were to be paid in installments of 50 livres, every six months, beginning on the day of their father’s death, and payments were to continue throughout their lives. The girls and their half-brother, Jean Marie Olive, also each were to have possession of a mahogany chest filled with their personal belongings. Regnaud de Beaumont specified that his son, still a minor, would stay on the plantation as overseer. He appointed his neighbor Michel Samuel DeColon his executor, perhaps hoping that his friend, familiar with life in the colonies, would work to ensure that Marie Claire and Marie Olive received their annuity.⁹⁹

Regnaud’s death precipitated a flurry of transatlantic correspondence and paperwork; his estate had to be valued, his wife had to choose which inheritance rights she would exercise, and the estate needed to be portioned out accordingly. Regnaud, never a good businessman, had proved astoundingly optimistic in judging the value of his own estate. It was small, smaller than anyone would have anticipated on the signing of the marriage contract of two such well-placed young people. It barely covered his debts, let alone provided enough income to support his three children in Saint-Domingue in the style he evidently felt they deserved. Its size led to

⁹⁸ “Testament du Sr. Regnaud de Beaumont homologué le 28 Juin 1775,” E 513, ADCM E 513. Hervé de Halgouet refers to a similar case, where a man in Saint-Domingue showed “exorbitant” generosity to his *ménagère*, who might have been his natural daughter, at the expense of his wife and daughter in France. Hervé du Halgouet, “Inventaire d'une habitation à Saint-Domingue,” *Revue d'histoire des colonies* 21, no. 4-5 (1933):215-250, p. 236.

⁹⁹ Lepointe calls the position of executor “an office of a friend.” It was seldom accompanied by any remuneration, with the occasional exception of a small legacy. Lepointe, *Droit Romain et ancien droit Français: Régimes matrimoniaux, libéralités, successions*, p. 458.

conflicts over its apportioning in disputes that divided parents from children and siblings from each other.

DeColon, as executor, began the sticky process of liquidating his friend's estate, while keeping the widow informed by letter. His news was seldom good. What he called the "cursed place" produced very little revenue in the year between Regnaud's death and his plantation's sale, and DeColon wrote that "the slaves here are dying of hunger, and all naked."¹⁰⁰ Finally, he wrote, "I have sold the plantation, the slaves, and the few beasts that remained for the sum of 34,000 livres," a considerable amount. However, that sum included "12,000 livres in letters of credit... and 18,000 livres cash."¹⁰¹ Colonial letters of credit were notoriously difficult to collect, and the entire sum amounted to scarcely more than the generous 30,000 livres dowry Marie Madelaine Royer brought into her marriage. He wrote, "the most difficult thing will be to get paid, and I fear a terrible suit."¹⁰² Thus began a long financial battle over the measly remnants of a struggling plantation. Over the course of this struggle, Marie Madeline Regnaud de Beaumont tried to preserve her family's legacy, her children worked to safeguard their own financial interests, and her husband's natural daughters struggled to preserve their way of life. The success of each depended on their ability to articulate their own version of their family relationship with the deceased Beaumont.

¹⁰⁰ Letter from Michel Samuel DeColon on 15 July 1776 in Leoganne, Saint-Domingue to the widow Royer Regnaud de Beaumont in La Rochelle, E 514, ADCM.

¹⁰¹ Letter from Michel Samuel DeColon on 15 July 1776 in Leoganne, Saint-Domingue to the widow Royer Regnaud de Beaumont in La Rochelle, E 514, ADCM.

¹⁰² Letter from Michel Samuel DeColon on 15 July 1776 in Leoganne, Saint-Domingue to the widow Royer Regnaud de Beaumont in La Rochelle, E 514, ADCM. "Le plus difficile fera d'être payé, et je crains un terrible procès."

DeColon, working under the tacit approval if not the explicit instruction of Madame Regnaud de Beaumont, worked to prevent Marie Claire and Marie Olive from inheriting the legacy left by their father by emphasizing their illegitimacy.

DeColon wrote,

I have sold the land in the town... the negress who occupies it is desolated but I do not know what to do. She obtained an official copy of the will by which the late Mr. Regnaud gave to his two natural daughters an annual pension of one hundred livres each, for a total of two hundred livres. There is every appearance that I will have to act; I will always respond that he has nothing, that first the privileged debts must be paid, then the others, and that it is not natural, although there may be a small pension to provide food, that the natural children have a pension in a situation in which the legitimate ones have nothing, and in which they are obliged to work to earn their bread. We will see what is decided.¹⁰³

In this extraordinary passage, DeColon makes quite clear that lineage and legitimacy trumped affection and even testamentary intentions. Legally, he was right: not only did common law consolidate the rights of children over their parents' estate, Regnaud de Beaumont's marriage contract confirmed his future children's inheritance.

However, his years in the colonies changed his family situation; he fathered not three children, but five, and he wanted to provide for all of them. He tried to do this through the legal means available to him: by making them legatees in his will. This recognition of their relationship, in an official document signed, sealed, and registered by a notary, offered Marie Clare and Marie Olive a portion of social legitimacy, even if legally they had none. Their father, wielding his prerogative to make a will, thus

¹⁰³ Letter from Michel Samuel DeColon on 15 July 1776 in Leoganne, Saint-Domingue to the widow Royer Regnaud de Beaumont in La Rochelle, E 514, ADCM. "J'ay vendu le terrain de la ville... La negresse qui l'occupois est desolée mais je ne sai qu'i faire, elle a levé une expedition du testament par lequel fu Mr. Regnaud donne a ses deux filles naturelles une pension annuelle de cent livres a chacune faisant 200#. Il y a toute apparence qu'on me faire actionner. Je repondray toujours qu'il n'a rien, qu'il faut premierement payer les dettes privileges, ensuite les autres, et qu'il n'est pas naturel quoyque le soit une pension alimentaire, que les enfans naturels ayent une pension dans le tems que les legitimes n'ont rien, et qu'ils sont obliges de travailler pour gagner leur nourriture, nous verrons ce qui sera decide."

tried to protect with the force of the law the inheritance he felt was theirs by right of their relationship to him.

According to the letter of the law, Regnaud de Beaumont's strategy had been sound. All debts and legacies would be paid out of the estate before it was divided amongst heirs.¹⁰⁴ DeColon and the widow knew that only if the estate were bankrupt would the annuities fail to be paid. What's more, the unnamed negress (possibly Marie Clare or Marie Olive) in DeColon's letter realized this as well. Upset at having her house, possibly one she had lived in for years, sold from under her, she turned to Regnaud de Beaumont's will. By obtaining an official copy, she demonstrated herself familiar with not only Regnaud de Beaumont's wishes, but also with the legal process by which they would be enacted. DeColon clearly thought she would take the case to court, and feared, as long as any money at all remained in the estate, that she would win. His strategy, therefore, drew more on moral than legal definitions of family. He emphasized the injustice of the situation for the legitimate children, and the father's "natural" obligation to assure their future first.

In the end, Marie-Madeline Regnaud de Beaumont renounced her right to her husband's estate.¹⁰⁵ This option, delineated in their marriage contract, protected her property from her husband's creditors, and ended her liability for his debts. One of their daughters, Marie Brigitte, joined her in her renunciation, thereby giving up all her claims on her father's estate, although she still would retain the right to one-third of her mother's. The other two legitimate children, however, Jean Marie and his

¹⁰⁴ For an elaboration on the laws surrounding the paying of debts before the division of the estate, see Lepointe, *Droit Romain et ancien droit Français: Régimes matrimoniaux, libéralités, successions*, pp. 394-395.

¹⁰⁵ 4 November, 1775, prepared by Notary Hérard, E 513, ADCM.

sister Marie Magdelaine, continued the suit. They appear to still have been trying to recuperate their father's estate in 1786, when Jean Marie wrote his last letter to his mother.¹⁰⁶ After that, the young man disappeared.

Inheritance, then, became a means of constituting, attacking, or defending competing understandings of family and family relationships. Official family ties formed in France were weakened by transatlantic distances, while colonial practices complicated notions of family as lineal blood relations. New types of family relationships gave rise to new means of transmitting wealth, and these were often hotly contested by kin who felt themselves slighted. These types of complications did not only play out in the colonies, however, because some mixed-race children came with their fathers to France. For instance, Aimé-Benjamin Fleuriau's decision to bring his two *mulâtre* daughters with him to France afforded them the opportunity to use French practices of inheritance to set up their own patrimony, and to pass the wealth they inherited from their French father to their own descendants in Saint-Domingue.

The Fleuriau Family: Women of Color and their Wills

Unlike his contemporary Rengaud de Beaumont, the Rochelais merchant Aimé-Benjamin Fleuriau traveled to Saint-Domingue as a young man free from attachments. Whereas Rengaud de Beaumont had the resources to marry, Fleuriau was the son of a sugar refiner and one of ten children, and largely depended on his

¹⁰⁶ Marie Madeline Regnaud de Beaumont wrote a frantic letter to the priest in St. Marc on 28 July, 1789, asking for news of her son. She says that her last letter from him was dated 6 August, 1786, and she did not know if he was alive or dead. ADCM E 515.

own resources to make his way in the world.¹⁰⁷ Soon after his arrival in Saint-Domingue, where he lived and worked on his uncle's plantation, he began a liaison with a slave woman named Jeanne, "dite Guimbelot."¹⁰⁸ Their union endured for at least ten years, over the course of which Fleuriau gave freedom to "sa petite."¹⁰⁹ The couple had eight children together, including two girls named Marie-Jeanne and Marie-Charlotte, the second and third oldest respectively, after their brother Jean-Baptiste.

When Fleuriau made his triumphant return to La Rochelle in 1755, his fortune made from the fields of cane worked by slaves on his plantation, he brought Marie-Jeanne and Marie-Charlotte with him. Marie-Jeanne was fourteen, her younger sister thirteen. The girls lived the rest of their lives in La Rochelle, in a large house owned by their father on the central Place d'Armes, where Marie-Charlotte died in 1773 at the age of thirty, and Marie-Jeanne in 1793 at the age of fifty-three.¹¹⁰ Throughout their lives, the two women occupied a curiously liminal position in La Rochelle, simultaneously part of the prominent Fleuriau clan and very much outsiders.

¹⁰⁷ Fleuriau, one of ten children, had two siblings and seven half-siblings, children of his father and a previous wife. Cauna, *Au temps des isles à sucre*, p. 254. This meant that Fleuriau's father's estate would be divided equally amongst all ten children, provided they were all living. His mother's estate would be divided three ways, among him, his brother, and his sister. Given the number of siblings, the modest nature of his father's work, and the fact that his father declared bankruptcy shortly before his death, he was unlikely to inherit much.

¹⁰⁸ Police des Noirs survey, 1763, 352, AMLR. Cauna hypothesizes that Jeanne belonged to another Rochelais colonist before Fleuriau bought her, because the name Guimbelot was very common in the port town. He proposes that perhaps she had belonged to Jacques Guimbelot, who was married in Croix-des-Boquets in 1729. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹⁰⁹ Jeanne was referred to this way in a plantation account of 1743, 1 Mi 255, ADCM. Saidiya Hartman cautions against concluding that lengthy relationships between male slave owners and their female slaves indicate consent. She asks, "Do four years and two children later imply submission, resignation, complicity, desire, or the extremity of constraint?" Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, 1997), p. 85.

¹¹⁰ Parish Registers of Saint-Barthélémy parish, GG 313 (1773) and GG 354 (1793), AMLA.

Although Aimé-Benjamin Fleuriau had acknowledged his paternity of the girls at their baptism in Saint-Domingue, once they arrived in France he never officially identified Marie-Jeanne and Marie-Charlotte as his daughters. During the eighteenth century a sense of lineage was very much alive among the aristocracy of both sword and robe, a status to which the Fleuriau family ardently aspired, and also among wealthy non-nobles.¹¹¹ This suggests that Fleuriau made a deliberate choice in his failure to recognize his relationship with his *mulâtre* daughters, a move meant to exclude them from his lineage or house. The women themselves, on the other hand, inserted themselves into the Fleuriau tradition. They drew upon the wealth and prestige of their well-known father by appropriating his name. Using his name and his money, they set up their own transatlantic family lineage, thereby simultaneously subverting their father's desires while also asserting their family connections with their siblings in Saint-Domingue.

Upon the birth of each of their children, Aimé-Benjamin Fleuriau and Jeanne *dite* Guimbelot took the infants to receive the sacrament of baptism at their parish church, as mandated by law and custom.¹¹² The parish registers, kept by royal decree, included baptism records for slave children and free children, people of color and whites; the priest included all in these important records, without regard to color or status. Marie-Jeanne, Marie-Charlotte, and their brothers or sisters all were identified as “fille” or “fils illégitime,” children of Aimé-Benjamin Fleuriau and

¹¹¹ Lebrun, *La Vie conjugale sous l'ancien régime*, p. 65-66.

¹¹² The *Code Noir* specifies in Article II that “all slaves... will be baptized and instructed in the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman religion.”

Jeanne, “negresse libre.”¹¹³ All adopted the surname Mandron as it was illegal for mixed-race children to take the name of their white father.¹¹⁴

Fleuriau returned to France in the company of his two young *mulâtre* daughters in 1755. He did not declare them to the office of the Admiralty upon their entry, because they were not slaves, but free people of color. Over the course of the next several decades, the girls lived in close proximity to their father in La Rochelle. They would have known of their father’s marriage to Marie-Anne-Suzanne Liège, daughter of a prominent Rochelais merchant, in 1756. They would have anticipated the birth of their six half-brothers and –sisters, the first of who was born in 1757. They would have learned of the death of two of these children in their infancy, and watched the others grow into adults. For the rest of their lives, Marie-Jeanne and Marie-Charlotte Mandron lived in close proximity to their Fleuriau kin. The two households maintained relations even after their father’s death. After the girls’ baptism in Saint-Domingue, however, their father never again officially acknowledged them his daughters. In the 1763 Police des Noirs survey, a compilation of all people of color, slave and free, living in La Rochelle, he identified them as “mulatresses... born free,” and living in La Rochelle “under [his]

¹¹³ Etat Civil, 85 Miom 46 and 85 Miom 47, CAOM.

¹¹⁴ Both Jacques Cauna and John Garrigus make reference to this law. Cauna claims that “the law forbid in Saint-Domingue freed people from carrying the same name as their white father.” Cauna, *Au temps des isles à sucre*, p. 54. Garrigus adds that “free colored children of white men often spelled their names differently from their fathers, especially after as 1773 law prohibited such persons from using ‘white’ names and ordering them to adopt names of African origin.” Garrigus, “Blue and Brown: Contraband Indigo and the Rise of a Free Colored Planter Class in French Saint-Domingue,” p. 248, fn 50. Also see Yvan Debbash, *Couleur ou liberté: le jeu de critère ethnique dans un ordre juridique esclavagiste* (Paris, 1967), p. 69.

direction.”¹¹⁵ Although he named their mother, “Jeanne Guimbelot, free negress,” in the declaration, he said nothing about his own paternity.¹¹⁶

The Mandron sisters, however, did publicly claim their relationship with their father. Marie-Jeanne, in particular, created opportunities to have this relationship recorded in official documents. Marie-Charlotte predeceased her father by fourteen years, perhaps victim of the “cold distemper” that he attributed to her in the Police des Noirs survey.¹¹⁷ Although she was buried in the Protestant Church, as her father would be after her, upon her death, masses also were said for her at two Catholic parish churches, Saint-Sauveur and Saint-Barthélémy, the latter of which was situated directly across the Place d’Armes from the house the Mandron sisters shared, adjoining the Protestant Church. Most prosperous Protestant families took the precaution of performing baptismal, marital, and funeral services in the Catholic Church, as the Church acted as the guardian of civil as well as religious legitimacy: only the sacraments could guard the civil privileges of legitimacy and succession. Marie-Charlotte’s joint funeral services in the Catholic and Protestant Churches positioned her in this tradition of prosperous Protestants, suggesting that she placed herself in the category of those who had to safeguard their patrimony, although she left no will herself.

Marie-Charlotte’s sister, Jeanne-Marie, attended the funeral mass at Saint-Barthélémy Church, along with one Elizabeth Morin: they both signed their names

¹¹⁵ Fleuriau, “Declaration des Polices des Noirs,” 5 September 1763, 352-19, AMLA.

¹¹⁶ Fleuriau, “Declaration des Polices des Noirs,” 5 September 1763, 352-19, AMLA.

¹¹⁷ Fleuriau, “Declaration des Polices des Noirs,” 5 September 1763, 352-19, AMLA. Fleuriau says that “the aforementioned Charlotte has been for a number of years attacked by a cold distemper (humeur froide) sickness, and it has afflicted her sight, from which neither doctor nor surgeon has yet been able to cure her.”

the parish register that recorded the death. Neither her father, nor her step-mother, nor any of her half-siblings attended the service. This in itself was not unusual: Protestants, especially wealthy and well-connected ones, often avoided Catholic services. Aimé-Benjamin's absence, however, meant that when the officiating *curé* asked for details about Marie-Charlotte's life to record in the parish register, Marie-Jeanne supplied them. In doing so, she framed her sister as a member of the Fleuriau family, but also emphasized her roots in Saint-Domingue. Marie-Jeanne immortalized her sister as

Marie-Charlotte Fleuriau, *dite* Mandron, daughter of Sieur Benjamin Fleuriau, merchant, and of Jeanne *dite* Guimbelot, native of the parish of Notre Dame du Saint Rosaire of Croix-des-Boquets, in the canton of Cul de Sac, in the jurisdiction of Port-au-Prince, island and coast of Saint-Domingue, in America.¹¹⁸

In appropriating the Fleuriau name for her sister, Jeanne-Marie emphasized the complexity of transatlantic family connections. She simultaneously aligned herself and her sister with their father by taking his name and emphasizing their relationship, and distanced them by acknowledging the distinctiveness of their Creole origins.

In his will, Aimé-Benjamin Fleuriau both reaffirmed his commitment to provide for his mulatto children's welfare, while at the same time emphasizing that his legitimate children were his true heirs, both in terms of the inheritance they received and in terms of how he envisioned his lineage: amongst the Fleuriau in La Rochelle there was little room for mixed-race kin. In February 1787, one month before his death, Fleuriau wrote out his will in his own hand. In it, he followed Rochelais common law to the letter in specifying that after his wife's portion of the estate had been separated from his, that the remainder was to be divided among his three surviving legitimate children, Aimé-Paul, Louis-Benjamin, and Marie-Adelaïde.

¹¹⁸ Etat Civil, Paroisse Saint-Barthélémy, 1773, GG 313, AMLR.

He clearly considered his plantation in Saint-Domingue his most valuable asset, and specified that his children were to own it jointly, and each could only sell their share to the others.¹¹⁹ Although he favored none of the children over the others in terms of the monetary value of their inheritance, he did allocate specific holdings to his children based on their gender and birth order. He specified that his most important property in La Rochelle, his *hôtel particulier* in the exclusive Saint-Barthélémy parish, go to his oldest son, with less important properties going to his younger son, and sums of cash to his daughter, who was already married and whose dowry comprised part of her inheritance.

Although his illegitimate children were excluded from this apportioning of their father's estate, he left generous legacies to Jeanne-Marie, his daughter in La Rochelle, and his other *mulâtre* children who had remained in Saint-Domingue.¹²⁰ As he outlined these sizable legacies, he also sketched his illegitimate children and grandchildren's relationships with each other. In doing so, he sketched a family a lineage for them that did not include him, their father. He wrote,

I give and bequeath to the children of the late Jeanne Guimbelon, I mean, Guimbelot, free negress, resident while living of Cul-de-Sac, Saint-Domingue, which children are surnamed Mandron, namely Mademoiselle Mandron, Créolle, current resident of the

¹¹⁹ "Dépôt du testament olographe de M Aimé Benjamin Fleuriau," 21 August 1787, in files of Notary Delavergne fils, 3 E 1698, ADCM.

¹²⁰ Historians have identified instances in which fathers have left the majority of their estate to their mixed-race children of their former slaves. Although this literature focuses on the United States in the nineteenth century, there are still certain parallels. For example, Tiya Miles explores the case of the Cherokee warrior Shoe Boots, whose daughter by his black slave eventually inherited his sizable estate. Miles emphasizes that Elizabeth, the daughter, inherited Shoe Boots property because the Cherokee respected her kinship relationship with her father and other tribe members. Miles, *Ties That Bind*, pp. 138-143. Similarly, Kent Anderson Leslie focuses on the case of Amanda America Dickson, daughter of a white man and his black slave woman, whose father left her all of his considerable fortune. Although this went against social mores, the Georgia Supreme Court ruled that a man's right to dispose of his property as he wished superseded cultural prohibitions against leaving property to the children of slaves. Kent Leslie, *Woman of Color, Daughter of Privilege: Amanda America Dickson, 1849-1893* (Athens, GA, 1995), pp. 80-104.

Place d'Armes of this town, the sum of twelve hundred livres, money of France, of life annuity, which will begin to run the day of my decease, and to her brother Paul Mandron resident of Mirbalais, Saint-Domingue, and to the legitimate children of the late Jean Baptiste Mandron, which children, nephews of the aforementioned Paul, do not make up but one head representing their father the late Jean Baptiste Mandron, while living a resident of Mirbalais, and in the last case merchant in Port-au-Prince, Saint-Domingue, where he died. I give and bequeath to the aforementioned Paul Mandron the sum of (that is, I give to Paul and the children of Jean Baptiste Mandron the sum of twenty-six thousand livres in the first place and as much for the last, the half payable in six months and the other half payable one year after my death) twenty-six thousand livres money of Saint-Domingue, and a parallel sum of twenty-six thousand livres to the children of the late Jean Baptiste Mandron, money of Saint-Domingue, one time payable to him and the other by him who will be charged with the overseeing of my plantation, that is thirteen thousand livres to each six months after my death, and the other thirteen thousand livres to each for a final and last payment one year after my death, which sums will return to the children of the late Jean Baptiste Mandron.¹²¹

This document, written by Fleuriau himself, elided his relationship with his own children. He did not claim paternity, as he did in their baptism records. Instead, he identified them only as the children of “Jeanne Guimbelot, free negress,” even fumbling her name the first time he wrote it.

But far from indicating his indifference to his children and their children, the will took great care to provide for them. He appointed his grandchildren, children of his late son Jean-Baptiste, wards of their uncle Paul, their father's brother, and in his

¹²¹ “Dépôt du testament olographe de M Aimé Benjamin Fleuriau,” 21 August 1787, in files of Notary Delavergne fils, 3 E 1698, ADCM. “Je donne et lègue aux Enfans de feu Jeanne Guimbelot, je dis, Guimbelot, negresse libre, vivante demeurante au Cul de Sac de Ste. Domingue, les qu'ils enfans sont surnommés Mandron, savoir a Madlle. Mandron, Créolle, demeurante actuellement devant la place d'Armes de cette ville la comme de douze cent livres, argente de France, de rente viagere, qui commencera a partir du jour de mon décès, et a son frere Paul Mandron habitant a Mirbalais de Ste. Domingue, et aux enfans légitimes de feu Jean Baptiste Mandron, les quells dits enfans, neveux dudit Paul, ne faisant qu'une tete représtantant celle de feu leur pere Jean Baptiste Mandron, vivant habitand a Mirbalais, et en dernier lieu marchand au Port au Prince de St. Domingue, ou il est décéé. Je donne et legue audit Paul Mandron la somme de (here he adds a note: Jed is que je donne au dites Paul et auxdits enfans de Jean Baptiste Mandron—vingt six mille livres pour le premier et autant pour ces derniers. Fleuriau) vingt six mille livres aux dits enfans dudit feu Jean Baptiste Mandron, argent de St. Domingue, une foy payee a l'un et a l'autre par ce lui qui sera chargé de la gestation de mon habitation, savoir, trize mille livres a chacun sis mois après mon décès et les autre treize mille livres a chacun pour final et dernier payement un an après mon décès, lesquelles sommes qui reviendra aux enfans dudit feu Jean Baptiste Mandron, seront employee en negres au choix de leur oncle Paul Mandron et mis a ferme pour le compte, profits et risqué de son dits neveux et nieces ses papilles.”

will charged Paul with looking out for his nieces' and nephews' welfare.¹²² He gave generous sums to Jeanne-Marie, or "Mademoiselle Mandron, Creolle," his daughter and for thirty years his neighbor in her house on the Place d'Armes. He left similar sums to her brother Paul Mandron, and to their late sibling Jean-Baptiste, whose children were to inherit in his stead. The amount of detail Fleuriau gave about his children's whereabouts, professions, marital status, and births of their children clearly indicates that he had maintained contact with his progeny in Saint-Domingue. Yet by emphasizing their lineage through their mother, Jeanne Guimbelot, free negress, he also indelibly marked them as people of color. Failing to mention his own relationship erased his children of color's ties to the Fleuriau name, but mentioning them gave them access to a portion of his fortune.

The legacies he left to his illegitimate children thus not only provided for their welfare, the act of a father, they also protected his estate from any future claims they might have made against it, the act of a savvy businessman. "My succession," he stated, "will be entirely free from obligation towards all of them [Marie-Jeanne, Paul, and Jean-Baptiste's children], whatever titles they have...." The Mandron children, if they were to try to claim a larger share of their father's estate based on his acknowledgement of his paternity at their baptism, would be cut off "without any of the dispositions previously made nor even any of my same liberalities."¹²³ This provision made quite clear that, although the merchant valued his children and

¹²² "Dépôt du testament olographe de M Aimé Benjamin Fleuriau," 21 August 1787, in files of Notary Delavergne fils, 3 E 1698, ADCM.

¹²³ "Dépôt du testament olographe de M Aimé Benjamin Fleuriau," 21 August 1787, in files of Notary Delavergne fils, 3 E 1698, ADCM. "Au moyen de ces dispositions et de celles que j'ai précédemment fait pour eux, intend que ma succession soit entierement libérée envers eux de tout ce don't a qu'il que titres que ce soit, je les aurois mis dans le cas de reclamer de moy, sans qu'oy aucun des dispositions précédemment faites, n'y même aucunes des mes libéralités n'auroient en lieu et n'auroient même y a eu lieu aujourd'huy aucun effet."

wanted to provide for them, he did not consider them entitled to an equal portion of his patrimony. This he reserved for his legitimate children. As his succession amounted to nearly one million livres, with each legitimate child receiving well over three hundred thousand livres, this discrepancy was significant.¹²⁴ The legacies to the Mandron children, then, had the overall effect of *distancing* them from the Fleuriau clan, in spite of the close ties the two branches of the same family had fostered throughout Aimé-Benjamin's life. The ties that had bound him to his Saint-Domingue offspring about to be severed by death, Aimé-Benjamin Fleuriau acted deliberately to exclude his mixed-race children from the Fleuriau family legacy that endured in La Rochelle.

Marie-Jeanne Mandron Fleuriau's Last Will and Testament

After her father's death, Marie-Jeanne remained the only surviving member of the Fleuriau clan with roots on both sides of the Atlantic. When she made her own will in 1788, she worked to bind the two branches of the Fleuriau family together, in name as well as in fortune.¹²⁵ Adopting the Fleuriau name and ascribing it to her brothers, nieces, and nephews in Saint-Domingue directly contravened her father's

¹²⁴ Fleuriau's estate amounted to a total of 960,033 livres, 13 deniers, 10 sols. Each legitimate child received 316,011 livres 4 sols 7 deniers after their mother's portion of the estate was deducted. ADCM, 3 E 1698, "Partage de la dite Veuve Fleuriau et ses Enfants," 24 September, 1787. In comparison, Fleuriau left an annual income of 120 livres to his domestic servant. ADCM, 3 E 1698, "Dépôt du testament olographe de M Aimé Benjamin Fleuriau," 21 August 1787, in files of Notary Delavergne fils.

¹²⁵ Martha Howell found that women who made wills left legacies of personal property to people, especially other women, who made up their social network over lineal descendants. This had the effect of reinforcing affective ties by linking them with economic ones, for often personal property had significant market value. Howell, *The Marriage Exchange*, pp. 162-167 and pp. 132-138. The case of Jean-Marie Fleuriau Mandron suggests the need to nuance these findings, as in her will she chose to reinforce family ties with economic ones.

wishes. This subversion, together with the fact that she named her Saint-Domingue relations her sole heirs, suggests that Marie-Jeanne understood herself to be different from her French half-brothers and –sister, but also perhaps that she took pride in her transatlantic origins. Through her will, she set up her own line of succession, drawn from the wealth and prestige of her father, but no longer dependant on it.

Marie-Jeanne began her will by both firmly inscribing herself within the framework of the Fleuriau family, while at the same time distancing herself from the family as a lineage. “I the undersigned, Marie Jeanne Fleuriau Mandron, maiden, resident of La Rochelle, Place d’Armes, have made and present my will, in case of my death, in the form that follows.”¹²⁶ Adopting the Fleuriau name, a move she eschewed during her father’s lifetime, emphasized her links to the wealthy, powerful, and well-connected Fleuriau family, and also flouted her father’s desire to minimize his relationship to his mixed-race children.

Identifying herself by both the Fleuriau and Mandron names also recalls, however, her relationship with her sister, Marie-Charlotte, who Marie-Jeanne also identified by both names in the parish register. Her use of both these names, not only the one of her wealthy merchant father, suggests Marie-Jeanne’s desire to affirm her family links not only with the Fleuriau clan, but with her brothers and sisters in Saint-Domingue as well. Further, at roughly the same time, her brother Paul in Saint-Domingue also adopted the Fleuriau name. Letters from his half-brother in La Rochelle were addressed variously to Paul Mandron, Pierre-Paul Mandron, and

¹²⁶ “Dépôt du testament de la citoyenne Mandron Fleuriau,” 24 November, 1793, records of Notary Farjanel, 3 E 960, ADCM. The will itself, written in Jeanne-Marie Fleuriau Mandron’s own hand, was dated 24 May 1788, although it was not filed until her death five years later.

Pierre-Paul Fleuriau Mandron.¹²⁷ This son of a La Rochelle planter became one of the most highly visible and politically active men of color in the colony on the eve of the Haitian Revolution. With other free men of color, he signed one of the first addresses made to the colonizing French; he signed his name “P. Fleuriau.”¹²⁸ His political influence was instrumental in preserving the Fleuriau plantation during the Revolution itself.¹²⁹ Paul Mandron’s daughter, who died in Saint-Domingue in 1803, went only by the name of Fleuriau.¹³⁰ Marie-Jeanne’s adoption of the Fleuriau name, then, not only emphasized her ties to her father, it also connected her with her brothers an ocean away. She further strengthened this bond by dividing her estate among her surviving siblings, nieces, and nephews.

In naming her brother Paul and the children of her brother Jean-Baptiste her heirs, Marie-Jeanne emphasized the strength of family ties and became a matriarch through whom wealth flowed in her own right. In her will, she wrote,

I instate as my heirs and universal legatees and give them in all propriety and in perpetuity, Pierre Paul Fleuriau Mandron, currently inhabiting the quarter of Mirabalais of Port-au-Prince, and the children of Jean Baptiste Fleuriau Mandron, inhabitant of the same quarter, as heirs of their father, all my goods, immeubles, meubles, effects, gold, silver, letters of credit, and other things of a moveable nature that are found to belong to me on the day of my death.¹³¹

¹²⁷ ADCM 2 Mi 238. Letters from Louis-Benjamin Fleuriau to Paul Mandron of 12 December 1792; to Pierre-Paul Mandron of 15 May 1794; and to citoyen Pierre-Paul Fleuriau Mandron of 11 February 1794.

¹²⁸ Jean Fouchard, *Les Marrons du syllabaire: Quelques aspects du problème de l’instruction et de l’éducation des esclaves et affranchis de Saint-Domingue* (Port-au-Prince, 1953), plates 34-37 are facsimile reproductions of this letter and its signatures. Paul Fleuriau’s signature appears on plate 37.

¹²⁹ Jean Fouchard, *Les marrons du syllabaire* (Port-au-Prince, 1953), planches 34-37. Also see Cauna, *Au temps des isles à sucre*, pp. 55-56.

¹³⁰ Cauna, *Au temps des isles à sucre*, p. 55. Cauna is not clear on his source for this information, but it is probably CAOM, Notary Badoux.

¹³¹ “Dépôt du testament de la citoyenne Mandron Fleuriau,” 24 November, 1793, records of Notary Farjenel, 3 E 960, ADCM. “J’institue pour mes heritiers et legatiare universels et leur donne en toute propriété et à la perpétuité à Pierre Paul Fleuriau Mandron, actuellement habitant au quartier de Miribalais du Por au Prince, et aux enfants de Jean Baptiste Fleuriau Mandron habitant le même quariter, comme heritiers de leur pere, tous mes biens, immeubles, meubles, effets, or argent, créances, et autres choses de nature mobilières que se trouveront m’appartenir au jour de mon décès.”

She further specified that if her brother Pierre Paul should predecease her, his portion of her estate should go to his children. This transfer of cash and goods, then, not only re-emphasized ties of kinship, it also created ties of heritage by specifying that property would flow from one generation to the next, in perpetuity.

By the time she made her will, Marie-Jeanne Fleuriau Mandron had amassed a considerable estate. Her most valuable items included a black box with silver curiosities inside, fine linens, wines, a gilded mirror with a fine painting above it in the frame, two more of these mirrors that included paintings in grisaille and were garnished with marble, a dozen cabriolet chairs covered in blue damask, a gold watch and chain, a bed, and a good amount of money, both in silver and in paper currency.

¹³² Inheriting such legacies of goods or cash could provide heirs with a valuable start in the world, or add to already sizable holdings. Her estate, then, could offer her heirs considerable financial advantages that could perhaps allow them to augment their own fortunes, but her legacy went beyond her immediate beneficiaries. The property she left, simply by virtue of being an inheritance, would be classified as *immeubles*, earmarked to be passed down to subsequent generations. By this act of writing her testament and leaving her property to her nearest kin who shared her family names, Marie-Jeanne Fleuriau Mandron created a heritage, assets that flowed from one generation to the next, but remained in the Fleuriau Mandron family in perpetuity.

Although Marie-Jeanne never specifically acknowledged her relationship with her white half-siblings in her will, she nonetheless appointed her younger half-brother Louis-Benjamin Fleuriau de Bellevue, a scholarly young man twenty years her junior,

¹³² “Inventoire Fleuriau Mandron,” 2 December 1793, archives of Notary Farjanel, 3 E 960, ADCM. She also had among her papers copies of her father’s will, and letters from her brothers in Saint-Domingue. The paper money she possessed was in assignats.

as the executor of her estate. She likely chose him as her executor because of their long history together: she knew him and had seen him grow into a man. She also likely knew of his reputation as a scholar, and knew he was trusted and admired in his city. He fulfilled this commission scrupulously, hiring a notary to represent the interests of his half-brothers, the legatees, and arranging for an inventory of his half-sister's goods after her death.¹³³ This curious situation, in which at the request of his Creole half-sister a legitimate son and heir oversaw the succession of an estate comprised largely of the fruits of his father's largesse to his illegitimate mixed-race children, demonstrates how family relationships complicated seemingly clear-cut hierarchies of race and gender. In appointing her half-brother her executor, Marie-Jeanne Fleuriu Mandron clearly trusted that the young Louis-Benjamin would distribute her estate as she wished. He thus became the means through which his father's wealth passed from the Fleuriu lineage and formed the basis of the Fleuriu Mandron heritage, newly-established by Marie-Jeanne.

Conclusion

The movement of white colonists, their mixed-race children, and slaves between the Antilles and France brought into question cultural meanings of race and gender, and also definitions of both authority within the family and family ties themselves. These shifts were played out within the realm of contracts and inheritance. White women, wives of male colonists in the eyes of the law, drew on the authority conferred by their race and by law to protect their own successions and

¹³³ "Inventoire Fleuriu Mandron," 2 December 1793, archives of Notary Farjanel, 3 E 960, ADCM.

those of their legitimate children born within wedlock, while defining their own race-based power over slaves. Some white men, torn between laws restricting the passing of inheritance to illegitimate children and their sense of responsibility for their Creole progeny, struggled to set up legacies that would ensure their mixed-race children's welfare while still remaining within the bounds of the law. Mixed-race children walked a fine line in inheritance law, legally restricted to inheriting only small legacies, never the bulk of their fathers' estates. Their marginal position combined with their own desire to care for family members and to strengthen the status and standing of their descendants prompted free people of color to set up their own patterns of lineage and inherited wealth, sometimes originally flowing from a white father, but also strengthening ties among free colored communities on both sides of the Atlantic.

In the context of a society that limited their civil rights, neither women nor slaves had the power to make contracts without the specific permission of their legal masters—their husbands or owners. White women wielded cultural power over slaves because of their race, but only could gain civil power to make contracts, including buying and selling slaves, with the permission of their husbands. Free men of color and unmarried or widowed women of color might have the legal recourse to enter into contractual relationships, but often did not possess the wealth to preserve or enhance the social position of their descendants. In both cases, either directly or indirectly, power flowed from and was bestowed by white French men, either in the form of legal permission to enter into contractual relationships, or in the form of wealth. These privileges, however, were not bestowed unequivocally. Men could

revoke powers of attorney and annual incomes they had previously given, while other family members all worked to protect their own powers and privileges, and those of their children, from each other.

Chapter 4:

Slaves and Owners, From Saint-Domingue to La Rochelle

Introduction

As ships carrying slaves or slave owners headed toward La Rochelle, the relationship between those left on the plantation and those headed toward France gradually shifted. Not only were such slaves often favorites, brought to France because their owners did not want to part with them, they also entered a place with very different experiences with and understandings of slavery from the island they had left. But distance was not only a factor in the lives of slaves chosen to make the Atlantic crossing; it also affected slaves left on the plantation when their owners returned to France. Slave owners in Saint-Domingue often chose, after making their fortunes, to return to France where they were received welcomes suited to their new station. Many set themselves up in splendid fashion, and stepped into new roles as pillars of the community. For both slaves and owners, their location in the Atlantic world and proximity to each other affected their experience of slavery.

Distance changed relations of slavery. Newly-absent plantation owners often struggled to oversee what was often their most important asset from a distance of more than four thousand miles. When an owner who had taken a direct hand in running his own plantation abandoned the colonies for France, he had to have utmost

confidence that his overseer would work towards his, the owner's, best interests, rather than his own. Some owners, having worked for years to build a successful and profitable plantation, cared about their overseers' loyalty deeply, and worked to foster openness and trust. But if the relationship between owner and overseer experienced a rupture, slaves could fill the gap by becoming informants in their own right. Under such circumstances, garnering the goodwill of slaves could provide owners with inside information about how overseers operated in owners' absence. If slaves were able to build and maintain amicable, if still hierarchical, relationships with their owners that endured the test of time and distance, they occupied a position as insiders who had access to information that their owners deeply desired: the state of their crops, the condition of the slaves, and, perhaps most importantly, the habits of their overseers. Owners sometimes even rewarded slaves for the loyalty they demonstrated across distance with the elusive prize of freedom.

On the other hand, absentee owners who had never set foot in the colonies but had acquired land there sight unseen had an understanding of slavery that relied more on hearsay or published accounts than personal experience. For such owners, forming relationships with a largely illiterate slave population in an age of slow and uncertain communication was seldom an option. Instead of relying on loyalty, trust, and insider information, which because of their distance were not open to them, many instead turned to rationalized theories of agricultural management. In an age where personal relationships greased bureaucratic wheels and offered the hope of advancement, to these owners slaves were nothing but columns of assets and losses, listed alongside livestock and crop yields.

Slaves who were brought or sent to France by their owners also negotiated new types of slave-owner relationships, ones in which they potentially could influence their owners to a greater extent than was possible in the colonies, and through them, their own destinies. Slaves who were brought or sent to France were distanced from the worst viciousness of slave society. Laws governing their presence in France offered them some protection, as did the literal space between them and the plantation society from which they came. Some slaves exploited this distance to act in ways that made their owners wish for the strictures of Saint-Domingue.

In all these cases, distance changed relationships between slaves and their owners, and shaped the lives of both. The distance itself made communication by letter uncertain and slow, and the fate of slaves, rather than being decided with an impulsive slash of an overseer's whip, instead came at the slow pace of a letter sent across the Atlantic. Differing legal systems meant that owners could not punish slaves in France with the same impunity as those in the colonies, and that uncertainty existed about exactly how slaves could behave. And although slaves were highly visible in France, their relative rarity meant that many metropolitan whites had different views about slavery from their colonial counterparts. The three stories that follow suggest the challenges faced by slaves and owners alike when distance shaped relations of slavery.

Slaves, free people of color, and slave owners used a variety of tactics to shape their own lives. Alexis, the slave of Paul Belin des Marais, capitalized on his long-standing relationship with his owner to position himself as a trusted informant

about his plantation after Belin returned to France. Belin rewarded Alexis for his loyalty by giving him his freedom. In this case, patronage had the flexibility to extend across lines of race and status, perhaps particularly when such ties were based on common experiences and time and distance diminished seemingly insurmountable differences between slaves and owners. On the other hand, Augustin, the slave of one Meynardie in the town of Marennes, outside of La Rochelle, adopted a different approach: instead of building ties with his owners, he made their lives as unbearable as he could. Augustin used techniques of resistance that so upset the hierarchy his owners believed existed between them and their black slave that they literally would not speak of his actions. In these two very different cases, one result was the same; both Augustin and Alexis forged relationships with their owners on their own terms, and took advantage of the distance across the Atlantic to structure both their own and their owners' experiences of slavery. Finally, the Rochelais merchant-turned-colonial-plantation-owner Aimé-Benjamin Fleuriau returned to his own city after two decades in the colonies, bringing his slave Hardy and four of his children by a former slave with him. Fleuriau leveraged his own position as a wealthy white merchant to benefit his children, motivated by kinship and affective ties.

The agency exerted by both slaves and their owners had limits other than the watery distance between France and its colonies, however. In the eighteenth century the state increasingly attempted to regulate the boundary between race and slave or free status. A series of laws aimed at controlling the circumstances under which people of color could enter France assumed a clear relationship between these two categories, and this supposition had very real consequences for people of color. But

this relationship was anything but self-explanatory: slaves, their owners, and free people of color all actively worked to shape it, sometimes in concert and sometimes in conflict with the intentions of the laws regulating slavery in France. They did this by mobilizing, creating, and manipulating personal relationships across or through distance, taking advantage of the cracks and gaps in what race and slavery meant in France versus in the colonies to put forward their own versions of the meanings of race and slave or free status in eighteenth-century France.

Paul Belin des Marais

Networking the Atlantic: Personal Relationships

Distance presented difficulties for merchants and traders as well as slaves and owners. Rochelais residents often built networks that bound the city's residents closer to their associates in the colonies. These ties, made necessary by the distance between metropole and colony, played an important role in facilitating business transactions. The distance and the attendant time lag in conducting business meant that personal relationships formed an important basis for any overseas partnership. Emotional attachment as well as self-interest formed a basis for networks of personal relationships in Old Regime France.¹ These affective ties helped bind together

¹ Historians have debated what motivated patron-client relationships. Roland Mousnier's foundational text argued that loyalty formed the basis for all patron-client relations. Roland Mousnier, *Les institutions de la France sous la monarchie absolue* (Paris, 1974). Later Lawrence Stone, Sharon Kettering, and William Beik all argued that in the seventeenth century, in particular, relationships of patronage and clientage were based primarily on self interest. Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York, 1979); Sharon Kettering, *Patrons, Brokers, and Clients in Seventeenth-Century France* (New York, 1986); and William Beik, *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-Century France: State Power and Provincial Aristocracy in Languedoc* (New York, 1985). Jonathan Dewald, on the other hand, places affective ties firmly at the center of such patron-

extended networks based on kinship or religion, for example.² For Rochelais Protestants, many of these relationships were more egalitarian than hierarchal, were based on mutual interests, and were cemented by kinship ties. Even so, creating and maintaining such ties required constant tending for fear they would weaken. Having such networks could make or break a young man's fortune, and the Rochelais Protestant Paul Belin des Marais was particularly fortunate in his connections. Belin constantly cultivated his contacts. Further, the young merchant created networks wherever he could, including with at least one of his slaves. The case of Belin and his slave Alexis suggests the difficulty in creating and maintaining personal networks both in France and in the colonies and the constant renewal they demanded, but it also highlights the flexibility such networks could have. Personal relationships, whether based on kinship, religion, or patronage, could benefit both the parties who entered into them, even those as far apart in status as masters and slaves.

The practice of making and maintaining contacts across distance was already well-established among Protestants by the eighteenth century. For Protestants, trade networks established in the seventeenth century also offered opportunities for religious refuge after the 1685 revocation of the Edict of Nantes.³ This mass exodus

client relationships. Jonathan Dewald, *Aristocratic Experience and the Origins of Modern Culture: France, 1570-1715* (Berkeley, 1993), esp. Chapter 4. All these authors agree that by the eighteenth century the nuclear family had taken prime of place over patron-client relationships as an organizing social unit.

² David Garrioch argues that in the eighteenth century patronage shifted to become more about community and family networks than hierarchal ties. As families changed, he says, patronage ties became class ties, and led to the formation of a coherent bourgeoisie. David Garrioch, *The Formation of the Parisian Bourgeoisie, 1690-1830* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996), esp. Chapter 5. For Garrioch, as for Dewald, although these ties might not have best served the needs of certain individuals, they did serve the needs of particular groups, usually based on social status, family affiliation, or religion, for example.

³ On the Huguenot Diaspora, see Jon Butler, *The Huguenots in America: A Refugee People in New World Society* (Cambridge, MA, 1983), Carolyn Lougee Chapell, "Family Bonds Across the Refuge," in *Memory and Identity: The Huguenots in France and the Atlantic Diaspora*, ed. Bertrand Van

reinforced already-established ties between the New World and the Old. Although many Huguenots left the Francophone world altogether, others sought the less stringent religious atmosphere of the French colonies. Protestants' presence was particularly strong on France's Atlantic coast, and new infusions of the religious group arrived in the Caribbean in the early eighteenth century, in hot pursuit of the white gold that was sugar. Such repeated waves of Huguenot colonial migration—much of it originating from France's west coast—continually reinforced networks based on trade, but also based on common religiosity and family connections.

When Paul Belin went to Saint-Domingue to earn his fortune, he drew on networks of family and personal relations to make his plantation a success. Relying on personal relationships became a hallmark of his venture, and he was wary of giving his trust or confidence to people he had never met or with whom he shared no ties of kinship, religion, or place. Common economic interest was not enough for him; instead he counted on personal familiarity as a basis for his business dealings. Paul Belin was not alone in his dependence on broad networks based on close connections; much of La Rochelle's Protestant population based their business transactions on personal ties. He was, however, particularly well placed to do this; he was born in about 1694 into a family of established and connected merchants. His father, Ozée Belin, was head of the mint of La Rochelle and director of the Compagnie Royale de Saint Domingue, suggesting that their religion had not impeded the Belin family in making the connections they needed to be appointed to

Ruymbeke and Randy J. Sparks, (Columbia, SC, 2003), Bertrand Van Ruymbeke, *From New Babylon to Eden: The Huguenots and their Migration to Colonial South Carolina* (Columbia, South Carolina, 2006).

such royal posts, even in the wake of the 1685 revocation of the Edict of Nantes.⁴ Eschewing following his father into an administrative position, the young Paul opted instead for a life of adventure on the open seas as a transatlantic ship's captain, a career he began in about 1714. He hardly embarked on this expensive enterprise alone, however. Rather, he relied on his merchant relatives in La Rochelle and their extensive business connections all along the Atlantic coast of France to fund and outfit the ships he sailed to the French Caribbean. The young Paul got his start in 1722, when Allard Belin of La Rochelle formed a partnership with Sieur Guillemaut de Beauleau, a Protestant who lived in the port town of Saint Malo, to equip a ship to sail for the colonies. They hired Paul Belin, Allard's cousin, as their captain.

Paul Belin further strengthened this business relationship between the Belin and Guillemaut families, prominent community members in two important seaports, when he married Françoise Guillemaut, Guillemaut de Beauleau's sister.⁵ This marital alliance did more than cement the relationship between extended kin: Belin acquired close business associates as well as a wife, as Françoise and her widowed mother remained integrally involved in transatlantic trade. Belin's new mother-in-law, Madame Jeanne Deshays Guillemaut, contributed to the outfitting of his ships, and Françoise herself made a number of transactions in her husband's name. In fact, this seemed to be the couple's intent from the beginning. They made a mutual will in 1722, six years after their marriage, in which they each named the other as the

⁴ Henri Teychenié, "L'Habitation des Belin (membres de la famille Charruyer, armateurs rochelais) à Saint-Domingue, dans la deuxième moitié du XVIIIe siècle" (Université de Paris, 1959), p. 5.

⁵ *Billet d'Interets cédé à Monsieur Guillemaut de Beaulieu le 12e Aoust 1722*, E 297, ADCM.

universal legatee.⁶ This clause circumvented the customary practice of dividing the estate immediately upon one spouse's death.⁷ By keeping the estate together and giving the surviving spouse its usufruct, Belin and Guillemaut acknowledged the significance their marriage alliance had for their families, who would eventually enjoy the fruits of their combined labors; provided the couple had no children, half of their joint estate would eventually return to each of their families. The couple also, however, made their faith in each other quite clear: by naming each other universal legatees, they went beyond ensuring each other's physical comfort in widowhood or old age. This provision, made so early in their marriage, points to a new type of family group, one which had the Atlantic as its core, and perhaps even as its very reason for existence. Paul Belin and Françoise Guillemaut ensured that the surviving spouse would be able to continue engaging in transatlantic trade, with the goal of even further increasing their joint estate.

Paul Belin des Marais' reliance on personal connections continued as he grew more and more prosperous. He left France for the colonies in the 1720s, leaving his wife his power of attorney and an extensive network of business contacts, comprised of both his kin and hers.⁸ He bought a plantation, probably his second, in Saint-

⁶ For more on inheritance laws, see Chapter 4. Briefly, usually half the estate would have gone to the deceased spouse's birth family immediately upon their death. Breton inheritance law mandated that parents split their estates equally among all sons. If the couple had no children, the estate would be equally split, half going to the husband's family of birth, and half going to the wife's family of birth. For more on inheritance law, see Jean Yver, *Égalité entre héritiers et exclusion des enfants dotés: Essai de géographie coutumière* (Paris, 1966), and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, "Family Structures and Inheritance Customs in Sixteenth-Century France," in *Family and Inheritance: Rural Society in Western Europe, 1200-1800*, ed. Jack Goody, Joan Thirsk, and E.P. Thompson (Cambridge, 1976).

⁷ Yver, *Égalité entre héritiers*; Le Roy Ladurie, "Family Structures and Inheritance Customs"; Charles A. Bourdot de Richebourg, *Nouveau Coutumier General, ou corps des coutumes generales et particulieres de France, et des Provinces* (Paris, 1724).

⁸ G. Rouzier, 13 July 1728, E 297, ADCM. In a note signed by G. Rouzier, he refers to Demoiselle Françoise Guillemaut as the "femme procuratrice de Paul Belin Sieur de Marais."

Domingue in 1735 from Demoiselle Margueritte (*sic*) Fouchard, the widow of Jean Guillemaut, relations of his wife's.⁹ He shipped the indigo and cotton he produced to his cousin Etienne Belin, a prominent merchant in La Rochelle who helped Paul to maintain his close ties with the extended Belin clan in the city. Paul's return to France in 1740 further fortified these connections, and even after he settled in Paris he expressed his explicit preference to have his colonially-produced products sent to his cousin. He wrote to his plantation overseer, saying "you tell me that you will conform with pleasure with the remittance of my effects, as well as [those which] I have sent you, namely by the port of La Rochelle to the address of my cousin Mr E. Belin...."¹⁰ In accordance with his wishes, his agents in Saint-Domingue did indeed send Etienne Belin ten barrels of indigo.¹¹

His close business associates realized and accommodated Belin's preference for building business relationships on personal ones, a common practice in the Old Regime that shaped social relations. For example, the ship's captain Bossinot de Bellissur made the most of his opportunity to meet Belin's family in La Rochelle by emphasizing this connection in a letter. He wrote,

I passed all the days of last week in La Rochelle. I saw there a part of your respectable family; M. Seignette your brother-in-law, Messieurs Etienne and Allard Belin your cousins, they showed me much courtesousness but I did not have the time to cultivate these excellent acquaintances. I was deprived of the honor of seeing Madame Seignette your sister, [as] she was a little indisposed. I stayed with M.

⁹ E 295, ADCM. Jean Guillemaut may have been Françoise's half brother. A Jean Guillemaut was born in Saint Malo in 1717, and another born in 1718, both sons of Guillaume Guillemaut, which was also the name of Françoise's father. The mothers, however, had different names. Although the sale of this plantation was initiated in 1735, Belin did not pay off all the interest on the property until 1765.

¹⁰ Letter from Paul Belin des Marais in La Rochelle to Mrs E. de la Vincendiere and Gel. Bernard, merchants in Saint Marc, 12 July 1768, E 298, ADCM. "Vous me dites que vous conformerez avec plaisir sur les remises des mes effets, ainsi que je vous l'ai mandé, savoir par le port de la Rochelle à l'adresse de mon cousin Mr. E. Belin...."

¹¹ Letter from Delavincendiere and Gel. Berand in Saint Marc to Belin des Marais in Paris, 15 October 1768.

Benjamin Seignette who is also your relative and with whom I have a business relationship.¹²

By reiterating the extent of his own inclusion in Belin's business and social circles,

Bossinot suggested his own trustworthiness.

These circles based on personal relationships extended to France's colonies.

During Paul Belin des Marais' twenty-year sojourn in Saint-Domingue, he surrounded himself with people who had some connection to his family, his home, or his religion. Although this habit may have alleviated feelings of displacement or alienation brought on by the colonial experience, it also corresponded with general Old Regime practice, and was not unexpected given Belin's penchant for maximizing personal ties.¹³ However, during his decades in the colonies Belin built other relationships as well, which often had their roots in shared colonial experience. Such networks often existed outside of more traditional connections of family, place of origin, and religion. They even could cross lines of race and slave or free status, demonstrating a surprising flexibility of social relations within the seemingly rigid plantation system. Paul Belin formed such an enduring relationship with his slave Alexis, one that stood the test of both time and distance across the Atlantic.

¹² Letter from Bossinot de Bellissur in Rochefort to Belin des Marais in Paris, 19 May 1764, E 298, ADCM. Bossinot writes, "J'ai passé Ttes [toutes] les jours de la semaine derniere a La Rochelle. J'y ai vu une partie de votre respectable famille ; M. Seignette votre beaufrere, Mrs. Etienne et Allard Belin vos Cousins, ils m'ont fait beaucoup de politesse mais je n'ai pas eu le tems de cultiver toutes ces bonnes connoissances, j'ai été privé de l'honneur de voir Madame Seignette votre sœur, elle etoit un peu indisposée. J'ai demeuré chez M. Ben. Seignette qui est aussi votre parent et avec lequel je suis en liaison d'affaires."

¹³ On the Old Regime practice of forming networks and using them for social, political, or financial advancement, see Beik, *Absolutism and Society*, especially pp. 15-16 and Chapter 10.

Plantation Networks

Systems of plantation management relied on shifting hierarchies and divided responsibilities. Absentee ownership brought further complications, as the off-site owner could not make immediate decisions, had little opportunity to discern if his wishes had in fact been carried out, and needed to rely on his agents' on-the-ground judgment. In transient Saint-Domingue, where Paul Belin's plantation thrived, carefully-built networks of personal contacts could shift in a moment, when colonists returned to France, died in the unfamiliar tropical climate, or simply continued roaming in pursuit of elusive fortune. When Belin left his plantation in about 1740 to enjoy his wealth in the metropole, he thought he had his system of management, based on personal contacts, securely in place. He had appointed a *gerant*, or overseer, to take care of the day-to-day management of the plantation. He had chosen a *procureur* to hold his power of attorney, to supervise the overseer, and to approve all financial outlays. He made clear to these agents that he expected frequent updates on his property, and he even enlisted some friends and neighbors to keep a watchful eye on the place. Most surprisingly, perhaps, he maintained contact with his slave driver, Alexis, who also communicated with his owner about plantation management. But these networks of oversight proved fragile, and Belin's careful plans fell apart when his *procureurs* hired a new overseer to manage his property and slaves.

Belin made a safe choice in naming the firm of de la Vincendiere and Berard, based in the town of Saint Marc, his *procureurs*. Like most such agents, the firm managed the properties of several absentee landowners in France, and also acted as contacts between planters in Saint-Domingue and the French merchants who wanted

their goods. They would have been well versed in negotiating the Atlantic divide, both in terms of the uncertainties of transatlantic communication and in their understanding of both French and colonial business and cultural practices. Although the overseer had charge of the quotidian plantation management and provided the owner with frequent reports on the plantation's profitability and resources, *procureurs*, too, had a powerful incentive to manage the plantation well; in lieu of a regular salary or fee, they, like de la Vincendiere and associates, often received five percent of the plantation's profits.¹⁴ Both Belin's *procureurs* and his overseer sent Belin regular updates on the state of his holdings, and he sent particular directives to each in turn.

Like most plantation owners, even when he still lived in Saint-Domingue, Belin employed an overseer to manage his plantation. This position, in particular, required a high degree of trust between patron and client, as in the overseer's hands lay the profits. His duties included planting and harvesting crops, supervising the work and provisioning of slaves, arranging for repairs to be made to old buildings and the construction of new ones, caring for the livestock, and purchasing any slaves, animals, or goods needed for the plantation. Although for large purchases the overseer would have needed authorization from the plantation owner, or the *procureur* in his absence, for the most part he had free reign over how the plantation was run. Predictably, then, when Belin chose an overseer he picked a man with whom he shared more than an interest in plantation management. Pierre Paumier, Belin's overseer of many years, originally came from Saint Malo, the same town where Belin's wife's family lived, and the overseer's family had connections with the

¹⁴ Teychenié, "L'Habitation des Belin," p. 134.

Guillemaut family. Belin also had known Pierre's father, Guillaume, who even may have been Belin's overseer before Pierre. Such a personal connection gave Belin confidence in his overseer, and cemented their association within the familiar framework of personal relationships. The complex ties that bound Pierre Paumier's and Belin's families together made them accountable to many people beyond the plantation where they both lived.

Paumier seemed just as cognizant of the benefits of such relationships as his employer, and he leveraged his position of trust with Belin to benefit his family in far-away Saint Malo. Following time-honored practice, Paumier, like most individuals, wanted to pass his own property on to his heirs. However, the distance between Paumier in Saint-Domingue and his family in Saint Malo posed particular challenges. Transmitting money and other goods from one side of the Atlantic to the other was time-consuming, expensive, and dangerous; unscrupulous ship's captains, entrusted with cash, did not always deliver the entire sum placed into their hands for safekeeping. When Paumier thus looked for other means of transmitting his estate, he turned to his longtime associate Paul Belin, whose transatlantic contacts ran alongside those of his overseer.

When Pierre Paumier died in the colonies, he made a will leaving all his goods to Belin. His estate was small, simply comprised of some shirts, handkerchiefs, some slaves whom he had bought from Belin but not yet paid for, and "old shirts and pants in a very bad state, which he had himself given to the *négresse* who served him." Belin also received Paumier's furniture, papers, and any other

property he might have had.¹⁵ Paumier's intention was not to will all his worldly goods to his employer, but that Belin act as the agent to transmit it to Pierre's mother, Anne Vincent, who lived in Saint Malo. Transmitting credit from one side of the ocean to the other was a difficult and messy business. Letters of credit could be lost or stolen in transit, unscrupulous credit holders might refuse payment, and the exchange rate between colonial and French livres often proved challenging to calculate accurately. Completing the transaction through a contact who was established on both sides of the Atlantic proved an elegant solution. Belin's wife, Françoise Guillemaut, also in Saint Malo, paid Anne Vincent, Pierre's mother, two thousand livres on 2 December 1736.¹⁶ Because Belin and Guillemaut were married and presided jointly over common assets, funds paid to one of them could be disbursed by the other without any further transfer of credit, a situation unique to married couples separated by the Atlantic. Paumier could have confidence that his small estate would indeed be placed in his mother's hands, because of the ties of family and place that bound him with Belin.

However, once Belin had left Saint-Domingue, he could no longer rely as heavily on personal relationships he had established in the colonies. Many of the contacts he had carefully amassed during his years there had died or moved on. Therefore, when he needed a new overseer for his plantation in 1768, twenty years after he had returned to France, he had to rely on his *procureurs* to choose a suitable agent. Although the ultimate choice of overseer lay, of course, with the plantation owner, only the *procureurs* knew both the plantation's needs and the available

¹⁵ Pierre Paumier's will, 6 October 1735, E 295, ADCM.

¹⁶ Pierre Paumier's will, 6 October 1735, E 295, ADCM.

candidates. When the overseer's post became available on Belin's plantation, his *procureurs* de la Vincendiere and Berard chose one Sieur Prunier for the job.

Problems with Prunier: Distance and Personal Relationships

Given the difficulties and uncertainties of communication between France and its transatlantic colonies, maintaining personal relationships over distance proved a challenge for many letter writers. In a society where letter writing played an important role in creating and maintaining bonds between those separated by distance, letters were considered conversations with people who were absent.¹⁷ But conducting such conversations with people on the other side of the Atlantic posed singular challenges.¹⁸ Letters could take two or even three months to make an initial journey; depending on the season and the frequency of the departure of ships, responses could take even longer to return. Further, the delivery process was circumspect; often letters traveled well beyond the most direct route from writer to recipient, and the farther a letter traveled the less likely it was to reach its final destination. Correspondents developed a variety of techniques to try to circumnavigate these difficulties. Letters crossing the Atlantic were usually written in duplicate, sometimes triplicate, and sent by different routes in an attempt to ensure that at least one copy would reach its intended recipient. Letter writers also

¹⁷ Elizabeth C. Goldsmith, *Exclusive Conversations: The Art of Interaction in Seventeenth-Century France* (Philadelphia, 1988), Chapter 4. Also see Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1994), Chapter 4.

¹⁸ See Jane Harrison, *Until Next Year: Letter Writing and the Mails in the Canadas, 1640-1830* (Waterloo, Ontario, 1997), especially Chapter 2, for an extensive discussion of these difficulties.

developed the art of summarizing in each letter what they had written in preceding ones, often including the date each earlier letter had been sent.¹⁹

The difficulties posed by distance proved particularly problematic for absentee landowners such as Paul Belin, whose continued financial prosperity lay in the balance. His challenges were twofold: he had to work to maintain the personal relationships he had so carefully built, and to keep these conversations going in spite of the challenges posed by transatlantic communication. For Belin, trust was a central factor in maintaining business relationships. But if trust was difficult to maintain over distance, it was even more difficult to develop. Landowners, used to using their positions of privilege to confer favors or reward loyalty, found themselves relatively powerless, relying on written direction rather than personal relations to assure that their plantations returned the expected profits.

Paul Belin encountered this very situation when his *procureurs* hired Prunier as his new overseer. Belin had never met Prunier, and none of his contacts who lived or passed through the colonies seemed to have the pleasure of his acquaintance either. This was indeed a dramatic departure from Belin's usual practices. Because of this lack of personal acquaintance Belin never fully trusted Prunier, and this mistrust eventually eroded any confidence he had in his *procureurs* de la Vincendiere and Berard as well. The one person on his plantation in whom his faith never faltered, however, was his slave Alexis, who had built a personal relationship with his owner during their years living and working together in Saint-Domingue. When Belin ultimately had to choose between his slave and his overseer, he took the side of his

¹⁹ Letter writers in La Rochelle employed these techniques, which Jane Harrison also identifies in the letters of Marie de l'Incarnation in Canada. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

slave. Trust, built on personal ties and common experience, had forged Belin's relationship with Alexis, but distance had transformed it. In the years since Belin had returned to France, he had come to consider Alexis not merely as a slave, or even as a slave driver, but as an informer. This crucial difference subtly shifted the power balance in their relationship by opening the opportunity for Alexis to leverage Belin's trust, which endured in spite of the distance between them.

Even from the other side of the Atlantic, Belin mobilized his extensive network of relatives, friends, and associates to supplement the information he received about his plantation from his *procureurs* and overseer. He relied on his contacts who traveled to or lived in the colonies for first-hand reports on his estate. When a "very truthful" friend of Belin's passed through La Rochelle after returning from the colonies and told him that Prunier the overseer was mismanaging his resources, he took the report extremely seriously.²⁰ Belin wrote immediately to his *procureurs* in Saint-Domingue, saying,

I know this gentleman particularly, and I have as much confidence in him as if I had seen it myself. 'Our overseer Prunier,' he told me, 'thinks little of your interest, but he thinks a lot of his own; he has a quantity of livestock on your plantation, in any case, which he sells, and he also sells grain that naturally comes from your plantation, while your slaves lack it.' I will have many things to tell you here that he informed me of, but that is useless on the part that I have taken. I do not charge him [Prunier]

²⁰ Letter to Mr Payen in Saint Domingue from Belin des Marais in La Rochelle, 14 June 1768, E 298, ADCM. "Vous recevrez cette letter sous le couvert de Mrs. De la Vincendiere et Gel Berand à qui j'ecris ce jour à l'occasion de Prunier mon economie sur mon habita[ci]on que je vous prie, Mr, de concert avec ces Mrs de mettre hors de che moi par des raisons que j'ai appris par un des mes amis très veridique qui venant de St Domingue a débarqué à Bordeaux et passé ici. J'aurais trop de choses à vous dire de tout ce qu j'en sais, je viendes même qu'une partie à Mrs. Vous feront part de la letter que je leurs ecris. Je suis bein fâché de ce derangement, mais cet home restant chez moi me feroit encore plus de tort que ce qui pouroit en arriver, par la license qu'il a pris; il y en avoit du temps de Mr. Raulin, il me l'avoit même mandé, mais cela n'etoir pas au point ou cel aest aujourd'hui. Je lui avois passé en faveur du bien qu'il me disoit de ses talents. Mais cet home me paroît trop apre, comme il en etoit quelque chose lorsque Mr de la Vincendiere a en ma procuration, c'est ce qui fait qu'il ne s'en est pas bien aperçu."

with embezzlement, but his interests, which he has at heart, are very contrary to mine, and at the same time very detrimental.²¹

For good measure he asked his old friend in the colonies Monsieur Payen to ensure

that his wish to dismiss the overseer was followed through.²² He asked his

procureurs to replace Prunier with an overseer

who did not have his own plantation [and] who was a sensible man, not violent towards my slaves, and who does not have poultry and livestock at my plantation[.] In order to make his life agreeable [he will have] a *négresse* and a *negre* to serve him and a little hunting without employing anyone else in it, or selling anything.²³ He reiterated his wishes to dismiss Prunier in his next letter to his *procureurs*, and

charged them particularly with visiting his plantation regularly to ensure that his

specifications about its management were followed. Although Belin did not say that

his informant accused the overseer of abusing his slaves, he nonetheless expressed

particular concern about their well-being. “Make sure that my slaves have small

pleasures,” he instructed, “like raising pigs and poultry.”²⁴ This trepidation about his

slaves was particularly suggestive as Belin acknowledged that although “he [Prunier]

drags from the plantation the most that he can, . . . I do not complain about my

²¹ Letter to Mrs. De la Vincendiere and Gel. Berard in Saint Marc from Belin des Marais in La Rochelle, 14 June 1768, E 298, ADCM. “Je connois particulièrement ce Mr, et j’y ai tout autant de foi que si je l’avois vu moi même. Notre economie Prunier, m’a-t-il dit, peut penser à vos interest, mais il pense encore plus aux siens, il a quantité de Bestiaux chez vous de toute façon dont il fait commerce, il vend même des grains de toute nature provenant de votre habit[at]ion pendant que vos negre en manquent j’aurais bien des choses à vous dire icy dont il m’a instruit, mais cela est inutile sur le parti que j’ai pris. Je ne le taxe pas de malversation, mais ses interest qu’ils a si à coeur sont très contraires aux miens et même très prejudiciables.”

²² Letter to Mr Payen in Saint Domingue from Belin des Marais in La Rochelle, 14 June 1768, E 298, ADCM and letter to Mrs. De la Vincendiere and Gel. Berard in Saint Marc from Belin des Marais in La Rochelle, 14 June 1768, E 298, ADCM.

²³ Letter to Mr Payen in Saint Domingue from Belin des Marais in La Rochelle, 14 June 1768, E 298, ADCM. “Il faudroit qu’il n’eut pas d’habit[at]ion, que ce fut un homme sensé, point violent à mes Negres, qu’il n’eut des volailles et bestiaux chez moi[.] [Q]ue pour se procureur la vie agreeable, une negresse et un negre a le server et un peut la chasse sans en employer d’autres n’y rien vendre.”

²⁴ Letter to Mrs de la Vincendiere and Gel. Berard in Saint Marc from Belin des Marais in La Rochelle, 12 July 1768, E 298, ADCM. “Faites ensorte que mes negres aient de petites douceurs comme d’élever cochons et volaille.”

revenues.”²⁵ Money, often framed as plantation owners’ biggest concern, played no role in his complaints.

Belin’s explicit instructions, however, elicited no response from his agents in Saint Marc. Although he sent letters in June, July, August, and October of 1768 reiterating his wishes, by November he still had not received confirmation that his orders had been carried out. This was a difficult situation indeed. Over 4,000 miles separated Belin from his plantation. Although his economic prosperity depended on the trustworthiness of those to whom he had confided its management, more than profits were at stake: Belin’s entire way of doing business, based on patron-client relationships and personal trust, was on the line. The lack of response from his *procureurs* simply could have meant that they had not received his letters. On the other hand, it could have indicated that they had ignored his instructions completely, or, worse, that they had flouted his authority in favor of their own agenda. Faced with their possible negligence, he urged them to choose an overseer who met with the approval of one person he did trust: his slave Alexis. He wrote to his *procureurs*, “As you know that I have my slave Alexis, subject of trust; the overseer must have a certain regard for him. Messieurs Fulliot and Raulin there [in Saint-Domingue] stress this confidence; I beg you to have it also, and to commend to him a new overseer.”²⁶

Belin’s request may have been born of desperation, but it also speaks to the difficulties in maintaining business relations over time and distance. Belin had not

²⁵ Letter to Mrs de la Vincindiere and Gel. Berard in Saint Marc from Belin des Maris in Paris, 16 August 1768, E 298, ADCM.

²⁶ Letter to de la Vincendiere and gel Berard in Saint Marc from Belin des Marais in Paris, 22 November 1768, E 298, ADCM. “Comme vous scaves que jay mon negre Alexis sujet de confiance il faut que l'econome ait d'une certain facon des egards pour luy Mrs Fulliet et Raulin y accents de la confiance je vous prie dy en avoir auesy et de la recommander un nouveau econome.”

known Prunier, his new overseer, in the colonies, and he may not have even known de la Vincendiere and Berard, his agents in Saint Marc. But he had known and worked alongside of Alexis on his plantation, where Alexis was his slave driver.²⁷

As a slave driver, a slave who oversaw the work and often the punishments of other slaves, Alexis occupied a position of responsibility on Belin's plantation.

Responsibility did not equal intimacy between the slave and owner, but it did indicate a certain level of trust. This trust, built on personal association, endured even after Belin returned to France. Alexis, Belin's "subject of trust," became a crucial player in subsequent correspondence between the *procureurs* and Belin, and later his heirs.

At long last, the *procureurs* responded to Belin; his last letter crossed their tardy response mid-journey. In spite of all Belin's injunctions, his *procureurs* hesitated in following his orders to replace the overseer Prunier. They took a delicate approach, however, that attempted to keep their own relationship with Belin intact. Rather than defending Prunier outright, they warned that "good men are scarce, and most rare."²⁸ Although they acknowledged Belin's ultimate authority by promising to carry out his wishes to replace Prunier, they began to raise doubts about the veracity of the accusations against the overseer, accusations which, by implication, charged them with the mismanagement of the plantation as well. "Without laying

²⁷ The "Liste des negres, negresses, négrilons et negrites mentionnés dans le procès verbale," written by Fougerais, 26 January 1762, E 295, ADCM, lists Alexis as a "commandeur de nation cotocoly, agé d'environ 55 ans." Although this is the first time Alexis appears in the archives, this is also the first plantation report available for the Belin estate. Belin's attitude toward Alexis in combination with Alexis' relatively advanced age suggest that the slave had been working the plantation for a number of years. Bernard Moitt and Gabriel Debien both suggest that the slave driver, or *commandeur*, was the most valuable slave on the plantation, and one who had a "stake in the system" because of his comparatively high status among slaves and his close working relationship with whites. Bernard Moitt, *Women and Slavery in the French Antilles, 1635-1848* (Bloomington, 2001), p. 40; Gabriel Debien, *Les esclaves aux Antilles françaises (XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles)* (1974), p. 124.

²⁸ Letter to Belin Des Marais in Paris from de la Vincendiere and Gel Berard in Saint Marc, 15 October 1768, E 298, ADCM. "Les bons homes sont rares, et bein rare."

claim to authorize or excuse S[ieu]r Prunier,” they wrote, “we cannot, Sir, excuse ourselves from saying to you that the wrongs he has done to you have been much exaggerated.” They further quickly put to bed any thoughts of their own laxity by reassuring Belin that “Mr. de la Vincendiere has often been on your plantation, where he has always found everything in a very good state,” and even that “the slaves never lack for anything.”

They did not disavow the alleged abuses altogether, however, for to do so would have been to challenge Belin’s authority directly. Instead, the *procureurs* subtly turned the suspicion to another possible culprit. “The number [of Sieur Prunier’s pigs] is less than that of S[ieu]r Porte, the doctor,” they slid into their letter. After defending Prunier and casting suspicion elsewhere, the agents casually let drop, “incidentally, all your slaves have pigs, they have as gardens not levees because they are too labor-intensive to keep clean, but a quite large terrain next to Madame Fouchard.” This last accusation may have been born of desperation, as the agents sought to cast blame everywhere but on themselves. However, given Belin’s letter expressing his faith in Alexis, this was the shot that came closest to home. “These,” the *procureurs* swore, “are the facts taken from the plain and exact truth.”²⁹

²⁹ Letter to Belin Des Marais in Paris from de la Vincindiere and Gel Berard in Saint Marc, 15 October 1768, E 298 ADCM. “Sans pretender autoriser ni excuser le Sr Prunié nous ne pouvons, Monsieur, nous dispenser de vous dire que l’on vous à de beaucoup exagéré les torts qu’il avis avis de vous, cet homme vous est plus utile que vous ne pensés pas ses talents et son activité, il sera difficile de le remplacer par un semblable, ce pensant M. Payen et nous ne negligérons rien pour y parvenir, notre Sr. Delavincendiere a souvent été sur votre habitation, ou il y a toujours trouvé tout en tres bon etat, M. Payen lui même n’a pû s’smpecher d’admirer la proprieté de vos jardins et combine toute votre habitation est en bon ordre, il y a des vivres vos negres n’en ont jamais manqué, le suel tort que nous lui ayons reproché estoit d’avoir un troupeau de cochons trop considerables, car quant aux animaux le nombre des siens est moins grand que celui du Sr. Porte chirugien, tous ses abus sont aisés a reformer, et si vos orders de le mettre dehors n’avient pas été aussy précis de le mettre dehors nous réussions pres M. Payen et nous d’autres parties que celui de reformer ces abus.

Unlike his earlier correspondance, Belin's letter asking his *procureurs* to commend a new overseer to the slave Alexis provoked a quick response. Although Prunier was accused of keeping forty-four pigs, they said that "among that number there are six that belong to your slave driver Alexis, and four to another of your slaves."³⁰ Because of this misunderstanding, they hinted, Prunier had done nothing wrong. In fact, they asserted, his conduct and efforts had been so exemplary that Belin should give him a raise, because he "cannot live on the 2500 livres that you gave to him."³¹

The practice of slaves raising pigs to supplement their diet was not by any means unusual. Owners often extended slaves the opportunity to raise pigs for their own consumption, a practice which provided slaves with extra nourishment at little or no expense to their owner. Priests reporting their journeys to the islands had long noted this practice. In 1722, the Dominican Jean-Baptiste Labat identified potatoes as slaves' major source of nutrients, but added that "they are permitted to raise pigs, and they can do it very easily with the branches or the stalks and leaves of potatoes, the head of the sugar cane, and the heavy foam when they can have it."³² Writing in the

"Vos negres ont d'aillents tous des cochons, ils ont pour jardins non pas des levées parce qu'il est trop interenant de les tenir nettes, mais un assez grand terrain du costé de Mde Fouchard, en un mot rien ne leur manqué cecy sont des faits prisés dans la plén exacte verité."

³⁰ Letter from de la Vincendiere and Gel Berard in Saint Marc to Belin des Marais in Paris, 21 November 1768, E 298 ADCM. "Dans le nombre desquels il y en a 6 à votre commandeur Alexis et 4 à un autre de vos negres."

³¹ Letter from de la Vincendiere and Gel Berard in Saint Marc to Belin des Marais in Paris, 21 November 1768, E 298 ADCM. "Cet Homme qui ne peut pas vivre avec les 2500 # que vous lui donné."

³² Jean Baptiste Labat, *Nouveau voyage aux isles de l'Amerique: contenant l'histoire naturelle de ces pays, l'origine, les moeurs, la religion & le gouvernement des habitans anciens & modernes: les guerres & es evenement singuliers que y sont arrives pendant le long sejour que l'auteur y a fait: le commerce & les manufactures qui y sont établies, & les moyens de les augmenter: avec une description exacte & curieuse de toutes ces isles: ouvrage enrichi de plus de cent cartes, plans & figures en tailles-douces.* (Paris, 1722), Vol. 3, p. 189. "On leur permit d'élever des Cochons, & ils le

late seventeenth century, the Jesuit priest Du Tertre explained how slave owners could turn this practice to their own benefit as well.

They [the slaves] in the past were permitted to feed pigs, but the great amount of care they require made them [the slaves] neglect those of their Masters which they left to die of hunger; [masters] were obliged to take this privilege away from them. Sieur d'Ontage who is loved by his slaves, feeds them in a manner, that in place of costing him is quite useful to him: because he gives them [his slaves] from time to time five little piglets to feed, of which he takes three of his choice for himself, and leaves two for them: this makes it be that they raise all with the same care, and as they all have an interest in seeing them well fed, it is up to him who feeds them, I'll be dashed if there is not one among them who does not bring them a brew of creeper leaves, or potato stalks, when they return from work at midday and evening. After they are killed, he gives them others, and thus the slaves are well nourished and it does not cost him anything.³³

With this history of pig-raising in mind, the *procureurs*' allegations appear more an attempt to legitimate the overseer's practice of raising pigs than to raise accusations of wrongdoing against the slaves.

This conflict over Prunier and his pigs points to the ways distance shaped the often-fraught relationships between plantation owners, overseers, and slaves.

Overseers occupied an ambiguous position on the plantation, the equals of neither the owners nor the slaves. Owners often perceived overseers as self-serving scoundrels

peuvent faire très-facilement avec les branches ou le bois & les feüilles de Patates, les têtes de Cannes, & les grosses écumes, quand ils en peuvent avoir."

³³ R.P. Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale des Antilles habitées par les François, devisée en deux tomes, et enrichi de Cartes & de Figures*. (Paris, 1667), p. 519. "On leur avoit autrefois permis de nourrir des Cochons, mais le grand soin qu'ils en avoient leur faisant negliger ceux de leurs Maistres qu'ils laissoient mourir de faim; l'on a esté contraint de leur retrancher cette permission. Le sieur D'otange qui est adoré de ses esclaves, les nourrir d'une maniere, qui au lieu de luy estsé à chargé luy est encor utile: car il leur donne de temps en temps cinq petit cochons à nourrir, dont il y en doit avoir trois pour luy, & deux pour leur part, à son choix: cela fait qu'ils les élevent tous avec un mesme soin, & comme ils sont tous interessés à les bien nourrir, c'est à qui leur donnera à manger, de sorte qu'il n'y a pas un d'entre eux qui ne leur apporte une brassée de fuëilles de Liannes, ou de bois de Pattates, quand ils retournent du travail, a midy & au soir. Apres que ceux la sont tuez, il leur en donne d'autres, & ainsi ses esclaves sont bien nourris sans qu'il luy en couste rien."

Moreau de Saint-Méry, writing at the end of the eighteenth century, does not mention this practice, although he does state the popularity of hunting wild boar. This is not unexpected, however, as Moreau offers very few observations of the daily life of slaves, focusing instead on the delineation of racial characteristics and descriptions of African-influenced celebrations. Médéric-Louis-Elie Moreau de Saint-Méry, *La description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de Saint-Domingue*, 3rd ed. (Saint-Denis, 2004), Vol. 3, p. 1403. On festivals, particularly dancing and music, see Vol. 1, pp. 63-70.

who satisfied their own needs in advance of those of the plantation. However, overseers and slaves occasionally competed for the same jobs, heightening the tension between overseers and slaves in positions of responsibility in particular.³⁴ Distance further complicated these difficult relationships, inhibiting the owner from keeping tabs on rivalries or making his own judgments about whose word to believe. Instead, he had to weigh the communications he received by letter against his own fading impressions, trying to make decisions based on limited evidence about what course of action would best benefit his own current and future interests and the plantation as a whole.

Belin spent the winter laid up with gout, during which time he seemed to realize that battling his agents in Saint-Domingue over his overseer was not in his best interest. Although when the New Year dawned he reaffirmed that, “I have made my choice to discharge S[ieu]r Prunier. My intention has always been that my slaves should have abundant supplies and even little pleasures,” in the end he underwent a change of heart. He agreed to keep Prunier on as overseer, and even to raise his wages by five hundred livres per year “on the condition that, as he promised, he decrease his herd of pigs, which he must have only for his own consumption; an overseer should not sell anything for his own profit.” Belin offered a polite parting dig to his agents, subtly reminding them that he, after all, was the owner of the plantation, while simultaneously appealing to their shared knowledge of the plantation system and its working. “I do not believe it has happened,” he said, “but if

³⁴ William E. Wiethoff, *Crafting the Overseer's Image* (Columbia, SC, 2006), especially Chapters 2 and 4. Also see John Spencer Bassett, *The Southern Plantation Overseer as Revealed in His Letters* (Northampton, MA, 1925), William Scarborough, *The Overseer: Plantation Management in the Old South* (Baton Rouge, 1966), Michael Wayne, *Death of an Overseer: Repoening a Murder Investigation from the Plantation South* (New York, 2001).

by chance you have made the decision to give, S[ieu]r Prunier his leave, you will be the masters, Messieurs, of taking him back under the conditions above.”³⁵ With this phrase, he reminded his agents that they were in his employ and that they would continue to remain so only through his good grace. In spite of the agents’ proximity to his plantation and their responsibility to oversee it and the slaves, Belin remained the master of plantation, slaves, overseer, and even *procureurs*.

Alexis: Slavery and Patronage

Although patronage and clientage continued to operate in eighteenth-century France, they increasingly worked alongside bureaucratic meritocracies and within the context of an economy increasingly dependent on cash exchange.³⁶ However, the patron-client system continued to prove instrumental in structuring relations of slavery, and even offered some opportunities for slaves embedded in plantation economies. Slaves had limited prospects to better their position through hard work or personal merit. However, slaves could reap benefits through building personal relationships with their owners. In such circumstances, slaves could actively shape their relationships with their owners by positioning themselves as clients, thus pushing their owners into the position of patrons. This tactic disrupted the strict

³⁵ Belin des Marais in Paris to Mrs de la Vincendiere and Gel Berard in Saint Marc, 24 January 1769, E 298, ADCM. “. . .j’avois pris mon parti de renvoyer le Sr Prunier, mon intention ayant toujours été que mes negres eussent abondamment des vivres et bein des petites douceurs. C’est en quoi je persiste et que je vous prie de recommander particulierement au Sr Prunier d’après ce que vous m’en dites je consens à garder chez moi. Je consens pareillement à lui augmenter ses gages de 500# par an à condition que comme il l’a promis, il diminuera son troupeau de cochons dont il ne doit avoir que pour sa consommation seulement, un economne ne devant vendre quoique ce soit à son profit.” “Si par hazard ce que je ne crois pas, vous vous fassiez decide à congédier le Sr Prunier, vous serez les maitres, Messieurs, de le reprendre aux conditions surdites.”

³⁶ Kettering, *Patrons, Brokers, and Clients*, pp. 224-225.

hierarchical divide between owners and slaves, and emphasized instead the common interests between the two apparently polarized groups. Alexis used such a method in maintaining his relationship with his owner, in spite of the time and distance that separated them.

Belin did not relate to his agents the whole story of the communiqué he received accusing Prunier of mismanagement. Not until after Belin's death in 1769 did his version of events begin to circulate among his heirs. As specified in the will made soon after his marriage, Belin did indeed leave the joint estate accrued by him and his wife to their nieces and nephews, with half the assets passing to one side of the family and half to the other.³⁷ Upon their uncle's decease, letters flew between the Seignette heirs in La Rochelle and the Hallays heirs in Saint Malo. Belin's nephew Pierre Henry Seignette, who acted as the spokesperson for his siblings and cousins, wrote to Alexandre Hallays to inform him of a particularly interesting turn of events. "There is a stir on the plantation," he wrote excitedly.

Alexis the slave, slave driver with whom my uncle took the most extreme care, wrote to him a year ago, and raised with him complaints against M. Prunier, who is the overseer. He [Alexis] accused him [Prunier] of embezzling the [labor of the] slaves to have them work his own plantation, and that he made off with their supplies for his animals, which he raised in great quantity. My uncle wrote to Monsieur Payen and Messieurs de la Vincendiere and Berard, without saying by whom he was informed, to send this overseer packing. They did not do it and wrote that although he had had some lapses, that he had reformed. He [Prunier] arranged it so that Alexis was suspected of being a complainer, for everyone said that he was a good slave, [and] it was added after that he was an insolent who had acted by enmity.... On the other hand, it is the best motive of the plantation to inform [you in] secret, my dear cousin, the truth of this affair.³⁸

³⁷ "Succession Paul Belin, 8 aoust 1769," E 299, ADCM.

³⁸ Pierre Henry Seignette to Alexandre Ozée Quentin Hallays, 22 June 1769, in "Copie de lettres ecrites de Paris relativement a la succession de M. Belin Desmarais," E 299, ADCM. "Il y a en du bruit sur l'habitation, Alexis negre commandeur dont mon oncle faisoit le plus grand cas l'en fit ecire il y a un an, et lui portoit des plaintes contre M. Prunier qui est l'econome, il l'accusoit du detourner les negres pour travailler sur son propre habitation, et qu'il leur enlevroit leurs vivres, pour ses bestiaux dont il elevoit une grand quantité. Mon oncle ecrit a Mrs Payen et a Mrs Delavincendrie et Berard, sans dire

Throughout his correspondence with his *procureurs*, Belin had never explicitly expressed his mistrust of them; on the contrary, he continuously assured them of his faith in their good judgment. His reliance on personal relationships meant that he needed to constantly renew these ties. Belin perhaps realized that even giving the merest hint that his confidence in Alexis surpassed his faith in his agents had proved a strategic error, as the agents had responded to this suggestion with accusations. Seignette's letter makes clear, however, that Belin's trust lay wholly with Alexis, and that he viewed his *procureurs* as negligent and his overseer as criminal. His heirs accepted this "truth," as Seignette calls it, along with their inheritance.

Although in the confrontation between plantations and patronage the latter generally came off for the worse, slavery was the one colonial arena in which the patron-client system continued to operate effectively. In some specific situations, owners and slaves had the opportunity to build mutually beneficial although hierarchical relationships. Although such ties had elements of both patron-client relationships, they fit neatly into neither category.³⁹ The relationships that actually

d'ou il etoit informé, du renvoyer sur le champ cet economie, ils ne l'ont pas fait et ont écrit qu'il y avoit bien eu quelques dous (?-- illegible), mais qu'il s etoient reformais, il font qu'on ait soupçonné Alexis de s'etre plaint, car tout en disant qu'il est tres bon negre on ajoute apres c'est un insolent qui a été acté par l'imitie qu'on lui a temoigne M de Belle contre l'on de dit d'un autre coté que c'est le meilleur sujet du l'habitation informer dans sous main, mon cher c., de la verité a cette affaire quand vous sera sur le bien." Although this book of letters does not actually identify Pierre Henry Seignette as the writer, contextual clues make him the only choice. He refers to his brother Paul Louis Seignette Desmarais, who inherited their uncle's house; Pierre is the only other possible heir. In this I follow Teychenié, who also refers to a letter from "P.H. Seignette" to Hallys in this same series; this letter, dated Teychenié, "L'Habitation des Belin" June 1796, appears in this same book of letters. Teychenié, "L'Habitation des Belin," p. 157. The document prepared by the notary Delavergne for Belin's heirs states that Hallays lived in "Cul [de Sac], on the Island and Coast of Saint Domingue." 13 January 1772, E 299, ADCM.

³⁹ Work on French patron-client relationships has already been cited; see especially Kettering, *Patrons, Brokers, and Clients*. On the master-slave dialectic, see Georg Wilhelm Fredrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford, 1977).

developed between slaves and their owners suggest that their experiences lay somewhere between the extremes proposed by these two philosophers. In this case the slave, although very much in the position of a subordinate, had something the owner wanted: loyalty, for example, or service. The owner's desire for something the slave had pushed him or her into the position of a possibly unwilling patron, who nonetheless needed to reward a slave for something that, in the framework of a master-slave relationship, would have belonged to the owner as a matter of course. In the case of Alexis and Belin, Alexis had the experience and expertise to effectively evaluate the management of Belin's *habitation*. Further, he was on-site, and as a slave driver would have had an on-the-ground understanding of Prunier's management techniques and practices. Belin wanted this information, and was in a good position to reward Alexis for it.

As a longtime associate, Alexis perhaps noted that Belin preferred keeping his business dealings personal. It is even possible that Belin, hedging his bets, had asked his slave to keep an eye on the overseer for him. Perhaps more likely, Alexis gambled on his owner's manner of doing business. He demonstrated a remarkable resourcefulness in sending Belin a letter. This act itself suggests Alexis' understanding of the complexities of transatlantic communications, not to mention the challenges of writing a letter or having one written for him.⁴⁰ He might have figured he had little to lose: if Belin dismissed or disregarded his warnings, his distance likely would have prevented him from taking any punitive action against his slave. But if

⁴⁰ Alexis' familiarity with complex systems of communication around the Atlantic suggests that he was one of the "Atlantic creoles" defined by Ira Berlin as people of Africa, Europe, or the Americas who were "familiar with the commerce of the Atlantic, fluent in its new languages and intimate with its trade and cultures." Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), p. 23.

Belin did take his accusations against Prunier seriously, he stood to gain much not only for himself, but for all the slaves on Belin's plantation by ridding them of a possibly abusive tyrant. If Alexis was very lucky, perhaps Belin might even reward him for pointing out Prunier's abuses.

In the context of plantation slavery, patron-client relationships may have proved very attractive to slaves because of their reciprocity. Alexis could approach Belin less as a supplicant than as an informant, knowing he had access to information Belin wanted. Although distance and profits both weakened many personal bonds forged in the colonies, slaves may have had a vested interest in presenting themselves as clients. By fostering patron-client type relationships, slaves opened up the possibility of seeking and returning favors based on a model that allowed flexibility within a multi-level hierarchy. In the context of an increasingly inflexible slave society, this may have proved an attractive option indeed for the specific slaves, usually men already working in a skilled capacity, who could access it.

Belin did, in fact, reward Alexis richly for his loyalty, in a manner befitting a generous patron. Belin expressed his wish that after his own death Alexis should be freed, and by endowing "the slave Alexis with the right and ability of the said slave to take from the plantation whichever *négress* he would like to choose."⁴¹ Perhaps Belin had made this promise to Alexis and his confidence in his slave stemmed from

⁴¹ Procuration of coheirs, prepared by Notary Delavergne in La Rochelle, 13 January 1772, E 298, ADCM. "De plus donnent pouvoir au Sieur procureur constitué du consentir si fait n'a été la liberté du nègre Aléxis avec le droit et faculté audit nègre du prendre sur l'habitation telle négresse qu'il voudra choisir suivant l'intention dudit feu Sieur Belin Desmarais qui est connue aux constituants." Belin had also expressed this intention to give Alexis "a negress of his choice" to his agents in Saint-Domingue. De la Vincendiere in Saint Marc to E. Belin and Seignette l'ainé in La Rochelle, 12 October 1770, E 300, ADCM. "Ensuite [after he receives his liberty] lui ferai la remise d'une negresse a son choix sur lad[i]te hor.(?) bien entendu que les frais, qui seront peu de chose, pour son affranchissement seront a la charge des heritiers."

his certainty that Alexis would do nothing to jeopardize his eventual liberty, or perhaps his freedom came as a surprise to the slave driver. In either case, giving Alexis not only his own freedom but also a slave woman of his choice gave him the status of both a free man and a head of household. When Belin's agents in Saint-Domingue wrote "the slave Alexis will... enjoy the fruit of the attachment his late master had for him," they referenced not only his freedom, but also his masculine authority over his wife and any children they may have had.⁴²

With the increasing bureaucratization of the colonies, however, came limits on the benefits patron-client relationships could offer slaves. The owner alone did not have the power to transform slaves into freedmen; the regulating oversight of the colonial bureaucracy modulated this power. Manumission laws charged colonial administrators with policing the boundary between slave and free, taking the demarcation of status out of the possibly capricious and easily-influenced hands of slave owners. In order to formally manumit a slave, the master needed to obtain permission to do so from colonial administrators. Administrators usually were quite liberal in granting this permission, perhaps because owners had to pay a hefty manumission tax. In the 1770s this typically amounted to around one thousand livres for a female slave and five hundred livres for a male slave, the disparities in these amounts reflecting that manumitting a female slave also meant freeing her descendants.⁴³ These substantial amounts could discourage all but the most

⁴² De la Vincendiere and Gel Berard in Saint Marc to Madame the widow Belin des Marais in Paris, 22 September 1769, E 298, ADCM. "Le negre Alexis, va par cet inventaire jouir de fruit de l'attachement qu'avoit pour lui feu son maitre qui avoit precedemment donné ordre à fuë M. Raulin de lui donner sa liberté."

⁴³ On the process of manumission, see Stewart R. King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig: Free People of Color in Pre-Revolutionary Saint Domingue* (Athens, 2001), pp. 108-109. King specifies that many owners successfully had these taxes waived or reduced. This, however, would have required further

determined manumitter.⁴⁴ The Belin heirs adhered to their uncle's wishes and began this process in a timely manner. An unforeseen catastrophe impeded the enregistration of Alexis' freedom papers, however: a severe earthquake in Port-au-Prince destroyed the offices of the *Intendant*, rendering him unable "to ratify the liberty of the slave Alexis."⁴⁵ Alexis finally received his liberty in 1771, two years after his owner's death, at which time Belin's nephew Seignette wrote, "We are quite relieved to see the affair of the slave Alexis finished."⁴⁶

Although Seignette by this time was a plantation owner, he had no firsthand experience with the colonies and probably little firsthand experience with slavery. He may have read travelogues about the colony to learn about his new property, he might have heard stories about the far-away land from his uncle, and he certainly read the letters sent to him by the plantation's *procureurs* and *gerant*. However, his views on colonialism, slavery, and free people of color were formed in France, rather than forged through colonial experience. Although Seignette made every effort to free Alexis he never trusted the former slave as his uncle had, and he had no idea how a

paperwork, and made manumission a longer process. See also "Settres-Patent du Roi," 22 April 1775 and "Ordonnance des Administrateurs concernant les Libertés," 23 October 1775, in Médéric-Louis-Elie Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et constitutions des colonies françaises de l'Amérique sous le vent* (Paris, 1784-1790), Vol. 5, pp. 587 and 610-613 respectively.

⁴⁴ A number of slave owners did go through with this process, however. A certain Boisdenier, a planter client of Port-au-Prince procureur Pierre Garasché, wrote to his agent asking him to see to the enregistration of the manumission of one of his slaves. He did not hesitate at the 1000 livre price, or the various other small fees associated with the manumission process. Boisdenier in Fonds des Nègres to Garasché in Port-au-Prince, 30 June 1780, 4 J 1610, ADCM.

⁴⁵ De la Vincendiere in Saint Marc to E. Belin and Seignette l'ainé in La Rochelle, 12 October 1770, E 300, ADCM. "Comme depuis l'évennement du tremblement de terre du Port au Prince les Bureaux du Mrs. Les Général et Intendnat n'ont pas encore repris leurs fonction, je n'ay encore pu faire ratifier la liberté du negre Alexis."

⁴⁶ Seignette in La Rochelle to Dulary in Saint Marc, 10 November 1771, E301, ADCM. "Nous sommes bien aise de voir teminé l'affaire du negre Alexis." Also see Pierre Henry Seignette in La Rochelle to de le Vincendiere in Saint Marc, 18 January 1771, E 301, ADCM. "Nous vous prions Monsieur, aussitot l'ouverture des baie? De procurer l'execution de la volonte de M. Belin Desmarais en faveur du Negre Alexis."

free black man could fit into a colonial framework. After Alexis' freedom was finally ratified, Seignette wrote to the *procureur*:

If you believe him [Alexis] useful to the plantation, do not neglect to attach him to it. We believe however that one must only have a limited confidence in these people. They are almost all rascals and liars. They are naturally enemies of those who command them. You must know better than us, and know what degree of confidence one can accord them.⁴⁷

Although Seignette seemed aware of complex colonial relationships and categories he did not understand, his categorical attitude marked a shift in how the Belin plantation was managed, and in French attitudes toward slavery and people of color in general.

The Heirs

After Belin's death, his heirs decided to keep his plantation intact. It was his estate's most valuable asset by far; even when the heirs filed for indemnity in 1829, after the upheavals of the Haitian Revolution, the French government judged the property to be worth the considerable sum of 54,818.22 francs.⁴⁸ The heirs' joint ownership and management of this property further buttressed the ties of kinship, religion, and commerce that joined the La Rochelle and Saint Malo branches of the family. Even while their inheritance reinforced the bonds of their mutual interest, however, the heirs shifted to a different style of plantation management that was independent of the complex system of personal relations and indebtedness so favored

⁴⁷ Seignette in La Rochelle to Dulary in Saint Marc, 10 November 1771, E301, ADCM. "Si vous le croyez utile a la habitation il ne faut pas manqué de lui attaché. Nous croyons cependant que ne faut avoir dans ces sorte de gens qu'une(?) confiance bornée. Ils sont Presque tout[es] coquine[s] et menteur[s]. Ils sont par etat enemis de ceux qui les comande. Vous les devé [devez] mieux connaitre que nous et savoir quell degree de confiance on peut les accorder."

⁴⁸ "Ministere des Finances- Etat Détaillé des Liquidations opérées a l'époque du 1er janvier 1830 par la commission chargée de répartir l'Indemnité attribuée aux anciens Colons de Saint-Domingue, en exécution de la Loi du 30 avril 1826 et conformément aux dispositions de l'Ordonnance du 9 mai suivant," 1829, Bibliothèque SOM D 64 1829, CAOM.

by their uncle. Like most absentee owners in France who had never set foot in the colonies, they relied on the overseer's dry figures of profits and losses to glean information about the plantation, and drew more on progressive theories than colloquial reports in their decision-making. As part of this shift in management style, the heirs expressed great concern over the physical well-being of their slaves; however, any opportunity for slaves to leverage personal relationships with their owners was gone.

The overseer's reports, sent regularly to the heirs, sketched a bare-bones picture of plantation life. They laid out slave demographics, the process and seasons of cultivation of crops, and the types of livestock that were raised there. The reports gave little insight into the relationships plantation residents had with each other or with the far-away property owners. The main difference, however, between the reports received by Paul Belin and those sent to his nieces and nephews was not in how they were written but in how they were read. Belin had spent two decades in the colonies, while most of his heirs had never set foot there. The deaths of slaves and the deaths of livestock, lined up in adjacent columns, could have little difference for them. From this lack of colonial experience stemmed a new leadership style emphasizing maximum profitability, a goal they worked to meet by combining new theories with old prejudices.

The overseer's reports focused primarily on the assets of the plantation, a concern that had slaves at its center because of both their market value and the value of their labor. A characteristic report, drawn up by the overseer in October of 1777, included a complete list of the slaves sorted into categories according to sex, with

separate lists for men, women, boys, and girls. The overseer who prepared the report gave each slave a number and listed their names, African nations, ages, and noted who had died since his last update had been sent. The Belin plantation was a large one. It included 89 adult male slaves, including Jacques, a Creole, age 47; Hector, from Congo, aged 23; La Fortune, a Barbutte slave who died 31 August 1777, aged 45; and three slaves purchased from the ship *La Badine*, captain Dupuy, in 1776. These three, Laraye, Cupidon, and Laviolette, all came from Congo, and the overseer classified all as adults although they were only twelve years old. The oldest man, Cesar, of the Bambarra nation, was ninety years old; Guillaume, of Arada, was close behind at 85. The overseer listed seventy enslaved women after the men. They included Minerve, of the Congo, aged 17; Izabelle, a Bambarra, aged 43; and Claudine, aged 39, a Creole, who died 12 September 1779. Three women, Rochelaise, Gutinelle, and Poitevine, all aged 14, were purchased from the slave ship *La Badine*, Captain Prin, in 1778.⁴⁹ The plantation also included 19 young boys, aged several months to nine years, and 26 girls, of similar ages.⁵⁰ The overseer followed this assessment of slaves with a list of their births and deaths, which included detailed information about the causes of slave mortality, but omitted even the names of the mothers of the newborns. The overseer perhaps wanted to make

⁴⁹ The names of Rochelaise and Poitevine are especially interesting, as they reference the native city of Belin and his heirs and a nearby province. These names presumably were given to the woman by the overseer, suggesting that perhaps he also was of Rochelais origin. This suggests that after the disastrous Prunier, the heirs tried once again to hire an overseer with whom they had personal ties. This could indicate that their shift away from patronage only extended to their relations with slaves.

⁵⁰ All this information is contained in "Etat General des negres de l'haon [habitation] les hers [heriteurs] Belin Desmarais en 8bre 1777," October, 1777, 4 J 2915, ADCM. Although the document is dated October 1777, it includes notations indicating slaves who were purchased in 1778. This may indicate that the overseer began preparing this report in 1777, or simply that he mislabeled the date. However, the year 1777 appears at the tip of several headings of the report, and the date 1778 appears as the purchase date for slaves in each of the four categories.

clear that each death came as a natural matter of course; twenty-one of the 38 deceased slaves were aged 70 or above when they died. In contrast, for the newborns, the very fact of their birth constituted enough information as they added to, rather than subtracted from, the value of the plantation. The overseer listed the animals found on the plantation immediately after this tally of slaves, highlighting to the heirs the value of both slaves and livestock.

A second list appended to the *gerant*'s report classified slaves according to the related variables of their gender and the type of work they performed.⁵¹ In general, all work classified as skilled labor was assigned to men. The *commandeurs*, or slave drivers, were considered the most skilled, and by the time the plantation passed into the heirs' control, all had been born in the colonies. The four drivers, Bastien, Louis, Michault, and Pierre, were followed by four indigo-processors (*indigoiteurs*), four carpenters, three masons, and five *cabrouetiers*, who transported the cane from fields for processing. Aside from these twenty men, the rest of the male slaves were classified as field hands, including the one-month-old Ambroise. None of the female slaves received any classification at all, although some of them surely worked as

⁵¹ This report follows the report dated October 1777 in the archives. "Etat des Negres, Negrillons, Negresses et Negrittes de l'habitation de Mr. Belin Desmarais, fait le 24 octobre 1777," 24 October 1777, 4 J 2915, ADCM.

The edited volume *More than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas* addresses the question of the gendering of slave work from several different points of view. Claire Robertson argues that slaves chose to divide labor along lines of gender were they given the autonomy to do so. Claire Robertson, "Africa into the Americas? Slavery and Women, the Family, and the Gender Division of Labor," in *More than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas*, ed. David Barry Gaspar, Jr., John McCluskey and Darlene Clark Hine, (Indianapolis, 1996), pp. 21-23. Richard Steckel points to the early tracking of enslaved boys and girls into different types of labor and the unavailability of skilled labor positions for women. Richard H. Steckel, "Women, Work, and Health under Plantation Slavery in the United States," in the same volume, pp. 44-45. Hilary Beckles argues that skilled women were seldom considered skilled workers Hilary Beckles, "Black Female Slaves and White Households in Barbados," in the same volume, pp. 115.

laundresses, midwives, or nurses; skilled labor performed by women was rarely considered such.

Just over a decade later, this system of classification was beginning to change in a way that further undermined possibilities for slaves to leverage personal relationships with their owners for their own benefit. Although the *gerant* still made separate lists for men and women, he listed slaves not according to their skill level but according to their monetary worth.⁵² This small but crucial shift implies a larger underlying change in the heirs' attitudes towards the slaves who worked their plantation; as their uncle's colonial experience receded farther back in time, they increasingly perceived slaves only in light of how they added to the plantation's assets. The most valuable slaves, the indigo-makers in their late twenties at the height of their strength and skill, such as Augustin, St. Lazerre, and Petit Bastien, were worth 6600 livres each. Women, across the board, were assigned lesser prices. The midwife Marie Thomas, a Creole woman aged 36, was given the highest value for a woman at 4000 livres, an overdue but dubious recognition of her skill. The infirm Louis Quecqué, Jasmin, and Eulisse, Fanchon, Jeanne, Rose, and Louise were all assessed at only 5 livres each. Old age and disability acted as the great equalizers in the disparity in the monetary values assigned to women and men. This document bleakly suggests that slaves' only worth lay in their labor, and that the skilled labor coded as masculine was the most significant. Slaves' labor potential also was of great consequence: the newborn infants Rémy, Michel, and St. Jean, all boys, each were valued at 150 livres even though they clearly were not yet working the fields.

⁵² "Inventaire Général du mobilier composant l'habitation de Messieurs les héritiers Bélin Desmarais à la mort de M. Vizeux Gérant remplacé par le Sieur Traston ce jour 2 Juin 1790: aux apointements de 6000 [Livres] par an Compris les soins de l'hospital," 2 June 1790, 4 J 2915, ADCM.

Although the girls Suzette and Nanon were worth less, the prices of boys and girls increased exponentially as they got older. Fabien, only eleven years old, was already priced at 2500 livres, while Phitiose, at twelve, was valued at 3000. According to this report, the 205 slaves who worked this plantation in 1790 were together worth 433,795 livres, a considerable portion of the plantation's net worth. These dry columns of assets and losses suggest little of the complexities of race and status in both colonial and metropolitan contexts where these categories were still very much disputed. They did highlight, however, the increasing importance of money, even in a place where prices were more generally measured in pounds of indigo than in pounds sterling.

This new shift towards an emphasis on monetary value cut both ways. Belin's heirs could perceive their slaves in the context of profits and losses, but the slaves themselves could leverage their value—and their cooperation—in a way that could bring them closer to freedom, a freedom not bestowed as a reward by an owner, but one earned through the painstaking process of self-purchase. The new prevalence of cash contributed to the ambiguity of the relationship between color and slave or free status, an uncertainty only made more distinct by the labor of free people of color on the plantation. In an accounting of debts, the overseer Vizeux included payment to an artisan named Paillet, who worked with a “free mulatto to build the slave huts, for a total of 222 days.”⁵³ The plantation's slaves certainly saw and perhaps interacted

⁵³ “Compte que moy Vizeux Gérant l'haon [habitation] Belin Desmarais rendu à Messierus Sr. Macary Beaucamp et Ponyés Frères negts. [négociants] St. Marc et charges de la Procuracion,” 23 July 1786, 4 J 2915, ADCM. “Pour 111 journées de nourriture de Paillet ouvrier et un mulatre libre pour faire les cazes a negre ensemble 222 journées.” On free people of color and their roles in Saint-Domingue, also see Stuart King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig: Free People of Color in Prerevolutionary Saint Domingue* (Athens, GA, 2001), and John Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint Domingue* (New York, 2006).

with this man as he worked to build their houses. But this unnamed mulatto was not the only person of color on the plantation to be paid in cash. Vizeux also listed a payment of 8.5 livres “to a slave of Lemere for capturing a maroon slave,” and another payment of the same amount “to the slave of Madame Couturier for a maroon slave.”⁵⁴ It was not uncommon for slaves to pursue runaways. That they were being paid for it, however, rather than offered more intangible rewards, suggests that slaves themselves might have had a say in how their cooperation was obtained. Belin perhaps bribed Alexis with the promise of his eventual freedom, relying on the deferred gratification intrinsic to the patron/client system. But Alexis’ successors knew, perhaps from the mulatto man who had helped to build their houses, that freedom could be bought.

The level of skill owners assigned to slaves’ tasks mediated their likelihood to receive monetary rewards. Slaves were not only remunerated for the violent work of slave catching, they could also receive rewards for performing their regularly assigned plantation duties. For example, Vizeux’s report lists “tips for the two indigo makers” of 33 livres each.⁵⁵ These indigo makers occupied privileged positions among slaves. Plantation owners relied on their skill for the purity, quality, and price of their product. They had to accurately judge the length of fermentation of the plants, how long to agitate the liquid drawn off the steeped stalks, the amount of lime to add to the precious liquid, how long to let the liquid settle, the amount of liquid to

⁵⁴ “Compte que moy Vizeux Gérant l’haon [habitation] Belin Desmarais rendu à Messieurs Sr. Macary Beaucamp et Ponyés Frères negts. [négociants] St. Marc et charges de la Procuracy,” 23 July 1786, 4 J 2915, ADCM. “Payé à un nègre de Leymere pour prise d’un nègre marron;” “Payé au nègre de Madame Couturier pour un nègre marron.”

⁵⁵ “Compte que moy Vizeux Gérant l’haon [habitation] Belin Desmarais rendu à Messieurs Sr. Macary Beaucamp et Ponyés Frères negts. [négociants] St. Marc et charges de la Procuracy,” 23 July 1786, 4 J 2915, ADCM. “Gratification à deux negres indigotiers... 66.”

draw off the indigo mud, and, finally, how long to let the mud dry before it could be cut into cubes and prepared for sale.⁵⁶ As the price the dye fetched at market depended on its color and purity, the indigo makers had important positions indeed, and it was essential to owners that the slaves prepare the best product possible.⁵⁷ For slaves, a tip such as this could have meant better food for their family, a warmer winter, or eventual freedom—powerful incentives indeed.

This practice of tipping reveals fissures in the slave system by suggesting that coercion alone might not prove incentive enough for slaves to perform their work to the best of their ability. Owners had good reason to encourage slaves with carrots rather than sticks in order to maximize their own profits. This new tactic also coincided with a philosophical shift in France toward an increasing condemnation of the brutality of slavery. As the abolitionist movement gained force, some landowners attempted to mitigate slavery's abuses by offering slaves positive incentives. This tactic had profoundly different implications for enslaved women and enslaved men because of the different ways in which owners valued their labor. It also signaled, however, a shift in the possibilities for owner-slave relations. As owners enthusiastically adopted blanket management strategies, at least partly in response to abolitionist urgings to ameliorate the conditions of slavery, individual slaves had

⁵⁶ For a good description of how indigo was made, see G. Terry Sharrer, "The Indigo Bonanza in South Carolina, 1740-90," *Technology and Culture* 12, no. 3 (1971):447-455, especially pp. 250-252. Contemporary sources also describe how indigo was made. See, for example, Du Terte, *Histoire Generale des Antilles*, Vol. 2, p. 107-110.

⁵⁷ John Garrigus describes the increasing importance of indigo production to the economic prosperity of Saint-Domingue in 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):233-263. He argues that indigo production offered economic opportunity for free people of color, in particular (pp. 237-247). It is possible that indigo production may have been a point of contact between skilled slaves who processed indigo and people of color who owned indigo plantations.

more limited opportunities to form personal relationships with their owners, relationships which they had often used for their own benefit.

Gendered Labor

Enslaved women had fewer opportunities than enslaved men to parlay their skills into concrete benefits such as cash rewards. Similarly, because of the lower value placed on women's labor, most women would not have had the opportunity to build a patron-client relationship based on mutual interests with their owners. Sexual and reproductive labor were avenues through which many women did engage in personal relationships with their owners; such connections, however, had profoundly different resonances than the ties between Alexis and Belin, for example, or the male indigo processors and the generous owners who tipped them. Sexual encounters between slave women and their owners often were tinged with abuse, and it remains difficult to perceive ways in which such women exerted agency.⁵⁸ Although some abolitionists identified reproduction as a locus for enslaved women's resistance, slave owners also treated it as an economic calculus aimed at producing more product: either slaves or the crops they tended. Both these formulations, however, frame slave women only in relation to their reproductive potential. This conception, while increasingly in line with contemporary ideas about European women, leaves no room

⁵⁸ Hilary Beckles delineates how slave women could pursue sexual relationships with white men for their own advancement; this could be framed as a form of agency, although within extremely constrained limits. Beckles, "Black Female Slaves and White Households in Barbados," pp. 117-119. Also see Bernard Moitt, "Slave Women and Resistance in the French Caribbean," in *More than Chattel*, p. 245; Moitt claims that enslaved women exchanged sexual favors for material goods. David Geggus argues that slave women could parlay their sexual service into freedom. David Geggus, "Slave and Free Colored Women in Saint Domingue," in *More than Chattel*, p. 265.

for the possibility of extended personal relationships, either sexual or not, between black women and white men.

From the 1770s onward proponents of slavery realized that if the slave trade were abolished, as seemed increasingly likely, in order for the Caribbean colonies to remain economically profitable the slave population would have to be self-sustaining. This gave the reproductive labor of enslaved women even more weight.⁵⁹ However, this emphasis on slave women's reproductive labor was hardly new; for well over a century, European writers copiously had addressed the ease with which black women gave birth. Du Tertre, writing in the seventeenth century, explained to his readers:

female *Négres* are naturally very fecund, so much so that it seems that God renews in their person the miracle of the Jewish women slaves in Egypt: because the more they suffer, the more they have children...they give birth with much ease, although they do not know for the most part that which the midwives know (?) to succor them in this state, ... and they are so little incapacitated by their childbirth that I have seen them bestir themselves two or three hours after in the Master's House, as if nothing had happened.⁶⁰

In one stroke, the Dominican priest legitimated the physical abuse of pregnant slave women and classified their reproductive labor as hardly any labor at all. To harness this amazing reproductive potential, Du Tertre urged owners to allow slaves to choose mates freely, which, he reasoned, would maximize birth rates and increase profits.

"The love that they have for each other," he claimed, "is quite tender." Family ties were so natural and powerful, he went on, that overseers should be careful to "conceal with prudence the discontentment that a man shows (?) when his wife is punished, or

⁵⁹ On slave women's productive and reproductive labor, see Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia, 2004).

⁶⁰ Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale des Antilles*, pp. 505-506. "Les femmes Nègres sont naturellement fort fécondes, si bien qu'il semble que Dieu renouvelle en leur personne la merveille des femmes Juives esclaves en Egypte: car plus elles ont de mal, & plus elles ont d'enfans; & le seul amour qu'elles leur portent les empesche d'en avoir davantage;... Elles accouchent avec beaucoup de facilité, & ne sçavent pour la pluspart ce que c'est que de Sages femmes pour les secourir dans cet état, ... & elles sont si peu incommodées de leur accouchement, que j'en ay veu tracasser deux or trois heurs apres dans la Case, comme si rien ne s'estoit passé."

that a Father and a Mother witness, when one of their children is punished.” This emotion could be so strong that “I have seen,” he claims, “fathers and mothers who throw themselves on their knees, and beg that they be beaten in the place of their children.”⁶¹ Further, he claims, “the *Nègres* love their children with such tenderness, that they take the butcher’s morsel from themselves to give it to them.”⁶² For Du Tertre, such displays of emotion were curious and touching, proof of *nègres*’ simplicity. Later, the Abbé Raynal accepted Du Tertre’s interpretation of such attachments, and advocated that owners facilitate them, both for their own good and for that of their slaves.

It was not until the second half of the eighteenth century that some authors began to question whether the productive work of slavery, particularly the brutal field labor in which women were concentrated, was conducive to carrying a healthy pregnancy to term. Noted abolitionist Abbé Raynal commented, “We compel the *Nègresses* to work so hard, before and after their pregnancy, that their fruit does not reach term, or survives only a short time after the birth.”⁶³ Abolitionists began blaming the cruelty of masters for the inability of the slave population in the colonies to sustain itself rather than placing the blame on slave women. Raynal says, “It is not the *Nègres* who refuse to multiply in the chains of their slavery. It is the cruelty of

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 499. “L’Amour qu’ils ont les uns pour les autres, est fort tendre, . . . : si bien qu’il faut que le Commanduer qui les chastie quand ils ont failly, dissimule avec prudence le mécontentement qu’un homme fait paroistre quand on punit sa femme, ou qu’un Pere & une Mere témoignent, quand on chastie quelqu’un de leurs enfans; . . . j’ay veu des Peres & des Meres qui se jettoient à genoux, & qui prioient qu’on les frappast `a la place de leurs enfans.

⁶² Ibid., p. 510. “Les Nègres ayment leurs enfans avec tant de tendresse, qu’ils s’ostent le morceau de la boucher pour leur donner.”

⁶³ Abbé Guillaume-Thomas-François Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissemens et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (Paris, 1778), p. 212. “Nous exigeons des Nègresses des travaux si durs, avant & après leur grossesse, que leur fruit n’arrive pas à terme, ou survit peut à l’accouchement.”

their masters that make the vows of nature useless.”⁶⁴ Raynal began to urge owners to offer rewards to female slaves who successfully bore children and raised them to a certain age.

This positive incentive plan grew out of Raynal’s apparent realization that controlling their own reproduction was a major mode of resistance and expression of self-ownership used by slave women.⁶⁵ He says,

Sometimes even, one sees mothers made desperate by the punishments that the weakness of their state brings upon them, wrest their infants from the cradle in order to suffocate them in their arms, and sacrifice them with a fury mixed with vengeance and with mercy, in order to deprive barbarous masters.⁶⁶

In this startling departure from earlier writings on slave reproduction, Raynal placed the blame for these infanticides squarely on the slave owners, not on the slave women who killed their children. Raynal thus turned ideals of motherhood upside down, positioning slave women as victims, and making their owners the “barbarous monsters.” Raynal drew on what he interpreted as the feminine imperative to have children, an idea that was quickly gaining credence in Europe, spurred on by Rousseau’s cult of domesticity. In his popular book *Emile*, Rousseau connected the physical act of giving birth and becoming a mother with the generation of maternal and familial feelings when he wrote:

I dare to promise these worthy mothers a solid and constant attachment on the part of their husbands, a truly filial tenderness on the part of their children, the esteem and respect of the public, happy deliveries without accident and without aftermath, a firm

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 212. “Ce ne sont pas les Nègres qui refusent de se multiplier dans les chaînes de leur esclavage. C’est la cruauté de leurs maîtres qui a se rendre inutile le vœu de la nature.”

⁶⁵ Barbara Bush, “Hard Labor: Women, Childbirth, and Resistance in British Caribbean Slave Societies,” in *More than Chattel*, pp. 204-208. Bush places low slave fertility rates in the context of resistance to slavery, and suggests that slave women played an active role in these low rates.

⁶⁶ Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Inde*, p. 212. “Quelquefois même, on voit des meres désespérées par les châtimens qui la foiblesse de leur état leur occasionne, arracher leurs enfans du berceau pour les étouffer dans leurs bras, & les immoler avec une fureur mêlée de vengeance & de pitié, pour en priver des maîtres barbares.”

and vigorous health; finally the pleasure of seeing themselves one day imitated by their own daughters and cited as an example to others' daughters.⁶⁷ When Raynal framed maternal feelings as the most powerful forces in slave women, powerful enough even to prompt women to kill their children to protect them from the horrors of slavery, he thus applied European ideas about femininity and motherhood to enslaved women of African descent. In doing so, he simultaneously suggested the equality of all women and an unalterable difference between women and men, a difference defined by women's biology.

In Raynal's view, this feminine imperative to have children, if approached correctly, could address both concerns about the sustainability of the slave population and emerging abolitionist criticisms of the cruel excesses of slavery. His plan would offer slave mothers an incentive to protect and nurture children, born and unborn, while at the same time offering slave owners a reason not to overwork pregnant mothers. "Nothing," he declared, "equals the enticement of liberty in the hearts of men." If slave owners would only

break the irons of mothers who had raised a considerable number of children, to the age of six years... the *Négresses* animated by the hope of such a great reward, to which all aspire, and which few achieve, would make neglect and crime be succeeded by the virtuous ambition to raise infants, whose number and preservation would assure them a tranquil state.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Emile, ou, De l'éducation," in *Oeuvres Complètes*, (Paris, 1969), p. 258-259. "...j'ose promettre à ces dignes mères un attachement solide et constant de la part de leurs maris, une tendresse vraiment filiale de la part de leurs enfans, l'estime et le respect du public, d'heureuses couches sans accident et sans suite, une santé ferme et vigoureuse, enfin le plaisir de se voir un jour imiter par leurs filles, et citer en exemple à celles d'autrui."

⁶⁸ Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissemens et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*, pp. 212-213. "On les verra peut-être se déterminer à rompre les fers des mères qui auront élevé un nombre considérable d'enfans, jusqu'à l'âge de six ans. Rien n'égale l'appât de la liberté sur le coeur de l'homme. Les Négresses animées par l'espoir d'un si grand avantage, auquel toutes aspireroient, & auquel peu parviendroient seroient succéder à la négligence & au crime, la vertueuse émulation d'élever des enfans, dont le nombre & la conservation leur assureroit en état tranquille." This paragraph does not appear in earlier editions of this text, although it does continue in later editions. For example, see Abbé Guillaume-Thomas-François Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissemens et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes. Nouv. ed. corrigée et*

By offering the slave women positive incentives he hoped plantation owners could more effectively harness their reproductive potential. This would not only benefit the owners by giving them long-term financial gains, it would also, he claimed, bring stability to slave families. If only slave traders would bring an equal number of male and female slaves to the islands, he hypothesized, “These unfortunates would forget the weight of their chains, and feel reborn.” By “putting the pleasures of love before all the blacks, they would be consoled and multiply.” He was not advocating the indiscriminate sexuality that critics accused plagued the isles; rather, he asserted that slaves “are for the most part faithful until death to the *Négresses* that love and slavery has given to them for companions.... For their part, the women, although not under an obligation to be chaste, are unwavering in their attachments.” By husbanding this fidelity and what Raynal interpreted as a natural propensity to form families, planters would be able to take advantage of “the almost incredibly fecundity” of black women.⁶⁹

The Belin heirs took injunctions to foster slave families to heart. They spoke of adding such positive incentives for slave women to have children as early as 1774. In a letter to an agent in Saint-Domingue, Paul Belin’s nephew Seignette wrote, “we think as well, Sir, that it would be good to recompense the women who raise their children with care; humanity requires that one treats them positively, it is again the

augmentée d'une table des materiars, vol. 4 (Amsterdam, 1774), pp. 230-231. Although the rest of the text is almost exactly the same, this paragraph does not appear.

⁶⁹ Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*, pp. 215; 213. “Cette dernière precaution (of ensuring the transportation of equal numbers of women and men), en mettant les plaisirs de l’amour à tous les noirs, les consoleroit & les multiplieroit. Ces malheureux oublient le poids de leurs chaînes, se sentiront renaître. Ils sont la plupart fidèles jusqu’à la mort aux *Négresses* que l’amour & l’esclavage leur ont données pour compagnes.... De leur côté, les femmes, quoiqu’on ne leur fasse pas une obligation d’être chastes, sont inébranlables dans leurs engagements...” (215). “Après avoir pris des mesures sages pour ne pas priver leurs habitations des secours que leur offre une fécondité presque incroyable...” (213).

interest of the Proprietors, [as] Creole *nègres* have a greater value than *nègres* brought over by boat.”⁷⁰ By adhering to such new, “enlightened,” forms of plantation management, the Belin heirs could simultaneously increase their own assets and follow the precepts of the *philosophes* by fostering their slaves’ supposedly natural urges to form families. By the mid-1780s, policies meant to foster slave women’s fecundity were firmly in place on the Belin plantation. In a 1786 report, for example, the overseer recorded payments of 30 livres each made to Zabeau, Rozette, Julienne, and Olive, the only payments made to female slaves. Each of these women had recently given birth, and was listed as a “nourrice.”⁷¹ Rozette gave birth to Scipion 10 August 1785; Zabeau gave birth to Brigitte 29 July; Julienne delivered Petite Roze 31 July; and Fanchette was born to Olive 14 March 1786. Lison gave birth to Savotte 31 June 1785, but did not receive a payment, possibly because either mother or child died. Three years later, payments of 30 livres were still being made to women who successfully birthed infants. Françoise had twins, a son named Febre and a daughter named Celeste on 13 January 1788; Heleine gave birth to St. Philippe the 24 February 1788; Monique delivered her daughter Charlotte 24 February 1788; and Camille gave birth to Hortense 10 March 1788.⁷² The consistency of these payments suggests a

⁷⁰ Seignette in La Rochelle to Dulary in Saint-Domingue, 8 April 1774, E 301 ADCM. "Nous pensons aussi, Monsieur, qu'il seroit bien de récompenser les femmes qui élèvent avec soin leurs enfants; l'humanité exige qu'on les traite favorablement, c'est encore l'intérêt des Propriétaires, les nègres créoles étant d'une valeur bein supérieure aux nègres de cargaison."

⁷¹ "Compte que moy Vizeux Gérant l'haon [habitation] Belin Desmarais rendu à Messierus Sr. Macary Beaucamp et Ponyés Frères negts. [négociants] St. Marc et charges de la Procuration," 23 July 1786, 4 J 2915, ADCM. "Payé à Zabeau nourrice;" "Payé à Rozette idem;" "Payé à Julienne idem;" "Payé à Olive idem."

⁷² This list appears in the accounts of 1788, which lists payments of 30 livres to "une negress Nommée Françoise pour avoir conservé son enfant," and the same amount for the same "service" to Monique, Heleine, and Camille. "Compte que moy Robert Vizeux Gérant l'habitation de Mrs. Led[it] hériters Belin Desmarais rend a MM Sr. Macary Beaucamp et Pourpés freres charges de la procuration," 13 July 1788, 4 J 2915, ADCM. A slave woman named Heleine, possibly the same one, died 29 November that same year. Françoise did not receive a double payment for having delivered twins.

coherent policy rewarding slave women's fertility, one that emerged from shifting attitudes about European women's roles within the family. While women long had been valued for both their productive and reproductive labor, a policy rewarding birth suggests the increasing importance attached to the second.

Although changing ideas about women's social roles and fertility were elaborated in France, it had a profound impact on the lives of slave women when plantation owners worked to apply French gender precepts to colonial life. Seignette and the other Belin heirs must have emphasized to their colonial *procureur* the importance they attached to the birth rate as a measure of the plantation's success, for he went to great lengths to reassure them that their slave population was indeed increasing in a satisfactory manner. In one of his regular letters to the Belin heirs, he wrote, "I see, Sirs, that the details that you were given about the plantation... brought you great pleasure, as did the inventory with which you were provided[.] On that occasion I observed to you that it was considered superfluous to repeat in the report the deaths and births." In spite of his stated reluctance to repeat himself, the number of births evidently was so noteworthy he felt the need to reiterate it in the same letter.

The births between 31 January 1790 and 8 October 1790 are included in the inventory under the articles "*Negrillons*" and "*Negrittes*" as you will realize in glancing attentively over it [the inventory], you will find under the heading of *negrillons* St Philippe, son of Heleine, born 15 February 1788, classified as number 14, as well as the other four [slave boys] who follow[.] [Each slave was numbered and listed by name in this inventory.] Under the heading of *negrittes*, Charlotte, daughter of Monique born 21 February 1788, classified as number 21, and the four others [slave girls] who follow, until number 25. These, then, are the births in order.⁷³

"Etat des Naissances & Mortalités des Nagres & animaux dependants de l'habitation de Messieurs les heritiers Belin située a l'Artibonnite depuis le 31 Julliet 1788," 4 J 2915, ADCM.

⁷³ Letter from Sr. Macary in Saint Marc to Messieurs les Heritiers Belin Desmarais in La Rochelle, 14 May 1791, 4 J 2915, ADCM. Je vois. Messieurs, que les details que vous ont été donnés de l'habitation par nos predecessors aux époques des 28 Juin 28 Aust et 6 8bre vous on fait grand plaisir ainsy que l'inventaire que vous a été remis, a l'occasion de celui ci je vous observerai qu'il a été consideré comme superflu de repeater dans l'état des mortalités et naissances, les naissances depuis le

Although the Belin heirs may have been the driving force behind this scrutiny of women's fertility, their colonial agents certainly responded to it. This signaled not only a new strain of thought arguing for the humanity of slaves, but a new interest in reproduction as part of the productive labor of a plantation.

The Belin heirs' new policy of rewarding slaves for their labor points to their ideas of the highly gendered nature of production. For them, men's most valuable work was skilled labor, and they accordingly rewarded the male slaves who engaged in skilled tasks. Women's most valuable contribution, however, was their reproductive labor, and it was only for having children that they could earn financial rewards. If their goal was buying their own freedom, the way open for them to meet it was by giving birth to more slaves. This policy was markedly different from their uncle's, partly because of its coherence; in theory, at least, any slave who performed his or her labor well would receive a reward. Paul Belin, on the other hand, offered his rewards based on personal favoritism, a policy which could have bought the fierce loyalty of some slaves, such as Alexis, but also the indifference or even hatred of others. Both these systems offered broader opportunities for men than for women; slave women had few opportunities to earn their master's particular favor except for

31 Janvier 1788 au 8 8bre 1790 puisqu'ils sont compris dans l'inventaire aux articles negrillons et negrittes ainsy que vous pourrés vous en convaincre en y jettant un coup d'oeil attentifs, vous trouverés dans la classe des negrillons St. Philippe fils d'Heleine né le 15 fevrier 1788, au No.[numero] 14 ainsy que les autres 4 qui suivens dans la classe des negrittes, Charlotte, fille de Monique née le 21 fevrier 1788 au No 21 des 4 autres suivantes jusqu'au 25e No. Voila donc les naissances dans l'ordre. See also "Inventaire Général du mobilier composant l'habitation de Messieurs les Héritiers Bélin Desmarais à la mord de Mr. Vizeux Gérant..." 2 June 1790, 4 J 2915, ADCM. Sr Macary gives another accounting of recent births and pregnancies in his letter to the same of 29 June 1791.

through sexual or reproductive service.⁷⁴ By the 1780s, however, the lives of both enslaved women of color and European women were shaped by assumptions of their biological destiny as mothers.

Pierre Garasché

Slave/Owner Relations in Saint Domingue

In spite of the growing abolition movement, the multiplication of laws regulating slavery in France, and changing French attitudes toward slavery in general, personal relationships between slaves and their owners played an important role in how individual slaves were treated. Location was significant: Pierre Garasché, a merchant and agent of Rochelais origin working in Port-au-Prince, often arranged for the care or transport of the slaves of his clients, whether they were sent from plantations to the city to learn a trade, left in his care by owners traveling to France, or quasi-illegally sent to friends or relatives in the metropole. His correspondence centered on these slaves, few of whom actually belonged to him, and suggests the extent to which slaves actively shaped their relations with their owners. Slaves' physical location, whether in France, Saint-Domingue, a city, or a plantation, affected both slaves' experience of slavery and the tactics they used to resist their enslaved

⁷⁴ On slave women's vulnerability to abuse because of their proximity to their owners, see Pamela Scully, *Liberating the Family? Gender and British Slave Emancipation in the Rural Western Cape, South Africa, 1823-1853* (Portsmouth, NH, 1997), p. 21.

status.⁷⁵ Likewise, their position in the Atlantic circuit shaped how owners responded to slaves' rebellion or obedience.

Pierre Garasché built his life in Saint-Domingue on his family connections in La Rochelle. His brother Daniel Garasché was one of the richest men in town in the second half of the eighteenth century, and together the two brothers developed a thriving business in transatlantic trade.⁷⁶ Pierre never owned a plantation; instead, he worked as an agent in Port-au-Prince, arranging the selling and trading of goods that moved between Saint-Domingue and France. In this capacity, he arranged for the shipment of large amounts of sugar and indigo to France; he also ordered specialized French goods that his colonial clients needed, such as the lancet requested by one Boisdenier, who lived in the backwoods town Fonds des Nègres, to replace the one "lost or sold" by the slave who worked as a doctor on his plantation.⁷⁷ His business was broad in geographic scope, and he had contacts in Bordeaux, Marseilles, Nantes, Curaçao, Jamaica, and even New Bern, a port on the coast of North Carolina. He acted as a middle man between colonists and their counterparts in France, connecting supply with demand.

One service Garasché provided was placing slaves in apprenticeships with master artisans. Although some owners sent their slaves to France for apprenticeships, training slaves for specific trades in Saint-Domingue proved cheaper,

⁷⁵ Ibid.; Sandra Lauderdale Graham, *House and Street: The Domestic World of Servants and Masters in Nineteenth-Century Rio de Janeiro* (New York, 1988).

⁷⁶ Henri Robert, Notes, 2 J 91 (1), ADCM, p. 21. Robert says that there were three Garasché brothers in Saint-Domingue, all of whom maintained fruitful trade relationships with Rochelais merchants.

⁷⁷ Boisdenier in Fonds des Nègres to Garesché and Billotteau in Port-au-Prince, 30 December 1780, 4 J 1610, ADCM. "Mon nègre chirugien a perdu ou vendu mon lancetier. Je vous prie de m'em procurer un autre, de la cachetter, et de une l'envoyer par la poste. Cependant si ces lancetter sont trop cheres, je vous prie de n'en point acheter, et de faire repasser la vielle lancrette que je joints ici. Je vous en aurai bien de l'obligation."

easier, and shorter. It was possibly for these reasons that Garasché's client Sainton decided to send his slave to Port-au-Prince, rather than to France, for his apprenticeship as a wigmaker.⁷⁸ An apprenticeship away from their owners could have provided slaves with new freedoms and opportunities. Although apprentices were bound to serve and obey their masters, simply being in Port-au-Prince could have offered Sainton's slave the opportunity to meet and interact with other people of color, some of them surely free.⁷⁹ This may have given the slave incentive enough to slow down his training. After the slave had already been learning his trade for some time, Sainton wrote to Garasché, "I beg you to give me news of my little *mulâtre*. He must know his trade [of wigmaker]."⁸⁰

⁷⁸ J. Sainton in Fond des Blancs to Garasché and Billoteau in Port-au-Prince, 16 October 1780 and 26 March 1781, 4 J 1610, ADCM.

Many of the owners who registered their slaves at the Admiralty in La Rochelle said their slaves would learn to be wigmakers. This was particularly true in the 1770s, after royal officials had begun to enforce more rigidly the requirements for bringing slaves into France. From 1772-1779, for example, the owners of seven out of 16 slaves brought into La Rochelle said they were to be apprenticed to wigmakers. (The low number of slaves declared in these years seems to be a direct result of stricter enforcement of laws limiting the importation of slaves.) Wigmaking might have been a particularly popular *métier* in which to train a slave because the most current fashions came out of France. For the same reason, it might have been a popular *métier* for owners to *say* they would train their slaves because this training would not be questioned. *Registre de sa majesté commencé le 4 julliet 1772 et fini le 19 julliet 1779*, B 231, ADCM. On wigmakers, see Mary K. Gayne, "Illicit Wigmaking in Eighteenth-Century Paris," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38, no. 1 (2004):119-137. This volume of *Eighteenth-Century Studies* is devoted to Hair.

⁷⁹ For example, Sandra Lauderdale Graham explores how city life transformed domestic life, for women domestic servants and slaves in particular, by offering them opportunities for social interaction and exchange. Graham, *House and Street*, especially Chapters 2 and 3.

⁸⁰ J. Sainton in Miragoâne to Garasché and Billoteau in Port-au-Prince, 16 October 1780, 4 J 1610, ADCM. "Je vous prie me donner des nouvelle de mon petit mulatre il doit savoir son metier, je voudrois bien qu'il sauroit batre de la caisse ny auroit il par moyen de la faire apprendre je vous prie de me dire votre sentiment."

Given the eighteenth-century preoccupation with the differences in hair texture of different races, training a black or mixed-race slave as a wigmaker may seem an unusual choice. I would suggest that this choice was intended to emphasize the contrast between the dark-skinned and curly-headed slave and the light-skinned, straight-haired owner for reasons of status akin to those that motivated white women to have their portraits painted with black boys. Practical reasons also likely played a role, however, as slaves were available sources of labor for their owners, and wigmakers or hairdressers may have been few and far between in rural colonial areas. For a brief discussion of race and hair, see Angela Rosenthal, "Raising Hair," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38, no. 1 (2004):1-16, especially pp. 2-7.

Knowing his slave, Sainton acknowledged the possibility that he might have played a role in slowing down his apprenticeship. The owner was, however, apparently eager to have his hair properly coiffed, for he sent Garasché a second slave, in the hopes that his training would be completed more quickly:

I send you, Sirs, a little *mulâtre*. I beg of you to have the competence to place him with a good white master wigmaker, so that he learn to nomen (?—illegible) and to serve above all to comb and braid well.... I was not counting on the other one to have stayed so long.... It may be largely his fault, but it is also that of his master, I beg you to not put this one I have sent you with the same master as the first.⁸¹

Sainton's eagerness to have a young *mulâtre* boy trained as a wig-maker suggests the multiplicity of roles slaves played in colonial society, and the variety of relationships slaves could have with their owners. Sainton's persistent preference for training young *mulâtres* could echo the French tendency to depict young black boys as servants, but with the colonial twist that the lighter skin tone of the *mulâtres* made them more attractive as domestics; it also might suggest that the owner had a blood relationship with the boys that gave him a particular interest in their welfare. A young *mulâtre* who dressed hair occupied a very specific niche on a plantation, one that had nothing to do with field labor. Having a slave with such specific skills attested to his owner's wealth; only very wealthy colonists would have owned slaves with such specific training, particularly in the small mountain town of Fond des Blancs where Sainton lived. But in choosing which slave would be given such a

⁸¹ J. Sainton in Fond des Blancs to Garasché and Billoteau in Port-au-Prince, 28 May 1781, 4 J 1610, ADCM. "Je vous envoyé Messieurs un petit mulatre je vous prie d'avoir la comptetence de le placer chez un bon maitre peruquier blanc a fin qu'il aprenne pour nonune? et pour servire surtout bien peigner et bien rater. ...Je ne suis pas comptant du premier pour avoir resté sy lontems... peut etre il y a beaucoup de sa faute, mais il y a aussy de celle de son maitre, je vous prie de ne pas mettre celluy que je vous envoie chez le meme maitre du premier."

privilege, as owners would have seen it, owners likely chose slaves for whom they had a personal preference.⁸²

Augustin: An Effective Rebellion

Garasché's brother-in-law Meynardie likely thought he had conferred such an honor on his slave Augustin when his family chose Augustin to send to him in France. Augustin, however, perceived the situation very differently. Meynardie and his wife had a country house in the small town of Marennes, about forty miles outside of La Rochelle. In this rural setting, Augustin was unlikely to find many other people of color, and the isolated setting also may have meant that his owners had the opportunity to surveil him more closely. Due to his occupation as a wigmaker his owners wanted him always nearby, for his domestic services that required him to spend long periods of time in the most intimate household spaces, or for his exotic cachet.

From the time Augustin entered Meynardie's household, he created constant problems. Meynardie wrote to his brother-in-law Garasché,

the family has given me in him a cruel gift.... That wretch has treated us to the blackest ingratitude, and his conduct makes me want to skin myself; I draw the curtain over that which he has been capable and which forces me to address you by the ship that is presently passing by here.⁸³

⁸² Working in a domestic context also made slaves more vulnerable to the abuses of their masters given the close quarters that they shared. For example, see Brenda Stevenson, *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (New York, 1996), and Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family, from Slavery to the Present* (New York, 1985). As the work of Sarah Maza and Cissie Fairchilds on servants in eighteenth-century France shows, servants were also vulnerable to sexual abuse by their masters. Sarah Maza, *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France: The Uses of Loyalty* (Princeton, NJ, 1983); Cissie C. Fairchilds, *Domestic Enemies: Servants and their Masters in Old Regime France* (Baltimore, 1984).

⁸³ Meynardie Jeune in Marenne to Pierre Garasché in the Cap, 23 June 1777, 4 J 1610, ADCM. All Garasché's letters from 1777 are addressed to him in le Cap, suggesting that he did not move to Port-

Garasché's sister added, "he is a rascal who has tricked us... we can no longer keep him without running the greatest risks."⁸⁴ Using the language of the boudoir, a room into which Augustin was probably often invited because of his trade of wigmaker, Meynardie purposefully "draw[s] the curtain" on his slave's unspecified wrongdoings. These offenses were so unbearable that they sent him back to Garasché in Saint-Domingue, as Meynardie wrote, "so that you might sell him or hire him out for my profit," even attaching his power of attorney to allow his brother-in-law to make all necessary arrangements without further delay.⁸⁵

Meynardie's exasperation was so great that he specified to Garasché that if Augustin had not been sold by 12 May 1783 he should be freed in accordance with a law passed ten years before that date, which he assured his brother-in-law allowed him to free his slaves without paying any kind of penalty or fine. Although Meynardie ultimately learned that this provision did not exempt him from paying hefty manumission fees, in the end he decided that

at the time of 12 May 1783 that rascal, in whom I still have an interest, will enjoy without any retribution by me all the fruit of his labor in order for him to put himself in a state to pay all the expenses of his liberty, for which I do not want to make new sacrifices.⁸⁶

au-Prince until later. "La famille m'avons fait en lui un cruel don, mais on ne pouvons pas prévoir l'avenir. Ce malheureux [Augustin] nous a payés de la plus noire ingratitude, & sa conduite ne tendont pas moins qu'a me depouiller; je tire le Rideau sur ce don't il a été capable & que me force de vous l'adresser par leN[avi]re ou passera la presente."

⁸⁴ Garasché Meynardie in Marennes to Pierre Garasché in the Cap, 24 June 1777, 4 J 1610, ADCM. "C'est unmalheureux qui nous a trompé... Nous ne puvons plus le garde[r] sans courir les plus gran risques."

⁸⁵ Meynardie Jeune in Marenne to Pierre Garasché in the Cap, 23 June 1777, 4 J 1610, ADCM. "pour que vous puissies le vendre ou engager a mon profit."

In France, dressing hair could provide individuals with a livelihood within a relatively limited social circle made up of friends, family members, and neighbors. Gayne, "Illicit Wigmaking in Eighteenth-Century Paris," p. 134. Whether or not this was true in the colonies, Meynardie likely assumed that his own frame of reference applied, and that many eager colonists would want to have their hair dressed and wigs made in the latest French styles.

⁸⁶ Meynardie Jeune in Marenne to Pierre Garasché in the Cap, 28 June 1777, 4 J 1610, ADCM. "Qu'a cette époque du 12 may 1783 ce malherueux, qui m'interesse encore, jouisse dans aucune retribution

One way or the other, Augustin would be freed. He begged Garasché, “look out for my interests, my friend, do not hide from me [that] when the arrangements that you make on his behalf produce for me 6000 [livres], they cannot reimburse me for that which this has cost me and has cost me to have him conducted close to you.”⁸⁷ But, he continued optimistically,

as he is a very good wigmaker and he dresses [the hair of] women as well as [that of] men I hope that you would make out well for me for the time he has left to serve, moreover that the corrections of America remind him of his work, and he will do by the fear of punishments that which he should have done for me as my due.⁸⁸

Meynardie seemed to expect from Augustin some type of specific action or behavior that he perceived as his due, whether because of his identity as a white European male, or his status as Augustin’s owner. Augustin, however, refused to comply, instead causing vexation at every turn. Augustin may have wanted to cause his owner as much trouble and expense as possible, or may have aimed more specifically to be returned to Saint-Domingue, a fate Meynardie clearly considered the worst but on which Augustin may have had a different perspective. His possible manumission may have come as an unexpected bonus.

Augustin used his relationship with his owner to get leverage over his own situation, and to maintain a substantial and sustained effort to control his own destiny. His rebellious acts were offered at least a minimum amount of protection by France’s

pour moi de tout le fruit de son travail pour qu’il se mette lui meme en etat de payer tous les frais de sa liberté pour laquelle je ne veux pas faire de nouveau sacrifice.”

⁸⁷ Meynardie Jeune in Marenne to Pierre Garasché in the Cap, 23 June 1777, 4 J 1610, ADCM. “Faites pour le mieux de mes interest, mon ami, ne vous dissimulant pas que quand les arrangements que vous prendres a son sujet me produront 6000, ils ne pourroient me rembourcer de ce ql. m’a couté & va me couter pour le faire conduire au préés de vous.”

⁸⁸ Meynardie Jeune in Marenne to Pierre Garasché in the Cap, 23 June 1777, 4 J 1610, ADCM. “Comme il est très bon perruquier et qu’il dresse aussi bien les femmes que les homes j’espere que vous m’en tireres bon parti pour le tems qu’il a a server, d’ailleurs les corrections de l’amerique le rappelleront a son devoir, & il fera par la crainte de châtimens ce qu’il auron du faire pour moi par reconnaissance.”

laws policing slavery, as the ultimate legal punishment for imported slaves was to send them back to the colonies. Meynardie could not within the bounds of the law kill, torture, or maim his slave, and although these practices may have been common enough in the colonies, the relative paucity of slaves in France could have offered Augustin some protection: as a curiosity, he would have been well known in the small town of Marennes. Any excessive punishment, while certainly within the realm of familiarity within the Old Regime, may have set the neighbors talking. Augustin therefore could have had the most to gain by pushing the limits of his owner's patience.

Meynardie did in fact pack Augustin off to Saint-Domingue later that summer; one Jacques Guibert of La Rochelle, Garasché's cousin, took charge of placing him on a ship.⁸⁹ "Too much indulgence spoiled him," Guibert wrote to Garasché in the letter that accompanied Augustin back to the colonies. "He is a bad sort who cost your brother-in-law dearly."⁹⁰ Meynardie undoubtedly agreed. "I hope, my friend," he wrote to Garasché,

that you approve of me; you would [even] more if you knew all the griefs I had because of him [Augustin], but I [will] forget them and do not want to dwell on them too much for the purpose of leaving him a slave his whole life; that he be happy one day and I would have the satisfaction of it, there are few Masters, perhaps not a one who would do for him that which I have done. I hope that he remember my indulgence to the good.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Jacques Guibert also had an extensive involvement in what seemed to be an informal slave trade in La Rochelle. When Rochelais residents received slaves from friends or relations in the colonies, Guibert often acted as their agent by registering them with the Admiralty. In January 1773, for example, he registered the slave Igenie, a young *mulâtresse* of about 12 or 13, for Madame la Comtesse de Moutboussier. Igenie was to learn to be a dressmaker. *Registre de sa majesté commencé le 4 julliet 1772 et fini le 19 julliet 1779*, B 231, ADCM.

⁹⁰ Jacques Guibert in La Rochelle to Pierre Garasché in the Cap, 26 July 1777, 4 J 1610, ADCM. "Trop de bonté l'ont gâté, c'est un mauvais sujet qui coûte gros à votre beaufre."

⁹¹ Meynardie Jeune in Marenne to Pierre Garasché in the Cap, 28 June 1777, 4 J 1610, ADCM. "J'espere, mon ami, que vous m'approuverés, vous feriés plus si vous savies tous les griefs que j'ai a sa charge, mais je les oublie & ne veux pas entirer davantage pour le laisser esclave toute sa vie ; qu'il soit

Augustin's ultimate legacy to his former owner was his beleaguered self-satisfaction that he had, in spite of his trials, acted in a manner befitting a munificent patron and a man of the Enlightenment.

Aimé-Benjamin Fleuriau

Jeanneton, Fleuriau, and Their Children

Jeanneton, slave of Aimé-Benjamin Fleuriau, likely had no opportunity to build a relationship with her owner except through her sexual service. White men's practice of taking slaves as mistresses had been condemned early on in colonial history. The *Code Noir* mandated that free men who had children with slave women would be fined, and if they were the owners of the women, both the women and the children would be confiscated.⁹² Du Tertre put such sexual abuse on par with physical abuse, saying, "I accuse no one in particular, I am only saying that in general, there are plantation owners that have abused their *Négresses*, just as much as the slave drivers who make them work."⁹³ Such liaisons continued, however, and the children born from them, often freed by their fathers, formed part of the substantial class of free people of color in the colonies. Some white men may have harbored real

heureux un jour & j'en aurai de la satisfaction, il est peu de Maîtres, peut être pas un seul qui fit pour lui ce que j'ai fait je desire que mon indulgence le rappelle au bien."

⁹² Code Noir, Article IX. "The free men who will have one or several children from their concubinage with their slaves, together with the masters who permitted this, will each be condemned to a fine of two thousand pounds of sugar; and if they are the masters of the slave by whom they have had the said children, we wish that beyond the fine, they be deprived of the slave and the children, and that she and they be confiscated for the profit of the hospital, without ever being manumitted. Nevertheless we do not intend for the present article to be enforced if the man who was not married to another person during his concubinage with his slave would marry in the church the said slave who by this means will be manumitted and the children rendered free and legitimate."

⁹³ Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale des Antilles*, pp. 511-512. "Je ne taxe personne en particulier, je dis suelement en general, qu'il y a quelques habitans qui ont abusé de leurs Nègresses, aussi bien que les Commandeurs qui les menent au travail."

affection for the women of color with whom they had children; many certainly maintained long-standing relationships with their mixed-race children, providing them with opportunities and goods. The terms of these relationships, which in colonial settings were quite common and socially acceptable, changed dramatically if fathers brought their children to France.

No equivalent social position existed for free people of color in the metropole. When Fleuriau brought some of his mixed-race children with him when he returned to La Rochelle, therefore, he had to negotiate the terms of their presence in France vis-à-vis the French state. His children, new to French ways and of mixed racial origin to boot, lacked their father's cultural clout; the merchant mustered his considerable position in the city as a rich, white, male merchant to protect them from laws that increasingly dichotomized black and white, slave and free. In doing so he highlighted the gap between French and colonial understandings of race and status and worked to bring French ideas closer in line with colonial ones that allowed a hierarchical continuum based on skin color. Although Fleuriau never acknowledged his children as his own after his return to France, his relationship with them motivated him to intervene in how the laws regulating the presence of people of color in France were interpreted and enforced on a local level.

It was probably when Fleuriau was working in the town of Croix-des-Bouquets that he began his relationship with Jeanne called Guimbelot, a free woman of color who at one time had been his slave.⁹⁴ The couple had at least eight children

⁹⁴Fleuriau's accounts of 1743 record his disbursal of first 397 livres, then 127 livres "au profit de sa petite, 1 Mi 255, ADCM. The account books give no further information about the nature of the disbursal. This sum suggests, although does not prove, that Jeanne had received her freedom, and perhaps that her former owner was helping her to set up house. Account books of 1777 refer to a

together: Jean-Baptiste, in 1740; Marie-Jeanne, in 1741; Marie-Charlotte, in 1742, Joseph-Benjamin, in 1743, Pierre-Paul, in 1745, Jean, in 1747; Toinette, in 1748, and Marie-Madeleine, in 1749.⁹⁵ Jeanne, their mother, certainly was free by 1741; the baptism record of Marie-Jeanne and her subsequent children refer to her as “Jeanne Guimbelot, free negress.”⁹⁶ Fleuriau gave her some means of her own: his account books of 1743 include two payments to Jeanne called Guimbelot, the first of 397 livres, followed by a smaller payment of 127 livres, “to the profit of his *petite*.”⁹⁷ In 1777, toward the end of Fleuriau’s life when he was residing in France, his plantation accounts record a further payment of 300 livres to “Jeanneton, former slave of M. Fleuriau, in order to carry out his intentions.”⁹⁸ Their long relationship, his continued support of her even long after he returned to France and his evident concern for their children make it tempting to read tenderness into this relationship. Decades of scholarship on gender and slavery caution against this conclusion, however, and even

further disbursal of 300 livres to “Jeanneton ancienne esclave de M. Fleuriau pour remplir ses intentions.” Also see Jacques Cauna, *Au temps des isles à sucre: Histoire d’une plantation de Saint-Domingue au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1987), p. 29. Because Guimbelot was a common name in La Rochelle, Cauna hypothesizes that Jeanne had originally belonged to another Rochelais settler in Saint-Domingue, and had been sold to Fleuriau (p. 30). This, however, is pure speculation.

⁹⁵ Etat Civil, Les Croix des Bouquets, Saint-Domingue, 85 MIOM 46 and 85 MIOM 47, CAOM. Although I did not find the baptism record of Jean-Baptiste in this collection, he certainly was Fleuriau’s son. Fleuriau left Jean-Baptiste’s heirs a legacy in his will equal to that left to the other of his Saint-Domingue children who were still alive, and Marie-Jeanne referred to Jean-Baptiste as her brother in her own will.

⁹⁶ To be precise, she is identified as “Jeanne dite Guimbelot negresse libre” in Marie-Charlotte’s baptism; “Jeanne negresse libre” in Joseph Benjamin’s and Toinette’s; and “Jeanne Guimbelot negresse libre” in Pierre Paul’s, Jean’s, and Marie-Madeline’s. Etat Civil, Les Croix des Bouquets, Saint-Domingue, 85 MIOM 46 and 85 MIOM 47, CAOM.

⁹⁷ “Livre des comptes,” 1743, 1 Mi 255, ADCM. Also cited by Cauna, *Au temps des isles à sucre*, p. 29.

⁹⁸ “Jeanneton ancienne esclave de M. Fleuriau pour remplir ses intentions.” “Livre des comptes,” 1777, 1 Mi 255, ADCM. Also cited by Ibid., p. 29.

the most generous interpretation of Fleuriau's behavior cannot overlook the fact that their relationship had an extreme power differential at its core.⁹⁹

Even at their baptisms, Fleuriau began building networks for his children. He acknowledged them all as his own, even though each were identified as illegitimate by the presiding priest. He named neighboring planters, merchants, and their wives as their godparents, thereby establishing for them a network of contacts that extended beyond his household and plantation. In spite of his efforts, these children occupied a somewhat liminal status: they were free but illegitimate, of mixed racial origins but the beneficiaries of whites whose goodwill toward them depended on their regard for their father.

Their marginal position became even more evident when some of Fleuriau's children arrived in France. When Fleuriau returned to La Rochelle in 1755 after twenty years of colonial life, he brought at least some of his children and his slave Hardy with him. All slave owners entering France had to make a formal declaration to the office of the Admiralty, which strictly regulated the presence of slaves and free blacks in France. Fleuriau faithfully did so, appearing at the Admiralty office in La Rochelle on 2 August 1755 to make a declaration for Hardy, at the time about 27 years old, who Fleuriau claimed had come to France to serve him on the voyage, to be instructed in Catholicism, and to learn a trade, all permissible reasons for importing a slave.¹⁰⁰ Fleuriau did not, however, register his two *mulâtre* daughters who

⁹⁹ See, for example, Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York, 2000), and Elsa Barkley Brown, "'What Has Happened Here': The Politics of Difference in Women's History and Feminist Politics," *Feminist Studies* 18, no. 2 (1992): 295-312).

¹⁰⁰ "1 negre, le Sr. Fleuriau," 2 August 1755, *Registre de la Majesté commancé le 23 mars 1753 et fini le 14 avril 1757*, B 6086, Archives Départementales de la Charente-Maritime. Fleuriau states that he and Hardy had arrived in France the month before.

accompanied him to France, nor did he register his three sons who joined him later in La Rochelle; under the Declaration of 1736, only slaves had to be registered, not free people of color.

This suggests a gap between the intent of the laws governing slavery in France and their practice in La Rochelle, a gap that left some whites the opportunity to make their own interventions in how race and status were defined. Technically, the Declaration of 1738 required slave owners in France to send their slaves back to the colonies after an initial period of three years. Owners could be granted an extension of this time if they renewed their initial registration of the slave and persuaded the Admiralty of the necessity of the slave's continued presence in France. In actuality, officials in La Rochelle treated this renewal as a formality, and approved requests for extensions as a matter of course. A few Rochelais slave owners faithfully completed these renewals every three years. Dame Margueritte Suzeanne Huet, for example, turned up at the Admiralty offices every time her slave's allotted term in France expired. She initially declared her slave Louis François, who she said had come to France to be trained in Catholicism and to learn a trade, in 1742. She renewed this declaration in 1745, 1748, 1751, and 1755, saying that he "had not yet been sufficiently instructed in the Catholic religion and does not know the *métier* to which she had put him. She will keep him," her declaration stated, "until he is in a state to be sent back to the colony."¹⁰¹ Yet others, including Fleuriau, renewed these

¹⁰¹ "Reiteration de Negre, Made. Gallifat, " 10 March 1755, *Registre de la Majesté commandé le 23 mars 1753 et fini le 14 avril 1757*, B 6086, Archives Départementales de la Charente-Maritime. "n'estre point asses instruit dans la Religion et ne seachant (sachant) le metier auquel elle l'a mis elle le gardera jusqu'au ce qu'il soit en etat d'estre renvoyé a la colonie."

registrations sporadically if at all.¹⁰² The variability in this practice suggests a tolerance of slavery in La Rochelle as a matter of course, to an extent beyond that strictly allowed by the law. It also hints at flexibility in how officials interpreted and enforced the strictures on slavery. This all changed with the Admiralty Ordinance of 5 April, 1762.

The Admiralty Ordinance of 1762

Since the beginning of the eighteenth century, the crown had gradually limited slave owners' rights to bring slaves into France. At the same time, such laws, notably the 1716 "Edict Concerning the Black Slaves of the Colonies" and the 1738 "Declaration Concerning the Black Slaves of the Colonies," had gradually circumscribed slaves' rights, increased the power their owners had over them, and also assigned more regulatory and punitive power to the state.¹⁰³ Fleuriau did renew his declaration of his slave Hardy in 1760. Although he claimed at that time to have renewed it in 1757, the records for that year do not confirm his claim. No subsequent renewal records for Hardy exist. These seemingly contradictory changes came in the overall context of the state working to centralize and consolidate its authority. Strengthening the authority of the state over owners and owners over slaves, then, all came under the rubric of bolstering hierarchy and control.

¹⁰² *Registre de sa majesté du greffe de l'amirauté commencé le 14 Avril 1757 et finy le 20 8bre 1760*, 20 August 1760, B 230, ADCM.

¹⁰³ For a full discussion of these laws and the efforts made by slaves and their allies to find loopholes in them, see Sue Peabody, *"There are No Slaves in France": The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien Régime* (New York, 1996), especially Chapters 2-3.

Early in the eighteenth century, laws aimed to regulate and limit the already-widespread practice of bringing or sending colonial slaves to France. The Edict of 1716 formalized the rights of owners to bring slaves to France in response to the great numbers of colonists who were already doing so. It required that slave owners register their slaves, both with the colonial governor before they took the slaves out of the colonies, and with the local Admiralty when they arrived in France. If they failed to correctly follow these procedures the slaves would receive their liberty, a technicality which a number of slaves exploited.¹⁰⁴ It specified that slaves could not marry without the consent of their masters, but if their masters did give them consent, slaves would be free. This provision kept hierarchies of gender and hierarchies of race from clashing by ensuring that women could not serve both masters and husbands, and that men could not be heads of families if enslaved.¹⁰⁵ The Declaration of 1738 reiterated most of these measures, formalized the registration procedures for slaves, and imposed stiff fines or slave confiscation by the state if owners did not follow correct procedures.¹⁰⁶ Both of these laws specifically applied to *nègres esclaves*, black slaves, leaving a loophole for people of color that slave owners and others could exploit.

¹⁰⁴ Article 5, Edict of 1716, Isambert, Decrusy and Taillandier, *Recueil Général des Anciennes Lois Françaises, depuis l'an 420 jusqu'a la Révolution de 1789* (Paris, 1830), Vol. XXI, p. 124. Also see Peabody, "There are No Slaves in France", Chapter 1, especially pp. 15-22.

¹⁰⁵ Article 7, Edict of 1716, Isambert, *Recueil Général des Anciennes Lois Françaises*, Vol. XXI, pp. 124-125.

¹⁰⁶ Declaration of 1738, *Ibid.*, Vol. XXI, pp. 112-115.

Unlike the Edict of 1716 and the Declaration of 1738, the Ordinance of 1762 was aimed not only at slaves, but at all people of color, regardless of their status.¹⁰⁷

It mandated

that all people of whatever quality or condition they be, French or Foreigners, who live in all the comprehensive jurisdiction of the Chamber, will be obliged to make in person, or by Agents furnished with their special powers of attorney, to the Clerk of the Chamber, or to the Clerks of the particular Admiralties into whose jurisdictions they fall, their precise declarations of *Nègres* or *Mulâtres* of one or the other sex, who live with them, and from which colony or place they were exported.

In other words, all people of color, no matter what their nationality, sex, or status, had to register with the Admiralty in order to stay in France. Further, in a departure from previous legislation, the ordinance

Mandated in addition that all other *Nègres* and *Mulâtres* of whatever profession they be and who are in service to no one, will be obliged to make likewise in person or by an Agent, furnished with their special power of attorney, to the said Clerks, and in the said time, their declarations of their [family] names, first names, age and profession, place of their birth, date of their arrival in France, and by what ship, and if they have been baptized or not.¹⁰⁸

Although the Ordinance specified no reprisals against those who failed to register, it did offer free people of color an unprecedented opportunity to officially record their status in a way that left no question about their difference from slaves. Fleuriau

¹⁰⁷ For further discussions on the Ordinance of 1762 and the legal case that brought it about, see Peabody, *There are No Slaves in France*, pp. 72-75, and Dwain Pruitt, "Nantes Noir: Living Race in the City of Slavers" (Emory University, 2005), pp. 74-76.

¹⁰⁸ "De Par le Roy S.A.S. Monseigneur le Duc de Penthièvre, Amiral de France; et Nosseigneurs de l'Amirauté de France, Ordonnance, Portant injonction a toutes Personnes demeurantes dans l'étendue de l'Amirauté, ou des Amirautés particulieres de son Ressort, qui ont a leur service des Negres ou Mulatres de l'un ou de l'autre sexe, d'en faire leur déclaration, en personne ou par Procureur, aux Greffes de l'Amirauté de France, ou aux Greffes des Amirautés particulieres de son ressort, sous telles peines qu'il appartiendra." 5 April, 1762, B 5592, ADCM. "que toutes personnes de quelque qualité, ou condition qu'elles soient, François, ou Etrangers, demeurantes dans toute l'étendue du ressort de la Chambre, feront tenus de faire en personne, ou par Procureurs fondés de leurs Procurations speciales, au Greffe de la Chambre, ou au Greffes des Amirautés particulières du ressort, leurs declarations précises des Nègres or Mulâtres de l'un ou de l'autre sexe, demeurans chez elles, & de quelle Colonie ou lieux ils ont été exportés." "...ordonne en outre que tous autres Nègres & Mulâtres de quelque profession qu'ils soient & qui ne sont au service de personne, feront tenus de faire pareillement en personne ou par Procureur, fondés de leur Procuration spéciale audits Greffes, & dans lesdits délais, leurs declarations de leurs noms, surnoms, âge & profession, lieu de leur naissance, temps de leur arrive en France, & par quell vaisseau, & s'ils sont baptizes ou non."

seized this opportunity when he went to the offices of the Clerk of the Admiralty in La Rochelle to register his two daughters and three sons.

When Fleuriau made his way to the Admiralty office on 5 September 1763, his five oldest children Joseph, Paul, Jean, Marie, and Charlotte Mandron, likely had been with him in La Rochelle for some time.¹⁰⁹ Like most Rochelais slave owners or free people of color who registered in response to the 1763 Ordinance, Fleuriau neglected to give the date the five *mulâtres* he claimed were “under his care” arrived in France; perhaps the shifting legal categories of race and status made him fear reprisal because their stay had exceeded the three-year limit for slaves. Fleuriau’s children had never before been officially classified as people of color except at their baptisms, where the priest identified them as *mulâtres* as a matter of course. Since their arrival in France, however, their father had been careful to avoid classifying them in any way that marked them as being of African descent. When he declared his children to the Admiralty in 1763, these children of privilege, sons and daughters of a wealthy planter and merchant who had been born free, were classified in the same document as one of their father’s slaves for probably the first time in their lives. This suggests that the Ordinance of 1762 reflected rather than precipitated a broader cultural shift in France in which color and status became broadly interchangeable and equivalent categories.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ The exact date of their arrival is unclear.

In the registration, Fleuriau refers to his children only by one name; their baptismal names are Jean-Baptiste, Marie-Jeanne, Marie-Charlotte, Joseph-Benjamin, and Pierre-Paul. The three youngest, Jean, Toinette, and Marie-Madeleine, do not appear in the La Rochelle archives.

¹¹⁰ Both Peabody and Pruitt interpret this law as precipitating a change in public attitudes toward slavery in France, and place it in the context of the racial paranoia of the *procureur du roi* Guillaume Poncet de la Grave, who drafted it. I argue that this attributes too much influence to one racially paranoid royal official; in order for the Ordinance to have evoked the response it did, it must have

Fleuriau framed his statement to best protect his children from the indignity of classifying them with slaves, even while taking advantage of the opportunity to officially record their liberty. Fleuriau began with his slave Hardy, whose declaration closely follows the parameters laid out by the Ordinance, and is similar to other declarations of slaves made by slave owners in La Rochelle. “I the undersigned declare to have in this town of La Rochelle,” Fleuriau stated, “one of my domestic *nègres* named Hardy who I have had learn the trade of saddler.” Although he promised to send Hardy back to his plantation on Saint-Domingue, he also asked, “as he will need a little more time to perfect his trade, and because it is morally impossible to find, from now until next 15 October the way to send him to Port-au-Prince to return him to my plantation,” that the court allow him until the following March or April, at which time he would be put on a ship bound for the colonies.¹¹¹ Few owners who had gone to the trouble and expense of bringing slaves to France really wanted to send them back, however, and Fleuriau proved no exception. Hardy never got on that ship; he remained in La Rochelle for another eight years, and died there in 1771 at the age of about 50. He was memorialized as “the son of an unknown father and mother, native of Guinea, a black belonging to the elder Monsieur Fleuriau, merchant.”¹¹² In his burial records, as in his Admiralty declarations, both his race and his status were made clear.

touched a deeper chord among many French people. Peabody, *There are No Slaves in France*, pp. 73-75; Pruitt, “Nantes Noir: Living Race in the City of Slavers”, pp. 74-76.

¹¹¹ “Registre pour recevoir les declarations des negres, negresses, mulatres et mulatresses qui sont dans cette ville de La Rochelle, suivant les lettres de M. L'Intendant,” 1763, 352-19, AMLR.

¹¹² “Hardy,” “Sepulchures, St. Barthélémy,” 1771, GG 309, AMLR. When he arrived in France in 1755, Hardy was recorded as being 27 years old; yet on his death 16 years later, he was said to be “about fifty years.” This discrepancy could stem from general uncertainty about age in the early modern period. Further, however, no member of the Fleuriau family, who was most likely to know

In his declaration of his children, Fleuriau differentiated them from his slave in part by the amount of detail he gave about them. He began with the antecedents of the

three young *mulâtres* and two young *mulatresses* (all born free), named Joseph, Paul and Jean, Marie and Charlotte Mendroux, children of the late Jeanne Guimbelot, free negress, Créole of the aforementioned place of Cul de Sac on the coast of Saint-Domingue.¹¹³

By naming their mother and specifying her free status, Fleuriau emphasized the special circumstances of their liberty, as they were all “born free.” Fleuriau fell back into the pattern of slave declarations, however, when he enumerated his sons’ apprenticeships. Fleuriau declared that the first two “young *mulâtres*” were apprenticed to goldsmiths, and that Jean was in apprenticeship to “a tailor of men’s suits.” Although the sons Fleuriau carefully avoided acknowledging in this official document may well have learned these particular trades, they had no reason to “perfect [them] to better earn their living,” as the merchant went on to claim.¹¹⁴

Rather, when they returned to the colonies, as at least Joseph and Paul certainly did, they took an active role in managing their father’s plantation.¹¹⁵ By emphasizing

Hardy’s age, attended his funeral. Hardy was buried in the Catholic Church, and the Fleuriau family, being Protestants, tended to avoid Catholic services.

¹¹³ Fleuriau declaration, *Registre pour recevoir les déclarations des Negres, Negresses, Mulatres & Mulatresses qui sont dans cette ville de la Rochelle, suivant les lettres de M. l’Intendant*, 1763, 352-19, Archives Municipales de La Rochelle. “Je déclare ensuite que j’au sous ma direction en cette ville trois jeune mulâtres et deux jeunes mulatresses (tous libres nés) nommée Joseph, Paul & Jean, Marie & Charlotte Mendroux enfans de feue Jeanne Guimbelot negresse libre, créole du dit lieu du Cul de Sac Côte de St. Domingue.”

¹¹⁴ Fleuriau declaration, *Registre pour recevoir les déclarations des Negres, Negresses, Mulatres & Mulatresses qui sont dans cette ville de la Rochelle, suivant les lettres de M. l’Intendant*, 1763, 352-19, Archives Municipales de La Rochelle. “Les deux premiers sont encore en apprentissage de l’orpheverée, Jean dans celui de tailleur d’habits d’hommes, sy c’etoit le beau plaisir de la cour de leur accordée de rester encore chez leurs mètres [maitres] jusqu’au mois d’avril prochain pour être plus en état de perfection dans leur métier pour mieux gagner leur vie.”

¹¹⁵ The passenger lists for La Rochelle list Joseph and Paul Mandrox as passengers on the ship the *Pere de Famille*, captained by Pierre Botineau, which departed from La Rochelle 25 July 1765, bound for Saint Domingue. They are identified as brothers, and each listed as 21 years of age, a slight miscalculation as, according to their baptism records, Pierre Paul would have been 20 and Joseph Benjamin 22; however, the boys were born only 17 months apart. They were both identified as

these apprenticeships, Fleuriau brought the declarations of his free children in line with the laws governing the presence of slaves in France, who were allowed to enter the country only to receive training in the Catholic religion or a trade, and under the condition that they be returned to the colonies within three years.¹¹⁶ He thus employed the language of the law, which collapsed categories of race and slave or free status, even as he seemed to be trying to rupture this equation.

By emphasizing the difference between the free *mulâtres* who were his children and Hardy his slave, Fleuriau mustered Enlightenment ideas on the liberty of all men, but he also drew on his colonial experience of how the distinction between race and slave or free status shaped lives. His declaration offers a nuancing of French understandings of race and slavery, as expressed in the Ordinance. Rather than a simple equating of the two, as the Ordinance moved towards doing, he distinguished multiple colonial categories. He counterpoised his *nègre* slave Hardy to his *mulâtre* children who were “born free,” Creoles, and children of a free woman. He promised unequivocally to send Hardy back to the colonies (even though he never did), while he supplicated permission to have his children remain. Although French law may have been moving gradually toward the equation of race with status, this unilateral

“natural sons of Sr. Fleuriau.” *Passagers embarqués en France- La Rochelle, 1764-1765*, Colonies F 5B 57, Centre d’Archives d’Outre Mer. Also see *Etat Civil, Les Croix des Bouquests, St. Domingue*, 26 January 1734-27 July 1749, 85 MIOM 46, CAOM.

¹¹⁶ This principle was first iterated in Article 2 of the Edict of 1716, which says, “Si quelques-uns des habitants de nos colonies... veulent amener en France avec eux des esclaves nègres de l’un et de l’autre sexe, en qualité de domestique ou autrement, pour les fortifier davantage dans notre religion, tant par les instructions qu’ils recevront que par l’exemple de nos autres sujets, et pour leur faire apprendre en même temps quelque art ou métier, dont les colonies puissent retirer de l’utilité par le retour de ces esclaves ; lesdits propriétaires seront tenus d’en obtenir la permission des gouverneurs généraux... » Isambert, *Recueil Général des Anciennes Lois Françaises*, Vol XXI, p. 123. This principle is reiterated almost word for word in Article 1 of the Declaration of 1738. Isambert, *Recueil Général des Anciennes Lois Françaises*, Vol XXII, p. 113.

approach was resisted and nuanced by whites as well as blacks, in a way that was informed by colonial experience.

Conclusion

The Atlantic shaped slavery, and distance between France and the colonies played a role in determining how slaves could actively influence their relationships with their owners. As slaves, free people of color, and slave owners traveled back and forth across the more than four thousand miles that separated France from Saint-Domingue they brought ideas about race and slavery with them. For people who had lived in the colonies, these ideas usually were based on experiences of the everyday interactions among whites, blacks, and people of color. Such experience often differed from the expectations about race and race relations promulgated in France, whether laws that attempted to strictly define the boundaries of race and slavery or Enlightenment ideas about race. When personal relationships based on quotidian exchanges grew between owners and slaves, slaves had the opportunity to shape these exchanges. Slaves used a wide variety of tactics to their advantage, although gender limited the options available to them. While men's strategies included rebelling against their owners, cooperating with their owners, and positioning themselves as clients and maneuvering their owners into the role of patron, women more often could only forge personal connections with their owners by complying with their desire for sexual service. In either case, however, slaves had some agency to define their owners' experiences of slavery even as the opposite was true.

Although even in France slaves had broad scope for manipulating their relationships with their owners by modifying their behaviors in accordance with changing circumstances, free people of color had more limited opportunities to affect their own position in relation to the state. The Ordinance of 1762 did offer them the possibility to officially record their free status, but they could only do this by classifying themselves explicitly by race, and alongside slaves. Although former slaves may not have had any objection at all to this categorization, mixed-race people who were “born free,” the sons and daughters of wealthy planters who in the colonies occupied privileged positions because of both their light skin color and their relative wealth, likely found this blanket cataloging galling in the extreme. Although their relatively dark skin color may have made it difficult for them to plead their cases to the Admiralty themselves, their white kin often possessed enough position and weight in the community to do it on their behalf. Under these circumstances, whites who owned slaves sometimes resisted emerging categories equating race with slave status.

The bonds between whites and people of color, slave or free, affected individual experiences of slavery, but also influenced constructions of race and slavery in France and how contemporaries understood the relationship between the two. Such social relations were neither predetermined nor dictated; rather, they were the product of individual negotiations, the sum of which helped to shape collective understanding. In the end, slaves, free people of color, white slave owners, and royal and local officials all promulgated their own versions of what slavery meant. All these versions in turn shaped the lived experiences of slaves in the colonies and in France.

Chapter 5:

People of Color in France: Establishing and Subverting Hierarchy

Introduction

In France's maritime seaports, methods of both establishing and subverting racial hierarchy differed from techniques used in the colonies. With its small but steady population of slaves and free blacks, La Rochelle had little need for the mechanisms of slave control that were utilized in the French Antilles—nor would the state support such measures. With its increasingly strict regulation of people of color, as demonstrated by the Edict of 1716, the Declaration of 1738, and the Police des Noirs legislation of 1777, the French state worked to keep an ever-closer eye on its black population. The office of the Admiralty had jurisdiction over this growing group. Owners' declarations of slaves to Admiralty officials as they brought their slaves into the country became sites where slave owners themselves worked to shape the law. In the city of La Rochelle the ways in which slavery was enacted and enforced were played out between slave owners and slaves rather than negotiated between owners and government officials. Slave owners tapped into traditional French mechanisms of social control, working to build vertical networks of patronage that bound slaves closer to them and positioned them firmly within the context of their owners' households. In contrast, slaves and free blacks worked to create horizontal networks that extended well beyond the household, situating them in a

broader community of people of color and emphasizing the long associations many of them had with the city of La Rochelle. As men of color in particular asserted their belonging in the city on the sea, they drew on traditional French gender norms to justify their claims.

Slave owners in the port cities were faced with the problem of how to maintain their power over their slaves in a society where slavery was an anomaly rather than a norm.¹ In order to do this, white owners manipulated traditional hierarchies and social structures to assert their authority over slaves. Colonial mechanisms of slave control were not available in La Rochelle, and laws that regulated slavery in France had lots of loopholes and were not necessarily designed to benefit owners. Owners turned instead to traditional French mechanisms of authority, which they applied in new ways to consolidate their power over their slaves. This was especially important because in a society with few slaves, it was harder to mark them as personal property. Although skin color was one thing that set most slaves apart, it could not be used as a hard and fast indicator of enslaved status, because many free blacks also lived in La Rochelle and slaves varied in hue from dark-skinned African to light-skinned mulatto to Native American. Further, meanings of skin color could be manipulated. Asserting authority through customary channels such as patron-client relationships, then, which in France traditionally had been used to bind social inferiors to superiors in a hierarchical relationship, framed the power slave owners exerted over their slaves in familiar terms that French people who had

¹ On the differences between slave societies and society with slaves, see Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), p. 8-9.

never set foot in the colonies could understand.² This set up a paternalistic relationship between owners and their slaves that drew on the patriarchal structure common in French families, one that was replicated in dealings among people of color.³

However, slaves and free people of color also worked to shape their own status and to create and use networks of patronage to their own advantage. Many free blacks in La Rochelle had lived there for years, and were familiar with the port city's politics, conflicts, and power structures. They challenged efforts to restrict their liberty, playing local and national interests against each other, and creating their own networks of patronage and mutual interest. Although they often created horizontal rather than vertical ties, that is, relationships among groups of social equals rather than with social inferiors or superiors, people of color still drew upon established French notions of the family and household to legitimate their claims to being part of the Rochelais community. In particular, drawing on traditional French ideas of masculinity, femininity, and household structure aided freed men and sometimes male slaves in their claims for freedom and integration into the community. In these situations, white women acted as instruments of integration by marrying black men, and black wives found themselves in a situation of coverture similar to white women.

²On patron-client relationships, see William Beik, *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-Century France: State Power and Provincial Aristocracy in Languedoc* (New York, 1985); Sara Chapman, *Private Ambition and Political Alliances: The Phélypeaux de Pontchartrain Family and Louis XIV's Government, 1650-1715* (Rochester, 2004); Ellery Schalk, "Clientage, Elites, and Absolutism in Seventeenth-Century France," *French Historical Studies* 14, no. 3 (1986):442-446. Roland Mousnier, *Les institutions de la France sous la monarchie absolue* (Paris, 1974) argues that patron-client relationships were based on trust, mutual affection, and ties of loyalty. Sharon Kettering challenges this view, emphasizing instead the role played by self-interest in forming political ties. Sharon Kettering, *Patrons, Brokers, and Clients in Seventeenth-Century France* (New York, 1986).

³ On definitions of family in eighteenth-century France, see Suzanne Desan, *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France* (Berkeley, 2004), Sarah Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs: The Causes Célèbres of Prerevolutionary France* (Berkeley, 1993).

Authority over their wives enabled black men to make claims to masculinity and legitimated their positions in the community as heads of households.⁴

Baptism and Patronage: Slave Owners' Authority

On the parts of whites and blacks, many claims for inclusion within the community were made through religion, historically a contentious issue in La Rochelle, and one that was tied to political conflict. Their position vis à vis both religion and local politics influenced how both slaves and owners went about making claims to authority or independence. La Rochelle's particular situation as an important port with a rare amount of independence from royal control shaped how such claims were made.

By the eighteenth century, the religious tensions in the city had calmed and Catholics and Protestants coexisted in a careful *détente*. However, the legacy of religious and political dissent ran deep and created rents in the social fabric that wily groups or individuals could exploit. For example, wealthy Protestants managed to get married and have their children baptized in the Catholic Church, a necessary process to establish legitimacy and thus inheritance rights, without providing the required proof of *catholicité*. In this essential moment of baptism, an infant's soul was accepted into the church at the same time as its person was declared to legally exist by the state. In France, a Catholic nation, parish baptism records played both civil and religious roles, situating the newly-baptized in a community of parents,

⁴ Amy Dru Stanley posits a similar claim that newly-freed slave men made claims to freedom and masculinity through their ownership over the labor of their wives and children in the post-bellum United States. Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (New York, 1998), Chapter 4, especially p. 143.

godparents, and fellow parishioners. This ceremony also played an essential part in the lives of slaves, brought by their owners to La Rochelle.

In 1755, Aimé-Benjamin Fleuriau returned triumphantly to La Rochelle, having made his fortune in sugar. Two years later, he wed twenty-four-year-old Marie-Anne-Suzanne Liège, daughter of a Protestant Rochelais merchant who also had holdings in the colonies. Together they had five children, born from 1757-1766. Fleuriau and his wife, although devoutly Protestant, had all their children baptized in the Catholic Church in order to establish their civil legitimacy and to ensure their ability to inherit their parents' considerable estate.⁵ This was a fairly common practice among well-heeled Protestants; according to royal decree, only children baptized in the Catholic Church were considered legitimate, thus able to inherit property from their parents. The Declaration of May 1724 summed up laws against Protestants, stipulating that the Roman Catholic religion was the only one in France, and that all marriages had to be conducted by Catholic priests. Any marriages by a Protestant pastor were not actually marriages at all, and the children born of these unions were illegitimate.⁶ As a result, the names of Protestant families riddle the Catholic parish registers, in spite of their well-known status as dissenters.

⁵ All their children were baptized in the parish church of St. Barthélémy, even though the family was Protestant. "Régistres de baptême," GG 280 (Aimé Paul- 1757), GG 282 (François Charles Benjamin-1758), GG 286 (Suzanne Catherine- 1760), GG 298 (Marie Adelaide- 1766), Archives Municipales de La Rochelle (hereafter AMLR).

⁶ Isambert, Decrusy and Taillandier, *Recueil Général des Anciennes Lois Françaises, depuis l'an 420 jusqu'à la Révolution de 1789* (Paris, 1830), Vol. XXI, p. 261-270. David Bien argues that Catholic judges, long considered conservatives, absorbed ideas of Natural Law and applied them to Protestant marriage beginning after the conclusion of the Seven Years' War in 1763. He posits that Protestants were persecuted during times of warfare or uncertainty, but that after 1763, peace brought with it increased toleration. Protestants won de facto rights to marriage and inheritance in the courts from the mid-1760s onward. This has broad implications for La Rochelle, where Protestants made up the wealthiest portion of the population; they were extremely concerned about inheritance rights, and took precautions to secure them. David D. Bien, "Catholic Magistrates and Protestant Marriage in the French Enlightenment," *French Historical Studies* 2, no. 4 (1962):409-429.

Many Protestants, then, had both marriage and baptism ceremonies performed at local Catholic parish churches, and the Fleuriau family was no exception.⁷ However, Protestants used traditional Catholic practices, such as godparentage, differently from their Catholic peers, often appointing servants or artisans as godparents to their children, or even their slaves. This curious circumstance opens up questions about the meaning of baptism within this religiously fraught community, and in turn of the relationships between slaves and their owners, and how owners used religion and traditional pathways of patronage to consolidate their control over their slaves.

Returning merchants or dignitaries visiting from the colonies regularly arrived in La Rochelle accompanied by slaves, and other merchants received slaves sent by friends, relatives, or business associates in the colonies.⁸ In fact, the slave owners who registered their slaves in the 1763 municipal census of people of color comprised many of the most important men in town.⁹ La Rochelle continued to be a bastion of Protestantism long after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and many of its most important, wealthiest, and most influential merchants were Protestant. Among these

⁷ Fleuriau and Suzanne Liège married in Bordeaux. Jacques Cauna, *Au temps des isles à sucre : Histoire d'une plantation de Saint-Domingue au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1987), p. 45. Holding their marriage ceremony outside of their native town could have made it easier for the couple to obtain the necessary proof of Catholicism they would have needed to marry.

⁸ "Registre de sa majesté du greffe de l'amirauté," 1719-1739, B 224-B 234 and B 8086, ADCM. These registers record the entry of slaves brought into France. They give the slave's name, age, place of origin, owner's name, and owner's reason for bringing the slave to France.

⁹ "Registre pour recevoir les declarations des negres, negresses, mulatres et mulatresses qui sont dans cette ville de La Rochelle, suivant les lettres de M. L'Intendant," 1763, Police des Noirs, 352, AMLR. This census was taken in compliance with the Ordonnance of April 5, 1762, issued by the admiralty, which required all people of color, both free and slave, to register with the police. "De par le roi S.A.S. Monseigneur le Duc de Penthièvre Amiral de France et nosseigneurs de l'Amirauté de France, Ordonnance, Portant injonction à toutes Personnes demeurantes dans l'étendue de l'Amirauté, ou des Amirautés particulieres de son Ressort, qui ont à leur service des Nègres ou Mulâtres de l'un ou de l'autre sexe, d'en faire leur declaration, en personne ou par Procureur, aux Greffes de l'Amirauté de France, ou aux Greffes des Amirautés particulieres de son Ressort, sous telles peines qu'il appartiendra," B 5592, ADCM.

were Pierre Seignette, who brought the slave Mamitor, only 10 or 11 years old, when he returned to La Rochelle from the colonies, and Jacques Rasteau, who received a slave named Sipoin from an associate in Saint-Domingue. Theodore de la Croix, Elie Vivier, Jacques Carayon, Tortue Bonneau, and other prominent Protestants also owned slaves in La Rochelle.¹⁰

In seeming contradiction with their own strong faith, these Protestant masters had their slaves baptized in the Catholic Church.¹¹ The Edict of 1716, the first law that allowed slaves to enter France under certain conditions, permitted slavery in France only under the condition that slaves be baptized and instructed in the Catholic religion or a trade.¹² “In order to confirm them in the instruction and exercise of our [Roman Catholic] religion,” the law stated, “and in order for them to learn at the same time some art or craft,” owners could bring or send slaves to France.¹³ The emphasis on religious training was especially important, because the argument that their conversion to Catholicism would save Africans’ souls acted as one of the primary justifications for slavery.¹⁴ If their owners failed to comply with these provisions, slaves were freed, and “could not be reclaimed,” as specified in the law.¹⁵ Therefore, hundreds of slaves brought into La Rochelle over the course of the eighteenth century

¹⁰ “Registre de la Majeste Commanche le 11e may 1729 et finy le 16 octobre 1737,” B 225, ADCM.

¹¹ Jules Mathorez gives one example of a Protestant baptism for a slave entering France in Ablon in 1603. Jules Mathorez, *Les étrangers en France sous l'Ancien Régime. Tome premier: Les Orientaux et les extra-Européens* (Paris, 1919), p. 367.

¹² Isambert, “Edict de 25 octobre 1716,” Vol. XXI, p. 122-126.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

¹⁴ The *Code Noir*, an edict issued by Louis XIV in March, 1685, enumerated laws governing slaves and the relations between blacks and whites. The first seven articles of this infamous code dealt with converting slaves to Catholicism, keeping the Sabbath, and preventing practisants from exercising other religions.

¹⁵ Isambert, Edict of 1716, p. 124.

were baptized in the parish churches; as part of this ceremony their owners selected godparents who presumably guided the slaves' religious development.

Prominent Protestant members of the Rochelais community also often took the precaution of baptizing their children in the Catholic Church, thereby assuring their legitimacy and civil status. Throughout France, well-placed Protestants baptized their children throughout the eighteenth century, thus outwardly conforming to the norms of Catholicism and French law. Historian Margaret Maxwell differentiates among groups of Protestants, arguing that urban members of the sect, most often well-off and well-educated members of the bourgeoisie, were more likely to submit to outward pressures to conform to the Catholic faith while at the same time maintaining private Protestant worship. Such families were most likely to marry and have their children baptized in the Catholic Church.¹⁶ Fleuriau himself had six children baptized in the Catholic parish of Saint-Barthélémy in La Rochelle. A certain parallel persisted, therefore, between Protestants' children and slaves in the society of the French seaport: the civil existence of both in France was predicated on their baptism in the Catholic Church.

The parallel ends here, however; patterns of godparentage among the children and slaves of wealthy Protestant families suggest very different reasoning behind the choice of godparents in these two groups, with rationales divergent from those of their Catholic peers. In the eighteenth century, Catholic parents often used baptism as an opportunity to cement relationships of patronage or clientage, frequently

¹⁶ Margaret Maxwell, "The Division in the Ranks of the Protestants in Eighteenth-Century France," *Church History* 27, no. 2 (1958):107-123, p. 107. In her footnote 10, Maxwell also refers to Alfred Leroux, *Les religionnaires de Bordeaux de 1685 à 1802* (Bordeaux, 1920), who concludes that Protestants in Bordeaux baptized their children in the Catholic Church until the Edict of Toleration in 1787.

appointing wealthy or powerful kin or community members as godparents to their children.¹⁷ In turn, godparents were expected to look out for their godchildren, guide their spiritual development, and offer them opportunities the children's parents could not. Parents often chose kin as godparents, thereby reinforcing family ties.¹⁸ In contrast, rather than choosing powerful godparents who may have been in a position to help their children, Protestant Rochelais merchants who baptized their children in the Catholic Church more often selected domestic servants, who acted as godparents in their own right, or as stand-ins for absent Protestant family members. For example, Suzanne Catherine Fleuriau, the daughter of Aimé-Benjamin and his wife, had Jean Gilbert, a domestic working in the home of her parents, as her godfather.¹⁹ The servant girl Marie Metay acted as godmother to their next child, Louis Benjamin.²⁰ Aimé-Benjamin Fleuriau stood as godfather for his grandson of the same name, but Jean Denis LeFevre, servant in the child's father's household, represented the merchant at the baptism ceremony.²¹ This relatively common

¹⁷ On relations of godparentage as a source of patronage, see Maurice Aymard, "Friends and Neighbors," in *Passions of the Renaissance*, ed. Rogier Chartier, (Cambridge, Mass, 1989); Sharon Kettering, "Patronage and Kinship in Early Modern France," *French Historical Studies* 16, no. 2 (1989):408-435, Sharon Kettering, "Patronage in Early Modern France," *French Historical Studies* 17, no. 4 (1992):839-862. Kettering defines a patron as one who "assists and protects his clients, providing them with offices, arranging profitable marriages, finding places for their children, helping them with lawsuits or tax problems." In contrast, "a client acts as a reliable, obedient subordinate..., helping a patron to perform the duties of office, providing information, offering advice, lending money, securing places for other dependents, fighting for him, even following him into exile." Kettering, *Patrons, Brokers, and Clients*, p. 3-4.

¹⁸ Christine Adams, *A Taste for Comfort and Status: A Bourgeois Family in Eighteenth-Century France* (University Park, PA., 2000), p. 89. In Chapter 3, n. 10, Adams cites Robert Hareven and Tamara K. Wheaton, eds., *Family and Sexuality in French History* (Philadelphia, 1980), p. 117; Margaret H. Darrow, *Revolution in the House: Family, Class, and Inheritance in Southern France, 1775-1825* (Princeton, NJ, 1989), Jean-Louis Flandrin, *Families in Former Times: Kinship, Household, and Sexuality in Early Modern France*, trans. Richard Southern (Cambridge, 1979).

¹⁹ Régistres de baptême, paroisse de Saint-Barthélémy, 1760, GG 286, AMLR.

²⁰ Régistres de baptême, paroisse de Saint-Barthélémy, 1761, GG 288, AMLR.

²¹ Régistres de baptême, paroisse de Saint-Barthélémy, 1785, GG 336, AMLR.

practice distanced Protestant families from the Catholic sacrament, while still conferring on their children the civil legitimacy Catholic baptism entailed.

In contrast to traditional Catholic baptism, this practice worked to position prominent Protestant merchants as patrons rather than as clients. In La Rochelle, Protestants were usually well-to-do merchants or members of the *petit bourgeoisie*; servants would most likely be practicing Catholics. Therefore, godparentage acquired a meaning in this community different from most interpretations of godparentage as a form of patronage. Rather than looking up the social scale to find godparents, Protestant merchants looked down. The ties of Protestant baptism in the Catholic Church therefore worked in reverse of those of Catholic baptism; rather than binding the child to a social superior with greater resources, Protestants bound their inferiors to them, weaving a network of servants and tradespeople around them and thus further securing their own social status and the loyalty of those who knew them intimately.

In some cases, even slaves were appointed godparents to the children of their Protestant owners. For example, Hardy, “servant in the paternal household,” acted as godfather to Marie Adelaide, daughter of Aimé-Benjamin Fleuriau.²² Although he is not identified in the parish records as a slave, this most likely is the same Hardy who accompanied the merchant from Saint-Domingue as a manservant. Similarly, François, “black servant in the household of the maternal grandmother” of a different newly-baptized infant stood as the child’s godfather in place of Charles Macarthy, yet another prominent Protestant merchant.²³ Because in Protestant families

²² Régistres de baptême, paroisse de Saint-Barthélémy, 1766, GG 298, AMLR.

²³ Régistres de baptême, paroisse de Saint-Barthélémy, 1786, GG 338, AMLR.

godparentage tended to be relegated to servants, this does not indicate that owners held black slaves in high esteem. Although becoming the godparent of a master's child may have been an honor, in the case of Protestant families it was an honor conferred on an inferior, meant to bind slaves further into the network of clients Protestant merchants created around them. In such cases, a godparent, usually a patron able to confer privilege on the infant, is in the position of a client, demonstrating loyalty to his or her owner by literally standing for them when their own presence could cause difficulties.

In marked contrast, owners themselves very often stood as godparents for their slaves. When Protestant ship's captain Pierre Bonfils returned to France in 1727 with his slave Pierre Daniel, Bonfils' wife Marie Legendre was named the slave's godmother.²⁴ Jean Bonfils, brother of Pierre, acted as godfather to his own slave Jean Marie in 1753, and his sister-in-law Marie Legendre again acted as godmother.²⁵ Protestant Hilaire Mathieu Vivier stood as the godfather to his slave Mathieu Victor, brought from the coast of Guinée, and a close relation, probably his sister-in-law, was the slave's godmother.²⁶

Acting as godparents to their slaves or calling on close kin or associates to fill this role enabled slave owners to consolidate their personal power over those they saw as their property, perhaps taking advantage of the great respect and fondness Creole historian and jurist Moreau de Saint-Méry alleges blacks had for their godparents. He claims that "the respect of the negroes for the godfather and their godmother is carried further, so that it takes away from that which they have for their

²⁴ Régistres de baptême, paroisse de Saint-Barthélémy, 1727, GG 78, AMLR.

²⁵ Régistres de baptême, paroisse de Saint-Barthélémy, 1753, GG 272, AMLR.

²⁶ Régistres de baptême, paroisse de Saint-Barthélémy, 1727-1729, GG 247, AMLR.

father and their mother.”²⁷ Slaves occupied a tenuous position in the Rochelais community. Usually brought from the colonies, they often had no connections beyond the whites who brought them. This placed them in very vulnerable situations, as new arrivals had no support network to turn to beyond their white owners, and owners themselves often inflicted abuse on slaves. Sue Peabody suggests that slaves understood the implications of protection and support in relations of godparentage, and sometimes turned to godparents outside the immediate families of their owners if they suffered abuse at their owners’ hands.²⁸ By associating slaves with specific owners, rather than with their own family groups, baptismal records firmly positioned slaves as property, and negate any social or kinship ties they may have had. The practice of slave owners or their close kin acting as godparents closed off potential pathways for slaves to garner support outside their immediate household, thus cementing the religious as well as legal authority of the master over the slave.

Examining patterns of godparentage in the baptism of slaves in La Rochelle suggests that Protestant merchants who followed royal decree and had their slaves baptized in the Catholic Church used the patron-client relationship implicit in godparentage for very different purposes from their Catholic neighbors. Baptism and godparentage became a means for owners to consolidate their own power and authority over slaves, authority that was most directly threatened by the Catholic Church and the French crown.

²⁷ Médéric-Louis-Elie Moreau de Saint-Méry, *La description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de Saint-Domingue*, 3rd ed. (Saint-Denis, 2004), p. 55.

²⁸ Sue Peabody, *"There are No Slaves in France": The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien Régime* (New York, 1996), p. 45. Peabody recounts the story of Catherine, a slave who seeks refuge from the abuses of her master with a lawyer who was godfather to one of her children (p. 41-48).

Religion and Slaves: The Absence of Alternate Authority

Baptism took on a particularly loaded connotation because of the persistent idea that once slaves received the sacrament of baptism, they were free.²⁹ Although manumission upon baptism was seldom practiced, this widespread belief suggests that the Catholic Church had the potential to act as an alternate source of authority for slaves, beyond that held by their masters. Slaves sometimes demonstrated their recognition of this, and occasionally even asked the Church for support and aid against the abuses of their owners. One way in which slaves could demonstrate their engagement with the Church was by making their marks in parish registers. For example, where his godparents and owners signed the parish register, Jean Marie, slave of Protestant ship's captain Jean Bonfils, also made his mark, a cross.³⁰ Because of the high rates of illiteracy among the population in general in the eighteenth century, having a participant in the baptism make their mark instead of signing their name was not unusual. However, newly-baptized slaves seldom made their marks; rather, during the baptism ceremony their presence was mediated by their owners, whose signatures instead appeared in the baptism registers. In such a context, the fact that some slaves persisted in making their marks suggests that they

²⁹ This belief spread in France as well as in European colonies where slavery was prevalent. On France, see Antoine Loisel, *Institutes coutumières* (Paris, 1608), p. 1, cited in Peabody, *There are No Slaves in France*, p. 31. Frank Tannenbaum helped to ensure the persistence of this idea among historians by giving it credence in Frank Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen: The Negro in the Americas* (New York, 1946), p. 53-57. The belief that baptism would lead to emancipation also might have prompted the statute of 1736, which "forbade the baptism of children whose mothers had not been legally manumitted." Leo Elisabeth, "The French Antilles," in *Neither Slave nor Free: The Freedman of African Descent in the Slave Societies of the New World*, ed. David Cohen and Jack Greene (Baltimore, 1972): pp. 134-171, p. 141. Elisabeth gives no citation for this statute, and it is unclear whether it originated from Versailles or local officials in Saint-Domingue.

³⁰ Régistres de baptême, paroisse de Saint-Barthélémy, 1753, GG 272, AMLR.

insisted on recording their physical presence as well as their civil and religious existence. Further, slaves such as Jean Marie could have viewed the Church as an alternative source of authority from their masters, particularly if their owners were Protestant.³¹ In such a situation, the act of a slave making a mark in an official register has profound overtones of resistance, an insistence on civic recognition, and an acknowledgement of competing sources of authority.³² Some slaves parlayed this understanding into freedom, or used it to carve out and protect social niches for themselves within the complex social framework of La Rochelle.³³

In some cases, in fact, the Church did extend a helping hand to slaves, intervening on their behalf in instances where their owners stood in the way of their religious development. For example, Robert Harms chronicles the story of Pauline Villeneuve, a young slave brought to Nantes by her owner and deposited at a convent for the duration of her mistress' extended visit to Paris. Very few slaves took religious vows, although many well-heeled colonists sent their mixed-race children to

³¹ Historiography on slave religion in the North American context can help illuminate questions of religion and slavery in the European context. A large body of works examines slave religion and its potential to question authority in North America. Early works emphasize Christianity as an alternate source of authority, and frame the practice of religion as a mode of resistance to slavery. See, for example, Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1974); Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1978), Albert Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones: Reflections on African-American Religious History* (Boston, 1995); Timothy Fulop and Albert Raboteau, ed., *African-American Religion: Interpretive Essays in History and Culture* (New York, 1997). More recent works on slave religion suggest that African, Christian, and Native American religions blended into a distinct whole, and emphasizes slaves' role in creating an autonomous culture. See Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, MA, 1998), Michael Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1998), Philip Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Low Country* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1998).

³² Laurent Dubois charts how slaves take every opportunity to record their civil existence in colonial records. Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2004), Chapter 9.

³³ Peabody demonstrates how slaves in Paris used the law to obtain their freedom. Peabody, *"There are No Slaves in France"*. Although I have found no similar cases in La Rochelle, I will suggest that slaves used their understanding of the specific culture of that port city to secure or affirm their freedom in other ways.

be educated in France, usually at religious establishments.³⁴ As the time drew near for her return to the colonies, Pauline made the decision to take vows and become a Benedictine Sister of Calvary. Her mistress would not easily relinquish Pauline, whom she viewed as her personal property, so the nuns brought suit on Pauline's behalf. The nuns marshaled support of religious leaders in Nantes and Paris, and together they fought Pauline's owner in the presidial courts of Nantes.³⁵ Pauline was awarded her freedom on a technicality, but this case vividly illustrates the Catholic Church's rarely-actualized potential as a refuge from slavery and a champion of emancipation. Sue Peabody also relates an account of a group of runaway slaves who sought refuge in Guadeloupe at a Jesuit mission. They claimed their extreme unhappiness at not being able to practice their Catholic religion under their new Protestant owners. Peabody points out the interest both the Jesuits and the slaves had in repeating such a story, but this account suggests that the Catholic Church could provide a refuge for slaves in the colonies as well as in France, and also that some slaves may have arrived in France with this knowledge.³⁶

³⁴ Although Peabody states that "education apparently played a relatively minor role in the purposes for which blacks were brought to Paris" based on her analysis of the Admiralty records, she also cites a report by Le Moynes, commander of the navy in Bordeaux, who refers to colonists' practice of sending their mixed-race children to France for their education. Peabody, *There are No Slaves in France*, p. 81, 121. Peabody cites "Réflexions sur la Déclaration du Roy du 9 aoust 1777—Registrée au Parlement le 27. pour la Police des Noirs par rapport à leur residence en Europe" (A.N., Colonies F¹B⁴, Fol. 402^v).

I found reference to only one such person of color in La Rochelle: Victoire, a free mulatta, made her own declaration in the Police des Noirs on 5 October, 1777. A native of Louisiana, she was living in the Convent des Dames de Providence in La Rochelle. She had resided in France for nine years, since she was a child of four. "Déclaration de Mulatresse", 5 October 1777, Colonies F¹B⁴, dossier VI, CAOM. I discuss her case further later in the chapter.

³⁵ Robert Harms, *The Diligent: A Voyage Through the Worlds of the Slave Trade* (New York, 2002), p. 6-11. Because religious orders had a relatively minor presence in La Rochelle, turning to them for aid was less of an option for slaves. Although Nantes also had a history of religious dissent, by the eighteenth century the Catholic Church and religious orders had gained a stronger foothold than in La Rochelle.

³⁶ Sue Peabody, "'A Dangerous Zeal': Catholic Missions to Slaves in the French Antilles, 1635-1800," *French Historical Studies* XXV, no. 2002 (2002):53-90, p. 53-54. Peabody cites [Guillaume

However, in the context of the seaport fraught with religious differences, slaves had few opportunities to participate in organized religion, Catholic or Protestant. The religious tension that permeated city politics and shaped the relationship between La Rochelle and the French crown complicated slaves' relationships to religion, and foreclosed potential opportunities for resistance to slavery through religious activity. In spite of the fact that slave baptism was relatively widespread, few slaves continued their participation in the Catholic Church. No slaves or free blacks played an active role in Catholic religious orders, few slaves were given Catholic burials, and slaves generally did not marry in the Catholic Church.³⁷ Further, in spite of the fact that many slave owners were Protestants, there

Moreau?], "Mémoires concernant la mission des pères de la compagnie de Jésus dans les isles François de l'Amérique," reprinted in *Annales de la société d'histoire de la Martinique* 27 (1988-91): 74-75.

According to Peabody, the date of the text is uncertain, but likely around 1709.

³⁷ In La Rochelle, no slaves or free blacks married in the parishes of Notre-Dame (the largest parish) or Saint-Barthélémy (the most prosperous parish). It is possible that slaves or free blacks may have married in the parishes of Saint-Nicolas, Saint-Sauveur, or Saint-Jean. AMLR, Sèrie GG. Some blacks claimed to be married, suggesting either that they did marry in other parishes, or that they had a different, non-Catholic understanding of marriage. Such an understanding could have incorporated forming marriage contracts before notaries, a common practice in the Protestant city, particularly for Protestants not of the highest rank. However, I found no evidence that blacks formed such contracts. Moreau notes that few blacks in Saint-Domingue married at all. Although he means this comment to illustrate what he calls their "primitive morals," this could also suggest the persistence of an African mode of constituting a family that persists in the colonies and even among slaves in France, leading them to reject Christian marriage ceremonies. Moreau de Saint-Méry, *La description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de Saint-Domingue* p. 57. More recent evidence suggests that many free people of color married, especially those who were well off. Stuart King opens his study with a free black military leader who married and stood as a witness at the weddings of many of his peers. Stuart King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig: Free People of Color in Prerevolutionary Saint-Domingue* (Athens, GA, 2001), p. ix-x.

The field of subaltern studies offers precedents for reading absences in the archives; here, I deal with the absence of religious records for the community of color in La Rochelle. For example, Gayatri Spivak re-reads an apparently clear-cut case of sati, the ritual suicide of Hindu widows, as a politically motivated suicide in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, (Urbana, 1988). Partha Chatterjee insists on the pluralistic nature of nations and the people who live in and contribute to them in Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ, 1993). Michel-Rolph Trouillot emphasizes the importance of the absence of sources and archives in shaping the writing of history. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Power and the Production of History* (Boston, 1995). Feminist scholars also emphasize the importance of considering those whose voices are silenced in the archives or in the telling of history. Patricia Williams, for example, describes the "emptiness of words" that fails to address the experiences of the subaltern, particularly black women.

are no indications at all of slave participation in the Protestant church.³⁸ Although Protestant activities were usually covert, substantial traces of participation in the Protestant religious tradition by many Rochelais families remain. The lack of involvement of slaves or free blacks suggests that either Protestant slave owners discouraged slaves from participating in their religious tradition, that Protestants actively excluded people of color, or that blacks actively chose to avoid organized religion altogether.

This absence of slave participation in the religious communities of La Rochelle poses an interesting contrast to slave engagement in religious activities in the Americas, where scholars have framed slave involvement in Christian religions as a form of resistance to their owners and their enslaved status.³⁹ Slaves often incorporated their own religious traditions into Christianity, emphasizing the immorality of slavery, their own opportunities for freedom in the afterlife, and the possibility of vengeance upon their owners. This creolized brand of Christianity offered broad scope for both continuance of African cultures and for rebellion against owners. However, in La Rochelle slaves may have been excluded from participation in Protestant churches by reluctant congregations of mostly elite merchants, and discouraged from participating in Catholic ceremonies by their Protestant masters. If they formed their own religious communities, drawing on either African or Christian religions, they were hidden well outside the bounds of organized religion. In this context, lack of participation could hint at the existence of a vibrant community of

Patricia J. Williams, "On Being the Object of Property," in *Theorizing Feminism: Parallel Trends in the Humanities and Social Sciences*, ed. Anne C. Herrmann and Abigail J. Stewart, (Boulder, CO, 2001), p. 285.

³⁸ Registres des Protestants, 1731-1790, GG 7-GG 8, GG 709-GG 712, AMLR.

³⁹ See footnote 31.

slaves and free blacks that subsisted outside the constraints of official Church documentation.

People of Color and their Relationships

The community of color in La Rochelle found areas outside organized religion to form networks among themselves. People of color in La Rochelle knew each other and sought each other out in times of need, picked their ways around the laws that made their presence in France increasingly precarious, and even capitalized on and manipulated the historic conflict of authority between the rebellious city and the centralized authority of the king. In doing so, they formed their own patron-client relationships and put forth their own variants of authority, which often simultaneously built on and undermined patterns of authority set by their owners. In forming friendships or romantic relationships, people of color often turned to others of similar race or status.⁴⁰ Gender played a central role, however, in cementing claims across lines of race and status. Specifically, men of color used their authority over women and children to assert masculinity that gave them both rights and position within the community. Expectations of masculinity and femininity in France extended to slaves and free people of color, defining their gender roles, how they constructed families, and ultimately their position in Rochelais society.

The former slave Pierre Neptune maneuvered among state authorities, local officials, and the will of his owner, successfully managing to gain his freedom and to

⁴⁰ Kathleen Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1996), p. 236-241. Brown discusses relationships among free blacks in the colony of Virginia, and highlights that they were more likely to form ties with those of similar social or economic groups, including slaves and occasionally poor whites.

become an established member of the Rochelais community of people of color. According to his own declaration in the 1777 Police des Noirs survey, Pierre Neptune was brought to France by one Monsieur Cadou, a ship's captain, in about 1724. Neptune identified himself as a native of Juda, on the coast of Guinée, and said that Cadou took him from his native land when he was only fourteen years old, and brought him to La Rochelle on the ship *Le Saint Philippe*.⁴¹ They probably came by way of the Antilles, where Cadou likely sold the rest of his human 'cargo.' Exercising the customary privilege of the captains of slave ships, Cadou brought Pierre Neptune to France as his own slave. Neptune served Cadou for twenty-two years, and on his master's death in 1749 his heirs gave the African his liberty, apparently in accordance with their father's wishes.⁴² Neptune was thirty-six.

In the decades he lived in La Rochelle, first as a slave and then as a free man, Neptune formed long-standing relationships with other free blacks. He married and had children, and he remained a constant figure in the port city for many years. His future wife had arrived in La Rochelle as a slave as well. In 1741, several years before Neptune received his freedom, Issac Vatable registered his slave Lisette with the Admiralty. He was traveling from Guadeloupe with his wife and children, and they brought Lisette, whom he identified as a twenty-six-year-old "creole negress," to serve them on their voyage. He also planned to instruct her in the Catholic religion, in accordance with the law. He promised to return Lisette to the colony within three

⁴¹ "Registre Contenant les déclarations des noirs, mulâtres, et autres gens de couleur, en consequence de l'Edit du Roy du 9 aout 1777," 1777, B 258, ADCM.

⁴² Ibid. Neptune gives a full account of his history in his Police des Noirs testimony, including the date of his freedom and the name of the notary in front of whom the act was passed. Also see Notary Act, 7 March 1749, 3 E 1612, ADCM, for the notary act passed in front of Fleury which gave Pierre Neptune his liberty.

years, as required.⁴³ Lisette remained in La Rochelle, however, and eventually she too received her freedom. She met Neptune, and in spite of their very different backgrounds, he from Africa and she born in the colonies, they were drawn together.

In about 1759, ten years after Pierre Neptune was freed, he and Lisette, now called Louise, were married. By that time, she too had been freed. The couple had several children, but none of them lived past childhood.⁴⁴ The parents remained fixtures of the community, however, and built a life for themselves in La Rochelle. In 1763, Pierre Neptune made a declaration for himself and his wife in a survey of people of color living in La Rochelle. In face of the increasing pressure on people of color to leave France and on authorities to require them to do so, they promised to return to Saint-Domingue or Martinique, where neither of them ever seems to have lived; Neptune perhaps specified these colonies because Rochelais merchants traded with them most frequently, but perhaps also he wanted to avoid mention of his wife's colonial homeland. Although the former slave agreed to comply with the law and to move his household to the colonies, he undoubtedly had reservations about crossing the Atlantic on a voyage redolent of the Middle Passage, which he had already undergone once in his life, particularly for a destination where the majority of the black population was enslaved, a condition both he and his wife had already endured. Although Neptune did not voice these reservations to the officials who recorded his statement, he did point out in his declaration the prohibitive cost of travel to the colonies, and he asked that the king pay for their trip.

⁴³ "Registre de sa Majesté commencé le 19 octobre 1737 et fini le 27 juin 1744," B 226, ADCM.

⁴⁴ "Déclaration du nommé Neptune, Noir," 18 September, 1777, Colonies F¹B⁴, folio VI, CAOM.

Although childless, at that time the couple had a mulatto girl of seventeen living with them. Very little information is available about this girl, whom Neptune only mentions once, in his 1763 declaration. This unnamed girl could be Rosette, who arrived in La Rochelle with Dame Louis Genevieve Roy in September of 1758 on a ship from Saint Domingue, when she was only thirteen years old.⁴⁵ It could be Nanette, who acted as a chambermaid to Widow Damien, and was freed by her mistress in February of that same year.⁴⁶ It could be any number of other young slave girls who arrived in La Rochelle from the late 1740s through the early 1760s, or she even could have been born in France, daughter of a French man and his dark-skinned mistress or wife, product of a colonial liaison. Former slave men in France sometimes married French women, and she could have been born of this genre of union, but was staying with Neptune and Lisette until she found work in La Rochelle. She even could have been the daughter of either Lisette or Neptune from a previous relationship. Whatever her origins, her protectors pledged to take the unnamed girl with them to the colonies. This living arrangement implies broad connections of people of color in La Rochelle, and suggests that Neptune and Louise, long-time residents of the port, themselves acted as patrons, and stood at the center of a network of patronage based on race and status.

Pierre Neptune and Louise showed themselves familiar with the laws which attempted to regulate the presence of people of color in France, and adept at manipulating the administrative system to their benefit. Neptune played the local administration against that of the kingdom when he promised to ask the king to

⁴⁵ “Registre de sa majesté du greffe du l'amirauté commencé le 14 Avril 1757 et finy le 20 8bre 1760,” 9 September 1758, B 230, ADCM.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 17 February 1758.

finance their voyage to the Antilles: he simultaneously assuaged any compunction local officials might have about enforcing the law while buying himself and his wife at least fourteen more years of freedom in France. He likely realized that even if he did ask the king to finance their journey, funding would not be forthcoming, and that the always-strained relations between La Rochelle and royal authority would work in his favor. These assumptions seem to have been well founded. In 1788, eleven years after the passage of the Police des Noirs legislation, Rochelais officials were still stalling their enforcement of the legislation by delaying the registration of laws and raising question after question about the fine points of their enforcement.⁴⁷

Slaves and free blacks also seized religion as an arena in which they could play into the historic tension between royal and local authority. In his declaration in the nation-wide 1777 Police des Noirs survey, Pierre Neptune assured officials of his Catholic religion when he declared himself and his wife Louise.⁴⁸ By this time Neptune had lived in La Rochelle for approximately 53 years, for the first 22 years as a slave, then for 31 years as a free man. In making his declaration, mandated by royal decree and sent to royal officials, Neptune took care to guarantee that he and his wife “profess the Roman Catholic and Apostolic religion, which he declared in his soul and conscience.”⁴⁹ This assurance acquired even more significance in the context of the history of religious strife in La Rochelle. In professing his Catholicism, Neptune

⁴⁷ For example, one notable epistle asked if an exception could be made for black wet nurses of white children. Letter from La Luzerne to the Admiralty officers in La Rochelle, Versailles, 17 juillet 1788. B 5592, ADCM.

⁴⁸ For the text of the law mandating this survey, see “Arrêt de conseil par lequel le roi nomme une commission pour lui proposer un règlement sur la police des noirs,” Versailles, September 8, 1776, Isambert Decrusy, and Taillandier, *Recueil Général des Anciennes Lois Françaises, depuis l'an 420 jusqu'à la Révolution de 1789*, vol. XXI (Paris, 1830), Vol. 24, p. 106-114. Neptune's Declaration is in Colonies F¹B⁴ Dossier VI, CAOM.

⁴⁹ “Déclaration du nommé Neptune, noir,” 18 September, 1777, Colonies F¹B⁴ Dossier VI, CAOM.

conformed to the demands of royal officials, who in this case held the power to decide his fate. In his 1763 declaration to local officials, Neptune did not mention religion at all. His two distinct rhetorics demonstrate his mastery of local and national political dynamics, and his ability to negotiate between the two.

In 1777, Pierre Neptune and Louise were still living in La Rochelle; they seem never to have made further supplications for financial support for a transatlantic journey. Louise worked as a washerwoman and Neptune as a day laborer, and both professed to be practicing Catholics.⁵⁰ None of their three children lived past childhood, and the documents make no further mention of the mulatto girl. However, this story suggests that slaves and free blacks living in France fit into and adopted traditionally French forms of patronage, with superiors in terms of status, power, or standing in the community acting to protect those less powerful than they. Neptune and Louise's tale also highlights the importance of French definitions of family and gender roles in the claims-making of slaves and free blacks in La Rochelle. Neptune included the mulatto girl as a member of his household, framing this relationship both in terms of traditional French notions of patronage and protection of inferiors, and also in terms of African ideas of extended family and fictive kin. A number of authors explore the persistence of African traditions among slaves and free blacks in the New World, claiming that Africans and their descendents, thrust into the New World, had "a creative response to strange surroundings" while they "maintained a conscious black identity."⁵¹ Neptune, one of few black men in La Rochelle,

⁵⁰ "Registre Contenant les déclarations des noirs, mulâtres, et autres gens de couleur, en consequence de l'Edit du Roy du 9 aout 1777," B 258, ADCM.

⁵¹ T.H. Breen and Stephen Innes, *"Myne Owne Ground": Race and Freedom on Virginia's Eastern Shore, 1640-1676* (New York, 1980), p. 69 and 18. See also Sidney Mintz and Richard Price, *An*

responded in this vein; in his declarations, he framed his masculinity in a way that would leave no doubt about it, either in his native or his adopted countries, by asserting his own authority over his household. Evelyn Brooks Higgenbotham defines race as “a highly contested representation of relations of power between social categories by which individuals are identified and identify themselves.”⁵² Neptune entered into this contest and actively shaped meanings of race in La Rochelle by asserting the primacy of masculine gender privilege over racial disadvantage, working to highlight the similarities between himself and other male heads of households in the town through emphasizing the differences between himself and the women in his charge.

Neptune’s declaration vividly expresses the hierarchical helix of gender and race. By including the mulatto girl in his declaration, Neptune offered her the status of a daughter whom he and his wife would look over and protect, even if they all went to the colonies. However, he could only do this because he was a male head of household. Even if his intentions were different, by making a declaration as a head of household that included his wife and another member of his household, he was drawing on the same patriarchal privilege as white male slave owners who declared their slaves. Feminist scholars, in particular, have delved into the relationship between race and gender, investigating how these two categories intersect and intertwine. Formulating theories of intersectionality, multiple identities, and

Anthropological Approach to the Afro-American Past: A Caribbean Perspective (Philadelphia, 1976). Michael Gomez connects this “black identity” specifically to African culture and a “move from ethnicity to race as the basis for such [a collective] identity.” Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks* p. 4.

⁵² Higgenbotham, "African-American History and the Metalanguage of Race," *Signs* 17, no. 2 (1992): pp. 251-274, p. 253.

simultaneity, scholars have examined how racial and patriarchal privileges were very closely related and mutually constituted.⁵³ Some historians, such as Kathleen Brown, have framed hierarchical gender relations as the model on which race relations were built.⁵⁴ Brown claims that for the first English settlers in Virginia, “the alleged physical and moral weakness of women provided authors with a useful metaphor for explaining other relations of dominance and submission,” particularly race relations.⁵⁵ In drawing on the privileges of patriarchy, Neptune used the same tools whites used to reinforce racism, simply deploying them with an emphasis on gender rather than race.

⁵³ As defined by feminist theorist Patricia Hill Collins, the idea of intersectionality “refers to particular forms of intersecting oppressions, for example, intersections of race and gender, or of sexuality and nation. Intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice.” Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York, 2000), p. 18. In Collins’ formulation, when such categories intersect, oppressions multiply. Higginbotham warns, however, that the idea of intersectionality suggests that black women (and other ‘Others’) can be separated into discrete identities. Rather, she argues, multiple identities work to constitute and reinforce each other. Higginbotham, “African-American History and the Metalanguage of Race,” p. 273. Similarly, Elsa Barkley Brown calls for a consideration of simultaneity rather than intersectionality. She claims that examining simultaneous identities and their resulting oppressions will allow for the examination of the connections between them. Brown, “‘What Has Happened Here’: The Politics of Difference in Women’s History and Feminist Politics,” p. 297.

⁵⁴ Kathleen Brown discusses the mutually constitutive nature of race and gender in colonial Virginia, Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs*. Brown frames the intersection of these discourses as a specifically colonial American phenomenon, but I argue rather that this intersection occurred in any society with slavery, and perhaps became more pronounced where slaves, free blacks, and whites coexisted. Hannah Rosen also argues that “meanings for whiteness and blackness were mapped onto preexisting gender polarities.” Rosen, “The Gender of Reconstruction: Rape, Race, and Citizenship in the Postemancipation South,” (University of Chicago, 1999), p. 17. In the context of empire, Laura Wexler goes further, claiming that gender masked hierarchies by naturalizing differences. She asserts, “by assimilating class and racial conflict to supposedly natural hierarchies of sexual difference, gender masks the contingent, ongoing, willful violence of those divisions.” Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000), p. 50.

⁵⁵ Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs*, p. 13.

Masculinity, Race, and Patriarchy

In the context of the Enlightenment and the simultaneous increase in the economic importance of the colonies, men of letters spilled much ink trying to define race. As mulattoes in Saint-Domingue gained political power and the population of free people of color in the colony neared parity with the population of whites, trying to understand, define, and contain racial mixing became a major preoccupation of scientists.⁵⁶ Controversy existed over the origins of racial differences. Some scientists, like the prominent naturalist Buffon, argued in favor of monogenetic generation: the theory that all humans belonged to the same species, regardless of race. Buffon argues, “the human species is not composed of species essentially different from each other, but rather the contrary, there was originally but a sole species of men.”⁵⁷ Others, including Voltaire, argued in favor of polygenesis, maintaining that different races of humans constituted different species.⁵⁸ But even polygenecists could not deny the reality of racial mixing, often brought on by the sexual abuse of female slaves at the hands of their white masters.

By the eighteenth century, moralists, scientists, and politicians viewed this racial mixing as a pernicious problem that threatened white supremacy, particularly in the profitable sugar colonies. Following the lead of earlier authors, Moreau de Saint-Méry, tackled the mission of defining minute degrees of miscegenation, thereby

⁵⁶ King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig*. King cites the number of both free people of color and whites at about 30,000 in 1789. The population of free blacks increased at twice that of whites during the 1770s and 1780s. In contrast, at the same time the slave population measured about 450,000. King, xv-xvi; xxiv.

⁵⁷ Georges Louis Leclerc Buffon, comte de, *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière, avec la description du cabinet du roi* (Paris, 1749), Vol. 3, p. 529-530.

⁵⁸ Voltaire, *Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations et sur pes principaux faits de l'histoire depuis Charlemagne jusqu'à Louis XIII* (Paris, 1963), Vol.1, p. 6. Voltaire describes the different races, which he considers different species, p. 6-9.

codifying whiteness.⁵⁹ Moreau based his theories on assumed unions between a white man and a woman of color, and Doris Garraway argues that he used this supposition both to legitimate the continued sexual exploitation of women of color and to assuage fears of the growth of a free population of color.⁶⁰ Even Moreau, however, like his contemporary Buffon, accepted that climate affected phenotypic, genetic, and moral disposition. For example, Moreau asserted that “the Creole Negroes are born with physical and moral qualities that give them a real right to superiority over those who are transported from Africa.” He later elaborated on the changes wrought by the climate: “The *negrillons* born in our Colonies, who have the same physical education and the same food as in Africa, in general have a less flattened nose, less fat lips and more regular features than African negroes.”⁶¹ Although he firmly believed that black blood would tell, he acknowledged the occasional difficulty in distinguishing between true whites and blacks who looked

⁵⁹ Moreau de Saint-Méry, *La description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de Saint-Domingue*. Moreau outlines his theories of racial mixing in great detail in Vol. 1, p. 86-102. He spends the rest of this section extolling the virtues of mulattoes, the beauty and sexuality of the women, and the qualities that make the men excellent soldiers (p. 103-111). Previous taxonomies of race include those outlined by Cornelius de Pauw, *Recherches philosophiques sur les Américains, ou, Mémoires intéressants pour servir à l'histoire de l'espece humaine*. (London, 1770) Vol. 1, p. 180-181, and Michel René Hilliard d'Auberteuil, *Considérations sur l'état présent de la colonie française de Saint-Domingue* (Paris, 1776-1777) Vol. 2, p 72-83 and 95-96.

⁶⁰ Doris Garraway, "Race, Reproduction and Family Romance in Moreau de Saint-Méry's *Description de la Partie Française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue*," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38, no. 2 (2005):227-246, especially p. 230. Garraway posits that Moreau positions white men as the original 'fathers' of mixed races, and mulatto women as the imagined product of the imagined union between white male masters and their black female slaves. This "family romance" justified continued white rule but does not threaten white hegemony because Moreau assumes that the libertine leanings of mulatto women made them infertile (235). He thereby issues white men an imperative to keep sexually abusing their female slaves, in order to create a free colored class, while justifying the abuse through the claim that such sexual alliances will 'soften' slavery by creating bonds of affection between masters and their slaves (237). Garraway points out that Moreau does not allow any role for white women in racial mixing (233).

⁶¹ Moreau de Saint-Méry, *La description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de Saint-Domingue*, p. 59 and 72. Buffon agreed with this theory of climactic variation, claiming that "c'est la chaleur excessive dans quelques contrées du globe qui donne cette couleur [des nègres]." Buffon, *Histoire naturelle*, Suppl. Vol. VI, p. 502.

white. Moreau said that “the two extremes for these freed people [who live in Saint-Domingue] are on the one side the negro and on the other individuals whose color does not show any perceptible difference, when one compares it with that of the White.”⁶²

Moreau’s theories of race had their roots in a rapidly changing Saint-Domingue. Numbers of free people of color grew rapidly, and this emerging class controlled an increasing proportion of wealth and power in the colony, even sending representatives to lobby on their behalf to the royal government in Paris.⁶³ People of mixed race owned plantations and slaves, worked as artisans, were educated in France, and played an active role in the military. Further, many of these people of mixed race boasted close kinship ties with island whites, ties that translated into business dealings, patronage relationships, and even marriage. In the colonies, then, hopes of clear-cut racial boundaries drifted into fantasy, the lines blurred by money and sex.

Fears of miscegenation drifted across the Atlantic to France. However, in France inter-racial sex diverged from Moreau’s assumption of white male master dominating black female slave. Although many white men brought black women with them to France as *ménagères*, housekeepers and de facto common-law wives,⁶⁴ men of color who lived in France also often married white women. In France, black

⁶² Moreau de Saint-Méry, *La description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de Saint-Domingue*, p. 86.

⁶³ On free people of color in Saint Domingue, see Debbash, *Couleur ou liberté: le jeu de critères ethnique dans un ordre juridique esclavagiste* (Paris, 1967), King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig*.

⁶⁴ Moreau says of such women, “the majority among them live with a white man, where, under the very little deserved title of *ménagères*, they have all the functions of a wife, without being very strongly disposed to accomplish the duties that go along with this title.” Moreau de Saint-Méry, *La description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de Saint-Domingue*, p. 106.

and mulatto slaves of both sexes were given their freedom, undermining the colonial idea that only black women, through their sexual intercourse with white men, could open a gateway to freedom for themselves and their mixed-race offspring. Instead, French constructions of faithful service more often determined which slaves received their freedom. Once slaves were freed, their gender broadly determined their future and the ways in which they could participate in French society. Although racial difference shaped the lives of first-generation blacks living in France, they could make claims to inclusion in the society based on acceptance of French gender roles. Through their dealings with authorities, blacks shaped and challenged colonial-influenced ideas about race, while building their claims for belonging in La Rochelle on patriarchy. Freed men of color, in particular, hinged assertions for inclusion in Rochelais society on their long-term associations with the community, and especially on their roles as heads of households.

Racial hegemony and patriarchal authority vied for supremacy in nation-wide surveys of people of color living in France, which took place in 1763 and 1777. The clash between these two conflicting power structures emerged most noticeably in the registers of free people of color living in the country. In these documents, freed women only rarely made their own declarations; more often, husbands, male relatives, or male employers made the declarations for them. In these cases, patriarchy and race did not conflict. However, the declarations made for or by free men of color raised questions of which hierarchy was more important. Should white men or even women make these declarations for free blacks, often their servants? Or should freed black men register themselves, their wives, and their children?

The initial 1763 municipal Police des Noirs survey conducted by the city of La Rochelle included only two declarations made by free blacks themselves: those of Pierre Neptune and Antoine Montreal. Although other free people of color lived in La Rochelle at the time, including Fleuriau's children Marie-Jeanne, Marie-Charlotte, Joseph, Paul, and Jean Mandron, only Montreal and Neptune went to the authorities to make their own statements; other free people of color had declarations made by white masters who employed them as servants, former owners, husbands, or, as in the case of the Mandron children, white relatives. Unlike most of the other free people of color who appeared in the survey, both Neptune and Montreal were husbands and heads of households. The men had both lived in La Rochelle for many years, Neptune for fifty-two and Montreal for forty-six. Both of them made claims of belonging in the Rochelais community based on their long residence, their faithful service to their masters, and their own patriarchal authority as heads of households.

Like Neptune, Antoine Montreal had been brought to La Rochelle as a boy. He arrived in 1717, only thirteen years old.⁶⁵ A native of Guinea, he came to France with a ship's captain whose name he could not recall. He served as a slave to Monsieur Pascauld, a merchant and a former deputy of the powerful Chamber of Commerce, until his owner died. He became the property of his former owner's widow, but when she wanted to take him with her to her new home in Paris, Montreal balked. He refused to leave La Rochelle, arguing with his mistress that at over sixty years old, he was too old and infirm to make the trip, adding that he did not want to live in Paris. She agreed to leave him behind, and gave him his freedom.⁶⁶ She also

⁶⁵ "Etat des noirs libres qui sont en France," 1777, Police des Noirs, 352, AMLR.

⁶⁶ Police des Noirs, 1777, B 258 ADCM.

left him a comfortable annual income of two hundred livres upon her death. At a late age Montreal married a white French woman, but at the time of his declaration his wife had recently passed away, after only five years of marriage.⁶⁷ Although the Declaration of 1738 forbade slaves from marrying, as a free man Montreal was exempt from this stricture.⁶⁸ His marriage to a white woman suggests not only a level of integration into Rochelais society, but also his persistent emphasis on status over race: as a free man, he could marry whomever he wished.

Neptune and Montreal's stories follow a similar trajectory. They arrived in La Rochelle within a few years of each other, both served the same owner for many years, both received their freedom from their masters, and, significantly, both married after becoming free. Like Neptune, Montreal expressed his uncertainty that the laws regulating blacks applied to him, and asked for special consideration because of his long-standing membership in the community. In Montreal's 1763 declaration, for example, he points to his exceptionality, detailing how his status makes him different from other people of color. It says,

The above named Montreal, sixty years old and infirm, has lived in this town for many years and has served as the domestic of Madame Pascauld for a very long time. She has left him two hundred livres of annual income.... He asks if he is in the same case as the other *nègres* with regard to his age and infirmity, [and] free state.⁶⁹

Despite framing his declaration as a query, Montreal made clear that he felt he was an exception, and that he differed from other people of color in La Rochelle because of his long residence in the community, his status as a free man, his white wife, and his independent income. Like Neptune, Montreal put the burden of action on state

⁶⁷ Police des Noirs, 352, AMLR.

⁶⁸ "Déclaration concernant les nègres esclaves des Colonies", 15 December 1738, Article 9. Isambert, *Recueil Général des Anciennes Lois Françaises* Vol. XXII, p. 114.

⁶⁹ Police des Noirs, 1777, 352, AMLR.

officials; he complied with the requirement to register, while making it clear that he viewed himself as a member of the community. By making his own declaration, using his white wife as an instrument for his belonging, Montreal made a powerful statement in favor of patriarchal authority. Montreal, like Neptune, participated actively in the process of his classification. He elides racial differences (perceived or otherwise) with the officials recording his declaration by emphasizing their gender similarities. For Montreal, race is an unstable category which, in the words of feminist theorist Amy Kaminsky, “rests on multiple factors, including self-definition, external attribution, and political exigency.” Kaminsky contrasts this instability with gender categories, which she classifies as less stable and less contestable.⁷⁰ Men of color in La Rochelle similarly played these categories off each other, using assumptions of fixed gender identity, bolstered by their assertions of masculinity substantiated by their wives and children, to shape fluctuating concepts of race. They worked to manipulate race as a category through their declarations, counterpoising it against supposedly fixed ideas about gender.

In emphasizing their status as married men and fathers, Neptune, Montreal, and other free men of color drew on what Robert Nye in his study of French masculinity calls “the concept of sexual identity,” or how historical actors conceptualized and played out their sexuality as a lived social category.⁷¹ They drew on masculinity as a fluctuating but “natural” category,⁷² implicitly opposing it to a much less stable concept of race, which many scientists and men of letters also

⁷⁰ Amy Kaminsky, "Gender, Race, Raza," *Feminist Studies* 20, no. 1 (1994):14-31, p. 11.

⁷¹ Robert Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France* (Berkeley, 1993), p. viii.

⁷² Nye argues that “sexual identity has been largely experienced and regarded in the past as a *natural* quality, expressed in and through the body and its gestures.” *Ibid.*, p. 6.

framed as a natural category. However, by placing these two categories back to back, Neptune and Montreal contrasted their race with their gender, demonstrating that their gender was fixed in an identifiably French way that emphasized masculine honor through control over women and children, but also by saying that they were manly enough to have wives and to father children.⁷³ Nye also suggests that in the eighteenth century “to contemporaries it must have seemed that family honor was inseparable from [a] stirring love of country.”⁷⁴ In asserting the integrity of their family units, therefore, free men of color also were asserting their Frenchness.

Defining Blackness

The construction of race did not take place in a closed society, however, and global events influenced the definition of race in France. The Seven Years’ War (1756-1763), following closely on the heels of the War of Austrian Succession (1740-1748), disrupted the Atlantic trade routes, and the French merchant marine had to be constantly on the lookout for English corsairs on the prowl. These expensive wars caused a drain on the royal French treasury and interrupted trade between France and the Caribbean, also causing hardship for merchants, sailors, dockworkers, and

⁷³ In contrast, in her study of masculinity and race in the United States, Gail Bederman explores black men’s struggle to achieve “manliness,” which was implicitly defined in terms of whiteness and white masculine ideals. Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago, 1995), p. 29. Bederman discusses the heavyweight prizefight between black Jack Johnson and white Jim Jeffries in 1910 in some depth. Johnson won, and in the ensuing publicity he self-consciously framed himself as a paragon of masculinity. Further, he portrayed his successive white wives “as wealthy, respectable women whose husband was successful and manly enough to support them in comfort and luxury,” p. 9. For Bederman’s discussion of Johnson, see especially p. 1-15.

⁷⁴ Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor*, p. 33.

shopkeepers whose livelihoods depended on transatlantic trade.⁷⁵ In order to fill this gap in trade, many ships' captains directed their vessels toward the Far East, particularly the French colonies in India.⁷⁶ Ships' captains persisted in exercising their customary privilege of returning to France with a slave as their personal property, and ships continued to carry passengers and their slaves. The population of people of color in France included those with roots in India or the French-held islands of Île de Bourbon (presently Réunion) and Île de France (presently Mauritius), as sailors, administrators, merchants, colonists, and their families trickled back to the mother country, their slaves in tow. Sometimes these slaves, of different complexion, features, and cultural background than slaves of African descent, posed challenges to emerging systems of racial classification. These slaves could use their cultural and phenotypical differences in their favor, as they formed ties in the French communities where they lived, and made claims for freedom.

Jean Nicolas, a forty-year-old *mulâtre*, arrived in La Rochelle from the Île de France in the Indian Ocean in about 1755 with his owner, one Monsieur Durango, an engineer for the king's works in the French colony of Pondicherry on the eastern side of the Indian peninsula. Durango gave Jean Nicolas his liberty, and as a free man he worked as a cook to several French families. In 1777, when Jean Nicolas made his Police des Noirs declaration, he was in the service of M. DeCramahay, an officer in the king's navy and a knight of the order of Saint Louis, living in a small town a few

⁷⁵ The bulk of La Rochelle's slave trade in particular was conducted from 1729-1790, with peak years in 1739, 1769, 1774, and 1783-1787, and nadir years from 1744-1747, 1756-1762, and 1779-1782, La Rochelle followed the general pattern of the French slave trade. Robert Louis Stein, *The French Slave Trade in the Eighteenth Century: An Old Regime Business* (Madison, WI, 1979), p. 207-209.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* Stein discusses trade in East Africa and the Indian Ocean in Chapter 9.

miles from La Rochelle. Jean Nicolas had married a white woman named Marie Anne Perraud; together they had one child.⁷⁷

A long-time resident of France, clearly well settled into the town in which he lived, Jean Nicolas' somewhat ambiguous racial identity, both as a person of mixed race and as a native of India, contributed to his ability to claim inclusion in the community, for himself and his heirs. In the 1763 survey, no free male *mulâtres* went to declare their own presence to the authorities, although a number of both free black men and free *mulâtre* women made their own declarations. This evidence suggests an opportunity for free people of mixed race to become absorbed in the community, an opportunity that disappeared with the passage of the more stringent 1777 Police des Noirs laws, which applied to "blacks, mulattoes, or other people of color of one or the other sex."⁷⁸

Some Indians brought their cases before the courts, defining their racial identities negatively, as *not African*, in order to gain their freedom and assert their place in French society. Sue Peabody investigates the case of Francisque, a slave born in India whose unclear racial identity was the basis for his suit for freedom.⁷⁹ In 1758, Francisque's lawyer argued before the Parlement of Paris that because he was not a black slave, the laws of 1716 and 1738 did not apply to him.⁸⁰ Peabody points to the slippage in the French term *nègre* in how it related to color and status; as the eighteenth century progressed, it increasingly referred exclusively to a slave of

⁷⁷ "Déclaration du Nommée Jean Nicolas, Mulatre," 18 September, 1777, Colonies F¹B⁴ Dossier VI, CAOM. This information is repeated in "Registre Contenant les déclarations des noirs, mulâtres, et autres gens de couleur, en consequence de l'Édit du Roy du 9 aout 1777," B 258, ADCM.

⁷⁸ "Déclaration pour la police des noirs," 9 August, 1777, Isambert, *Recueil Général des Anciennes Lois Françaises*, Vol. XXV, p 82.

⁷⁹ Peabody, "There are No Slaves in France", Chapter 4, p. 57-71.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

African descent.⁸¹ In such a context, definitions of race gained in importance. Indeed, Francisque's lawyers hinged their case on arguing that he was not in fact a *nègre*, because he had been born in India. Francisque ultimately was given his freedom, although the reasons why remain unclear.⁸²

Jean Nicolas had much in common with Francisque. A native of the Île de France and a mulatto to boot, his skin and hair would have appeared more similar to Francisque's and even to the French natives who surrounded him than to that of Montreal, Neptune, Gilles, Louise, or other slaves coming from Africa or the Caribbean. Of mixed parentage himself, he brought out uncertainties in race and slavery, both because he was the son of a European and because he was not African. Because of this, he may not have been perceived as a black man, or as subject to the laws governing blacks in France. However, he made sure that his masculinity and his status as a head of household were not in doubt; in his declaration, he specifically mentioned his white wife and their son. In spite of this, Jean Nicolas' son does not appear in the register as a person of color. The former slave likely made a conscious choice to define his child as European. However, the official who took his declaration, knowing what Jean Nicolas looked like and his former status as a slave, accepted this choice. This suggests that in France, racial classifications strayed from those outlined by de Pauw, Hilliard d'Auberteuil, and Moreau, which focused on strict genealogical interpretations of bloodlines. Instead, racial classification depended more on appearance and status within the community.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 61.

⁸² Ibid., p. 70.

Slavery and Servitude

Neptune, Montreal, and Jean Nicolas were all free men, former slaves liberated by their masters, possessed of papers confirming their freedom. However, the status of people of color in La Rochelle was by no means always as simple to ascertain. Lines often blurred between slavery and servitude, particularly because the tasks performed by slaves and servants in metropolitan France tended to be similar. The case of François Gilles demonstrates the difficulty in demarcating this boundary, and suggests that slaves could construe faithful service to the same master for many years as servitude, rather than slavery. Although in France slaves and servants performed similar work, servants enjoyed some advantages over slaves, notably the opportunity to leave their jobs if they became too unsatisfactory, and the hope of a better life in the future, often built from servants' carefully-hoarded wages. However, masters treated servants and slaves similarly in many instances, suggesting haziness in the boundaries dividing the two, the blurring of which slaves in particular might have encouraged.⁸³ Aside from performing similar work, slaves and servants both demonstrated the status of their masters through their visual and sartorial display and they were likely to receive legacies on their master's death as a reward for their good and faithful service.⁸⁴

⁸³ Kathleen Brown points out that in the North American British colonies, the type of work a person performed defined his or her status. For example, women who engaged in field labor, whether they were free or slave, were tithable because of their work. This separated servants and slaves from wives and daughters, even though they may have performed some similar labor. Brown argues that the laws that defined tithability aimed to differentiate English and African women. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarch*, p. 120-128.

⁸⁴ Sarah Maza and Cissie Fairchild both examine servants in eighteenth-century France. Fairchild studies servants 'from above,' relying primarily on travelers' accounts, descriptions of servants, documents produced by masters, and etiquette manuals for her information. She gives demographic information, descriptions of servants' work, and expectations of servants' behavior. Maza, by contrast, examines servants 'from below,' focusing more exclusively on the experiences of servants themselves.

Born a black slave in Saint-Domingue, Gilles arrived in France in 1741 as the property of the widow d'Assigny. The pair disembarked in Bordeaux, but soon arrived in La Rochelle, where the widow had contacts. She transferred ownership of her slave to Jean Vivier, a wealthy Protestant merchant to whom she owed money, in payment for her debt. The Vivier family had a large stake in the transatlantic trade. Jean Vivier had followed his father into the sugar refining business, processing raw sugar shipped from the colonies. He became a wealthy and prominent merchant, and was elected as a representative to the influential Chamber of Commerce.⁸⁵ Further, Jean Vivier previously had included other slaves in his household. At the beginning of July 1737, Paul Seignette, another Protestant merchant who was involved in the Chamber of Commerce, left his slave Jean Baptiste, who in turn had been given to him by a business associate in Saint Domingue, in Vivier's care while he returned to sea as a ship's captain.⁸⁶ Jean Baptiste remained in the Vivier household for over three months; Seignette presumably returned to collect him on the completion of his journey.⁸⁷ Two of his children, Paul and Elie, were elected to the Chamber of Commerce and outfitted ships for the colonial trade; Elie eventually served as the

She examines legal and financial reasons people might choose to enter servitude, the friction-causing differences between servants and other workers, the gender implications of servitude, and reasons why individuals might remain in servitude. Cissie Fairchilds, *Domestic Enemies: Servants and their Masters in Old Regime France* (Baltimore, 1984), Sarah Maza, *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France: The Uses of Loyalty* (Princeton, NJ, 1983). Maza discusses servants and sartorial display, p. 118-123. Fairchilds discusses the customary practice of leaving legacies to servants, p. 139-140.

⁸⁵ Émile Garnault, *Livre d'or de la Chambre de commerce de La Rochelle: contenant la biographie des directeurs et présidents de cette chambre de 1719 à 1891* (La Rochelle, 1902). For information about Jean Vivier, see p. 17-21.

⁸⁶ "Registre de la Majesté Commancé le 11e may 1729 et finy le 16 octobre 1737," B 225, ADCM.

⁸⁷ "Registre de sa Majesté commanqué le 19 octobre 1737 et fini le 27 juin 1744," Declaration de Noir, 19 October 1737, B 226, ADCM.

director of the Chamber.⁸⁸ Vivier's son Elie also counted a black servant as part of his household; at least from 1730 to 1742, André had worked for Elie Vivier in the capacity of a domestic. The young Vivier asserted that "he had never intended for him [André] to have the title of slave."⁸⁹ Elie and Paul Vivier continued to declare slaves to the Admiralty for business associates who had brought their slaves from the colonies.⁹⁰ By acting as agents for slave owners and sometimes caretakers for slaves, the Vivier family clearly participated in the slave system. Jean Vivier knew what he was doing, then, when he made a declaration for François Gilles in 1763.

About nine years after his arrival, Jean Vivier in turn gave Gilles to his relative Jacques Carayon, another prominent Protestant member of the Rochelais community and future representative to and director of the Chamber of Commerce, who, in partnership with his mother, made his fortune in the slave trade.⁹¹ In 1763, Carayon made a Police des Noirs declaration for Gilles, but listed him as free. Further, Carayon emphasized that he paid Gilles wages, as he would any other domestic. His motives in doing so may not have been altogether altruistic: he also stated that if Gilles were required to return to the colonies, because he was a free man he, Carayon, would not pay his way.⁹² Unlike most other free blacks, who took every available opportunity to inscribe the circumstances of their emancipation in official

⁸⁸ Garnault, *Livre d'or de la Chambre de commerce de La Rochelle: contenant la biographie des directeurs et présidents de cette chambre de 1719 à 1891*. For Elie Vivier, see p. 51-52.

⁸⁹ "Registre de sa Majesté commencé le 19 octobre 1737 et fini le 27 juin 1744," Declaration de Noir, 19 October 1737, B 226, ADCM.

⁹⁰ Elie Vivier declared the slave Thereze for a M. Sallette who commanded the *flute du roy*, on 24 February 1748. "Registre de la Majeste commencé le 9 novembre 1747 et finy le 16 janvier 1751," B 228, ADCM. Paul Vivier declared the slave Joseph for Sr Jean Baptiste Charles DeClien, lieutenant des vaisseaux and a knight of the order of Saint Louis. "Registre de la Majesté commencé le 23 mars 1753 et fini le 14 avril 1757," B 6086, ADCM.

⁹¹ Garnault, *Livre d'or de la Chambre de commerce de La Rochelle: contenant la biographie des directeurs et présidents de cette chambre de 1719 à 1891 e*, p. 55.

⁹² Police des Noirs, 1763, 352, AMLR.

documents, Gilles never gives precise information surrounding the circumstances surrounding his liberation.⁹³ Rather, Gilles cites his faithful service to one master for twenty-seven years.

Gilles married a white woman, Elizabeth Provost, a native of the small town of Bourget. Provost also had been a servant, and undoubtedly had come to the prosperous town of La Rochelle looking for an advantageous position. She found it with the Carayon family, one of the wealthiest families in the city. The two servants met at the home of their masters, and with Carayon's permission, they were married.⁹⁴ Many masters disliked employing married servants, thinking that marriage split their loyalties and that their spouses were prioritized before their masters.⁹⁵ Carayon seemed to be no exception. Rather than continuing in his service, Gilles and Provost contracted out their work together to Carayon and other merchants in town. In his declaration, Gilles states that "Sieur Carayon had given him permission to put himself on his own, and to work for his own profit, which he actually did with his wife, who is also in the service of the aforementioned Sieur Carayon and of several other merchants of this town."⁹⁶ Gilles declared himself a free man, even though he did not have legal documents that affirmed his status. However, he did lay claim to two privileges in his life that marked him as a free man rather than a slave: his ability

⁹³ Dubois, *Colony of Citizens*. Dubois charts how slaves inscribed their family history in marriage contracts and other documents, p. 249-253. He shows how the possession of documents could aid former slaves in their claims to freedom, p. 76-80. He shows how, in the precarious environment of post-Revolutionary Guadeloupe, freed people and their former masters went before notaries to certify their freedom, p. 374-378.

⁹⁴ Servants tended to marry later than other workers, to have some accumulated wealth on marriage, and were less likely to marry people from their own village or of their own profession. Fairchilds, *Domestic Enemies*, p. 82.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 81

⁹⁶ "Declaration du Nommé F. Giles, Noir," 19 September, 1777, Colonies F^{1B}4, Dossier VI, CAOM. Giles says that "Sieur Carayon lui aurait permis de se mettre dans son particulier et de travailler pour son compte, ce qu'il fait actuellement avec sa femme qui est au service ainsi que lui, dudit Sieur Carayon et de plusieurs autres negociants de cette ville."

to earn wages and to choose his own master, particularly emphasizing that he served several families at once; and his marriage. As a married man he controlled his wife's labor, even though his wife was white and French-born.

In this context, an extremely fine line demarcated slavery from servitude. Gilles may have been technically a slave, yet his owner Carayon treated him like a servant by offering him wages. Servants were ubiquitous in eighteenth-century France.⁹⁷ Comprising as much as one-fifth of adult workers, servants' tasks ranged from the menial to the ceremonial, and the families they served included the highest nobility and the pettiest bourgeois. In spite of the wide variety of arrangements that determined their servitude, servants virtually all lived in the households of their masters and they virtually all received wages, either in money or in kind. The dearth of willing European labor in the colonies meant that slaves performed tasks that servants carried out in France, running households, cooking, cleaning, running errands, and acting as body servants. But once slaves arrived in France, they served masters not *instead of* but rather *in addition to* servants. The similarity of these two states meant that service could be an avenue to freedom; many masters freed their slaves, including Neptune and Montreal, citing decades of devoted service. But this was a slow route to freedom, particularly in a land where slaves and servants performed much of the same types of work and enjoyed many of the same freedoms of movement. Some slaves managed to position themselves as free, with or without

⁹⁷ Maza, *Servants and Masters*, especially Chapter 1, and Fairchilds, *Domestic Enemies*, especially Chapter 1. Henri Robert claims that there were 1,288 domestics in La Rochelle in 1767, out of a population of 15,340. Unpublished Manuscript, ADCM, 2 J 91 (1). Robert cites no source for these numbers.

the documentary approval from their owners that would have been so necessary in the colonies.

In France's colonies, white masters controlled the line between slavery and servitude through their control over the production of and reliance on documents to testify to a person of color's freedom.⁹⁸ In France, on the other hand, although people of color seldom produced documents themselves, their access to the written word was mediated differently, through whites as writers, rather than whites as owners. In France, blacks had opportunities to record their words in documents without having whites as intermediaries, thus opening up opportunities to define and assert their own status. The prevalence of servants, who did not need papers attesting to their status, could have facilitated such opportunities for slaves. When they could, free people of color worked to ensure that documents confirmed their liberty. Former slaves, such as Neptune and Montreal, whose masters had given them their freedom, took every opportunity to inscribe the circumstances of their liberty in official documents. Further, they often referred to other documents in each record in which they were recorded: Neptune cites very specifically the notary act that made his freedom official in his Police des Noirs declaration, for example.⁹⁹ But Gilles did not describe the circumstances of his freedom, and he produced no documents to

⁹⁸ Dubois, *Colony of Citizens*, p. 76-80. Dubois argues that "the documents that granted slaves freedom similarly perpetuated the fiction that the freed slave was invented by the master" (76). See also the work of Jean Hébrard, who argues that a potential conflict exists between the spoken and the written word, particularly in a society that remained largely illiterate and where literacy and status often were closely connected. The privileged produced documents, had access to the written word, mediated the access others had to documents, and defined the importance of documents in society. See, for example, Jean Hébrard, "The Writings of Moïse (1898-1985): Birth, Life and Death of a Narrative of the Great War," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 44, no. 2 (2002):263-292.

⁹⁹ Neptune cites this notary act in his "Déclaration du nommé Neptune, Noir," 18 September, 1777, Colonies F¹B⁴, dossier VI, CAOM. The notary act can be found in Notaire Fleury, 7 March 1749, 3 E 1612, ADCM.

corroborate it. In such circumstances, his legal status lay in the hands of his owners. However, Gilles enjoyed de facto freedom, whether Carayon had actually set him free or not. Although he referred to himself as a free man, in the absence of legal proceedings, his freedom may well have depended on the goodwill of his masters. Such goodwill could be precarious, and different masters extended freedom to their slaves in very different ways. At the same time, though, Gilles saw and exploited a breach in legal practice: if no one testified otherwise, he was, in fact, a free man. Further, the official who recorded his declaration accepted his story without further testament. Thus, the word of a black man was accepted as fact, and through his own words and actions, Gilles' story became inscribed in the documents.

Women's Opportunities: Slavery, Servitude, and Marriage

Both slavery and freedom had different implications for men and women. Not only was slavery a gendered experience, freedom and belonging in a community were also asserted in highly gendered ways.¹⁰⁰ Their gender effectively limited opportunities available to women, both slave and free.¹⁰¹ The experiences of Jean

¹⁰⁰ Many authors address the gendered experience of slavery, including Kirsten Fischer, *Suspect Relations: Sex, Race, and Resistance in Colonial North Carolina* (Ithaca, NY, 2001), Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia, 2004). For post-emancipation gendered experiences, see Scully, *Liberating the Family?*; Glenda E. Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill, 1996). Maza and Fairchilds both discuss the gendered nature of servitude. Fairchilds, *Domestic Enemies*, Maza, *Servants and Masters*.

¹⁰¹ The extensive literature on gender in early modern France intersects with themes of general interest in the fields of women's history and French history. For example, early literature addresses women's political and cultural involvement: Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, 1988); Nina Gelbart, *Feminine and Opposition Journalism in Old Regime France: Le Journal Des Dames* (Berkeley, 1987); Dominique Godineau, *The Women of Paris and Their French Revolution*, trans. Katherine Streip, (Berkeley, 1998). Further themes include the place of women and gender in the intellectual history of the Enlightenment: Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1994); Carla Hesse, *The*

Baptiste André Deday, Marie Catherine Mercier, and Marie Jeanne Angelique, all slaves of Monsieur Mensard de Saint Michel, suggest how gender shaped people of color's position and opportunity within the community of La Rochelle. Mesnard brought all three from Saint Domingue as slaves. Deday, the only man, was born in Cap Français, Saint-Domingue, and came to France with his owner in about 1752, when he was about sixteen years old. He served Mesnard as a domestic slave for eight years, and then received his liberty. However, he continued working for Mesnard as a domestic for another fourteen years, probably under similar circumstances as he had labored as a slave, and performing the same work.¹⁰² In all likelihood, his circumstances remained much the same. In the end, after working for Mesnard for twenty-two years, Deday left his former owner to enter the service of the Marquis de Niran, emphasizing that he had one major power as a servant that he lacked as a slave: the power to make contracts. Armed with his freedom, he could enter into the service of anyone he wished, and in the end, he forcibly declared his independence by leaving his former owner. Marie Catherine Mercier and Marie Jeanne Angelique, brought to France by the same Monsieur Mesnard, did not have that opportunity.

Marie Catherine Mercier and Marie Jeanne Angelique arrived in France in 1754 and 1756 respectively, both brought by Mesnard. Both negresses came from

Other Enlightenment: How French Women Became Modern (Princeton, 2001); Lieselotte Steinbrügge, *The Moral Sex: Woman's Nature in the French Enlightenment*, trans. Pamela E. Selwyn (New York, 1995). Other historians have discussed the blending of public and private (Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs: The Causes Célèbres of Prerevolutionary France* (Berkeley, 1993)); women's roles in participating in and shaping the work force (Clare Haru Crowston, *Fabricating Women: The Seamstresses of Old Regime France, 1675-1791* (Durham, North Carolina, 2001)); and the family as a metaphor in political and social life (Desan, *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France* (Berkeley, 2004), Lynn Avery Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley, 1992)).

¹⁰² Declaration de Noir Jean Baptiste André Deday, 19 September 1777, Colonies F¹B⁴ Dossier VI, CAOM.

Mesnard's plantation in Cap Français; Mercier was twenty-three when she arrived in France, and Angelique only eight. They could have been mother and daughter; although they make no mention of their relationship, they certainly knew each other in Saint-Domingue, and they continued their relationship in France, even coming together to make their obligatory declarations to the Admiralty. Upon their arrival in France, the two women disembarked in Bordeaux. Mercier served her owner for two years after their arrival there. Although at that point he gave her liberty, she remained in his service for an additional twenty years, almost up to the time of the Police des Noirs declaration. At the beginning of 1777 he decided to have her trained as a seamstress, suggesting that he still oversaw her welfare even though she was technically not enslaved. Mesnard gave Angelique, only eight years old, to his sister upon her arrival in France in 1756. She served her new mistress for twenty and a half years, a point on which she was very precise. She finally received her liberty, probably just before she made the declaration. She also worked as a seamstress.¹⁰³ None of the three former slaves detail their journey from Bordeaux to La Rochelle, but in all likelihood they made it together, probably accompanying their master.

Although Mercier and Angelique were in situations very similar to that of Deday, slaves of the same owner, their options were considerably more limited than his because of their gender. Women were both more dependant on and more vulnerable to their masters, placing them in a precarious situation within the household.¹⁰⁴ This vulnerability also limited their mobility; men servants tended to

¹⁰³ Declarations des negresses Marie Catherine Mercier and Marie Jeanne Angelique, 22 September 1777, Colonies F¹B⁴ Dossier VI, CAOM.

¹⁰⁴ Maza, *Servants and Masters*, p. 89.

travel farther and more frequently than women.¹⁰⁵ Further, fewer opportunities for employment were available to women than men; often domestic service was the only profession open to them.¹⁰⁶ In a society defined by the patriarchal family unit, women had little choice but to attach themselves to fathers, husbands, or masters. In fact, in 1777, Mercier and Angelique were two of only three free women of color who made their own declarations. The third, Victoire, was probably the illegitimate daughter of a wealthy colonist, possibly one who had roots in La Rochelle.¹⁰⁷ A *mulatresse* from Louisiana and a pensionnaire in the Convent of the Ladies of Providence in La Rochelle, she had been brought to France to be educated.¹⁰⁸ Other free women of color were declared by their employers, who often were their former masters, or their husbands.

Marriage offered another possibility to freed women, but the marriage of slaves or former slaves posed challenges to the systems of gender and race hierarchy when it caused them to clash. Married women were legally subject to their husbands, under whom their own civil identities were subsumed. When men of color married women of color, as Neptune married Louise, the gender hierarchy remained intact, and, as we have seen, it could even aid men in their claims for acceptance in the community. The union of white men and black women usually was more covert, with the women presented either as housekeepers or domestics, although they also often acted as wives; in these cases too the gender and race hierarchy remained intact.

¹⁰⁵ Fairchilds, *Domestic Enemies*, p. 63.

¹⁰⁶ Maza, *Servants and Masters*, p. 43.

¹⁰⁷ The Rasteau family, for example, had branches in both Louisiana and La Rochelle. The connections of this wealthy Protestant family made La Rochelle one of the main trading ports for the North American colony before the Treaty of Paris ended the Seven Years' War in 1763, and the French ceded all of Louisiana to the British.

¹⁰⁸ Declaration de mulatresse Victoire, 5 October 1777, Colonies F¹B⁴ Dossier VI, CAOM.

However, when white women married black men, hierarchies of gender and race came into conflict. At the same time, black men could parlay their gender into political and civil legitimacy, as their female counterparts could not, basing claims of belonging on their status as heads of families, husbands, and fathers.

Conclusion

The presence of slaves in La Rochelle posed challenges and offered opportunities to owners and slaves alike. The law, public opinion, and custom prevented owners from using many of the mechanisms of slave control familiar in the colonies, including harsh physical punishments, so owners instead adapted familiar French means of reinforcing hierarchy. By adjusting forms of patronage to frame slaves as dependent clients, owners reinforced their own physical and moral control over those they perceived as their property, emphasizing their own racial hegemony. La Rochelle's particular history of religious conflict enabled Protestant slave owners to use the institution of Catholic baptism to strengthen their power over their slaves, manipulating traditional and well-worn paths of patronage and appointing themselves or their close kin as godparents, thereby assuring their religious and civic authority over their slaves and foreclosing opportunities for resistance that slaves might have created. However, slaves and free blacks did not simply accept this new kind of domination passively. Rather, they pushed back on this apparent barrier, playing different sources of authority against each other in the conflict-fraught seaport. They searched for alternate sources of influence, including the Catholic Church, and they adapted the hierarchical structure used by their masters for their own purposes and to

assert their own freedoms. In so doing, free men of color emphasized gender as fixed and immutable, next to variable constructions of race, and they presented gender rather than race as an organizing hierarchy. Free black men thus made claims to inclusion in Rochelais society by creating bonds of patronage themselves and by emphasizing their status as heads of households based on their control over their wives and children. These privileges enabled them to appeal to a common ground of masculinity between them and those who recorded their declarations. Black women, free or slave, had no such recourse. Their race united with established gender hierarchies to further circumscribe opportunities they might have found in France.

Conclusion

In eighteenth-century France, the categories of race and gender were malleable and porous, and people of color and whites, slaves and free, women and men, all worked to shape what they meant and how they affected individuals and members of these groups. Some, such as the slave Alexis, resorted to the time-tested method of seeking the favor of a powerful protector, in this case his owner Paul Belin. Others, including the freedman Neptune, instead formed horizontal networks that anchored them firmly in the communities where they lived and worked. While Alexis worked within a framework of patronage and Neptune took the family as his major point of reference, gender was the primary category motivating both Madame Regnaud de Beaumont and Mademoiselle de Clermont. The former used laws and contracts in creative ways that bolstered her own tenuous authority as a married woman struggling to maintain a transatlantic business and the respect of the community in her husband's absence. Mademoiselle de Clermont, placed as she was at the center of Louis XIV's court, seemed in a position where slavery and colonialism would not affect her daily life. But it was these very categories she chose to engage with to bolster her own status and position as a white woman. For all these individuals, the intersections of race and gender blended with intersections of slavery and colonialism. These categories were simultaneously sweeping and intimate; they

spanned the breadth of the Atlantic, incorporating France and its colonies, yet at the same time penetrated the most personal relations of family life.

Remembering Slavery in France

Attitudes towards France's role in the history of slavery have started to change in the years since Sue Peabody's landlord flatly informed her that "there are no slaves in France." In 2001, France passed a law that recognized slavery and the slave trade as a crime against humanity. As part of that law, French schools must include France's role in the slave trade as part of the curriculum. In 2006, May 10 became a national day of remembrance of slavery. Museums, including the Louvre, offered special tours that highlighted collections pertaining to slavery. Cities with past involvement in slavery and the slave trade also are gradually beginning to acknowledge their prosperity's dark roots. Universities and museums in France's Atlantic port towns increasingly devote resources and exhibition space to commemorating slavery and the slave trade. Nantes has established the Centre d'études des Anneaux de la Mémoire, which has the goal of better understanding the history of slavery and the slave trade, and their contemporary consequences. The Musée du Nouveau Monde in La Rochelle devotes a room of exhibits to the artifacts of slavery, and publishes a guide to slavery in its collections.¹ Yet in spite of this increasingly widespread recognition, there persists a notion that slavery in France was something isolated and uncommon, without widespread repercussions in the metropole itself.

¹ Thierry Lefrançois, *L'Esclavage dans les collections du Musée du Nouveau Monde* (La Rochelle, 1998).

Even as recognition of slavery has been brought into the present, it remains largely unacknowledged in France's past. Perhaps the steadfast belief that "there are no slaves in France" can peacefully coexist with official recognition of the inhumanity of slavery because France is still not considered a site where slavery existed. Perhaps because the French have not yet grappled with the way in which slaves and slavery shaped their own society, remembrance and commemoration can take the place of understanding. Understanding how slavery shaped French history and society must necessarily go beyond a few ceremonies or museum tours that primarily take place in major slave trading ports, such as La Rochelle, Nantes, and Bordeaux, thereby perpetuating the persistent idea that France's only involvement in slavery was through the slave trade. Although France did indeed play a considerable role in the *traite des noirs*, the consequences of slavery and colonialism extended far beyond individuals who actively engaged in the buying and selling of human chattel. Indeed, it shaped the lives, relationships, and experiences even of those in France who had no direct experience with the slave trade.

The contemporary continuation of this negation of slavery on French soil became evident to me through my own experience researching slavery in France in the French archives. When I explained to archivists and other researchers that I was studying people of color in France, their almost-universal response was not to disavow slavery, but rather to disclaim that its evidence existed in their archives. Time and again I was admonished to visit the colonial archives in Aix-en-Provence. In spite of the increased acknowledgement of France's role in the slave trade, the idea persists that slavery and its repercussions were isolated in the colonies. If slaves did

enter France, so this thinking goes, it was only under exceptional circumstances brought about by colonialism. Slaves were brought to France by colonists, and would leave when the colonists left; any crossing of boundaries between metropole and colonies was temporary and its effects reversible.

The physical separation of the colonial archives in Aix-en-Provence from the National Archives in Paris reinforces this tendency to consider the history of France and its history of slavery separately. This division of documents also has the effect of separating scholars, and limiting opportunities for potentially fruitful conversation about the intersections of French history with the history of slavery. Perhaps partly in result it is only recently that historians have begun to consider the possibility and impact of slavery in France, and even now few scholars consider the connections between France and its Caribbean colonies. These connections, based on common interest, experience, and personal relations, formed a complex web that wove France and its colonies inextricably together; evidence of them similarly is spread around National, Colonial, and provincial archives.

The distancing of slavery from France in the historical imaginary also has extended to interpretations of artworks. In wandering through the vast collections of the Louvre or the stately corridors of Versailles, one comes across a number of works by French artists that depict people of color. Yet where race is concerned, content has been so truncated from meaning that art historians and historians alike sometimes offer scholarly analyses of paintings without considering the significance of the race of the people who inhabit them. This failure to connect people of color with other

French figures painted by French painters illustrates the continuing tendency to separate slavery from France.

People of color were part of a network of relationships that bound colony to metropole even before they arrived in France. Some had labored to produce sugar and other colonial products that were sold in France at great profit to plantation owners; many had owners who came from France and one day planned to return; some may have seen long-awaited letters arrive or have heard talk of the metropole's far-away cities. When slaves were brought or sent to France, few came alone; most traveled with owners, relatives, and, occasionally, other people of color. This meant that even when they first set foot on French soil, they were bound into networks that spanned the Atlantic. They brought their own contributions to these networks: they already had ideas about the meanings of race, gender, and family and experience negotiating these categories. Many brought first-hand experience with slavery. Each had a personal history that had begun elsewhere, but most of these histories were entangled in some way with France's Caribbean colonies. The same was also true of the whites people of color encountered in La Rochelle. Through connections of business, kinship, and friendship, the Atlantic seaport and the sugar giant were bound closely together.

Personal connections in particular were sites of great potential for people of color in France. Personal ties, particularly built across lines of race, opened up possibilities for people of color while at the same time challenging French ideas about racial categories. The French idea of family was central to both these challenges and opportunities. The family was a site where people came together across lines of

gender and generation. Interactions among men, women, and children within a family structure followed well-established patterns, where parents worked to safeguard their children's interests, and husbands held legal and social sway over their wives. When people of color entered into French families, they disrupted these well-worn hierarchies and called into question the practices that had ossified around them. Common law called for equal inheritance among all children, but how could children protect their future inheritance from a half-sibling of color? Fathers were supposed to divide their estates among their legitimate heirs, but how could a father ensure he provided for all his children, no matter their race? Wives' identities were legally subsumed to those of their husbands, but what happened when husbands were four thousand miles away?

French families, when confronted with such contingencies brought about by slavery and colonialism, demonstrated responsiveness and elasticity. Family members adapted well-tested family strategies, particularly regarding marriage and inheritance, or created new ones as the need arose, with the goal of defining who could or could not claim family membership. As French families changed shape and color because of the widespread colonial practice of white men taking women of color as mistresses, family members responded by calculating ways to exclude people of color, at least in part by subsuming them under the category of illegitimacy.² But people of color in France also manipulated the idea of family for their own purposes.

² Considering race as component of the category of illegitimacy in the eighteenth century suggests the possibility of examining in a new light Revolutionary laws mandating equal inheritance among all children, legitimate and illegitimate, girls and boys. Could such laws have been intended to include people of color? On Revolutionary laws of equal inheritance, see Suzanne Desan, *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France* (Berkeley, 2004), Chapter 4.

By presenting themselves in a family context, a concept familiar to all French subjects, people of color could claim social legitimacy and belonging.

Individuals intervening in meanings of family often had the immediate goal of altering their own personal situation, and so did those manipulating categories of race and gender. These categories were simultaneously at play on private and very public levels. Not many were in the position to make broad, public statements about the relationship between race and gender in French society. But the very fact that this relationship was a matter of public debate suggests that social categories made relevant by colonialism affected even those whose lives did not directly intersect with slavery. Race and gender therefore affected individual experience on a very intimate, private level, but they also were visible categories that contributed to an outward social persona. Personal experiences and public constructions of race and gender thus were in constant dialogue, and shaped each other in a continuous loop.

The well-meaning archivists who urged me toward Aix were right—I did find evidence of the people of color I was looking for in the colonial archives. This evidence confirmed what I already knew: that people of color formed part of the fabric of French society and French families. But I also found evidence of their presence in the archives in La Rochelle. In the departmental and municipal archives in the port city, local, royal, and private papers all yield tantalizing hints of their lives and the relationships they formed in France. Examining these diverse sources alongside each other suggests the extent to which they viewed themselves and were viewed as a part of life in the port city.

This project brings connections and intersections to the forefront: across distance, time, race, gender, and even discipline. People who lived in eighteenth-century La Rochelle knew the potential power of these intersections as sites of subversion and change, and for that reason made interventions at these precise spots. It is at these intersections where students of history also can find the potential for change and innovation.

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