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# Breaching the Citadel of Slavery: Condorcet, the Abbé Grégoire, and the Assault on Racial Hierarchy in the Colonial Disputes (1788-1791)

Jeffrey D. Waller  
*Georgia Southern University*

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BREACHING THE CITADEL OF SLAVERY: CONDORCET, THE ABBÉ GRÉGOIRE, AND  
THE ASSAULT ON RACIAL HIERARCHY IN THE COLONIAL DISPUTES (1788-1791)

by

JEFFREY D. WALLER

(Under the Direction of Jeffrey D. Burson)

ABSTRACT

Issues affecting France's colonies came to the fore through critiques of social, political, and economic matters during the Late Enlightenment and French Revolutionary era of the late 1780s and early 1790s. Of all the questions France faced during this period, the colonial issues of slavery's abolition and civil equality for the free people of color in the French Caribbean were among the most contentious. These two matters are most often characterized in the historiography of French abolitionism as separate issues. However, while the analysis of works by Condorcet and Grégoire on slavery and civil equality for the free people of color demonstrates that the works are related in their attacks on the colonial system's racial hierarchy, the refutations of the defenders of slavery made a connection between abolitionism and the rights of the free people of color explicit. Examined in this study are the various discourses that took place from 1788-1791 between the writings of Condorcet and Grégoire and the rebuttals of the defenders of slavery. Of equal importance, the legislative debates in the National Assembly in 1791 between Grégoire and members of the Club Massiac, a group of slaveholders represented by deputies such as Malouet and Moreau de Saint-Méry, are also scrutinized. This study underscores how the issues of civil equality for the free people of color and the abolition of

slavery became linked in the minds of those who believed that the preservation of France's Caribbean colonial system hinged on maintenance of the racial hierarchy.

INDEX WORDS: French colonialism, Abolitionism, Slavery, Racial hierarchy, Condorcet, Grégoire, Free people of color, Saint-Domingue, Malouet, Moreau de Saint-Méry, National Assembly, May 15 decree

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JEFFREY D. WALLER

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JEFFREY D. WALLER

Major Professor: Jeffrey D. Burson  
Committee: Christina D. Abreu  
Robert K. Batchelor

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## DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Emory and Josie Waller, who have always encouraged me to pursue my educational goals, and to my partner, Chip Girndt, who never wavered in his belief that I could achieve these goals. Your love and support have been beyond measure.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	3
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION .....	5
Legacies .....	5
Historiography of French Abolitionism and the Colonial Debates .....	9
Organization.....	15
2 CONDORCET’S <i>RÉFLEXIONS</i> AND THE CONDORCET-MALOUET DIALOGUE.....	16
Background: France, the Slave Trade, and Colonial Slavery .....	16
The Condorcet-Malouet Dialogue .....	18
3 DEFENSE OF THE FREE PEOPLE OF COLOR .....	23
The Abbé Grégoire’s Introduction to the Colonial Issues .....	23
Grégoire’s <i>Mémoire en faveur des gens de couleur</i> .....	27
Condorcet’s “On Admitting the Delegates of the Planters of Saint-Domingue to the National Assembly” .....	39
Summation of the Link between the Works of Condorcet and Grégoire ...	44
4 PROSLAVERY DEFENSE OF RACIAL HIERARCHY IN THE COLONIES .....	47
Opposition to Grégoire and His <i>Mémoire en faveur des gens de couleur</i> ...	47
Debates of the May 15 Decree.....	50
5 CONCLUSION.....	68
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	71

CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION

Legacies

On December 12, 1989, in the final event celebrating the bicentennial of the French Revolution, the Abbé Grégoire and the marquis de Condorcet were solemnly inducted into the Panthéon in Paris during a ceremony presided over by François Mitterrand, President of the Fifth Republic.<sup>1</sup> In the induction speech delivered by the French Minister of Culture, Jack Lang, Grégoire and Condorcet were welcomed into the Panthéon, “the temple of the Republic,” a former church which houses the remains of the French Republic’s most venerated citizens.<sup>2</sup> Lang extolled the priest Grégoire as a visionary, a man whose zeal for a liberated humanity contrasted starkly to the “[i]nflexible severity of a Church that had not yet united, as had Grégoire, the gospel with the rights of man.”<sup>3</sup> When Grégoire was close to death in May 1831 but denied the sacraments by the royalist Archbishop of Paris for his refusal to recant the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and certain revolutionary principles opposed by the Church, Lang noted

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<sup>1</sup> Steven L. Kaplan, *Farewell Revolutions: Disputed Legacies, France, 1789/1989* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 340-42. Also inducted into the Panthéon that day was the French mathematician and education reformer, Gaspard Monge (1746-1818). The three men, Grégoire the priest, Condorcet the noble, and Monge the commoner, symbolically represented a union of the Three Estates (2). Unlike Grégoire and Monge, however, Condorcet was symbolically interred, with knowledge of the whereabouts of his remains at the paupers’ grave at Bourg-la-Reine forgotten since the middle of the nineteenth century.

<sup>2</sup> Jack Lang, *Hommage solennel à Condorcet, l'abbé Grégoire et Monge au Panthéon*, speech: Panthéon, Paris, December 12, 1989, 1, accessed December 29, 2016, <http://www.culturecommunication.gouv.fr/content/download/117337/1326025/version/1/file/Dis-cours-J-Lang-au-pantheon-12121989-double-page.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 9. Lang: “Inflexible sévérité d'une Église qui n'a pas encore uni, comme l'avait fait Grégoire, Évangile et droits de l'homme.”

appreciatively that fortunately for Grégoire, “there was a priest human enough to disobey” the Church hierarchy.<sup>4</sup> Whereas Grégoire was a member of the clergy, Condorcet was a noble, though Lang asserted that the marquis’s thoughts on liberty and equality belied his birth into a noble house with an ancient lineage reaching back ten centuries. The French minister repeated d’Alembert’s famous description of Condorcet, proclaiming the *philosophe* to be a “snow-covered volcano,” a revolutionary who “dreamed of equality” for the “others” of France and her overseas possessions.<sup>5</sup>

Though these two men were of privileged backgrounds before the start of the French Revolution in 1789, Grégoire and Condorcet are mentioned most often in the context of their association with the *Société des amis des noirs*, or the Society of Friends of the Blacks, France’s oldest and most influential abolitionist group that was established in 1788 to advocate for France’s most disadvantaged people, the enslaved blacks of the colonies. As men who possessed complementary talents, Grégoire and Condorcet confronted the white colonial planter class in Saint-Domingue as a formidable duo that espoused the abolitionist position in the colonial issues of 1788-1791.

This study contends that the granting of civil equality to the free people of color and the abolition of slavery were not treated as wholly separate issues during the debates over the colonial system from 1788-1791. However, neither Condorcet nor Grégoire was the one to make

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 10. Lang: “Ses ennemis, eux, ne lui pardonnent pas, mais il y eut un prêtre assez humain pour désobéir...”; Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall, *The Abbé Grégoire and the French Revolution: The Making of Modern Universalism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 219-20; Ruth F. Necheles, *The Abbé Grégoire 1787-1831: The Odyssey of an Egalitarian* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing, 1971), 276. According to Necheles, King Louis-Philippe involved himself in the controversy, and on behalf of Grégoire, instructed his wife’s confessor, the Abbé Guillon, to administer the sacrament of extreme unction to Grégoire.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 3. Lang: “‘Volcan couvert de neige,’ dit de lui d’Alembert.”

this connection explicit. Ironically, it is from the lips and the pens of Malouet, Moreau de Saint-Méry, and other defenders of colonial slavery in addressing their colleagues, constituents, and crowds of spectators in the National Assembly debates who made this connection explicit.

Whereas many works in the historiography of France's colonial system appear to point to the debates over civil equality for the free people of color in the National Assembly as the starting point for the colonial debates, this study argues that debate began substantively with the dialog between Condorcet's 1788 edition of *Réflexions sur l'esclavage des nègres* (*Reflections on Negro Slavery*) and Malouet's *Mémoire sur l'esclavage des nègres* (*Memoir on Negro Slavery*), his same-year refutation of Condorcet's attacks on the racial hierarchy and slavery in the French West Indies. Grégoire's *Mémoire en faveur des gens de couleur* (*Memoir in Favor of the People of Color*) and Condorcet's *Sur l'admission des députés des planteurs de Saint-Domingue dans l'Assemblée nationale* ("On Admitting the Delegates of the Planters of Saint-Domingue to the National Assembly") contain their 1789 defenses of civil equality for the free people of color. Like Condorcet's *Réflexions*, these works also attacked the colonial system's racial hierarchy. This study will demonstrate that slavery's defenders viewed the debates over the civil equality for the free people of color as a subterfuge for a renewed assault on racial hierarchy, and ultimately slavery. Furthermore, because Condorcet's and Grégoire's works form the basis for antislavery arguments and the defense of the free people of color, they are considered in detail to demonstrate how the issues they addressed became linked in the minds of the defenders of the colonial system.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> With the exception of Condorcet's "On Admitting the Delegates of the Planters of Saint-Domingue to the National Assembly," none of the major primary works used in this study have completed English translations.

The republication of Condorcet's *Réflexions* in 1788,<sup>7</sup> specifically in conjunction with the rebuttal it prompted from Pierre-Victor Malouet (Condorcet's and Grégoire's primary antagonist on colonial issues) has been underappreciated as an early source for the enmity that ensued between the *Société des amis des noirs* and the Club Massiac, the most influential group of colonial slaveholders based outside the colonies.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, this dialog between Condorcet and Malouet has also been neglected as a significant starting point for some of the quarrels between abolitionists and the defenders of slavery. The Condorcet-Malouet dialog philosophically presaged many of the arguments over colonial issues that would appear later in the National Assembly. Condorcet's *Réflexions*, followed by Grégoire's *Mémoire*, helped to reinforce the position of the *Société des amis des noirs* on the gradual abolition of slavery, and this study demonstrates that advocacy for the rights of Saint-Domingue's free people of color was no less a part of that same strategy of French abolitionism. Whereas Condorcet worked more closely with the *Société des amis des noirs*, Grégoire promoted abolitionist arguments in this same period mainly through his efforts in the National Assembly. Since Condorcet would not be elected to the National Assembly until September 1791, Grégoire would politicize Condorcet's more philosophical musings on behalf of people of color in the French colonies in his *Réflexions*. Through his oratorical prowess, Grégoire carried the abolitionist struggle against Malouet and the proslavery factions to the highest levels of the French constitutional assembly.

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<sup>7</sup> *Réflexions sur l'esclavage des nègres* was originally published pseudonymously by Condorcet in 1781.

<sup>8</sup> Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery 1776-1848* (London: Verso, 2011), 174-75.

As Laurent Dubois asserts about the colonial issues of this period, slavery was at the heart of the matters under consideration, “even when it was not explicitly discussed.”<sup>9</sup> Although the legislation produced as a result of the debates between the French abolitionists and the proslavery representatives in the French government had a minimal impact on the institution of slavery in the short term (the decrees would be largely ignored in the colonies), the ideas that underpinned Grégoire’s and Condorcet’s arguments against the colonial planter class helped to undermine slavery in the long term. For example, the Decree of May 15, 1791, the law which broke the color barrier in the colonies and gave citizenship rights to free people of color for the first time in French colonial history demonstrated the potency of Grégoire’s and Condorcet’s arguments that skin color was not an insurmountable obstacle to political equality. Though few free people of color could meet the stringent requirements for citizenship spelled out in the legislation, David Brion Davis insists that the May 15 decree was significant nonetheless in that “it represented a break in the color wall,”<sup>10</sup> as racial discrimination served as one of the foundations of slavery.

#### Historiography of French Abolitionism and the Colonial Debates

In the historiography of French abolitionism, scholars view Condorcet and Grégoire as seminal figures. Both men were actors on many of the same stages, and their roles expanded considerably during the upheaval of the French Revolution. While many of the works focusing on this period of French history reflect the individual contributions of Grégoire and Condorcet,

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<sup>9</sup> Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 98-99.

<sup>10</sup> David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution 1770-1823* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1999), 143.

they fail to locate a relationship between the men's works on behalf of blacks and people of color in France's overseas empire that reveals the continuity of a larger dialog with defenders of the colonial system's racial hierarchy. This thesis seeks to contribute to the scholarship on the debates between 1788-1791 over the colonial issues of slavery and civil equality for the free people of color by underscoring how Condorcet's and Grégoire's works, and the discursive context in which they participated with slavery's defenders, forged a connection between the abolition of slavery and civil equality for the free people of color in the minds of readers and those who heard the debates in the National Assembly.

Considering the Abbé Grégoire's significance to the abolitionist movement, English-language monographs about him are not as numerous as one would think.<sup>11</sup> For the last third of the twentieth century, Ruth Necheles's well-researched biography, *The Abbé Grégoire 1787-1831: The Odyssey of an Egalitarian*, provided readers with a detailed account of his "egalitarian career and his religious activities" in support of Protestant, Jewish, and black emancipation.<sup>12</sup> More than three decades after Necheles's work was published, Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall's *The*

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<sup>11</sup> In French-language scholarship, interest in Grégoire has increased substantially since the sesquicentennial of the abolition of slavery in 1848 and the bicentennial of the French Revolution in 1989. Several important monographs on Grégoire in French have appeared during the time of these anniversaries and form part of the works consulted in the preparation of this study. Rita Hermon-Belot's *L'abbé Grégoire, la politique et la vérité* is a work that centers on Grégoire as the revolutionary priest, a man of often paradoxical beliefs and actions: Rita Hermon-Belot, *L'abbé Grégoire, la politique et la vérité* (Paris: Seuil, 2000). In his work, *L'Abbé Grégoire, défenseur des Juifs et des Noirs*, Maurice Ezran insists that universality was behind all of Grégoire's pursuits: Maurice Ezran, *L'Abbé Grégoire, défenseur des Juifs et des Noirs: Révolution et tolérance* (Paris: Harmattan, 1992). In his study of Grégoire's thought, Jean Dubray argues in *La pensée de l'Abbé Grégoire* that the influence of religious philosophy was at the heart of his support for human rights: Jean Dubray, *La pensée de l'Abbé Grégoire: Despotisme et liberté* (Oxford, UK: Voltaire Foundation, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Ruth F. Necheles, *The Abbé Grégoire 1787-1831: The Odyssey of an Egalitarian* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing, 1971), xvii.

*Abbé Grégoire and the French Revolution: The Making of Modern Universalism* appeared in 2005. Sepinwall referred to this work on Grégoire as a blending of *old* biography and *new* or *social* biography. Instead of biographical scholarship that inflated the significance of an individual to an historical period, Sepinwall based her approach on the 1968 call of David Brion Davis “for a new biography that would focus on individuals in order to illuminate larger cultural developments.”<sup>13</sup> The second part of Sepinwall’s work, “Grégoire in Paris: Revolution and Regeneration, 1789-1801,” is a fine overview of Grégoire’s early writings and labors on behalf of the rights of people of color, but it does not reveal any clear connection his pro-slavery opponents made between these efforts and the abolition of slavery. In addition to Necheles and Sepinwall, the only other sizeable work in English on Grégoire published in the last few decades is *The Abbé Grégoire and His World*, an edited volume by Jeremy and Richard Popkin.<sup>14</sup> While the essays in this volume reflect the diversity of Grégoire’s interests, the work tends to compartmentalize his life’s work and inadvertently reinforces the separateness of abolitionism and the advocacy for the civil equality of the free people of color.

As a scholar of the French language and the French Enlightenment, David Williams has made important contributions in illuminating Condorcet’s role as a modern thinker. Following the death of Leonora Cohen Rosenfield in 1982 and the posthumous release of her edited volume

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<sup>13</sup> Sepinwall, *The Abbé Grégoire*, 4, 246. Sepinwall’s reference: David Brion Davis, “Some Recent Directions in American Cultural History” *American Historical Review* 73 (Feb 1968): 704-05. Davis argues that “cultural tensions and contradictions may be internalized, struggled with, and resolved within actual individuals.”

<sup>14</sup> Jeremy Popkin and Richard Popkin, eds. *The Abbé Grégoire and His World* (Boston : Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000). Jeremy Popkin’s introduction of the volume places the chapters by various scholars within the framework of Grégoire viewed as a “prophet of modern values,” (ix) with essays germane to this thesis discussing his role in the *Société des Amis des Noirs* (Society of the Friends of Blacks) and abolitionism.



of essays, *Condorcet Studies I* (1984), Williams edited the second volume, *Condorcet Studies II* (1987), with its aspects of Condorcet as “reforming theorist and political thinker.”<sup>15</sup> Among his other works, the most notable is *Condorcet and Modernity* (2004), which informs the discussion regarding the significance of Condorcet’s advocacy of social reform and what Williams calls “his theoretical understanding of the dawn of modernity,” an understanding that also includes his progressive ideas on slavery.<sup>16</sup>

Scholarship on Condorcet and the influence of Physiocratic thought on his antislavery views is most significant in understanding how political economy underlies his *Réflexions*. With her work, *Economic Sentiments*, Emma Rothschild has added substantially to the understanding of Condorcet’s economic philosophy, including the influence of the *Économistes* or Physiocrats on his thinking.<sup>17</sup> French historian Marcel Dorigny’s essay in *Rethinking the Atlantic World* builds on Rothschild by reexamining the influence of Physiocratic works on the slavery debate.<sup>18</sup> Dorigny reminds the reader that Condorcet’s work on the links between Physiocracy and anti-slavery thought “summarized, practically all by itself, the quintessential doctrine of

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<sup>15</sup> Williams, ed. *Condorcet Studies II*, 8.

<sup>16</sup> David Williams, *Condorcet and Modernity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 9.

<sup>17</sup> Emma Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet, and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 1. On the subject of Condorcet’s economic thought, see also Rothschild’s “Axiom, Theorem, Corollary, & C: Condorcet and Mathematical Economics.” *Social Choice and Welfare* 25 (2005): 287-302 and “Social Security and Laissez Faire in Eighteenth-Century Political Economy.” *Population and Development Review* 21, no. 4 (Dec. 1995): 711-44;

<sup>18</sup> Marcel Dorigny, “The Question of Slavery in the Physiocratic Texts: A Rereading of an Old Debate,” in *Rethinking the Atlantic World: Europe and America in the Age of Democratic Revolutions*, ed. by Manuela Albertone and Antonio de Francesco (Basingstoke Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 147-62.

[Physiocracy] from its origins,” a school of thought that emphasized both a political and a theoretical opposition to slavery.<sup>19</sup> This study continues this focus on Physiocratic political economy and its significance to the antislavery discourse by examining how Physiocratic theories contributed to the gradual approach to emancipation advocated by Condorcet, Grégoire, and the *Société des amis des noirs* during the period of the colonial debates.

The scope of this study also falls within the framework of C.L.R. James’s influential 1938 book, *The Black Jacobins*,<sup>20</sup> a work that was instrumental in defining French Atlantic history in terms of a transoceanic social, political, and economic exchange between France and the Caribbean. Indeed, Laurent Dubois and Julius Scott affirm the value to the historiography of James’s methodology and scholarship found in *The Black Jacobins* with the claim that “[w]ithout using the term, James pioneered what we now call an ‘Atlantic’ approach to the history of Europe and the Americas.”<sup>21</sup> James revealed that the influence of the French Revolution was not confined to the metropole, but was profoundly felt in the French Caribbean, particularly Saint-Domingue. He helped to draw attention to the hypocrisy of many French revolutionaries when the strength of their principles faltered in the face of colonial slavery, and

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 148, 160. For other recent scholarship that includes material examining the influence of Physiocratic ideas on slavery, see Liana Vardi, *The Physiocrats and the World of the Enlightenment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012) and Anoush Fraser Terjanian, *Commerce and Its Discontents in Eighteenth-Century French Political Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1963).

<sup>21</sup> Laurent Dubois and Julius S. Scott, “Introduction,” in *Origins of the Black Atlantic*, eds. Laurent Dubois and Julius S. Scott (New York: Routledge, 2010), 1.

he demonstrated the inherent contradictions of upholding the privileges of white slaveholders against the rights of the free people of color.<sup>22</sup>

In the areas of emancipation and the debates surrounding the free people of color, the works of John Garrigus and David Geggus are significant in providing background on the disputes over colonialism, slavery, race, and citizenship that took place before the Haitian Revolution.<sup>23</sup> In their works, Jeremy Popkin and Laurent Dubois place Grégoire and Condorcet as leading voices in support of the free people of color who were opposed to the interests of the colonial planters and commercial interests of the French Atlantic ports involved in the slave trade. While Popkin tends to minimize the significance of Condorcet's *Réflexions* as a work "primarily remembered today for the extreme caution" of its arguments for gradual emancipation, Dubois emphasizes the significance of Condorcet's work to the antislavery approach of the *Société des amis des noirs* from the organization's inception in 1788.<sup>24</sup> The subsequent adaptations of Condorcet's antislavery proposals to the mission of the *Société des*

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<sup>22</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, 80-81.

<sup>23</sup> John D. Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); David P. Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002); David P. Geggus and Norman Fiering, eds. *The World of the Haitian Revolution* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009); David P. Geggus, "Racial Equality, Slavery, and Colonial Secession during the Constituent Assembly" *American Historical Review* 94, no. 5 (1989): 1290-1308.

<sup>24</sup> Jeremy Popkin, *You Are All Free: The Haitian Revolution and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010) and "Saint-Domingue, Slavery, and the Origins of the French Revolution," in *From Deficit to Deluge: The Origins of the French Revolution*, ed. by Thomas E. Kaiser and Dale K. Van Kley (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 227; Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 182. Dubois also briefly discusses the earliest confrontations between the *Société des amis des noirs* and the Club Massiac, in addition to the disputes over the rights of the free people of color in his *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 72-90.

*amis des noirs* would also encompass Grégoire's and Condorcet's rationalizations made the following year in support of the free people of color.

## Organization

This study first examines in detail the textual battle of ideas between Condorcet's *Réflexions sur l'esclavage des nègres* and Malouet's *Mémoire sur l'esclavage des nègres*. This dispute underscores the significance of Condorcet's views, for it was Condorcet's harsh critique of the slave trade and slavery, and particularly of the slave owners, which unnerved Malouet and the colonial planter class.<sup>25</sup> Grégoire's *Mémoire en faveur des gens de couleur* and Condorcet's "On Admitting the Delegates of the Planters of Saint-Domingue to the National Assembly", on the other hand, are both defenses of Saint-Domingue's free people of color and excoriations of the white planter class, are then thoroughly explored in order to demonstrate how arguments for civil equality for free people of color could be read by their pro-slavery critics as undermining slavery through attacks on the colonial system's racial hierarchy. The last portion of this paper analyzes how Grégoire's National Assembly debates with Malouet and other members of the Club Massiac over the civil equality of free persons of color publicized a connection between the free people of color debates and advocacy for abolishing slavery.

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<sup>25</sup> In *The French Enlightenment and Its Others*, David Allen Harvey considers the "fundamental divide" between the pro-slavery colonial Enlightenment and most of the *philosophes* of the metropole by an examination of the dispute between the planters of the French Caribbean represented by Pierre-Victor Malouet and the abolitionist position of Condorcet, an examination that this thesis expands to a greater extent. David Allen Harvey, *The French Enlightenment and Its Others: The Mandarin, the Savage, and the Invention of the Human Sciences* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 173-79.

CHAPTER 2  
CONDORCET'S *RÉFLEXIONS*  
AND THE CONDORCET-MALOUET DIALOGUE

Background: France and Colonial Slavery

The decade of 1781-1790 was the most active period of French involvement in the Atlantic slave trade, and that decade's most pronounced feature for France's overseas empire was the flow of enslaved peoples to the sugar and coffee plantations of its wealthiest colony, Saint-Domingue. According to David Brion Davis, Saint-Domingue was "the centerpiece of the Atlantic slave system," it is estimated that in this decade Saint-Domingue "produced over half the world's coffee" and "exported almost as much sugar as Jamaica, Cuba, and Brazil combined."<sup>26</sup> This economic import of slavery interests translated into political clout, with at least one hundred and fifty members of the Constituent Assembly of 1789 holding property in the various French colonies. An even greater number had direct and indirect commercial ties to the slave trade interests of busy *négrier* or slaving ports such as Bordeaux, Nantes, and La Rochelle, as well as those involved in colonial trade who viewed slavery as essential to their prosperity. This alliance of colonial and metropole interests produced a powerfully entrenched lobby in the heart of Paris for the maintenance of the slave trade and slavery.<sup>27</sup>

It was during this time of French history, in the context of slavery's perceived indispensability to France's prosperity, that Condorcet wrote *Réflexions sur l'esclavage des*

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<sup>26</sup> David Brion Davis, "Impact of the French and Haitian Revolutions," in *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, ed. David Geggus (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), 4.

<sup>27</sup> Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 167.

*nègres* (1781) with the objective of challenging the morality and economic necessity of slavery. In 1788 Condorcet reissued *Réflexions* with its proposal for the gradual abolition of slavery and the transformation of France's New World colonies into societies of free farmers and laborers. But, that same year, using notes and observations collected in his position as a former naval administrator in Saint-Domingue from 1765 to 1769, and as a planter who married into Saint-Domingue's white planter class, Pierre-Victor Malouet published his *Mémoire sur l'esclavage des nègres* as a repudiation of Condorcet's *Réflexions*.<sup>28</sup>

Harvey places Malouet among Colonial Enlightenment figures, educated men whose thinking was "related to that of the metropole but sharply opposed to it on certain points (notably issues of race and slavery)." <sup>29</sup> Men like Malouet generally were not proponents of universalism, but believed they were endowed with a particular knowledge of the colonies that was not understood by philosophers like Condorcet in France, and as such, opposed the implementation of revolutionary principles emanating from the metropole onto the colonial system.<sup>30</sup> Appointed intendant of French Guyana following the Kourou disaster of 1763-65 in which thousands of Europeans succumbed to disease and starvation, Malouet believed that the colony's failure was proof that Europeans laborers were unsuitable for the rigors of a tropical climate and that black slavery was essential to French success in the colonies of the West Indies.<sup>31</sup> Condorcet and

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<sup>28</sup> Harvey, *French Enlightenment and Its Others*, 175; Jean Tarrade, "Is Slavery Reformable? Proposals of Colonial Administrators at the End of the Ancien Régime," in *The Abolitions of Slavery: From Léger Sonthonax to Victor Schoelcher 1793, 1794, 1848*, ed. Marcel Dorigny (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003), 105-06.

<sup>29</sup> Harvey, *French Enlightenment and Its Others*, 5, 155.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 165-66.

Malouet's dispute provided the opening salvo for the ensuing colonial debates that would help determine France's relations to its colonies and, ultimately, its relation to slavery. This philosophical battle, which would eventually extend to the arena of French politics, exposed many of the contentious issues that would pit French abolitionists against the planter class and the interests of the *négrier* ports.

### The Condorcet-Malouet Dialogue

In the 1781 edition of *Réflexions*, Condorcet used the pseudonym of Reverend Joachim Schwartz, a Swiss pastor, but by the release of the 1788 edition his authorship of the work was widely known.<sup>32</sup> In the dedicatory epistle, he set the tone for the entire work as he addressed blacks as “my friends” and “my brothers,” insisting that they “have the same mind, the same reason, and the same virtues as whites,” and subsequently, vilifying the colonial whites, whom he holds in contempt by declaring them to be less than men.<sup>33</sup>

Whereas Condorcet argued that the perpetuation of slavery and the instability caused by war in Africa was due primarily to the “infamous trade of the brigands of Europe” rather than

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<sup>32</sup> Jean-Antoine-Nicolas de Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet, *Réflexions sur l'esclavage des nègres, et autres textes abolitionnistes*, ed. by David Williams (Paris : L'Harmattan, 2003), 1. French literary scholar Joseph Jurt suggests that Condorcet used the pseudonym “Schwartz” to identify with enslaved peoples as it translates as “black” in German, and he presented himself as a Protestant minister “so he can suggest a consensual humanitarian position” with Protestant Christians and philosophers in opposition to unenlightened Catholic Spaniards. (Joseph Jurt, “Condorcet: l'idée de progrès et l'opposition à l'esclavage,” in *Condorcet, mathématicien, économiste, philosophe, homme politique. Colloque international Condorcet*, eds. Pierre Crépel and Christian Gilain (Paris: Minerve, 1989), 388-89). Jurt: “Par le choix de la figure du pasteur Schwartz, dont le nom traduisant un terme allemande suggère l'identification avec les Noirs),”... A travers l'instance du pasteur, il peut suggérer une position humanitaire consensuelle, partagée par des chrétiens (protestants opposés au catholicisme répressif d'Espagne) et des philosophes.”

<sup>33</sup> Condorcet, *Réflexions*, 3.

their African suppliers,<sup>34</sup> Malouet countered that the merchant is merely conducting a commercial transaction as “he buys from a barbarous society” prisoners of war deemed as such through “the will of the strongest.”<sup>35</sup> As crimes against humans are measured, Condorcet asserted that slavery is the most egregious since it involved the theft of the most fundamental right of a man, namely theft “of all that nature has given him to preserve his life and satisfy his needs” as well as his ability “to dispose of his person.”<sup>36</sup> Malouet’s approach to his justification of slavery did not include attempts to attack Condorcet’s objections to slavery on the basis of morality or the natural rights of man. Indeed, he found no fault with Condorcet’s opposition to slavery on those grounds, and he acknowledged that slavery is at all times a violation of one’s natural rights.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, Malouet noted that because slavery is either established or

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<sup>34</sup> Condorcet, *Réflexions*, 9. Condorcet: “L’excuse alléguée est d’autant moins légitime que c’est au contraire l’infâme commerce des brigands d’Europe qui fait naître entre les Africains des guerres presque continuelles, don’t l’unique motif est le désir de faire des prisonniers pour les vendre.”

<sup>35</sup> Pierre-Victor Malouet, *Mémoire sur l’esclavage des nègres* (Neufchâtel, 1788), 20-21, accessed December 10, 2016, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k84485w/f1.image>. Malouet: “Le Marchand Européen, sur les Côtes d’Afrique, n’a point créé la Servitude , & sa retraite ne sauroit la détruire. Il achete d’une société barbare, les membres qui la composent & qui se: vendent alternativement, amis, ennemis, Princes , Sujets , pères & enfans, selon l’état & la volonté du plus fort.”

<sup>36</sup> Condorcet, *Réflexions*, 7. Condorcet: “Réduire un homme a l’esclavage, l’acheter, le vendre, le retenir dans la servitude, ce sont de véritables crimes, et des crimes pires que le vol. En effet, on dépouille l’esclave, non seulement de toute propriété mobilière ou foncière, mais de la faculté d’en acquérir, mais de la propriété de son temps, de ses forces, de tout ce que la nature lui a donné pour conserver sa vie ou satisfaire à ses besoins. Á ce tort on joint celui d’enlever à l’esclave le droit de disposer de sa personne.”

<sup>37</sup> Malouet, *Mémoire sur l’esclavage*, 20-21. Malouet: “Á Dieu ne plaise que j’essaie ici de consacrer l’esclavage , et de le réduire en principes! Il est, il fera toujours une violation du droit naturel dans la personne de celui qui le connoît et le respecte. —Croyons que l’homme est forti libre des mains de la nature ; — mais par une fuite de l’ordre établi ou toléré par la Providence , que cette li berté subit d’étranges révolutions!”



tolerated by Providence, for the enslaved person, “this freedom undergoes strange revolutions.”<sup>38</sup> Instead of gaining advantages from the abolition of the slave trade, Malouet believed Africans would remain subject to the will of a despot who could slaughter his people at will rather than live with the more benign power of the master, “who has only the right to make them work.”<sup>39</sup>

In addition to paternalistic ideas circulating among slaveholders and their allies in defense of the institution of slavery, many critics of abolitionism believed that the colonies were too crucial to France’s wealth and its position in the competitive drive for overseas colonies to attempt any substantial reforms that would possibly destroy the plantation economy of the French Caribbean. To the contrary, Condorcet asserted that the abolition of slavery would stimulate trade and “make the colonies more flourishing.”<sup>40</sup> He also insisted that even with respect to France’s colonies, the expediencies of commerce must be subordinated to justice to enslaved peoples. France’s colonial interests are never an excuse to deprive even one man of his right to freedom.<sup>41</sup>

Condorcet questioned the argument that whites were not suited for agricultural labor in the tropics, asserting that there was no convincing proof that whites were physically unfit to cultivate in the West Indies.<sup>42</sup> Ideally, Condorcet would forego plantation-style cultivation and

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>40</sup> Condorcet, *Réflexions*, 19. Condorcet: “La destruction de l’esclavage ne ruinerait ni les colonies, ni le commerce; elle rendrait les colonies plus florissantes; elle augmenterait le commerce.”

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 16.

divide the land into smaller plots, thereby inspiring a large class of self-sufficient small farmers.<sup>43</sup> It is at this point in *Réflexions* that Condorcet's arguments turn from the issues of morality of slavery to more economic arguments against its inefficiency. This type of thinking by Condorcet reflected the influence of his mentor, Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot, the liberal economist appointed by Louis XVI to be France's finance minister from August 1774 to May 1776. The references to the use of slave labor to cultivate colonies in Turgot's *Reflections on the Formation and Distribution of Wealth*, referred to by Condorcet as "the germ of the treatise on *The Wealth of Nations*,"<sup>44</sup> is apparent in Condorcet's *Réflexions*. Influenced by Turgot's ideas on the division of labor, Condorcet stated that "the more the work is divided, the more the product is improved," and he argued for a labor specialization that would make production in the colonies more efficient.<sup>45</sup>

In contrast to Condorcet's reformist agenda, Malouet espoused the belief in the value of the colonies to France, and he opposed any scheme that would threaten their economies, including the emancipation of enslaved peoples. Unlike Condorcet, Malouet was a proponent of mercantilism, and he believed that Turgot's economic policies would be as disastrous for the colonies as they had been for the metropole during Turgot's tenure as finance minister. He questioned the wisdom of submitting political interests "to the remonstrances and precepts of

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Jean-Antoine-Nicolas de Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet, *Life of M. Turgot: Comptroller General of the Finances of France, in the Years 1774, 1775, and 1776* (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1787), 74, accessed January 4, 2017, <https://archive.org/details/viedemonsieurTUR00COND>.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 17.

philosophy.”<sup>46</sup> Disputing Condorcet’s contention that the colonies were a drain on French resources, Malouet argues to the contrary that the relationship between the metropole and the colonies is more interdependent. As well as depriving farmers and manufacturers of the metropole markets for their surplus.<sup>47</sup>

Condorcet’s views were dangerous to men such as Malouet, whose economic, social, and political prestige derived from wealth generated through sugar, coffee, and indigo produced by enslaved people. Alternatives to a system based on slavery were derided indiscriminately as naïve and unworkable musings from outsiders. Any reform proposal which threatened the racial hierarchy that kept white planters, the *grands blancs*, at the apex was certain to meet vehement resistance. As a mortal threat to their way of life, any innovation, particularly changes that originated from the metropole, would be considered suspect by white planters. The coming of the French Revolution in the following year would complicate matters greatly for the white planters. As diverse ideas of equality began to find applicability in the metropole, the white planters would not be immune to what they often perceived as a contagion of novel ideas that could infect their world to its very foundations. It was in this climate, with its new conditions that Condorcet helped to bring into being through *Réflexions*, in which white planters grew increasingly more defensive concerning criticism of the colonial system’s racial hierarchy, and by extension, slavery.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 54. Malouet: “Je suis donc loin de croire qu'aucune Métropole cède sur ce point aux remontrances & aux préceptes de la Philosophie et si les plus ardens Promoteurs de l'affranchissement des Nègres se trouvoient à la tête du Gouvernement, ils éprouveroient, comme M. Turgot, le danger & l'impuissance de convertir, en actes législatifs, tous les mouvemens de bienfaisance qui contra rient de grands intérêts politiques.”

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 51-53.

## CHAPTER 3

## DEFENSE OF THE FREE PEOPLE OF COLOR

## The Abbé Grégoire's Introduction to the Colonial Issues

Around the same time as the first Condorcet-Malouet debate, the Abbé Grégoire was still devoting much of his time and energy to advocating for the extension of French citizenship to Jews. Indeed, as Sepinwall says of him, Grégoire arrived somewhat late to the abolitionist cause, and as late as the autumn of 1789, he condemned philanthropists he perceived to be more concerned with blacks overseas than with Jews at home in France.<sup>48</sup> Grégoire's renown in France as a writer and intellectual beyond ecclesiastical circles was due primarily to his participation in a 1788 essay contest sponsored by the Metz Academy in Alsace-Lorraine on the question, "Are there ways of making the Jews more useful and happier in France?" His response, *Essai sur la régénération physique, morale, et politique des Juifs* (*Essay on the Physical, Moral, and Political Regeneration of Jews*), took first prize.<sup>49</sup> In 1788 he penned his *Motion en faveur des Juifs* (*Motion in Favor of Jews*) as a restatement of his celebrated *Essai*. In his *Motion en faveur des juifs*, Grégoire said of the French abolitionists, shortly before counting himself among their numbers, that "their hearts flourish in favor of the helots and Negroes, while the unfortunates that they meet scarcely obtain a look of compassion from them."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Sepinwall, *The Abbé Grégoire*, 91, 93.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*; Necheles, *The Abbé Grégoire*, 17.

<sup>50</sup> Henri Jean-Baptiste, l'abbé Grégoire, *Motion en faveur des Juifs* (1789), in *L'abbé Grégoire, évêque des lumières*, ed. Frank Paul Bowman, (Paris: Editions France-Empire, 1988), 41. Grégoire: "On voit trop souvent des hommes de fer, qui profanent le terme de bonté; ils ont la générosité de chérir les humains à deux mille ans ou deux mille lieues d'existence; leurs coeurs s'épanouissent en faveur des ilotes et des nègres, tandis que le malheureux qu'ils rencontrent

Grégoire left Lorraine in 1789 to represent the First Estate as a clerical deputy in Paris, and it would not be long before his involvement in French politics would pique his interest in issues that affected France's colonies. Among those whom Grégoire encountered in Paris were abolitionists from France and Britain, as well as free blacks and free people of color. As he had with the Jewish question, Grégoire was determined to find the answers to colonial questions, particularly where issues of injustice were concerned. With the slave trade, the abominable conditions of enslaved people in Saint-Domingue and other French colonies, and the exclusion of free blacks and free people of color from the privileges of French citizenship, Grégoire would join with Condorcet and other abolitionists to shake the foundations of slavery.<sup>51</sup>

As Grégoire became more involved in colonial questions, his became a deeper commitment to abolitionism. It was during a joint attack on a lobby representing the interests of planters in the French colonies where one can detect the likelihood of a more direct collaboration

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obtient à peine d'eux un regard de compassion.” At least with respect to two prominent abolitionists and founding members of the *Société des amis des noirs*, Mirabeau and Condorcet, Grégoire's criticism of the abolitionist attitude toward Jews was an overgeneralization. Mirabeau's advocacy for Jewish emancipation is contained in works such as *Sur Moses Mendelssohn, sur la réforme politique des Juifs*, published a year before Grégoire's *Essai*. Additionally, Mirabeau's was a leading voice in the attempt to extend the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen to Jews during the debates of December 1789. As for Condorcet, he had not yet attained a political position from which he could more authoritatively advocate for Jewish equality. However, as the Badinters have demonstrated in their biography of Condorcet, a few weeks following the postponing of a vote to enfranchise Jews, Condorcet was a signatory to the petition calling for citizenship for French Jews submitted to the Assembly by a delegation of the Jews of Paris in January 1790. In May 1790 the Jews of Paris would petition the Assembly to their reconsider their petition for citizenship. Condorcet, in a report issued in his capacity as a commissioner for the Assembly, implored, “It is worthy of a Commune in which philosophy shone, even under despotism, to take up the cause of these victims of ignorance.” See Elisabeth and Robert Badinter, *Condorcet (1743-1794): un intellectuel en politique* (Paris: Fayard, 1988), 290-91. Condorcet: “Il est digne d'une Commune au sein de laquelle a brillé la philosophie, même sous le despotisme, de prendre en main la cause de ces victimes de l'ignorance.”

<sup>51</sup> Sepinwall, *Abbé Grégoire*, 93.

between Condorcet and Grégoire. The colonial question was twofold: it concerned the amount of representation in Paris due the colonial white planters, and it concerned the issue of representation for the *gens de couleur libres*, or the free people of color, who sought political rights with their white counterparts. Jeremy Popkin finds the re-energized antagonisms between the nobility and the Third Estate by the French Revolution to be analogous to the situation in the France's most valuable colony, as "the revolution also upset the delicate balance between whites and free people of color in Saint-Domingue."<sup>52</sup>

The man who exerted the most influence on Grégoire in Paris was Julien Raimond, a free man of color and Saint-Domingue planter, who was the most visible proponent in Paris for the rights of the free people of color. Raimond's upbringing as the son of a white planter father and a mixed-blood mother made him uniquely qualified to instruct Grégoire concerning the intricacies of the racial situation in Saint-Domingue. He was witness to many of the changes that affected people of color with regard to their legal status. As the number of free people of color and their economic clout increased, both *grands blancs* (the white planters) and *petits blancs* (artisans and small farmers) became fearful of this expanding non-white demographic. Although the *Code Noir* of 1685 had stipulated that emancipation corresponded to birthright citizenship, several royal decrees and regulations issued during the mid-eighteenth century eroded the few protections afforded in the *Code Noir*. Free people of color in France's colonies found their employment prospects and social opportunities limited by racially-discriminatory decrees.<sup>53</sup> Infuriated with the indignities foisted upon the free people of color by the biased decrees and legislation, Raimond relocated to France in 1784 in an effort to convince the Ministry of the

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<sup>52</sup> J. Popkin, *You Are All Free*, 35.

<sup>53</sup> Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 61-63.

Navy to urge reform of the biased colonial laws. In October 1789 he met Grégoire, who before the meeting had shown in issues affecting the colonies. According to John Garrigus, the meeting with Raimond was the impetus to what would become Grégoire's tireless obsession with abolitionism.<sup>54</sup>

Like Condorcet, Raimond was a proponent of gradual emancipation, and their views on regeneration, or the transformation of degraded persons such as enslaved blacks into French citizens, was part of the gradual emancipation agenda that influenced Grégoire. Grégoire had his own ideas about regeneration from his earlier work on Jewish emancipation, and he believed that like the Jews of France, regeneration was the key to the eventual integration of enslaved blacks into French society.<sup>55</sup> Out of his encounters with Raimond, other free people of color, and abolitionists like Condorcet and Thomas Clarkson,<sup>56</sup> Grégoire turned his attention to France's overseas colonies, particularly Saint-Domingue. When in November 1789 a deputy brought up the matter of the creation of a colonial committee within the Assembly, the planters and their allies objected to its creation. They wished to keep colonial affairs in the hands of a more pliable Council of State rather than an unpredictable legislature.

Condorcet was president of the *Société des amis des noir* at this time, but as Necheles reveals, it was Grégoire who convinced the *Société* to support the free people of color in

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<sup>54</sup> John D Garrigus, "Julien Raimond (1744-1801): Planter, Revolutionary, and Free Man of Color in Saint-Domingue," in *The Human Tradition in the Atlantic World, 1500-1850*, eds. Karen Racine and Beatriz G. Mamigonian (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publisher, 2010), 126.

<sup>55</sup> Dubois, *Colony of Citizens*, 184; Sepinwall, *Abbé Grégoire*, 107-08.

<sup>56</sup> Necheles, *Abbé Grégoire*, 60; Marcel Dorigny and Bernard Gainot, *La Société des Amis des Noirs 1788-1799: Contributions à l'histoire de l'abolition de l'esclavage* (Paris: UNESCO, 1998), 251-54. Clarkson was a leading British abolitionist who greatly influenced Grégoire, particularly in his opposition to the slave trade.

attaining their rights before any other colonial questions could be addressed by the Assembly. As Clarkson noted in his 1808 history of the abolition of the slave trade, Condorcet was preoccupied with the constitutional project at this time. He believed that Condorcet was of the opinion that a constitution was vital for France, since “the revolution was of more importance to Frenchmen, than the abolition of the slave trade” and that its abolition “would naturally flow from” a secured revolution.<sup>57</sup> The influence of British abolitionists on the program of the *Société* was behind the initial reluctance of the *Société* to take up the cause of the free people of color. This influence was reflected primarily in the centrality of the abolition of the slave trade to most of the prominent members of the *Société*.<sup>58</sup>

#### Grégoire’s *Mémoire en faveur des gens de couleur*

As the main spokesman for the free people of color in the Assembly, Grégoire faced tremendous opposition. The antagonism of the white planters and their Assembly allies to representation for free people of color resulted in his being shouted down as he spoke at times as well as debate being steered away from anything which threatened the interests the white planter class. This obstruction by the slavery interests within the Assembly led to Grégoire’s decision to express his sentiments on the free people of color in an essay.<sup>59</sup> Grégoire’s *Mémoire en faveur des gens de couleur* is the priest’s first work to address colonial issues directly. While he related

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<sup>57</sup> Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade by the British Parliament* (London: R. Taylor and Co., 1808), 140-41, accessed March 11, 2017, <https://archive.org/stream/historyofrisepro02clar#page/n0/mode/2up/search/Condorcet>.

<sup>58</sup> Necheles, *Abbé Grégoire*, 59-63.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-65.



the account of the situation in Saint-Domingue as told to him by Raimond, and as revealed in Raimond's written works, the influence of Condorcet's *Réflexions* also permeated Grégoire's *Mémoire* as it relates to the injustices of racial hierarchy in the colonies.

In the opening to the *Mémoire*, Grégoire issued an indictment of slavery as that odious affliction of Saint-Domingue imposed by whites "to wrest from man that inalienable and sacred portion of his patrimony."<sup>60</sup> Acknowledging the disregard by whites for the protections afforded free people by the *Code Noir*, Grégoire claimed whites "have raised a wall of separation between them and a class of free men...as if all were not children of the same father."<sup>61</sup> As Condorcet did in *Réflexions*, Grégoire is unrestrained in his view that slavery made brigands of slaveholders, "who consider the nations as their properties and toys."<sup>62</sup> However, one can see how Grégoire also hedged somewhat in noting that "the fate of an empire" hung on the questions surrounding free men of color, and the solutions "must be considered then under the double aspect of politics and humanity."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Abbé Henri Jean-Baptiste Grégoire, *Mémoire en faveur des gens de couleurs ou sang-mêlés de St-Domingue et de autre isles françoises de l'Amérique, adressé a l'Assemblée nationale*, in *L'abbé Grégoire, évêque des lumières*, ed. Frank Paul Bowman (Paris: Éditions France-Empire, 1988), 47. Grégoire: "Sans cesse elle est contrainte de lutter contre la tyrannie, qui, depuis la naissance du monde le parcourt pour ravir à l'homme cette portion inaliénable et sacrée de son patrimoine."

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. Grégoire: "...ils ont élevé un mur séparatif entre eux et une classe d'hommes libres... comme si tous n'étaient pas enfants du père commun."

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. Grégoire: "...et assouvir la férocité de quelques brigands qui considèrent les nations comme leurs propriétés et leurs jouets."

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 47-48. Grégoire: "...mais quand ces intérêts sont liés au sort d'un Empire, la question se complique et devient plus délicate. Il faut l'envisager alors sous le double aspect de la politique et de l'humanité."

Due to his friendship with Julien Raimond, Grégoire was privy to the injustices that free people of color had to endure in Saint-Domingue. He revealed that free people of color had “to bear all the burdens of society more than the whites,” but were relegated “to share feebly in the benefits.”<sup>64</sup> He listed many of the duties performed by the free people of color which relieved whites of many responsibilities in the colony. One the most vital functions performed by free men of color was their roles in the *Maréchaussée*. Deriving its name from the rural police force of the French metropole, the *Maréchaussée*'s main role was to enforce order and discipline among the plantation slaves of Saint-Domingue. As Stewart King notes of the significance of the *Maréchaussée* to Saint-Domingue's social system, “The white power structure regarded these enforcers as the most useful of their African-American subalterns.”<sup>65</sup>

In addition to the *Maréchaussée*, free men of color had been subjected to military conscription at times. Grégoire noted the hypocrisy of France drafting free men with no political rights into the military while simultaneously condemning Britain's impressments of sailors.<sup>66</sup> Equally egregious in Grégoire's eyes was the institution of the *piquet*, whereby free men of color were obligated every six or seven weeks to leave their homes for a week to serve a white military officer. The free man of color went uncompensated for the expenses he incurred in the use of his own horse, and Grégoire was critical of this abuse by any white official “who uses service to the

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 48. Grégoire: “Supporter toutes les charges de la société plus que les blancs, n'en partager que faiblement les avantages, être en proie aux mépris, souvent aux outrages, aux angoisses, voilà le sort des gens de couleur, spécialement à Saint-Domingue.”

<sup>65</sup> Stewart R. King, “The *Maréchaussée* of Saint-Domingue: Balancing the *Ancien Régime* and Modernity,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2004). <https://muse-jhu-edu.libez.lib.georgiasouthern.edu/article/173267>.

<sup>66</sup> Grégoire, *Mémoire en faveur des gens de couleurs*, 48.

king as an excuse in a country where the civil servants, especially the military, have the omnipotence of viziers.”<sup>67</sup>

Grégoire denounced efforts by Saint-Domingue’s white elite to provide an unfair advantage to whites over free men of color in various aspects of colonial life, though Grégoire indicated that the application of particular rules was limited to a small part of the colony and some had become obsolete but could be enforced if an official were so inclined. In an effort to encourage immigration of whites to Saint-Domingue and to safeguard employment for the non-propertied whites, or the *petits blancs*, already in the colony, colonial regulations in certain areas of employment discriminated against free men of color. One regulation prohibited free men of color from using European names, requiring them to use African names for the reason of better clarifying social rank. To enforce further the loathsome nature of the intolerance in Saint-Domingue, Grégoire listed other restrictions on people of color that caused men like Julien Raimond to seek redress in the metropole. These included a prohibition on free people of color dining with whites as well as dancing after nine o’clock without permission of the authorities. Free people of color could not use carriages, lest they upstage their white superiors, and some rules even proscribed certain fashions for people of color, with a violator punished by having his or her clothes torn in public.<sup>68</sup> Raimond was even required to seek official permission to leave Saint-Domingue, since free people of color were not permitted to emigrate from the colony to France in their own right.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid. Grégoire: “...afin de servir les caprices d’un homme qui prétexte le service du roi dans un pays où les préposés civils, et surtout militaires, ont la toute-puissance des vizirs.”

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 50.

Grégoire blamed much of the animosity and defamation leveled at the free people of color on defenders of the white power structure in Saint-Domingue, and he believed this contributed to the misunderstandings and lack of sympathy for the free people of color by most French citizens in the metropole. In Grégoire's mind, "The conduct of the whites is in accord with these principles, and as though it were not enough for them to pour humiliation on people of color, they inspire the same feelings in their negroes, who then affect a tone of superiority toward the slaves of mulattos."<sup>70</sup> One of these advocates of white supremacy mentioned by name in *Mémoire en faveur des gens de couleurs* was the colonial lawyer and reform advocate, Michel René Hilliard d'Auberteuil.<sup>71</sup> Though it called for progressive modifications to France's mercantilist policies, colonial administration, and the amelioration of the conditions of enslaved peoples in the colonies, his two-volume *Considérations sur l'état présent de la colonie française de Saint Domingue* (1776-77) also supported the idea that the subordination of Saint-Domingue's people of color was essential to the maintenance of white supremacy in the colony.<sup>72</sup>

It was the contempt in which whites held people of color, Grégoire asserted, that dictated their disadvantages by law and custom. People of color had little recourse in the face of

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 51-52. Grégoire: "La conduite des blancs est concordante à ces principes, et comme s'il ne leur suffisait pas de verser l'humiliation sur les gens de couleur, ils inspirent les mêmes sentiments à leurs nègres, qui affectent ensuite le ton de supériorité envers les esclaves des mulâtres."

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 50-51.

<sup>72</sup> Ogle says that this idea found in the second volume of d'Auberteuil's *Considérations* was common to many white elite who "believed that a visual economy relating subordination to skin color was the mechanism by which their own superiority was assured over their numerically superior slaves." See Gene E. Ogle, "'The Eternal Power of Reason' and 'The Superiority of Whites': Hilliard d'Auberteuil's Colonial Enlightenment," *French Colonial History* 3(2003), 42-43.

discrimination and abuse by whites, and the whites often behaved with an aura of impunity. Generally, there was scant regard for the bodily integrity of women of color among whites, and the father or husband faced daunting obstacles to justice. According to Grégoire, free people of color “has to be six times right, in order to obtain justice once,” with a standard of evidence required that was rarely asked of whites, even if ill-treated by the lowest *petit blanc*.<sup>73</sup> And even in the instance where the authorities found the white perpetrator guilty, the punishment would seldom matched the degree of the offense. As Grégoire declared of the disregard for the humanity of people of color, they possess “not even the right of animals, the one of repelling force by force.”<sup>74</sup>

In 1784 the crown revised the *Code Noir* in an effort to ameliorate some of the worst abuses of colonial slavery, and Grégoire reminded his contemporaries that at that it was the white planters, and not the free men of color, who protested against this humane action by the court. These reforms included work exemptions for enslaved women with children, days of rest for the enslaved on Sundays and Catholic feast days, and the limiting of corporal punishment, under pain of prosecution, to twenty-five lashes. Grégoire claimed all slaveholders and free people of color accepted the changes as necessary, but the disregard for these reasonable measures by some cruel *grands blancs* reflected poorly on white planters overall.<sup>75</sup>

Much of Grégoire’s commentary was used to reinforce the injustice in the treatment of the free people of color by the whites in Saint-Domingue. This was especially significant in the

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<sup>73</sup> Grégoire, *Mémoire en faveur des gens de couleurs*, 52. Grégoire: “Du mépris à l'injustice, il n'y a qu'un pas; aussi faut-il que le mulâtre ait six fois raison, pour obtenir une fois justice.”

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 52. Grégoire: “L'homme de couleur n'a pas même le droit des animaux, celui de repousser la force par la force.”

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

effort to help dispel a pervasive belief among many citizens in the metropole that whites, even the most cruel of the *grands blancs*, held the free people of color in high esteem. Grégoire asked, “And who are these men that contempt consumes?”<sup>76</sup> To underscore the significance of free people of color to the overall well-being of the colonies, and by extension, to the prosperity of France, Grégoire appealed to the qualities of people of color which he believed made them indispensable to colonial society. He praised free people of color for the honorable way most of them acquired their emancipation. Citing their reputation for martial courage, he noted that “in the last American war, they displayed their intrepidity in Savannah.”<sup>77</sup> To Grégoire, the free people of color represented the bulwark against any slave insurrection on Saint-Domingue. Their patriotism he believed to be beyond reproach. As an example of this patriotism, he referred to their enthusiasm in contributing privately for a warship to help protect the colony in 1783. This was in contrast to the reluctance of most of the white colonists to aid the royal treasury, depleted greatly by war.<sup>78</sup>

In the matter of altruism, Grégoire praised the free people of color for what he considered one of the most outstanding virtues the group, something he considered to be worthy of emulation by white colonists. He contended that free people of color were even charitable to poorer whites, though despised and abused by many of those same whites they sought to help.<sup>79</sup> He also maintained that it was common for people of color to purchase freedom for a child of

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 54. Grégoire: “Et quels sont ces hommes que le mépris consume?”

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. Grégoire: “Dans la dernière guerre d'Amérique, ils ont déployé leur intrépidité à Savannah.”

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

color born to a master and an enslaved woman, if the master did not liberate the child before or upon his death, stating that people of color “saved to make them the precious gift of liberty.”<sup>80</sup> He even appealed to Hilliard d'Auberteuil and his *Considérations* as a source of validation for buttressing the reputation for positive qualities found among the free people of color. Grégoire found it incredible that faced with so much adversity and injustice the free people of color maintained their dignity, and urged whites to “recognize in them a praiseworthy propensity to virtue, since degradation, the father of so many vices, has not blackened their hearts, nor altered the native traits of their amiable character.”<sup>81</sup>

Like Condorcet did in *Réflexions*, Grégoire used a literary device by employing Spain as the foil in his questioning of French colonial policy in Saint-Domingue. Occupying the eastern two-thirds of the island of Hispaniola, Spain’s colony of Santo Domingo contained far fewer slaves than Saint-Domingue. Grégoire claimed that the Spanish colonists in Santo Domingo were far more indifferent to skin color than the French colonists of Saint-Domingue. He laid some of the blame for this difference on the modifications to the *Code Noir* two decades earlier in 1768, especially the restrictions that deprived men of color greater opportunities in the military. Grégoire rebuked his countrymen, “who rightly reproach the Spaniards for cruelties in the New World, cede to them in the same country the palm branch of justice and of humanity.”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 54-55. Grégoire: “On a vu de généreuses mulâtresses acheter des enfants de couleur, que leurs pères n'avaient pu affranchir avant leur mort; elles économisaient pour leur faire le don précieux de la liberté.”

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 55. Grégoire: “Il faut donc reconnaître en eux une bien louable propension à la vertu, puisque l'avilissement, le père de tant de vices, n'a point flétri leur coeur, ni altéré les traits natifs de leur aimable caractère.”

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 56. Grégoire: “Les Français qui reprochent avec raison aux Espagnols des cruautés dans le nouveau monde leur cèdent dans le même pays la palme de la justice et de l'humanité.”

Pointing out the absurdity of judging a man based on the pigment of the skin, Grégoire asked whites to imagine themselves mocked for their white skin by Africans on the coast of Gambia. It was no wonder to Grégoire what their response would be, and he exclaimed, “With what vehemence you would cry injustice!”<sup>83</sup> If society is prosperous, he posed, then why would its racial composition become a source of contention. He continued along this line of argument as to the relevance of a man’s origins, disputing the relevance of one having a white father and a woman of color as his mother. He asked whites if they knew truly their own origins, and inquired if it would be unjust if a segment of society reproached them for having pirates, prostitutes, or other men and women deemed disreputable, as their progenitors.<sup>84</sup> The point he was most adamant about making in his appeal for the free people of color was that merit mattered over origins or bloodlines. This emphasis on merit was an important feature of the revolutionary period in he wrote, and it helped distinguish it from the *ancien régime*. As he admonished whites, Grégoire declared, “To borrow the merit of others is to admit the shortage of personal merit.”<sup>85</sup>

Grégoire dismissed the white planters’ reasons for denying the rights of citizenship to the free people of color. The arguments the planters used to deny civil equality to free people of color included the loss of the colony from conquest by a hostile power, secession from the metropole by the whites, the free people of color or free blacks splitting away from the social order, or a revolt by the enslaved blacks. These events may come to pass, Grégoire admitted,

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid. Grégoire: “Supposons que sur les bords de la Gambie, votre peau blanche vous attire les insultes des noirs, avec quelle véhémence vous crieriez à l’injustice!”

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 56-57.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 57. Grégoire: “Emprunter le mérite d’autrui, c’est avouer la pénurie de mérite personnel.”



“But the admission of mixed blood to the advantages of a citizen does not provide even the pretext of an invasion.”<sup>86</sup> He asserted that no argument from the planters supplanted the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen.<sup>87</sup> He maintained that the social order was predicated on the cooperation of the free people of color, and so “on the contrary it is necessary to give them relief, to cement the union between them and the whites, and their combined efforts will maintain subordination more effectively.”<sup>88</sup>

There is no ambiguity as to the meaning of his words, for Grégoire was clearly speaking of the racial hierarchy as it related to the maintenance of slavery. He warned the white planters that the continued denial of the rights of the free people of color could lead to the devastation of the colony if the free people of color opted to redress the injustices through rebellion. “If, on the other hand, the mixed-bloods, weighed down by insults, join with the slaves to break the links with the metropole, their triumph is certain, the whites will succumb by their inferiority. Fear to embitter men who, deeply affected by our refusal, would seek in their strength what they could not get from our justice. Resistance to oppression is a right emanating from God, and recognized by the National Assembly.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 60. Grégoire: “A des princes tourmentés par la rage des conquêtes, il ne faut pas de raison; mais l'admission des sang-mêlé aux avantages de citoyen ne fournit pas même le prétexte d'une invasion.”

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. Grégoire: “Loin donc que le préjugé qui pèse sur les sang-mêlé soit utile à la colonie, il faut au contraire leur donner du relief, cimenter l'union entre eux et les blancs, et leurs efforts combinés maintiendront plus efficacement la subordination.”

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. Grégoire: “Si au contraire les sang-mêlé, excédés d'insultes, se réunissent aux esclaves pour briser les liens avec la métropole, leur triomphe est certain, les blancs succomberont par leur infériorité. Craignons d'aigrir des hommes qui, profondément affectés de nos refus, chercheraient dans leur force ce qu'ils n'auraient pu arracher à notre justice. La résistance à l'oppression est un droit émané de Dieu, et reconnu par l'Assemblée Nationale.”

After appealing for justice for the free people of color, Grégoire, as did Condorcet in *Réflexions*, attacked the slave trade. Noting the exhaustion of the African population, he related his fear that some whites in colonial areas were turning to Indians to supplement a shortage of enslaved blacks. Citing the examples of efforts to curtail the slave trade by the Portuguese and the Quakers,<sup>90</sup> he expressed hope that in “just a few more years, and in our annals there will remain only the memory of a crime of which a more wise posterity blushes for the earlier generations.”<sup>91</sup>

He warned the planters again of the significance of the free people of color to the maintenance of the slave system in Saint-Domingue. If the enslaved blacks discover that the free people of color refuse to protect the masters, then that could be sufficient cause to begin an uprising. All that would be needed, Grégoire supposed, was for a charismatic leader, an Othello or Padrejean, “to awaken in the soul of the negroes the feeling of their inalienable rights” and lead them out of bondage.<sup>92</sup> In a similar manner to Condorcet’s assertion that commodities for European consumption did not excuse the enslavement of even one human being, Grégoire argued that the metropole’s need for sugar and coffee was not justification for enslavement.

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<sup>90</sup> Grégoire is likely referring to the banning of slave importation into the Portuguese metropole in 1761, which, according to Blackburn, was the “first decree banning a branch of the Atlantic slave trade.” In 1770 the Quakers in New England adopted the first rules targeting slave trading. See Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 62, 97.

<sup>91</sup> Grégoire, *Mémoire en faveur des gens de couleurs*, 62-63. Grégoire: “Encore quelques années, et dans nos annales il restera seulement le souvenir d'un forfait dont une postérité plus sage rougira pour les générations antérieures.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 63. Grégoire: “Oui, le cri de la liberté retentit dans les deux mondes, il ne faut qu'un Othello, un Padrejan, pour réveiller dans l'âme des nègres le sentiment de leurs inalienables droits.”

Sugar and coffee would not console the French people when the colony is shattered and torn from the Motherland.<sup>93</sup> Grégoire argued that the interests of the white planters and the free people of color are often identical. With both groups desirous of the maintenance of Saint-Domingue's slavery-based economic order, it made no sense for the whites to fear the attainment of the rights of citizenship for the free people of color.<sup>94</sup>

Grégoire ends the *Mémoire* with a decree proposal for the Assembly. He proposed that the free people of color and free blacks of Saint-Domingue “are declared citizens in every sense of the term and in everything assimilated to the whites.”<sup>95</sup> He also called for the racial integration of the militias and the opening of military, ecclesiastical, and civil employment to all free peoples, contravening the restrictive measures that evaded the rights of emancipated peoples under the *Code Noir*. Moreover, he added a provision to facilitate the emancipation of the enslaved, streamlining the cumbersome rules that were designed to make freeing an enslaved person costly to the master. Importantly, he suggested the keeping of a registry to record the major events in the lives of people of color, a recommendation designed to help endow a human with personhood taken for granted among whites as well as to protect an individual from arbitrary arrest or re-enslavement.

In a desire to prevent future tampering with those provisions of the *Code Noir* that, if taken at face value, imparted French citizenship rights to all free peoples, Grégoire proposed the abrogation of all legislation that conflicted with Articles LVII and LIX. These articles declared

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 65-66.

<sup>95</sup> Grégoire, *Mémoire en faveur des gens de couleurs*, 68. Grégoire: “Les gens de couleur de Saint-Domingue et des autres colonies françaises, y compris les nègres libres, sont déclarés citoyens dans toute l’étendue du terme, et en tout assimilés aux blancs.”

that emancipation of enslaved persons in the French West Indies “will be considered as birth in our islands,” and that emancipated persons are to have “the same rights, privileges, and liberties enjoyed by persons born free.”<sup>96</sup> He even included a provision that would make it a grave offense for anyone “to reproach the half-blood for their origin.”<sup>97</sup> Appealing to his fellow clerics, he invited priests in the colonies to employ their vocation “to erase the prejudice and to help bring about the execution of this decree.”<sup>98</sup> Lastly, Grégoire requested that five deputies to the National Assembly be selected from among the free people of color until the time arrived that elections to the colonial assemblies included all free peoples.<sup>99</sup> In the minds of the defenders of the colonial system, , Grégoire’s proposals in his *Mémoire en faveur des gens de couleur*, as did Condorcet’s proposals in *Réflexions*, would undoubtedly alter, by design, the racial hierarchy in the colonies with the goal of undermining slavery.

Condorcet’s “On Admitting the Delegates of the Planters of Saint-Domingue to the National Assembly”

Just a few months before Grégoire released his *Mémoire en faveur des gens de couleur*, Condorcet published another work on the colonies in June 1789, “On Admitting the Delegates of the Planters of Saint-Domingue to the National Assembly.” Unlike Grégoire’s *Mémoire en faveur des gens de couleur*, this essay focused more concisely on the slave trade and the

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<sup>96</sup> Laurent Dubois and John D. Garrigus, *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2006), 53-54.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 69. Grégoire: “Défense de reprocher aux sang-mêlé leur origine, sous peine d’être poursuivi comme pour injures graves.”

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. Grégoire: “Les curés sont invités à user de tout le crédit que leur donne leur ministère pour effacer le préjugé, et concourir à l’exécution du présent décret.”

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

questions of representation for the planters in the French legislature than on the rights of people of color. The essay demonstrated for citizens of the metropole and the deputies of the Assembly that it was purely self-interests which governed the planters' actions, and that these defenders of racial hierarchy and slavery had little regard for the well-being of the nation and the basic Revolutionary principles of liberty and justice. As Jeremy Popkin acknowledged, the crux of the argument concerned the white planters' demand to represent all of the inhabitants of Saint-Domingue based on the entire population of the colony, including most *petits blancs*, who were excluded from casting votes because they owned no property, free people of color, free blacks, and enslaved peoples.<sup>100</sup>

Condorcet began his criticism of the planters' arguments with a comparative list of what a representative of a free nation believed versus the beliefs of a planter, with the justifications asserted by each challenger considered to be that group's "profession of faith."<sup>101</sup> Calling freedom a natural right in the first and second defenses of his position, the representative of a free nation, or Condorcet to be precise, argued that no person can be deprived of his freedom except as a punishment for a crime. Unambiguously, Condorcet affirmed that any other transgression of this natural right of freedom constituted a crime, and no amount of financial gain could ever excuse the transgressor. Conversely, the planter asserted that freedom is not a natural right and the expediency of enslaved labor producing wealth justified the enslavement of some

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<sup>100</sup> Jeremy D. Popkin, "The French Revolution's Other Island," in *The World of the Haitian Revolution*, eds. David Patrick Geggus and Norman Fiering (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), 201-02.

<sup>101</sup> Jean-Antoine-Nicolas de Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet, "On Admitting the Delegates of the Planters of Saint-Domingue to the National Assembly (1789)," in *Condorcet: Foundations of Social Choice and Political Theory*, eds. and trans. Iain McLean and Fiona Hewitt (Aldershot, UK: Edward Elgar, 1994), 360.

groups to the benefit of others. Using this logic, the planter proposed that even cruelty and murder could be justified in the name of financial interests.<sup>102</sup>

The third and fourth defenses give some insight into the French abolitionist view on the nature of property and slavery. Condorcet described property as sacred and disputed society's right to confiscate one's property without sufficient reason. But as Condorcet declared earlier in *Réflexions*, "We have showed that the master had no right over his slave; that the action of retaining in servitude is not the use of property but a crime."<sup>103</sup> In the fourth defense, Condorcet explained that with regard to enslaved peoples, property rights are not at issue. He stated unequivocally that "one man cannot be the property of another," and not even society could sanction slavery. In contrast, the planter defended society's right to enslave any group if by doing so it would profit another group. The planter denied Condorcet's assertion of slavery's inherent contradictions to the rights of man, declaring against Condorcet's claim that "oriental despotism therefore contradicts both reason and justice."<sup>104</sup>

In the fifth and sixth defenses proffered by Condorcet and the planter, the revolutionary notion of laws that bound and protected all of a nation's citizens equally was placed within the context of a colonial system with slavery as its foundation. Condorcet attacked the reaping of profit by the planter through another man's unremunerated labor, and he disputed the planter's feelings of privilege and immunity before laws against violence and crime. This comparison

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Condorcet, *Réflexions*, 22. Condorcet: "Nous avons montré que le maître n'avait aucun droit sur son esclave; que l'action de le retenir en servitude n'est pas la jouissance d'une propriété, mais un crime."

<sup>104</sup> Condorcet, "On Admitting the Delegates," 360.

revealed a liberal belief Condorcet upheld with respect to the limits of self-interest in the face of justice and its significance in the creation of a just society.<sup>105</sup>

Instead of permitting seats in the National Assembly for those who aspire “to preserve principles which contradict the natural rights of men,” Condorcet admitted that he would rather support legislation barring slaveholders from becoming deputies.<sup>106</sup> He alluded to legislation in the United States which attempted to prevent slaveholders from holding federal offices; however, Congress voted down the measure for fear of alienating the Southern states where slavery was established. Condorcet acknowledged that his country was different than America, with France having far fewer planters, but he refused to tread lightly in his straightforward condemnation of the *grands blancs*. He even went so far as to advocate the revocation of French citizenship for any man who would violate the natural rights of another through the institution of slavery.<sup>107</sup> With the forcefulness of his arguments and in consideration of the number of deputies who would consider profit over principle, he put the French legislature on notice that slavery would be among the foremost colonial questions, since, to his thinking, the rights of all men “are the sole concern of all political associations.”<sup>108</sup>

With the question of planter delegates to the Assembly, Condorcet thought it absurd that the planters claimed authority to represent the slaves and demanded the number of deputies to the Assembly be determined based on the free and enslaved populations. Scoffing at the assertion that one can faithfully represent a man he oppresses, Condorcet retorted that “[a] man

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 361.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

only represents those who have elected him and whose interests he shares.”<sup>109</sup> Although the planters had asked the Assembly to seat twenty-one delegates, Condorcet estimated that they were entitled, based on the white population in Saint-Domingue, to no more than one or two delegates. In Condorcet’s judgment, if the Assembly were to acquiesce to the planters’ demands, the action would be rightly regarded as a bribe of the legislature and viewed as a stain on the nation’s honor.

Like Grégoire, Condorcet does raise concern about the exclusion of free people of color from the political process, arguing that this denial of the rights of free men caused the planters to forfeit their rights to be admitted to the Assembly, and he referred to the planters as “simply the agents of one particular class of citizens.”<sup>110</sup> Condorcet’s argument that a man could lose his rights if he were to violate the natural rights of his fellow man, as in the case of a Saint-Domingue planter, was a testament to the gravity in which Condorcet viewed natural rights. White planters clamoring for representation, while at the same time denying the franchise in colonial assembly elections to free people of color, struck Condorcet as hypocritical. He denied to the planters the argument that they claimed for themselves: that a man should have participation in creating the laws by which he was subject. Condorcet’s response to their entreaty was to say that their denial of natural rights to free people of color, free blacks, and the people they kept enslaved would be justification for the planters’ exclusion from the National Assembly.<sup>111</sup> He ends his brief work by reminding the planters that the ownership of land and the effort involved in its cultivation to produce a bounty does not justify the crime of slavery. To

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<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 362.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*



close his argument, Condorcet asserted that the planters only offer “insult to nature and a desecration to reason” when those who own human beings dare speak of rights.<sup>112</sup> Even more forcefully and concisely than did Grégoire’s *Mémoire en faveur des gens de couleur*, Condorcet’s work indicts the colonial system for its racial hierarchy and the slavery that the racial hierarchy bolstered.

#### Summation of the Link between the Works of Condorcet and Grégoire

Rather than addressing the disparate issues of the abolition of slavery and the civil equality of the free people of color, Condorcet’s *Réflexions*, Grégoire’s *Mémoire en faveur des gens de couleur*, and Condorcet’s “On Admitting the Delegates of the Planters of Saint-Domingue to the National Assembly” are actually in dialog with one another in ways that inform the early strategy of French abolitionists in confronting slavery and its supporters. Because it has been argued that granting civil equality to the free people of color would strengthen slavery, at least temporarily,<sup>113</sup> Grégoire’s and Condorcet’s defense of the free people of color are often treated in the historiography as contradictory, something seemingly antithetical to the goals of French abolitionism. Indeed, the late historian William B. Cohen said of this contradiction that “[t]here is something unseemly about Grégoire, the abolitionist, arguing that the colored should

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<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 363.

<sup>113</sup> Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 195; David P Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002), 164-65; William B. Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans: White Responses to Blacks, 1530-1880* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1980), 114.

be given rights as good loyal slaveowners, on whom the whites could depend against the slaves.”<sup>114</sup>

In so far as the racial hierarchy was an underlying basis for slavery in the colonies, the arguments made in Grégoire’s *Mémoire en faveur des gens couleur* and Condorcet’s “On Admitting the Delegates of the Planters of Saint-Domingue to the National Assembly” do demonstrate that the works in their day constituted no less an abolitionist assault on the racial hierarchy than the assertions and recriminations found in *Réflexions*. Condorcet and Grégoire understood the implications of the debates surrounding the rights of the free people of colors, and Malouet and the other members of the Club Massiac were well aware of the dire consequences that could follow a victory by the abolitionists in the metropole. Disrupting the colonial social system by bestowing civil equality on men of color was a slippery slope which could undermine slavery in the long term.

In an environment in which the proponents of the rights of man fulminated against the despotic elements of the *ancien régime*, even the supporters of slavery understood the implications inherent in the discussion of man’s natural rights. An assault on despotism lay at the heart of the appeal to natural right in the denunciations of slavery advanced by Condorcet and Grégoire, and these arguments were not lost on men such as Malouet, who was also familiar with earlier critiques on the institution of slavery put forth by philosophers such as Montesquieu and Rousseau. However, with credible abolitionist voices in the National Assembly, the threat to slavery had moved beyond the limited arena of philosophical jousting in texts into the political arena where concrete measures could be debated that could result in an existential threat to the French colonial system of slavery. In France’s revolutionary political climate, Condorcet’s

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<sup>114</sup> Cohen, *French Encounter with Africans*, 114.

*Réflexions* generated much stronger opposition in 1788 than it had when first published under the pseudonym of Reverend Schwartz in 1781, and its reappearance produced an immediate and hostile reaction by the defenders of slavery. In comparison to a legislative effort to abolish slavery, the granting of civil equality for the free people of color represented a more reachable goal, and thus represented a more immediate danger to the proponents of the colonial system. The defenders of the free people of color, particularly Grégoire as deputy to the National Assembly, came under attack immediately upon release of his *Mémoire* with its harsh critique of racial hierarchy in the colonies.

## CHAPTER 4

## PROSLAVERY DEFENSE OF RACIAL HIERARCHY IN THE COLONIES

Opposition to Grégoire and His *Mémoire en faveur des gens de couleur*

Médéric-Louis Élie Moreau de Saint-Méry was a lawyer, planter, and deputy to the National Assembly from the colony of Martinique. As Dubois describes him, Moreau de Saint-Méry “was a citizen of the Atlantic,” a man who was determined to solve a problem that vexed him greatly: his belief that “no one, especially the administrators on both sides of the Atlantic who governed the Caribbean colonies, knew anything about them.”<sup>115</sup> In collaboration with fellow associates of a colonial society known as the *Cercle des Philadelphes*, Moreau de Saint-Méry collected material for a comprehensive account on all aspects of Saint-Domingue which he turned into “a classic Enlightenment project, based on the idea that knowledge would promote better governance.”<sup>116</sup> From the viewpoint of confronting this perceived ignorance of colonial life by people in the metropole, Moreau de Saint-Méry was so incensed at Grégoire for his defense of Saint-Domingue’s free people of color and for his opposition to racial hierarchy that he fired off a rebuttal that was three times longer than Grégoire’s *Mémoire*.<sup>117</sup> Moreau de Saint-Méry’s *Observations d’un habitant des colonies, sur la Mémoire en faveur des gens de couleur par M. Grégoire (Observations of an Inhabitant of the Colonies on the Memoir in Favor of the People of Color by Mr. Grégoire)* lambasted Grégoire for his critique of Saint-Domingue

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<sup>115</sup> Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 10.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid. This study became his *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l’Isle Saint-Domingue...* (Philadelphia: 1797), accessed March 2, 2017, <https://archive.org/stream/descriptiontopog00more#page/n5/mode/2up>.

<sup>117</sup> Sepinwall, *Abbé Grégoire*, 104; J. Popkin, *You Are All Free*, 54.

“without having the slightest notions of the places of which he feigns to speak with confidence.”<sup>118</sup>

Moreau de Saint-Méry attributed most of the distortions and half-truths he claimed to find in Grégoire’s *Mémoire* to what he considered an indiscriminate duplication of Julien Raimond’s observations about colonial life in Saint-Domingue. In addition to exaggerations about military duties like the *piquet*, Moreau de Saint-Méry claimed that Grégoire overstated the significance of the free men of color to the *Maréchaussée*, but understated the number of whites who also served in the same units.<sup>119</sup> Moreau de Saint-Méry also denied that racial considerations were the motivation behind many of the restrictions on the lives of free people of color in areas such as employment opportunities and surnames for children seen as illegitimate. He countered that many of the limitations were also completely applicable to most *petits blancs* of the lowest means.<sup>120</sup>

As for the social constraints for the free people of color, Moreau de Saint-Méry argued that Grégoire either hyperbolized them or they are unenforceable among the colonists.<sup>121</sup> Racial distinctions as such were endemic to any society where slavery existed, since distinctions between free and enslaved had to be rigorously enforced.<sup>122</sup> Rather than being seen as a sort of

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<sup>118</sup> Médéric-Louis Élie Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Observations d’un habitant des colonies, sur la Mémoire en faveur des gens de couleur par M. Grégoire* (N.p.: December, 1789), 2, accessed March 2, 2017, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k57904669/f2.image>. Moreau de Saint Méry: “...sans avoir les moindres notions sur les lieux dont il affecte de parler avec assurance.”

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-8.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-11.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-17.

<sup>122</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, 38. James noted that the authorities in Saint-Domingue further separated the offspring of white and black parents into 128 racially-distinct groups.

badge of shame, Moreau de Saint-Méry insisted that if Grégoire studied the various categories established to classify the diverse races, “he would soon see that this colored hierarchy also has its principles in pride like all the others.”<sup>123</sup>

In the area of public responsibility, Moreau de Saint-Méry alleged that the color barrier was not only just, but necessary. With respect to the racial hierarchy in the colonies, he asserted, “It is in this respect that prejudice is shown in all its strength.”<sup>124</sup> He invoked language similar to Grégoire, Condorcet, and others who believed that regeneration was necessary for an emancipated person to become an active citizen capable of exercising all that civil equality entailed. “It is not possible that beings, who were yesterday in slavery,” Moreau de Saint-Méry declared of the free people of color, “are today in the first ranks of society, burdened with responsibilities, which assume education, morals, and general trust.”<sup>125</sup> As a defender of the colonial system, Moreau de Saint-Méry could not countenance the free people of color meriting rights and privileges on par with whites; thus, the maintenance of racial hierarchy in the colonies

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 13. Moreau de Saint-Méry: “Quant aux distinctions Mulâtre libre, Quarteron libre, &c. &c., elles ont été la suite de l'amour-propre de ceux-mêmes à qui elles appartiennent. Si M. Grégoire étoit Curé d'une Paroisse des Colonies, & qu'il s'avisât de dire d'un Quarteron libre, en le mariant, qu'il n'est que Mulâtre libre, il verrait bientôt que cette hiérarchie colorée, a aussi ses principes dans l'orgueil comme toutes les autres.” Moreau de Saint-Méry is known today as an ethnographer of the Creoles of the West Indies, and his *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue* is still studied today. See Doris Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 247- 92.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 18. Moreau de Saint-Méry: “C'est à cet égard que le préjugé se montre dans toute sa force.”

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 19. Moreau de Saint-Méry: “Il n'est pas possible que des êtres, qui étoient hier dans l'esclavage, soient aujourd'hui dans les premiers rangs de la société, chargés d'emplois, qui supposent l'éducation, les mœurs, & la confiance générale.”

certainly would preclude the possibility of a system in which the numerically-dominant, enslaved blacks could lawfully challenge the supremacy of white rule.

#### Debates of the May 15 Decree

Not long before the May 1791 debates over the free people of color began, Moreau de Saint-Méry would publish yet another work critical of abolitionists; this one targeted the *Société des amis des noirs*. The work, *Considérations présentées aux vrai amis du repos et du bonheur de la France, a l'occasion des nouveaux mouvemens de quelques soi-disant Amis-des-Noirs* (Considerations Presented to the True Friends of the Tranquility and Happiness of France, on the Occasion of New Activities of Some So-Called Friends of the Blacks), expressed his concern for the colonies should the National Assembly grant civil equality to the free people of color. In what is one of the most telling statements on the effect this innovation of the racial hierarchy would have on slavery and the future of the colonies, Moreau de Saint-Méry wrote:

I do not know if we have been pushed to madness as far as relying on them [free people of color] to abolish slavery, by telling them, after they would be made white: "Can you grant nothing to these unfortunate slaves when you have obtained so much yourselves?" And thus would you have a title to their alleged gratitude. I shall not tire of repeating: if our slaves can suspect that it is a power which belongs to them to decide their fate independently of the will of their masters; if, above all, they acquire proof that the mulattoes have resorted to using this power; if they are convinced that they no longer regard us with absolute dependence; if they finally see that without our participation the mulattoes have become, or will become, our equals, there is no longer hope for France to retain her colonies.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Médéric-Louis Élie Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Considérations présentées aux vrai amis du repos et du bonheur de la France, a l'occasion des nouveaux mouvemens de quelques soi-disant Amis-des-Noirs* (Paris: L'Imprimerie nationale, 1791), 48, accessed March 7, 2017, <http://www.patrimoines-martinique.org/ark:/35569/a011416928915J2y645/1/1>. Moreau de Saint-Méry: "Que sais-je si on n'a pas poussé la folie jusqu'à compter sur eux pour faire abolir la servitude, en leur disant, après qu'on en auroit fait des blancs: "pouvez-vous ne rien accorder à

On the floor of the National Assembly on May 11, 1791, Malouet warned his colleagues against political innovations in the colonies which arose from the metropole, and he repeated the same argument he used against Condorcet to counter Grégoire's position during the debates over the free people of color. Grégoire had asked at the May 11 session that the Assembly make the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, adopted in August 1789, applicable to the colonies.<sup>127</sup> In turn, this would provide a legal basis for the granting of civil equality to the free people of color. However, Malouet denied the applicability of much of French law to the colonies, including the Declaration. In a manner similar to his argument against Condorcet in 1788, Malouet insisted that "it is not only in soil and climate, in crops and products, that these differences and oppositions consist; it is essentially in the population, in the number and kind of men who make up this population, in their employment, destination, means, morals, and habits."<sup>128</sup> Like Condorcet, Grégoire had never visited the French colonies, and Malouet was critical of Grégoire's lack of first-hand knowledge of the peculiarities of colonial life.

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ces malheureux esclaves lorsque vous avez tant obtenu vous-mêmes" & l'on se seroit ainsi un titre de leur prétendue gratitude. Je ne me laisserai pas de le redire: si nos esclaves peuvent soupçonner qu'il est cue puissance à laquelle il appartienne de statuer sur leur sort, indépendamment de la volonté de leurs maîtres; si sur-tout ils acquièrent la preuve que les mulâtres ont recouru utilement a cette puissance; s'ils font convaincus qu'ils ne sont plus à notre égard dans une dépendance absolue ; s'ils voient enfin que sans notre participation , les mulâtres sont devenus ou doivent devenir nos égaux, il n'est plus d'espoir pour la France de conserver ses colonies."

<sup>127</sup> *Archives parlementaires de 1787 à 1860. Recueil complet des débats législatifs et politiques des Chambres françaises. Archives parlementaires du 13 Avril au 11 Mai 1791. Tome XXV*, eds. M.J. Mavidal and M.E. Laurent (Paris: Société d'imprimerie et librairie administratives, 1886), 740, accessed January 16, 2017, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k49540k>.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 752.



There is no doubt that Grégoire's endeavors on behalf of the free people of color occupied a great deal of his time from late 1789 to 1791. In fact, when Grégoire merits mention in works dealing with this period it is usually within the context of the debates over the civil equality of the free people of color. Therefore, consumed by an issue that his enemies in the Club Massiac and its allies representing France's *ports négriers* tried unremittingly to keep separate from the slave trade and slavery in the National Assembly, it is not surprising that many historians during this period have largely ignored or have given short shrift to Grégoire's abolitionist efforts in this period. After all, as has been demonstrated, the pamphlets relating the plight of Saint-Domingue's free people of color by the mulatto planter Julien Raimond first piqued Grégoire's interest in issues affecting France's colonies, and this interest intensified further upon Grégoire's personal meeting with Raimond in October 1789.<sup>129</sup> Unable to represent himself with a seat in the National Assembly, it was Grégoire who championed Raimond's interest in the metropole. Of course, being a wealthy Saint-Domingue indigo planter whose plantation at one point was served by more than one hundred enslaved men, women, and children, Raimond was not an abolitionist in any discernible way at this point in time.<sup>130</sup> Raimond's activities in the metropole from as early as 1784 involved a single purpose: the achievement of civil equality for the free people of color.<sup>131</sup> It is possible that this close alliance Grégoire maintained with Raimond in these years produced what appears historiographically to be a conflation of goals, or single-mindedness, between the men that does not do justice to Grégoire's more complex views concerning racial hierarchy, the slave trade, and slavery.

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<sup>129</sup> Garrigus, "Julien Raimond," 126.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

At times, it is true that Grégoire made an effort to separate the issues of the rights of the free people of color and the abolition of the slave trade and slavery. Pragmatism was the order of the day and the *Société des amis des noirs* had agreed with Julien Raimond that calls for the abolition of the slave trade and slave emancipation would be a distraction. The decision by the *Société des amis des noirs* to advocate on behalf of the free people of color had been agreed upon at an earlier meeting involving Raimond and Grégoire.<sup>132</sup> Threatened by any talk of interference with their economic livelihoods, the planters and their allies from the *ports nègriers* mostly presented a united front in these discussions of mutual interests. With 1,100 French ships carrying 370,000 human beings forcibly removed from their homelands crossing the Middle Passage to the New World, the decade of the 1780s was the height of the Atlantic slave trade. The vast majority of these enslaved peoples were taken to Saint-Domingue.<sup>133</sup> Wanting his words to be heard and desiring a successful outcome to the free people of color debates, Grégoire was appealing in his oratory. At the height of the debates in the National Assembly of May 11, 1791, Grégoire noted “that whenever there has been any question in this assembly of free men of color, we have not ceased to postpone, and on the slave trade and slavery of the negroes, of which we did not speak, of which we did not wish to speak, and whose cause has nothing in common with that of the mulattoes.”<sup>134</sup> The records states that Grégoire received applause for this statement, pleasing those who had no desire to unite the issues.

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<sup>132</sup> Dorigny and Gainot, *La Société des Amis des Noirs*), 244-48.

<sup>133</sup> James E. McClellan III, *Colonialism and Science: Saint Domingue in the Old Regime* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 51-52.

<sup>134</sup> *Archives parlementaires du 13 Avril au 11 Mai 1791*, 740. Grégoire: “J’observerai en passant que toutes les fois qu’il a été question dans cette assemblée des hommes de couleur libres, on n’a pas cessé de nous reporter et sur la traite et su l’esclavage des nègres dont nous ne parlion pas, dont nous ne voulions pas parler et dont la cause n’a rien de commun avec celle des mulâtres.”

Not every deputy in the National Assembly was convinced that the issue of the free people of color was unrelated to questions surrounding slavery. It was the royalist cleric and deputy, Jean Siffrein Maury, better known as the Abbé Maury, who understood that the debates over the free people of color masked the larger disputes fought between the abolitionists and the Club Massiac over the issues of the slave trade and colonial slavery. During the proceedings of the National Assembly on May 13, 1791, Maury warned the deputies that arguments over the free people of color “will, sooner or later, return you to the same question that you had wisely wanted to stifle from the beginning.”<sup>135</sup> Quoted at length, his words demonstrated his understanding of what he considered to be the circuitous tactics of the two opposing groups which he believed would ultimately lead them back to the slavery question:

They speak to us here of particular circumstances which they do not develop; and there is great care to lay out for us beautiful systems, from which they seem to exclude all the consequences relating to freedom for the blacks. (*some deputies- No! No!*) The supporters of the men of color thus want to move us imperceptibly toward this great national license which they hold suspended over all the workshops of the blacks to proclaim soon in the new world the reign of the freedom they aspire to propagate over the whole expanse of the French Empire. It is the liberation of the slaves that inspires in them such vehement interest they take in the mulattoes. The orators opposed to this opinion have imitated, in their turn, the tortuous step of their adversaries; they fear to tackle head-on the question of slavery; they desired to make it implicitly prejudiced in their favor, not by a formal decree, but by preambles, by remote inductions, by indirect consequences, and by preliminary decisions; and to brush aside men of color from the exercise of political rights, they believed that this prior disinheritance would be an obstacle moreover, which would prevent you from reaching the slaves to shatter their irons. It is thus that in equivocating, in soliciting only a provisional law, by

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<sup>135</sup> *Archives parlementaires de 1787 à 1860. Recueil complet des débats législatifs et politiques des Chambres françaises. Archives parlementaires du 12 Mai au 5 Juin 1791. Tome XXVI*, eds. M.J. Mavidal and M.E. Laurent (Paris: Société d'imprimerie et librairie administratives, 1887), 51, accessed January 22, 2017, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k49541x.image.f4.langFR>. Maury: “Les débats actuels vous ramèneront, tôt ou tard, vers cette même question que vous aviez voulu sagement étouffer dès son origine.”

concealing one's means and one's views, for fear of facing the danger, one puts oneself in a perilous position, where one becomes very easy to defeat.<sup>136</sup>

Despite his incisive analysis of the debates in which he effectively revealed the underlying tensions of the slavery issue, Maury still urged his colleagues to “leave the blacks there and not confuse two absolutely disparate causes.”<sup>137</sup> He also questioned the legitimacy of the debates in the Assembly by appealing to existing decrees from the previous year. The decree of March 8, 1790, had declared the colonies not subject to the constitution and granted the colonial assemblies the right to legislate according to the colonies' needs, and included wording that made it a criminal act to foment agitation against the colonial system, a provision that produced consternation among the abolitionists. With the approval of the decree of October 12, 1790, the status of persons could not be legislated in the metropole without a formal request from

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid, 52. Maury: “On nous parle ici de circonstances particulières qu'on ne développe point ; et on a grand soin de nous étaler de beaux systèmes, d'où l'on semble exclure toutes les conséquences relatives à la liberté des noirs. (Non! non!) Les partisans des hommes de couleur veulent ainsi nous acheminer insensiblement vers cette grande patente nationale qu'ils tiennent suspendue sur tous les ateliers des nègres pour proclamer bientôt dans le nouveau monde le règne de la liberté qu'ils aspirent à propager sur toute l'étendue de l'Empire français. C'est l'affranchissement des esclaves qui leur inspire cet intérêt si véhément qu'ils prennent aux mulâtres. Les orateurs opposés a cette opinion ont imité, à leur tour, la marche tortueuse de leurs adversaires ; ils ont craint d'aborder de front la question de l'esclavage; ils ont voulu la faire préjuger implicitement en leur faveur, non par un décret formel, mais par des préambules, par des inductions éloignées, par des conséquences indirectes, par des décisions préparatoires; et en repoussant les hommes de couleur de l'exercice des droits politiques, ils ont cru que cette exhéredation préalable serait un obstacle de plus, qui vous empêcherait d'atteindre les esclaves pour briser leurs fers. C'est ainsi qu'en tergiversant, en ne sollicitant qu'une loi provisoire, en dissimulant ses moyens et ses vues, de peur d'affronter le danger, on se met dans un poste périlleux, où l'on devient très facile à vaincre.”

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. Maury: “Laissons là les nègres et ne confondons pas deux causes absolument disparates.”

the colonial assemblies.<sup>138</sup> After denigrating the free people of color as “the shameful fruits of the licentiousness of their masters,”<sup>139</sup> Maury later expressed his main reason for opposing civil equality for the free people of color; namely, that if they were given the rights of active citizenship, then the free people of color would come to dominate the whites through sheer numbers, representing a threat to the white colonists as well as to French interest in the Caribbean.<sup>140</sup>

While Grégoire’s oratory on the floor of the National Assembly at times indicated a disjointed approach between advocacy for the free people of color and abolitionism, subsequent statements he made on the free people of color appear to belie this separation. For Grégoire, the empowerment of the free people of color with civil equality was also a means to an end; namely, amelioration of the conditions under which the enslaved toiled and the eventual abolition of slavery. Written less than one month following the May 15 decree, Grégoire’s June 1791 *Lettre aux citoyens de couleur et nègres libres de Saint-Domingue* (“Letter to the Citizens of Color and Free Blacks of Saint-Domingue”) discussed one of his rationales for supporting the rights of the free people of color. He referred to the *Société des amis des noirs* by name, reminding the free people of color that France’s most important vehicle for abolitionism fought for their rights, *as well as the enslaved*, and in doing so paid a price through the calumny of its enemies who

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<sup>138</sup> Dubois, *Avengers*, 84-87; Geggus, “Racial Equality,” 1295, 1301.

<sup>139</sup> *Archives parlementaires du 12 Mai au 5 Juin 1791*, 52.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

accused the *Société* of fomenting insurrection among the people of color and of treasonous collaboration with Britain.<sup>141</sup>

Grégoire fully expected to exact payment from the free people of color for the *Société's* support when it came to the amelioration of the conditions of those enslaved on their plantations in the colonies. "We have lightened your sorrows," he reminded the free men of color, "lighten those of these unfortunate victims of greed who water your fields with their sweats and often with their tears."<sup>142</sup>

In this same letter, Grégoire again revealed eloquently that the rights of the free people of color were never truly divorced from the question of slavery:

One day the sun will light up among you only free men; the rays of the star that spread light will fall no longer on irons and slaves. The National Assembly has not yet associated them [enslaved blacks] with your fate, because the rights of citizens, abruptly conceded to those who do not know their duties, would perhaps for them be a fatal gift; but do not forget that, like you, they are born and remain free and equal. It is in the irresistible march of events, in the progression of enlightenment, in which all the dispossessed peoples in the domain of freedom ultimately recover this inalienable property.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Abbé Henri Jean-Baptiste Grégoire, *Lettre aux citoyens de couleur et nègres libres de Saint-Domingue, et des autres isles françoises de l'Amerique* (1791), in *Œuvres de l'Abbé Grégoire*, Vol. 6 (Nendeln, Liechtenstein: KTO Press, 1977), 82-83.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 91. Grégoire: "Nous avons allégé vos peines , allégez celle de ces malheureuses, victimes de l'avarice qui arrosent vos champs de leurs sueurs et souvent de leurs larmes."

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 90. Grégoire: "Un jour le soleil n'éclairera parmi vous que des hommes libres ; les rayons de l'astre qui répand la lumière ne tomberont plus sur des fers et des esclaves. L'assemblée nationale n'a point encore associé ces derniers à votre sort, parce que les droits des citoyens, concédés brusquement à ceux qui n'en connoissent pas les devoirs, seroient peut-être pour eux un présent funeste ; mais n'oubliez pas que, comme vous, ils naissent et demeurent libres et égaux. Il est dans la marche irrésistible des événemens, dans la progression des lumières que tous les peuples dépossédés du domaine de la liberté récupèrent enfin cette propriété inamissible."

For all Grégoire's fulsome rhetoric extolling the law's significance and for all the duties and obligations he imposed on the free people of color as recompense for the passage of the May 15 decree, the reality was that most free people of color were not able to meet the stringent requirements demanded of the May 15 decree. Emancipation alone was insufficient for voting rights, and a man of color had to meet the additional requirement of having been born of free parents. Moreover, the law was met with violent resistance by whites in the colonies, and the governor of Saint-Domingue informed the metropole that he was powerless to put the legislation into effect. Although ineffectual with regard to its implementation in the colonies, as David Geggus asserted of the May 15 decree that "the white colonists regarded the decree as a dangerous breach in the colonial system."<sup>144</sup> Even so, this defeat of the proslavery party in the National Assembly, and the small victory achieved by Grégoire and the allies of the free people was significant. While not an attack on slavery directly, Grégoire's and Condorcet's successful defense of the free people of color threatened a major underpinning of the colonial system, namely this belief in the *noblesse de la peau*, or the nobility of the skin, that is to say prejudice based on skin color. All parties to the debates over the free people of color understood that a threat to white supremacy was a threat to the slave system, given that the "colonists and officials had traditionally regarded racial prejudice and discrimination as necessary bulwarks of slavery."<sup>145</sup>

As Necheles states of the influence of Grégoire's *Lettre aux citoyens de couleur*, "this pamphlet, rather than the law itself, became the center around which future controversy would rage because in it Grégoire not only bitterly attacked the planters but he also expressed

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<sup>144</sup> Geggus, "Racial Equality," 1303.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 1301.

dissatisfaction with the limitations incorporated into the recent law.”<sup>146</sup> In fact, Grégoire’s enemies blamed the major slave uprising in Saint-Domingue in August 1791 on his inflammatory writing.<sup>147</sup> Enraged by what they perceived to be the open-ended nature of Grégoire’s pamphlet, several proslavery deputies denounced Grégoire’s attacks on the colonial racial hierarchy which supported slavery. One person in particular, Charles de Chabanon, a Saint-Domingue deputy to the National Assembly, published a pamphlet in which he meticulously dissected Grégoire’s *Lettre* with acerbic commentary that appeared in a column alongside Grégoire’s original text. Chabanon’s *Dénonciation de M. l’abbé Grégoire, et de sa lettre du 8 juin 1791* endeavored to make the case that Grégoire would never be satisfied with the extension of civil equality to a handful of free people of color, and that undermining the racial hierarchy was merely a precursor to the overthrow of the France’s colonial economic system based on slavery.

Like Malouet in his refutation of Condorcet’s *Réflexions* and Moreau de Saint-Méry in his criticism of Grégoire’s *Mémoire en faveur des gens de couleur*, Chabanon asserted that antislavery philosophers were out of touch with life in the colonies. Going further than Malouet and Moreau de Saint-Méry, he placed Grégoire among those impudent philosophers who have declared themselves, through their works, to be the enemies of France, her king, and her colonies, and he accused Grégoire of being a thinker whose thoughts emanated from the “delirium of virtue,” which had no basis in the realities of colonial life, but nevertheless

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<sup>146</sup> Necheles, *Abbé Grégoire*, 93.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 97-98. Necheles counted Louis XVI among Grégoire’s enemies. She also noted that since the legislature’s “inconsistent policies had permitted existing social conflicts in the West Indies to grow out of control,” the National Assembly shared responsibility for the uprising with Grégoire’s writings and other “subversive propaganda.”



constituted a threat to the French empire.<sup>148</sup> Invoking the March 8 and October 12 decrees from 1790 which stipulated that reforms to the colonial system originate in the colonies and that criminalized writings considered subversive to colonial stability, Chabanon insisted on the enforcement of constitutional measures to protect the colonies from agitators. He blamed Grégoire and “the slanderous curses of a fanatical society and the imitative antics of provincial club members,” namely the *Société des amis des noirs* and the provincial Jacobin clubs, particularly the Jacobin Club in Bordeaux, for the blatant disregard of earlier decrees insulating the colonies from metropole interference, and stifling dissent in the National Assembly of those opposed to the May 15 decree.<sup>149</sup>

Like other defenders of the colonial racial hierarchy, Chabanon repeated the claim that the *Code Noir* was never meant to be interpreted as to make free people of color the political equals of whites in the colonies. Even as subsequent decrees and regulations appeared to reinforce this view, the defenders of slavery vehemently resisted the notion that men merited civil equality through virtue of their free status rather than from any racial distinctions.<sup>150</sup> However, any threat to white supremacy in the colonies could ultimately serve to undermine slavery, and Chabanon was clearly convinced that Grégoire’s support for the free people of color

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<sup>148</sup> Charles de Chabanon, *Dénonciation de M. l'abbé Grégoire, et de sa lettre du 8 juin 1791, adressée aux citoyens de couleur & Nègres libres de Saint Domingue & des autres isles françaises de l'Amérique* (Paris: Imprimerie de la Feuille du Jour, 1791), i, 2, accessed January 4, 2017, <https://archive.org/details/dnonciationdemla00chab>.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4. Chabanon: “Les imprécations calomnieuses d'une société fanatique, et les singeries imitatives des clubistes provinciaux. Voilà ce qui a paralysé les chambres de commerce lorsqu'il importoit le plus à leur patriotisme, de développer de grands mouvemens.”

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

undermined the *Code Noir* and all the decrees which followed, thereby constituting a threat to the continuation of slavery in the French colonies. “The remainder of his letter will prove [Grégoire] aims for nothing less than to arm the people of color,” Chabanon remonstrated, “not only to contain the slaves, but to make them free.”<sup>151</sup>

In his attempt to justify slavery, Chabanon also appealed to Grégoire’s status as a cleric and employed a scriptural reference:

God embraces all men quite differently: he accepts enormous differences between them, and that, notably from freedom to slavery. Without speaking of all the earth’s peoples, to whom God has permitted slaves, since the abbé Grégoire wants, in this respect, to be blind to the most authentic masterpieces of history. As a minister of religion, at least he should not lose sight of *Genesis*. It reads there (47:18-19), “There is nothing left for the Lord but our bodies and our lands. Buy us therefore, we and our land for bread: we will be Pharaoh’s slave-servants.”<sup>152</sup>

Since the priest asserted that it is virtue, and not a hierarchy based on color, which distinguishes men from one another, Chabanon accused Grégoire of either ignorance of the words of *Genesis* or a willful denial of scripture.<sup>153</sup>

Despite the assurance of legislation that any reform of slavery had to originate in the colonies, Grégoire did “pronounce affirmatively that the National Assembly has only

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid. Chabanon: “La suite de sa lettre va prouver qu’il ne vise à rien moins qu’à armer les gens de couleur, non pas seulement pour *recéler les esclaves, mais pour les rendre libres.*”

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 8. Chabanon: “Dieu embrasse bien différemment tous les hommes : il admet entre eux, d’énormes différences, et celle, notamment de la liberté à l’esclavage. Sans parler de tous les peuples de la terre, auxquels Dieu a permis d’avoir des esclaves, puisque M. l’abbé Grégoire veut, à cet égard, s’aveugler sur les monumens les plus authentiques de l’histoire ; en ministre de la religion, du moins devoit-il ne pas perdre de vue la Genèse. On y lit (chap. XLVII, vers. 18, 19), ‘Il ne reste rien auprès du Seigneur, que nos corps et nos terres. Achetez-nous donc, nous et notre terre, pour du pain : nous serons serviteurs esclaves de Pharaon.’”

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 9.

temporized, by not yet associating the slaves with the fate of the free men of color.”<sup>154</sup> In Chabanon’s estimation, Grégoire’s words in his *Lettre* left no doubt that civil equality for the free people of color was an intermediate step to the ultimate goal of the abolition of slavery in the colonies. Chabanon also disputed Grégoire’s categorization of the slave trade and colonial slavery as European crimes. He contrasted slavery in Greek and Roman societies in antiquity with slavery in the French colonies, and he believed the latter to be more humane in comparison.<sup>155</sup>

In the postscript to his *Dénonciation de M. l'abbé Grégoire*, Chabanon warned his colleagues that Grégoire’s writings counted the priest among those whom the National Assembly deemed seditious and disruptive to the stability of the colonies.<sup>156</sup> Chabanon reminded the reader that the threat of secession loomed large over the debates about the free people of color and slavery, and he urged the metropole “to respect this inequality between people” in a guarantee similar to the arrangement between the federal government of the United States and the individual states in which there would be no interference with the slave trade until 1808.<sup>157</sup> His final plea left no doubt that he believed the implementation of the May 15 decree was a threat to peace and unity with the mother country, and that colonial stability depended upon the maintenance of the racial hierarchy and slavery. Saint-Domingue and the other colonies “must be

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 24. Chabanon: “et quand un décret nous dit affirmativement ‘que le corps législatif ne statuera jamais sur le sort des personnes non libres, que sur la demande expresse et spontanée des assemblées coloniales,’ vous prononcez affirmativement que l’Assemblée Nationale n’a fait que temporiser, en n’associant pas encore les esclaves au sort des hommes de couleur libres!”

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 48. Chabanon: “Voilà donc les Etats-Unis assujettis par la loi, pour 17 ans encore, à respecter cette inégalité entre les personnes.”

treated as sisters, and not as minor daughters,” Chabanon proposed menacingly, “as not to risk that they emancipate themselves.”<sup>158</sup>

Another member of the pro-slavery faction in the National Assembly was a Saint-Domingue deputy, Louis-Marthe, the marquis de Gouy d’Arsy. An absentee planter who had married into a planter family but never visited Saint-Domingue,<sup>159</sup> Gouy d’Arsy addressed his constituents in a letter regarding the debates in the National Assembly surrounding the free people of color. Like Moreau de St. Méry and Chabanon, Gouy d’Arsy viewed these debates as concealing the greater issue of slavery. He condemned this “new explosion of hatred from the *Société des amis des noirs*” whose opinions on civil equality for free people of color he considered more focused than usual for the *Société*, but “were no less dangerous.”<sup>160</sup> As the *Société* had agreed to take up the cause of the free people of color, and since Jacques Pierre Brissot was the head of the *Société*, Gouy d’Arsy attacked him directly, proclaiming derogatorily, “I thought less of avenging myself than defending the great cause of slavery that this fool attacked.”<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 49-50. Chabanon: “...attend qu'un décret de suspension, relativement à celui du 15 mai, annonce d'avance ce qu'il fera décréter immuablement, 'que des Colonies, telles que les Antilles Françaises, doivent être traitées en sœurs, et non pas en filles mineures, pour ne pas hasarder qu'elles s'émancipent d'elles-mêmes.'”

<sup>159</sup> J. Popkin, “Saint-Domingue, Slavery, and the Origins of the French Revolution,” 226.

<sup>160</sup> Louis-Marthe, marquis de Gouy d’Arsy, *Confession d’un député dans ses derniers momens, ou liste des péchés politiques de Louis-Marthe de Gouy* (Paris: May, 1791), 2, accessed March 22, 2017, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k57911032/f4.image>. De Gouy: “Depuis plusieurs mois, nous travaillions dans le silence à ce grand ouvrage, lorsqu'une nouvelle explosion de la haine des Amis des noirs nous prouva que les sentimens de cette Société, n'avaient été que concentrés, mais qu'ils n'en étaient pas moins dangereux.”

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 2-3. Gouy d’Arsy: “Quelques jours après, vingt-cinq mille exemplaires de ma réponse le couvrirent- de ridicule & de boue, aux yeux de la France entière; je pensais moins à me venger qu'à défendre la grande cause de l'esclavage que cet insensé attaquoit.”

Gouy d’Arsy clearly regarded the debates surrounding the free people of color as more expansive, and a continuation of earlier debates with the *Société*. Again, he linked the new debates to threats to the slave trade and trade with the colonies, as he did earlier in the year when he and his pro-slavery colleagues sought “to awaken the cities of commerce to the imminence of the danger which threatened us.”<sup>162</sup> Turning his attention to Grégoire, Gouy d’Arsy was determined to discredit Grégoire’s defense of free people of color as mere subterfuge for his genuine goal of abolition of slavery. He deliberately exaggerated Grégoire’s reaction to the brutal execution of Vincent Ogé, the free man of color broken on the wheel in February 1791 following his unsuccessful revolt in Saint-Domingue during the previous year.<sup>163</sup> Gouy d’Arsy accused Grégoire of threatening the white colonists with a slave insurrection, and he quoted the priest as saying on the floor of the National Assembly: “I could call for the vengeance of slaves on the heads of his executioners, but such language would not be that of a minister of peace.”<sup>164</sup> In fact, Grégoire did not mention the use of slaves for retribution against Ogé’s tormenters, but he did state in the May 11 session of the National Assembly that Ogé’s “blood cries for vengeance, but I stop; it is not for a minister of a God of peace to call for.”<sup>165</sup>

In addition to Chabanon’s and Gouy d’Arsy’s derisive critiques, Grégoire’s *Lettre aux citoyens de couleur* also came under attack in the National Assembly from deputies who viewed

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 3-4. Gouy d’Arsy: “En conséquence nous convînmes le 12 février d’éveiller les villes de commerce sur l’imminence du danger qui nous menaçait.”

<sup>163</sup> Dubois, *Colony of Citizens*, 104.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 9. Gouy d’Arsy: “Je pourrais appeler sur la tête de ses bourreaux la vengeance des esclaves, mais ce langage ne serait pas celui d’un ministre de paix!”

<sup>165</sup> *Archives parlementaires du 13 Avril au 11 Mai 1791*, 742. Grégoire: “Son sang crie vengeance; mais je m’arrête, ce n’est pas à un ministre d’un Dieu de paix de la réclamer.”

support for the rights of the free people of color as destabilizing to the racial hierarchy in the colonies, and thus slavery. Posted for all deputies of the National Assembly as an annex in the parliamentary record, Grégoire's *Lettre* renewed the acrimonious dialog of the debates over the May 15 decree between the Club Massiac and the *Société des amis des noirs*. At a session of the National Assembly on September 24, 1791, as plantations and towns continued to burn in Saint-Domingue, Malouet, who was prevented from speaking during that session, had his opinion made known through an annex. As he did in his refutation of Condorcet's *Réflexions*, Malouet reiterated his assertion that the colonists knew better than the deputies in the metropole what was good for the colonies, and he addressed the necessity of revoking the May 15 decree in light of what occurred in Saint-Domingue since "the issues relative to the condition of black slaves and free people of color" had been agitated by the majority of deputies in the metropole.<sup>166</sup>

Malouet asserted that the needs of the colonies required "an intermediate class, of which the race of emancipated men can only come about by two conditions: property and the interruption of all affinity with the slaves."<sup>167</sup> While he admitted that many of the free people of color met the property requirement that placed them on par with the white planters, he denied that they could separate themselves sufficiently from their connection with enslaved peoples.

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<sup>166</sup> *Archives parlementaires de 1787 à 1860. Recueil complet des débats législatifs et politiques des Chambres françaises. Archives parlementaires du 17 au 30 septembre 1791. Tome XXXI*, eds. M.J. Mavidal and M.E. Laurent (Paris: Société d'imprimerie et librairie administratives, 1888), 294, accessed February 12, 2017, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k49546n>. Malouet: "L'instant où l'on a agité en France, avec une grande considération, les questions relatives à la condition des noirs esclaves et des gens de couleur libres, était ce ui où le régime, relatif aux uns et aux autres, aurait reçu par les colons mêmes, plus éclairés sur leurs vrais intérêts, l'amélioration dont il est susceptible, en s'arrêtant toutefois au terme que leur prescrivent l'existence et sûreté des colonies."

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.* Malouet: "De là suit la nécessité d'une classe intermédiaire dont la race des affranchis ne peut sortir que par deux conditions : la propriété et l'interruption de toute affinité avec les esclaves."

“But all of which indispensable to the maintaining of this system cannot be granted them. What is it that is essential? It is that not only the slave but his family, his emancipated parents, can never be equal with the whites.”<sup>168</sup> Based on what he considered two indisputable prerequisites of for any legislation, he called for the revocation of the May 15 decree not merely because it was a bad law, but for the reason that it could be implemented in the colonies only through force.<sup>169</sup> Malouet left no doubt as to the implications of the debate over civil equality for the free people of color for the racial hierarchy of the colonial system. He argued that while a law such as the May 15 decree was ostensibly just and reasonable, it was still a bad law because “it attacks the bases and the supports of the social system which it is wants to submit to it, even if it were in this case to conform to the general principles of the justice of reason.”<sup>170</sup>

Though he was quick to denounce philosophical musings that condemned slavery, Malouet did not take issue when citing philosophers to justify the necessity of slavery due to the special conditions endemic to the colonies in the French West Indies. He cited Montesquieu’s contention that consistency in principles and means was important for any government. “What are the principles of the colonial system? What are the means of cultivation in the tropical zone?”

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid. Malouet: “Tout ce qui peut se concilier en cè genre avec le régime domestique des colonie, ne leur sera plus contesté par les blancs; mais tout ce qui est indispensable pour lè maintien de ce régime ne peut leur être accordé. On, qu'est-ce qui est indispensable? c'est que non seulement l'esclave mais sa famille, ses parents affranchis, ne puissent jamais être en parité avec les blancs.”

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 294-95.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 295. Malouet: “Une loi est mauvaise non seulement lorsqu'elle blesse les principes généraux de la justice et de la raison; mais encore lorsqu'elle attaque les bases et les appuis du régime social qu'on veut lui soumettre, quand même elle serait, dans ce cas-là, conforme aux principes généraux de la justice de la raison.”

Malouet asked the deputies of the National Assembly. "Slavery of the blacks," he answered.<sup>171</sup>

The words expressing his belief in the ultimate goal of the supporters of the free people of color contained no ambiguity, as he alleged:

It is therefore a matter of knowing if you want to destroy slavery, and I would say frankly that such is the intentions of the promoters of the decree of May 15th. Because such was the object of the establishment and the first work of the *Société des amis des noirs*, in France as in England. When they could not arrive right at the goal, they took, one after another, indirect routes to achieve it.

Thus, they attacked the slave trade. Obligated to yield again on this point, they considered the intermediate class between the blacks and the whites as a first level of the servitude which had to be destroyed; and in this they act very consistently. But why do they deny this consequence when we make an objection to them? Why do they say that they do not intend to change the colonial system, nor the domestic regimes on which it rests? What! It is up to them, who abhor this regime the most, whom we report to for the choice of the suitable means of preserving it. And the colonists, whose life and prosperity are attached to it, will appear to you mere suspects in this discussion! It is, gentlemen, I dare say a manner too new in which to judge these matters. And what must I do to enlighten you about the fateful error into which they lead you if you do not perceive the latest result, the same one that the adversaries of the colonies hide only clumsily? Did they not say to you here, "Perish the colonies, rather than our principles?" Did they not then say with great assurance that their innovations tend to the preservation, to the prosperity of the colonies? And when they are shown the extravagance of this safety, when they are pressed into their last entrenchments, do they not prepare you skillfully for consolations on the ruin of commerce and the colonies? Hear them; it is a little thing. The wound will easily heal, and the produce of the colonies and their influence are not what we believe.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid. Malouet: "Il s'agit donc de savoir si vous voulez détruire l'esclavage, et je dirai franchement que telle est l'intention des promoteurs du décret du 15 mai, car tel a été l'objet de l'établissement et des premiers travaux la Société des amis des noirs, en France comme en Angleterre; lorsqu'ils n'ont pu arriver droit au but, ils ont pris, l'une après autre, des voies détournées pour y parvenir.

Ainsi, ils ont attaqué la traite ; obligé de céder encore sur ce point, ils ont considéré la classe intermédiaire entre les noirs et les blancs, comme un premier échelon de la servitude qu'il fallait détruire, et en cela ils agissent très conséquemment. Mais pourquoi nient-ils cette conséquence, lorsqu'on leur en fait l'objection? Pourquoi di-sent-ils qu'ils n'entendent pas changer le système colonial, ni les régimes domestiques sur lesquels il repose? Quoi! C'est à eux, qui abhorrent le plus ce régime, que nous nous en rapportons pour le choix des moyens propres à le conserver, et les colons, dont la vie et la prospérité y sont attachées, vous paraîtront seuls suspects dans cette discussion! C'est, Messieurs, j'ose le dire une manière aussi neuve que déraisonnable de juger de



## CHAPTER 5

## CONCLUSION

At the end of the session of September 24, 1791, the May 15 decree was revoked and the National Assembly sent three commissioners to Saint-Domingue with the charge of promulgating the new decree and overseeing the restoration of order from the slave uprisings as well as the revolt of many free people of color.<sup>173</sup> No matter how disappointing the setback of the revocation of the May 15 decree, Condorcet and Grégoire would live to see slavery abolished by the National Convention in France's colonies in February 1794. However, Napoleon reintroduced slavery in May 1802, but his efforts to reimpose slavery in Saint-Domingue failed, and Haitians would win their independence in 1804. The French would not abolish slavery permanently until the decree of 27 April 1848.<sup>174</sup> While Condorcet's personal advocacy for the abolition of slavery would end prematurely when he became a victim of the Terror in March 1794,<sup>175</sup> Grégoire continued to be a tireless campaigner on behalf of enslaved peoples for the rest

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telles questions. Et que faut-il donc pour vous éclairer sur l'erreur funeste dans laquelle on vous entraîne, si vous n'en apercevez pas le dernier résultat, celui même que; les adversaires des colonies ne dissimulent que maladroitement? Ne vous ont-ils pas dit ici: "Périssent les colonies plutôt que nos principes?" Ne disent-ils pas ensuite, avec une grande assurance, que leurs innovations tendent à la conservation, à la prospérité des colonies? Et lorsqu'on leur démontre l'extravagance de cette sécurité, lorsqu'on les presse dans leurs derniers retranchements, ne vous préparent-ils pas adroitement des consolations sur la ruine du commerce et des colonies? À les entendre, c'est peu de chose; cette plaie se cicatrisera facilement; le produit des colonies et leur influence ne sont pas ce que l'on croit."

<sup>173</sup> J. Popkin, *You Are All Free*, 38.

<sup>174</sup> M'Baye Gueye, "From Definitive Manumissions to the Emancipation of 1848," in *The Abolitions of Slavery: From Léger Sonthonax to Victor Schœlcher 1793, 1794, 1848*, ed. Marcel Dorigny, 318-29 (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003), 322.

<sup>175</sup> Condorcet's death in his prison cell at Bourg-la-Reine on March 28, 1794, remains shrouded in mystery. For the various conjectures concerning his death, see "Épilogue," E. and R. Badinter, *Condorcet*, 619-21.

of his life, writing prolifically on the subject throughout the years of the Directory, Napoléon, and the Bourbon Restoration.<sup>176</sup> Their joint interment in the Panthéon was a testament to the high esteem with which France values Condorcet's and Grégoire's support for human rights.

Condorcet and Grégoire chiseled away at the foundational edifice that supported the institution of slavery in the Atlantic world, namely racial inequality. Though presentist arguments are quick to reproach both men for their gradual approach to abolitionism, it cannot be denied that the two thinkers were far ahead of their time in their advocacy for legal equality irrespective of race. Both men had to navigate the sociopolitical fluidity of the French Revolution, a feat that often called for compromise as pragmatic political considerations often had to be weighed against their progressive philosophies. Like their nemeses who comprised the pro-slavery faction, Condorcet and Grégoire were aware of the impact that a breach in the barricade of racial hierarchy would have on the despotism of French colonial slavery and a future enlightened humanity. While hiding from the Terror at the home of Madame Vernet following the issuance of an arrest warrant from the Committee of Public Safety in October 1793,<sup>177</sup> Condorcet still mustered the words to reflect his optimism for the future, declaring:

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<sup>176</sup> Besides those mentioned in this study, Grégoire's major works on slavery include: *De la liberté de conscience et de culte à Haïti (1824)*, in *Œuvres de l'Abbé Grégoire, Vol. 8*, (Nendeln, Liechtenstein: KTO Press, 1977), 137-184; *De la noblesse de la peau ou de préjugé des blancs contre la couleur des Africaines et celle de leurs descendants noirs et sang-mêlés (1826)*, in *Œuvres de l'Abbé Grégoire, Vol. 8*, (Nendeln, Liechtenstein: KTO Press, 1977), 185-266; *On the Cultural Achievements of Negroes (1808)*, trans. Thomas Cassirer and Jean-François Brière (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996).

<sup>177</sup> Williams, *Condorcet and Modernity*, 42-43.

The time will therefore come when the sun will shine only on free men who know no other master but their reason; when tyrants and slaves, priests and their stupid or hypocritical instruments will exist only in works of history and on the stage; and when we shall think of them only to pity their victims and their dupes; to maintain ourselves in a state of vigilance by thinking on their excesses; and to learn how to recognize and so to destroy, by force of reason, the first seeds of tyranny and superstition, should they ever dare to reappear amongst us.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Jean-Antoine-Nicolas de Caritat, marquis de Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* (1794), trans. June Barraclough (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979), 179.

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