Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue

John D. Garrigus

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Before Haiti

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For Ami, who taught me so much

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Acknowledgments

This book has been a long time in the making. It started as a doctoral thesis at Johns Hopkins and is a direct descendant of *Neither Slave Nor Free*, a book that came out of a Hopkins conference and was edited by Jack Greene and David Cohen. In that volume and in my work with him, Greene gave me a new vision of the American hemisphere. Frank Knight, who took me under his wing when I was just starting to focus on Saint-Domingue and Haiti and knew nothing about Latin America, made it possible for me to think and teach about the Caribbean in the way that I do. Orest Ranum introduced me to early modern France and to notarial records. He even found me a place to live in Paris, where I completed much of the initial research for this book in the mid-1980s.

I originally went to Hopkins to study French history with Bob Forster, who, more than any other one person, planted the seeds for this project. In the early 1980s Bob launched himself into what amounted to a largely new field for him—the Haitian Revolution and its causes. At a time when historians of eighteenth-century France avoided grappling with race and slavery, he immersed himself in plantation accounts and colonial correspondence and convinced me to follow him. At one of our first meetings, he presented me with my own three-volume set of Moreau de Saint-Méry's 1797 *Description* of the colony; he had picked up "an extra." I owe him for a great deal more than that early gift.

Outside of Hopkins, a number of colleagues, friends, and reviewers have shaped this manuscript. My friends and colleagues at Jacksonville University have been reading and hearing about segments of this book for years. Craig Buettinger, Jay Clarke, and Eric Thomas helped with comments on parts of the manuscript. In long conversations as we team-taught courses on Latin America, Douglas Hazzard forced me to think about identity formation in Saint-Domingue and Haiti. Rebecca Scott, whose advice I describe in the introduction, focused my attention on race as a cultural, rather than biological, phenomenon. Robert Paquette reviewed an earlier version of the manuscript

anonymously, and then graciously called me to insist that I follow through with revisions. David Geggus and Philip Boucher have given similar support, encouragement, and advice. Two scholars who entered the field after I did, Stewart King and Dominique Rogers, have been unstinting in citing my articles and unpublished thesis. Gerard and Janine Lafleur offered me an apartment in Aix-en-Provence one summer fifteen years ago, and Gerard's ideas are found throughout this volume. Anne Pérotin-Dumon and Tommaso Astarita have been steadfast friends and important sources of advice and inspiration. Anne Leighton helped in the research and writing of this book, probably more than she realizes.

Over the years, some of the material presented in this book has appeared in *Americas, Slavery & Abolition*, *Revista Review Interamericana* and the *Journal of Caribbean History*, and it appears here by permission.

In his books on Guadeloupe and Saint-Domingue, and through his friendship and generosity, Laurent Dubois motivated me to return to France in 2003 and complete the research that informs the final chapters of this book. Down to the final days of writing, our conversations have shaped my conclusions about how wealthy families of color responded to an insurrection that destroyed their way of life but made a new identity possible.

Finally, this project, begun so long before I met her, is dedicated to Ami Richards, whose courage and compassion helped me complete it.

Introduction

On the morning of May 15, 1766, Julien Raimond, a 22-year-old native of the French Caribbean colony of Saint-Domingue, made his first surviving appearance before a colonial notary. The son and grandson of successful indigo planters, Raimond had probably just returned from Europe, where many wealthy colonists like his father sent their children for schooling.[1] Two of his sisters had been in France before their 25th birthdays and both women eventually married well-to-do Frenchmen in Bordeaux and Toulouse and settled there.[2] But sometime after 1763, when the end of the Seven Years' War restored shipping, Julien Raimond returned to Saint-Domingue. There, with his three surviving brothers, he became an indigo planter like his father Pierre and maternal grandfather François Begasse. Eventually he owned hundreds of slaves and built an impressive plantation house. Profits from slave labor filled that residence, like his father's, with books, sheet music, silver, and crystal. A slave trained as a pastry chef prepared delicacies for his table.[3]

In 1766 the wealthy and well-connected 22-year-old creole was already something of a local notable. In an affidavit drafted on May 15 of that year the notary Rivet described him as "Sieur Julien Raimond," using a title of respect reserved for honorable citizens.[4] Yet before Rivet stamped his seal on the document Raimond had signed, he realized he had made an error. The Superior Council of Port-au-Prince had recently required notaries and priests to keep more detailed and consistent records. So he took his quill and, in the margin next to Raimond's name, wrote "*quarteron.*" That word meant that one of the young man's four grandparents had been an African. Julien Raimond was a man of color.

In amending this document, the conscientious notary marked a new era in the history of the largest, deadliest, and most profitable slave regime in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world. For this act was perhaps Raimond's first formal indication of the increasing hostility he and others like him would face from Saint-Domingue's administrative and social elite. By 1784, far wealthier than his French father or

grandfathers had ever been, Raimond was so frustrated by what he described as the "humiliations" of colonial life, that he returned to France to persuade imperial administrators to reform Saint-Domingue's racial laws.

He wanted reform, not revolution. As a planter whose slave inventory covered several tightly written pages, he was not advocating emancipation. Raimond was not among the founding members of the new abolitionist Society of the Friends of the Blacks, formed in Paris in 1788. But the following year in Paris, Raimond and members of the Friends succeeded in putting colonial racism on trial before the Revolutionary deputies who had voted the Declaration of the Rights of Man. In 1791, when Parisian legislators gave limited voting rights to free people of color, whites in Saint-Domingue took up arms. Colonial men of color fought back. As civil war broke out, the Caribbean's largest and best-policed slave system let down its guard. In late August, slaves in the colony's richest sugar plain began to burn their masters' plantations, launching the world's only successful slave revolution. Their struggle against France ended, more than a decade later, with the creation of Haiti, the second independent nation-state in the New World.

In his 1986 survey of Latin American and Caribbean slavery, Herbert Klein described the unusual importance of men like Raimond in the history of the Americas:

> A very small segment of the free colored in the French West Indies . . . more than any such group in America challenged the power and wealth of even the master class. Whereas the freedmen in all other slave societies entered at the lowest ranks of free society, in the French West Indies they were often permitted to enter the class of plantation owners from the beginning. Although their relative numbers were no greater than those for the northern European slave colonies, the French *gens de couleur* held a power to challenge even the highest elites. This helps explain the ferocity of the attack on their rights just as it explains their own ability to destroy the dominance of the master class in the midst of the French Revolution.[5]

This book began as an attempt to explain how and why this unusual class developed. For Saint-Domingue in 1789 was a society whose 30,831 French colonists, already outnumbered fourteen to one by their slaves, lived alongside at least 24,848 free people of African descent.[6] Although many of these free people of color were black, the wealthiest and most outspoken of them were men and women of mixed European and African ancestry. In a much-cited claim, Raimond

estimated that his class controlled one-third of Saint-Domingue's pre-Revolutionary wealth. As Klein points out, "This was apparently the only significant group of free colored planters known to have existed in any slave society in America."[7] How did this ostensibly unique group come into being?

In 1990 I tried to answer this question with a tightly focused study of the colonial economy, the kind of in-depth investigation of pre-Revolutionary Saint-Domingue that had never been published. I hoped that analyzing over 8,000 notarized contracts like the one Julien Raimond signed in 1766 would reveal the origins of free colored planting wealth. It might also answer an even more important question: Why did racial prejudice work differently in the various slave societies of the New World? Why did French West Indian colonists, as Klein describes them, allow "freedmen . . . to enter the class of plantation owners from the beginning," in contrast to slave owners in the rest of the hemisphere? Was this the dynamism of Saint-Domingue's plantation economy at work? Or was there something about French colonial culture that fostered such a glaring exception to the racial rules of New World slavery?

As I revised the doctoral dissertation that forms the core of this study, I received a letter from Rebecca Scott, who had read the manuscript. Scott challenged my assumption that racial labels in Saint-Domingue were fixed and based on objective criteria. She noted something I had not seen: my data illustrated how colonial racial categories shifted over time. Officials sometimes described Raimond and individuals like him as nonwhites, and, at other times, as members of the colonial elite. Her observation changed my research. In addition to investigating how men and women of African descent became wealthy slave owners, I now began to ask, "Why did colonial society scorn some wealthy slave owners as vile people of color?"

In the context of U.S. history, this question has an obvious answer: Raimond and those like him lived in a society built on the labor of enslaved Africans. Racial disdain justified the slave system and therefore afflicted anyone whose African ancestry was visible or known. But I argue in this book that Saint-Domingue's colonists did not universally apply this "one-drop rule" in Saint-Domingue, especially before the 1760s. In the late eighteenth century, French colonists described African descent as "an indelible stain," and I had originally accepted their racism as inevitable in a plantation society with so many African slaves and so few European masters. I understood Saint-Domingue's large free colored population to be a material phenomenon, produced by the colony's unique economy, population, and terrain. Most other

historians have done the same, for good reason.[8] Conditions in Saint-Domingue were, in fact, quite different from those shaping France's other plantation colonies, Martinique and Guadeloupe.

But to understand why Saint-Domingue's free colored population was unique in the Americas, we must compare the colony to slave societies that did have similar material conditions—a dynamic plantation economy, an enslaved majority, and ample land available for new farms and ranches. British Jamaica and Portuguese Brazil both shared these characteristics. And in both colonies, elites accepted some of their most prosperous and Europeanized mixed-race neighbors as full members of the master class, as whites, in essence. The comparison of Saint-Domingue with Jamaica and Brazil, developed below, illustrates that, in the late eighteenth century, the wealth and social self-confidence of men like Julien Raimond was not in itself unusual. What was unusual was that Saint-Domingue's colonial elite defined Raimond as a man of color and sought to humiliate him.

The thesis of this study is that an important mid-century shift in the way French colonists defined their own identity deliberately alienated Saint-Domingue's wealthy freeborn families, recasting them as "freedmen," or ex-slaves. This redefinition, resulting from political disputes in the colony after the disastrous Seven Years' War, helped destabilize Saint-Domingue's slave regime in ways that made the Haitian Revolution possible. Racism certainly existed in France's colonies before 1763.[9] And Saint-Domingue's leaders applied the new color line inconsistently, often debating its utility.[10] But a new emphasis on white purity and mixed-race degeneracy provoked a deep reaction in some of the colony's richest creole families in one particular area of Saint-Domingue. That region, the colony's long and mountainous southern peninsula is the focus of this book.

Comparing Saint-Domingue to similar New World slave societies reveals that the existence of wealthy planters of partial African descent was not unique to this colony. What was unique was the way French colonists in the 1780s applied racial labels to such men, refusing to give "white" status to even a few well established light-skinned families. The problem is that Saint-Domingue cannot be fairly judged against most of its neighbors. Slavery's economic dynamism, the ratio of masters to slaves, and the availability of land in this French possession differed too greatly from conditions in the colonial United States, in the smaller plantation islands of the Lesser Antilles, and in Spain's Caribbean colonies. Only in Brazil and Jamaica were material conditions truly similar to Saint-Domingue, to the extent that wealthy

planters of African descent emerged there too by the late eighteenth century.

In British North America the numerical dominance of whites insured that African ancestry meant something very different than it did in Saint-Domingue. In the French sugar colony in 1788, people of African descent comprised roughly 90 percent of the population. In the southern states of the newly independent United States in 1790, they were only 40 percent. Mainland Anglo-American society officially disapproved of sex between masters and slaves. In 1790, free people of color were only 1 percent of the free population in the upper U.S. South and just 3 percent in the Deep South.[11] In Saint-Domingue in 1788, interracial sex was widely acknowledged. People of color there approached 50 percent of the free population.

Some free people of color in North America did become wealthy, but under British rule, most were farmers, fishermen, or boatmen. In the upper South, this pattern persisted into the national period.[12] In the lower South, after independence, prosperous free colored farmers were even more unusual. There was no free colored planter class, except in nineteenth-century Louisiana, where most were immigrants from Saint-Domingue. Even there, in 1832, only 212 free people of color owned slaves.[13]

The Lesser Antilles colonies of France and Britain were fundamentally less similar to Saint-Domingue than they appear at first glance. It is true that enslaved people were the majority in eighteenth-century Barbados, Martinique, Antigua, or Guadeloupe, comprising 75 to 85 percent of the population. Like Saint-Domingue, these were sugar colonies, in which slave mortality was high and white men outnumbered white women. Along with the harsh labor regime, interracial sex and slave manumission were accepted features of colonial life in these islands. Some, like Martinique in 1776, did develop free populations of color as large as one-quarter of the total free population.[14] Yet these Lesser Antilles colonies were extremely small; most of them were no larger than five or six U.S. colonial parishes. Saint-Domingue alone had ten times the area of French Martinique and Guadeloupe combined. Because there was little vacant land in these islands, most free people of color lived and worked in the port cities, where white colonists used laws and social pressure to limit their economic success. Generally speaking, there was no free colored planter class in the Lesser Antilles in the eighteenth century.[15]

The two exceptions to this were Dominica and Grenada. In these underpopulated islands, which frequently changed hands between England and France, arable land was available for much of the

eighteenth century. Prosperous free colored planters did emerge there after the 1760s, some of them emigrating from neighboring colonies to establish coffee, cacao, and sugar estates.[16] Yet, as a class, they never amassed the wealth of their counterparts in Saint-Domingue. They exerted much of their influence in local society thorough their military, rather than economic, presence.[17]

Spain's eighteenth-century Caribbean territories were too detached from the Atlantic trade in slaves and plantation goods to compare with Saint-Domingue. Many of these colonies did possess large, rural free populations of color. More than a quarter of Cuba's free population in 1774 was of African descent, as were more than half of all free people in Puerto Rico in 1775.[18] But large-scale plantation slavery was not yet important. In 1774, slaves were only 23 percent of Cuba's population and only 11 percent in Puerto Rico the following year. Free people of color in these islands, like their white neighbors, were mostly poor farmers and artisans. The situation was similar in Santo Domingo, across the mountains from French Saint-Domingue, and in Trinidad, still a mostly undeveloped Spanish outpost in the 1780s. It was also the case in Spain's coastal ports on the mainland: Vera Cruz, Cartagena, Caracas, and, in Florida, Saint Augustine.[19]

Of the many slave colonies in the eighteenth-century New World, only British Jamaica and Portuguese Brazil were roughly similar to Saint-Domingue. Unlike Spain's Caribbean colonies, all three had large enslaved populations working under cruel conditions to produce sugar and other profitable commodities. In the eighteenth century alone, between them, these three territories absorbed over 40 percent of the transatlantic slave trade.[20] By 1768, slaves comprised about 50 percent of Brazil's population and 90 percent of Jamaica's. In all three societies it was openly acknowledged that many European colonists and their American-born sons had children with slave women. In all three, white fathers often freed their mixed-race children, and recognized their paternity.[21] All three had the kind of undeveloped interior land that was unavailable in most of the Lesser Antilles islands. This frontier allowed free people of color, as well as new European immigrants, to establish farms and ranches, some of which eventually became full-blown slave plantations. In Jamaica and Brazil, even more than in Saint-Domingue, these interiors also sheltered semipermanent communities of escaped slaves. Finally, all three colonies relied on free people of African descent to police the slave population.[22]

In Brazil, according to censuses, the free population of color was especially large in frontier regions like the Mato Grosso, where free coloreds outnumbered whites in the late eighteenth century. In the

district of Sabará, in the Minas Gerais region, the focus of a frontier gold rush in the 1750s but later an economic backwater, white men formally acknowledged paternity of about one-third of all the mulatto children they freed in the eighteenth century. Brazil's male colonists regularly bequeathed property to such children, despite complaints by white heirs. Moreover, Portuguese law insured that children born out of marriage could claim some share in their father's estate even if he had never drafted a legal testament.[23] Eighteenth-century Brazilian society was deeply racist, excluding persons with up to four degrees of African ancestry from public offices. Yet nearly all observers agreed that colonial officials were very flexible about these racial laws in practice, especially for wealthy, light-skinned persons.[24] In 1766, therefore, when Julien Raimond signed his contract in Saint-Domingue, it was highly likely that planters who looked like him existed in Brazil. In the Portuguese colony, however, these men's property and social connections would probably have given them "white" status, which French colonial society denied to Raimond. In fact, the free colored indigo planter was aware of this discrepancy. In the 1780s he recommended to French colonial officials that Saint-Domingue adopt Brazilian racial practice.[25]

In Jamaica, as well, Raimond would probably have been considered "white." Jamaican law and practice discriminated against free people of African descent, but influential planters used the Colonial Assembly to carve out exceptions on a case-by-case basis. From the late 1600s through the 1700s this body granted civil rights to more than 200 free persons of color.[26] Consequently, by the 1760s Jamaica's population included numerous individuals who, despite their partial African ancestry, enjoyed the rights of full citizenship—a kind of honorary "whiteness." William Cunningham, perhaps the wealthiest, owned 160 slaves at his death in 1762.[27]

In conditions like those found in parts of Jamaica, Brazil, and Saint-Domingue, where slaves outnumbered owners ten to one, where many of the slaves were African rather than locally born, and where there were many more male colonists than female, it is not surprising that free men and women who owned land and workers formed a united master class. What is harder to explain is why, in Saint-Domingue, the idea of racial impurity triumphed over slave-owners' solidarity. For by the 1780s, the French colony's meticulous exclusion of mixed-race people from white society had more in common with North America than with Jamaica and Brazil.[28] Understanding Julien Raimond's humiliation and the political campaign it engendered requires explaining why French Saint-Domingue refused

to acknowledge the social and political "whiteness" of wealthy, European-educated slave owners.

The answer has to do with emerging tensions about French colonists' "American" identity. This book argues that France's 1763 defeat in the Seven Years' War led Saint-Domingue to abandon its social definition of racial categories, like those that Jamaica and Brazil used, for a more explicitly biological racism. After the war, the colony experienced the same kind of imperial restructuring that led North Americans to rebel against Britain and heightened the resentments of Spanish American colonists against peninsular authorities. Under this pressure, white creolized New World Frenchmen used race to define their political and cultural bond with the metropole. Saint-Domingue's elite colonists wanted France to end military rule and claimed the colony was ready for a more "civilized" and "liberal" colonial regime. To dismiss French fears that island-born whites would abandon the metropole, these leading colonists collaborated with imperial administrators to create a new public sphere that emphasized the cultural and political community between all white people. To solidify this concept of the essentially French whiteness that immigrants and creole colonists shared, they used Enlightened notions of gender and biology to distance themselves from mixed-race creoles like Raimond. The moral and physical corruption of "mulatto" women and men, they argued, made both sexes unnaturally feminine and dangerous to civic life. In the 1770s and 1780s, these sexual and political stereotypes broke apart the colony's creole class structure. The new racial and moral hierarchy ranked wealthy planters and merchants of color below even enslaved Africans, for free colored wealth and culture were merely the by-products of their "corruption." In fact, the economic success of some free colored families created deep resentment among European immigrants to Saint-Domingue. The new color line soothed these class tensions. Humiliating wealthy mixed-race planters eased relations between poor whites and their wealthy neighbors, at least until the French Revolution began.

From the 1760s, Saint-Domingue's free people of color responded to these new forms of prejudice by attacking colonial oppression with liberal ideals, proving their patriotism in rhetoric and action. After 1789, with little or no intention of liberating their slaves, the very families most likely to be accepted in Jamaica or Brazil as "white" revealed the absurdity of Dominguan racism. This elite group used the first three years of the French Revolution to offer another vision of colonial society, even as a new definition of metropolitan French citizenship was emerging. Adopting, and, indeed, helping shape the terms of this

French debate, Saint-Domingue's elite men of color proved to their European contemporaries that brown- and black-skinned people from the Caribbean could meet the Revolution's ideals. Their successful campaign for full civil rights was built upon a powerful claim to "natural" or "American" virtue that would ultimately justify Haitian independence. The history of those creole families in eighteenth-century Saint-Domingue is therefore an important thread in the story of Latin American independence and creole consciousness.

The history of Saint-Domingue's free people of color also illuminates the cultural factors shaping racism in different New World societies. The comparative study of New World slavery began in 1947, when Frank Tannenbaum, a U.S. historian of Latin America, published a short book entitled *Slave and Citizen*.[29] Tannenbaum concluded that differences in the religious and legal cultures of Europe's colonial powers explained why "the adventure of the Negro in the New World has been structured differently in the United States than in other parts of this hemisphere."[30] He was especially intrigued by how much easier it appeared to be for slaves to secure freedom in Latin America than in British colonies or in the antebellum United States. In Latin America, he believed, Catholicism and the Roman law tradition encouraged masters to recognize their slaves' humanity. In contrast, the rarity of manumission was the "primary aspect of slavery in the British West Indies and in the United States."[31]

For Tannenbaum, therefore, the number of ex-slaves or free people of color in a given New World society indicated the harshness of its slave regime and the virulence of racial prejudice there. Comparing the United States to what he believed was a less color-conscious Brazil, Tannenbaum wrote: "what the law and tradition did was to make social mobility [for slaves and ex-slaves] easy and natural in one place, difficult and slow and painful in another."[32] Tannenbaum admitted that his *Slave and Citizen* raised many more questions than it answered. Indeed, his passing references to French Caribbean slavery classed it with British and North American varieties, in spite of the fact that these were Catholic islands with a slave code based on Roman law.

In the 1950s and 1960s, scholars began testing Tannenbaum's provocative hypothesis that the colonizing European culture determined New World racism. Comparing legal systems and plantation conditions with increasing rigor, by the early 1970s many historians had concluded that the material conditions of slavery were more important than culture in forging racism. In 1971, for example, Carl Degler reexamined the contrast between Brazil's racial history and

that of the United States. Calling his book *Neither Black Nor White*, Degler devoted special attention to the two societies' very different attitudes about racial mixture, rather than their legal definitions of slavery. Rejecting Tannenbaum's focus on Portuguese versus British culture, Degler identified the interworkings of geography, demography, and economy as the chief reasons why Brazilian slavery had what he called "the mulatto escape hatch"—the possibility of freedom and social mobility for mixed-race slaves.[33] Other historians working on Cuba, Jamaica, and the United States came to similar conclusions about the greater importance of the physical and economic environment over cultural factors in shaping slavery and racism.[34]

In 1971, Gwendolyn Hall brought Saint-Domingue into this new materialist scholarship, demonstrating the similarities between the eighteenth-century French colony and nineteenth-century Cuba, the leading slave producer of sugar in its era. Like so many others, Hall turned to this topic out of interest in Tannenbaum's question of "why racism is, and has been, more powerful in the United States than elsewhere in the Americas."[35] In *Social Control in Slave Plantation Societies*, she described how racial prejudice in Saint-Domingue and later in Cuba grew stronger as sugar plantations became more profitable and slaves became the largest single population group. Racism "[w]as a mind control device designed to keep the slave passive enough to insure the survival of the system," she concluded. The discrimination Julien Raimond experienced in Saint-Domingue was an expression of the "basic conflict . . . over wealth and over power to protect the wealth."[36] What was not clear from Hall's study was why, if racism primarily served economic interests, French colonists were so bent on humiliating wealthy slave owners like Raimond. Why had they permitted men like Raimond to become so prosperous in the first place?

In 1972 a collection of research essays on free people of color in over a dozen New World colonies, entitled *Neither Slave Nor Free* and edited by David Cohen and Jack Greene, administered the coup de grâce to Tannenbaum's cultural determinism. By juxtaposing their contributors' analyses of Dutch, British, Danish, Spanish, French, Portuguese/Brazilian, and U.S. racial policies, Cohen and Greene illustrated that material conditions consistently overrode religious and legal influences on New World racism. Economic pressures and the danger of slave rebellion, especially, shaped manumission and racial prejudice across the hemisphere.[37]

Neither Slave nor Free liberated historians of the United States, Caribbean, and Latin America from the question suggested by Tannenbaum's essay, "Which European culture produced the worst

slavery and racism?" Since the 1970s scholars have moved away from elaborate comparative frameworks to focus on the ways racial prejudice shaped specific societies.[38] Yet when such detailed studies, like this one, are placed back into a comparative context, they again reveal the importance of culture in determining racial attitudes.

Acknowledging this fact does not require rejecting materialist explanations of racism. Attitudes in much of Saint-Domingue up to 1763, I argue, followed the pattern seen in Jamaica and Brazil. The constant influx of new African workers, the brutality of the plantation regime, the high ratio of male to female colonists, the military and economic value of local patronage networks, and isolation from other colonists all encouraged European men to free their children of color and establish them economically. The social status of some of these people of color over time came to be based more on their wealth and social connections than on their African genealogy. Local society regarded the wealthiest families of this type as members of the master class, as responsible and respectable colonists. The ongoing growth and oppression of the slave population did discourage the promotion of new free colored families to this elite level. But the examples of Jamaica and Brazil illustrate that those families that had been successfully "whitened" into the plantocracy were mostly immune from racial challenges. Moreover, though new racial tensions may have slowed the social ascent of new free colored families in Jamaica and Brazil, it seems never to have stopped the ascent completely, or reversed the process, at least until the era of the Haitian Revolution.

This is where Saint-Domingue's history was exceptional. Here, my evidence shows, families that were once accepted in the elite were rejected as nonwhite in the 1770s and 1780s. I argue that cultural and political forces inspired and shaped the new color line, while the ever-mounting economic success of these families ensured that resentful whites would adopt the new racist stereotypes. After 1763, Enlightened ideas and social institutions produced a new self-consciousness in Saint-Domingue about "civilization," "virtue," as well as "race." This is no resuscitation of Tannenbaum's theory, for this cultural movement was not imported wholesale from France. Instead, at its highest levels, colonial and metropolitan discourse about many of these topics influenced each other, especially where race was concerned. Racism was a tool that colonial administrators and creole elites used together to "civilize" Saint-Domingue, despite the fact that the two groups defined this goal in strikingly different ways. There was no cultural determinism at work here. French political and scientific concerns, as well as Caribbean social and

economic conditions, shaped the evolution of Saint-Domingue's distinctive racial ideology.

Colonial culture was not only a tool for justifying and enforcing the subjugation of people of color. Joan Dayan has written, "Numerous accounts testify that in no instance was a black slave in Saint-Domingue helped by [French slave] laws or regulations."[39] This study, however, illustrates that French legal culture was a two-edged sword, one sometimes wielded by free coloreds and even by slaves. To reveal that dozens, perhaps hundreds, of slaves used the marriage provision of the Code Noir to attain freedom in the 1780s is not to defend the humanity of France's slave laws. Similarly, to point out how France's legal institutions allowed some colonial people of color to create public identities that whites could not challenge is not to claim, like Tannenbaum, that the Roman law system sheltered slaves from racism and inhumanity.

Instead the previously unstudied documents I analyze here confirm what Mimi Sheller has found in her comparison of peasant struggles in nineteenth-century Haiti and Jamaica: that social power in these islands was not only decided by imperial policies and by slavery's unequal distribution of freedom and wealth. Individuals who managed to escape slavery in eighteenth-century Saint-Domingue, like black peasants in nineteenth-century Haiti, were able to negotiate their racial and social identities in civil society, in a "public sphere" from which they were officially excluded.[40] Decades before the outbreak of the French and Haitian Revolutions, men and women with very little power used public texts to successfully protect their liberty and demand justice.

Such findings allow this book to contribute to a second historical literature, that which describes the causes of the Haitian Revolution. Given the historical importance of the Revolution and the influence of the cultural/material debate about American racism, it might appear surprising that scholars have devoted such little attention to Saint-Domingue's free people of color. Until quite recently, Gwendolyn Hall's *Social Control* was the only book-length study in English devoted to this topic.[41] This was no oversight. Historians recognized that Saint-Domingue's free population of color was the first group of its kind to force the repeal of racial laws and that its success inspired imitation and repression throughout the hemisphere. But those who studied Haiti also knew that the best nineteenth-century accounts of the Haitian Revolution suffered from an overemphasis on free colored achievements. Looking for a more democratic and accurate understanding of Haiti's unprecedented independence, twentieth-century

scholars have mostly devoted themselves to the long-ignored question of slaves' role in the revolutionary period.

After declaring independence from France in 1804, descendants of men like Julien Raimond ruled Haiti for much of the nineteenth century. The Haitians who published the first detailed narratives of the revolution in the 1840s were members of this "mulatto"[42] oligarchy. David Nicholls has described how these "*mulâtrist*" historians developed a Revolutionary narrative that served the interests of their class.[43] The strongest proponent of this interpretation, Beaubrun Ardouin, credited wealthy free men of color with beginning the Revolution. Glorifying free colored revolutionaries who challenged French racism, rather than the black men who led ex-slave armies, Ardouin wrote to confirm the oligarchic pretensions of his own mixed-race class. Free men of color had initiated the Revolution against France and their descendants' superior education and talents made them the natural leaders of the new nation, he argued. Because they suffered and fought French racism, they could not be guilty of racism against the darker-skinned peasant majority. As Mimi Sheller notes, it was no accident that Ardouin and others published their histories in the 1840s, shortly after the Haitian state exiled a black peasant leader who criticized a new mulatto president for not living up to his promises to democratize Haitian society.[44] This interpretation was so central to the self-conception of the nineteenth-century elite that Haitians writing in the generation after Ardouin published several volumes describing French prejudice against Saint-Domingue's free men of color.[45]

But twentieth-century events shifted this focus. By the 100th anniversary of independence in 1904, the Haitian state had come to support a "black" Revolutionary narrative, one centered on the ex-slave generals Toussaint Louverture and Jean-Jacques Dessalines, rather than free colored planters. In the centenary year the government inaugurated what Joan Dayan has called the state cult of Dessalines, unveiling a monument and adopting a national anthem, "La Dessaliniene."[46] From 1915 to 1934 the humiliating U.S. occupation of the country increased urban intellectuals' interest in the culture of Haiti's rural majority. This painful period inspired the foundation of a Haitian historical society in 1924 and the appearance of new Haitian scholarship on Louverture and Dessalines.[47]

In the 1930s Caribbean writers outside Haiti also turned to Saint-Domingue's great slave revolutionaries to remind the world of the potential power of colonized peoples.[48] *Black Jacobins*, published in 1938 by the Trinidadian man of letters C.L.R. James, remains the most widely read account of the Haitian Revolution. In the broadest

sense, most subsequent scholars have adopted his vision of the Revolution as an uprising of oppressed colonial working people. Following the example of his Haitian contemporaries, James helped retire the *mulâtrist* interpretation, arguing instead that Saint-Domingue's free population of color was a kind of Marxist middle class that aspired to join the white plantocracy. James agreed with Ardouin that these families were hardworking and frugal. But he also adopted French and populist stereotypes about their selfishness: they "were everywhere the least willing to submit to statute labor and public dues."[49] By emphasizing how mass revolutionary action had produced the Haitian Revolution, while others wrote of chaos and manipulation, and by combining critical scholarship in French archives with his own political zeal and stirring prose, James set a high literary standard that makes his book still valuable today.[50]

It was not until the 1950s that new kinds of academic research emerged from France to reinforce James's conviction that Saint-Domingue's enslaved masses were at the heart of the Haitian Revolution. Since the 1880s, French historians had mostly studied the colony to understand and improve their nation's administration of its new African and Asian territories.[51] But in the 1950s Gabriel Debien, a researchcer trained in this imperialist tradition, began to focus on Caribbean plantation records, inspired by the work of Brazilian and U.S. scholars. While earlier French studies of Antilles slavery had been based on legal texts, travelers' accounts, and administrative correspondence,[52] Debien adopted the social-science approach of France's *Annales* historians. He tracked down and analyzed estate inventories, colonists' letter-books, and other long forgotten documents containing information about slave death rates, African ethnicities, slave culture, and daily plantation operations.[53] After publishing close to one thousand articles and research notes, Debien warned readers of his 1974 book *Les esclaves aux Antilles françaises*, "It is still premature to present a overview of slavery in the French Antilles."[54] Indeed, in a single generation it was not possible for Debien, working in a field that attracted few advanced students, to synthesize the scattered and partial documentation he had unearthed. Yet his career reoriented French Caribbean historians toward a better understanding of how the material conditions of slavery shaped the possibilities for resistance. His successors have produced more sustained examinations of individual estates,[55] ventured deeper into demography,[56] and cast more light on the place of the plantation in the imperial economy.[57]

Debien's careful attention to neglected primary sources was an important inspiration for the Haitian historian Jean Fouchard. Well before the 1960s Haitians had come to view those slaves who escaped plantation bondage as the founders of a popular resistance tradition that culminated in independence. In his statue of the "Unknown Maroon," installed before the presidential palace in Port-au-Prince around 1959, the Haitian sculptor Albert Mangonès had celebrated this quasi-mythic figure. Fouchard's *Les marrons de la liberté* (1972) reinforced this nationalist image, arguing that the Revolution was not the handiwork of French Jacobins, free colored planters, nor a few black generals.[58] Instead, Haiti's successful conquest of liberty was grounded in a pre-Revolutionary culture of slave resistance, which Fouchard investigated by collecting 48,000 notices of escaped slaves from colonial newspapers. His peers, including James and Debien, hailed *Les marrons* as a masterpiece. However, Fouchard could show no link between the beginnings of the Haitian Revolution and colonial-era *marronage* and many historians outside Haiti remain skeptical of his thesis.[59] Because his notices could not be reliably quantified, even his description of the scale of pre-Revolutionary slave escapes remained anecdotal. Yet Fouchard's book illustrates how far explanations of the Revolution had come from the nineteenth-century claim that wealthy slave-owning men of color launched the Haitian Revolution.

In the last twenty-five years, it has been David Geggus, together with Carolyn Fick, who has been most important in revealing the actions and aspirations of the enslaved people at the center of the Haitian Revolution. One of Geggus's most important achievements, building upon Debien's legacy, has been to create his own database out of hundreds of published and archival plantation slave lists. This has allowed him to chart, for example, the African ethnic groups most likely to be found on Saint-Domingue's wide variety of sugar, coffee, and indigo estates. This, in turn, has illuminated the extent to which the slave uprisings in the North Province in August 1791 were the result of cross-cultural alliances between island-born and African slaves. While maintaining a scholarly skepticism about nationalist and ideological rhetoric, Geggus has connected the conditions of colonial slave life to the events of the Revolution better than anyone. Thanks to him and to Fick's original research and book on the Revolution, we have a better understanding of how slaves' actions contributed to Haitian independence.[60] Moreover, Geggus has opened new connections between the Haitian Revolution and other fields of

slavery studies, by systematically evaluating Haiti's influence on early-nineteenth-century slave revolts throughout the Americas.[61]

Laurent Dubois's new narrative history, *Avengers of the New World*, synthesizes the archival research of Geggus, Fick and many others into a powerful argument for the importance of the Haitian Revolution in world history. Dubois breaks new ground by emphasizing, even in his title, that Haiti's Revolution was as much about the emergence of a new "American" identity as about slaves' unprecedented victory over their masters.[62]

In fact, the idea of political independence from France only emerged late in the Revolution, but its roots lay deep in the eighteenth century. In Saint-Domingue as in the rest of the hemisphere, tensions between European administrators and colonists generated ideas about "American" or "creole" identity that reached a critical mass after the Seven Years' War. In France's largest remaining New World colony, those tensions were reflected in the changing civic status of the free population of color.

This book uses more than 9,000 notarial deeds from three neighboring colonial districts in Saint-Domingue's South Province to uncover those identities. Historians have often dismissed Haiti's southern peninsula as the center of "mulatto" power, implying that it cannot be representative of the nation's "black" majority, meaning the ex-slaves whose dark-skinned generals Toussaint Louverture, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, and Henri Christophe all emerged from Saint-Domingue's North Province. But there are three main reasons why this study looks carefully at the South as it considers the evolution of ideas about race and citizenship in Saint-Domingue and Haiti.

The first is that notarial records from the South are the oldest surviving from French colonial Saint-Domingue. They allow us to follow individuals and families across the most tumultuous half-century the Atlantic world had seen to that date, from 1760 to 1803. Because many authors focus their narratives on the blood and fire of the 1790s, this book's relatively long view of pre-Revolutionary conditions illuminates critical phenomena, like the gradual evolution of racial prejudice, and the slow and conservative rise of free colored planting wealth.

Second, scholarship on Saint-Domingue/Haiti, two hundred years after independence, has progressed to the point that the complex interplay of regional societies must be explored. Carolyn Fick's *Making of Haiti* (1990) illustrates the value of blending the revolutionary history of the South Province with better-known material from the rest of the colony.[63] Stewart King's *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig* uses

notarial contracts from the North and West to illuminate the existence of a free colored "military leadership class" as well as a distinct planter class in those provinces before 1789. But King's synthetic approach masks profound regional differences. Dominique Rogers' sophisticated comparison of the free coloreds of pre-revolutionary Cap Français and Port-au-Prince explores those variations and concludes that free coloreds there were gradually assimilating into colonial society before 1789. The South Province is now the missing piece of the puzzle. Unlike the areas King studies, it had no discernable "military leadership class," nor the large and distinct free black population that both Rogers and King identify.[64]

This inconsistency is significant. Historians have long portrayed Revolutionary-era conflicts between Saint-Domingue's South and North Provinces as racial warfare between "blacks" and "mulattos," even while acknowledging that these labels were inaccurate.[65] Beaubrun Ardouin, from the South, opined in the 1840s that the North Province was more "aristocratic" and his own province was more "democratic," an orientation he attributed to the French education of Southern leaders.[66]

But this study, taken together with the work of King and Rogers, offers a more convincing hypothesis. French military institutions and the constant influx of new African captives created a different set of free colored attitudes and opportunities in Cap Français than in the rest of Saint-Domingue. The South produced no ex-slave generals like Toussaint Louverture, nor a free black military class because the region was far more Caribbean in its orientation than the North or West. The conditions of frontier society in the South Province encouraged cross-cultural mixing which, together with the rarity of slave imports in this region, discouraged the formation of a distinct free black class. The South differed from the North not because it was more French, as Ardouin saw it, but because it was more "American," in the broader sense of that term.

Finally, the history of the South Province is important since the region played a special role in the origin and conclusion of the Haitian Revolution. Though there were perhaps three hundred wealthy free people of color in the cities of Cap Français and Port-au-Prince and their surrounding regions in 1789,[67] it was free people of color from the South who challenged colonial racism most effectively. Julien Raimond, supported by about a dozen of his neighbors, convinced Parisian revolutionaries and abolitionists to postpone their attacks on the slave trade. By engaging these allies, instead, in a campaign to recognize the citizenship of mixed-race colonists, Raimond destroyed

the stability of the slave regime. This was not his goal. Nevertheless, by the summer of 1791, the legislation and publicity he had stimulated in France raised such high expectations among free coloreds and created such a furor among radical white racists that civil war in Saint-Domingue was practically inevitable. Moreover, chapter 8 provides new evidence that Raimond's free colored allies in Port Salut parish consciously provoked Saint-Domingue's first Revolutionary slave conspiracy on the estates of their white neighbors in January 1791. Finally, in 1804, it was the nephew of one of Raimond's neighbors and strongest political allies who wrote the Haitian Declaration of Independence. Chapter 9 concludes that this was not merely an expression of Louis Boisrond-Tonnerre's romantic personality. Haitian independence as he expressed it was shaped by the South's intense consciousness of its creole identity, set against its strong attachment to French Republican values.

This book's first chapter describes the origins of that identity. Legal and census records from the first half of the eighteenth century show how buccaneers, French immigrants, and enslaved Africans formed new households, as well as slave plantations, in this isolated region. On this frontier, it was not ancestry, but social class and to some extent gender, that defined racial labels. Newly arrived Frenchmen married the daughters of propertied colonists, regardless of their racial background. These relationships created a rich network of local and intra-Caribbean connections that survived into the 1760s. The second chapter draws on a systematic analysis of over 4,000 notarial contracts from the 1760s to describe the economic role of the free people of color in Saint-Domingue's southern peninsula. It illustrates how some children of French immigrants and slave women became wealthy planters, and describes how poorer free people of color established themselves in at least four distinctive occupations. Chapter 3 examines the complex and often contradictory interactions among free people of color, slaves, and the colonial state. It pays special attention to how free coloreds used the legal system, constabulary, and militia to protect their liberty and set themselves apart from the slave population.

Chapter 4 begins to examine the creation of a new, self-conscious colonial culture after the end of the Seven Years' War, in reaction to controversial imperial reforms. The end of the chapter traces free colored involvement in an anti-militia revolt in 1769, a critical event in the changing relationship among colonists, free people of color, and imperial authorities. Chapter 5 continues to describe the impact of Enlightenment thought on white colonial self-perceptions. It shows how a new ideology of white purity resolved the debate

between colonial elites and imperial administrators about whether Saint-Domingue should have a military or civilian government.

Chapter 6 returns to the economic realm and to the southern peninsula in the 1780s. It describes the ascending fortunes of free colored planters and poorer farmers, artisans, and householders, despite the new racism. This chapter devotes special attention to the mounting prosperity of those old creole families who were now officially labeled "people of color," and shows their wealth was not due to coffee. Instead they continued to grow and smuggle indigo dye, diversifying into cotton. Chapter 7 examines the increasingly degraded civic status of free colored militiamen and slave-hunters in the 1770s. Some slaves found new routes to freedom in this period, through marriage and through constabulary service. More than 500 Dominguan men of color joined a French expedition to fight in the American Revolution in Georgia. Others tracked rebel slaves in the colony's mountains. Yet French colonists would not recognize any civic virtue in these sacrifices.

Chapter 8 traces Revolutionary events on both sides of the Atlantic. Following the wealthy families described in chapters 3 and 6, it shows how men of color in both Paris and Saint-Domingue dismantled the sexual images that excluded them from public life. But white colonial revolutionaries denied that brown and black men could be citizens. In 1791 French attempts to impose free colored citizenship brought civil war to Saint-Domingue and, ultimately, slave revolution.

Chapter 9 uses the economic and social data from over 1,000 notarized contracts drafted in Aquin parish between 1790 and 1803 to trace the experience of the free colored elite in the Revolution. Though the free colored population dominated military and civilian leadership, plantation agriculture and property values suffered enormously after the end of slavery. At the same time, however, the town's once-illegal trade with other Caribbean islands increased and some wealthy families began to sell land to ex-slaves, creating a new peasant class. Evidence of the ongoing vitality of Freemasonry suggests that, despite economic hardship, local elites embraced French republican values. The epilogue summarizes events that followed the arrival of a French expeditionary force in 1802, and ends by examining the life of Louis Boisrond-Tonnerre, the author of the Haitian Declaration of Independence.