

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

“WORK, FAMILY, AND PUBLIC ORDER”: SLAVERY,  
EMANCIPATION, AND FAMILY POLITICS IN THE NINETEENTH-  
CENTURY FRENCH ANTILLES

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Abbreviations	...iii
List of Tables	...iv
List of Charts	...v
List of Images	...vi
List of Maps	...vii
Dissertation Abstract	...viii
Acknowledgements	...xv
Introduction	...1
<b>PART I: ABOLITIONIST FAMILY POLITICS AND SLAVERY</b>	
Chapter One. “A profound and natural antipathy between marriage and slavery:” French Abolitionism during the July Monarchy	...40
Chapter Two. “This principle <i>that the slave family is indivisible:</i> ” Patriarchy, Slavery, and Amelioration in the French Antilles, 1830-1848	...107
<b>PART II. FAMILY POLITICS IN THE POST-EMANCIPATION ERA</b>	
Chapter Three. “ <i>Vive le mariage! Vive la liberté!</i> ” Republican Family Politics and Revolutionary Emancipation, 1848-1852	...186
Chapter Four. “We are living in a different age:” Labor, Gender, and Family Politics from Emancipation to the <i>Fin de Siècle</i>	...241
Epilogue. “The taste of family:” Multiethnic Working Families after Slavery	...313
Appendix: Demographic Data	...339
Bibliography	...352

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AD-G: Archives Départementales de la Guadeloupe  
AD-M: Archives Départementales de la Martinique  
AN: Archives Nationales (Paris and Pierrefitte)  
ANOM: Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer  
ANOM IREL: Online database for the Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer  
BNF: Bibliothèque Nationale de France  
BFAS: British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society  
SFAE: Société Française pour l'Abolition de l'Esclavage  
SMC: Société de la Morale Chrétienne

## LIST OF TABLES

1.1: Births per 1,000 in the Enslaved Populations of Martinique and Guadeloupe, 1834-1847	...80
2.1: The Free People of Color and White Populations, 1802-1826	...122
2.2: Registered Freedom Patents in Martinique, 1830-1840	...154
2.3: Select Manumissions in Martinique in 1842 by Sex, Age, and Occupation	...161
2.4: Select Manumissions in Guadeloupe in 1842 by Sex and Occupation	...162
4.1: Decennial Sugar v. Foodstuff Cultivation in Martinique	...273
4.2: Decennial Sugar v. Foodstuff Cultivation in Guadeloupe	...273
A.1: Populations of Martinique and Guadeloupe, 1831-1847	...339
A.2: Estimated Number of African Captives Disembarked in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana, 1800-1831	...340
A.3: Births in Martinique, 1832-1847	...341
A.4: Deaths in Martinique, 1832-1847	...342
A.5: Marriages in Martinique, 1835-1847	...343
A.6: Births in Guadeloupe, 1832-1847	...344
A.7: Deaths in Guadeloupe, 1832-1847	...345
A.8: Marriages in Guadeloupe, 1835-1847	...346
A.9: Resident Populations and Marriages per 1,000 in Martinique, 1848-1890	...347
A.10: Resident Populations and Marriages per 1,000 in Guadeloupe, 1848-1890	...349
A.11: Number of European, African, South Asian, and Chinese Indentured Laborers in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana, 1853-1888	...351

## LIST OF CHARTS

1.1: Number of Births v. Deaths in the Enslaved Population of Guadeloupe, 1834-1847	...81
1.2: Number of Births v. Deaths in the Enslaved Population of Martinique, 1834-1847	...82
2.1: Free and Enslaved Marriages, Martinique, 1835-1847	...143
2.2: Free and Enslaved Marriages, Guadeloupe, 1835-1847	...143
4.1: Marriages in the French Antilles, 1848-1888	...282

## LIST OF IMAGES

IMG 3.1: <i>Mariages des esclaves, achat de dessins lithographiés pour être envoyés aux colonies, 1847</i>	...206
IMG 4.1: <i>Marchande d'écrevisses</i>	...306
IMG 4.2: <i>Martinique. Fort-de-France. Compagnie Transatlantique. Porteuses de charbon</i>	...310
IMG 5.1: <i>Famille d'Indiens Travaillant La Canne à Sucre. Guadeloupe</i>	...328
IMG 5.2: <i>Groupe de Femmes et de Jeunes Filles Indiennes</i>	...334

## LIST OF MAPS

Map 0.1: The Lesser Antilles and the Americas	...xxi
Map 0.2: Martinique, Dominica, Guadeloupe and Its Dependencies	...12

## DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Slavery was abolished in the French empire for the second time in 1848. Abolition was preceded by an almost twenty-year period of debate in both France and the colonies over the fate of slavery, when enslaved people, anti-slavery advocates, and pro-slavery factions struggled to dismantle—or preserve—the colonial order while articulating claims about what freedom ought to be. In the aftermath of emancipation, these struggles took on new forms and meaning as freedpeople, planters, and imperial policymakers clashed over labor, public order, and civil rights.

This dissertation examines how enslaved and freed persons, colonial authorities, and metropolitan abolitionists perceived, experienced, and contested the transition from slavery to emancipation in nineteenth-century Martinique and Guadeloupe through a multivalent concept I refer to as “family politics.” As I employ it, family politics denotes discourse about, policies regarding, and practices of, intimacy, love, and power within networks of kinship, co-residence, parentage, and marriage. Thus, family politics pertains as much to the everyday interactions and intimate relationships between men, women, and children as it does to political discourse and policies promulgated by colonial elites and abolitionist reformers who perceived the family as the site on which political power and social order should be constructed. I argue that, through discourse, policies, and in practice, enslaved and freed persons, colonial elites, and metropolitan abolitionists all mobilized family politics to try to fashion a political and social order after the collapse of slavery. My focus on family politics during the transition from slavery to freedom in the French Antilles invites several new considerations of the social conflicts at the core of slavery, abolition, and emancipation in nineteenth-century Martinique and Guadeloupe.



Scholarly emphasis on the influence of British anti-slavery on French abolitionists has often framed the French anti-slavery movement as an anemic imitation of the more robust Anglo model and hampered by cautious conservatism. However, my research uncovers how French abolitionists' concern with family life among the enslaved populations became the central framework through which they identified, tried,—and ultimately—failed to address colonial problems. Specifically, French anti-slavery advocates viewed the family as a moralizing influence, which would fashion enslaved persons into industrious free workers. During the 1830s and 1840s, metropolitan reformers implemented colonial reform policies (referred to as amelioration) that, among other measures, promoted marriage and strengthened protections for the enslaved family.

Current historiography, however, has largely emphasized the inefficacy of French amelioration policies, given their abbreviated implementation a few years before emancipation. However, this argument that amelioration was simply illusory obscures the ways in which enslaved persons mobilized these policies to challenge the slave regime during the crucial years before its demise. Through an analysis of legal suits that were brought by enslaved and freed women during amelioration, which asserted illegal separation from family members or corporeal abuse, the project reveals the ways in which enslaved persons adopted abolitionist family politics to challenge slaveholders and make new claims to freedom. As a result, the dissertation highlights the new vulnerabilities in slaveholders' authority and power that emerged in the two decades before emancipation.

The dissertation's analysis of family politics also reframes historiographical understandings of the emancipation project and post-emancipation era in Martinique and Guadeloupe. From 1848-1852, republican colonial administrators capitalized on French

abolitionists' family politics to oversee the transition from slavery to freedom. Similar to metropolitan anti-slavery advocates, republican administrators emphasized marriage, work, and the family as civilizing institutions that would transform enslaved persons into citizens. As part of this family politics, administrators adopted racial fusion as the bedrock of post-emancipation society. Racial fusion was an imperial ideology that accepted all colonial subjects as nominally free, equal, and French—yet also held that formerly enslaved persons needed to defer to colonial elites and learn civil values, hard work, and public order by remaining on the plantations. This contradiction at the core of racial fusion—that freedpeople were French, but required a moralizing influence in order to become full citizens—allowed colonial authorities to implement disciplinary policies intended for the continued expropriation of black labor in service of the plantation economy. While racial fusion thus nominally espoused equality without regard to race or previous status as enslaved or free, in practice, it was an imperialist family politics that justified the continued domination of formerly enslaved colonial subjects.

The project's analysis of labor and social order in the late nineteenth-century French Antilles underscores how racial fusion gave way to colonial elites' exploitation of the black working populations. After abolition, freedpeople sought to establish themselves independently from the estates, and in response, colonial administrators implemented a variety of mechanisms to maintain a dependent plantation labor force. Authorities turned to bureaucratic tools such as the census, tax rolls, and civil registers to compel whole families back to plantation labor and otherwise secure the interests of large-scale proprietors. As authorities passed laws that punished freedpeople for labor violations, they implicitly and explicitly linked what they viewed as “unproductive” labor, sexuality, and reproduction to black workers. Colonial elites mobilized

these racialist and gendered justifications for the continued exploitation of the working populations of Martinique and Guadeloupe through the turn of the century.

For both metropolitan reformers and colonial elites, therefore, family politics fundamentally functioned as a tool of discipline, which they believed would transform enslaved persons into industrious and obedient workers. Thus, similar to scholars of empire, who have traced the ways in which imperial domination was constructed on categories of race, sex, and gender, I conceptualize the family politics of abolitionist reformers and colonial elites as a manifestation of imperial biopolitics. In discourse and in policies, their family politics emphasized the need for disciplining and controlling the labor of black colonial subjects—which gave rise to the rigid and racialist hierarchies of domination that structured the late-nineteenth-century French empire.

Family politics also, however, reveal the ways in which enslaved and freed persons pushed back—either directly or indirectly—on their continued expropriation. Indeed, during slavery and the post-emancipation era, enslaved and freed persons maintained their own family politics that both adapted to and competed with the norms reformers, policymakers, and planters dictated. The alternative social and cultural institutions that enslaved and freed peoples created over the course of the nineteenth century served as survival strategies, as a means of establishing autonomy, and as a space from which they could counteract the continued exploitation of their labor.

In this respect, my understanding of enslaved and freed peoples' family politics in practice—that is, the (re)constitution of the social and cultural interactions that anchored quotidian customs of kinship, intimacy, and love—draws on the rich scholarship of anthropologists and historians of slavery and its afterlives in the Americas. This scholarship has argued that enslaved and freed

people built enduring cultural, social, and political institutions that adapted, modified, and competed with those structures imposed on them from above. My research on family politics reveals similar patterns in Martinique and Guadeloupe. In the French Antilles, freedpeople practiced a variety of intimate conjugal relationships that did not necessarily prioritize marriage, engaged in family-run enterprises, and legalized their kin ties (often blended and matrifocal) in the civil registers of their communes, among other examples.

My focus on family politics also reveals how enslaved and freed women played an essential role in establishing autonomy before and after slavery. Black women cultivated kin networks according to their own social and cultural customs. Working women also established themselves as heads of their households and, through their labor and entrepreneurialism, became integral to the post-slavery economy. The working women of Martinique and Guadeloupe therefore fashioned the alternative family norms and economic institutions that defied the expectations of colonial elites.

Drawing on notarial, civil, and administrative archives in France, Martinique, and Guadeloupe to reconstruct a social and political history of slavery, abolition, and emancipation, this dissertation employs family politics to make three main arguments. Firstly, I argue that family politics allowed black women to play an integral role in both challenging repressive policies in slavery and freedom and preserving freedpeoples' autonomy in post-emancipation Martinique and Guadeloupe. Secondly, my analysis of family politics highlights the enduring connections, rather than ruptures, between slavery, abolition, and emancipation in the French Antilles. For example, while reformers and colonial authorities nominally embraced racial fusion and egalitarian citizenship before abolition, they also carefully mobilized this discourse to strengthen racial domination in the post-emancipation era—with the overall aim of maintaining

the coercive labor system integral to the plantation economy. Thus, the discourse of family politics that French abolitionists and colonial elites espoused resonated more with planters' patriarchal slaveholding ethos—emphasizing how the ways of the former order survived long after freedom. Thirdly, family politics reveal the ways in which enslaved and freed persons in nineteenth-century Martinique and Guadeloupe pushed authorities and elites to recognize their rights and accommodate their alternative social and cultural institutions. In this way, the project contributes to ongoing scholarship that prompts us to consider freedpeople's protracted struggle for civil inclusion in the French empire.

The dissertation is divided into two parts, comprised of an Introduction, four chapters, and an Epilogue. Part I, "Abolitionist Family Politics and Slavery," traces the development of abolitionist family politics in France and its implications for and consequences in Martinique and Guadeloupe from 1830-1848. Drawing on discourses of family and social order prevalent in nineteenth-century France, metropolitan abolitionists implemented amelioration policies in order to reform enslaved people through their family lives and attenuate the absolute authority of slaveholders. During amelioration in the 1830s and 1840s, enslaved people seized on these reforms to challenge the absolute authority of slave owners. Several important lawsuits submitted by enslaved and freed women asserted illegal family separation or abusive treatment under these policies, which compelled colonial officials to investigate and adjudicate these claims. The legal challenges that these women raised during this period reveal how, rather than a series of superficial measures, amelioration created a space in which colonial administrators, enslaved persons, and slaveholders reformulated the boundaries of authority and bondage—during a critical moment of vulnerability before the final collapse of slavery.

The two chapters and Epilogue in Part II, “Family Politics in the Post-Emancipation Era,” examine the family politics of the republican emancipation project and the post-emancipation period through the *fin-de-siècle*. I show how policymakers and elites employed family politics as a tool for moralizing and disciplining freedpeople into plantation workers. The census, the tax roll, the civil registers, and the legal system were all employed to affix the black family to plantation production. Freedpeople, however, rejected or modified these family policies. They maneuvered around legal and civil family norms for the purpose of evading labor restrictions and they established familial structures and kin networks according to their own needs and customs. The alternative and vibrant social and cultural institutions that freedpeople created served as survival strategies and a means of establishing economic and social autonomy from the plantation regime. The family politics of the working populations of Martinique and Guadeloupe therefore manifested their broader struggle over the meaning, scope, and practice of freedom in the late nineteenth century.

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Map 0.1: The Lesser Antilles and the Americas<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Map: Wikipedia commons, CC BY-SA 3.0. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Caribbean\\_general\\_map.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Caribbean_general_map.png)

## Introduction.

### Three Families

December 20, 1848. “The negro Youcar left the plantation with his wife to go work for Madame de la Salle.”<sup>1</sup> So marked the first occasion when some formerly enslaved workers departed the plantation of Pierre Dessalles—one of the most prominent planters in Martinique—in search of better wages or opportunities after the abolition of slavery. It was a turbulent time, as emancipation came to the island in May of that year following slave uprisings in the colonies and a revolution in France. In December of 1848, the repressive policies designed to force freedpeople back to the estates had yet to be implemented, and the influx of subsidized indentured immigrants brought from South Asia, Africa, and China as cheap labor had not yet arrived. For freedpeople, it was a time of jubilation and opportunity.<sup>2</sup>

For probably the first time in their lives Youcar and his unnamed wife had options: to seek out wages for their labor, to move, and to prioritize their own needs and aspirations. And so, they made a decision to leave *Nouvelle Cité*, where near-daily conflicts broke out between formerly enslaved workers and Dessalles over the terms of sharecropping contracts.<sup>3</sup> Madame de la Salle could possibly afford to pay wages, and, in addition to the cash, Youcar and his wife perhaps rented a house and a garden on her property—a private home and the chance to grow

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Dessalles, diary entry for December 20, 1848 in Pierre Dessalles, *La vie d'un colon de la Martinique* Vol. 4, Henri de Frémont and Léo Elisabeth, eds. (Courbevoie, France: H. de Frémont [51 rue de Visien 92400]: 1985), 97. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

“Le nègre Youcar est sorti de l’habitation avec sa femme et a été se placer chez M<sup>me</sup> de La Salle.”

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, diary entry for June 8, 1848, 48, where Dessalles describes the celebrations and dancing of the population in Saint Pierre. Other diary entries for that month discuss the energetic movement of freedpeople throughout the towns and countryside.

<sup>3</sup> See *ibid*, diary entries from July-December, 1848 for numerous examples.

some crops or raise livestock for another source of income.<sup>4</sup> Apprehension, exhilaration, and perhaps a sense of disbelief must have swirled in their heads as Youcar and his wife deliberated their options. When they left the plantation where they had likely been enslaved all their lives, one could imagine that they felt the full weight of their decision to leave the home they had known for the possibilities that freedom afforded.

October 1850. In dire financial straits, the formerly enslaved Saturnin returned home to Martinique from a lengthy sojourn in Guadeloupe. He must have been anxious about his homecoming. Saturnin had left in a hurry two years' previously after earning the wrath of his father and former master, Pierre Dessalles. He came back to Martinique partly at the behest of his half-sister, Calixte Valmenier (née Dessalles), to care for their aging father and, likely, saw this as an opportunity to earn a living. Saturnin would beg Dessalles for forgiveness for his "wrongs," which mostly consisted of teaching formerly enslaved workers (like Youcar and his wife) to read and urging them to push Dessalles for wages rather than sharecropping arrangements. He also would marry Rosélie, a formerly enslaved woman who lived in the bourg of Sainte Marie. Together, Saturnin, his wife, and their two children lived with Dessalles for the remainder of his life in Martinique.<sup>5</sup> It was a tense arrangement, as fights erupted when Rosélie or Saturnin demanded that Dessalles accord them respect as free persons and acknowledge that he was no longer the absolute authority figure. They all struggled to adjust to a tenuous post-

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 97 fn234.

<sup>5</sup> Dessalles died on a visit to France on March 5, 1857. See Elborg Foster and Robert Foster, trans. and eds., *Sugar and Slavery, Family and Race: The Letters and Diaries of Pierre Dessalles, Planter in Martinique, 1808-1856* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 314.

slavery dynamic in which former masters and former slaves were forced to accommodate each other in new ways.<sup>6</sup>

May 10, 1881. Raymond Frontier, a cultivator in Macouba, married Marie Elizabeth Salmon, a “cultivator born in India...the natural and recognized daughter of Miss Allamellon...also a [Indian] cultivator residing in the same place.”<sup>7</sup> Raymond, an Afro-Martinican farmer, already had two daughters with Marie Elizabeth. Another daughter, Philomène, would arrive in about four months.<sup>8</sup> Marie Elizabeth and her mother Allamellon had been settled in Martinique for some time, and were most likely British subjects from India or former residents of France’s *Établissement Français de l’Inde* who had fled poverty, famine, or other troubles at home. Together, mother and daughter made the arduous journey across the world for the promise of a better situation—indenturing themselves to one of the sugar estates in Macouba. Over the course of the late nineteenth-century, the multiethnic and interracial Frontier-Salmon family continued to grow with three more children—and had abiding roots in the region during the twentieth century, as Philomène Frontier died in the neighboring commune of Basse-Pointe in December 1967.<sup>9</sup> Constituted almost a generation after the abolition of slavery, the Frontier-Salmon family was representative of the vast changes in the social and cultural

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<sup>6</sup> See Pierre Dessalles, diary entry for September 25, 30, and October 16, 1850 in *La vie d’un colon de la Martinique* Vol. 1, 193-6. Also see diary entries for 1851-1856 for the Dessalles-Saturnin household.

<sup>7</sup> ANOM IREL, *Régistres de l’état civil du commune Macouba*, 1881, Entry #49, “Mariage de Sieur Frontier (Raymond) et la demoiselle Salmon (Marie Elizabeth).”

“Le sieur Raymond Frontier, cultivateur, né et domicilié au Macouba...Et la demoiselle Marie -Elizabeth Salmon, cultivatrice née dans l’Inde, domiciliée au Macouba...fille naturelle reconnue de demoiselle Allamellon...aussi cultivatrice, domiciliée au même lieu.”

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 1881, Entry #142, “Naissance de la demoiselle Frontier (Philomène).”

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, (margin inscription).



composition of the laboring populations of the French Antilles, which had become increasingly multiethnic, polyglot, and mixed by the turn of the century.

Taken together, the stories of these three families represent many of the aspirations and struggles of colonial subjects living in the French Antilles during the transition from slavery to freedom. This project is about these and countless other families—composed of enslaved, freed, and mixed-race peoples—who helped to shape the contours of slavery and emancipation in nineteenth-century Martinique and Guadeloupe. The dissertation is also about how French reformers, colonial authorities, and Antillean proprietors tried to discipline, remake, and order a post-slavery society by reforming the family lives of the laboring populations. At its core, therefore, this project is about how the family became an essential site for the construction of a new social order in post-emancipation Martinique and Guadeloupe.

### Family Politics

The transition from slavery to freedom in the French Antilles was a process that—sometimes implicitly and sometimes consciously—was understood and articulated through what I refer to in this project as family politics. As I employ it, family politics is a multivalent concept that references discourse about, policies regarding, and practices of, intimacy, love, and power within networks of kinship, co-residence, parentage, and marriage. Thus, family politics refer as much to the quotidian intimate and social relationships between men, women, and children as it does to the discourse and policies of elites, reformers, and authorities that framed the family as a terrain on which political power and social order should be constructed. Through discourse, policies, and in practice, enslaved and freed persons, planters, reformers, and colonial authorities mobilized family politics to fashion a political and social order in the absence of slavery.

My conceptualization of family politics draws on a vast historiography on revolutionary France, post-colonial studies of race, sex, and gender, and scholarship on slavery and its afterlives in the Americas. As discourse, family politics reflects what historians have argued about the family model of politics in revolutionary and post-revolutionary France—that family was the foundation for reconceptualizing political power in the absence of a monarchy and the foundation upon which republican citizens were to be formed.<sup>10</sup> Like republican revolutionaries and Napoleonic jurists, metropolitan anti-slavery reformers in the 1830s and 1840s adopted the family as a tool for reimagining and reorganizing social and political order in the colonies after abolition.

Specifically, these French abolitionists viewed the family as a moralizing institution—the key to reforming both the white and nonwhite colonial populations. Through family politics, French anti-slavery advocates perceived abolition as a moralization project that would generate a stable, orderly, and productive post-slavery society and economy. Thus, reformers implemented reform policies that, among other measures, promoted marriage and strengthened protections for the enslaved family. In particular, abolitionists intended for amelioration (a series of colonial reform policies drafted by French reformers that were passed by either royal edict or

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<sup>10</sup> Drawing on Freud's theory of the family romance (that relationships within the household are critical to how individuals think about political authority), Lynn Hunt conceptualized the family model of politics as critical to the French Revolution, when radical revolutionaries replaced paternal authoritarianism with fraternal republicanism. See: Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 1-16. In addition to Hunt, Suzanne Desan's study has demonstrated the ways in which republicans instituted new family laws and reforms in effort to impose these politics in the household. See: Suzanne Desan, *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), especially 47-92. For family, power, and politics in nineteenth-century France, see: Jennifer Ngaire Heuer, *The Family and the Nation: Gender and Citizenship in Revolutionary France, 1789-1830* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 15-120; Martine Segalen, *Mari et femme dans la Société paysanne* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980); and Katherine Lynch, *Family, Class, and Ideology in Early Industrial France: Social Policy and the Working Class Family, 1825-1848* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988). Finally, in her study of gender in nineteenth-century Europe, Joan Scott established that politics and gender are co-constitutive. See: Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018 [first published in 1988]), 28-52.

parliamentary legislation during the 1830s and 1840s) to reform enslaved persons through their family lives in order to manage a stable transition from slave to free labor.

During the emancipation project of 1848-1852, republican colonial administrators capitalized on French anti-slavery's family politics to oversee the transition from slavery to freedom. Similar to abolitionists reformers, republican administrators emphasized marriage, work, and the family as civilizing institutions that would transform enslaved persons into citizens. As part of this family politics, republican administrators adopted racial fusion as the bedrock of post-emancipation society. Racial fusion was an imperial ideology that accepted all colonial subjects as nominally free, equal, and French—yet also held that formerly enslaved persons needed to defer to elites and authorities and learn civil values, hard work, and public order by remaining on the plantations. This contradiction at the core of racial fusion—that former slaves were French, but needed a moralizing influence in order to become fully-fledged citizens—allowed these same authorities to pass disciplinary policies designed for the continued expropriation of black labor in service of the plantation economy.<sup>11</sup> While racial fusion thus nominally espoused equality without regard to race or previous status as enslaved or free, in practice, it was an imperialist family politics that justified the continued domination of formerly enslaved colonial subjects.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> For examples of this in post-1848 Réunion, see: Françoise Vèrges, *Monsters and Revolutionaries: Colonial Family Romance and Métissage* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 1-21.

<sup>12</sup> Foucault's conceptualization of biopower has influenced this argument. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, 140-3. Furthermore, Elizabeth Colwill's study of Toussaint Louverture's marriage encouragement in his post-emancipation labor laws demonstrates suggestive connections between the 1848 republican conceptualization of marriages as the foundation for a new labor order and the late 1790s discourse that argued marriage and family were key to economic revitalization and labor discipline. See Elizabeth Colwill, "Freedwomen's Familial Politics: Marriage, War and Rites of Registry in Post-Emancipation Saint-Domingue" in Karen Hagemann and Jane Rendall, eds., *Gender, War and Politics: Transatlantic Perspectives, 1775-1830* (New York: Macmillan, 2010), 75-8.

Indeed, colonial elites implemented a variety of mechanisms to maintain a dependent plantation labor force over the course of the nineteenth century. After abolition, freed families (like Youcar and his wife) sought to establish themselves independently from the estates. As a result, many freedpeople sought work in the cities, to own, lease, and farm small plots of land, and perform only seasonal wage labor on the plantations. In response, colonial administrators turned to bureaucratic tools such as the census, tax rolls, and civil registers to compel whole families back to plantation labor and otherwise secure the interests of large-scale proprietors. As authorities passed laws that punished freedpeople for labor violations, they implicitly and explicitly linked what they viewed as “unproductive” labor, sexuality, and reproduction to freedpeople. This discourse provided colonial elites with the racialist and gendered justifications for the continued exploitation of and interference in the labor and lives of the working populations of Martinique and Guadeloupe.

Taken together, French anti-slavery reformers, *colons* and colonial authorities in Martinique and Guadeloupe thus understood family as a tool of discipline, which would transform enslaved persons into industrious and obedient workers. Therefore, similar to scholars of empire, who have traced the ways in which imperial domination was constructed on categories of race, sex, and gender, I conceptualize the family politics of metropolitan abolitionists and colonial elites as a manifestation of colonial biopolitics.<sup>13</sup> In discourse and in policy, the family politics of French reformers and colonial elites emphasized the need for

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<sup>13</sup> For instance, Ann Stoler has argued that the family, sex, and intimacy in European empires were integral to the technologies and tools of colonial domination and the formation of racialized hierarchies. See: Ann Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010 [first published 2002]), 41-111; and idem, “Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies,” *The Journal of American History* Vol. 88, no. 3 (Dec., 2001): 829-65.

disciplining and controlling the labor of black colonial subjects—which gave rise to the rigid and racist hierarchies of domination that underscored the late-nineteenth-century French empire.<sup>14</sup>

Family politics also, however, reveal the ways in which enslaved and freed persons pushed back—either directly or indirectly—on these restrictions as they safeguarded their own aims and customs. Indeed, during slavery and the post-emancipation era, enslaved and freed persons maintained their own family politics that both drew on and competed with the norms policymakers and *colons* dictated. The alternative social and cultural institutions that enslaved and freed peoples created over the course of the nineteenth century served as survival strategies, as a means of establishing autonomy, and as a space from which they could counteract the continued exploitation of their labor.

For example, freedpeople practiced a variety of intimate conjugal relationships that did not necessarily prioritize marriage, sought to buy land that they then farmed in common with relatives, engaged in family-run businesses, and legalized their kin ties (often blended and matrifocal) in the civil registers of their communes, among other examples. Enslaved and freed women thus played an essential role in family politics. For example, when metropolitan reformers implemented policies designed to prevent the separation of slave families, it was enslaved women who compelled colonial authorities to enforce these laws as they pursued a variety of legal strategies for manumission. After abolition, working women established themselves as heads of their households and, through their labor and entrepreneurialism, became integral to the post-slavery economy. Black women also cultivated kin and community networks according to their own social and cultural customs. The laboring women of Martinique and

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<sup>14</sup> See: Vèrges, *Monsters and Revolutionaries*, 1-21; Myriam Cottias, “Gender and Republican Citizenship in the French West Indies, 1848-1945,” *Slavery and Abolition* Vol. 26, no. 2 (August: 2005), 233-45; and Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall, eds., *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

Guadeloupe therefore constituted alternative family norms and pursued many different paths to autonomy that defied the expectations of colonial and metropolitan authorities.

In this respect, my understanding of freedpeoples' family politics in practice—that is, the (re)constitution of the social and cultural interactions that anchored quotidian customs of kinship, intimacy, and love—draws on the rich scholarship of anthropologists and historians of slavery and its afterlives in the Americas. These scholars have argued that freedpeople built enduring cultural, social, and political institutions that adapted, modified, and competed with those structures imposed on them from above.<sup>15</sup> By analyzing the transition from slavery to freedom (and the conflicts this transition engendered between colonial elites, reformers, and freedpeople) through the lens of family politics, this project thus contributes to scholarship on the structural continuities in the long history of slavery and its afterlives in the Americas.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> For freedpeoples' cultural and social institutions in the post-emancipation Americas, see: Sidney Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations* (Chicago: Aldine, 1974); Michel Rolph-Trouillot, "Culture on the Edges: Creolization in the Plantation Context" *Plantation Society in the Americas*, Vol. 5 (1998): 8-28; Sidney Mintz and Richard Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); Walter Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981); Richard Price, *The Convict and the Colonel: A Story of Colonialism and Resistance in the Caribbean* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Edith Clarke, *My Mother Who Fathered Me: A Study of the Family in Three Selected Communities in Jamaica* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1957); Michael Horowitz, *Morne-Paysan, Peasant Village in Martinique* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976); Mimi Sheller, *Citizenship from Below: Erotic Agency and Caribbean Freedom* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); and Jean Besson, *Martha Brae's Two Histories: European Expansion and Caribbean Culture-Building in Jamaica* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> See: Thomas Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Frederick Cooper, Thomas Holt, and Rebecca Scott, *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Post-Emancipation Societies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Jason McGraw, *The Work of Recognition: Caribbean Colombia and the Postemancipation Struggle for Citizenship* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Rebecca Scott, *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba after Slavery* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005); Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003); Nan Woodruff, *American Congo: The African American Freedom Struggle in the Delta* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Julie Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction: From Slave to Wage Laborer in South Carolina* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Alan Adamson, *Sugar without Slaves: The Political Economy of British Guiana, 1838-1904* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972); Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); and Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People*.

The dissertation employs an analysis family politics to make three central arguments. Firstly, my examination of family politics renders visible the integral role of black women in challenging the repressive policies that shaped both the slavery and post-slavery regimes. Over the course of the 1830s to the turn of the century, enslaved and freed women were able to draw on family politics to mount legal and administrative challenges against the colonial order. Women used the courts to sue for the freedom of family members, establish themselves as heads of their households, and through their labor and entrepreneurialism, were otherwise instrumental agents in maintaining a degree of separation between their families and the plantation. My focus on the ways in which black women interacted with the colonial administration in order to advance and protect their own interests, thus allows for an examination of their integral role in using family politics to preserve freedpeoples' autonomy in post-emancipation Martinique and Guadeloupe.

Secondly, an understanding of how family politics shaped the transition to freedom in the French Antilles underscores the enduring connections, rather than ruptures, between slavery, abolition, and emancipation. For example, while reformers and colonial authorities nominally embraced a republican discourse of racial fusion and egalitarian citizenship before abolition, they carefully mobilized this discourse to strengthen racial domination and racialist hierarchies in the post-emancipation era—with the overall aim of maintaining the coercive labor system integral to the plantation economy. Thus, the discourse of family politics that French abolitionists and colonial elites espoused resonated more with planters' patriarchal slaveholding ethos—demonstrating the degree to which the former order continued to have salience long after freedom.

Thirdly, an analysis of family politics reveals the ways in which enslaved and freed persons in nineteenth-century Martinique and Guadeloupe demanded rights from the state through their

family lives. For example, as abolitionists imposed amelioration policies in the colonies, which included protections for slave families, enslaved men and women marshaled these laws to challenge the legal limits of slaveholders' authority. During the post-emancipation period, administrators' efforts to impose patriarchal norms on freed families through civil registers backfired as these authorities were compelled to accommodate the preponderance of female-headed households. In bondage and in freedom, therefore, enslaved and freed persons pushed authorities and elites to recognize their family politics: such as the indivisibility of the family, customary rights to land, and the authority of women in matrifocal households. Tracing the longer history of how freedpeople pushed colonial elites to uphold their rights and accommodate their alternative social and cultural institutions, this dissertation contributes to ongoing scholarship that prompts us to consider the protracted struggle for civil inclusion in the French empire.

This dissertation takes part of its title from Article IV of the 1848 French Constitution, which proclaimed that the Second Republic was founded on the basis of “work, family...[and] public order.”<sup>17</sup> In nineteenth-century Martinique and Guadeloupe, the multiethnic populations composed of enslaved and freed persons of African descent, reformers, planters, and others who found themselves in the French Antilles made, challenged, and remade these principles in discourse and in practice before, during, and after abolition. In doing so, these populations helped build a family politics that shaped work, public order, and autonomy in the absence of slavery.

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<sup>17</sup> Faustin-Adolphe Hélie, *Constitutions de la France: ouvrage contenant outre les constitutions, les principales lois relatives au culte, à la magistrature, aux élections, à la liberté de la presse, de reunion, et d'association, à l'organisation des départements et des communes, avec un commentaire* (Paris: A. Marescq Ainé, Libraire-Éditeur, 1880), 1103.

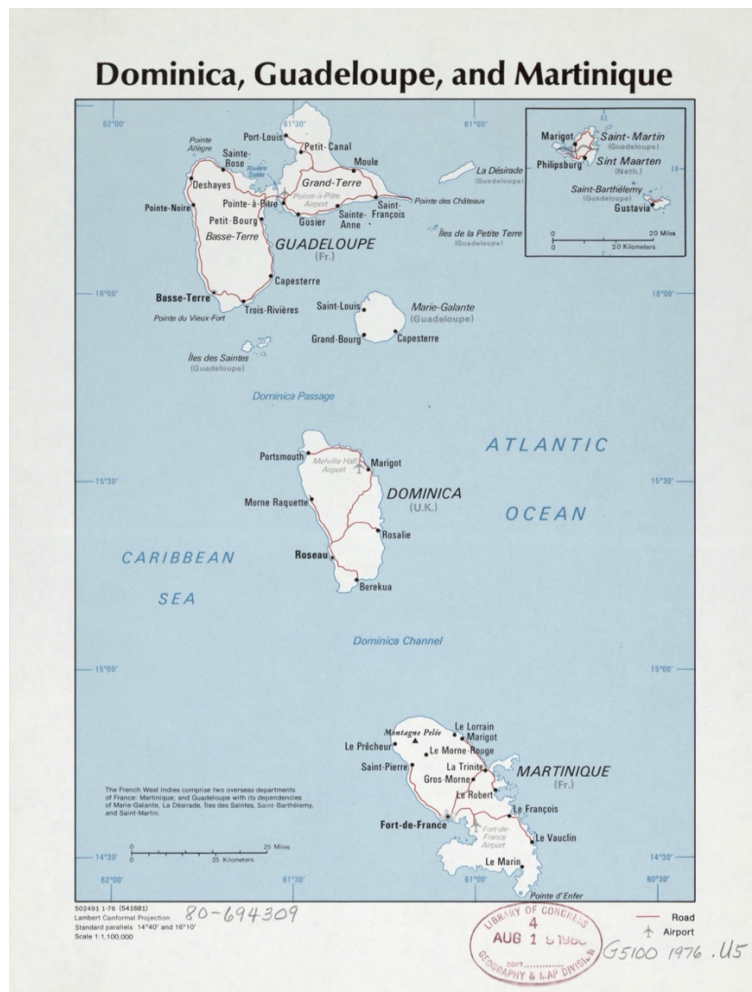
Article IV: “Elle a pour base la famille, le travail...l'ordre publique.”



## Martinique and Guadeloupe

Taken together, Martinique and the archipelago of Guadeloupe and its dependencies are approximately 1,065 square miles (almost 150 square miles smaller than Rhode Island).

Map 0.2: Martinique, Dominica, Guadeloupe and Its Dependencies.<sup>18</sup>



Beginning in the sixteenth century, the French Crown began to devote resources to colonizing the region, with settlers arriving in Martinique and Guadeloupe in 1635. The first fifteen years of French settlement in the Lesser Antilles were marked by misery and conflict, as the would-be

<sup>18</sup> Map: Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division, in the public domain under the digital id <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g5100.ct002868>.

proprietors struggled to eke out a precarious living through tobacco and subsistence farming with the aid of a small population of French *engagés* (indentured laborers).<sup>19</sup> The 1650s brought sugar cultivation to both islands when the local administration welcomed Dutch and Jewish refugees (driven out of Pernambuco, Brazil by the Portuguese), who brought with them the technical knowledge of sugar production and access to commercial networks and traders in Holland. Proprietors in Martinique and Guadeloupe began buying enslaved Africans and converting tobacco and subsistence crop farms to large sugar estates. By 1660, enslaved Africans composed nearly half of the local populations.<sup>20</sup>

Slavery and tropical commodity production thus appeared on the islands almost in tandem with French settlement. Between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, French colonization and slavery would consolidate in the region—creating wealthy plantation societies that were racially and hierarchically stratified between a white minority, a growing class of free people of color, and the enslaved persons who constituted the majority of the population. These plantation societies experienced profound turbulence over the course of the eighteenth century—including

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<sup>19</sup> The first French colony in the Caribbean was established in Saint Christopher (modern-day St. Kitts) in 1625. For the histories of French colonization in the Atlantic and Lesser Antilles, see: Myriam Arcangeli, *Sherds of History: Domestic Life in Colonial Guadeloupe* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2015), 17-20; Armand Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996-1998); 47-78; Liliane Chauleau, *Dans les îles du vent, la Martinique (XVII<sup>e</sup>-XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1993) 13-23, and 73-141; Pierre Pluchon, ed., *Histoire des Antilles et de la Guyane* (Toulouse, France: Edouart Privat, éditeur, 1982); Henri Bangou, *La Guadeloupe: Histoire de la colonization de l'île, 1492-1848* Vol. 1, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1976); James Pritchard, *In Search of Empire: The French in the Americas, 1670-1730* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 72-122; John Parry, Philip Sherlock, and Anthony Maingot, *A Short History of the West Indies* 4<sup>th</sup> edition (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987); and Robert L. Pacquette and Stanley L. Engerman, eds. *The Lesser Antilles in the Age of European Expansion* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 128-66. For indentured immigrants, see: Gabriel Debien, *Les Engagés pour les Antilles (1634-1715)* (Paris: Société de l'Histoire des Colonies Françaises, 1952).

<sup>20</sup> See: Paul Butel, *Histoire des Antilles françaises, XVII<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris: Éditions Perrin, 2002). For sugar production in Brazil and the expulsion of the Pernambuco settlers, see: Stuart Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society: Bahia, 1550-1835* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985). The early settlement years of the French Antilles parallels much of the English experience in Barbados and other islands, see: Richard Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, by the University of North Carolina Press, 2000 [first published in 1972]).

the meteoric rise of the sugar industry, international war, slave rebellions and revolutions, and emancipation.<sup>21</sup> In the midst of the French Revolution, a slave insurrection in the northern plains of Saint-Domingue resulted in emancipation in 1794.<sup>22</sup> Enslaved insurgents expanded the scope of republican political culture by demanding citizenship and political equality, although colonial policy remained contradictory and ambiguous regarding their inclusion into the French body politic.<sup>23</sup>

Napoleon's campaign to re-establish slavery led to a protracted and violent conflict with two very different outcomes in Saint-Domingue and Guadeloupe—revolutionary liberation in the first and successful re-enslavement and subjugation in the latter. The Restoration government reinstated many of the proslavery and planter-friendly policies of the Old Regime, and looked the other way as French merchants continued to engage in the illegal slave trade. Throughout the

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<sup>21</sup> On the consolidation of French colonial rule in the Caribbean, see: Lucien René Abénon, *La Guadeloupe de 1671 à 1759: Étude politique, économique, et sociale* 2 Vols., (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1987); Butel, *Histoire des Antilles françaises, XVIIe-XXe siècles*; Gabriel Debien, *Les esclaves aux Antilles françaises, XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles* (Basse-Terre: Société d'histoire de la Guadeloupe, 1974). For plantation societies in the eighteenth century, see: Malick Ghachem, *The Old Regime and the Haitian Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); James McClellan, *Colonialism and Science: Saint-Domingue in the Old Regime* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), especially 1-108; John Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); and Dominique Rogers, "On the Road to Citizenship: The Complex Path toward the Integration of Free People of Color in the Two Capitals of Saint-Domingue," in David Geggus and Norma Fiering, eds., *The World of the Haitian Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 65-78.

<sup>22</sup> Except for Martinique, under British occupation at the time.

<sup>23</sup> Carolyn Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint-Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990); Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); idem., *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004); Jeremy Popkin, *You Are all Free: The Haitian Revolution and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); David Geggus, "The Caribbean in the Age of Revolution," in David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, eds., *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, c. 1760-1840* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); and Yves Bénéot, *La révolution française et la fin des colonies, 1789-1794* (Paris: La Découverte, 2004).

nineteenth century, the Haitian Revolution loomed large in the consciousness of enslaved people, planters, and anti-slavery reformers as the struggle over enslavement and freedom continued.<sup>24</sup>

This project begins in the 1830s, when the July Monarchy came to power in France and novel attention was paid to the issue of slavery and abolition. It is during this period that Martinique and Guadeloupe—small islands on the outposts of the French empire—became central sites for the making of abolition, emancipation, and the transition to a post-slavery social and political order. As a result, the dissertation engages with a broad range of scholarship on abolition and slavery and its afterlives in the Americas.

### The Family Politics of Slavery

Historians of slavery in the Americas have long studied how the family structured the lives and labor of enslaved and freed persons as well as the dynamics between slaveholders and their enslaved workers.<sup>25</sup> Scholars have also emphasized how family underpinned enslaved peoples' informal economy, especially their ability to acquire property.<sup>26</sup> Family land tenure in slavery in turn structured the social networks of slave societies and established enslaved persons' customary rights to free time to cultivate their plots and acquire cash and goods in exchange for foodstuffs. And finally, the enslaved family has often been cited as a space of African and Afro-creole cultural articulation and acculturation, in which enslaved persons transposed and created

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<sup>24</sup> Yves Bénot, *La démente coloniale sous Napoléon* (Paris: La Découverte, 1992); Frédéric Régent, *Esclavage, métissage, liberté: la révolution française en Guadeloupe, 1789-1802* (Paris: B. Grasset, 2004); Jacques Adélaïde-Merlande, *La rébellion de la Guadeloupe, 1801-1802* (Gourbeyre: Archives départementales de la Guadeloupe, 2002); Rebecca Hartkopf Schloss, *Sweet Liberty: The Final Days of Slavery in Martinique* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); and Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique*, 307.

<sup>25</sup> See: Richard Dunn, *A Tale of Two Plantations: Slave Life and Labor in Jamaica and Virginia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014); and Jennifer Palmer, *Intimate Bonds: Family and Slavery in the French Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2016).

<sup>26</sup> Dylan Penningroth, *The Claims of Kinfolk: African American Property and Community in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Betty Wood, *Women's Work, Men's Work: The Informal Slave Economies of Lowcountry Georgia* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1995); and Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, especially pp. 32-4.

meanings of kinship and intimacy in bondage.<sup>27</sup> This project expands on this historiography by analyzing slavery and its demise in the French Antilles through family politics, which shaped how enslaved and freedpeople worked, loved, and established kin and community. In particular, my analysis highlights the experiences and contributions of enslaved and freed women who helped constitute the lived experiences and everyday practices of intimacy that informed family politics before and after slavery.

In this respect, my conceptualization of family politics draws upon a robust body of scholarship on enslaved women and the sexual economy of slavery in the Americas. From the Caribbean to Latin America and North America, slavery depended on the continuous exploitation of black women's reproductive, productive, and sexual labor. Historians of the slave societies of the Americas have identified the ways in which slaveholders consciously adopted a calculus of the "sexual economy of slavery," that simultaneously expropriated and commodified enslaved women's bodies for their pleasure and profit.<sup>28</sup> By framing slavery as a sexual economy, scholars have emphasized not just the ideologies, capital, commodities, and racial hierarchies that slavery produced (slave-racial capitalism), but also how black women's

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<sup>27</sup> See: James Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441-1770* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Ira Berlin, "From Creole to Africa: Atlantic Creoles and the Origins of African-American Society in Mainland North America," *The William and Mary Quarterly* Vol. 53, no. 2 (April, 1996): 251-88; and John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>28</sup> I employ Adrienne Davis' conceptualization of the sexual economy of slavery in: Adrienne Davis, "'Don't Let Nobody Bother Yo' Principle': The Sexual Economy of American Slavery," in Sharon Harley and the Black Women and Work Collective, eds., *Sister Circle: Black Women and Work* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 105. For the commodification of black women as objects of sexual pleasure, reproduction, and production, see: Edward E. Baptist, "'Cuffy,' 'Fancy Maids,' and 'One-Eyed Men.': Rape, Commodification, and the Domestic Slave Trade in the United States," *The American Historical Review* Vol. 106, no. 5 (Dec., 2001): 1619-50. See: Doris Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Hilary McD Beckles, *Centering Women: Gender Discourses in Caribbean Slave Society* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 1999); and Jennifer Morgan, "'Some Could Suckle over Their Shoulder': Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology, 1500-1770," *The William and Mary Quarterly* Vol. 54, No. 1 (Jan., 1997): 167-92.

reproduction anchored this system. Specifically, enslaved women literally reproduced future capital (in the form of new enslaved persons) and physically produced commodities (sugar, cotton, coffee, etc.) for the profit of the men and women who owned them.<sup>29</sup>

Even in slave societies like the Caribbean, where high rates of slave mortality forced slaveholders to turn to the slave trade to replenish the enslaved labor force (as opposed to relying on natural increase), historians maintain that black women's bodies, wombs, and labor was inextricable from the "landscape of colonial slavery."<sup>30</sup> Indeed, African women were forcibly transported to the plantation colonies approximately on par demographically with men (especially in the waning years of the traffic).<sup>31</sup> Further, all slave laws throughout the Americas were based on the principle of *partus sequitur ventrum*, (that children inherited their enslaved status from their mothers only) which inextricably tied slavery to the womb. Therefore, compelled to labor, give birth, and provide sex to men of all races and statuses, black women's bodies—from the earliest days of European exploration and settlement to the developed creole communities of the nineteenth-century—were implicated in the reconstitution of capital and the racial hierarchies that structured the slave societies of the Americas.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Walter Johnson, for example, defines "slave racial capitalism" as an entangled series of considerations that composed slaveholders' economic calculus: investment in land and enslaved laborers, cotton prices, futures market, technology, and an ideology of racial domination that, taken together, made capital in the antebellum South inflexible and reliant on continuous expansion. See: Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 13. For women who owned enslaved persons, see: Stephanie Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

<sup>30</sup> Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 3-4.

<sup>31</sup> David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 96.

<sup>32</sup> Hilary Beckles, "Sex and Gender in the Historiography of Caribbean Slavery," in Verene A. Shepherd, ed., *Engendering Caribbean History: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers 2011), 41. See also: Jennifer Spear, "Colonial Intimacies: Legislating Sex in French Louisiana" *The William and Mary Quarterly* Vol. 60, no. 1 (Jan., 2003): 75-98; Morgan, "'Some Could Suckle over Their Shoulder': Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology, 1500-1770," 167-92; Baptist, "'Cuffy,' 'Fancy Maids,' and 'One-Eyed

Enslaved women were thus essential to the plantation economy. In addition to backbreaking labor in sugar and cotton fields, enslaved women grew food, marketed produce, and built the roads, ditches, and canals that consolidated the infrastructure that plantations depended for the circulation of capital and commodities. They worked in cities as day laborers, artisans, vendors, and prostitutes. Enslaved women also performed the required domestic labor beyond the sexual. They cooked the food their masters ate and laundered the clothes they wore. Enslaved domestics nursed white children and were the chambermaid confidantes of their mistresses.<sup>33</sup>

Scholarship has also emphasized the myriad of strategies that enslaved women employed to push back against their owners—violence, “insolence,” marronage, abortion, infanticide, sabotage, and countless other means.<sup>34</sup> In the face of the exploitative power that was imposed on them, enslaved women sometimes retaliated, sometimes “survived in ways not typically heroic” and sometimes “succumbed to the violence inflicted on them.”<sup>35</sup> Enslaved and freed women also

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Men.’: Rape, Commodification, and the Domestic Slave Trade in the United States,” 1619-50; and Garraway, *The Libertine Colony*, especially pp. 194-292.

<sup>33</sup> See: Marietta Morrissey, *Slave Women in the New World: Gender Stratification in the Caribbean* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1989); Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650-1838* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990); Bernard Moitt, *Women and Slavery in the French Antilles, 1635-1848* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Arlette Gautier, *Les sœurs de Solitude: La condition féminine dans l’esclavage aux Antilles du XVIIe au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Editions Caribbeennes, 1985); Sandra Lauderdale Graham, *House and Street: The Domestic World of Servants and Masters in Nineteenth-Century Rio de Janeiro* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); and Maria Odila Silva Dias, *Power and Everyday Life: The Lives of Working Women in Nineteenth-Century Brazil* Ann Frost, trans., (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

<sup>34</sup> See: Hilary Beckles, *Natural Rebels: A Social History of Enslaved Black Women in Barbados* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989); Sandra Lauderdale Graham, *Caetana Says No: Women’s Stories from a Brazilian Slave Society* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Sylvaine Diouf, *Slavery’s Exiles: The Story of the American Maroons* (New York: New York University Press, 2014); and Jane Landers, “Maroon Women in Colonial Spanish America: Case Studies in the Circum-Caribbean from the Sixteenth through the Eighteenth Centuries,” in Darlene Clark Hine and David Barry Gaspar, eds., *Beyond Bondage: Free Women of Color in the Americas* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

<sup>35</sup> Marisa Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 3.

went to court to sue their masters for freedom for themselves and children, relying on longstanding slave codes, amelioration policies, and free-soil statutes to press their claims. Some of these claims were successful and some were not.<sup>36</sup>

This project contributes to this scholarship by focusing on how enslaved women were crucial to the demise of the slave regime in Martinique and Guadeloupe. I analyze how enslaved women took advantage of the family politics underlining slave amelioration and anti-slavery policies passed by abolitionists in the metropole to push new claims for freedom for themselves and family members. Women filed legal suits over abuse and illegal separation from young children—and many of these lawsuits were eventually successful, albeit protracted. The French Antilles is a particularly rich case study for analyzing the ways in which black women appealed to reform laws because of the ambiguous legal intersections between the *Code Noir* (one of the most comprehensive slave codes in the Americas) and the novel amelioration policies passed by the anti-slavery lobby in Paris. It demonstrates how enslaved persons, particularly women, exploited the metropolitan and colonial family politics of slavery and anti-slavery in their efforts to achieve freedom from bondage.

And yet, while enslaved women helped constitute and challenge the boundaries between slavery and freedom, it was the anxious, patriarchal worldview of slaveholding men that underpinned the ideology of the slave regime. Scholarship on the slave societies of the Americas has long demonstrated that slaveholders' power and domination were constituted through gender

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<sup>36</sup> Camilla Cowling, *Conceiving Freedom: Women of Color, Gender, and the abolition of Slavery in Havana and Rio de Janeiro* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Alexandra T. Havrylshyn, "Free for a Moment in France: How Enslaved Women and Girls Claimed Liberty in the Courts of New Orleans (1835-1857)," PhD diss. (University of California, Berkeley, 2018); Lea VanderVelde, *Redemption Songs: Suing for Freedom before Dred Scott* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Eric Gardner, "'You Have No Business to Whip Me': The Freedom Suits of Polly Walsh and Lucy Ann Delaney," *African American Review* Vol. 41, no. 1 (Spring, 2007): 33-50; and Sue Peabody, "'Free upon Higher Ground': Saint Domingue Slaves' Suits for Freedom in U.S. Courts," in Geggus and Fiering, eds. *The World of the Haitian Revolution*, 261-83.



ideologies that drew on familial discourses. The formative scholarship of Eugene Genovese on the antebellum U.S. South and Gilberto Freyre on Brazil illuminated how masters morally justified their domination over, exploitation of, and dependency on enslaved people by conceptualizing their power in patriarchal and familial terms. It was, in essence, an ideology that accommodated affection, desire, violence, and cruelty. It demanded subordination but couched this subjugation in familial language.<sup>37</sup> This patriarchal slaveholding ideology was therefore deeply intertwined with family politics, gender, and the sexual economy of slavery—which scholars have held as integral to the practice and ideology of domination.<sup>38</sup>

Gender and race were mutually implicated in the constitution of the patriarchal authority of slaveholders. Their power was contingent on their ability to oversee their dependents and enslaved workers on the estates, which they did by controlling the sexuality of both white and black women.<sup>39</sup> Historians have further explored the consolidation of patriarchal ideologies of slavery, domination, and power in the Americas, including in the French Caribbean.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Eugene Genovese, *Roll Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage, 1976), especially pp. 3-112; and Gilberto Freyre, *The Masters and the Slaves, Casa Grande & Senzala A Study in the Development of Brazilian Civilization*, Samuel Putnam, trans., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), especially chapters 3 and 4. Also see: Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Fatal Self-Deception: Slaveholding Paternalism in the Old South* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and Nancy Naro, *A Slave's Place, a Master's World: Fashioning Dependency in Rural Brazil* (London and New York: Continuum, 2000).

<sup>38</sup> Doris Garraway, *The Libertine Colony*, 23.

<sup>39</sup> Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, & Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 323.

<sup>40</sup> For example, Thomas Thistlewood, the overseer on the Egypt plantation in Jamaica appears frequently historiography on slavery ideologies in the British West Indies. See: Trevor Burnard in *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Douglas Hall, *In Miserable Slavery: Thomas Thistlewood in Jamaica, 1750-86* (London: MacMillan, 1989); and Beckles, *Centering Women*, 22-58. Similarly, Paul Cheney's study of Étienne-Louis Ferron de Ferronnays and Pierre-Jacques Corbier examines slaveholding ideologies and plantation management in Saint-Domingue. See: Paul Cheney, *Cul de Sac: Patrimony, Capitalism, and Slavery in French Saint-Domingue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

However, what remains understudied in this scholarship is how the patriarchal slaveholding ideologies of *colons* in the French Antilles contrasted with abolitionist gender politics in nineteenth-century Europe.<sup>41</sup> As bourgeois notions of family, work, and order shaped anti-slavery discourse in the metropole—which coalesced into a series of amelioration policies in the 1830s and 1840s—slaveholders were confronted with ideological and political assaults on their rule. And yet, little scholarly attention has been paid to how French anti-slavery, largely unintentionally, introduced new vulnerabilities in the colonial order and the absolute power of slave holders as a result.<sup>42</sup>

This dissertation addresses this point by analyzing how the nineteenth-century slave societies of the French Antilles were ordered according to a patriarchal slaveholding ideology anchored in a sexual economy of slavery, and how this system began to flounder at a moment of crisis for planters (abolitionism). In essence, the project emphasizes how the patriarchal slaveholding ideology of the colonies—which was constituted on masters’ uncontested power over the enslaved persons—came into conflict with the family politics driving abolitionism in France. In this way, my analysis expands current understandings of the ways in which enslaved people seized on French abolitionists’ amelioration policies to challenge the authority of slave owners.

### Metropolitan Abolitionist Gender Politics

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<sup>41</sup> This has been more closely examined in the American South. See: Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*; and Peter Bardaglio, *Reconstructing the Household: Families, Sex, and the Law in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

<sup>42</sup> An exception is Rebecca Hartkopf Schloss, who has argued that amelioration policies prompted white slaveholders to try to shore up political power and social ascendancy by tightening control over the sexuality and comportment of white women. Elided in this approach, however, is an understanding of the ways in which enslaved people took advantage of the vulnerabilities amelioration created within the slave system. See: Schloss, *Sweet Liberty*, 184-225.

The dissertation also examines the development of French anti-slavery in the 1830s and 1840s, and therefore builds on scholarship of European abolitionism. Most historiography on abolitionism in France has debated the extent to which French anti-slavery emerged in response to British abolition. Scholars have long pointed out the striking disconnect between the popular mobilization of working and middle class people—and women in particular—in anti-slavery campaigns in England compared with the elitist politics of nineteenth-century French abolitionism. These differences in public participation, historians argue, indicate that organized French anti-slavery was at best a pale imitation of British abolitionism, and that the overall scale and scope of France’s abolitionist movement was hampered by cautious conservatism.<sup>43</sup>

Historians have also highlighted the important similarities between French and British anti-slavery. Both movements reflected the changing economic and political priorities of an industrializing Europe. Many of the formative studies on British abolitionism have debated the extent to which anti-slavery was more reflective of a mobilization of humanitarian impulses or, rather, a clash between an increasingly inefficient economic system built on slavery and a profitable capitalism built on “free” labor.<sup>44</sup> French abolitionists were also conceptualizing slave

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<sup>43</sup> Lawrence Jennings, *French Anti-Slavery: The Movement for the Abolition of Slavery in France, 1802-1848* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); idem., *French Reaction to British Slave Emancipation* (Baton Rouge, L.A.: 1988); Seymour Drescher, “Two Variants of Anti-Slavery: Religious Organization and Social Mobilization in Britain and France, 1780-1870,” in *Anti-Slavery, Religion, and Reform: Essays in Memory of Roger Anstey* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1980); idem., “Women’s Mobilization in the Era of Slave Emancipation: Some Anglo-French Comparisons,” in Kathryn Kish Sklar and James Brewer Steward, eds., *Women’s Rights and Transatlantic Antislavery in the Era of Emancipation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007); Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848* (London: Verso, 1988), 473-516; David Brion Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

<sup>44</sup> For the humanitarian anti-slavery argument, see: Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Seymour Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010 [first published in 1977]); Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760-1810* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1975); and Adam Hochschild, *Bury the Chains: Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free an Empire’s Slaves* (Boston: Mariner, 2005). For the argument that British abolitionism was motivated by the transition to capitalism and, consequently, a nascent middle-class ideology about the virtues of free labor, see: Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994 [first published in 1944]); David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); and David

reform during the post-revolutionary period—a time of industrial, intellectual, political, and social transformation.<sup>45</sup> Both French and British reformers feared destabilizing the status quo in the colonies too quickly—many of them having witnessed firsthand how slave emancipation in Haiti sparked revolutionary liberation and upheaval.

Additionally, both French and British abolitionist movements were flexible and conservative enough to accommodate some proslavery interests—indeed, much of the scholarship on the waning years of slavery in the British colonies has emphasized how local assemblies in the West Indies promulgated legislation intended to curb some of the worst abuses of slavery as a means of prolonging the institution.<sup>46</sup> For the French empire, historians have demonstrated how similar reforms were implemented in the eighteenth century in order to strengthen slavery.<sup>47</sup> During the nineteenth century, the British and French proslavery press drew on much of the same reformist language to bolster planters' stance and answer the criticisms of anti-slavery advocates.<sup>48</sup> In sum, both movements were cautious. Few abolitionists

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Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1783-1807* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>45</sup> For these transformations, see: François Furet, *La Révolution: de Turgot à Jules Ferry, 1770-1880* (Paris: Hachette, 1988); Angré Jardin and André-Jean Tudesq, *Restoration and Reaction, 1815-1848* (Cambridge and New York: 1983); William Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); and Lynch, *Family, Class, and Ideology in Early Industrial France*.

<sup>46</sup> See: David Barry Gaspar, "Ameliorating Slavery: The Leeward Islands Slave Act of 1798," in Pacquette et al., *The Lesser Antilles in the Age of European Expansion*; idem., "Slavery, Amelioration, and Sunday Markets in Antigua, 1823-1831" *Slavery & Abolition* Vol. 9, no. 1 (May: 1988); 1-28; John Ward, *British West Indian Slavery: The Process of Amelioration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); Christer Petley, *Slaveholders in Jamaica: Colonial Society and Culture during the Era of Abolition* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009); and Robert E. Luster, *The Amelioration of the Slaves in the British Empire, 1790-1833* (New York: P. Lang, 1995).

<sup>47</sup> Ghachem, *The Old Regime and the Haitian Revolution*; and Yvan Debbasch, "Au cœur du 'gouvernement des esclaves': La souveraineté domestique aux Antilles françaises (XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles)" *Revue française d'histoire d'outre mer*, Vol. 72, no. 266 (1985): 31-53; and Debien, *Les esclaves aux Antilles françaises*.

<sup>48</sup> See: Laurence Jennings, "Slavery and the Venality of the July Monarchy Press," *French History*, Vol. 9 (1995): 48-66.

called for immediate emancipation, except for the most radical detractors. Instead, they argued for a period of amelioration—during which new policies, laws, and education would, abolitionists believed, moralize enslaved persons and prepare them for freedom.

Thus, British and French abolitionists were equally concerned with reforming the enslaved populations in their colonies. They generated similar discourses that espoused what scholars have referred to as abolitionist gender politics, which simultaneously recognized the humanity of enslaved men and women and cast them as degraded victims in need of (metropolitan) salvation and Christian education to transform them into free, dignified, and industrious colonial subjects.<sup>49</sup> However, the major difference between French and British abolitionist gender politics lay in the ways in which reformers applied them—as the colonies (and by extension, the empires) transitioned to a post-slavery order.

Scholars have extensively studied how British abolitionism adopted domestic ideologies in the service of anti-slavery—especially the ways in which middle class English women’s sugar boycotts mobilized the domestic sphere as a space protected from the evils of slavery, ideologically cordoning off the British home from the colonies. British abolitionist gender politics were thus part of a wider discourse that emphasized hierarchy and difference between metropole and colony, rather than integration between them in an imperial body politic.<sup>50</sup>

In France, anti-slavery operated differently because it revolved around family politics in the post-revolutionary era—which I take as a point of departure from historiography on European abolitionism. Nineteenth-century French anti-slavery emerged in a period when the

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<sup>49</sup> Diana Paton and Pamela Scully, eds., *Gender and Slave Emancipation in the Atlantic World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 2-3.

<sup>50</sup> Ann McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), 45.

family in France had undergone substantive changes. For instance, historians of the French Revolution have argued that the family romance of politics was essential to how revolutionaries conceptualized public order, governance, and society in the absence of an absolute monarchy, and how they reformulated French families to reflect republican egalitarian principles.<sup>51</sup> Scholars have also shown how the Napoleonic Code reinvigorated patriarchal authority and hierarchy by overturning the most egalitarian measures of republican family reform by politically subordinating women and household dependents.<sup>52</sup> And, as industrialization and its consequent social changes swept through France in the nineteenth century, reformers grew increasingly anxious over the conditions of laboring families who did not conform to the Napoleonic family model.<sup>53</sup> Family, in other words, had been central to the political and social transformation of the whole of nineteenth-century France, and reformers employed it as a tool for re-ordering and reimagining post-slavery colonial societies.

This project takes up this point and applies it to the colonies by underlining how French abolitionists conceptualized colonial families as central sites for formulating a nascent post-emancipation politics and social order. Further, abolitionists viewed family reform as key for

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<sup>51</sup> See: Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, 1-16; and Desan, *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France*, 93-249. For patriarchy, household, and family in the Old Regime, see: Sarah Hanley, “Engendering the State: Family Formation and State Building in Early Modern France” *French Historical Studies* Vol. 16 (1989): 4-27; Sarah Maza *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France: The Uses of Loyalty* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983); Julie Hardwick, *The Practice of Patriarchy: Gender and the Politics of Household Authority in Early Modern France* (University Park, P.A.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998); François Lebrun, *La vie conjugale sous l’ancien regime* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1975); and James Traer, *Marriage and the Family in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980).

<sup>52</sup> Desan, *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France*, 283; Joan Wallach Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996); idem., *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018 [first published in 1988]); and Heuer, *The Family and the Nation*, 121-91.

<sup>53</sup> See: Lynch, *Family, Class, and Ideology in Early Industrial France*; Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 93-112; and Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France*, 143-93.

consolidating metropolitan control over the colonies—reformers cited colonial family degeneration as justification for wrangling power from recalcitrant planters. In doing so, they developed the foundation for a post-colonial imperial ideology that posited the inclusion of colonial subjects in the body politic but on the understanding that these subjects owed deference and obedience to *La Mère-Patrie*.<sup>54</sup>

Reformers espoused an ideology of the fusion of the races—the integration of white and black and colony and metropole—but only on the premise that France would dictate the terms of the new imperial order. The reformers who created anti-slavery policies that targeted enslaved families aimed at something much larger than encouraging enslaved people to marry. Anti-slavery advocates intended to transpose French bourgeois ideologies of social order to consolidate imperial control over the colonies.<sup>55</sup> Thus, hierarchy and imperial domination were masked in a discourse of fraternal inclusion—the “great French family” that justified colonial systems of exploitation and racial subordination because it held that colonial subjects needed tutelage before they could be fully-fledged members of the French body politic.<sup>56</sup>

As emancipation came to the French colonies in the midst of yet another revolution in 1848, this abolitionist gender politics continued to inform colonial policy. Initially, enslaved persons were transformed into citizens with no voting restrictions and the empire became formally race-blind (although scholars have long disproven the myth of a raceless France and

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<sup>54</sup> Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries*, 24.

<sup>55</sup> As Alice Conklin has argued for the late nineteenth century, French imperial policymakers assumed that there was a single universal civilization (conveniently based on French norms) into which all colonial populations should learn to assimilate and defer to. See: Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 15.

<sup>56</sup> See: Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries*, 4-5; and Janet R. Horne, “In Pursuit of Greater France: Visions of Empire among Musée Social Reformers, 1894-1931” in Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Gouda, eds., *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998) 21-42.

French empire in practice).<sup>57</sup> As freedpeople, planters, and policymakers clashed over post-emancipation work and order, the family politics that abolitionist reformers had envisioned transformed into a tool for disciplining the working class populations and a framework through which their labor and customs were explicitly racialized and gendered. Consequently, it informed the ways in which these populations contested these new forms of domination.

### Post-Emancipation Family Politics

This project further emphasizes how administrators, planters, and freedpeople struggled over the post-emancipation order through family politics. In doing so, it contributes to a rich body of scholarship on the post-emancipation Caribbean, Latin America, and the American South. Historiography has underscored the ways in which freedpeople constituted themselves as political actors and demanded political and social recognition and inclusion—often in ways that resonated across regional or colonial contexts. Historians have also produced robust studies of how former slaveholders, business interests, and political institutions collaborated to suppress the political will of these populations and find novel ways to subjugate them, creating new systems and methods of labor expropriation.<sup>58</sup>

In historical and anthropological studies of the Caribbean, scholarly emphasis has long been placed on the post-emancipation period as an era of transition from a slave economy to a hybrid economy of peasant production that evolved in tandem with and in resistance to the

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<sup>57</sup> See: Peabody and Stovall, eds., *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France*; Owen White, *Children of the French Empire: Miscegenation and Colonial Society in French West Africa, 1895-1960* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999); Jean-Loup Amselle, *Affirmative Exclusion: Cultural Pluralism and the Rule of Custom in France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003); and Emmanuelle Saada, *Empire's Children: Race, Filiation, and Citizenship in the French Colonies* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012).

<sup>58</sup> See: Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*; Cooper, Holt, and Scott, *Beyond Slavery*; McGraw, *The Work of Recognition*; Scott, *Degrees of Freedom*; Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet*; Woodruff, *American Congo*; Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction*; Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*; Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905*; and Helg, *Our Rightful Share*.



plantation. This process, scholars have shown, shaped the development of Afro-Caribbean social and cultural institutions, as well as a working class political consciousness, over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The work of Sidney Mintz, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Richard Price, Jean Besson, and others have traced the ways in which freedpeople and their descendants constructed social and cultural institutions that enabled them to engage in survival strategies, carve out spheres of autonomy, and build community.<sup>59</sup>

Across the Caribbean, the cultural and social practices of family land tenure—small plots of land where freedpeople and their descendants built their homes and cultivated crops and livestock for the provisioning economy—represented a tenuous form of independence. These land parcels could not be sold, ownership belonged to all children of the family equally, and they remained distinct from other lands that members of the family might buy or rent to increase their income. The value of family land lay not in its profitability (often, these tracts barely yielded enough for subsistence) but in what it represented: a separate, autonomous institution that allowed freedpeople and their descendants to safeguard and sustain familial ties and practice their own customs of kinship and household. As Besson has defined it, family land in the post-emancipation era was a process of Caribbean institution building.<sup>60</sup>

Freed women—and their labor—were essential to this process of post-slavery civil, cultural, and social institution building throughout the Americas. In the Caribbean, freed

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<sup>59</sup> Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations*, 43-81; Woodville Marshall, “Peasant Development in the West Indies since 1838” in P.I. Gomes, ed., *Rural Development in the Caribbean* (Kingston, Jamaica: Heinemann, 1985); Richard Price, *The Convict and the Colonel: A Story of Colonialism and Resistance in the Caribbean* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Michel Rolph-Trouillot, *Peasants and Capital: Dominica in the World Economy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988); idem., “Culture on the Edges: Creolization in the Plantation Context,” Mintz and Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture*; Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People*, especially 220-2; and Besson, *Martha Brae’s Two Histories*, 313-20.

<sup>60</sup> See: Besson, *Martha Brae’s Two Histories*, 318-9; Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 172-3; Clarke, *My Mother Who Fathered Me*, 21-46; and Sheller, *Citizenship from Below*, 187-209.

households tended to be matrifocal, where female kin ensured the day-to-day survival and reconstitution of the family and performed the vital agricultural and urban labor that structured the colonial economy.<sup>61</sup> In the United States, freed women also helped articulate black peoples' claims to political and civil rights in the post-emancipation period—such as in the Reconstruction-era South, where testimonies of raped and assaulted African-American women revealed their demands for justice, to be protected, and recognized as equal members of the body politic.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, although they were politically disenfranchised everywhere in the Americas during the nineteenth century, freed women pushed for different forms of political inclusion that pressured authorities to acknowledge them as civic subjects.

This dissertation contributes to this scholarship in several significant ways. Firstly, it establishes how family politics framed the struggle between colonial administrators, planters, and freedpeople over post-emancipation labor and civil rights. As authorities and planters employed a variety of repressive policies (the census, taxes, and disciplinary labor laws, among others) designed to maintain a fixed workforce on the plantations, freedpeople responded by drawing on their family politics to circumvent these restrictions in late-nineteenth-century Martinique and Guadeloupe.<sup>63</sup>

Secondly, the dissertation reveals the ways in which colonial elites created a post-emancipation family politics that reinforced racial domination under new guises. Although racial

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<sup>61</sup> See: Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 170-1; and Clarke, *My Mother Who Fathered Me*, 21-46.

<sup>62</sup> See: Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

<sup>63</sup> For comparative restrictions enacted in Jamaica, Brazil, and the United States see: Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 115-43; Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet*, 412-64; Woodruff, *American Congo*, 74-109; Naro, *A Slave's Place, a Master's World*; 153-176; McGraw, *The Work of Recognition*, 73-99; and Diana Paton, *No Bond but the Law: Punishment, Race, and Gender in Jamaican State Formation, 1780-1870* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 83-155.

categories (nominally) disappeared in the French empire following abolition in 1848, colonial elites reconstructed a racist social hierarchy in the absence of slavery over the course of the late nineteenth century.<sup>64</sup> Struggling to reassert control over formerly enslaved workers, colonial elites associated black families with deviancy and conflated the black worker with the enslaved worker, which in turn justified their continued exploitation of freed men and women.

Thirdly, the project's analysis of post-emancipation family politics sheds light on the ways in which freed women played an integral role in the conflicts over race and labor that erupted between colonial elites and freedpeople during this period. The dissertation focuses on freed women's work and entrepreneurialism in the urban French Antilles to analyze how they ensured the survival of the black family and constituted a significant part of the local economies. This approach reveals how, even as black women were marginalized by the racist and gendered policies that colonial and metropolitan elites espoused, their labor proved essential for preserving freedpeople's post-emancipation autonomy in Martinique and Guadeloupe.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, by studying freed women in the late-nineteenth-century French Antilles, we can understand how they preserved freedpeople's family politics in the face of continued exploitation and repression.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> On post-emancipation racism in France and the French empire, see: Herrick Chapman and Laura Frader, eds., *Race in France: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Politics of Difference* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004); and Peabody and Stovall, eds., *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France*.

<sup>65</sup> See: Doris Garraway, "Race, Reproduction and Family Romance in Moreau de Saint-Mery's Description..." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* Vol. 38, no. 2 (2005): 227-46; Myriam Cottias and Annie Fitte-Duval, "Femme, Famille et Politique dans les Antilles Françaises de 1828 à nos Jours," *Caribbean Studies* Vol. 28, no 1 (Jan-June, 1995): 77-8; Silyane Larcher, *L'autre citoyen: l'idéal républicain et les Antilles après l'esclavage*, (Paris: Armand Colin, 2014) 127-68; Cottias, "Gender and Republican Citizenship in the French West Indies, 1848-1945," 233-45; Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries*, 185-243; and Gautier, *Les Sœurs de Solitude*, 261-2.

<sup>66</sup> I draw on scholars such as Mintz and Besson who argue that that women (and gender roles more broadly) were integral in Caribbean culture-building and creolization in the post-emancipation period. In particular, Besson's focus on family land and Afro-Caribbean family structures in Jamaica demonstrates the creative processes women employed to appropriate and overturned European cultural institutions. See: Besson, *Martha Brae's Two Histories*, 9-10 (for Caribbean cultural institution building) and 16-18 (for gender and culture-building). For a select and

## Organization

This dissertation is divided into four chapters and an Epilogue. Chapter One analyzes the development of abolitionist family politics in the context of nineteenth-century France and how it was tied to social and political transformation within the nation, British emancipation, and recent historical memory of the Haitian Revolution. I examine how French anti-slavery reformers, who were predominately statesmen working from within Louis Philippe's government, focused their attention and efforts on the enslaved family. These abolitionists argued that the degradation of both white and black families in the colony was among the worst evils of slavery and proposed a variety of amelioration and abolition policies that aimed to moralize enslaved persons and slaveholders through family politics.

Reformers' focus on the family allowed them to re-envision and propose laws that aimed to reduce the authority of slaveholders over their slaves and replace the absolute power of masters with the authority of the state. However, they faced numerous obstacles to building a united anti-slavery front, which limited their ability to pass comprehensive reforms. From the perspective of metropolitan reformers, the amelioration policies that they managed to implement—such as the 1845 Mackau Law—failed to achieve both their family reform goals and efforts to curb the power of slaveholders.

Chapter Two argues that abolitionists' amelioration policies did bring about changes to the slave regime during the 1830s and 1840s in Martinique and Guadeloupe, although not

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incomplete list of seminal scholarship on the development of African-American, Afro-Caribbean, and Afro-Brazilian cultures in the during and after slavery, see: Mintz and Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture*, especially pp. 42-84; Stephan Palmié, ed., *Slave Cultures and the Cultures of Slavery* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995), especially 12-39; Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations*, 131-250; Sweet, *Recreating Africa*, 31-58; idem., *Domingos Álvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); João Reis, *Death is a Festival: Funeral Rites and Rebellion in Nineteenth-Century Brazil* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003) 39-65; idem., *Slave Rebellion in Brazil*, 93-128; and Karasch, *Slave Life in Rio de Janeiro*, 214-53.

necessarily in the ways that anti-slavery advocates had initially intended. French amelioration has remained understudied in the historiography because of its timing and supposed inefficacy. Historians maintain that, while the legislation rankled colonial elites, amelioration policies had little practical effect on reforming the Antillean slave regimes, given that the period between amelioration and emancipation was so brief. However, this chapter argues that the historiographical claim that amelioration policies were simply illusory oversimplifies how enslaved persons understood or adapted them in the crucial period before emancipation. During amelioration, enslaved people filed lawsuits against illegal family separation and demanded that new provisions regulating punishment and abuse be enforced. These policies did compel colonial officials to investigate and adjudicate legal suits brought by enslaved persons—and women in particular—over these issues. Rather than a series of hallow measures, then, amelioration laws created space in which colonial administrators, enslaved persons, and slave owners reformulated the boundaries of authority and bondage.

The third chapter examines the emancipation period from 1848-1852 by analyzing how the anti-slavery discourse of family and morality was reformulated into the republican emancipation project. Republican colonial policymakers—dispatched to the islands in the summer of 1848 to restore order after slave insurrections had forced the governors to implement abolition—focused on marriage and the family as the means of engendering a stable transition to a post-slavery society. Republican officials urged freedpeople to marry, legally sanctify their families, and agree to association and sharecropping contracts with their former masters, which continued to tie their labor to the estates. Emphasis on racial fusion, moral reform, and plantation labor formed the core of their subsequent policies.

Republican commissioners faced various obstacles in their endeavors: namely, planters' resistance to making any concessions to formerly enslaved workers and freedpeoples' determination to define free labor on their own terms. The revolutionary conflict between these groups in Martinique and Guadeloupe emerged from the clash between these conflicting labor systems anchored in family politics—such as plantation work, associated with patriarchal authority and commodity production, versus the black peasant economy, which encompassed a plurality of family structures and systems of work. This contestation between two alternative visions of labor and family life during the brief-lived Second Republic laid the foundation for the broader struggle freedpeople engaged in over the meaning, scope, and practice of freedom in the late nineteenth century.

Chapter Four continues this line of argument by analyzing how the freed family was the major site in which colonial administrators, planters, and freedpeople fought as they struggled over the post-emancipation labor system and the rights of new citizens. Authorities and planters employed a variety of coercive mechanisms to co-opt the labor of the black family for the plantations. Freedpeople responded by drawing on legal and civil family norms to evade labor laws.

The chapter also demonstrates how, although racial categories legally disappeared in the French empire following the abolition of slavery, metropolitan and colonial officials and elites who lived, traveled to, or imagined the French Antilles, explicitly racialized the colonial population—and black women in particular.<sup>67</sup> I argue that, even as black women were

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<sup>67</sup> On race-blindness and racism in France, see: Gwenaële Calves, “Color-Blindness at a Crossroads in Contemporary France,” in *Race in France: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Politics of Difference*, Herrick Chapman and Laura Frader, eds., (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004); 219-226. See also: Ann Stoler, “Colonial aphasia: Race and disabled histories in France.” *Public Culture* Vol. 23 no. 1, (2011): 121-156; and Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries*, 185-243.

marginalized by the racialist and gendered family politics that colonial and metropolitan elites espoused, their labor, entrepreneurialism, and reproduction were crucial for families to establish economic and social autonomy in post-emancipation Martinique and Guadeloupe. In effect, by studying these gendered forms of labor in the late-nineteenth-century French Antilles, we can understand how these practices enabled freedpeople to engage in Caribbean cultural institution building in the broader history of the region.

The Epilogue considers a bricolage of incomplete archival data to pose preliminary questions about the changing ethnic dynamics of the post-emancipation rural workforce in late-nineteenth-century Martinique and Guadeloupe. Between the 1850s and the beginning of the 1900s, tens of thousands of indentured immigrants from South Asia, China, and Africa were brought as indentured laborers to the French Antilles. To a greater or lesser extent, colonial elites viewed immigrants as simultaneously the solution to their labor problems and as disruptive malcontents that further threatened social and political order. Colonial administrators and proprietors were especially concerned with what they perceived as excessive crime and violence committed by indentured South Asian men. Authorities viewed young and single South Asian male workers as social agitators who required the orderly discipline of a “regular” family life to ensure their good behavior. However, the supposed paucity of “suitable” South Asian women in rural immigrant communities led to officials’ increasingly pessimistic attitudes toward indentured labor migration by the turn of the century. For colonial elites, South Asian immigration seemed to only exacerbate the problems of post-emancipation family politics.

However, there remain many questions about the ways in which indentured immigrants perceived their experiences as they made the profoundly disorienting journey across two oceans to settle in Martinique and Guadeloupe. In particular, fragmentary evidence suggests that

indentured immigrants were remarkably adept at reconfiguring their social and cultural customs to adapt to their new circumstances—and their family customs often brokered these dynamics. As a result, they helped formulate a multiethnic, polyglot, and creolized working class in nineteenth-century plantation communities—leaving much to be discovered about community solidarity and cohesion in the “frontier” worlds of the rural Caribbean.<sup>68</sup>

### On Sources and Translations

The dissertation analyzes a wide range of primary source material from colonial and national archives, digitized repositories, periodicals, and published manuscripts. I examined administrative correspondence and reports; census records; notary contracts; civil birth, marriage, and death certificates; paternity declarations; manumission inscriptions; legal briefs; memos; court minutes; medical reports; travel accounts; diaries; parish registers; periodicals and official gazettes; civil and criminal codes; lithographs; and photographs. I read these materials for what they say, do not say, and cannot say—keeping in mind that the colonial archive is the

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<sup>68</sup> As Mintz has argued, Caribbean plantation societies are a particular type of frontier community—he defined this as a cluster of multiethnic populations, organized by the demands of plantation production—which is reconstituted through the continuous contact between many different peoples brought to work on the estates. See: Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations*, 53. For scholarship on indentured immigrants, diaspora, and debates over their political, cultural, and social assimilation in the Americas see: David Northrup, *Indentured Labour in the Age of Imperialism, 1834-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Walton Look Lai, *Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar: Chinese and Indian Migrants to the British West Indies, 1838-1918* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Moon-Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); Kathleen Lopez, *Chinese Cubans: A Transnational History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013); David Dabydeen and Brinsley Samaroo, eds., *Across Dark Waters: Ethnicity and Indian Identity in the Caribbean* (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 1996); Verene A. Shepherd and Glen L. Richards, eds., *Questioning Creole: Creolisation Discourses in Caribbean Culture: In Honour of Kamau Braithwaite* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2002); Viranjini Munasinghe, *Callaloo or Tossed Salad? East Indians and the Cultural Politics of Identity in Trinidad* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); Sherry-Ann Singh, *The Ramayana Tradition and Socio-Religious Change in Trinidad, 1917-1990* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2012); and Brackette F. Williams, *Stains on My Name, War in My Veins: Guyana and the Politics of Cultural Struggle* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).



repository of the imperial state and so, often elides the experiences and perspectives of colonized subjects.<sup>69</sup>

In this endeavor, my methodology is guided by the work of Marisa Fuentes and Saidiya Hartman, who prompt scholars of slavery and its afterlives to carefully consider how we locate and analyze the experiences of the enslaved and freed in the archival records. Their archival methodologies remind us that lives of enslaved and freed persons are, to some extent, always unrecoverable—and the narratives that scholars construct about them can act as another kind of violence.<sup>70</sup> Thus, while I employ primary source analysis to reconstruct historical narratives, I also emphasize the fact that all of the information available to historians of the nineteenth-century French Antilles on the quotidian lives of enslaved and freed persons come from slivers of heavily mediated accounts that range from the mundane (notarial and civil) to the spectacular and violent (court cases and police records). Rather than smoothly integrate these sources into a seamless account, then, this project often mediates on the kinds of inconsistencies or problems that created these archival silences or biases in the first place. As a result, I sometimes emphasize more of the questions or unresolved contradictions that emerge from the archives rather than provide concrete answers in my analysis.

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<sup>69</sup> My conceptualization of the colonial archive draws heavily on the work of Lisa Lowe, Ann Stoler, Marisa Fuentes, Michel Foucault, and Edward Said. See: Lisa Lowe, “The Intimacies of Four Continents,” in Ann Stoler, ed., *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Ann Laura Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance,” *Archival Science*, Vol. 2, (2002): 87-109; idem, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive*; Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972); and Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

<sup>70</sup> Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* Vol. 12, no. 2, (2008): 1-14; idem., *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007); idem., *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2019); and Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive*.

Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine. The French word for slave, “esclave,” is rarely used by my nineteenth-century interlocutors (although they do use the term “esclavage”). When quoting an interlocutor prior to emancipation in 1848, I therefore translate “négre, nègresse” as “slave.” After 1848, I translate these terms to “negro” and “negro woman.” When the sources refer to “le/s noir/s,” I translate the term as “black” or “the blacks.”

Family terms are also tricky to translate. When sources describe “enfants naturels,” I use “illegitimate children” to refer to persons born outside the bonds of legal marriage to correlate more closely to the meaning of the term. Elites, planters, authorities, and reformers all universally and pejoratively referred to long-term sexual relationships outside marriage as “concubinage,” or sometimes, “libertinage.” I have avoided using both terms, as they flatten a variety of intimate partnerships—such as courting, temporary relationships, partnerships where couples did not live together at all, and arrangements where they did (either full or part-time).<sup>71</sup> Usually, the exact nature of the arrangement between a particular couple gets lost in the archives, given that “concubinage” was almost universally applied. Therefore, in the interest of streamlining the writing and acknowledging the limits of the source material, I have elected to use the terms “informal unions” when describing these relationships in my own analysis, but I also employ “concubinage” or “libertinage” when directly translating from sources to maintain the original meaning of the interlocutor. It is important to note, however, that my meaning of “informal unions” is intended to accommodate a broad array of intimate relations and affective ties that had rich and varied meanings to those who practiced them.

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<sup>71</sup> Mintz and Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture*; 61-80; Besson, *Martha Brae's Two Histories*, 277-312; and Anthony Kaye, *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 51-83.

Finally, after 1848, racial categories are not always clear-cut in the archives. The absence of racial signifiers in post-emancipation sources can obscure whether an individual was freed by abolition in 1848 (“nouveaux libres” or “les affranchis”) or had been a free person of color before emancipation (“ancien libre de couleur” or “gens de couleur”). Given that racial categories no longer appear in the records, other markers, such as occupation (cultivator, porter, day laborer, laundress, domestic servant), are used to gauge whether a person had likely been formerly enslaved. On the other hand, persons with large amounts of property or wealth, or who learned trades that required literacy and advanced training (secretary, shopkeeper, etc.), likely had been *gens de couleur*, perhaps even *petit blanc* before 1848.<sup>72</sup>

While the differences between an urban shopkeeper and a day laborer underlined some of the stark social, economic, and political divisions in the post-emancipation era, there were also points of deep, often familial, connections between those formerly enslaved and those formerly freed. Many freedpeople in the *Registres des Nouveaux Libres*, for example, were given the surnames of children or parents or even grandparents who had been manumitted and were living as *gens de couleur* before 1848. Family ties often linked these two groups together, even if wealth and social status divided them on paper. Therefore, some of the archival ambiguities regarding whether or not an individual had been manumitted before abolition are perhaps less significant than they might first appear. In sum, while the post-emancipation archives pose

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<sup>72</sup> Aside from occupation, other formal indications in the archives that an individual was likely enslaved are unknown date of birth, parents, or age; a surname that is heavily exoticized or Africanized or somehow makes reference to race (i.e. “Akoualé, Kouakou, etc.); or a nickname or first name that makes reference to race (i.e. “Marie dite Nègresse”). Only in cases where the individual is recorded to have been “born in Africa” and not identified as an immigrant, however, can an individual’s race/prior status be concretely determined. Otherwise, I have relied on contextualization and careful reading of the archives to trace how freedpeople are inscribed in these records. *Petit blancs* can sometimes (and without a high degree of certainty) be recognized by having been born to married parents, literacy (in court memos, this was noted), having several middle names, or place of birth (in France).

critical challenges, they also contain the fragmented accounts of the social and cultural lives that freedpeople built, which offer some promising insights into their longer struggle to establish various paths to autonomy as colonial citizens in the late nineteenth century.

## PART I: ABOLITIONIST FAMILY POLITICS AND SLAVERY

### Chapter One. “A profound and natural antipathy between marriage and slavery:” French Abolitionism during the July Monarchy

In April of 1835, François André Isambert (a lawyer and abolitionist politician) seized his moment during a debate in the Chamber of Deputies over the number of garrisons stationed in the colonies to deliver a speech denouncing the “perpetual system of slavery” that had generated “traits of incredible cruelty to slaves.”<sup>1</sup> Among the most horrific consequences of slavery that Isambert recounted was the total breakdown of family life in the colonies: “in the interior of the plantations, what a situation! There, for the slaves, all family affection is forbidden; children do not know their father; men can only engage in transient and immoral unions; young girls are delivered without defense to the brutality of the masters... Thus the *colons* maintain the slaves in a deplorable state of savagery.”<sup>2</sup>

Put another way, Isambert declared that “family” did not and could not exist for enslaved people so long as colonists subjugated them to the “deplorable state of savagery” of slavery. As Isambert’s speech indicated, French abolitionists were very worried about the state of enslaved families. Reformers across political divisions all repeatedly expressed anxieties over the slave

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<sup>1</sup> Isambert, a lawyer from Aunay-sous-Aneau, Eure-et-Loire and liberal member of the Chamber of Deputies, had by this time established his reputation as an active abolitionist. He corresponded extensively with John Scoble, the secretary of the British Anti-Slavery Society, provided legal defense for Cyrille Bisette and several free men of color following their expulsion from Martinique in 1824, was a founding member of the SFAE, and publicly lobbied the regime for colonial reforms.

<sup>2</sup> SFAE, *L’Abolitionniste française, bulletin mensuel de la société instituée en 1834 pour l’abolition de l’esclavage*, Vol. 1, (Paris: Imprimerie De Paul Dupont et Cie, 1835), 6. Hereafter *L’Abolitionniste française*. This was the official periodical of nineteenth-century French anti-slavery.

“...système perpétuel d’esclavage... il cite plusieurs traits d’une cruauté inouïe exercée envers les esclaves... Et, dans l’intérieur des plantations, quelle situation! Là, pour les nègres, toute affection de famille est interdite; les enfants ne connaissent pas leur père, les hommes ne peuvent s’y livrer qu’à des unions passagères et immorales; les jeunes filles sont livrées sans défense à la brutalité des maîtres... Ainsi les colons entretiennent les esclaves dans un état de sauvagerie déplorable.”

family in anti-slavery discourse and publications. The problem of the family in slave societies underlined the many colonial reform policies proposed and implemented in the final years of slavery in the French empire.

For example, as Alexis de Tocqueville argued in an anti-slavery investigative report four years later: “there exists, in effect, a profound and natural antipathy between the institution of marriage and that of slavery.” Tocqueville claimed that enslaved men had no incentive to marry “when he is in his condition, which never permits him to exercise conjugal authority; when his sons must be born his equals.” By the “sole fact of his slavery,” Tocqueville argued, the enslaved man could not comprehend “the duties, the rights, the hopes, or the worries” that characterized conjugal authority.<sup>3</sup> In Tocqueville’s report, slavery and marriage could not coexist because slavery rendered men, women, and children equals and thus erased men’s conjugal authority over dependent wives and their control over children. In other words, slavery upended the natural order of the patriarchal family as these elite nineteenth-century politicians and reformers understood it.

Across the political spectrum, anti-slavery advocates echoed Tocqueville’s argument. Louis Blanc asserted that enslaved persons had no incentive to form families because an enslaved father “does not have the right to protect his wife, or monitor his children.” Furthermore, he stated that enslaved women cannot be mothers: “a slave woman brings slaves

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<sup>3</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Rapport fait au nom de la Commission chargée d’examiner la Proposition de M. Tracy, relative aux esclaves des colonies, par M. A. de Tocqueville, député de la Manche* (Paris: A. Henry, imprimeur de la Chambre des députés, 1839), 3-4. Hereafter Tocqueville report.

“Il existe, en effet, une antipathie profonde et naturelle entre l’institution du mariage et celle de l’esclavage. Un homme ne se marie point quand il est dans sa condition de ne pouvoir jamais exercer l’autorité conjugale; quand ses fils doivent naître ses égaux, et qu’ils sont irrévocablement destinés aux mêmes misères que leur père; quand, ne pouvant rien sur leur sort, il ne saurait connaître ni les devoirs, ni les droits, ni les espérances, ni les soucis dont la paternité est accompagnée.”

into the world; she cannot have children.”<sup>4</sup> Moreover, even as radical abolitionist Victor Schœlcher denounced the “deplorable promiscuity” of informal unions, he also admitted that enslaved people had no incentive to establish legitimate families. Similar to Blanc, Schœlcher argued that enslaved men could not be fathers as they had no paternal authority: “the son must obey, not the father but the master. The child is a slave before he is a son.”<sup>5</sup>

The common denominator among these claims was the argument that the patriarchal family, as inscribed in French law, did not, could not, exist in slave societies. In France, the Napoleonic Code had endowed male heads of household with near-absolute rights over wives, children, and property, which codified the authority of married fathers as the gatekeepers of the morality of the women and children in their households. The patriarchal family reflected the nodes of political authority that Napoleonic jurists had envisioned, in which family members

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<sup>4</sup> Louis Blanc, “De l’abolition de l’esclavage aux colonies,” *Revue du progrès politique, social, et littéraire*. Ser. 2, Vol. 3 Jan. 15-July 1 (Paris: 1840), 4.

“Pourquoi d’ailleurs le nègre se marierait-il? Qu’est-ce qu’un père de famille qui n’a pas le droit de protéger sa femme, ni celui de surveiller ses enfants et de les conduire dans la vie? Une négresse met au monde des esclaves; elle ne fait pas des enfants; il n’est pas donné à une négresse d’être mère!”

<sup>5</sup> Victor Schœlcher, *Des colonies françaises: abolition immédiate de l’esclavage* (Paris: Pagnerre, 1842), 76.

“le père n’y saurait avoir aucun caractère, l’autorité du maître est toujours au-dessus de la sienne...le fils doit obéir, non point au père, mais au maître. L’enfant est esclave avant d’être fils.”

Schœlcher (1804-1893) was the son of a porcelain factory owner from Alsace and a laundry maid from Paris. He studied at the Lycée Condorcet and initially became a liberal-leaning journalist and pamphleteer. After a trip to the southern United States, Cuba, and Mexico (1829-1830), Schœlcher began his career as an abolitionist activist and writer. He toured the Caribbean extensively from 1840-1842 and West Africa from 1845-1847. During the 1848 Revolution in France, Schœlcher was appointed Under-Secretary of the Navy for the Provisional Government and was instrumental in the passage of the abolition decree in April. He served as a delegate for Martinique from 1848-1849, when he introduced a bill for the abolition of the death penalty. Schœlcher went into exile in London after the coup of Louis-Napoleon, returning to France only after 1870. During the Third Republic, he was elected as senator-for-life for Martinique in 1875 and continued to write extensively on the colonies, including indentured immigration. As one of the leading abolitionists and statesmen writing issues pertaining to the French colonies throughout much of the nineteenth century, Schœlcher will appear extensively throughout this dissertation. For biographies and collections of his letters and works, see: Nelly Schmidt, *Victor Schœlcher et l’abolition de l’esclavage* (Paris: Fayard, 1994); idem., *La correspondance de Victor Schœlcher* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1995); Anne Girollet, *Victor Schœlcher abolitionniste et républicain: approche juridique et politique de l’œuvre de la République* (Paris: Karthala, 2000); Rodolphe Robo, *L’Abolition de l’esclavage, la République et Victor Schœlcher* (Cayenne, French Guiana: 1983); and Louis Bougenot, *Victor Schœlcher* (Paris: Nouvelle Revue, 1921).

were connected to the body politic through their patriarch. As a result, scholars have argued, the patriarchal family as envisioned in French civil law was the foundation of political and social order—with men linking the household to the body politic and women raising future generations of French citizens. Post-revolutionary French family law thus attempted to codify the European bourgeois ideology of the separation of spheres.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout the 1830s and 1840s, French abolitionists appealed to the government by arguing that slavery degraded the family. Enslaved parents were powerless to protect their children from the misery of bondage, enslaved women could not be mothers because they could not properly nurture or care for their offspring, and enslaved fathers were denied conjugal and paternal authority because their masters wielded ultimate power over enslaved women and children. Hence, slavery prevented men and women from adhering to the familial model of authority critical to the proper functioning of social and political order. Instead, the power of the master operated as a warped, perverse abuse of the authority of the father and husband. The ensuing “deplorable promiscuity” that reformers ascribed to colonial societies had rendered France’s overseas territories morally bankrupt.

Abolitionists’ preoccupation with enslaved families may seem perplexing at first glance, given that enslaved peoples throughout the Americas had either very limited or nonexistent legal protections or personhood status—including a right to marriage.<sup>7</sup> Since 1685, however, slave

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<sup>6</sup> See: Desan, *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France*, 283-310; Karen Offen, *European Feminisms, 1700-1950: A Political History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000) 87-107; and idem, *The Woman Question in France, 1400-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 160-81.

<sup>7</sup> In the United States for example, enslaved people could not legally marry, and instead would profess unions through various cultural practices, such as jumping the broom. See: Patrick W. O’Neil, “Bosses and Broomsticks: Ritual and Authority in Antebellum Slave Weddings,” *The Journal of Southern History* Vol. 75, No. 1 (Feb., 2009): 29-48; Frances Smith Foster, ed. *‘Til Death or Distance Do Us Part: Marriage and the Making of African America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 70-5. For an example of how slave marriage in Brazil prompted contestations between slaveholders and enslaved people, see: Graham, *Caetana Says No*, 1-72.



families did have certain legal status in French colonial societies.<sup>8</sup> Louis XIV's royal edict for the colonies, the *Code Noir*, defined slave-owners' authority and established some protections for enslaved persons. The *Code Noir* also granted slaves the right to a Catholic marriage—although in the context of the nineteenth century, this in and of itself was no longer considered the basis of a legal union.<sup>9</sup> After the French Revolution, enslaved people could marry in the church, but their unions were not (technically speaking) legal because they were not inscribed in the civil registers.<sup>10</sup> The Napoleonic Code made no special provisions for slave marriages, or indeed, even for marriages between interracial couples in the colonies, although an 1803 ministerial decree had banned marriages between whites and blacks in France and the continental Napoleonic empire. Thus, during this period, enslaved couples who married had religious, rather than civil, weddings.<sup>11</sup>

While the *Code Noir* recognized the enslaved family in principle, it contained several provisions that restricted it. For example, Article 10 invested slaveholders with the power to consent to slave marriages, rather than delegating that authority to the enslaved mother and father of the spouses (which upheld the patriarchal power of the master over enslaved children as well as their parents). Article 12 stated that children born in wedlock to enslaved parents with

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<sup>8</sup> *Code Noir ou recueil d'édits, déclarations et arrêts concernant les esclaves nègres de l'Amérique, avec un recueil de réglemens, concernant la police des îles françaises de l'Amérique et les engagés* (Paris: 1685), hereafter *Code Noir*; and Ghachem, *The Old Regime and the Haitian Revolution*, 85 fn28-29 and 117.

<sup>9</sup> For how French revolutionaries secularized marriage see: Desan, *The Family on Trial*, 47-92

<sup>10</sup> Charles Rémusat, *Rapport fait au nom de la Commission chargée de l'examen de la proposition de M. Passy sur le sort des esclaves dans les Colonies françaises: séance du 12 juin 1838 de la Chambre des députés* (Paris: A. Henry, 1838), 12.

<sup>11</sup> For marriage in the colonies during the Napoleonic and Restoration era, see: Rebecca Hartkopf Schloss, "'The Distance between the Color White and All Others': The Struggle over White Identity in the French Colony of Martinique, 1802-1848" (PhD diss., Duke University, 2003), 51-5. For the ban on interracial marriage in the continental empire see: Jennifer Heuer, "The One-Drop Rule in Reverse? Interracial Marriages in Napoleonic and Restoration France," *Law and History Review* Vol. 27, no. 3 (Fall, 2009): 515-48.

different owners would belong to the master of the mother and Article 13 stipulated that children followed the legal status of their mothers (*partus sequitur ventrum*). However, Article 11 forbade the marriage of any enslaved persons who did not themselves consent to the marriage and Article 9 attempted to prevent sexual liaisons between masters and enslaved women by stipulating that slave owners could lose their enslaved mistresses to the state if they impregnated them and refused to marry them (although in practice, these relationships were commonplace and male owners lived in flagrant violation of these clauses).<sup>12</sup> These articles, then, were less about protecting the rights of enslaved spouses and parents and more about explicitly delineating the claims slaveowners could make on enslaved persons.

Thus, the *Code Noir* defined and preserved the authority of slaveowners at the expense of enslaved persons. The patriarchal authority of the master, which included the right to regulate the intimate relationships within the plantation, was virtually unassailable.<sup>13</sup> Article 31 prevented enslaved persons from bringing civil or criminal suits against their owners. Therefore, families separated by sale or enslaved couples prohibited from marrying had little recourse when slave owners and administrators ignored the Code's stipulations regarding the rights of slave families.<sup>14</sup>

As a result, reformers asserted that the restrictions impeding enslaved persons' ability to legally marry had created serious problems in colonial societies. They argued that both enslaved persons and *colons* suffered from the collapse of moral order in their intimate lives, which in turn

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<sup>12</sup> Garraway, *The Libertine Colony*, 194-239; and Gautier, *Les sœurs de Solitude*, 62-6.

<sup>13</sup> Cheney, *Cul de Sac*, 44.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid; Ghachem, *The Old Regime and the Haitian Revolution*, 182 fn50 (for Article 31); and Yvan Debbasch, *Couleur et liberté. Le jeu de critère ethnique dans un ordre juridique esclavagiste* (Paris: Dalloz, 1967).

caused social degeneration and affected labor output—implicitly linking the concepts of family, work, and public order in their diagnosis of colonial social problems.

In an analysis of governors' reports from French Guiana, for example, *L'Abolitionniste française* decried the “black class's horror for work in the fields and the early demoralization of young girls,” connecting the concept of enslaved men's “hatred of work” with the sexual exploitation of enslaved women. The critique continued: “the blacks' aversion exists only for sugar cane work, the original and permanent cause of the introduction and prolonged maintenance of slavery,” and “the corruption of slave women's morals is born of the promiscuity maintained by slavery, and one also recognizes it as another source of the jealousy of the masters' wives.”<sup>15</sup> Anti-slavery reformers claimed that demoralization, promiscuity, jealousy, and antagonism toward labor in the colonies were all symptoms of the same problem. Slavery had corrupted natural family structures and norms for both the white and black colonial populations. Black men were not happy providers but rather “averted work.” Black women were promiscuous. White women were given over to vicious bouts of jealousy as their husbands engaged in affairs with their enslaved mistresses. White men became despots. Slavery, in other words, degraded everyone in colonial society.

This notion of the corrupted moral lives of enslaved persons and slave owners became a central issue for French abolitionists in the 1830s and 1840s—a period of larger transformation in Caribbean slave societies. Against the background of British emancipation and the recent history of the Haitian Revolution, reformers debated and proposed various abolition policies with

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<sup>15</sup> *L'Abolitionniste française*, 44.

“...de la classe noire son horreur pour le travail des champs, et la démoralisation précoce de ses jeunes filles? N'est-il pas notoire que l'aversion des noirs n'existe que pour le travail de la canne de sucre, cause originaire et permanente de l'introduction et du maintien prolongé de l'esclavage? La corruption des mœurs des négresses naît de la promiscuité entretenue par l'esclavage, et on en reconnaît une autre source dans la jalousie des femmes de maîtres.”

the aim of ensuring a seamless transition from slavery to freedom. Primarily, they aimed to transform enslaved persons into productive citizens without dismantling the plantation economy. They argued that this could not be accomplished without addressing the dysfunctions embedded in colonial social life. Reformers asserted that by encouraging legal marriage among enslaved men and women, they could lay the foundation for stable post-emancipation households, and thereby encourage productivity and economic growth. Additionally, abolitionists sought to rehabilitate slaveholders who wielded near-despotic power over their enslaved workers. Reforming slave owners would halt the spread of moral contagion that abolitionists argued was rampant among colonial elites and rehabilitate white men and women from their degraded state. Thus, abolitionists claimed, moral reform was necessary in order to prepare both enslaved people and *colons* for emancipation.

In anti-slavery discourse, the enslaved family emerged as one of the most consistent themes. In print and in speeches, abolitionists emphasized the suffering wrought by the sexual exploitation of enslaved women, the abandonment of enslaved children, and the separation or corporal abuse of enslaved family members as part of enumerating slavery's widespread abuses. However, an examination of abolitionist-backed colonial legislation in the 1840s indicates that this focus on family was not merely the rhetoric of hand-wringing moralists. For example, the 1845 Mackau Law (a bundle of colonial reform policies passed after much wrangling in the government), included amelioration provisions designed to protect the enslaved family. Several articles encouraged slave marriages, prohibited the breakup of the family through sale, and codified their rights to cultivate property and pass it on to their children.<sup>16</sup> Family, therefore,

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<sup>16</sup> Victor Schœlcher, *Histoire de l'esclavage pendant pendant les deux dernières années* (Paris: Pagnerre, 1847), 33-8.

became a central framework through which abolitionists identified, envisioned, and attempted to remedy the problems with slavery that they perceived in the colonies.

But why did metropolitan reformers focus on the family in their anti-slavery debates and campaigns? What problems—real or perceived—did abolitionists’ preoccupation with the family allow them to identify in the colonies? What solutions or consequences—intended or not—did family-oriented abolitionist policies engender? What does an examination of the discussion of family, gender, and race in French abolitionist discourse reveal about how metropolitan anti-slavery advocates not only conceptualized the emancipation project, but also, how they reformulated the relationship between colonies and metropole in the post-revolutionary era? In short, what did abolitionists’ preoccupation with the family produce in terms of anti-slavery politics and what consequences did these policies have?

Previous scholarly emphasis on the influences of British anti-slavery’s role in shaping French abolitionism obscures the significance of French abolitionists’ focus on family politics as the central problem of their abolition project.<sup>17</sup> French reformers’ insistence that slavery degraded family life in the colonies allowed them to re-envision and propose laws that in part diminished the authority of slaveholders over their enslaved workers and replaced the absolute power of masters with the authority of the state. For metropolitan abolitionists, gradual emancipation plans had a double purpose: to morally reform enslaved persons in anticipation of freedom and to curtail what they viewed as the tyrannical authority of colonial slaveholders. They proposed and implemented amelioration policies (with metropolitan oversight) as a means of achieving these aims. In this way, French anti-slavery reformers illuminate what Diana Paton and Pamela Scully have defined as transatlantic “abolitionist gender politics,” that aimed to

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<sup>17</sup> See: Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress*, 224; Jennings, *French Anti-Slavery*, 20; and Patricia Motylewski, *La Société française pour l’abolition de l’esclavage* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1998), 48.

reform slave societies through policies that targeted men, women, and children through the social and political gender norms of elite nineteenth-century Europe. Which is why, in the case of France, the patriarchal family model was the foundation for the gender abolitionist politics that informed amelioration policies and anti-slavery discourse in the metropole.<sup>18</sup>

### French Abolitionists and Abolitionism

In France, organized abolitionism had been an almost dead letter since the loss of Haiti in 1804. After the 1830 Revolution, however, several events in the metropole and the colonies precipitated renewed interest in the slavery problem. The Revolution had catapulted many liberal opposition leaders into power—politicians who advocated for social and political reforms in both the metropole and the colonies. During this regime, several of these prominent reformers (such as the Duc de Broglie, Passy, and Guizot) occupied key parliamentary and cabinet positions.<sup>19</sup> In addition to these political shifts, the revolution gave new momentum to longstanding campaigns by free people of color in France and the colonies for civil rights and the abolition of racial restrictions—issues which helped push colonial issues to the fore in the new regime.<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, several of the free people of color exiled from the Antilles in the 1820s during the Bissette Affair, including Cyrille Bissette, Jean-Baptiste Volny, and Louis Fabien, wound up in

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<sup>18</sup> Paton and Scully, eds., *Gender and Slave Emancipation in the Atlantic World*, 2-3.

<sup>19</sup> For general history of the overthrow of the Restoration, the establishment of the July Monarchy and its political leaders, see: Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le moment Guizot* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985); H.A.C. Collingham and R.S. Alexander, *The July Monarchy: A Political History of France, 1830-1848* (London: Longman, 1988), 6-22; Paul H. Beik, *Louis-Philippe and the July Monarchy* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand, 1965), 22-32; André Jardin and André-Jean Tudesq, *Restoration and Reaction, 1815-1848*, Elborg Forster, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 93-110; and Douglas Johnson, *Guizot: Aspects of French History, 1787-1874* (London: Routledge, 1963), 6-8.

<sup>20</sup> For free people of color's campaigns against racial restrictions in the colonies, see: Lorelle Semley, *To Be Free and French: Citizenship in France's Atlantic Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 115-7; and Schloss, *Sweet Liberty*, 152-83.

France, where they obtained legal and financial assistance from abolitionists.<sup>21</sup> During the 1830s, they pleaded their case in Paris directly to the government by publishing petitions that professed their loyalty and their commitment to stability and tranquility in the colonies while airing their grievances.<sup>22</sup> Liberal reformers in the government listened, and argued that growing tensions in the colonies (there were several slave rebellions in the 1820s and 1830s in Martinique, for example) indicated dire need for reform. Under the leadership of the new Minister of the Navy, General Sébastiani (a member of the Société morale chrétienne, SMC), the government created a commission to explore questions related to colonial legislation and policy in September 1830.<sup>23</sup>

Members of the commission, including Isambert, consulted frequently with free men of color, and in 1831, the government adopted some of the commission's recommendations

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<sup>21</sup> Following an 1822 slave revolt in Martinique, the colonial government instituted a series of even more restrictive "security" measures that targeted free people of color as well as the enslaved population. This caused an outcry in the *gens de couleur* population, and several prominent free men of color, Cyrille Bisette, Louis Fabien, Jean-Baptiste Volny, Montlouis Thébia, Joseph Richer, and others, were all arrested and tried in 1824 for distributing an incendiary, anonymous pamphlet (which Bisette allegedly penned) as well as several petitions addressed to the governor, king, and the Chambers demanding that civil rights be restored to *gens de couleur*. The alleged organizers of the campaign (Bisette, Fabien, and Volny), were condemned to the galleys, branded, and eventually deported to France. Others (Thébia, Richer, etc.) were sentenced to permanent exile from Martinique. The severity of these punishments shocked liberal-leaning *milieus* in the metropole, and many of them publicly defended free people of color. For example, Isambert handled Bisette, Volny, and Fabien's legal appeal to the metropolitan courts, and helped coordinate a publicity campaign defending *gens de couleur* and excoriating racial prejudice among *colons*. For an overview of the Bisette Affair, see: Éric Mensard, "Les mouvements de résistance dans les colonies françaises: l'affaire Bisette (1823-1827)," in Marcel Dorigny, ed., *L'Abolition de l'esclavage: de L.F. Sonthonax à V. Schœlcher, 1793, 1794, 1848* (Paris & Saint-Denis: UNESCO & Université de Vincennes, 1995), 293-9; Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 477-8 and 484-5; and Schloss, *Sweet Liberty*, 99-101. For Isambert's efforts to vindicate Bisette and others, see: François-André Isambert, *Mémoire justificatif des hommes de couleur de la Martinique condamnés par arrêt de la cour royale de cette colonie, contenant l'histoire des hommes de couleur dans les colonies françaises* (Paris: Imprimerie de E. Duverger, 1826).

<sup>22</sup> See: Mondésir Richard, *Observations sur le projet de loi relative aux droits civils et politiques des hommes de couleur des colonies françaises, adressés à la chambre des pairs* (Paris: De l'Imprimerie de Auguste Mie, 1833); *Mémoires pour les hommes de couleur de la Martinique* (Paris: Imprimerie de Duverger, 1829); *Pétition des Hommes de Couleur de la Martinique, déportés aux colonies étrangères par M. le Général Donzelot en décembre 1823 et janvier 1824* (Paris: Imprimerie d' E. Duverger, 1828); and *Pétition des hommes de couleur libres de la Martinique, qui depuis deux ans attendent, dans les Prisons de Brest, l'envoi de la procédure, à la suite de laquelle ils ont été condamnés aux galères perpétuelles* (Paris: Imprimerie de E. Duverger, 1826).

<sup>23</sup> Yun Kyoung Kwon, "Ending Slavery, Narrating Emancipation: Revolutionary Legacies in the French Antislavery Debate and 'Silencing the Haitian Revolution,' 1814-48," (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2012), 196-7.

piecemeal through several royal decrees that allowed free people of color to inherit property from whites. New policies annulled colonial restrictions on civil rights for free people of color; and eradicated the manumission tax to encourage slaveholders to free slaves and regulate the status of persons who had achieved *de facto*, but not *de jure*, freedom. The government instituted colonial councils and allowed them to send delegates to Paris. Free people of color were granted full civil rights with the law of April 24, 1833. Finally, the regime took concrete steps to end the slave trade and signed two slave trade repression treaties with Britain in 1831 and 1833.<sup>24</sup>

While the first three years of the July Monarchy thus suggested a new, albeit cautious, willingness on the part of the government to tackle a range of colonial reform policies, it was international events that galvanized the formation of organized anti-slavery activity. According to historian Lawrence Jennings, the French abolitionist movement had no active mission until British emancipation in 1834 spurred them to organize.<sup>25</sup> Even so, the French abolitionist society lacked the popular participation that characterized British anti-slavery. Fewer than one hundred politicians and statesmen composed the SFAE in 1834, though it was the first organization since

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<sup>24</sup> For these ordinances, see: Jennings, *French Anti-Slavery*, 31-32; ANOM FM GEN 171/1380, Baron de Mackau, "Rapport au Roi," December 1843; Ministre de la Marine et des Colonies Vice-Amiral De Rosamel, *Notices statistiques sur les colonies françaises* (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1837), 6-14; and Kwon, "Ending Slavery, Narrating Emancipation," 197. Many free people of color were disqualified from their newfound voting rights because of the high *cens*, see: Schloss, *Sweet Liberty*, 152; Léo Elisabeth, "La domination française, de la paix d'Amiens à 1870," in Pierre Pluchon, ed., *Histoire des Antilles et de la Guyane* (Toulouse: Edouard Privat, 1982), 396; and Ghislaine Ornème, "Identité et combat assimilationniste des libres de couleur de la Martinique de 1789 à 1833," in Marcel Dorigny, ed., *Esclavage, résistances et abolitions* (Paris: CTHS, 1999), 303. For the ordinances see: *Ordonnance du roi portant abrogation des arrêtés coloniaux qui ont restreint, à l'égard des personnes de couleur libres, la jouissance des droits civils*, le 24 février 1831 (Paris 1831). For discussion of the April 24 law, see: *Journal de Paris*, February 20, 1834; *Le Constitutionnel*, February 18, 1834; and *Revue des Colonies*, August 1834. For the repeal of the manumission tax, see: *Le Moniteur Universel*, March 3, 1831. For the treaties regarding the slave trade, see: Paul Kielstra, *The Politics of Slave Trade Suppression in Britain and France, 1814-48: Diplomacy, Morality and Economics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 138-206; and Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 484.

<sup>25</sup> Jennings, *French Anti-Slavery*, 47.



the *Amis des Noirs* to exclusively take up the question of abolition.<sup>26</sup> Established by and composed of moderate, center-left, and liberal politicians and reformers from the SMC, the SFAE declared that it sought to “demand the application of all measures that tend towards the emancipation of slaves, in our colonies.”<sup>27</sup>

These efforts, however, were often conservative, owing to the political and economic background of most of the SFAE’s founding members. Since its inception, the SFAE was almost entirely a government organization, with its meeting schedule organized around parliamentary sessions in Paris. Almost all its members were politicians and ministers working from within the Orleanist regime.<sup>28</sup> For example, of the ninety-one publicly listed members from 1835-1842, fifty were identified by political affiliations. Twenty members were members of the “liberal” or “left opposition;” sixteen as “moderate opposition,” “dynastic opposition,” or some other political distinction such as “center-left opposition”; eleven as “pro-government” or “Orléanist;” and three as “former Bonapartist.” Of the ninety-one members, thirty-two also belonged to the SMC. Furthermore, ten members either served in administrative or legal posts in the colonies (such as Adolphe Gatine, as a former magistrate, and Jacques Roger du Loiret, as a former administrator in Senegal) or owned property (including slaves) in the colonies (such as Amédée William Thayer, a founding SFAE member, who co-owned a plantation in Martinique, and Louis

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<sup>26</sup> For general history of the founding and organization of the SFAE, see: Jennings, *French Anti-Slavery* 48-75; Philippe Vigier, “La reconstitution du mouvement abolitionniste français sous la monarchie de juillet,” in Dorigny, ed., *L’Abolitions de l’esclavage*, 285-92; Nelly Schmidt, *Abolitionnistes de l’esclavage et réformateurs des colonies: 1820-1851: Analyse et documents* (Paris: Karthala, 2000), 84-94; and Seymour Drescher, “British Way, French Way: Opinion Building and Revolution in the Second French Slave Emancipation,” *The American Historical Review* Vol. 96, no.3 (1991): 714-8.

<sup>27</sup> *Revue des Deux Mondes*, Tome X, 4eme série (April, 1836): 418.  
“L’objet des travaux de la société est de réclamer l’application de toutes les mesures qui tendent à l’émancipation des esclaves, dans nos colonies.”

<sup>28</sup> Motylewski, *La société française pour l’abolition de l’esclavage*, 45-8.

Joseph Alexandre Laborde, who had owned slaves in Saint-Domingue). Of these eleven, six are listed as proprietors or having family property in the West Indies.

That over ten percent of SFAE members had property interests or other ties to the colonies reveals two striking details. Firstly, French anti-slavery was an elite and highly metropolitan-oriented institution, with most of its members based in Paris. Secondly, despite a high number of “liberals” or “leftist opposition members,” the society remained conservative enough in aim and scope to include colonial proprietors and planters (former or otherwise) in its membership.<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, at no point before the late 1840s did the organization seek public support for its aims. Distrustful of popular participation, members of the SFAE made no attempts to open satellite societies in the provinces, organize national petition campaigns and boycotts, or appeal to the wider public. Indeed, high membership fees deliberately restricted the SFAE’s membership to elite men (Bissette, for example, was never financially solvent enough to afford dues). Only one person of color, the Haitian Simon Linstant, became an honorary member after winning a prize for an essay he penned against racial prejudice.<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, while sincere, the aims of the SFAE were cautious and emphasized gradual reform rather than radical change.<sup>31</sup> It proclaimed that although it sought the eradication of slavery, its primary concern was focused on accomplishing this aim gradually, by finding “the most prompt and efficacious means of improving the lot of the black race, to enlighten its intelligence and prepare it for a liberty which is useful and profitable to all the inhabitants of the

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<sup>29</sup> Jennings provides a list of members and their political affiliations in *French Anti-Slavery*, 56-8. For other examples of published membership lists see: *Revue des Colonies*, February 8, 1835; *Revue des Deux Mondes*, April 1836; *Bulletin de la Société Française pour l’Abolition de l’Esclavage* from the years 1835-1838 and 1842; and Motylewski, *La société française pour l’abolition de l’esclavage*, 45-8.

<sup>30</sup> Kwon, “Ending Slavery, Narrating Emancipation,” 200.

<sup>31</sup> Motylewski, *La Société française pour l’abolition de l’esclavage*, 48.

colonies.”<sup>32</sup> The SFAE also focused on achieving its aims by working with the government. As scholars have shown, this strategy prevented them from making any rapid headway, as Louis-Philippe was well-known for his reluctance to implement radical policies.<sup>33</sup> It also stymied abolitionists’ ability to mount a cohesive challenge to well-funded, powerful, and more united colonial interest groups.<sup>34</sup>

However, much less historiographical attention has been paid to the question of how working with and from within the regime informed the ways in which French abolitionists perceived colonial problems and the slavery question—in ways that perhaps they themselves did not fully realize. During the early years of the July Monarchy, policymakers faced four problems that fundamentally shaped the anti-slavery debate over the course of the 1830s and 1840s: (1) rapid industrialization and social change in France, (2) the campaign for civil rights for free people of color, (3) British emancipation, and (4) grappling with the legacy of the Haitian Revolution. These intertwined problems shaped the development of slave reform policies in French anti-slavery—and engendered an abolitionist family politics that shaped France’s colonial reform policies during the 1830s and 1840s.

#### Visions of Family Reform in Post-Revolutionary France and the Empire.

The early years of the July Monarchy were characterized by heightened anxiety about social problems and the family in both France and its colonies. As they articulated a gradualist

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<sup>32</sup> *Revue des Deux Mondes*, April 1836, 418-9.

“L’objet des travaux de la société est de réclamer l’application de toutes les mesures qui tendent à l’émancipation des esclaves, dans nos colonies, et en même temps de rechercher les moyens les plus prompts et les plus efficaces d’améliorer le sort de la race noire, d’éclairer son intelligence et de lui préparer une liberté qui soit utile et profitable à tous les habitants [sic] des colonies.”

<sup>33</sup> Collingham and Alexander, *The July Monarchy*, 1.

<sup>34</sup> Jennings, *French Anti-Slavery*, 86-8.

approach for abolition in the colonies in order to prepare slaves for freedom, members of the SFAE reflected ongoing contemporaneous debates over the social disruptions wrought by economic transitions in nineteenth-century France. Thus, abolitionists' attention to the slave family as a colonial problem reflected the wider anxieties of metropolitan reformers grappling with the problem of growing social and economic inequality generated from steady industrial production.<sup>35</sup>

It was also a period of romanticism in intellectual circles, when French thinkers problematized the question of social organization through dynamic and nuanced debates on social theory. Emerging utopian ideologies offered novel ways of thinking about both the positive and negative effects of economic progress on society. Intellectuals and government officials alike felt compelled to reconcile economic change with widening social inequalities precipitated by the uneven processes of industrialization, worker migration, and urbanization in key regions.<sup>36</sup>

For middle-class reformers, the family—particularly the working-class family—demonstrated these larger social and economic problems. Reforming families, they believed, would correct social and economic inequalities. The idea that family reform was integral to addressing social problems already had a long history in nineteenth-century France. In the 1790s, the French Revolution radically redefined the family to reflect the values of the new state, as revolutionaries recognized that reforming the domestic practices and relationships that structured

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<sup>35</sup> Collingham and Alexander, *The July Monarchy*, 1.

<sup>36</sup> Naomi Andrews, "Breaking the Ties: French Romantic Socialism and the Critique of Liberal Slave Emancipation," *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 85, No. 3 (September 2013): 489-90; Lynch, *Family, Class, and Ideology in Early Industrial France*, 10; and Christopher H. Johnson, *Utopian Communism in France: Cabet and the Icarians, 1839-1851* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 13-9.

the intimate world of family life was an integral step in their plans to create liberated citizens and build an egalitarian society.<sup>37</sup>

The Napoleonic regime dismantled many of these revolutionary family policies by restoring the authority of male heads of households—essentially replacing the egalitarian family model of the Revolution with the patriarchal family.<sup>38</sup> The Code reflected the values of the bourgeoisie, which sought to protect family property, marital relations, progeny, and honor by controlling marital sexuality and reproductive strategies.<sup>39</sup> The intimate dynamics, sexual relations, and reproduction norms central to bourgeois family life allowed for reimagining and renegotiating the bonds between citizen and nation. It also served as a site of reform or intervention to address wider social and political problems—from ameliorating poverty and social inequality to slavery and colonial society.<sup>40</sup>

Therefore, the idea that the family was the foundation of society and the means through which citizens were connected to the body politic took on particular salience during the post-revolutionary period. Breakdowns in family structure indicated wider social and political dysfunction. Social theorists and utopian thinkers such as Charles Fourier and Etienne Cabet proposed different utopian visions of family life in their efforts to reconcile structural economic

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<sup>37</sup> Desan, *The Family on Trial*, 1 and Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, 4.

<sup>38</sup> Offen, *The Woman Question in France, 1400-1870*, 89; and Desan, *The Family on Trial*, 312-5.

<sup>39</sup> André-Jean Arnaud, *Essai d'analyse structural du code civil français, la règle du jeu dans la paix bourgeoise* (Paris: R. Pichon et R. Durand-Auxias, 1973), 55; and Robert Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 31-46. Scholarship on the nineteenth-century French family takes its cue from Michel Foucault, who theorized that the reproductive, familial, and sexual practices of the bourgeoisie represented a “technology of sex” that became central to how, as a class, the bourgeoisie reproduced themselves socially and politically. See: Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1 (New York: Random House Press, 1980), 120-5.

<sup>40</sup> Heuer, *The Family and the Nation*, 9. For more on the contradictions and problems of the family metaphor, see: pp. 192-202.

change with social and economic inequality.<sup>41</sup> The family ideologies of reformers such as moral economists and social Catholics shaped the policies that affected working-class family life in industrializing cities. As women and children entered into an industrializing workforce and working-class people turned to municipal aid societies for help surviving wage fluctuations and unemployment, these reformers highlighted the breakdown of family life as symptomatic of wider social problems. They emphasized how alcoholism, child labor, prostitution, and informal unions in the working classes all indicated that urbanization and industrialization had dislocated the family as the center of moral stability.<sup>42</sup> By the 1830s, many of these reformers advocated for state intervention into working-class families in order to promote work, morality, and public order in a recently industrializing society: in essence, a kind of social engineering project that would be enacted on lower-class French families.<sup>43</sup>

Viewing marriage as the foundation of the family, these reformers focused their interventions on conjugal relations between working-class men and women. Informal unions were commonplace and were a particular source of frustration for reformers, who claimed that

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<sup>41</sup> See: Charles Fourier, *Publication des manuscrits de Charles Fourier* (Paris: Librairie phalanstérienne, 1851-1858); and Etienne Cabet, *Douze lettres d'un communiste à un réformiste sur la communauté* (Paris: Bureau du Populaire, 1841-1842), 7; idem, *Voyage en Icarie* (Paris: Bureau du Populaire, 1848); and Johnson, *Utopian Communism in France*, 13-9.

<sup>42</sup> Lynch, *Family, Class, and Ideology*, 10 and 32-33. Lynch distinguishes between “social Catholics” (clergy and members of lay organizations who favored direct intercession with individual working-class families to encourage them to improve their behavior) and “moral economists” (predominately middle-class reformers and statesmen who advocated for government intervention in family matters to promote reform)—though frequently these groups had similar intentions and perspectives. Also see: David Harvey, *Paris: Capital of Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 188-9.

<sup>43</sup> Lynch, *Family, Class, and Ideology*, 3; and Jacques Rancière, *Nights of Labor: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France*, John Drury, trans., (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989). Several policies Lynch discusses that moral economists instituted in industrial cities such as Mulhouse, Rouen, and Lille to intervene in working-class family life included expelling *concubinaires* from the cities, preventing them from accessing municipal welfare, and documenting the marital status of workers in their *livrets*.

these relationships were an insidious “working class habit.”<sup>44</sup> Reformers asserted that working-class men and women would rather occupy themselves with their next payday and indulge in the sensuous pleasures of life than save to prepare themselves for undertaking the financial and moral responsibility of family life.<sup>45</sup> The frugal, pious, and self-sufficient family (under the guidance of a sober father) emerged in reformers’ discourse as the ideological model for correcting social problems, and they employed a variety of policies, incentives, and punishments to convince working-class men and women to marry—from raising funds to pay for weddings to expelling recalcitrant *concupinaires* from certain cities.<sup>46</sup>

For example, in 1827 Baron Charles Dupin (who would later advocate proslavery positions) proposed a measure to inscribe the *livrets* of working-class men and women with their marital status and the number of children they had. That way, employers would endeavor to hire legally married men and women over those living in informal unions—especially during times of high unemployment. Thus, “in hard times, workers would soon learn that one of the most efficacious ways of escaping misery and famine would be to sanctify their reprehensible relations by marriage. Gradually, the men who now live a scandalous life would be called back into the gentle empire of moral habits.”<sup>47</sup> While Dupin’s proposals never became official policy, his and other reformers’ preoccupation with informal unions among working classes informed

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<sup>44</sup> Michel Frey, “Du mariage et du concubinage dans les classes populaires à Paris (1846-1847),” *Annales* Vol. 33, no. 4 (July-August 1978), 803.

<sup>45</sup> Jean-Charles Simonde de Sismondi, *Nouveaux principes d’économie politique, ou de la richesse dans ses rapports avec la population* Vol. 2 (Paris: Delaunay 1827), 265; and Dr. Thouevenin, “De l’influence que l’industrie exerce sur la santé des populations dans les grands centres manufacturiers,” *Annales d’hygiène publique et de médecine légale* 36 (1847), 86 as quoted in Lynch, *Family, Class, and Ideology*, 77.

<sup>46</sup> Lynch, *Family, Class, and Ideology*, 70-80.

<sup>47</sup> Charles Dupin, *Des forces productives et commerciales de la France*, Vol. 1 (Paris, 1827), 101-2, as quoted in Lynch, *Family, Class, and Ideology*, 78-9.

the ways in which they perceived social problems. For them, sexuality, marriage, and work discipline had to be carefully managed to realize the vision of pervasive morality, “an empire of moral habits,” in which social vices would naturally disappear. They agreed that the patriarchal family was the foundation for this moral order and a solution to social problems.

Family also offered a framework of thinking about social relationships and politics in the context of empire. As metropolitan reformers studied working-class families in the 1820s, free people of color in the Antilles began to push the French government to implement new colonial policies. The family provided free people of color with a useful metaphor for re-envisioning the relationship between the colonies and France. They developed a discourse of the “great French family,” which incorporated colonies and metropole into an integral, indissoluble unit. For example, recounting the 1833 law that granted civil rights to free people of color, Bisette proclaimed in the *Revue des Colonies* that they were “without restriction, part of the great family” of France.<sup>48</sup> By the “great family,” Bisette meant that “there are no longer men of color, for us, among free men, there are only Frenchmen.”<sup>49</sup> Fusing the rights of citizenship and political integration in this vision of the “great French family,” Bisette employed familial language to emphasize a raceless political discourse and ideology in which all free men of the colonies attained the same civil rights and civic status as Frenchmen in the metropole.

The concept of the “great French family” permeated the multilayered claims of men of color who demanded equality before the law, the eradication of political, social, and legal exclusion based on race, and to be incorporated into the empire as French citizens. For these civil

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<sup>48</sup> *Revue des Colonies*, August 1834, 8.

“Parmi les bienfaits dont il faut lui savoir gré, il convient de compter la loi du 24 avril 1833, qui a reconnu aux hommes de couleur les droits de citoyens français, et qui les a placés, sans distinction, au sein de la grande famille.”

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

“Il n’y a plus d’hommes de couleur, pour nous, parmi les hommes libres, il n’y a plus que des Français...”



rights proponents, the familial language of citizenship that they developed provided a powerful rhetorical tool. The “great French family” invoked a concept of imperial citizenship in which all free men enjoyed equal political and social rights. By incorporating men of color into the body politic as French citizens, civil rights advocates argued, the “fusion of the races” would follow, thus obliterating racial prejudice and strengthening the bonds between metropole and colonies as a result. This concept of racial fusion presented an alternative, race-blind vision of French imperial politics.<sup>50</sup>

Conceptually, racial fusion inherently invoked interracial unions. Its proponents seized on the interracial family (constituted through marriage) as the embodiment of fusion. In 1803, a continental ministerial decree prohibited marriage between blacks and whites in France and colonial administrations followed suit with similar policies.<sup>51</sup> *De la situation des gens de couleur libres aux Antilles françaises* (the incendiary anonymous pamphlet that sparked the Bissette Affair) included in a list of grievances the fact that white parents were unable to name mixed-race children as their legal heirs.<sup>52</sup> Abolitionists argued that colonial governments’ attempts to

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<sup>50</sup> Françoise Vergès argues that the “great French family” echoed the family romance politics of the French Revolution, but rather than overthrow the authority of the state, it emphasized strong bonds with and attachment to, the metropole as the center of imperial power. Educated and wealthy free men of color, such as Bissette, conceptualized France as a mother figure (*la mère-patrie*), which allowed them to imagine “themselves as the brothers of French citizens. And they appealed France to protect them against the tyrannical power of the [white] landowners.” See: Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries*, 5 and 3-8. For examples of this language of attachment, see: *Memoires pour les hommes de couleur*, 141. Lorelle Semley also discusses Bissette’s arguments for colonial inclusion in French citizenship in: Semley, *To Be Free and French*, 140-51. Additionally, John Garrigus demonstrates how free people of color in Saint-Domingue developed similar claims for civil rights at the end of the eighteenth century. He argued that interracial mixing had created new bonds between colonial citizens of color and metropolitan citizens: “France was their *patrie*, and Frenchmen were their brothers, literally as well as figuratively.” See: John Garrigus, “Redrawing the Color Line: Gender and the Social Construction of Race in Pre-Revolutionary Haiti,” *Journal of Caribbean History*: 30, 1 (1996), 42. See also: Léo Elisabeth, “The French Antilles,” in David W. Cohen and Jack P. Greene, eds., *Neither Slave nor Free: The Freedman of African Descent in the Slave Societies of the New World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 134-71.

<sup>51</sup> For laws prohibiting interracial marriage in the colonies, see: *The Antislavery Reporter*, July 1, 1840. For continental France under Napoleon, see: Jennifer Heuer, “The One-Drop Rule in Reverse?” 515-7.

<sup>52</sup> *De la situation des gens de couleur libres aux Antilles françaises* (Paris: Imprimerie de J. Mac Carthy, 1823), 13-14. For the discussion on interracial marriage prohibitions, see: *Pétition des Hommes de Couleur de la Martinique*,

legally erase the interracial family created “anti-social laws,” which legally inscribed racial prejudice and exacerbated social tensions.<sup>53</sup>

Metropolitan abolitionists’ criticism of colonial proscriptions on interracial marriages reveal how liberal metropolitan reformers began to engage with free people of color’s discourse on fusion to highlight the need for colonial social and political reforms. For instance, Isambert argued that white “color prejudice” was a “fanaticism” that should have been weakened by the “frequent alliances between them [Europeans] and the children of African soil, but have only increased because local laws constrain the ways to legitimize them by marriage.”<sup>54</sup> Legal restrictions on interracial marriage, in other words, did not prevent intimate relationships across the color line.

Therefore, such repressive legislation prevented these interracial families and individuals from legitimizing the “alliances” that otherwise united them. The result, Isambert concluded, was

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*déportés aux colonies*, 7 and ANOM FM GUA 107/750, *Petition des Hommes de Couleur de la Guadeloupe*. Other grievances included policies forbidding free people of color from adopting the surnames of white families and instead taking names that were Africanized or were otherwise deemed to reflect their occupation or color. See: *Revue des Colonies*, November 1836, 185.

<sup>53</sup> See: Gatine’s argument in *Revue des Colonies*, November 1836, 188.

“...les lois anti-sociales, qui autrefois ne permettaient pas aux hommes de couleur de porter les noms des familles blanches...lorsque le sang d’Afrique s’était mêlé au sang d’Europe.”

Alexandre Adolphe-Ambroise Gatine was a lawyer in Paris who defended many men of color deported from Martinique after the Bissette Affair from 1824-1827. He was also a prominent abolitionist and a member of the Commission on the Abolition of Slavery and the Commissioner General of the Republic in Guadeloupe in 1848. See: Schmidt, *Abolitionnistes de l’esclavage et réformateurs des colonies*, 1087-8.

<sup>54</sup> Isambert, *Mémoire justificatif des hommes de couleur de la Martinique*, 1-2.

“Un autre genre de fanatisme moins facile encore à déraciner, puisque ceux qui en sont atteints conviennent qu’ils s’en trouvent malgré eux subjugués par les impressions de leur enfance, le préjugé de la différence des couleurs entre les hommes, qui depuis moins d’un siècle s’est fortement enraciné dans nos colonies du Nouveau-Monde parmi les descendants des Européens; un préjugé que des fréquentes alliances entre eux et les enfants du sol africain auraient dû affaiblir, mais n’ont fait qu’accroître parce que les lois locales ont interdit les moyens de les légitimer par le mariage; un préjugé qui aveugle l’élite de toute la population des colonies esclaves, au point de compromettre journellement sa sûreté, et d’obliger les métropoles à s’armer de rigueur et de pouvoir arbitraire pour maintenir par des réglemens [sic] administratifs l’inégalité même civile entre des hommes que la loi naturelle et la loi promulguée déclarent également libres et capables de tous honneurs, libertés et franchises.”

that “the bias that blinds the elite of every population in the slave colonies daily compromises their security, and compels the metropole to arm them with harshness and arbitrary power to maintain...inequality between men that natural and promulgated law has declared free.”<sup>55</sup> By excluding free people of color from civil rights, especially the right to form families, colonial elites undermined the security and stability of the colonies—as only violence could maintain an unnatural social and political hierarchy divided by race.

The plight of the interracial family in these petitions alluded to an underlying set of claims that free men of color made in articulating their demands for civil rights: that the intimate bonds between *gens de couleur* and whites generated common economic and political interests. Acknowledging the rights of interracial families would thus strengthen and ensure political and social stability.<sup>56</sup> Thus, the interracial family, as the physical embodiment of the fusion of whites and free people of color, provided both metropolitan and colonial reformers with a metaphor to campaign for colonial reforms that would ensure future cooperation, stability, and public order in the colonies.<sup>57</sup>

By placing family at the center of the debate for civil rights, free men of color and their supporters created a vision of political inclusion that explicitly rejected racial division. They claimed that common interests between elite whites and free men of color should be encouraged

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 2.

“Un préjugé qui aveugle l’élite de toute la population des colonies esclaves, au point de compromettre journellement sa sùteté, et d’obliger les metropoles à s’armer de rigueur et de pouvoir arbitraire pour maintenir...l’inégalité même civile entre des hommes que la loi naturelle et la loi promulguée déclarent également libres...”

For a similar argument, see: Mondésir Richard, *Observations sur le projet de loi relatif aux droits civils et politiques des hommes de couleur des colonies françaises* (Paris: Imprimerie de Auguste Mie, 1833), 14.

<sup>56</sup> Richard, *Observations sur le projet de loi relatif aux droits civils et politiques*, 14.

<sup>57</sup> In contrast with how abolitionists depicted sex between enslaved women and white men, which were, almost without exception, presented as an abuse of slaveholders’ power and reflective of extensive moral corruption in the colonies. This phenomenon is discussed later in this chapter.

through racial mixing (embodied in the interracial family), which would in turn strengthen the colonial system as a whole. The interracial family would become the “great French family,” a model of imperial cooperation and progress, as espoused in the discourse of racial fusion. The ideology behind racial fusion emphasized the inclusion of all free persons in the colonies into the French body politic, in which “Frenchmen” would be the only marker of citizenship, not skin color. Stability and progress in colonial societies would then follow.

Metropolitan abolitionists expanded on these conceptions of family as the generator of an imperial order to include enslaved peoples. Reforming slave families, abolitionists claimed, would prepare them to become free (and productive) citizens in due course. Like social reformers espousing marriage as a solution to inequality and poverty among the metropolitan working classes or free people of color arguing that family was the foundation of civil and political rights, abolitionists viewed family as a moralizing, civilizing, and political institution that (if carefully managed) could ensure a harmonious transition from slavery to freedom. But they also looked beyond France for examples to bolster this argument—highlighting the contrasting outcomes of British and Haitian slave abolition in their claims.

#### Considering Two Abolitions: Britain vs. Haiti

One of the most striking differences between the British and French abolitionist movements was the level of enthusiastic public participation in Britain’s case compared with that of France.<sup>58</sup> Seymour Drescher differentiated between the elitist French “Continental,” and the Anglo-American popular and inclusive variants of nineteenth-century anti-slavery. For Drescher, the French model was characterized by its narrow political aims and elite base of supporters,

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<sup>58</sup> See: Jennings, *French Anti-Slavery*, 285-7; idem, *French Reaction to British Slave Emancipation* (Baton Rouge, L.A.: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 185-94; Drescher, “British Way, French Way,” 711; and Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress*, 224.

while British abolitionism was distinguished by the combination of its massive popularity, expansive network of chapters, and ability to campaign over an extended period of time.<sup>59</sup>

Even as slavery in the Americas appeared to be expanding in the early nineteenth century, decades of sustained public pressure had pushed the British government to prohibit the slave trade in 1807 and, in August 1833, abolish slavery throughout the empire (after a period of apprenticeship).<sup>60</sup> British anti-slavery efforts at home and abroad, therefore, marked an era of profound transformation in popular politics, in which new forms of mobilization included attending public meetings, joining clubs and organizations, and marshalling the power of the press.<sup>61</sup> British abolition merged these new techniques of organization and campaigning that made it a “pioneering organization in mobilizing hitherto untapped groups as actors for philanthropic and social reform.”<sup>62</sup> Mobilizing and coordinating public pressure against slavery and the slave trade was crucial for convincing the British government to pass the 1833 Act.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Drescher, “British Way, French Way,” 714. Also see: Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 293-330 and 419-472; and Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress*, 224-5.

<sup>60</sup> For expansion of slavery in the Americas see: Davis, “Foreword,” in Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), xiii-xx; David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 185-206; Drescher, “Capitalism and Slavery after Fifty Years,” *Slavery and Abolition* Vol. 18, no 3 (December 1997): 212-27; Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 1-17, 303-29, and 395-420; Dale Tomich, *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar: Martinique and the World Economy, 1830-1848* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016) 51-76; and Rebecca Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba, 1860-1899* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985) 1-11. For the British emancipation bill, see: *An Act for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Colonies; for Promoting the Industry of the Manumitted Slaves; and for Compensating the Persons hitherto Entitled to the Services of such Slaves*, 28 August 1833.

<sup>61</sup> Seymour Drescher, “Women’s Mobilization in the Era of Slave Emancipation: Some Anglo-French Comparisons” in Kathryn Kish. Sklar and James Brewer. Stewart, *Women’s Rights and Transatlantic Antislavery in the Era of Emancipation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 112.

<sup>62</sup> Seymour Drescher, “Public Opinion and Parliament in the Abolition of the British Slave Trade,” in Stephen Farrell, Melanie Unwin, and James Walvin, eds., *The British Slave Trade, Abolition, Parliament, and People: Including the Illustrated Catalogue of the Parliamentary Exhibition in Westminster Hall, 23 May-23 September 2007* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 42.

<sup>63</sup> Davis argues that while eighteenth-century British antislavery reformers, such as Granville Sharp, wanted to attack slavery as a whole, they made a strategic decision to focus almost exclusively on the slave trade—assuming

Fundamentally, the British abolition movement (largely through the efforts of Protestant men and women) urged a public boycott of West Indian-produced goods (especially sugar).<sup>64</sup> Scholars have argued that during the sugar boycotts, female abolitionists were especially important actors in developing a discursive *cordon sanitaire* between immoral and unhygienic slave-produced sugar and the sanctity of the domestic sphere in the metropole.<sup>65</sup> This historiography has demonstrated how British women capitalized on the bourgeois and evangelical “separation of spheres” ideology that endowed them with authority as moral influencers who guarded their families against the evils of the outside world.<sup>66</sup> Scholars have therefore argued that, during the boycott of the West Indian sugar at the tea service and armed with the bible, petitions, and embroidery, abolitionist women galvanized public support for the

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that the end of the trade would compel planters to take better care of their slaves which would, in turn, lead to gradual emancipation. See: Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, 235.

<sup>64</sup> On anti-slavery boycott campaigns in this period more broadly, see: Deirdre Coleman, “Conspicuous Consumption: White Abolitionism and English Women’s Protest Writing in the 1790s,” *English Literary History* Vol. 61, no. 2 (1994): 341-62; L.B. Glickman, “‘Buy for the Sake of the Slave:’ Abolitionism and the Origins of American Consumer Activism,” *American Quarterly* Vol. 56, no. 4 (2004): 889-912; and Carol Lasser, “Voyeuristic Abolitionism: Sex, Gender, and the Transformation of Antislavery Rhetoric,” *Journal of the Early Republic* Vol. 28, no. 1 (2008): 82-114.

<sup>65</sup> For British women and their involvement in the anti-slavery movements in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, see: Clare Midgley, *Women against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992) 9-84; idem., “Slave Sugar Boycotts, Female Activism, and the Domestic Base of British Anti-Slavery Culture,” *Slavery and Abolition* Vol. 17, no. 3 (Dec., 1996), 137-62; Drescher, “Women’s Mobilization in the Era of Slave Emancipation: Some Anglo-French Comparisons,” 98-120; Charlotte Sussman, “Women and the Politics of Sugar, 1792,” *Representations* Vol. 48 (1994): 48-69; and idem., *Consuming Anxieties: Consumer Protest, Gender, and British Slavery, 1713-1833* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), chapters 5-6.

<sup>66</sup> For the development of the separation of spheres ideology in Britain, including its middle-class and religious overtones see: Thomas Gisborne, *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies in the Strand, 1797); idem., *An Enquiry into the Duties of Men in the Higher and Middle Classes of Society in Great Britain, Resulting from Their Respective Stations, Professions, and Employments* (London: T. Cadell, 1824); Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 3; Lenore David and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 170; Catherine Hall, *White, Male, and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 75-107; and Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (London: Pimlico, 2003), 262-73. For domestic sphere as the site where women used their influence for the anti-slavery cause, see: Mimi Sheller, “Bleeding Humanity and Gendered Embodiments: From Antislavery Sugar Boycotts to Ethical Consumers,” *Humanity* Vol. 2, no. 2 (Summer, 2011): 171-92.

anti-slavery cause and isolated their homes from the pernicious influences and products of the degraded colonies.

British abolitionist discourse therefore posed an alternative vision for national, as well as colonial, moral order.<sup>67</sup> The abolitionist home transformed into a space that reimagined new imperial models that linked the global system of empire to the domestic sphere—which required careful management to ensure the British home was not tainted with slave-produced goods.<sup>68</sup> Thus, unlike the “great French family,” which held interracial comingling and mixing as an ideal model for a productive and harmonious relationship between metropole and colony, organized British abolitionism generated a vision of empire in which metropolitan domestic space required distancing from the noxious practices of its overseas subjects.

After these public anti-slavery campaigns pressured the British government to abolish slavery, both proslavery and abolitionists groups in France paid particularly close attention to the West Indies—namely, the morals and work habits of former slaves. The former governor of French Guiana, Captain Layrle, wrote of his travels throughout the British colonies that among freedpeople “former habits still prevail, and that there are numerous instances of a want of fidelity in married persons.” Layrle believed that the efforts of ministers had prevailed upon the morals and habits of freedpeople somewhat successfully, to the extent that “married persons refuse to associate with those who live in an immoral manner; women, especially will not yield on this point, and affix a profound contempt on those who persist in their former irregularities.” He grudgingly noted that such attitudes indicated that “family ties are increasingly regarded;

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<sup>67</sup> Charlotte Sussman, “Women and the Politics of Sugar,” 65.

<sup>68</sup> Ann McClintock argues that discourses of consumption of colonial products meant that British imperialism during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries cannot be understood “without a theory of domestic space and its relation to the market.” See: McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 17. For a similar argument, see: Sheller, “Bleeding Humanity and Gendered Embodiments,” 173.

infancy is cared for; old age and its infirmities inspire interest.” Nevertheless, Layrle concluded, British emancipation was “a hasty and unjust measure.” It was “hasty” because the apprenticeship period was not long enough for “the moralization of the rural classes” and did not “sufficiently prepare” the population “to enjoy the benefits of liberty.” It was unjust, because it “ruined colonial property” and sacrificed colonial and metropolitan economic interests.<sup>69</sup>

Abolitionists, on the other hand, viewed the British abolition project favorably, repeatedly proclaiming the transition from slavery to freedom in the West Indies a success. French abolitionist Alphonse de Lamartine, for instance, praised the 1834 Act for demonstrating the “advantages of free labor” while preserving the rights of colonists, providing an indemnity, and redeeming “the priceless...principle of liberty.” France, by contrast, continued to “keep in chains, in oppression, in immorality, in concubinage, in the privation of all that constitutes humanity, three hundred thousand slaves” rather than raise this “whole race of men to voluntary labor, to liberty, to family, to civilization.”<sup>70</sup> British emancipation uplifted its colonial subjects to morality and civilization while the French colonies maintained slaves in moral dissolution and brutal suppression.

Yet, as “slavery kill[ed] the moral man,” abolitionists asserted, the transition to freedom should have been a process of gentle rehabilitation—starting with measures to reform enslaved

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<sup>69</sup> Marie Jean-François Layrle, “L’Abolition de l’esclavage dans les colonies anglaises,” as quoted and translated in *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*, April 17, 1844.

<sup>70</sup> BNF 8-LE62-578, Alphonse de Lamartine, *Sur l’émancipation des esclaves: Discours de M. Alph. De Lamartine, Séance de la Chambre des Députés du 23 avril 1835* (Paris: Imprimerie De H. Fournier, 1835); and *Archives parlementaires de 1787 à 1860: recueil complet des débats législatifs et politiques des chambres françaises, imprimé par ordre du Sénat et de la Chambre des députés* (hereafter AP, CD), Lamartine on April 22, 1835, t. 95, 66. Also reprinted in Schmidt, *Abolitionnistes de l’esclavage et réformateurs des colonies*, 560. “L’Angleterre, après de longues enquêtes, vient, par le bill de 1834, d’abolir l’esclavage; les avantages du travail libre ont été constatés à ses yeux... le principe sans prix aux yeux d’un peuple chrétien, le principe de la liberté et de la dignité des enfants de Dieu... depuis longtemps à la France... retenir dans les fers, dans l’oppression, dans l’immoralité, dans concubinage, dans la privation de tout ce qui constitue l’humanité, trois cent mille esclaves... toute une race d’hommes au travail volontaire, à la liberté, à la famille, à la civilisation.”



men and women by encouraging marriage and promoting a spirit of industry and work.<sup>71</sup> They therefore admired apprenticeship as an education project that would civilize former slaves, teach them moral and industrious habits, and thereby establish a firm foundation for emancipation. As Tocqueville asserted, it would inevitably “weaken” France’s authority over the colonies if the regime emancipated enslaved people without moralizing them first: such a measure would result in a “lazy” and “disordered” population, which would make “administration difficult and moralization almost impractical.”<sup>72</sup> Given the fear that former slaves would languish in “idleness and disorder” without a gradual transition to emancipation, abolitionists debated at length the question of how to “confer upon the slaves certain conditions and certain rights,” that would encourage moral conduct and an industrious work ethic.<sup>73</sup>

Bissette, for example, maintained that amelioration was key for moralizing enslaved people into a sense of family responsibility and pride in agricultural labor: “it is advantageous to colonial society to ameliorate the morality of slaves...to inculcate the spirit of family and the attachment to the soil they cultivate and enrich.”<sup>74</sup> Others agreed. When BFAS delegates visited Paris in January 1840 to persuade the SFAE to seek “the immediate and entire abolition, and of

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<sup>71</sup> AP, CD, Isambert on April 22, 1835, t. 95, 55; and *Le Moniteur Universel*, May 15, 1844.

“L’esclavage tue l’homme moral.”

I have found little evidence that French abolitionists paid much attention to British slave amelioration efforts before emancipation. For recent scholarship on early nineteenth-century British amelioration, see: Caroline Spence, “Ameliorating Empire: Slavery and Protection in the British Colonies, 1783-1865,” PhD diss., (Harvard University, 2014), 193-243.

<sup>72</sup> Tocqueville Report, 15-6.

“... on y arrive avec une autorité affaiblie...la population noire a déjà pris des habitudes d’oisiveté et de désordre qui en rendent le gouvernement difficile et la moralisation presque impraticable.”

<sup>73</sup> *Procès-Verbal des séances de la chambre des pairs: session de 1845*, Vol. 5 (Paris: Imprimerie De Crapelet, 1845), 2869.

“...en conférant aux nègres, sous certaines conditions, sous certaines réserves...”

<sup>74</sup> *Revue des Colonies*, August, 1835, 76.

“S’il est avantageux à la Société colonial d’améliorer le moral des esclaves, il ne l’est pas moins de leur inculquer l’esprit de famille et l’attachement au sol qu’ils cultivent et fécondent.”

steadfastly resisting any proposition that might be made to enforce an apprenticeship as preliminary to complete emancipation,” Lamartine rebuffed their arguments, and maintained the “necessity of an apprenticeship for the benefit of the negroes.” To this, the BFAS delegation replied, “the best way to educate the negro is to make him free.”<sup>75</sup> Thus, even though the BFAS had declared apprenticeship an “erroneous” failure, French abolitionists continued to embrace it as an emancipation model.<sup>76</sup> They championed policies designed to promote marriage, prevent the separation of slave children from their families, and ease the working conditions on the plantation.

While French abolitionists admired parts of the British abolition plan and even sought financial backing from the BFAS, they remained wary of adopting British abolitionism campaign tactics, or heeding the advice of BFAS members who urged immediate emancipation.<sup>77</sup> In the context of deteriorating Anglo-French relations in the 1830s and 1840s, the SFAE recognized that its enthusiasm for British abolition placed them in a delicate position. International standoffs between the two nations, including over the British navy’s campaign of “search and seizure” against vessels suspected of illicit slave trafficking and the Egyptian crisis of the 1840s, led to a rise in anglophobia and French nationalistic sentiment that the proslavery lobby was only too happy to exploit.<sup>78</sup> Colonial interest groups published a veritable deluge of anglophobic

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<sup>75</sup> *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*, April 8, 1840.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, April 7, 1841.

<sup>77</sup> Jennings, *French Anti-Slavery*, 287.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 32, and 153-4; and Drescher, “Women’s Mobilization in the Era of Slave Emancipation,” 104. Thiers believed that supporting Muhammad Ali’s efforts in the Egyptian-Ottoman War (1839-1841) would strengthen France’s position in North Africa, pitting France against both European and Ottoman interests as established in the Convention of London in 1840. See: Efraim Karsh and Inari Karsh, *Empires of the Sand: The Struggle for Mastery in the Middle East, 1789-1923* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 27-41.

propaganda portraying slave emancipation as part of a British project to weaken France.<sup>79</sup> They also drew upon the recent history of the Haitian Revolution to stoke apprehension about attempting a second French emancipation project.

In stoking anti-British sentiment, proslavery lobbyists drew direct connections between the 1834 Abolition Act and the Haitian Revolution. François Mauguin, the delegate representing Guadeloupe, warned that “the fatal effects of emancipation in Saint-Domingue” could repeat themselves in the West Indies and spread throughout the Caribbean.<sup>80</sup> Proslavery factions thus emphasized that British abolition posed a security threat to the French colonies, which hampered abolitionists’ efforts to push the government on colonial reforms. It was in this context that French abolitionists found themselves precariously defending the legacy of emancipation while criticizing the outcome of the Haitian Revolution.

At first, they emphasized how the loss of Saint-Domingue functioned as an unwarranted catch-all reaction to squash even the most moderate of colonial reforms. Isambert said as much to the Chamber of Deputies, stating “whenever there is a question on the colonies, one never ceases to proclaim that the decree of the Convention of February 1794 caused the innumerable misfortunes that afflicted this part of our possessions.” Consequently, Isambert, claimed, Saint-Domingue created the “singular illusions” that the “question of emancipation” was fundamentally based on the notion of “disturbing the colonies and losing them.”<sup>81</sup> Lamartine

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<sup>79</sup> Drescher, “Women’s Mobilization in the Era of Slave Emancipation,” 104.

<sup>80</sup> *Bulletin de SFAE*, no. 3 (1835), 12. Charles Dupin makes a similar argument in AP, CD, June 11 1833, t. 85, 14.

<sup>81</sup> AP, CD, Isambert on April 22, 1835, t. 95, 53.

“Vous le savez, Messieurs, toutes le fois qu’il est question des colonies, on ne cesse de proclamer que le décret de la Convention de février 1794 a causé des maux incomblables qui ont affligé cette partie de nos possessions.”

“En vérité, Messieurs, quand on traite ces questions, on arrive à de singulières illusions. On dit que la question d’émancipation était de nature à bouleverser les colonies, et de les perdre.”

made a similar observation that the “fatal experience” of the Saint-Domingue Revolution made discussing the slavery issue potentially perilous: “We must be careful...we will be, Gentlemen. The example of 1794 has taught us [this].”<sup>82</sup> To defend British abolition and convince the regime to implement colonial reform policies, French abolitionists had to rewrite the legacy of the Haitian Revolution—to decouple slave emancipation from the specter of disorder and territorial loss that the proslavery lobby propagated.<sup>83</sup> They also had to counter proslavery arguments that hasty abolition led to the rapid demoralization of black people who reverted to “their primitive state of African savagery” by living in “a horrible promiscuity” and “hideous ignorance and destitution.”<sup>84</sup>

Abolitionists highlighted the different outcomes of slave emancipation in the British West Indies and Haiti, emphasizing the success of the former and failure of the latter. The British carefully managed the transition from slavery to freedom, while the French, owing to civil war and the intransigence of *colons*, lost control over the situation in Saint-Domingue. As a result, French anti-slavery reformers recast the Haitian Revolution as an aberration that would not be repeated if France took the cautious, preparatory steps necessary to ensure a peaceful transformation.<sup>85</sup> The emphasis on the ties between metropole and colony was particularly important in this argument, as they maintained that *colons* could not be entrusted with an emancipation project that might run counter their immediate interests. France, abolitionists

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 65.

“Nous devons être prudents, réservées: nous le serons, Messieurs. Nous sommes instruits par l'exemple de 1794.”

<sup>83</sup> Kwon, “Ending Slavery, Narrating Emancipation,” 195.

<sup>84</sup> *La Réforme*, May 4, 1847, quoting a common proslavery argument.

“vers leur état primitive de sauvages africains...une horrible promiscuité...hideux d'ignorance et de misère...”

<sup>85</sup> This speaks to Vergès’ framework of colonial family romance, in which France constructed itself as the parent of the colonized, guiding them in the transition from slavery to freedom. See: Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries*, 1-21.

asserted, must oversee every step of the process to ensure a stable transition. The localized and despotic power of masters over the enslaved populations would therefore be replaced by the just power of the state.

This argument featured a delicate balance between criticizing the nascent Haitian state and emphasizing the virtues of gradual emancipation. As evidence for how unchecked *colon* authority could corrupt colonial society, anti-slavery advocates cited widespread “moral dissolution” in early nineteenth-century Haiti as a pre-revolutionary legacy. They criticized all elites, from white slave owners to contemporaneous leaders in Haiti, for corrupting the morals of former Haitian slaves. Schœlcher, for example, after a trip to Haiti in 1841 criticized family life there, asserting: “marriage is almost an exception in Haiti. One lives in an organized concubinage which has taken all the forms and often also the duration of legitimate unions.”<sup>86</sup> Informal unions, he maintained, were commonplace among both the poorer classes and the most venerable government officials. He referenced the example of Marie-Madeleine Lachenais, the mistress and influential political advisor of both presidents Pétion and Boyer from 1807-1843. As Schœlcher told it, “the head of state, the first of all, lives publicly out of wedlock with a woman, a new Diane de Poitiers, who is today his mistress after having been the mistress of his predecessor, and who, promenades in her carriage accompanied by an escort of the president’s guard!”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Schœlcher, *Colonies étrangères et Haiti: résultats de l’émancipation anglaise* (Paris: 1843), 283. For more on his travels to Haiti and the Americas from 1840-1841, see: Nelly Schmidt, “Un témoignage original sur Haïti au XIX siècle: celui de l’abolitionniste Victor Schœlcher,” in *Jarbuch für Geschichte von Staat, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Lateinamerikas* 28 (Cologne: University of Cologne, 1991): 327-41.

“Le mariage est presque une exception en Haïti. On vit dans un concubinage organisé qui a pris toutes les formes et souvent aussi la durée des unions légitimes.”

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 289.

“Le chef de l’état, tout le premier, vit publiquement hors mariage avec une femme, nouvelle Diane de Poitiers, qui est aujourd’hui sa maîtresse après avoir été celle de son prédécesseur, et qui se promène dans sa voiture accompagnée d’une escorte de la garde du président!”

Schœlcher's chapter "Les Haïtiennes—Le Concubinage" on informal conjugal unions in Haiti indicates that he viewed the intimate relationships between Lachenais and presidents Pétion and Boyer as symptomatic of broader social and political problems rooted in an "incomplete" moral transition after the revolution. The association of "le concubinage" with "Les Haïtiennes" indicated how the entire nation suffered this moral collapse. Instead of the security of a civil marriage contract, Schœlcher asserted, conjugal partners chose informal unions, and accepted any children born from this relationship as legitimate.

Schœlcher was particularly troubled by how Haitian politicians had debated new family policy proposals from 1838-1839 (such as extending a law that allowed a husband and wife working in the same profession to share a license to include couples living in informal unions). Such proposals, Schœlcher continued, were often rejected or modified before becoming law. However, he questioned, was it not "already a shame that the state of morals allowed this to be proposed?"<sup>88</sup> From the intimate affairs of elites to the customs dictating the terms that men and women agreed to before living together, Schœlcher decried what he described as the "disorder" and "immorality" of Haitian family life. This "disorder" extended to even the family of the president (the imagery of Lachenais promenading publicly with an armed presidential guard

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Born in Saint-Domingue to Marie Thérèse Fabre, free woman of color, and Colonel de Lachenais, a white Frenchman, Marie-Madeleine (Joute) Lachenais is sometimes referred to as the "President of Two Presidents" and her political influence on both Boyer and Pétion was considerable as she oversaw many acts passed in the Haitian Parliament from 1818-1840. When Boyer was deposed in 1843 and fled to exile in Jamaica (and later, France), Lachenais and her children accompanied him. She died in Jamaica in 1843. See: Thomas Madiou, *Histoire d'Haïti*, Vol. 3 (Port-au-Prince: J. Courtois, 1848), 260.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 289.

"L'amendement, mis aux voix, fut rejeté, mais n'est-ce pas déjà une honte que l'état des mœurs ait permis de le proposer?"

most vividly embodied this). The political and social problems of Haiti stemmed from such vices.<sup>89</sup>

However, Schœlcher was careful to point out that informal conjugality and its widespread social acceptance was not a practice that emerged only in post-independence Haiti. Rather, the “distant cause” of “this strange disorder peculiar to this country” was directly rooted in the “slackening of colonial mores” that occurred when Saint-Domingue was governed by the *colons*. He maintained that whites, driven by “color prejudice...left...prostitution as their sad heritage. The heirs accepted the legacy.”<sup>90</sup> In other words, sexual relationships between white men and women of African descent, which had been prevalent in Saint-Domingue social life, had inspired a legacy of conjugal relationships in Haiti, which gave these “slack mores” social legitimacy.

Therefore, in response to proslavery advocates who emphasized that emancipation would bring about moral disorder, liberal abolitionists countered with the argument that the misfortunes of Haiti stemmed from particular causes and “social vices that were inherited from slavery, and not at all from her inhabitants’ own characters.”<sup>91</sup> For abolitionists, local problems and the loss of France as a civilizing force formed the crux of Haiti’s problems; especially when compared with the British example of apprenticeship, which reformers celebrated as having successfully emancipated slaves, provided for their moral improvement, and maintained the plantation system

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<sup>89</sup> Schœlcher was not alone in his criticism of the Haitian regime. Isambert excoriated President Boyer for his foreign and economic policies and accused him of ending some of the previous industrial and “moral improvements” of the country during the 1820s. See: *Le Constitutionnel*, July 8, 1841.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 288.

“...d'un étrange désordre spécial à ce pays, et dont nous pourrions expliquer la cause lointaine par les souvenirs du relâchement des mœurs coloniales. Avec le préjugé de couleur, les blancs ont laissé dans leur triste héritage la prostitution avouée. Les héritiers ont accepté le legs.”

<sup>91</sup> *La Réforme*, May 4, 1847.

“Ne venez donc plus insulter la race noire au nom d'Haïti, les malheurs de cette république tiennent à des causes particulières, à des vices sociaux que lui a légués l'esclavage, et non pas au caractère propre de ses habitants.”

of production. In their reinterpretation of the Haitian Revolution and its legacies, anti-slavery reformers thus infused emancipation with renewed legitimacy. However, French abolitionists emphasized a line of argument that conformed to their overall moderate approach to the slavery question: that the metropole must institute an emancipation project aimed at reforming colonial mores in order to avoid repeating the mistakes that led to the loss of Saint-Domingue.

As a result, the conceptualization of family as a moralizing mechanism that would transform enslaved persons into productive colonial subjects allowed French abolitionists to uphold British emancipation as a successful foil to post-independence Haiti. Reforming family life for both enslaved men and women and slave owners thus emerged in both discourse and policy initiatives in abolitionist debates in the 1830s and 1840s.

#### Degradation and Despotism: The Problem of Family in Slave Societies

“Marriage is incompatible with servitude,” declared Schœlcher, since slavery eroded the traditional gender roles innate in family life. He continued: “the male or female slave, in the middle of the animal life in which they were made, in the deep intellectual and moral darkness where they are plunged, hardly conceive of the association of marriage, let alone understand it, with their fiery sensual passions.”<sup>92</sup> Slavery, abolitionists agreed, prevented enslaved men and women from fulfilling the rights and duties of both marital and parental roles and taming their sexual desires. They argued that enslaved men and women were physically and morally

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<sup>92</sup> Schœlcher, *Des colonies françaises*, 72-5. See also: Tocqueville, “The Emancipation of Slaves” (1843) in *Writings on Empire and Slavery: Alexis de Tocqueville*, Jennifer Pitts, ed., and trans., (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 212 for a similar diagnosis of marriage and slavery.

“Le Mariage est incompatible avec la servitude.”

“L’esclave mâle ou femelle, au milieu de la vie animale qu’on lui a faite, au sein de la profonde obscurité intellectuelle et morale où on le laisse plongé, ne conçoit guère l’association matrimoniale, et encore moins conçoit-il, avec ses ardentes passions sensuelles...”



brutalized by corporal punishment, excessive labor demands, sexual victimization (of women), and the breakup of the slave family.

Abolitionists acknowledged that “family sentiment is developed among them [enslaved persons] to a very high degree” despite “the bestial state to which they are condemned,” but maintained that enslaved people lived “in absolute promiscuity, without law and order.”<sup>93</sup> Arguing against *colons*’ claims that enslaved persons were naturally hyper-sexualized (and thus unable to learn the moral behavior that freedom required), abolitionists claimed that “promiscuous” practices, such as informal unions, were not the result of any natural immorality, but rather, perpetuated by slavery’s unlawful and demoralizing effects.<sup>94</sup> For example Schœlcher argued that slavery, and not innate “promiscuity,” prevented enslaved people from legally sanctioning the family ties they held by the “natural morality of the heart.”<sup>95</sup> Much like reformers preoccupied with informal unions among the working classes in France, then, abolitionists viewed the absence of legal families among the enslaved populations of the colonies as symptomatic of a wider social dysfunction.

One of the foremost reasons why French abolitionists viewed slavery as inherently “antifamily,” was because it obliterated enslaved men’s authority over women and children. They claimed that the slaveholder’s power to override the authority of an enslaved man rendered

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 79.

“... les nègres des colonies vivent dans une promiscuité absolue, sans lois, ni ordre... mais ils ont des liaisons où se retrouve la fixité des relations conjugales...Même dans l'état bestial auquel ils sont condamnés, le sentiment de la famille s'est développé chez eux à un très haut degré.”

<sup>94</sup> For the proslavery arguments on the dangerous sexuality of slaves (in particular slave men) see: Andre de Lacharière, *De l'affranchissement des esclaves dans les colonies françaises* (Paris: Eugène Renduel, 1836), 62 and 122; Adolphe Jollivet, *Des pétitions demandant l'émancipation immédiate des noirs dans les colonies françaises* (Paris: 1847), 27.

<sup>95</sup> Schœlcher, *Des colonies françaises*, 81.  
“...la moralité naturelle de leur cœur.”

him passive and complacent about exerting control over women. “Why, if you please,” demanded the SFAE, would the slave man “marry, when his wife can be stolen, and when the paternal power becomes the prerogative of the master?” Why, in other words, would enslaved men marry, if they could not unequivocally exercise any patriarchal authority over their wives’ sexuality and labor, an essential characteristic that defined the patriarchal head of household? From this perspective, no slave man could fulfil the role of husband because his master superseded his authority over and restricted sexual access to women. As the SFAE pointed out, as long as the slave owner wielded absolute power over slave women (and for abolitionists, this always implied sexual control), enslaved men could only expect to bear “the expenses of the marriage” without any of the benefits.<sup>96</sup>

Abolitionists emphasized how physical separation of slave couples acted as a powerful disincentive to marriage. For example, during a conversation with several enslaved workers on the Amé-Noël plantation in Guadeloupe, an unnamed enslaved man told local priest Abbé Dugoujon how “it was not possible for him to marry” as his intended partner “does not belong to my master.”<sup>97</sup> This separation made marriage unfeasible, given the long hours of daily toil, the daunting prospect of negotiating a slave marriage between two masters, and the geographical obstacles that had to be surmounted for this unnamed couple to seek a formal union. In sum, abolitionists argued, enslaved men’s inability to control the sexuality of women and the obstacles that prevented long-term attachment all rendered them unable to fulfill the role of husbands.

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<sup>96</sup> *L’Abolitionniste française*, Vol. 2, 44.

“Pourquoi, s’il vous plaît, se marierait-il, lorsqu’on peut lui ravir sa femme, et lorsque le pouvoir paternel deviant l’apanage du maître? Il n’aurait que les charges du mariage!”

<sup>97</sup> Abbé Dugoujon, *Lettres sur l’esclavage dans les colonies françaises, par M. l’abbé Dugoujon, ex-missionnaire apostolique du St Esprit* (Paris: Pagnerre, 1845), 28. Dugoujon was a former French missionary in the Saint-Esprit order. Also see: Rémusat, *Rapport fait au nom de la Commission*, 51-2.

“Père, la chose n’est pas possible...La personne que je voudrais épouser n’appartient pas à mon maître.”

Enslaved men were also denied fatherhood. Under the law, most enslaved children were considered fatherless—throughout the slave societies *partus sequitur ventrum* rendered fathers legally irrelevant, as slavery was a condition inherited only from mothers.<sup>98</sup> Further, as Tocqueville asserted, while enslaved men had children, they “cannot know the duties, the rights, the hopes or the worries which accompany paternity.”<sup>99</sup> The SFAE maintained that slave children were “the property of the master,” an authority external to the slave household.<sup>100</sup> Enslaved men therefore could not exercise the responsibilities and duties of fatherhood, those prerogatives belonged to the master. Schœlcher similarly noted that enslaved fathers could not fulfill their paternal obligations because “whatever the father might instruct his son to do,” the master’s command was final, and “the son must obey, not the father, but the master. The child is a slave before a son.”<sup>101</sup> Slavery thus eclipsed the fundamental roles of father and child with the relationship between master and slave. More than upend the natural bonds of filial obedience and paternal authority between men and their children, slavery leveled the hierarchy between them: enslaved children were born to be their fathers’ equals and condemned to the same fate: a life of indefinite bondage.

Thus, abolitionists argued, slavery directly led to widespread moral degradation among the enslaved population: “Since we have reduced the black man to a brutish state, he has coarse

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<sup>98</sup> Davis, “‘Don’t Let Nobody Bother Yo’ Principle’ The Sexual Economy of American Slavery,” 109-10.

<sup>99</sup> Tocqueville Report, 4.

“...il ne saurait connaître ni les devoirs, ni les droits, ni les espérances, ni les soucis dont la paternité est accompagnée.”

<sup>100</sup> *L’Abolitionniste française*, Vol. 2, 46.

“L’enfant né de ce mariage, ne devient-il pas, dès le moment de sa naissance, la propriété du maître?”

<sup>101</sup> Schœlcher, *Des colonies françaises*, 76.

“le fils doit obéir, non point au père, mais au maître. L’enfant est esclave avant d’être fils.”

instincts,” which, the SFAE argued, compelled him to seek sexual gratification in informal unions.<sup>102</sup> Slavery rendered them powerless to protest when they were flogged in front of their children and unable to protect their wives or daughters from sexual assault.<sup>103</sup> For abolitionists, then, it was little wonder that slave men decided it was better to not marry—and thus avoid the humiliation of being the equal of his wife and children and failing to guard them from all manner of abuse.<sup>104</sup> This rendered the enslaved man bereft of patriarchal responsibilities, a victim of moral degradation, and led him to choose informal cohabitation, where he simply accepted his partner’s “children for his own” and chose to “retain the right to separation.”<sup>105</sup> However, some abolitionists maintained, enslaved men yearned for more and desired marriage and family. “Black people ask the freedom to earn the bread that belongs to them, to have a family,” declared Bissette. “They ask to work as men and not as beasts, to legitimately unite with their wives and to produce free beings.”<sup>106</sup> They wanted, in other words, to be free men with free families.

Debates over the condition of enslaved women allowed abolitionists to further expand on these arguments. While the anti-slavery discourse on the conditions of enslaved men stressed their inability to wield patriarchal authority, enslaved women were almost universally presented

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<sup>102</sup> *L’Abolitionniste française*, Vol. 2, 44.

“Puisqu’on réduit le noir à l’état de brute, il en a les grossiers instincts.”

<sup>103</sup> Schœlcher, *Des colonies françaises*, 76.

“Ceux-là, voyez-les chefs de famille, et flagellés en présence de leurs fils; époux, pères, et ne pouvant défendre leur femme, leur jeune filles, les êtres de leur amour que l’on dépouille et auxquelles on inflige le profane supplice!”

<sup>104</sup> Tocqueville Report, 6.

<sup>105</sup> Schœlcher, *Des colonies françaises*, 72.

“Le nègre prend une femme avec laquelle il vit maritalement, et dont il accepte les enfans pour siens, mais il veut se conserver la faculté de séparation...”

<sup>106</sup> *Revue des Colonies*, October, 1835.

“Les noirs demandent la liberté de gagner du pain qui leur appartienne, d’avoir une famille. Ils demandent à travailler comme hommes et non plus comme bêtes, à s’unir légitimement avec leurs femmes et à produire des êtres libres”

as either bereaved or indifferent mothers. Reformers were troubled by the widespread assertion among colonial administrators and the proslavery lobby that “there scarcely exists a natural and necessary relationship between the mother and the child” in slavery.<sup>107</sup> Both abolitionists and policymakers were concerned with the alarmingly low birth rates recorded among the enslaved populations that they read in reports on the colonies:

Table 1.1. Births per 1,000 in the Enslaved Populations of Martinique and Guadeloupe, 1834-1847<sup>108</sup>

Year	Guadeloupe		Martinique	
	Total Slave Population	Births per 1,000	Total Slave Population	Births per 1,000
1834	96,684	-1.70	78,233	1.79
1835	96,322	-2.92	78,076	2.87
1836	95,609	1.04	77,459	1.42
1837	94,591	0.25	76,012	-3.78
1838	93,349	5.51	76,517	-1.02
1839	93,646	3.85	74,333	0.89
1840	94,109	-1.64	76,403	6.28
1841	93,558	-2.03	75,225	2.71
1842	92,639	-4.07	76,172	-0.11
1843	92,322	0.38	75,736	7.66
1844	91,831	3.06	76,117	9.72

<sup>107</sup> Pro-slavery advocate and Colonial Delegate from Martinique, Jollivet, quoting Tocqueville’s argument about slavery and motherhood in Adolphe Jollivet, *Analyse des délibérations et avis des conseils coloniaux et des conseils spéciaux sur l’abolition de l’esclavage dans les colonies françaises* (Paris: Imprimerie De Cosse et Laguionie, 1842), 15. See also: Ministre de la Marine et des Colonies, *Commission instituée par décision royale du 26 mai 1840 pour l’examen des questions relatives à l’esclavage et à la constitution politique des colonies* (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1843), 87, 131, 134, 150 for discussions about enslaved women as indifferent mothers. “Maintenant que le mariage, a dit son rapporteur, l’honorable M. de Tocqueville, est Presque inconnu parmi les esclaves, il n’existe guère de rapport naturel et nécessaire qu’entre la mère et l’enfant.”

<sup>108</sup> Demographic data for the populations, births, and deaths for Martinique and Guadeloupe during these years are available in Tables A1, A3, A 4, A6, and A7 in the Appendix. While abolitionists drew on these numbers to make their arguments, it is important to note that the census and demographic data for much of the 1830s and 1840s is shaky at best and often provokes more questions than answers. For instance, the births, deaths, and marriages of the enslaved populations were only officially registered starting with new colonial policies implemented in the 1830s, so it is difficult to assess whether or not the official numbers provided by the Department of the Navy from the 1830s-1840s reflect a significant shift from before this period. The figures for Guadeloupe were compiled from Alexandre Moreau de Jonnés, *Recherches statistiques sur l’esclavage colonial et le moyens de le supprimer* (Paris: Imprimerie De Bourgogne et Martinet, 1842) (years 1831-1838); and *Tableaux et relevés de population, de cultures, de commerce, de navigation, etc.* (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1839-1848) (available years from 1839-1847). The data for Martinique is from Tomich, *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar*, 142.

Table 1.1, Continued

Year	Guadeloupe		Martinique	
	Total Slave Population	Births per 1,000	Total Slave Population	Births per 1,000
1845	90,997	-1.95	76,042	-0.62
1846	89,341	-3.78	75,339	2.67
1847	87,752	-5.75	72,859	1.39

Chart 1.1. Number of Births v. Deaths in the Enslaved Population of Guadeloupe, 1834-1847

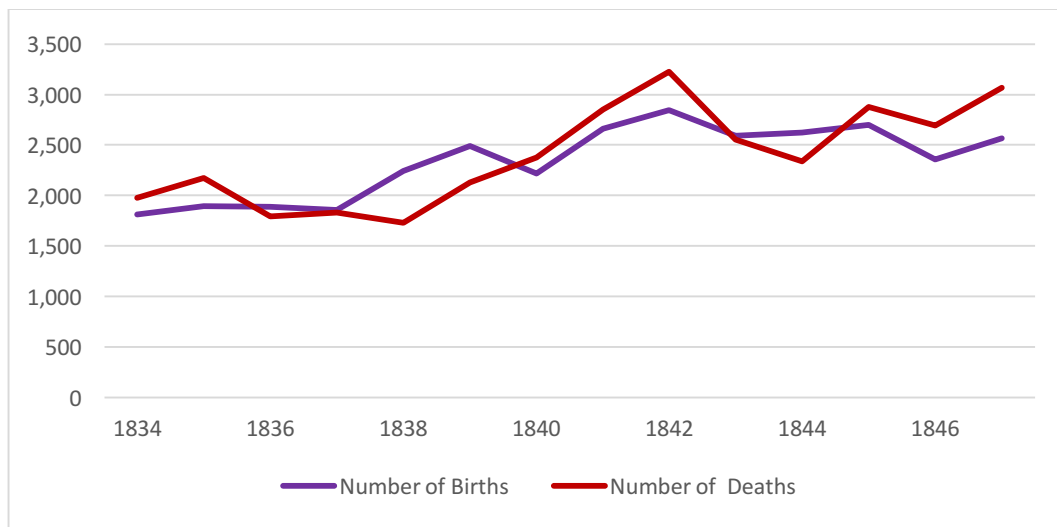
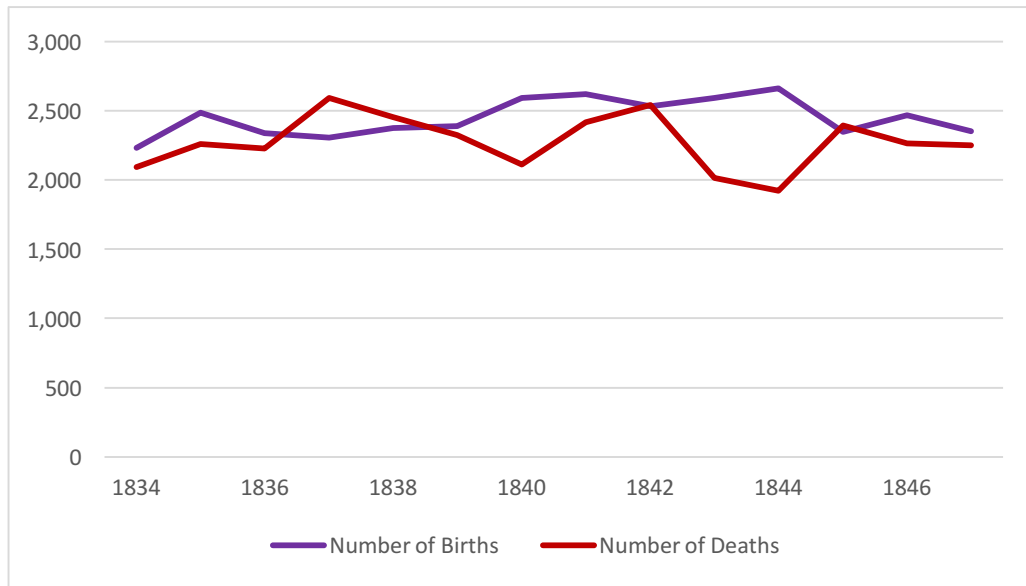


Chart 1.2. Number of Births v. Deaths in the Enslaved Population of Martinique, 1834-1847



Although statistical reports noted factors other than birth rates that contributed to the decline in the enslaved populations of Martinique and Guadeloupe from 1834-1847 (such as manumissions, natural disasters, escape to neighboring colonies, and epidemics), most metropolitan reformers emphasized the problem of negative fertility rates.<sup>109</sup> Birthrates on both islands, compared to the total enslaved population, were strikingly low—even negative, for at least eight nonconsecutive years in Guadeloupe and four in Martinique. Enslaved women in the French Antilles did tend to have few children, and despite the efforts of planters to encourage pregnancies, the enslaved population remained unable to reproduce itself through natural increase following the abolition of the slave trade.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> *Tableaux et relevés de population, de cultures, de commerce, de navigation, etc.* 1845, 13.

For example, the 1845 report for Martinique indicated that an unnamed sickness affecting children was to blame for diminution of the slave population. During that same year, there were 571 manumissions, 86 runaways to “foreign countries,” and 177 deaths over births (decreasing the overall population by 834) in Guadeloupe. “En 1845, l’excédent des décès sur les naissances, dû en partie à une épidémie qui a sévi sur les enfants, a diminué la population esclave.”

<sup>110</sup> Dessalles, for example, tried to encourage pregnancies among his enslaved workers, see: Dessalles, letter to his mother, Sainte-Marie, July 4, 1823, in *La vie d’un colon* Vol. 1, 90.

In 1847, for example, there were 27,371 women between the ages of fourteen and sixty and 2,564 births (or one birth per 10.68 women) in Guadeloupe. In Martinique, 23,406 women in the same age range had a total of 2,352 children (or one birth per 9.95 women).<sup>111</sup> For these low birth rates, the Department of Navy and Colonies blamed “debauchery, criminal abortions, and the little care that mothers take in general with their children” for the decrease in the enslaved population.<sup>112</sup>

Abolitionists echoed this claim, though they framed their critique of these reproductive strategies against slavery itself and not enslaved women. For example, Schœlcher declared that an enslaved woman naturally rejected motherhood when she realized how her “belly gives slavery its existence.”<sup>113</sup> In a similar vein, the Broglie report asserted that many enslaved women resorted to preventing conception or ending their pregnancies by any means necessary (including abortion and infanticide) rather than give birth to future enslaved people. Even more concerning,

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<sup>111</sup> *Tableaux et relevés de population, de cultures, de commerce, de navigation, etc.* 1845, 12-15.

This is an imperfect estimate. The records detailing population numbers by sex and age use only the following categories: “girls under 14,” “women between 14 and 60” and “women over 60,” making it difficult to approximate how many women of reproductive age were having children. Furthermore, I only have population numbers detailing age and sex for the years 1839, 1843, 1845, and 1847. This estimate was measured using the full number of women between the ages of 14-60.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 1843, 20. This complaint was specifically in reference to low birth rates in French Guiana. “...le libertinage, les avortements criminels et le peu de soins que les mères prennent généralement de leurs enfants...”

<sup>113</sup> Schœlcher, *Des colonies françaises*, 78-9. For other references to abortion, infanticide, and abandonment practices in the French Antilles, see: ANOM FM SG MAR 33/290, “Rapport au Ministre de la Marine,” October 20, 1831; and Louis Blanc, “De l’abolition de l’esclavage aux colonies,” 5. Although a sense of how often enslaved women procured abortions or committed infanticide eludes the archives, planters were well-aware that they occurred. See: Dessalles, letter to his mother, Caféière, September 13, 1823, *La vie d’un colon*, Vol. 1, 97 and op. cit., letter to his mother, September 15, 1824, 128. For enslaved women’s reproduction more broadly in the French Antilles, see: Moitt, *Women and Slavery*, 89-99. “...et que, sans doute il est des ateliers dont les négresses ne voulant pas avoir d’enfants, usent de moyens connus d’elles seules, pour étouffer le fruit de leur conception, ou détruire leur progéniture à sa naissance. Est-ce la peine de naître, disent ces malheureuses, dont le ventre donne la servitude avec l’existence, est-ce la peine de naître, pour vivre dans l’esclavage?”



the report asserted, was the fact that enslaved persons did not consider such practices immoral or criminal because modesty and parental responsibility did not exist for them. Thus, practices like infanticide “odious as it is,” reflected the “social crime” that was “the degradation, the depravity of a whole class.”<sup>114</sup> Tocqueville succinctly summarized the problem in a speech to the Chamber of Deputies: “the slaves of our colonies are unhappy and miserable until death. The numbers prove it.”<sup>115</sup>

In the same vein as Schœlcher, abolitionists argued that enslaved women not only rejected motherhood, but were unable to become mothers, because they gave birth to slaves, not children.<sup>116</sup> In this perspective, the enslaved woman was capable only of replenishing the labor force, and the conditions in which she became pregnant, gave birth, and raised her children (if they were not taken from her) were all shaped by the indelible marks of slavery. Reformers relied on anecdotal evidence to convey the suffering of enslaved mothers.

Enslaved women, asserted Abbé Dugoujon, remained in a “condition which deprives them of all the sweetness and consolations of motherhood, in which they are exposed every day to seeing their children, even from the most tender age, cruelly whipped or loaded with irons, according to the caprices of an irascible or drunken master, of a...brutal manager, of a brutish and vindictive driver.” Enslaved women had no recourse when their children were “torn from them to be thrown on the market like calves.” It was little wonder, he reiterated, that

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<sup>114</sup> Commission instituée, par décision royale du 26 mai 1840 pour l’examen des questions relatives à l’esclavage et à la constitution politique des colonies (hereafter Broglie Commission), *Rapport au ministre secrétaire d’état de la marine et des colonies* (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1843), 87-8.

“L’infanticide, en effet, tout odieux qu’il soit...la dégradation, la dépravation de toute une classe, est un crime social.”

<sup>115</sup> Tocqueville, “Discours à la Chambre des Députés, séance du 31 mai 1845. Discussion des projets de lois présentés par le ministre de la Marine, baron de Mackau,” in *L’Abolitionniste française*, July 1845.

“...les esclaves de nos colonies sont malheureux et misérables jusqu’à la mort. Les chiffres le prouvent.”

<sup>116</sup> Blanc, “De l’abolition de l’esclavage aux colonies,” 4.

bondswomen refused to have children. Indeed, Dugoujon underscored this claim with a story about an enslaved woman in Guadeloupe, known as “the virgin of the islands,” who refused to marry, and declared: “I content myself with being miserable in my person without bringing children into the world who might be unhappier than myself.”<sup>117</sup>

Enslaved mothers themselves were also subjected to humiliating and cruel punishments, often “stripped bare on the floor and hit in the presence of the entire gang,” including their children.<sup>118</sup> Anti-slavery newspapers published sensationalized accounts of corporal punishment in the colonies—as with the case of Jenny, an enslaved woman and mother of nine in Prêcheur, Martinique. Jenny’s master, Mr. Lehimas ordered that Jenny’s children watch as their mother was stripped naked, tied up, and whipped because he suspected her of helping one of them shirk their work responsibilities. As reported in the metropolitan press and abolitionist accounts, Jenny’s children watched this ordeal “in tears,” powerless to intercede on behalf of their mother.<sup>119</sup> Schœlcher observed that the circumstances surrounding Jenny’s ordeal, in which a mother was humiliated, degraded, and beaten in front of her children, for acting on her maternal

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<sup>117</sup> Abbé Dugoujon, *Lettres sur l’esclavage dans les colonies françaises*, 65-6. For more on the separation of children and mothers, see: Schœlcher, *Des colonies françaises*, 45-82.

“...et j'avais de la peine à me faire à cette idée que des mères qui aiment leurs enfants aussi tendrement que les négresses pussent se trouver bien d'une condition qui les prive de toutes les douceurs et de toutes les consolations de la maternité, dans laquelle elles sont exposées tous les jours à voir leurs enfants, même dès l'âge le plus tendre, cruellement fouettés ou chargés de fers, selon la caprice d'un maître irascible ou aviné, d'un gèreur...brutal, d'un commandeur grossier et vindicatif; dans laquelle aussi ils peuvent leur être arrachés pour être jetés sur le marché comme des veaux.”

“...une jeune négresse si persuadée de la misère de sa condition, que son maître ne put jamais la foire consentir à se marier au nègre qu'il lui présentait. Elle attendait que le père (à l'autel) lui demandât si elle voulait un tel pour mari, car pour lors elle répondit, avec une fermeté qui nous étonne: Non mon père, je ne veux ni de celui-là ni d'aucun autre; je me contente d'être misérable en ma personne sans mettre des enfants au monde qui seraient peut-être malheureux que moi... Elle est aussi toujours constamment demeurée dans le même état de fille, et on l'appelait ordinairement la *Pucelle des îles*.”

<sup>118</sup> *L'Abolitionniste française*, Vol. 2, 317-8.

“La commission a appelé l'attention du ministre, surtout sur les femmes esclaves, particulièrement sur les femmes enceintes ou nourrices; d'ailleurs la pudeur est révoltée d'une femme mise à nu sur la terre et frappé en présence de l'atelier.”

<sup>119</sup> *Courrier Français*, December 11, 1826; and Victor Schœlcher, *Histoire de l'esclavage*, 386-7.

instincts to help and protect them, no less, was a perversion of the natural bonds of love between mothers and children that “could only be found in slavery.”<sup>120</sup> In this argument, the cruelty inherent in the relation between master and slave obliterated the bonds between child and mother and thus severed the most sacred of relationships in the family.

These relations were further frayed by the common practice of family separation through sale. The *Code Noir* ostensibly prohibited selling prepubescent children away from mothers, but colonial authorities widely tolerated the practice.<sup>121</sup> Bissette highlighted how children as young as two were sold away from their mothers—as with the case of Agnes and Bruno. In 1841 in Capesterre, a Désirée Grizel sold the two-year old Bruno for a sum of 467 francs to a demoiselle Rosette from Saintes (an island dependency of Guadeloupe, about fourteen kilometers away from the Basse-Terre side of the island, where Capesterre is located). As Bissette noted, Bruno was not the first child Agnès lost to the financial interests of her owner: out of her seven children, only one son and one daughter remained with her in the service of Grizel.<sup>122</sup>

Reformers seized on these reported instances of family separations through sale as one of the main reasons why enslaved women rejected both marriage and motherhood: it was difficult to complain about the low rates of marriage and births among enslaved people, Schœlcher maintained, when “husband and wife are not invested with the rights of husband and wife, or when the child, a kind of cattle endowed with speech, can be detached from the family at a

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<sup>120</sup> Schœlcher, *Histoire de l’esclavage*, 385.

<sup>121</sup> Ulrike Schmieder, “Histories under Construction: Slavery, Emancipation, and Post-Emancipation in the French Caribbean,” *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* Vol. 31, No. 2 (2008): 227.

<sup>122</sup> Cyrille Bissette, “A Monsieur Dupin, député de la Nièvre, Procureur-Général à la Cour de Cassation,” in *Lettres politiques sur les colonies sur l’esclavage et sur les questions qui s’y rattachent* (Paris: Ebrard, Libraire, 1845), 96-97. Schœlcher covers similar types of separations via sale in *Des colonies françaises*, 57-60.

certain age, like the foal and the calf that no longer needs mother's milk."<sup>123</sup> Therefore, for reformers debating new colonial policies, one of the first steps they considered to encourage fecundity and marriage among slave women was to strengthen *Code Noir* provisions forbidding the sale of prepubescent children away from their mothers.<sup>124</sup>

However, reformers noted, there were other problems enslaved women faced that prevented them from forming maternal attachments to their children. Bondswomen had precious little time to spend with their children and attend to their care—as they were assigned the same grueling labor tasks as enslaved men. Demanding overseers compelled new mothers to bring their infants into the fields, tied to their backs, where they endured the hot sun. Nursing bondswomen could only leave work for a few minutes at a time to hastily breastfeed before being called back to work.<sup>125</sup> Expectant mothers were obligated to work up until the moment of delivery and allowed only a scant few days' rest before having to return to the fields.<sup>126</sup> By forcing mothers into performing intense manual labor without regard for their biological sex or reproductive responsibilities, reformers argued, it was little wonder that many infants died and women viewed childrearing as another form of exploitation.<sup>127</sup> From their perspective, the

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<sup>123</sup> Schœlcher, *Des colonies françaises*, 76-7.

“Plaignez-vous encore que le mariage ne soit pas constitué parmi les esclaves! Que peut-il être dans un mode d'existence où le père et la mère n'ont point les droits de père et de mère, où le mari et la femme ne sont point investis des droits de mari et de femme, où l'enfant, sorte de bétail doué de la parole, peut être détaché de la famille à un certain âge, comme le poulain et le veau qui n'ont plus besoin du lait maternel?”

<sup>124</sup> For an example of how these policies were proposed and debated, see: “Proposition lue par H. Passy, dans la séance de la Chambre des Députés du 10 février 1838,” in Schmidt, *Abolitionnistes de l'esclavage et réformateurs des colonies*, 525-30.

<sup>125</sup> *La Reforme*, January 3, 1847.

<sup>126</sup> Moitt, *Women and Slavery*, 89-90.

<sup>127</sup> *La Reforme*, January 3, 1847.

laboring conditions under slavery prevented enslaved women from fulfilling some of the most essential roles of maternal care: devoting the proper amount of time to nurturing their children.

The other central problem preventing enslaved women from becoming wives and mothers, reformers argued, was their widespread sexual exploitation at the hands of their owners, overseers, and other men in colonial society. Scholars have demonstrated that slave societies in the Americas were established through the coerced sexual labor of enslaved women—what Adrienne Davis has termed a “political economy of slavery” that routinely exploited black women’s sexuality for the pleasure and profit of their owners, overseers, and countless other men.<sup>128</sup> Enslaved women were usually expected to perform sexual labor, and colonial authorities and planters excused their own sexual liaisons by blaming the tropical climate for bolstering their sex drives—and characterizing enslaved women as promiscuous, seductive, money-grubbing, and materialistic temptresses.<sup>129</sup> Indeed, as scholars have emphasized, colonial white men consistently viewed black and mixed-race women as hyper-sexualized symbols of promiscuity and lascivious behavior.<sup>130</sup>

Abolitionists, however, highlighted the predatory aspect of these sexual relations, stressing that slavery enabled white men to give into their basest instincts to the utter

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<sup>128</sup> Davis, “‘Don’t Let Nobody Bother Yo’ Principle’ The Sexual Economy of American Slavery,” 105.

<sup>129</sup> Schmieder, “Histories Under Construction,” 228; Myriam Cottias, “La séduction coloniale: Damnation et stratégies, Les Antilles, XVIIe-XIXe siècle,” in C. Dauphin and A. Farge, eds., *Séduction et sociétés: Approches historiques* (Paris: Seul, 2001), 125-40. This perspective of materialistic enslaved women was not confined to the French Antilles. For example, Thomas Thistlewood, an overseer in eighteenth-century Jamaica, frequently noted in his diaries the money and gifts he would give to the enslaved women he raped on the Egypt plantation and frequently complained about paying money to Phibbah, his enslaved mistress. See: Burnard in *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire*, 168-92; and Beckles, *Centering Women*, 22-58.

<sup>130</sup> Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs*, 187-211; Garraway, *The Libertine Colony* 229; Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 71-2; Arlette Gautier, “Les esclaves femmes aux Antilles françaises, 1635-1848,” *Histoires réflexions* Vol. 10 (1983): 209-34; and Melanie Newton, “Philanthropy, Gender, and the Production of Public Life in Barbados, ca. 1790-1850, in Scully and Paton, eds., *Gender and Slave Emancipation in the Atlantic World*, 225-46.

“demoralization of...young girls.”<sup>131</sup> They claimed that in this libertinage, enslaved women recognized an avenue to secure freedom for themselves and their children. While the SFAE declared that “modesty forbids us to go into detail on this side of colonial mores,” they condemned the widespread practice of masters manumitting their enslaved mistresses and offspring after many years of their sexual and domestic services.<sup>132</sup>

Reformers asserted that the predatory sexual advances of a master began when girls were at a young age and were sometimes sanctioned—or even sought out by—their parents. Indeed, Schœlcher claimed that enslaved parents, ignorant and miserable, would offer the “barely nubile” bodies of their daughters to their owners, in return for their masters’ goodwill.<sup>133</sup> In this account, the master’s sexual defilement of young slave girls is indicative of his widespread abuse of their parents—rendered ignorant, demoralized, and devoid of the protective parental inclination that would shield their daughters. In short, the conditions of slavery were so brutal that parents offered up their young daughters as sexual sacrifices in exchange for a little bit of kindness.

Such moral corruption at a young age, abolitionists argued, meant that young girls were raised to engage in immoral behavior: “The corruption of the mores of enslaved women is born in the promiscuity maintained by slavery” when their bodies were constantly at the disposal of men who abused them.<sup>134</sup> Reformers thus agreed with the colonial male perspective that

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<sup>131</sup> *L’Abolitionniste française*, Vol. 2, 44.  
“la démoralisation précoce de...jeunes filles...”

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*, 55.  
“Quant aux négresses, une voie leur est ouverte pour gagner la liberté et celle de leurs enfants. La pudeur défend d’entrer dans le détail de ce côté des mœurs coloniales.”

<sup>133</sup> Schœlcher, *Des colonies françaises*, 73. CLR James also discussed how enslaved mothers would poison a daughter’s rivals for the master’s affections. See: CLR James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1989 [first published in 1963]), 16.  
“Le planteur, malheureusement, n’a rien à forcer sous ce rapport; tout est à sa disposition, le père et la mère d’une jeune fille à peine nubile, recherchent eux-mêmes pour elle presque comme un honneur les bontés du maître.”

<sup>134</sup> *L’Abolitionniste française*, Vol. 2, 44.

enslaved women were hyper-sexualized, but they argued that it was not because they were natural temptresses living in a tropical climate. Rather, it was because they were born into conditions where, from a young age, sexually predatory men corrupted their morals and left them in debauched ignorance. Slave women could be “civilized,” abolitionists argued, with proper moralization, religious education, and monogamous marriage. However, such moralization efforts would be incomplete without significant transformations in colonial society.

In their writings on the corruption of enslaved men and women and the absence of family life in slavery, abolitionists depicted the colonies as beyond the pale of civilization. Oppressed by their masters, abolitionists asserted, enslaved men and women drifted in and out of sexual unions, were indifferent to the wellbeing of their children, lived crudely, and exhibited little propriety. Schœlcher recalled an incident in Martinique when he dined with an elderly woman, and one of the valets was “a boy of twelve or thirteen years old, entirely naked. He told me his linen was in the laundry. This is how slavery has raised slaves above African barbarism!”<sup>135</sup> Here, Schœlcher criticizes not the enslaved valet, but rather, his mistress, the elderly widow who provided him with only a single set of clothes.

Similarly, and in more forceful language, Bissette excoriated the parish priest of Fort-Royal (Abbé Rigord) in 1845 for claiming “that slavery, which we now regard as a degeneration, has been considered by our fathers as a powerful means of civilization.” As Bissette exclaimed, “A means of civilization!...But your fathers have ruled them [slaves] with shackles and whipped, mutilated, tortured, killed...in the name of civilization...Have your parishioners in Martinique

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“La corruption des mœurs des négresses naît de la promiscuité entretenue par l’esclavage...”

<sup>135</sup> Schœlcher, *Des colonies françaises*, 5.

“Je me souviens qu’autrefois, dînant à la Martinique chez une veuve âgée, je vis parmi les valets qui nous servaient à table un garçon de douze à treize ans entièrement nu. On me dit qu’apparemment son linge était à la lessive. Voilà comme la servitude a élevés les nègres au-dessus de la barbarie africaine!”

performed on Black Men their pretended work of civilization? Come on! Monsieur l'Abbé, no one has ever more impolitely mocked God and man than those whose interests you defend!"<sup>136</sup>

While in both of these accounts slaves are depicted as uncivilized and degraded, the slaveholders are held accountable—from the elderly widow who failed to clothe her valet to the masters who resorted to brutal physical punishments to impose their will yet thought of themselves as civilized, god-fearing men.

Doris Garraway has argued that eighteenth-century observers of the French Antilles described *colons* as white noble savages who embodied aristocratic notions of virtue and conduct.<sup>137</sup> In the post-revolutionary context of the 1830s, French abolitionists recast the trope of aristocratic white noble savages as arbitrary, cruel, and lascivious brutes acting despotically outside all moral conventions. Throughout the 1830s and early 1840s, colonial administrative reports indicated that slaveholders were doubling down in corporeal punishments administered to slaves in the wake of recent insurrections and rumored plots, particularly in cases where slaves were suspected of poisoning livestock or their masters. As these reports trickled into France, they convinced many leading abolitionists that slave owners could not be trusted to aid in the abolition project. In particular, they emphasized specific cases of shocking abuse to argue that

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<sup>136</sup> "A Monsieur l'Abbé Rigord, curé du Fort-Royal, Martinique," letter from Cyrille Bisette December 4, 1845, as printed in Bisette, *Lettres politiques sur les colonies sur l'esclavage*, 196.

Abbé Rigord quoted as: "...que l'esclavage, que nous considérons aujourd'hui comme un dégradation, a été considéré par nos pères comme un moyen puissant de civilisation un moyen puissant de la civilisation."

Bisette: "Un moyen de civilisation!...Mais vos pères les ont gouvernés avec le carcan et à coups de fouet, mutilés, torturés, tués...au nom de la civilisation... Vos clients de la Martinique ont-ils accompli sur les Noirs leur prétendue œuvre de civilisation?... Allons donc! Monsieur l'Abbé, jamais personne ne s'est plus impudemment moqué de Dieu et des hommes, que ceux dont vous défendez les intérêts!"

<sup>137</sup> Garraway, *The Libertine Colony*, 96. Garraway locates the origins of the white noble savage trope in a discourse that "refashioned pirates into heroes in the service of the king and elevated the bourgeois values of production and commerce alongside older aristocratic notions of virtue, valor, and heredity as bases for social distinction."



the metropolitan government should aggressively check the power of masters over enslaved persons.<sup>138</sup>

Much of the abolitionist press covered cases of cruelty against slaves in vivid detail. In an analysis of several Procurer-General reports forwarded to Paris, the SFAE recounted an incident in Vieux-Fort, Guadeloupe, where a slave owner routinely loaded his slaves with chains and weights, and jailed them in dungeons so small that even children had trouble sitting in them.<sup>139</sup> In a particularly visceral account in *Des colonies françaises*, Schœlcher declared that one master would order his slaves to be whipped and would light a cigar after giving the command, “and as long as the cigar lasted, the whip would slash.”<sup>140</sup> In these accounts, cruelty is inextricably linked to despotism.

Reformers argued that the unmitigated power that masters exercised over their slaves inevitably corrupted them by transforming them into sadists who took pleasure in inflicting corporal punishment and humiliation. Abolitionists asserted that slavery transformed rational, property-owning men into sadistic tyrants. This corruption was so complete, that slave owners rarely recognized their own transformations. Some of the worst documented cases of abuse, Schœlcher claimed, were committed by men “known for their gentleness of manners.” As they convinced themselves that they acted within the limits of their power, they saw no contradiction in believing themselves to be men of “humane habits,” even as they “strike a woman until she is left with twenty bloody sores on her body!”<sup>141</sup> Owning bondspersons transformed these men of

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<sup>138</sup> Schœlcher, *Des colonies françaises*, 27-44.

<sup>139</sup> *L'Abolitionniste Français*, Vol. 1, 32.

<sup>140</sup> Schœlcher, *Des colonies françaises*, 29.

“Un maître allumait son *bout* (long cigarette [sic] du pays) au moment où il ordonnait une flagellation, et tant que le cigarette [sic] durait, le fouet cinglait.”

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

“humane habits” into despotic tyrants.<sup>142</sup> In recounting these (often spectacular) episodes of violence, reformers depicted the colonies as uncivilized and disordered, and emphasized how slavery transformed gentlemen into sadists. Essentially, they argued, the male slaveholder could no longer claim moral authority, rationality, or “humane habits.”

Abolitionists also argued that slavery degraded white women—their publications implied that slavery rendered *colon* women into barren, despotic shrews. For instance, the Marlet case, which was sensationalized in Bissette’s *Revue des Colonies*, depicted how white mistresses were just as susceptible to sadism as masters. In June 1828, Dame Marlet appeared before the Royal Court of Martinique for “having exceeded the limits of her power” in administering punishment to her slaves. She was accused of “cruelly chaining” a slave named Fermine, “causing the death of her slave Remy” and, through “bad administration,” letting many of her enslaved workers starve, which caused several of them to run away in marronage and steal from the neighbors.<sup>143</sup>

In his coverage of her trial, Bissette highlighted in detail how Marlet “mutilated” and murdered her slaves and reduced the rest of them “to the cruelest starvation.” For Bissette, the Marlet trial echoed this wider abolitionist argument on white morality: “servitude everywhere

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“Mais que penser d’un état social où un homme d’habitudes humaines, prend lui-même le fouet et frappe une femme jusqu’à lui laisser vingt plaies saignantes sur le corps!”

<sup>142</sup> For a discussion of the power of slaveholders over their slaves in the legal system, see: *Mœurs des trois couleurs aux Antilles, ou lettre de la Martinique sur les vices du système colonial dans les colonies françaises* (Paris: Imprimerie de Migneret, 1822), 4-26.

<sup>143</sup> ANOM FM MAR 33/281, “Extrait des registres du Greffe de la Cour Royale de l’île Martinique,” September 6, 1828. Bissette covered the Marlet case extensively in *Revue des Colonies*, February 1836, 351-53. Dame Marlet was sentenced to three years’ banishment from the French colonies and forbidden from owning enslaved persons in the future. Her remaining enslaved workers were sold for the profits of the government. “La Dame Victoire Alexandrien Dubue de Rivery, veuve Marlet accusée 1. de contravention aux ordonnances relatives à la nourriture et à l’entretien des esclaves par leurs maîtres, 2. d’avoir excédé les bornes de son pouvoir en faisant infliger à ses esclaves, notamment à la née Fermine des châtimens cruels, 3. d’avoir, par sa mauvaise administration et en privant ses esclaves de tout ce que la loi leur accorde, et qui est indispensable à leur existence, été la cause première de leurs vols chez leurs voisins, de leurs fréquents marronages... et 4. d’avoir occasionné la mort du né Remy, son esclave...”

has cruel effects for the master and the slave, for the metropole as well as for the colony.” He declared that slavery was a double-edged process of victimization, as “people who condemn other races to exploitation, never fail to deprave themselves.”<sup>144</sup> It was inevitable, in other words, that white slaveholders became despots. As demonstrated in the Marlet case, this depravity extended to members of the “gentler sex.” White women were just as susceptible to the corrupting influences of slavery as white men.<sup>145</sup>

Slaveholding perverted the intrinsic “gentle” nature of white women, rendering them incapable of remaining within the moderate “limits of their power” and encouraging them to succumb to their darkest and most depraved impulses. Frequently, abolitionists seized on the trope of the white woman who, driven “jealous to the point of fury” by her husband’s philandering, exerted her rage on enslaved women with punishments that she herself “could not bear to watch.”<sup>146</sup> Rather than excoriate them for this behavior, metropolitan reformers excused white women as victims of their husbands’ depravity. The “source of jealousy of the masters’ wives,” the SFAE maintained, resulted from their husbands’ affairs with enslaved women.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> *Revue des Colonies*, February 1836, 351-53.

“Les planteurs de tous les pays ont, en effet, les mêmes préjugés. Partout la servitude a de cruels effets pour le maître et pour l’esclave, pour la metropole aussi bien que pour la colonie, et les peuples condamnés à l’exploitation des races qui leur paraissent inférieures, n’ont jamais manqué de se dépraver eux-mêmes.”

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid*, 351-53.

<sup>146</sup> *Mœurs des trois couleurs aux Antilles*, 6-7.

“..elles sont jalousies jusqu’à la fureur; solitaires dans leurs habitations, éloignées de tous les dangers de la galanterie; mais elles ne sont que plus clairvoyants sur le gout humiliant de leurs maris pour les Nègresses, devenant alors despotiques et inexorables, il ne leur coûte rien d’ordonner des châtiments dont leur sensibilité ne pourrait même supporter la vue.”

<sup>147</sup> *L’Abolitionniste française*, Vol. 2, 44.

“La corruption des mœurs des négresses naît de la promiscuité entretenue par l’esclavage, et on en reconnaît une autre source dans la jalousie des femmes des maîtres.”

Even Bissette argued that the white male slave owner not only corrupted himself in his sexual liaisons with enslaved women, but also his wife and daughters, thus subverting his patriarchal responsibilities as the guardian of familial virtue. “Today’s colonial society confirms that libertinage is the normal state of white colonists,” Bissette wrote. “They are a sad guardian of the virtue of their wives and daughters. It is very difficult when fathers, husbands and brothers live in chronic debauchery, for the mores of the opposite sex to not be affected by this continual defilement.”<sup>148</sup>

Schœlcher maintained that white creole women were left to languish alone in bed every night while their husbands sought sexual gratification with their enslaved women. He implied that colonial women had fewer children than their metropolitan counterparts because of their husbands’ *libertinage*.<sup>149</sup> Husbands defiled their wives in their sexual encounters with enslaved women, and their sons learned to imitate their behavior. As a result, *colon* women were bereft of attention, sexual companionship, and (as Schœlcher insinuated) sometimes without children of their own. Little wonder then, anti-slavery advocates claimed, that white women, humiliated by their husband’s behavior, became “despotic and inexorable” toward the enslaved women in their households.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> *Revue des Colonies*, October 1835, 163.

“La société actuelle des colonies atteste que le libertinage a dû être l’état normal des colons blancs, et cela même est un triste garant de la vertu de leurs femmes et de leurs filles. Lorsque les pères, frères et maris vivent dans une débauche chronique, il est bien difficile que les mœurs de l’autre sexe ne se ressentent pas de cette continuelle souillure.”

<sup>149</sup> Schœlcher, *Des colonies françaises*, 31.

“Les femmes mariées, si elles ne font pas d’enfants, sont mises à la barre toutes les nuits, afin que le mari aille chercher d’autres négresses, et faire des enfants avec elles.”

<sup>150</sup> *Mœurs des trois couleurs aux Antilles*, 7.

“...elles sont jalousies jusqu’à la fureur; solitaires dans leurs habitations, éloignées de tous les dangers de la galanterie; mais elles ne sont que plus clairvoyants sur le gout humiliant de leurs maris pour les Nègresses, devenant alors despotiques et inexorables...”

Underlining this discourse is the claim that white women were fundamentally unable to become virtuous wives and mothers because their husbands did not fulfill their marital obligations. Therefore, this failure of white creole men with respect to their wives resulted in the degeneration of white creole morality as a whole. Colonial elites espoused “an ideal of white masculinity” that “posited all white men as loving fathers and faithful spouses within stable white households,” and an “ideal of white womanhood that cast them as the physical guardians of white purity and as custodians of the cultural markers of white identity.”<sup>151</sup> However, as abolitionists were quick to point out, these ideals had been corrupted by the sexual activities of white men. The result was widespread immorality and debauchery among *colons*, which manifested as cruelty and despotic behavior that was exercised on enslaved women’s bodies.

Liberal abolitionists argued that this despotism disqualified *colons* from collaborating on the emancipation project. Reformers agreed that emancipation would require “new means of administration and policing, which will have to be placed at the disposal of the colonial Governors for the rigorous execution of the statutes that will govern the enslaved population...a new society founded on moral and civil relationships.”<sup>152</sup> In other words, to succeed, reform policies had to be administered from the metropole; otherwise the entire emancipation project would be at risk.

Hence, in their focus on how slavery corrupted both white and black men and women, abolitionists laid the groundwork for a two-step emancipation project. Firstly, they argued, they

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<sup>151</sup> Schloss, *Sweet Liberty*, 6-7.

<sup>152</sup> ANOM FM GEN 171/1376, Ministère de Marine et des Colonies, “Rapport au Conseil des Ministres,” Paris, November 5, 1839. “Il serait superflu de pousser plus loin ces indications, de même que de mentionner, autrement que pour mémoire, l’étude à faire des nouveaux moyens d’administration et de police qu’on devra mettre à la disposition des Gouverneurs des colonies pour l’exécution rigoureuse des statuts qui régiront la population émancipée; il suffira de dire ici que c’est une société nouvelle a fondée sous tous les rapports moraux et civils.”

needed to craft a set of policies designed to improve the moral conditions of enslaved persons, to “civilize” them and prepare them for transforming into colonial citizens. Secondly, they needed to recalibrate the relationship between masters and enslaved people so as to remove animosity between them and prepare colonial societies to withstand the transition from slavery to freedom.

As a result, the moralization discourse that emphasized the need for reforming white and black men and women was incorporated into legislative policies as a series of measures that emphasized “rehabilitating” the family lives of slaves as a means of encouraging them to work—the central tenet of French abolitionists’ family politics. Instead of immediate emancipation, abolitionists proposed a system of amelioration that they argued would rectify these moral defects of slavery by targeting the roots of moral corruption. Over the long run, however, amelioration was intended to “civilize” slaves through a moral education that would encourage them to form legitimate families and work industriously.<sup>153</sup>

#### The Mackau Law and Stalemate, 1845-1848

France’s period of slave amelioration—a series of stopgap policies implemented sporadically since the 1830s and culminating with the more comprehensive Mackau Law of 1845—drew on this abolitionist discourse and translated it (in part) into colonial legislation. Over the course of almost two decades, anti-slavery advocates and politicians deliberated and proposed various emancipation plans that were all essentially gradualist. They aimed, over time, to “improve the fate of the black class, to enlighten his mind and to prepare him for a liberty that is useful and profitable to all habitants of the colonies,” without disrupting economic output.<sup>154</sup> Reformers

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<sup>153</sup> *Procès-Verbal des séances de la chambre des pairs*, 2868; and *Le Moniteur Universel*, May 31, 1845.

<sup>154</sup> Société française pour l’abolition d’esclavage, “Extraits de status,” in Schmidt, *Abolitionnistes de l’esclavage et réformateurs des colonies*, 463.

“...de rechercher les moyens les plus prompts et les plus efficaces d’améliorer le sort de la classe noire, d’éclairer son intelligence et de lui préparer une liberté qui soit utile et profitable à tous les habitants des colonies.”

agreed that the government should craft policies that would prepare for emancipation without threatening the needs of the *colons*, “who are our parents and compatriots, and whose interests must be spared.” A system of “perfect moral instruction,” they maintained, would “create families,” allow “enslaved men [to] become husbands and fathers,” and eventually transform them into productive “free men and citizens.”<sup>155</sup> Most abolitionists expected that ameliorating the moral conditions in the colonies would create a more efficient, orderly plantation regime in which enslaved persons would be civilized into productive workers and slave owners into gentle, paternalistic proprietors.

Scholars have emphasized how, from 1835-1847, abolitionists achieved very little in the way of concrete abolition policy but succeeded in pushing the issue through the channels of government. Reformers published pamphlets and newspapers, gave abolitionist speeches at banquets in Paris, and formed investigative commissions. It was only in the late 1840s, as public animosity toward Louis-Phillipe’s regime mounted, that French abolitionists began to organize more widespread public campaigns to try to force the government to take decisive action on the slavery issue.<sup>156</sup> The regime, for its part, was determined to “proceed with calm and prudence” on abolition, effectively allowing it to stall in parliamentary debates.<sup>157</sup> Adolphe Thiers, rather than permit liberal politicians to bring up the issue of abolition for debate in the Chamber of

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<sup>155</sup> “Discussion de la chambre des pairs relative à l’émancipation des esclaves (séances du 24 février et du 11 juin 1833)” reprinted in SFAE, *L’Abolitionniste français*, Vol. 1, 34.

“Du reste, la situation de ces esclaves s’améliore; le gouvernement s’occupe sans doute de leur émancipation en même temps qu’il protégé les colons, qui sont nos parens [sic] et nos compatriotes et dont les intérêts doivent être ménagés. Pour nous, dit l’orateur en terminant, préparons la liberté, perfectionnons l’instruction morale; qu’on crée des familles; que les nègres deviennent maris et pères; ils seront des hommes libres et ensuite des citoyens.”

<sup>156</sup> See: Jennings, *French Anti-Slavery*, 193-228; Drescher, “Two Variants of Anti-Slavery,” 53; and Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 493-4.

<sup>157</sup> ANOM GEN 171/1376, Saint-Hilaire, “Note,” January 6, 1840. For examples of the banquet speeches, see: *Discours de M. de Lamartine au banquet donné à Paris le 10 mars 1842 pour l’abolition de l’esclavage* (Paris: Imprimerie Panckoucke, 1842); and *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*, February 26, 1840.

Peers, effectively tabled it altogether by appointing a Commission composed of representatives from liberal abolitionists and politicians from the port cities with their pro-colonial perspectives. A royal ordinance in May of 1840 established the Commission, headed by the moderate Duc de Broglie, to examine slavery, consider amelioration measures proposed by various statesmen, and gather facts on emancipation in Britain.<sup>158</sup>

The Broglie Commission, which initially met a scant five times from June 4-18, 1840, concurred with the gradualist tenor of these various proposals when it decided that it did not have sufficient information to make a recommendation to the government. Instead, it drafted a list of possible modes of emancipation that were submitted to the Department of the Navy, which then forwarded these proposals to the colonial governments. These recommendations included, for example, the Tracy proposal of encouraging slaves to purchase their own freedom and automatic enfranchisement of newborn slaves and Tocqueville's suggested system of emancipation with an undefined period of "tutelage" for former slaves, similar to British apprenticeship.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> *Le Moniteur Universel*, June 8-9, 1840. Passy and Tocqueville proposed the most extensive amelioration plans. In 1838, Hippolyte Passy introduced legislation proposing that children born to slave mothers be immediately emancipated, allowed to remain in the "care of their mothers" and proposed an indemnity payment of 50 francs per child to be paid over ten years to their owners. See: AD-MAR 1 J 34, *Observations sur la proposition de M. de Passy relative à l'affranchissement des esclaves qui naîtront à l'avenir aux colonies françaises par M. Conil, délégué de l'île de Bourbon* (Paris: Imprimerie De Guiraudet et Ch. Jouaust, 1838), 1; and "Proposition lue par H. Passy, dans la séance de la Chambre des Députés du 10 février 1838," in Schmidt, *Abolitionnistes de l'esclavage et réformateurs des colonies*, 525-30. Tocqueville proposed an apprenticeship-like system of at least ten years in which former slaves would continue to work for their former masters but receive religious and moral education as well as the right to marry. See: Tocqueville, "The Emancipation of Slaves," (1843) in *Writings on Empire and Slavery*, 218 and *Le Siècle*, June 17, 1844. These various proposals had already been adopted piecemeal into a series of royal decrees and laws in the late 1830s and early 1840s. In 1839, for example, the government earmarked 650,000 francs to augment the number of clergymen, establish schools, and chapels, and in general provide religious instruction to slaves. The fact that the Broglie Commission was therefore still debating them as part of future amelioration plans emphasizes its conservative scope. See: *Exposé général des résultats du patronage des esclaves dans les colonies françaises* (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1844), 3-5. Hereafter *Exposé general*. Also see: Schœlcher, *Histoire de l'esclavage*, 76.

<sup>159</sup> See: Broglie Commission, *Rapport au ministre secrétaire d'état de la marine et des colonies*; and Jennings, *French Anti-Slavery*, 149-52.



Effectively, this process further delayed the implementation of abolitionist policies for the next two years as the Commission waited for replies from colonial administrators (who were in no hurry to reply). During this period, it became apparent to many liberal reformers that the Broglie Commission could “study the question ad infinitum,” rather than produce a viable emancipation plan.<sup>160</sup> Finally, after three years, the Commission submitted a report that recommended a hybrid project drawing on several recommendations: in which infants would be automatically freed, manumission restrictions would be lifted (through *pecule* and *rachat*), and stipulated a twenty-year transitional period of apprenticeship, after which enslaved people would be formally freed.<sup>161</sup> However, the government declined to adopt the recommended plan, capitulating to outrage from proslavery forces and a new bout of anglophobia in public opinion following recent conflicts with Britain overseas.

As a result, from 1843-1847, the abolitionist movement began to fracture between those who viewed working within the purview of the government as the only viable option and those like Schœlcher who increasingly argued that immediate emancipation would be the only solution to the social problems in colonial societies. The tipping point came in 1845, following an abolitionist petition campaign, which circulated among workers in Lyon and Paris.<sup>162</sup> Bowing to these renewed pressures to re-address the slavery question, Baron Mackau, the Minister of the Navy, crafted a bill that co-opted various aspects of the Tocqueville, Passy, and Broglie recommendations into a package of amelioration legislation. Intended to reinforce some of the reform policies that were passed in the 1830s, the law represented an effort to give government

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<sup>160</sup> Jennings, *French Anti-Slavery*, 152.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, 183. *Pecule* referred to the personal income or property amassed by a slave and *rachat* to self-purchase (buying manumission for oneself).

<sup>162</sup> Schœlcher, *Histoire de l'esclavage*, 6-7.

authorities more control over how slave owners were required to treat their enslaved workers, although in practice, the law did not go this far.<sup>163</sup>

Passed by a vote margin of 103 to 56, the Chamber of Peers presented the Mackau law as a compromise between the pro-colonial lobby and an anti-slavery contingent slowly gaining some popular traction.<sup>164</sup> Among other measures, the bill authorized the department of the Navy to draft new regulations designed to “moralize” the enslaved populations through religious education. In terms of discipline, the Mackau Law set limits on what constituted the legal amount of punishment for slaves and standardized penalties for various infractions.<sup>165</sup> It also included policies designed to inculcate in enslaved men and women the desire for legitimate families.

For example, the law stipulated that marriage between a freed and an enslaved person would result in automatic manumission of the enslaved partner and directed colonial councils to help reunite married slaves separated by sale. It also, essentially, reinforced extant slave codes—such as *Code Noir* statutes that prohibited masters from selling prepubescent children away from their mothers. The law relaxed manumission protocols and allocated funds to help enslaved people purchase freedom for themselves and immediate family members. Article 3 of the law formalized the previously customary process of inheritance of garden plots and property between enslaved parents and their children. Encouraged by colonial reports that slaves took particular pride in maintaining their gardens—which they believed instilled in slaves “a taste for property

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<sup>163</sup> Jennings, *French Anti-Slavery*, 205.

<sup>164</sup> For how colonial delegates raised money to bribe the metropolitan press for favorable coverage see: Jennings, “Slavery and the Venality of the July Monarchy Press,” 48-66.

<sup>165</sup> Jennings, *French Anti-Slavery*, 218; and Moitt, *Women and Slavery*, 103-4. The full text of the Mackau legislation appears under “Loi du 18 juillet 1845,” and “Loi du 19 juillet 1845” in Schœlcher, *Histoire de l’esclavage*, 33-8.

and well-being, and...for making them industrious, useful farmers and desirous of family ties”—metropolitan policymakers drafted clauses that affirmed slaves’ rights to pass on the property they earned or cultivated to their children.<sup>166</sup> Hence, in theory, the Mackau Law emphasized marriage, family, and work as the foundation for amelioration policies. But in practice, other than a few policies (such as novel manumission regulations), it did little other than reinforce and strengthen existing and customary rights and protections according to enslaved people.

Even as it was implemented, the Mackau Law pleased no one. While some planters expressed relief that emancipation had yet again been delayed, proslavery groups complained that, despite the indentured labor provisions attached to the new manumission laws (for example, that an enslaved person manumitted by *rachat* must work at least five years for their former masters), the law had failed to prevent loss of labor. Instead, as planters complained in a memo to the Minister of the Navy, enslaved people manumitted under the new legislation were refusing to work, and indulged in “most deplorable idleness...dragged into all the vices that follows in its wake, and are a loss for productive wealth.” *Colons* demanded that the government add amendments to the law that would empower proprietors to bring “this already liberated population back to work, which is civilizing and fruitful.” The pro-colonial lobby, then, refused to concede an inch in the battle to maintain slavery.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> *Exposé général*, 290. See: Article 3 of Mackau Law in Schœlcher, *Histoire de l’esclavage*, 33. “C’est un moyen bien efficace de leur donner le goût de la propriété, du bien-être, et, par conséquent, d’en faire des industriels, agriculteurs utiles et désireux des liens de famille.”

<sup>167</sup> Conseil des délégués des colonies, *Mémoire sur le travail des affranchis dans les colonies françaises, exigé par la loi du 18 juillet 1845, à Monsieur le Ministre de la Marine et des Colonies* (Paris: Firmin Didot Frères, 1847), 23-4. “...pour réprimer le vagabondage, et mettre un terme à l’oisiveté déplorable de cent mille affranchis, qui, livrés à la paresse, sont entraînés dans tous les vices qu’elle mène à sa suite, et sont perdus pour la richesse productive. Nous demandons avec instance au gouvernement, des mesures intelligentes, étendues, efficaces, pour ramener au travail, qui civilise et qui féconde, cette population déjà libérée.”

On the other side, while some of the bill's supporters praised the legislation as a first step in preparing the colonies for a post-slavery order, for many abolitionists the Mackau Law did not go nearly far enough in preparing enslaved people for emancipation.<sup>168</sup> *La Réforme* continued to publish accounts that highlighted slaveholders' continued abusive treatment of enslaved people, which forced the Department of the Navy to demand that colonial authorities investigate these incidents. As a result, in 1846 Mackau passed a new ban on the corporal punishment of women and young children.<sup>169</sup>

Likewise, Schœlcher highlighted how *colons* continued to abuse enslaved people in his *Histoire de l'esclavage pendant les deux dernières années*—an almost-600-page work that inveighed against the Mackau Law's inefficacies.<sup>170</sup> Other abolitionists noted that the *rachat* provisions to motivate enslaved persons to purchase the freedom of themselves and their family members were actually having the opposite effect, since the *colon*-dominated commissions placed in charge of setting manumission prices fixed them exorbitantly high.<sup>171</sup> The critical consensus among these abolitionists was that the law did not go far enough either in preparing slaves for freedom or in setting the colonies on the path toward emancipation. More concerning was the fact that the law did little to actually remove power from the hands of *colons* and pro-colonial interests.

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<sup>168</sup> See: the debates in *Le Moniteur Universel*, April 8, 1845. For criticism of the bill, see: Bissette, *Du projet Mackau tendant à violer la loi du 24 avril 1833 sur le régime législatif des colonies* (Paris: Imprimerie administrative de Paul Dupont, 1844); *Le Semeur*, June 26, 1844; *Le Siècle*, May 15, 1844 and June 17, 1844; and *Le National*, May 15, 1844. For the issue of corporal punishment, see: Schœlcher, *Histoire de l'esclavage*, 44-5.

<sup>169</sup> See: *La Réforme*, November 1, 1845 and *L'Abolitionniste française*, 93.

<sup>170</sup> Schœlcher, *Histoire de l'esclavage*, 5-46.

<sup>171</sup> *L'Abolitionniste française*, Vol. 2, 262-3. I discuss *rachat* and these other provisions at length in the second chapter.

Arguing that the Mackau Law was an utter failure and did not bring any measurable moral or material improvement to the lives of slaves, many abolitionists abandoned the idea of amelioration altogether and pressed for immediate emancipation as the only solution for transforming the colonies. Criticizing a pamphlet submitted by slavery apologist Abbé Rigord, in which he argued that the colonies needed more time after the Mackau Law to moralize and prepare slaves for abolition, Schœlcher declared “time! For 300 years, the priests of bondage have been charged with moralizing slaves.” The rebuke continued: “time to prepare the slaves for liberty! But this is an indefinite postponement; no one is a dupe to that formula anymore, under which there is only slavery with the hypocrisy of emancipation.”<sup>172</sup>

The Mackau law also marked a shift in proslavery tactics. As *colons* and their defenders repeatedly signaled that they would do all in their power to resist any change in the status quo, they began to adopt amelioration as a delay tactic—hoping to indefinitely postpone an emancipation bill. Therefore, after the Mackau law, abolitionists began to argue that moral reform could never occur while slavery still existed—marking a profound shift from their moralization arguments in the 1830s. Marriage again entered into their arguments as evidence that amelioration was a failed policy. Indeed they emphasized how it benefitted proslavery interests:

The prior moralization of slaves through marriage is one of nonsense used by those who do not want to free them. Legitimate unions among slaves will always be the exception. How can the man who does not belong to himself want to marry a woman who is not free to give herself; a woman, for whose happiness he can do nothing, while on the contrary his master can whip her naked when it strikes his fancy! How can the man and the woman...[whose] children will be torn from them at the age of fourteen if it pleases the master, how, finally, [can]

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<sup>172</sup> Schœlcher, *Histoire de l'esclavage*, 195.

“Du temps! Mais il y a 300 ans, prêtres de la servitude, que vous êtes chargés de moraliser les nègres... Du temps pour préparer les nègres à la liberté! Mais c’est un ajournement indéfini; personne n’est plus dupe de cette formule, sous laquelle il n’y a que l’esclavage avec l’hypocrisie de l’émancipation.”

miserable slaves, to whom the legal family is literally impossible, consent to marry? No, no, it is not because the slaves are ignorant or wicked...it is because *marriage is incompatible, radically incompatible, with slavery.*<sup>173</sup>

The conclusion that “marriage is radically incompatible with slavery” marks a striking departure from abolitionist discourse in the 1830s and early 1840s, which argued for encouraging marriage among enslaved persons as a means of “reforming” them and socializing enslaved men and women into their roles as fathers and mothers in order to ease their transition from slaves to workers. By 1846-1847, liberal abolitionists recognized that pro-slavery interests had reformulated the discourse of amelioration in order to delay any further concessions to emancipation. For Schœlcher and radical abolitionists, the Mackau law was proof that immediate emancipation was the only solution that would rescue the colonies from further degeneration.

#### Conclusion: Stalemate

Unwieldy, conciliatory to colonial interests, and falling far short of abolitionists’ reform aims, the Mackau Law has also been dismissed by scholars who cite its short implementation to argue for its seeming ineffectiveness, as emancipation rendered it void in 1848.<sup>174</sup> From the metropolitan abolitionist perspective, this was an all-too obvious conclusion. However, the creators of the Mackau Law unintentionally created new avenues for slaves to contest the colonial regime through its family reform policies. As a result, the final years of Antillean

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid, 191-2. Emphasis mine.

“La moralisation préalable des esclaves par la mariage est un de ces non-sens employés par ceux qui ne veulent pas leur liberté. Les unions légitimes parmi les esclaves seront toujours des exceptions. Comment l’homme qui ne s’appartient pas voudrait-il épouser une femme qui n’est pas libre de se donner; une femme, pour le bonheur de laquelle il ne peut rien, tandis que son maître, au contraire, peut la fouetter nue quand il lui en prend fantaisie! Comment l’homme et la femme...auxquels leurs enfants seront arrachés à l’âge de quatorze ans, s’il plaît au maître, comment enfin de misérables esclaves, auxquels la famille légale est littéralement impossible, consentiraient-ils à se marier? Non, non ce n’est point parce que les nègres sont bruts ou méchants...c’est parce que le mariage est incompatible, radicalement incompatible avec l’esclavage.”

<sup>174</sup> See: Josette Fallope, *Esclaves et citoyens: les noirs à la Guadeloupe au XIXe siècle dans les processus de résistance et d’intégration: 1802-1910* (Basse-Terre: Société d’histoire de la Guadeloupe, 1992), 308; Jennings, *French Anti-Slavery*, 233; Moitt, *Women and Slavery*, 84; and Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 487.

slavery witnessed renewed contestation between slaves, *colons*, and local administrators over the scope of these amelioration regulations.

Chapter Two. “This principle *that the slave family is indivisible:*” Patriarchy, Slavery, and Amelioration in the French Antilles, 1830-1848

In January 1844, Martinican planter Pierre Dessalles wrote, as was his habit, a brief summary of his day in a diary. Work on his plantation *Nouvelle Cité* continued slowly, and he was unhappy with his manager, Mr. Jules, who apparently did “little to deal with it.” Otherwise, nothing remarkable had happened, until he retired in the evening to spend time with his wife and daughters in the little salon where the ladies of the house worked on their sewing and crafts. He sat with his daughter Antoinette to play cards. Their quiet family night, however, was quickly upended by a “most disagreeable episode.”

At some point during the game, they heard “rustling in my wife’s sewing basket and Émilie [one of his daughters] says to her mother that it is being stolen. We all get up, and indeed the basket is gone.” Furious, Dessalles called together all the “slaves, who fan out in every direction to catch the rascal... When we return, we find the basket on the wall of the terrace; the material for a waistcoat that had been inside it was found on the ground. The slaves, astonished by such boldness, loudly lament this infamy, and yet the thief was among them!” Outraged by such a “horrible, nocturnal scene,” Dessalles sent his enslaved workers away with a “thunderous voice.” After reassembling the basket, the family reconvened in the salon to continue their game, but not “without making some sad reflections.” As Dessalles complained, “twenty years ago, such things did not happen; one slept with the doors open, and everything that belonged to the masters was sacrosanct. Ever since the ideas of philanthropy have come to corrupt our slaves, they go in for every kind of brigandage and soon, alas! our very lives will no longer be safe.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dessalles, diary entry for January 11, 1844 in *La vie d’un colon de la Martinique* Vol. 3, 102. The Dessalles were originally a Catholic family from Breton and they probably emigrated to Martinique around the mid seventeenth century. The Dessalles men established themselves as influential planters and magistrates in the island. See: Foster and Foster, trans. and eds., *Sugar and Slavery, Family and Race*, 9.



The “philanthropy” Dessalles alluded to undoubtedly referred to the colonial amelioration policies simultaneously under debate in the metropole. Dessalles’ assertion that “ideas of philanthropy have come to corrupt our slaves” underscored how, by the mid 1840s, *colons* resented metropolitan amelioration policies and viewed them as a dangerous project that threatened to destroy the colonial order. Even more revealing, Dessalles implied that his enslaved workers understood these “ideas of philanthropy” and were therefore motivated to act out against him. In effect, he believed that amelioration had given enslaved people an avenue through which they could challenge his authority without fear of repercussion.

The voluminous diaries and letters of Dessalles, which span intermittently from 1808-1857, provide an unparalleled window into early-nineteenth-century Martinique. They remain one of the few sources of private papers and correspondence of a resident planter that are available to historians examining nineteenth-century slavery and society in the French Antilles.<sup>2</sup> Dessalles embodied the patriarchal authority of planters and plantation managers that fundamentally structured the slave societies of the Americas.<sup>3</sup> By his own account, Dessalles demanded absolute obedience and deference as master, father, and husband. In this way, he reflected the

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“Mes travaux vont lentement, et M. Jules s’en occupe peu...je jouais au cartes avec Antoinette dans le petit salon où ces dames s’étaient tenues pour travailler. Nous entendons remuer la cassette à ouvrage de ma femme: Émile dit à sa mère que quelqu’un la lui vole. Nous nous levons tous, et en effet nous ne trouvons plus la cassette. J’appelle tous les nègres, chacun prend une direction différente pour rencontrer le fripon. Nous nous absentons une minute du théâtre du vol, nous y revenons et l’on trouve la cassette sur le mur de la terrasse; et l’étoffe du gilet qui y était renfermée est trouvée par terre. Les nègres, étonnés d’une pareille hardiesse, crient à l’infamie, et parmi eux était le voleur! je n’ai jamais vu scène nocturne plus horrible! D’une voix de tonnerre, j’ai dispersé tous ces coquins et nous nous sommes remis à notre partie, non sans avoir fait de tristes réflexions. Il y a vingt ans, de semblables choses ne se voyaient pas; on couchait les portes ouvertes et tout ce qui appartenait aux maîtres était religieusement respecté. Depuis que les idées de philanthropie sont venues corrompre nos nègres, ils se portent à tous les brigandages et bientôt, hélas! nos vies ne seront plus en sûreté.”

<sup>2</sup> Some eighteenth-century comparisons are: Étienne-Louis Ferron de Ferronnays and Pierre-Jacques Corbier in Cheney, *Cul de Sac*, 35-40; Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (London: John Stockdale, 1794-1804); and Thomas Thistlewood in Burnard *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire* 1-36; Hall, *In Miserable Slavery*, 1-24; and Beckles, *Centering Women*, 22-58.

<sup>3</sup> See: Genovese, *Roll Jordan, Roll*, 3-112; and Freyre, *The Masters and the Slaves*, 185-467.

social and political systems of power in slave societies, in which slaveholders were virtually unassailable, regardless of any laws or norms imposed by the metropole or resistance from their enslaved workers and dependents.<sup>4</sup>

Even in the French Antilles, where the *Code Noir* ostensibly functioned to rein in slaveholders and set limits on slave owners' sovereignty in theory, it actually preserved and strengthened masters' authority in practice.<sup>5</sup> Across the slave societies of the Atlantic World, planters understood their authority in explicitly patriarchal terms.<sup>6</sup> Slaveholding men viewed themselves as absolutist fathers, *bons pères de famille*, a role that involved a set of reciprocated obligations and services that legitimized their mastery and their exploitation of others. Enslaved people owed their deference and labor. In return, slave owners were ostensibly required to provide for them materially.<sup>7</sup> Enslaved persons were to obey their masters like children obeyed their fathers, and masters were obligated to provide for their enslaved workers like children. And, like a father, these masters expected unquestioning obedience. Thus, masters' ideology of patriarchal authority justified their domination of the enslaved persons under their domain.

As Genovese argues of the antebellum American South, this patriarchal authority largely served to rationalize masters' dependency on slaves and morally legitimate the practice of slave ownership of and domination over enslaved people.<sup>8</sup> In Martinique, Dessalles consistently depicted himself as a father figure to his slaves. He described himself as “fond” of his enslaved

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<sup>4</sup> Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, Desire*, 20. The editors of Dessalles' diaries also discuss this ideology as it specifically relates to Dessalles in *Sugar and Slavery, Family and Race*, 3-27.

<sup>5</sup> Ghachem, *The Old Regime and the Haitian Revolution*, 13; Cheney, *Cul de Sac*, 44.

<sup>6</sup> Genovese, *Roll Jordan, Roll*, 3-112; and Freyre, *The Masters and the Slaves*, 185-467.

<sup>7</sup> Cheney, *Cul de Sac*, 71.

<sup>8</sup> Genovese, *Roll Jordan, Roll*, 89.

workers as though they were his own children, who did not “have enough tears to shed” when they died of disease, who felt only pain on a New Year’s Day when he could not afford to give them the customary gifts, and who disciplined them by taking their half-Saturdays to punish them for theft or bad work. He also often described how he “reproached” them (verbally or physically) for bad behavior and his benevolence always came second to his financial interests: “I have produced... fourteen hogsheads of sugar. The slowness in production harms my operations. As soon as the mill starts running, my slaves are exhausted, it’s only the whip that drives them.”<sup>9</sup>

By his own account, then, Dessalles’ behavior embodies the patriarchal slaveholding ethos similar to slaveowners’ ideologies in the American South and Brazil: a morally-justified system of domination that encouraged both affection and cruelty.<sup>10</sup> The result was a practice of authority—anchored in violence and subordination—that upheld the slave societies of the French Antilles. This patriarchal slaveholding ideology was deeply intertwined with gender, sexuality, and desire, which scholars have held as integral to the practice and ideology of domination.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Dessalles described his affection for his enslaved valet Nicaise as that of love for a child, wept when his enslaved field worker Adée died from smallpox, had a particularly bleak financial outlook at the end of 1842 which meant he was unable to provide gifts to his enslaved workers on New Year’s Day, and spoke frequently of disciplining and whipping both household and field slaves—including his son Saturnin. These events, along with countless others, highlight his patriarchal slaveholding ethos. See: Dessalles, diary entry for February 7, 1837 (for Nicaise) in *La vie d’un colon* Vol. 2, 22; op. cit., diary entry for March 17, 1837 (for Adée), 31; op. cit., diary entry for December 31, 1841 (for New Year’s presents); and op. cit., diary entries for January and early February 1842, Vol. 3, 10-17, (for punishments levied on the work gangs because of the theft of some wood). For Saturnin’s punishment, see: op.cit, diary entry for August 20, 1843, 83. For his comment on exhaustion and the whip, see: op. cit., diary entry for May 2, 1840, Vol. 2, 247.

“...j’ai fait dans ma semaine 14 boucauts de sucre. Cette lenteur dans la fabrication nuit à mes travaux. Aussitôt que le moulin marche, mes nègres n’en peuvent plus c’est par le fouet qu’on les fait marcher.”

<sup>10</sup> Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll*, 4, and op. cit., *Fatal Self-Deception*, 99-102.

<sup>11</sup> See: Garraway, *The Libertine Colony*, 23.

Abolitionism and amelioration threatened to dismantle this system, which makes the mid nineteenth century an important moment to study the attitudes and response of slaveholders in the French colonies. Indeed, Dessalles' recollection of the almost-stolen sewing basket in 1844 revealed an underlying anxiety shared among slaveholders in Martinique and Guadeloupe: that their grip of this patriarchal system of power was slipping. Although the fact that the basket was abandoned suggests that the thief was frightened enough by the outcry to drop the endeavor, for Dessalles, this was beside the point. That something, which "belonged to the master," had been interfered with indicated that there was a breakdown in the system of authority and reciprocity which he and other slaveholding men believed naturally governed the relationship between masters and slaves.

On the other hand, Dessalles' diaries indicate how slaveholders' authority had never been so simple to execute in practice. Indeed, his writings reveal countless incidents of suspected poison, marronage, property theft, and rebellion on his plantations and disobedience and resistance on the part of his enslaved laborers (which make it highly unlikely that the sewing basket is as much of an anomaly as he claimed).<sup>12</sup> Complaints of incompetent or cheating overseers and creditors (including his own brother) reveal Dessalles' frustration over not being able to run his plantations and business affairs as he wished. Dessalles' marriage to *colon* Anna Bence can be described as indifferent at best and acrimonious at worst, with numerous recordings of spousal discord that stretched between Martinique and the family château in Bergerac—four volumes of diary entries worth. Even his relationship with his children was fraught. He complained incessantly of his daughters' expensive tastes and, at several points, Dessalles and his son Adrian

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<sup>12</sup> For poison, see: Dessalles, letter to his mother, August 22, 1822 in *La vie d'un colon*, Vol. 1, 64-6. For examples of theft see: op. cit., diary entries for January and early February 1842, Vol. 3, 10-17. For complaints about managers, see: op. cit., diary entry for April 11, 1842, 21.

were not on speaking terms. Toward the end of his life, his children tried to avoid paying him the full sum of an agreed-upon pension—which led to several blow-up fights over money and the family patrimony.<sup>13</sup> In sum, Dessalles’ authority as a master and patriarch was never absolute, and he was constantly forced to reconcile his demands with those of his enslaved workers, white employees, and family.

Thus, the sewing basket affair might almost be seen as business-as-usual. It was not, however, because of how Dessalles (and perhaps also the thief) understood this transgression. For Dessalles, the basket represented his fears of what the ongoing debates in France meant for the future of colonial slavery. The stolen basket revealed the ways in which *colons* like Dessalles had begun to consider with alarm that the practice of treating human beings like property “that belonged to the masters” was no longer certain or “sacrosanct.” The family’s “sad reflections” that they were living in a different time and that their enslaved workers had been corrupted by “ideas of philanthropy,” underscored how they perceived that metropolitan abolitionists’ efforts to legislate reform would be disastrous for the colonies.

Likewise, the stolen basket indicates how enslaved people also sensed new vulnerabilities in the slave system. That is to say, perhaps the thief was emboldened by rumors of reform that circulated throughout the colony. During this period, enslaved persons in Martinique and Guadeloupe proved remarkably adept at taking advantage of renewed metropolitan attention to the slavery issue to press for certain rights.

Elites like Dessalles recognized that they were slowly and irrevocably losing ground against the government. Although the regime demonstrated no intention of dismantling slavery outright, by the mid 1840s, debates in the metropole signaled an overall willingness to consolidate control

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, diary entry for January 8 and 9, 1847, 237.

over the colonies through amelioration policies. The Mackau Law was a step in this direction, as its overall aim was to give government officials more authority to check the power of slave owners.<sup>14</sup> Particularly galling for *colons* was how the new law levied punitive measures on slaveholders: fines of 101-300 francs on those who impeded the religious instruction of enslaved workers, or neglected to distribute adequate food and clothing rations, or illegally extended workdays. The laws also imposed a prison sentence or a fine on masters who “inflicted on his slave illegal treatment, or who has exerted or caused to be exerted on him any abuse, violence, or assault.”<sup>15</sup>

However, historians maintain, while such laws rankled colonial elites, amelioration policies had little practical effect on reforming the Antillean slave regimes, because of timing and inefficacy. The Mackau Law, for instance, was implemented a mere three years before emancipation in 1848, and due to the vehement intransigence of *colons*, it did little to rapidly improve the conditions of enslaved persons. Scholars claim that, while amelioration perhaps checked some of the most brutal aspects of the slave system, the measures were limited and inadequate, with negligible consequences for enslaved people. By and large, therefore, amelioration remains understudied in the historiography, because scholars emphasize how these

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<sup>14</sup> Jennings, *French Anti-Slavery*, 205 and 211-2. Also see: Chapter One, 91-100.

<sup>15</sup> “Loi relative au régime des esclaves dans les colonies,” Paris, July 18, 1845 in *Bulletin officiel de la Guyane française, de l’année 1845* (Cayenne: Imprimerie du gouvernement, 1845), 217-8. Many similar reforms had been implemented in Saint-Domingue in 1784, indicating that metropolitan policymakers drew on pre-revolutionary policies regarding the slave regime as they conceptualized nineteenth-century amelioration. See: Cheney, *Cul de Sac*, 7-8 and 71-5; Ghachem, *The Old Regime and the Haitian Revolution*, 126-50; Yvan Debbasch, “Au cœur du ‘gouvernement des esclaves’: La souveraineté domestique aux Antilles françaises (XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles)” *Revue française d’histoire d’outre mer* Vol. 72, no. 266 (1985): 31-53; and Gabriel Debien, “La nourriture des esclaves sur les plantations des Antilles françaises aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles” *Caribbean Studies* Vol. 4, no. 2 (1964): 3-27. “Tout maître qui aura infligé à son esclave une traitement illégal, ou qui aura exercé ou fait exercer sur lui des sévices, violences ou voies de fait, en dehors des limites du pouvoir disciplinaire, sera puni d’un emprisonnement de seize jours à deux ans, et d’une amende de 101 fr. à 300 fr., ou de l’une de ces deux peines seulement.”

policies failed to noticeably improve the daily lives of enslaved persons or effect widespread, significant changes in how they were treated.<sup>16</sup>

While the long-term effects of amelioration policies are impossible to measure, given their uneven implementation before 1848, the argument that they were simply illusory oversimplifies how enslaved persons understood or adopted them in the crucial period before emancipation. While some amelioration policies, such as marriage encouragement, had largely failed to achieve their aims, it was not only because the policies were weak, but also because enslaved people did not embrace them.

This is in direct contrast with other policies that arguably had more of a destabilizing influence on the Antillean slave regime: such as enslaved women's lawsuits contesting family separation or their demands that new provisions regulating punishment and abuse be enforced. These policies demanded that colonial officials to investigate and adjudicate legal suits filed by enslaved people over issues such as abuse or separation from their families. In this way, we can analyze how enslaved persons adapted these policies to improve their situation and compelled their owners to follow the letter, if not the spirit, of reform laws. The legal suits that enslaved people raised during the July Monarchy illuminate how they used amelioration policies to challenge their masters and claim freedom for themselves and their families.

Also obscured in the scholarship on the nineteenth-century French Antilles is how these reforms introduced a bundle of new or reformulated policies into an already messy legal system of competing claims of authority over enslaved persons. That is, amelioration prompted slave owners, who were protecting longstanding property interests, to challenge colonial

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<sup>16</sup> On the supposed inefficacy of amelioration, see: Moitt, *Women and Slavery*, 84; Fallope, *Esclaves et citoyens*, 301-8; Gautier, *Les Sœurs de Solitude*, 130-50; Jennings, *French Anti-Slavery* 226-36; and Tomich, *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar*, 112-3.

administrators who represented the regime and its determination to tighten control over the colonies. While amelioration policies were often unevenly applied, their implementation created new vulnerabilities in the absolute power of slave holders.

Moreover, these vulnerabilities emerged during a period of social and political turbulence in the Antilles. Martinique and Guadeloupe had experienced a series of crises over the course of the early nineteenth century: including slave rebellions, natural disasters, British emancipation (and consequently, the efforts of enslaved people to escape to neighboring islands), and a volatile political battle between *colons* and free people of color over civil rights.<sup>17</sup> Depending on their status, enslaved and free residents of Martinique and Guadeloupe thus viewed changes to colonial policy as either inflaming these tensions or as a moment of opportunity to test the limits of the regime. Rather than a series of illusory measures, then, amelioration laws formed a space in which colonial administrators, enslaved persons, and slave owners reformulated the boundaries of authority and bondage during the July Monarchy to incorporate more flexible manumission policies and stricter proscriptions against abuse. Family politics became the major site on which slaves, authorities, and *colons* clashed over these boundaries.

From the point of view of the authorities, amelioration represented the state's first efforts to initiate gradual change in the colonies by "morally improving" slaves through marriage and attenuate the absolute authority of slave owners in matters of discipline and manumission—thereby consolidating control over the system. *Colons*, on the other hand, viewed amelioration as a direct usurpation of their power as masters, although some evidence indicates that they

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<sup>17</sup> For how British emancipation influenced slaves in Martinique and Guadeloupe (for example, in motivating slaves to escape to neighboring Anglophone islands such as Dominica and Saint Lucia), see: *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*, January 13, 1841. Dessalles also discussed a case in which a small canoe of enslaved runaways fled to a "nearby colony" (likely Dominica or Saint Lucia) and capsized offshore. Everyone on board drowned. See: Dessalles, diary entry for January 25, 1842 in *La vie d'un colon* Vol. 3, 12. For campaigns of free people of color see: AN BB/20/1/6 Dossier 2, Affaire des nomeés Bissette, Fabien, et Volny.



embraced reform late in the 1840s as a means of prolonging their command over a bound labor force.<sup>18</sup> From the perspective of enslaved persons, however, amelioration policies created opportunities to force certain concessions from their owners and the authorities. In promulgating amelioration policies throughout the 1830s and 1840s, the government had unintentionally created new legal ambiguities that enslaved people exploited in the new and extant slave laws.

Enslaved persons' reliance on the legal system to challenge their masters was not a strategy unique to the nineteenth-century French Antilles. Throughout the slave societies of the Americas, enslaved persons had "long been litigious" and worked from within the legal system in service of their own purposes.<sup>19</sup> They raised funds to purchase freedom for themselves, relatives, and community members, filed freedom suits, and sued masters for abusive treatment.<sup>20</sup> Neither was amelioration a new concept introduced by the French. The Bourbon and Pombaline Reforms in eighteenth-century Spanish America and Brazil, respectively, introduced new rules governing the

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<sup>18</sup> Jennings argues that planters in Guadeloupe considered emancipating their enslaved workers in exchange for an indemnity and a guarantee that freed workers would be forced to continue to work on the plantations. These planters, he argued, were motivated to procrastinate any movement toward true free labor in the colonies—even at the expense of giving up slave ownership. The goal was to maintain a permanent supply of bound labor at any cost. See: Lawrence Jennings, "French Slave Liberation and Socialism: Projects for 'Association' in Guadeloupe, 1845-1848," *Slavery & Abolition* Vol. 17, no. 2 (August, 1996): 93-111.

<sup>19</sup> See: Camilla Townsend, "'Half My Body Free, the Other Half Enslaved': The Politics of the Slaves of Guayaquil at the End of the Colonial Era," *Colonial Latin American Review* Vol. 7, no. 1 (1998): 108; Ghachem, *The Old Regime and the Haitian Revolution*, 15; and Loren Schweninger, *Appealing for Liberty: Freedom Suits in the South* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1-9.

<sup>20</sup> For the French Antilles, see: Ghachem, *The Old Regime and the Haitian Revolution*, 77-210 (especially for manumission suits alleging cruelty). For Spanish American manumission, see: Camilla Townsend, "In Search of Liberty: The Efforts of the Enslaved to Attain Abolition in Ecuador, 1822-1852," in Darién J. Davis, ed., *Beyond Slavery: The Multilayered Legacy of Africans in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 37-56; and Cowling, *Conceiving Freedom*, especially 47-70. For Brazil, see: Mary Karasch, *Slave Life in Rio de Janeiro* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 335-70. For an example of black Catholic brotherhoods that would pool resources to buy the freedom of its members, see: João José Reis, *Slave Rebellion in Brazil: The Muslim Uprising of 1835 in Bahia*, Arthur Brakel, trans., (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 149.

management of enslaved persons, and, since the late eighteenth century, the British had instituted a number of ameliorative policies geared toward moderating the worst abuses of slavery.<sup>21</sup>

The nineteenth-century French Antilles, however, provide an important case study in the history of slavery amelioration in the Americas. In Martinique and Guadeloupe, enslaved persons and reformers tested the absolute authority of slaveowners by marshalling both older laws (such as the *Code Noir*) as well as recent amelioration legislation to mount legal suits that pushed against the boundaries of freedom and slaveholders' patriarchal authority. Further, the ways in which enslaved persons, particularly women, capitalized on abolitionists' gender ideologies and family policies in service of their claims to freedom highlights how they used the experiences of their private lives and intimate relationships to demand rights and concessions from the slaveholding establishment. This argument raises new questions about how enslaved people manipulated reform policies to challenge the colonial regime and what the implications of amelioration meant from their perspectives. Family politics was essential to this process.

### The French Antilles as Patriarchal Slave Societies

In the post-revolutionary era, colonial administrators and planters focused on rebuilding the plantation economy to compensate for the loss of Haiti. The Restoration consolidated colonial policy in favor of business interests largely based out of Atlantic port cities—such as Bordeaux, La Rochelle, and Havre—with long histories of financial investment in colonial

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<sup>21</sup> For general overview of Bourbon reforms, see: Allan J. Kuethe and Kenneth J. Andrien, *The Spanish Atlantic World in the Eighteenth Century: War and the Bourbon Reforms, 1713-1796* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 271-304. For amelioration in Spanish America see: Alejandro de la Fuente, "Slaves and the Creation of Legal Rights in Cuba: Coartación and Papel," *Hispanic American Historical Review* Vol. 87, no. 4 (2007): 659-92; and Cowling, *Conceiving Freedom*, 47-70. For amelioration in the British West Indies, see: David Barry Gaspar, "Slavery, Amelioration, and Sunday Markets in Antigua," 1-28; Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 17-20; and Luster, *The Amelioration of the Slaves in the British Empire*, especially chapters 2 and 3.

slavery.<sup>22</sup> At first, the early nineteenth century witnessed a surge in sugar cultivation. Between 1816 and 1835, Martinique experienced an approximately 35% increase in sugar cultivation and Guadeloupe a 41% increase. The changes in these patterns of cultivation indicated that the transition to sugar monoculture had been virtually complete by the July Monarchy, as sugar expansion came at the expense of coffee, cacao, and cotton cultivation, which dropped to under ten percent of colonial exports. Combined with the strong protections in the *Exclusif*, most planters had voluntarily switched to sugar monoculture by this point.<sup>23</sup>

As in the eighteenth century, these plantations were massive, rigorously organized sites of production that combined extensive land resources with mechanized equipment and relied on heavily integrated markets that coordinated the vast circulation of commodities, credit, and capital.<sup>24</sup> Sugar cultivation mobilized the labor of large groups of chattel slave labor, which was augmented by the illicit slave trade in the early nineteenth century.<sup>25</sup> However, over the course of the 1830s, the French Antilles began to experience a drop in yields as a result of exhausted land resources in the colonies, enforced abolition of the slave trade, and a dwindling supply of credit

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<sup>22</sup> For French Atlantic cities and their ties to the slave colonies, see: Palmer, *Intimate Bonds*, 6-12; John Clark, *La Rochelle and the Atlantic Economy during the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), especially 134-57; and Paul Butel, *Les négociants bordelais, l'Europe et les îles au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Aubier, 1996).

<sup>23</sup> For sugar consolidation, see: Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique*, 307; and David Watts, *The West Indies: Patterns of Development, Culture, and Environmental Change since 1492* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 287 and 296-300. For the decline of other commodity production see: Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 479. For the *Exclusif*, see: Christian Schnakenbourg, *Histoire de l'industrie sucrière en Guadeloupe (XIXe-XXe siècles)* Vol. 1 (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1980), 65-92. Also see: *Notices statistiques sur les colonies françaises imprimées par ordre de M. le Vice-Amiral de Rosamel, Ministre secrétaire d'état de la marine et des colonies* Vol. 1 (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1837), 35; and *Commission instituée par décision royale du 26 mai 1840 pour l'examen des questions relatives à l'esclavage et à la constitution politiques des colonies* (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1843), 65 and 143.

<sup>24</sup> See: Cheney, *Cul de Sac*, 1; and Schnakenbourg, *Histoire de l'industrie sucrière en Guadeloupe* Vol. 1, 22.

<sup>25</sup> Fallope, *Esclaves et citoyens*, 74-5; and Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 479. For estimated numbers of African captives imported into the French Antilles over the nineteenth century, see: Table A.2. in Appendix.

from metropolitan investors unwilling to commit extensive resources to a slave economy as abolitionism was on the rise and other modes of sugar production gained traction.<sup>26</sup>

The key problem, as Dale Tomich emphasizes, was that Antillean sugar production was hampered by inefficiency and environmental obstacles, including: limited land resources, soil erosion, outdated technology, lack of credit, shifting markets, and inability to dynamically invest capital.<sup>27</sup> Natural disasters further destabilized production.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, the domestic beet sugar industry began to take off in agricultural regions of France (the *départements* of the Nord, Pas-de-Calais, Somme, and Aisine) where, by 1836, approximately 260 factories had produced over 20,000 metric tons of sugar.<sup>29</sup> In these regions, a stable labor force and low wages, plus a well-developed infrastructure of rivers, roads, canals and railroads (thanks to large-scale capital investment), combined with the latest production techniques, meant that manufacturers' costs remained low while output steadily increased. By 1836, beet sugar supplied up to a third of French consumption.<sup>30</sup> During the early years of the July Monarchy therefore, the sugar colonies were being slowly squeezed out of the very industry that they had produced.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Jennings, "French Slave Liberation and Socialism," 96; and Watts, *The West Indies*, 300.

<sup>27</sup> Tomich, *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar*, 115.

<sup>28</sup> For example, an earthquake in Guadeloupe in 1843 decimated Pointe-à-Pitre and killed more than 1,500 people. See: C. Sainte-Claire Deville, *Observations sur le tremblement de terre éprouvé à la Guadeloupe le 8 février 1843* (Imprimerie du Gouverneur: Basse-Terre, 1843), 1-68; and Nathalie Feuillet, François Beauducel, and Paul Taponnier, "Tectonic Context of Moderate to Large Historical Earthquakes in the Lesser Antilles and Mechanical Coupling with Volcanoes," *Journal of Geophysical Research* Vol. 116, (October 2011): 3.

<sup>29</sup> Tomich, *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar*, 115.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, and pp. 113-31 (for the growth of the beet sugar industry in France and its competition with the colonies).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 253. Also see: Fallope, *Esclaves et citoyens*, 249-52; and Schnakenbourg, *Histoire de l'industrie sucrière en Guadeloupe*, Vol. 1, 124-36.

Planters argued that such hardships meant that, more than ever, slavery remained an economic necessity, and that any change in the status quo would result in the collapse of colonial production. They uneasily watched abolitionist initiatives unfold in metropolitan debates and decried the amelioration policies tested out on royal domains—plantations owned by the Crown in Martinique and Guadeloupe. Dessalles, for example, recorded his anger in 1839 that the royal domains had been ordered to proceed with several amelioration policies—such as marriage encouragement, primary education for enslaved children under sixteen, and limitations on corporal punishment—on the Saint Jacques plantation. He perceived that “to establish amelioration on one plantation and to not do it on neighboring plantations” would only encourage “the slaves of these plantations: [to] obtain by force what one does not grant you through goodwill.”<sup>32</sup> From Dessalles’ perspective, the Crown’s experiments with amelioration on its own properties threatened order and production on everyone else’s property.

Other planters, however, believed that slavery remained safe as long as the government remained too cash-strapped to grant them an indemnity. Even this assurance, however, had disappeared by the 1840s.<sup>33</sup> The Mackau Law provoked a hostile reaction from the slavery establishment, which viewed the bill as a signal that the government was taking concrete steps toward emancipation, and thereby aggressively interfering with colonial affairs. Planters bitterly complained that the law undermined their control over their slaves and made no mention of restitution for the loss of enslaved labor. For planters, amelioration policies threatened the economic viability of the colonies and their authority as masters.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Dessalles, diary entry for July 4, 1839, in *La vie d'un colon* Vol. 2, 189-90 (and fn15, p. 190). “Établir des améliorations sur une habitation et ne pas le faire sur les habitations voisines, c’est dire aux nègres de ces habitations: —Obtenez de force ce qu’on ne veut vous accorder de bonne volonté.”

<sup>33</sup> Jennings, “French Slave Liberation and Socialism,” 94-6.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

*Colons*, like slave owners throughout the Americas, often exhibited near-paranoia over any challenge to their authoritarian power on the plantations—a fear compounded in the nineteenth century by the Haitian Revolution.<sup>35</sup> They worried about the rising number of free people of color, slave rebellions, and the consequences of British emancipation in neighboring islands.<sup>36</sup> Increasing social and political tensions during the 1820s and 1830s, combined with the growing population of *gens de couleur*, convinced many *colons* that free people of color would kill and replace the white population if given the chance.<sup>37</sup>

Although incomplete census data makes it impossible to reconstruct a complete account of the number of whites and free people of color, the 1842 calculations of Alexandre Moreau de Jonnès (a colonial administrator in Martinique who served as aid-de-camp to Governor Villaret-Joyeuse and conducted a demographic survey of the French colonies in the 1820s) indicated an increase in the number of *gens de couleur* between 1802 and 1826:

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<sup>35</sup> Genovese, *Fatal Self-Deception*, 99-102; and Alfred Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean* (Baton Rouge, L.A.: Louisiana State University Press, 1988).

<sup>36</sup> There were several slave rebellions during this period in Martinique. See: Rebecca Hartkopf Schloss, "The February 1831 Slave Uprising in Martinique and the Policing of White Identity," *French Historical Studies* Vol. 30, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 203. For details on the 1831 slave uprising, see: ANOM FM SG MAR 18/160, "Rapport du Capitaine Cazeneuve, commandant le navire Martinique, sur les événements [sic] du février 1831 en Martinique;" op. cit., "Lettre sur les derniers événements [sic] de Saint-Pierre, Martinique;" ANOM FM SG MAR 18/161, "Extrait au registre des procès verbaux des délibérations du conseil privé de la Martinique," May 19, 1831; and op. cit., "Rapport de M. Dariste au Ministre de la Marine et des Colonies," April 16, 1831. For the Grand'Anse Rebellion, see: *Revue des Colonies*, July 1834; ANOM FM SG MAR 46 (all dossiers); Gatine, *Sommaire des moyens de cassation à plaider pour les condamnés de la Grand'Anse, hommes de condition libre, demandeurs en cassation de l'arrêt de la cour d'assises de Saint-Pierre du 30 juin 1834; et pour les esclaves condamnés conjointement par le dit arrêt, profitant du pouvoir des libres* (Paris: Imprimerie de Dezauche, 1834); and Fabien, Bissette, and Gatine, *Affaire de la Grand'Anse, Martinique. Au roi, en son conseil* (Paris: Imprimerie de J.S. Cordier, 1834).

<sup>37</sup> For growth of the *gens de couleur* population, see: Léo Elizabeth, "The French Antilles" 151-2. Dessalles fervently believed that free people of color would one day rise up against the whites and often referred to them as "our most cruel enemies." See: Dessalles, letter to his mother, April 15, 1825 in *La vie d'un colon* Vol. 1, 151-2.

Table 2.1. The Free People of Color and White Populations, 1802-1826.<sup>38</sup>

Year	Martinique		Guadeloupe	
	White	Free People of Color	White	Free people of Color
1802	9,826	6,578	--	--
1806	9,877	6,589	--	--
1807	9,953	8,616	--	--
1816	9,298	9,364	12,983	7,946
1817	--	--	13,654	8,364
1818	--	--	13,782	8,700
1819	--	--	14,143	9,128
1820	--	--	14,092	9,152
1821	9,867	11,073	12,802	8,604
1822			11,636	8,981
1823			11,193	9,135
1824	--	--	11,439	9,477
1826	9,937	10,786	11,569	9,500

The rise in the *gens de couleur* population, de Jonnès maintained, stemmed from the misguided practice of manumitting slaves, especially enslaved women who went on to have free children: “Surely everyday domestic relations give birth to sympathies, natural affections, which are beyond all [financial] interest, and which inspire, especially among creole women, a compassionate beneficence for slaves; but colonial society, like any other, is not governed by sentiments.” Why? Because sentiment could endanger the status quo.

Analyzing the population trends of Martinique, de Jonnès cautioned that “such a social order gives rise to conflicting interests, domestic misfortunes, civil disruptions, hostile, hidden

<sup>38</sup> All figures, except for 1806 and 1821, are collated from Alexandre Moreau de Jonnès, *Recherches statistiques sur l’esclavage colonial et sur les moyens de le supprimer* (Paris: Bourgogne et Martinet, 1842), 17-19. The years 1806 and 1821 for Martinique are from Schloss, “The Distance between the Color White and All Others,”<sup>97</sup>. Liliane Chauleau gives different numbers for the years 1805 and 1807 in Martinique, claiming that in 1805 there were 9,826 whites and 6,578 free people of color and in 1807, 10,377 whites and 6,555 free people of color, in Chauleau, *Dans les îles du vent*, 213. As most scholars who work with official French population statistics rely on the de Jonnès report, I have elected to do the same. De Jonnès does not supply any figures from 1826-1831, and after this date, the racial categories differentiating whites and free people of color are no longer used, so it is difficult to gage how much of the free population was originally labelled *blanc* and how many were originally *gens de couleur*.

and threatening passions, always ready to explode and to subvert everything.”<sup>39</sup> The increase in *gens de couleur* was particularly troubling because the growth of the white population was either negligible or declined outright. Indeed, as Schloss has argued, any gains in the *colon* population likely occurred from the small migration of poor, semi-skilled *petits-blancs* from France, rather than a higher birthrate among resident elite planters.<sup>40</sup> Thus, the July Monarchy’s restoration of civil rights to free people of color further exacerbated *colons*’ fears that their social and political dominance was under siege.

Complaints of “insolent” free people of color appear repeatedly in the writings of planters and their proslavery delegates in Paris. Dessalles, for example, railed against individuals from the free people of color population he deemed “arrogant,” “impudent,” “haughty,” and “lacking in respect” for whites. “While I was riding through town I was stopped by the mulatto woman Laquiotte,” he remarked on one instance in 1837, “who asked me to lend her some plates and pots for the meal she is to give on the occasion of the marriage of her son Montart, that insolent mulatto and enemy of Whites...A horrible race, these free people of color: proud and insolent in prosperity, they will, if they think it necessary, resort to the vilest marks [of deference] to obtain help, which they then quickly forget.”<sup>41</sup> Writing in March of 1838, Dessalles blamed free people

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<sup>39</sup> de Jonnès, *Recherches statistiques sur l’esclavage colonial*, 150 and 17.

“Sans doute, les relations domestiques de tous les jours font naître des sympathies, des affections naturelles, qui sont en dehors de tout intérêt, et qui inspirent, surtout aux femmes créoles, une bienfaisance compatissante pour les esclaves; mais la société coloniale, pas plus que toute autre, ne se gouverne point par des sentiments...”

“...un tel ordre social enfante d’intérêts opposés, de malheurs domestiques, de désordres civiles, de passions hostiles, cachées et menaçantes, et toujours prêtes à éclater et à tout subvertir...”

<sup>40</sup> Schloss, “The Distance between the Color White and All Others,” 96-9.

<sup>41</sup> Dessalles, diary entry for January 17, 1837, in *La vie d’un colon*, Vol. 2, 17.

“Alors que je traversais le Bourg, la mulâtresse Laquiotte m’arrêta pour me prier de lui prêter des plats et des casseroles pour le repas qu’elle doit donner à l’occasion du mariage de son fils Montart, mulâtre insolent et ennemi des Blancs...C’est une horrible race que celle de couleur: orgueilleuse et insolente dans la prospérité, elle emploie dans le besoin les marques les plus viles pour obtenir des secours qu’elle ne tarde pas à oublier.”



of color for inciting disorder among the enslaved populations and declared “hatred and vengeance inform all the actions of their lives. They are not content with a perfect equality... They absolutely dream of taking over the colony.”<sup>42</sup> *Gens de couleur*, for Dessalles, did not know their place, which confirmed for him the fact that they desired to overtake whites at the top of the political and social hierarchy.

Dessalles thus harshly criticized his friends and neighbors who embraced “dangerous” forms of interracial intimacy in their private lives that neglected the social formalities that upheld the racial colonial order. Visiting his acquaintance Mr. Burot, Dessalles found him “surrounded by his mulatto women and bastards.” He claimed that Burot had become an alcoholic following the death of “one of his bastards,” and rarely left his home or the company of his mixed-race family, and so, Dessalles implied, had become “a bitter enemy of the whites”—in essence, betraying his own class by repudiating the sanctity of white ascendancy.<sup>43</sup>

On the same day, Dessalles went to visit Pierre Cardin: “a good man, but also surrounded by mulattoes. His bastards live pell-mell with his legitimate children. Truly, such neglect of the proprieties is found only in Martinique. It makes me shudder.”<sup>44</sup> Six years later, Dessalles again complained about Cardin’s mixed-race children: “Pierre Cardin dined with me; all his bastards

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, diary entry for March 30, 1838, 109.

“Les habitations doivent les malheurs qu’ils éprouvent chez eux aux conseils perfidies que les hommes de couleur donnent aux esclaves... la haine et la vengeance dirigent toutes les actions de leur vie. Elle ne se contenterait pas d’une égalité parfaite... Elle rêve bien positivement de la possession entière des colonies.”

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, diary entry for November 30, 1837, Vol. 3, 77.

“J’ai été chez M. Louisie Burot, que nous avons trouvé entouré de ses mulâtres et ses bâtards. Dans cette colonie, le vin marché tête levée: ce brave homme, depuis la mort d’un de ses bâtards, n’est pas sorti de chez lui... Il est prouvé bien au contraire que c’était un ennemi acharné des Blancs...”

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, diary entry for November 30, 1837, 77.

“De chez M. Louisie Burot, j’ai été chez Pierre Cardin, bon homme, mais entouré aussi de mulâtres; ses bâtards vivent pêle-mêle avec ses enfants légitimes. C’est vraiment un oubli des convenances qu’on ne voit qu’à la Martinique, et qui me fait frémir.”

came and walked around at Nouvelle Cité. I had a collation served to them, and they danced to the violin until ten at night; they even slept here and will leave in the morning. You can't be polite to these free people without being taken advantage of."<sup>45</sup> Implied here is that free people of color, raised with indulgence by a white father and "pell-mell" with white children, would inevitably become threatening, greedy social upstarts taking advantage of the white class. Even though Dessalles drew a line, lunching alone with Cardin and serving only an informal meal to his "bastards," the Cardin children still managed to subvert social propriety and racial hierarchy by long overstaying their welcome. As Dessalles referred to it elsewhere in his diaries, nothing good could come from white men choosing to "wallow in dirty linen."<sup>46</sup>

Though Dessalles recorded such moments in which he and his family rubbed elbows with free people of color, such interracial socialization was always inherently fraught. For instance, Dessalles recounted an instance of "brazen" behavior on the part of several free women of color who "sat down next to my wife and daughters," at a party given at his friend Louis Littée's home. Disparaging the lady of the house, Dessalles continued, "I do not understand Creole ladies who love to surround themselves with mulatto women" and stated that had he been aware of the incident when it occurred, he would have "spoken to Louis Littée and made him feel the impropriety of it."<sup>47</sup> In other words, interracial socialization could be tolerated as long as it did

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, diary entry for September 3, 1843, 84.

"Pierre Cardin a dîné avec moi; tous ses bâtards sont venus se promener à *la Nouvelle-Cité*. Je les ai fait collationner, et ils ont dansé au violon jusqu'à 10 heures du soir; ils ont même couché et s'en iront demain matin. On ne peut pas faire une politesse à ces gens libres sans qu'ils en abusent."

<sup>46</sup> At one point, Dessalles despaired that his son Adrien (who treated his mixed-race children as full members of the family and dined with persons of color at the same table) was in danger of "tomberait dans le linge sale." See: *ibid*, diary entry for February 9, 1849, Vol. 4, 107.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, diary entry for January 31, 1842, Vol. 3, 12.

"Mme Littée, créole sans éducation, se trouvait entourée de mulâtresses libres qui ont eu l'effronterie de s'asseoir auprès de ma femme et de mes filles. Je ne l'ai su qu'à mon retour chez moi; autrement, j'en eusse parlé à Louis Littée, et je lui aurais fait sentir cette inconvenance. Je ne conçois pas cet amour des dames créoles à s'entourer de mulâtresses.

not transgress the boundaries of racial hierarchy. A slave owner might give a party and invite free people of color to participate in festivities, but eating or sitting together threatened white ascendancy.

De Jonnès shared Dessalles' perspective on free people of color. He asserted that "dangerous liaisons" between white *colons* with enslaved women had undermined the economic power of whites by giving rise to increasing numbers of mixed-race individuals who were eventually freed by their fathers. These mixed-race children, he argued, depleted the wealth of white creole planters through "considerable acquisition" of property. According to de Jonnès, "the *colons* hardly make a will without leaving to some *affranchis* a more or less considerable part of their fortune, to the detriment of their legitimate heirs." Insinuating that *colons* both manumitted and bequeathed their property as a "sort of restitution" to their illegitimate mixed-race children, de Jonnès purported that these inheritance practices threatened the material prosperity of white families more broadly, especially when they were compelled to turn over large chunks of an estate to an illegitimate heir.<sup>48</sup>

While he argued against the practice, de Jonnès' report reveals how commonplace interracial sex was in the plantation household. Dessalles himself is a case in point. For all his anger with his friends over having mixed-race children, Dessalles is notably silent about his own affairs. For example, he had at least one child (Saturnin) by his enslaved worker Trop, who he described as "docile" and "promiscuous."<sup>49</sup> Unlike Pierre Cardin, however, Dessalles never

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<sup>48</sup> ANOM 8DFC/470, Alexandre Moreau de Jonnès, *Recherches historique sur les affranchises et les gens de couleur de la Martinique et de la Guadeloupe*, 1816.

"Par une sorte de restitution...les colons ne font guères de testaments sans laisser à des affranchis, au détriment de leurs héritiers-légitimes, une partie plus ou moins considérable de leur fortune."

<sup>49</sup> Dessalles, letter to his mother, July 4, 1823 in *La vie d'un colon* Vol. 1, 89-92. Saturnin was a major source of discord between Dessalles and his wife. See: op. cit., diary entry for June 22, 1843, Vol. 3, 76.

acknowledged Saturnin as his son, which reflected his attitudes about preserving distance and hierarchy between whites and mixed-race children.

Indeed, when his son Adrien recognized his mixed-race daughter Palmire after emancipation and treated her as an equal member of the family Dessalles was apoplectic. “He forgets that, by keeping his bastard here, he places me in a most awkward position.” Dessalles elaborated: “certainly, nothing would give me more pleasure than being of use to this young girl, if I saw her occupied and treated as a servant; but it pains me to see that Adrien considers her as if she were one of my legitimate granddaughters.”<sup>50</sup> He would never accept Palmire as more than part of the domestic staff (although, from the diaries, it seems as though she was treated as a lady of the house by her father and the other servants), let alone a member of the family.

In these examples—viewing Palmire only as a domestic servant and fathering a child or children with the enslaved women he owned—Dessalles demonstrated how the sexual economy of slavery was an essential component of slaveholder’s patriarchal ideology. That is, slave owners demanded unmediated access to enslaved women’s sexual, reproductive, and physical labor and associated black women with “servant” labor and “promiscuity.” Dessalles’ diary starkly reveals the ways in which slave owners viewed enslaved women as having certain labor obligations in the plantation household and in the slave barracks.

For instance, his personal papers count pregnancies and miscarriages among his enslaved workers as a matter of course. In one letter to his mother about the state of slaves on *Nouvelle Cité*, Dessalles wrote, “Praxcède says that she is pregnant, but her pregnancy does not show yet.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, diary entry for April 20, 1849, Vol. 4, 116. See the same entry for how Adrien insisted that Palmire be treated as a family member in the household.

“Il oublie qu’en conservant ici sa bâtarde, il me place dans une position peu convenable. Certes, rien ne me ferait plus de plaisir que d’être utile à cette jeune fille, si je la voyais occupée et traitée comme une servante mais je vois avec peine qu’Adrien la considère comme si elle était une de mes petites-filles légitimes.”

As long as she is a libertine anyway, I would at least like her to have many children who would someday make good slaves for us. Praxcède always behaves well; she runs everything in the house and especially in my room; she is eager and faithful.”<sup>51</sup> Was Praxcède expectant with Dessalles’ child? The letter is ambiguous on this point. Perhaps when writing to his mother Dessalles wished to stress Praxcède’s supposed promiscuity to obscure his own. Nevertheless, the letter indicates that Dessalles expected to benefit from Praxcède’s reproductive and domestic labor. Dessalles was remarkably honest about how he viewed sex as integral for reconstituting his plantation household, increasing his labor force, and reaffirming his authority. For Dessalles, sex with enslaved women yielded capital returns.

Slaveholders, overseers, and managers demanded unrestricted access to enslaved women—which was in turn predicated on denying enslaved men exclusive sexual rights to the women they lived with or married. As the Crown Prosecutor of Fort-Royal stated, “I must confess that many of the slaves, when urged by their priest to marry, each answered: ‘I’m not stupid, my master would take my wife the day following my marriage.’”<sup>52</sup> Controlling access to sex and women on the plantation served to reinforce the patriarchal power of slaveholding men. Dessalles actively monitored and interfered with the intimate relationships between his enslaved people, particularly those who performed domestic labor.

One striking example is when Dessalles’ encouraged his enslaved valet Nicaise to have sex with enslaved women in the master bedroom. While it is not clear if Dessalles himself

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, letter to his mother, Sainte-Marie, July 4, 1823, Vol. 1, 90.

“Praxcède dit qu’elle est grosse; elle n’a pas encore déclaré sa grossesse; au reste puisqu’elle est libertine, je voudrais au moins qu’elle fit beaucoup d’enfants, nous aurions de bons sujets un jour. Praxcède se conduit toujours bien, elle a la haute main dans la maison et surtout dans ma chambre, elle est zélée et fidèle.”

<sup>52</sup> *Exposé général*, 574.

“Je dois avouer encore que beaucoup de nègres, pressés par leur curé de se marier, ont chacun répondu: ‘Pas si bête, mon maître prendrait ma femme le lendemain de mon mariage.’”

participated in these sexual activities, he was an active and obtrusive voyeur who made his opinions on their performance known. “I am irritated by the sullenness of the young mulatto woman Adée, whom my young slave Nicaise had chosen for his mistress,” he complained in 1837. “I don’t know whether it is stupidity or affectation, but the fact is that I have never seen more grimacing. A vestal virgin would not have acted with more fuss. The devil take her! She is at least twenty-five years old and has already roasted many broomsticks.”<sup>53</sup> This unsettling assessment is revealing on many fronts, particularly in Dessalles’ presumption that an enslaved woman in her mid-twenties was naturally promiscuous and the ambiguous slippage in the statement that Nicaise, an enslaved man, “chose his mistress.” His assumptions regarding Adée’s sexuality display the attitudes held among slaveholders and other men in positions of authority over enslaved women: that their bodies were innately sexualized and readily sexually available. The claim that Nicaise “chose” Adée for his mistress is noteworthy for the implications of agency that it placed on the enslaved valet, when it was Dessalles who seems to have urged him to have intercourse, and perhaps even joined them.

Indeed, Dessalles’ entertainment seems to have been the priority, and whatever Nicaise or Adée might have wanted mattered little. On the following day, Adée’s continued reluctance “tired and bored” Dessalles, and on the third night, after a similar performance, he threw Adée out of the bedroom. It was only after Nicaise protested that Dessalles relented, but he still made Adée “promise to correct herself.” Dessalles also demanded that Nicaise swear to “abandon her if she does not change,” notwithstanding his observation that the couple seemed to “love each

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<sup>53</sup> Dessalles, diary entry for January 13, 1837, in *La vie d’un colon* Vol. 2, 15.

“Je suis irrité par la maussaderie de la jeune mulâtresse Adée, que mon jeune nègre Nicaise avait choisie pour maîtresse; mais je pense qu’il va l’abandonner; s’il en était autrement, je ne m’occuperais plus de lui. Je ne sais si c’est bêtise ou afféterie: ce qu’il y a de certain, c’est que je n’ai jamais vu plus de grimaces; une vestale n’aurait pas agi avec plus de difficulté. Que le diable l’emporte! elle a vingt-cinq ans au moins, et a joliment rôti le balai...”

other.”<sup>54</sup> Choice of sexual partner in the Dessalles household, it seemed, could only go to the extent that it did not annoy the master or spoil his entertainment.

This account reveals many insights into how the intimate lives of slaves could be invaded and managed by their owners. Dessalles clearly considered it his prerogative as the master to observe his enslaved manservant’s conjugal activities and evaluate his choice of partner. For both Nicaise and Adée, being forced to perform their intimacy in this context could only have been a stress on their relationship (if they had one). Indeed, from Adée’s perspective, it is not clear if she was even a willing conjugal partner for Nicaise— “they seem to love each other” suggests more about Dessalles’ perfunctory annoyance rather than a substantive observation about their relationship. This encounter thus highlights one of many ways in which a master’s interference into the sexual activities of his enslaved workers could degrade, humiliate, or drive a wedge between them.

Dessalles’ preoccupation with the sexual lives of his slaves was not an isolated case. Sexual access to bondswomen was carefully controlled by masters, plantation managers, and overseers across the slave societies of the Americas.<sup>55</sup> In October 1847, the enslaved Augustin was sentenced to wear irons for six months after he assaulted the master of the woman he had been visiting. According to the legal brief, Augustin had been “having intimate relations with one of the slaves of Mr. Louisy Thibia, named Anna,” but it seemed as though she broke off the relationship because she stopped receiving him at her hut. One night, Augustin made such a

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<sup>54</sup> Dessalles, diary entries for January 14 and 15, 1837 in *ibid*, 15-16.

“Ce soir, mon petit nègre a fait venir Adée auprès de lui; elle s’est conduite assez bien, quoique faisant toujours des grimaces. Cela me fatigue et m’ennuie.” And: “Mais ils paraissent s’aimer... Elle promet de se corriger et Nicaise me promet à son tour qu’il l’abandonnera si elle ne change pas.”

<sup>55</sup> See: Graham, *Caetana Says No*, 1-72; Morrissey, *Slave Women in the New World*, 147; Morgan, *Laboring Women*; 69-143; Gautier, *Les sœurs de Solitude*, 71; and Thomas Foster, *Rethinking Rufus: Sexual Violations of Enslaved Men* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2019), especially 46-67.

scene when Anna refused to open the door that Thibia intervened “to restore order,” which is when Augustin knocked him unconscious.<sup>56</sup> In this case, Thibia’s intervention seemed motivated by his desire to re-establish peace in the middle of the night. But it also reveals how closely slaveholders followed the goings-on at night in the slave barracks. Like Dessalles in his bedroom, Thibia seems to have paid careful attention to sexual relationships in his slave huts.

Indeed, slave owners were fiercely protective of their rights to interfere in the sexual and conjugal activities of enslaved persons. Local elites were enraged with the promulgation of the 1840 royal ordinance that, among other reforms, aimed to encourage slave marriages. Even more infuriating was the ordinance’s directive to local magistrates to visit private plantations to report on compliance and levy fines on those who ignored the rule.<sup>57</sup> Dessalles labeled the ordinance “appalling!” and he, his neighbor Lalanne, and other *colons* mounted a signature campaign for a letter of protest against it, which declared: “a new ordinance that diminishes the master’s authority and takes the time of his slave, attacks the most sacred right of property: a right that the ordinances and edicts of our kings have consecrated in the most formal manner [cites the 1685 Code Noir].”<sup>58</sup> Elsewhere in the diary, Dessalles recounts stories from neighbors who were more

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<sup>56</sup> ANOM FM SG MAR 98/876, “Administration de la Justice, Affaire Augustin,” October 15, 1847. “Augustin... esclave de l’habitation Duverger d’Auroy, né et demeurant au François, était accusé d’avoir commis des excès, et exercé des voies de fait sur la personne du S<sup>r</sup> Louisy Thibia, de condition libre. L’accusé avait eu précédemment des relations intimes avec une des esclaves du S<sup>r</sup> Louisy Thibia, nommée Anna. Il éprouvait un vif mécontentement de ce que cette femme depuis quelques mois refusait de le recevoir chez elle. Aussi, le 7 juin dernier, vers d’un heures du soir, se présenta-t-il devant sa case dont il parvint à ouvrir la porte. Réveillé par la bruit, le S<sup>r</sup> Louisy Thibia se leva et intervint pour rétablir l’Ordre, mais Augustin méconnut son autorité, l’injuria grossièrement, déchira ses vêtements, le poursuivit jusque dans sa propre maison et lui porta au visage deux coups de poing qui le renversèrent à terre sans connaissance... Reconnu coupable, l’esclave Augustin a été condamné à six mois de chaîne de police par application des Actes 5 du C.P.C.M. et 34 de l’édit de Mars 1685.”

<sup>57</sup> *Exécution de l’ordonnance royale du 5 janvier 1840 (...)* (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1842), 6. Aside from encouraging marriage, the ordinance stipulated that all enslaved persons should receive religious instruction and that parish priests should make monthly visits to private plantations.

<sup>58</sup> Annexe. Document B, Lettre rédigée le 6 juin 1840, in Dessalles, *La vie d’un colon*, Vol. 2, 351 and diary entries for May 8, 9, 11, 14, and 15, 1840 in *ibid*, 248-9 for the coordinated signature campaign that Dessalles and Lalanne organized.



vehement. In one case, when a royal prosecutor visited the Percin plantation, the proprietor “chased him off shouting abuses.”

Even local magistrates objected to the ordinance as a gross abuse of power. Huc, the mayor of Prêcheur, threatened the governor that if any administrator “stepped foot in his quarter, he [Huc] would have him arrested for disturbing the peace.”<sup>59</sup> These *colons* objected to the ordinance as a threat to the “most sacred rights of property.” The fact that slaveholders were violently chasing away royal magistrates, over what historians have argued was a “half-hearted” reform measure to promote slave marriages, thus suggests how they equated their patriarchal authority as masters with absolute control over the conjugality of their enslaved workers.<sup>60</sup>

This is not to say that *colons* discouraged slaves from marrying, but rather that they demanded the final say in the matter—and often for ulterior motives. In 1840, for example, Dessalles congratulated himself on throwing a wedding party for his slave Césaire, detailing the lavish festivities he provided for his family, friends, and slaves: “at nine o’clock my daughter helped dress the bride... When the ceremony was over they came back to the plantation, accompanied by the musicians... They took over my salon, and the dance began. The slaves of the whole neighborhood came to share their joy. I had a magnificent meal served to my invited guests; we were 22 at a table! After the Whites’ dinner, that of the slaves was served, and it was

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“une ordonnance nouvelle qui diminue l’autorité du maître et dispose du temps de son esclave, attaque le droit le plus sacré de la propriété: droit que les ordonnances et les édits de nos rois ont consacré de la manière la plus formelle...(ordon. du roi, mars 1685).”

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, diary entry for July 9, 1840, 258.

“On dit que M. Percin, lorsque le procureur du Roi s’est présenté chez lui, l’a chassé en l’invectivant d’injures. M. Huc, maire du Prêcheur, a plus fait: il a déclaré au Gouverneur que, s’il mettait les pieds dans son quartier, il le ferait arrêter comme perturbateur du repos public.”

<sup>60</sup> Jennings, “French Slave Liberation and Socialism,” 94.

copious and good.”<sup>61</sup> In praising his daughter for participating in the bridal preparations of an enslaved woman, remarking on the quality of the food and music served, and opening his home to neighbors, friends, and enslaved people alike, Dessalles revealed the ways in which arranging a slave marriage reconstituted the patriarchal ideology that governed the plantation. He was able to approve the match while flaunting his wealth and “joyous,” enslaved people to his neighbors; thereby reaffirming his authority as a benevolent master and patriarch.

Such public displays of benevolence masked a more unsettling fact that *colons* refused to acknowledge but which permeated quotidian life on the plantations: that the unchecked sexual escapades of white men created a veritable quagmire of familial ties between masters and enslaved persons that could be dangerous if not carefully managed. For example, in his entry for August 21, 1837 Dessalles recorded an incident with his son Adrien:

I saw the mulatto girl Victorine come out of Adrien’s room. I slapped her a few times and called her all kinds of names. I want to put a stop to this shameful commerce, which is highly offensive to me. This little hussy is of a revolting effrontery. I have never interfered with Adrien’s conduct with women, but in this circumstance, there are specific reasons, known only to my son—to whom I told them in confidence—to make me insist that this odious commerce must end. My son did not heed my appeals and makes my slave persist in guilty disobedience.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Dessalles, diary entry for January 11, 1840 in *La vie d’un colon*, Vol. 2, 229.

“A 9 heures, ma fille a fait faire [sic] la toilette de la mariée; à 10 heures, la noce est partie pour le Bourg. La cérémonie faite, ils sont revenus sur l’habitation, escortés des musiciens... Ils se sont emparés de mon salon, et la danse a commencé. Les nègres du voisinage sont venus prendre part à leur joie. J’ai fait server, pour les convives que j’avais invités, un repas magnifique: nous étions 22 à table! Après le dîner des Blancs, on a servi celui des esclaves qui a été copieux et bon.”

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, diary entry for August 21, 1837, 57.

“J’ai vu la mulâtresse Victorine sortir de la chambre d’Adrien. Je lui ai donné quelques paires de soufflets, et l’ai fort mal traitée. Je veux faire cesser cet infâme commerce, qui m’offusque au plus haut point. Cette petite coquine est d’une effronterie révoltante. Je ne me suis jamais occupé de la conduite d’Adrien avec les femmes; mais dans cette circonstance, des raisons particulières et qui ne sont connues que de mon fils—auquel je les ai confiées—me font tenir à voir finir cet odieux commerce. Mon fils a résisté à ma prière, et entretient mon esclave dans une désobéissance coupable.”

These “specific reasons” remain unsaid in the rest of the diary, but scholars have speculated that “the mulatto girl Victorine” might have been Dessalles’ daughter by another enslaved woman (or that he at least suspected that she was).<sup>63</sup> That Adrien was perhaps having sex with his mixed-race half-sister would have greatly troubled his father, causing him to display more than his usual ire about Adrien’s sexual conquests among enslaved women. Another possibility, suggested by Adrien’s intransigence and Dessalles’ characterization of Victorine as a “hussy,” is that Dessalles *père* was also having (or had) sex with her. Although this technically did not qualify as incest, the thought of sharing women with his son perhaps unnerved (or jealously enraged) Dessalles enough to demand that the relationship cease.

The incident between Adrien and Victorine, irrespective of their kin ties, encapsulated the inherent vulnerability of patriarchal power in the slave societies of the French Antilles. That is, how the unrestrained power of slave owners could have unanticipated and disastrous outcomes. Although slaveholders closely monitored conjugality on the plantations, and consolidated their authority by controlling sexual access to enslaved women in particular, they could not avoid the consequences of their own promiscuity. Rape on the plantation created interracial families, with natural-born and mixed-race slave children bound to their white fathers and half-siblings by blood and in bondage.<sup>64</sup> The ever-present possibility of incest makes one consider how plantations operated as hazardous spaces where all moral and social conventions could be uncontrollably transgressed, rather than as rational, disciplined, and organized sites of production.

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<sup>63</sup> *Sugar and Slavery, Family and Race*, 111 fn28.

<sup>64</sup> For more on incest in slave societies see: Garraway, *The Libertine Colony*, 275-89. For mixed-race and white slaveholding families in the U.S. see: Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2008).

In sum, patriarchy was the guiding ideology at the core of elite *colon* slaveholding power in the nineteenth century, which insisted on maintaining racial boundaries while simultaneously transgressing them through sex. What these relationships highlight are the ways in which the household operated as the space in which the political and social power of white slaveholders was reconstituted by carefully mediating intimacy on a daily basis. As a result, this ideology was inherently fragile, and open to challenges on several fronts: abolitionists policies drafted in France, efforts of colonial administrators to impose these polices, and the actions of enslaved persons who contested their masters' authority.

### Enslaved Families and Amelioration

Like metropolitan abolitionists, colonial administrators considered legal marriage the foundation of the family, without which it could not exist. Accordingly, much of the insight into slave family life available to historians is heavily mediated through sources that emphasized marriage and enslaved persons' supposed antipathy toward it. This presents a methodological problem as there are no records that provide an unfiltered glimpse into the motivations and desires underpinning enslaved peoples' conjugal decisions. However, when reading the expectations of administrators and actions of enslaved people carefully against one another, a picture of enslaved persons' intimate and quotidian experiences emerges and reveals much about the context, texture, and substance of conjugal life and the ways in which enslaved people responded to metropolitan reform efforts.

In the wake of metropolitan abolitionist debates on the vices of slavery, colonial magistrates were dispatched to travel throughout the colonies in the 1840s. Part of their job was to interview enslaved persons and local authorities on the plantations in each parish. Responses were collected by the Ministry of the Navy and published as the *Exposé général des résultats du*

*patronage des esclaves dans les colonies françaises*—a 688-page compilation of colonial authorities’ reports and reflections on the general situation of the colonies in 1844. These authorities urged enslaved people to marry and praised marriage as a stabilizing influence on the enslaved population. In turn, enslaved persons challenged these moralization overtures and opposed attempts by colonial authorities to further interfere in their family lives. The *Exposé général* therefore indicates the extent to which enslaved people rejected marriage policies and offers a glimpse at the alternative family structures they created in slavery.

“The slave marries in horror,” proclaimed a priest in Martinique.<sup>65</sup> Another maintained, “there are very few slave couples that have been united religiously and these are the only unions to which one could apply the term *marriage*.”<sup>66</sup> Like abolitionists in the metropole, colonial administrators, priests, and contemporary observers observed that enslaved people, on the whole, refused to marry. They complained that, in cities, villages, and plantations alike, the lack of marriage among the enslaved population generated “with a few rare exceptions, the same habits of prodigality and debauchery, the same improvidence of the future, the same promiscuity of the two sexes.”<sup>67</sup> Since they placed little social stigma on illegitimate children, observers claimed,

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<sup>65</sup> *Exposé général*, 569. For unknown reasons, the responses by the priests are anonymized. Other authorities (such as attorneys general) are noted by title (and not surname) throughout the document. “L’esclave a marié en horreur.”

<sup>66</sup> Ministère de la Marine et des Colonies. *Etats de population, de cultures, et de commerce relatifs aux colonies française* (Paris: Ministère de la Marine et des Colonies, 1836), 61, as quoted in Cottias, “Gender and Republican Citizenship in the French West Indies, 1848-1945,” 235.

<sup>67</sup> ANOM FM GEN 167/1348, “Guadeloupe, Conditions des esclaves de la ville de la Basse-Terre en 1844;” Extrait d’un rapport adressé, le 1 octobre 1844, au gouverneur de la colonie, pour M. Fourniols, procureur général intérimaire, in *Revue Coloniale*, January, 1846. “...mais ce sont, à quelques rares exceptions près, les mêmes habitudes de prodigalité et de débauche, c’est la même imprévoyance de l’avenir, la même promiscuité des deux sexes.”

slaves were believed to be “apathetic” toward marriage because they were hypersexual and disorderly.<sup>68</sup>

For example, the Crown Prosecutor of Marie-Galante declared that (with the exception of a few who labored industriously and saved for manumission), most enslaved men were savage, brutish, and obeyed only their “natural inclinations.” According to the Crown Prosecutor, the enslaved man focused only on constructing a “good hut,” in planting a “well-kept garden,” and in the acquisition of “riches with which he seduces several women and thus is able to satisfy his fickle taste.” This assessment dismissed enslaved men as capricious and motivated to work only to satisfy an enormous sexual appetite. However, it suggests an alternative possibility: the extent to which enslaved men strategized to acquire the goods needed to establish a conjugal home. A well-made house, a thriving garden, and material possessions or cash on hand were perhaps the requisite goods needed before men could settle down (either in a monogamous or polygamous arrangement). For the Crown Prosecutor, what were enslaved men’s misguided priorities to acquire riches and satisfy fickle tastes could actually indicate well-established customs and practices for beginning intimate relationships among enslaved men and women—perhaps harkening back to African customs of sexual initiation, conjugality, and bridewealth.<sup>69</sup>

The report continued to note that, even for the “intelligent slave man,” marriage “did not enter into his calculations, because he knows that the man cannot be emancipated without his wife or children.” The Crown Prosecutor therefore concluded that enslaved men had no desire for legal marriage or a family because it represented another form of oppression: “this way of life

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<sup>68</sup> *Exposé général*, 571-2.

<sup>69</sup> Scholars have demonstrated the practice of African marriage customs in the Americas. For example, see: Sweet, *Recreating Africa*, 34-50.

will offer nothing surprising to those who know the character of the black African. For him, marriage would be a...new sort of slavery” that either restricted him to a single sexual partner (presumably) or prevented him from achieving his goal of manumission.<sup>70</sup>

From this perspective, imposing marriage on enslaved men would be another form of oppression. Their “happiness” and “fickle taste” rendered them unable to embrace the role of husband. African and creole conjugal norms, such as polygamy, polyandry, and informal unions, were thus recast by some colonial officials as evidence that enslaved men would continue to “obey their natural inclinations” to satisfy their own “happiness” and give into their basest desires. These “natural inclinations,” colonial officials emphasized, were dangerous. Slave owners and colonial officials feared that sexual jealousy or other motivations prompted enslaved men to kill enslaved women and that marriage would perhaps exacerbate these problems if spouses found themselves unable to dissolve their unions.<sup>71</sup>

Conjugal violence in the slave barracks seemed to confirm these perspectives. For instance, the enslaved Magloire happened on his partner *en flagrante* with another enslaved man. Magloire murdered his partner’s lover in a moment of what members of the Privy Council described as the “effervescent jealousy of African blood.” Magloire was condemned in 1831 to forced labor for life, however, his subsequent good behavior led the Privy Council to conclude in

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<sup>70</sup> *Exposé général*, 579-80.

“Je parle seulement des hommes; le nègre sauvage et brut, et le nègre intelligent. Que le premier, obéissant à son penchant naturel, devenu pour lui une sorte d’instinct qu’il a puisé dans les mœurs de son pays, fasse consister tout son Bonheur dans la possession d’un bonne case, dans la jouissance d’un jardin bien entretenu, planté de toutes espèces de vivres...précieuses richesses avec lesquelles il séduit plusieurs femmes et se met ainsi à même de satisfaire son goût volage en jouissant de sa nuit comme bon lui semble, cette manière de vivre n’offrira rien d’étonnant à ceux qui connaissent le caractère du noir africain. Pour lui le mariage serait...un nouvel esclavage en quelque sorte. Le nègre intelligent...Le mariage, pour celui-ci, ne peut entrer dans ses calculs, car il sait que l’homme ne peut être émancipé seul, sans la femme ou les enfants.”

<sup>71</sup> James Sweet cites this as one reason why many slaveholders were reluctant to encourage marriages in Brazil in Sweet, *Recreating Africa*, 44.

1841 that his crime was born of ignorance, sexual jealousy, and unchecked instinct rather than an innately menacing disposition.<sup>72</sup> The Magloire case, for them, reaffirmed the innate sensuality and animalistic impulses of African men. These colonial officials, (who themselves likely engaged in sexual relationships with enslaved and free women of color) held enslaved men as potentially dangerous because they indulged in their instincts for “promiscuity” and violence.

From this perspective, it would be difficult to encourage enslaved men to adopt marriage. Their supposed perpetual moral corruption meant that emancipation would be a risky endeavor as enslaved men’s conjugal practices would lead to a disordered society. The proslavery delegate from Martinique Adolphe Jollivet emphasized this when he argued that enslaved men routinely abandoned the women they impregnated for new partners and abnegated their paternal responsibilities in favor of the “regime of promiscuity, of universal concubinage.”<sup>73</sup>

On the other hand, many colonial officials and residents believed that encouraging marriage would yield good results, not because it would morally prepare enslaved men for eventual freedom, but rather because it would strengthen the slave regime. Andre de Lacharière, a member of the Colonial Council of Guadeloupe and President of the Royal Court in the 1840s, observed that informal unions were little more than unstable and temporary connections, “constantly forming and dissolving. They rarely last more than a year, often less.” He

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<sup>72</sup> ANOM FM SG GUA 142/937, “Extrait du registre des procès-verbaux des délibérations du Conseil Privé de la Guadeloupe et dépendances, session ordinaire,” February 4, 1841.

“La jalousie et l’effervescence du sang africain l’ont poussé au crime.”

<sup>73</sup> Adolphe Jollivet, *Des pétitions demandant l’émancipation immédiate des noirs dans les colonies françaises* (Paris: 1847), 27.

“Les négresses, en général, sont abandonnées par les hommes qui les ont rendues mères; cela est inévitable sous un régime de promiscuité, de concubinage universel.”



emphasized that informal unions had deleterious effects on slaves' morals, health, welfare, and, most importantly, work.<sup>74</sup>

For Lacharière, the working day was the only time the enslaved man demonstrated any capability for civilized behavior: “during the day, he works like the European peasant: he is a civilized man. At night, the barbarian reappears.”<sup>75</sup> After a long day of work, the enslaved man (rather than rest his body in preparation for the next day's labor) would set off on nightly sojourns to visit “one of his women” or attend parties. These nocturnal trips to indulge in sex, music, and dancing sometimes required “several leagues” of traveling on foot away from the surveillance of “his master's house.” Enslaved men's nocturnal activities allowed them to rest for “scarcely an hour or two” before they had to return to work, “fatigued by these nightly excesses” and too listless to work efficiently as a result.<sup>76</sup>

Lacharière concluded that slaveholders should encourage marriage as a remedy to energize their labor forces: marriage would compel an enslaved man to be “more sedentary, more moral, more attached to his hut, to his children, to what he possesses,” and, therefore, a better-rested, more productive, and easily monitored worker.<sup>77</sup> In this view, marriage would

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<sup>74</sup> Andre de Lacharière, *De l'affranchissement des esclaves dans les colonies françaises* (Paris: Eugène Renduel, 1836), 122. For polygamy in the eighteenth-century French Antilles, see: Moitt, *Women and Slavery*, 84. “Les unions se forment et se dissolvent sans cesse. Elles durent rarement plus d'une année, souvent moins.”

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 62.

“Le jour, il travaille comme le paysan européen; c'est l'homme de la civilisation. La nuit, le barbare reparaît.”

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. Anthony Kaye's analysis of how enslaved men would visit neighboring plantations to court women argues that, to some extent, slaveholders tolerated this practice (especially if they owned the bondswomen being visited) because they hoped these interactions would yield future property increases in children. See: Kaye, *Joining Places*, 52.

“Au lieu d'abandonner au sommeil ses membres fatigués il erre dans les ténèbres comme les hyènes de son pays, il accourt au bruit d'un tambour lointain qui l'invite à la danse; ou bien il va visiter une de ses femmes; il "fait ainsi plusieurs lieues; les mornes, les rivières, les précipices, rien ne l'arrête. A peine s'est-il couché une heure ou deux qu'il est obligé de se remettre en route pour retourner chez son maître; c'est le corps fatigué des excès de la nuit qu'il commence les travaux de la journée.”

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 122.

“Le mariage le rendrait plus sédentaire, plus moral, plus attaché à sa case, à ses enfants, à ce qu'il possède.”

render enslaved men more docile and industrious, as opposed to informal unions, which made them itinerant and lackluster workers. Encouraging marriage would therefore strengthen slavery.

Reports and pamphlets produced in the proslavery camp thus presented an image of enslaved men as dangerous, yet frivolous. They depicted African and Afro-Caribbean men in animalistic terms—Lacharière describes them as like the “hyenas of their country,” guided purely by their pleasure instincts. They sought sex and music rather than the security of working diligently.<sup>78</sup> More threateningly, enslaved men could demonstrate volatile and homicidal instincts that spoke to their “African blood” (as in the case of Magloire). For some proslavery advocates, enslaved men were beyond all redemption, and even civilizing institutions like marriage would not reform their habits and behavior. For others, marriage could be an effective moralizing tool because it could potentially strengthen the slave system by affixing enslaved men more firmly to the plantations. Underlining all of these proslavery arguments was the assumption that enslaved men were inherently degraded in their morals and behavior, a claim that metropolitan abolitionists directly countered in their discourse on the plight of enslaved men.

Thus, as with metropolitan abolitionists, colonial authorities were preoccupied with the low number of slave marriages, although for different reasons. Whereas abolitionists viewed marriage as a mechanism that would reform enslaved men into free workers, administrators and some planters maintained that slaveholders had a vested interest in promoting marriage among the enslaved since it made them “more moral, more industrious, more obedient.”<sup>79</sup> In other

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 62.

“...il erre dans les ténèbres comme les hyènes de son pays...”

<sup>79</sup> See: excerpts of arguments by Isambert (arguing that slave owners prevented marriages) and Jollivet’s rejoinder, in ANOM FM GEN 372/2197, “Colonies généraux, mariage des noirs,” (full title and date not legible). Dessalles also expressed his opinion that enslaved people should marry to stabilize general order and improve morality. He believed that many of the troubles in his slave barracks occurred because of jealousy and promiscuity. For slave marriage and morality see: Dessalles, letter to his mother, December 10, 1823 in *La vie d’un colon*, Vol. 1, 103; for disorder caused by informal unions see: op. cit., diary entry for September 5, 1842, Vol. 3, 39.

words, many officials and planters viewed marriage as a stabilizing influence on the slave populations that in turn strengthened the system overall. They believed that slaves who married were less likely to run away or wander at night, and were more likely to be productive and docile.

Further, while metropolitan reformers tended to blame slave owners for obstructing slave marriages, colonial observers tended to assign fault to the enslaved themselves. For example, Jollivet maintained that while “marriages are encouraged and remunerated by masters,” they remained “rare on the majority of plantations” because slaves demonstrated “little inclination to form this relationship.”<sup>80</sup> He noted that for the first five months of 1840 in Martinique, there were “only 28 [marriages]...which proportionately would give 67 marriages for the year.”<sup>81</sup> As it turns out, Jollivet’s estimate was overly optimistic; there were only forty slave marriages that year:

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“Les colons savent que les noirs mariés sont plus moraux, plus travailleurs, plus obéissants, aussi ont ils tout fait pour encourager le mariage des noirs.”

<sup>80</sup> ANOM FM SG GEN 144/1221, Jollivet, *Analyse des rapports des procureurs généraux, procureurs du roi et de leurs substituts sur l’exécution de l’ordonnance du 5 janvier 1840, par M. Jollivet, member de la Chambre des Députés, délégué de la Martinique* (Paris: Imprimerie Blondeau, 1841), 9. Hereafter Jollivet report.

“Les mariages sont encouragés et même rémunérés par les maîtres, mais ils sont encore rares sur la plupart des habitations, par l’effet du peu d’inclination des esclaves à former ce lien.”

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

“En 1839, il n’a été que de 42, en 1840 de 28 pendant cinq mois, ce qui, proportion gardée, donnerait pour l’année 67 mariages.”

Chart 2.1. Free and Enslaved Marriages, Martinique, 1835-1847.<sup>82</sup>

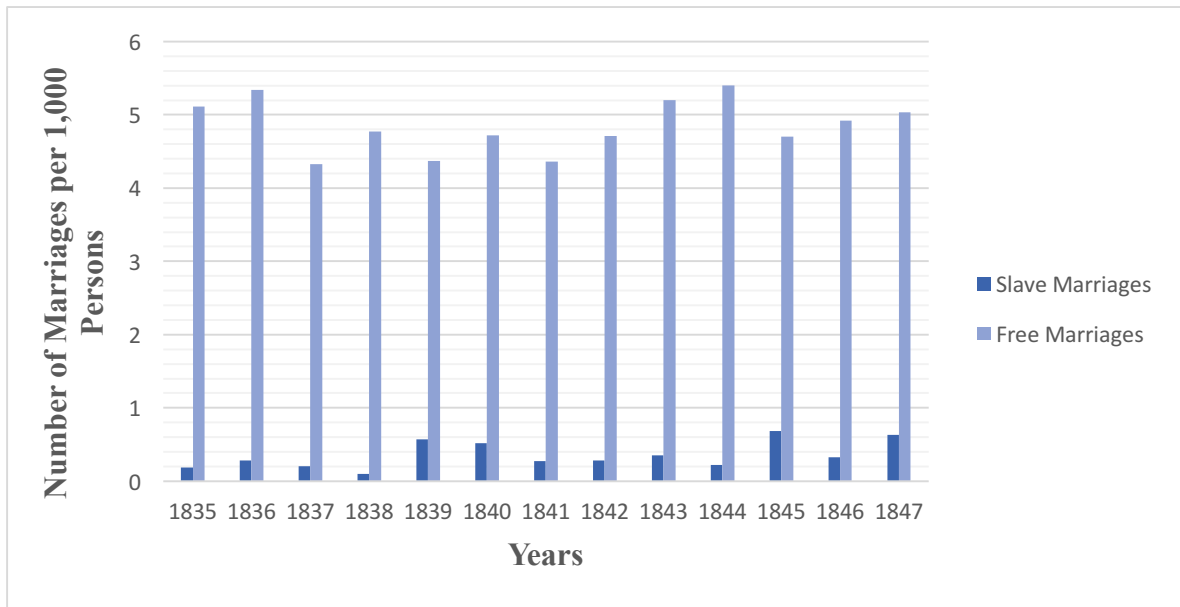
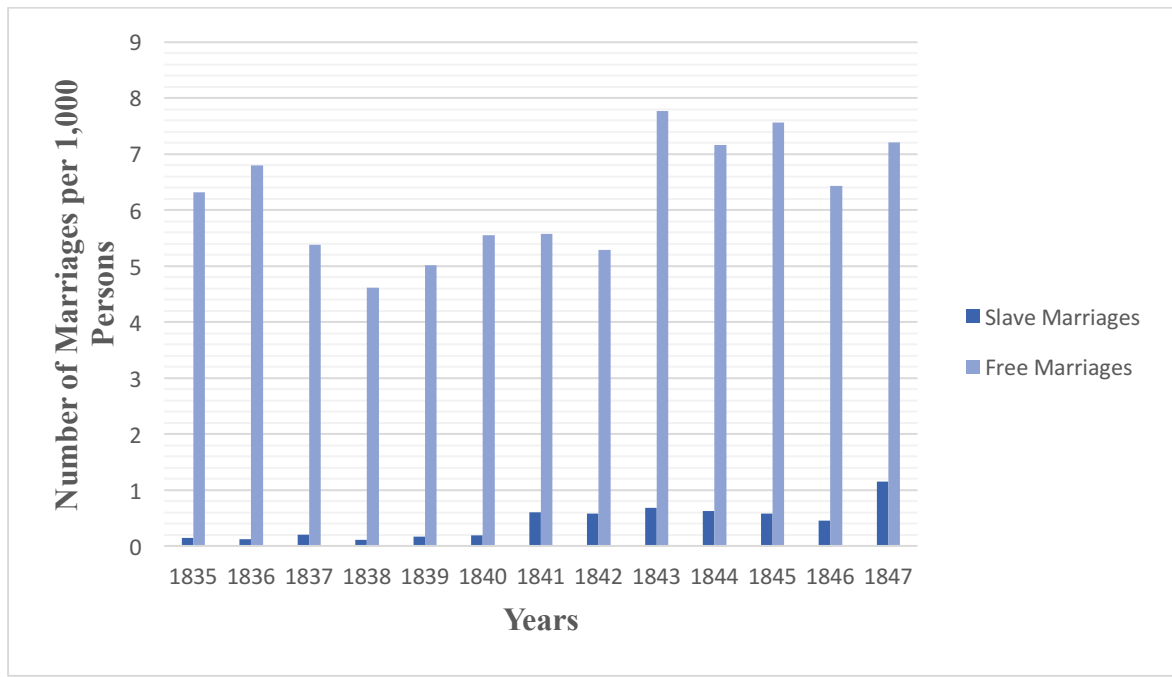


Chart 2.1. Free and Enslaved Marriages, Guadeloupe, 1835-1847



<sup>82</sup> Rates calculated per capita of 10,000 persons of the total enslaved population and 10,000 persons of the total free population. Number of marriages for each population for both Martinique and Guadeloupe available in decennial figures collated from: *Tableaux et relevés de population, de cultures, de commerce, de navigation, etc.* (Paris: Imprimerie Royal, 1839 and 1847).

During the July Monarchy, abolitionist debates on moral reform in the metropole prompted colonial administrators to study slave conjugality in earnest. The figures they established found that slave marriages remained low for the 1830s and 1840s—although the slight uptick in the rate of slave marriages in the late 1840s is likely due in part to amelioration policies starting to have the desired effect. Colonial officials were charged with encouraging slave marriages, particularly on the royal domains, where slave weddings were celebrated with more frequency.<sup>83</sup> However, while the annual rate of slave marriages increased during this period, the overall number of marriages remained low compared with free marriages and in proportion to the total slave population (see Table A.1 in Appendix). For example, even at the height of slave marriages in Guadeloupe in 1847, 101 marriages could hardly make a dent in an enslaved population of 87,752. This suggests that, overall, enslaved men and women remained unwilling to marry.

To understand the failure of amelioration policies to generate a significant increase in slave marriages, it is necessary to provide a closer analysis of the social and cultural family customs of the enslaved population. One of the most comprehensive sources for this is the *Exposé général*, although direct testimony from enslaved men and women is heavily mediated in this source. In many instances, the reports collapsed the perspectives of several testimonies from enslaved persons into a single anonymous remark (and even the names of those writing these reports are sometimes not given). Nevertheless, a closer reading allows a glimpse into some of the obstacles, social relations, and cultural values that brought enslaved persons into conflict with policymakers' moralization efforts.

Administrators noted that enslaved people offered various reasons for rejecting marriage. Some enslaved respondents reportedly viewed marriage as a distinctive *colon* institution: “I

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<sup>83</sup> ANOM FM GEN 372/2197, “Note,” Paris, December 27, 1847.

hoped to obtain some success from my exhortations,” wrote the Crown Prosecutor on Marie-Galante in 1841, “addressed to one of them [an enslaved field laborer], who had for a long time lived as a good husband with a slave woman from the same [work] gang, with whom he had several children, but he answered me insouciantly that marriage was for the whites.”<sup>84</sup> That is, marriage was a European cultural and social practice, and enslaved persons practiced their own conjugal institutions rather than those of their owners.

Additionally, officials maintained, enslaved people misunderstood the rights and duties of the marital relationship. For example, they noted that some enslaved men sought to marry only to acquire “a wife to serve him, that he could consider as his servant.”<sup>85</sup> Thus, officials surmised, many women rejected marriage in favor of informal arrangements, where the men had to give them gifts and treat them kindly to make them stay in the relationship.<sup>86</sup> Other enslaved persons explained that they preferred to live in informal unions, as it was easier to “abandon their husband or wife, in case they were not compatible.”<sup>87</sup> Both enslaved men and women, officials maintained, failed to understand that marriage entailed a combination of property and income:

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<sup>84</sup> *Exposé général*, 578-9.

“J’espérais obtenir quelques succès de mes exhortations adressées à l’un d’eux, vivant d’ailleurs depuis longtemps en bon mari avec une négresse du même atelier, de laquelle il avait plusieurs enfants mais il me répondit avec insouciance que le mariage avait institué pour les blancs.”

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, 584.

“...le nègre ne prenait une femme que pour se faire servir, qu’il la considérait comme sa domestique...”

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 583.

“...les femmes se trouvent plus heureuses avec un compère qui a pour elles des prévenances, et qui leur fait des cadeaux, qu’avec un mari, qui ne ferait rien pour elles et les traiterait comme des servantes.”

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 588.

“Les esclaves l’expliquent; ils ne se marient pas, disent-ils, parce qu’ils se priveraient de la liberté d’abandonner leur mari ou leur femme, dans le cas où les caractères ne pourraient pas s’accorder.”

“for slaves, marriage did not mean joint-ownership; their interests are entirely distinct,” which indicated they had their own arrangements regarding the division of marital property.<sup>88</sup>

As Anthony Kaye has demonstrated for the Natchez District of antebellum Mississippi, enslaved men and women operated under various categories of structured intimacy—that ranged from “sweethearting” (non-monogamous, temporary relationships for the young) to “living together” (which constituted not just sharing a home but receiving informal recognition from the community of a more permanent bond).<sup>89</sup> No matter the arrangement, the intimate bonds that enslaved men and women formed were always subjected to the whims of their owners—couples were vulnerable to separation, sexual assault, and interference.<sup>90</sup> In Martinique and Guadeloupe, there were strong indications that, because enslaved men and women were subject to their owners’ intrusion in their conjugal affairs—which ranged from the temporary to the permanent—they struggled to protect their intimate social structures.

Indeed, one of the most common themes that emerge in these reports is that enslaved men and women rejected marriage as a means of asserting autonomy against their master’s interference into their intimate lives—as encapsulated so vividly in Dessalles’ diary. One official report noted that, whenever masters encouraged enslaved people to abandon informal unions, they “always” replied: “*My body is yours, but my heart belongs to me,*” a striking declaration of ownership over one’s decision to love and an attempt to protect the most intimate relationships

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 583.

“Pour les esclaves, le mariage n’est pas même une communauté; leurs intérêts sont complètement distincts.”

<sup>89</sup> Kaye, *Joining Places*, 51-2. Further, James Sweet has argued for the persistence of African customs regarding marriage, relationships, and sexuality well into the eighteenth century in Brazil, many of these intimate categories had roots in Africa. See: Sweet, *Recreating Africa*, 34-58.

<sup>90</sup> For examples of sexual abuse of enslaved couples and conjugal interference, see: Graham, *Caetana Says No*, 1-72; and Foster, *Rethinking Rufus*, 1-10 and 46-67.

from the purview of slaveholders.<sup>91</sup> Administrators, however, continued to interpret enslaved persons' refusal to marry as evidence that they misunderstood what the institution entailed, had insatiable carnal appetites, or that they were unwilling to undertake marital responsibilities and duties.

Ironically, this view failed to acknowledge that many of the enslaved couples that colonial authorities interviewed had lived together for many years in stable relationships. The Crown Prosecutor in Martinique, for example, reported on an incident on the Fougainville plantation, where the proprietor tried unsuccessfully to encourage a marriage between “a slave man and slave woman who had been living together for a long time and were getting along well.”<sup>92</sup> Another unnamed couple that refused to marry had been living together for at least nineteen years.<sup>93</sup> Many of the enslaved men and women interviewed had several children together, implying that their informal relationships had some measure of longevity. For instance, Gilles and Suzette, listed as a *commandeur* and cultivator (or field hand), respectively, on the Grand Marigot plantation (a royal domain) in Guadeloupe are noted as being “in a union” for twenty years.<sup>94</sup> Thus, enslaved people's reluctance to marry (even after approached by colonial administrators) may indicate a practice through which they could thwart further interference

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<sup>91</sup> *Exposé général*, 587. Emphasis in original. Also see: *L'Abolitionniste française*, 46, where this phrase was paraphrased as “*Mon corps est à vous; mon cœur est à moi.*”

“Leur réponse aux maîtres qui les invitent à l'abandon du concubinage est toujours celle-ci: *Mon corps est à vous, mais mon cœur m'appartient.*”

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 576.

“M. de Fougainville a engagé un nègre et une négresse, qui vivent depuis longtemps ensemble et font bon ménage, à faire consacrer leur union, il n'a pu les y décider, le refus vient surtout de l'homme.”

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, 589.

<sup>94</sup> ANOM FM SG GUA 107/749, “Extrait du registre des procès-verbaux des délibérations du conseil privé de la Guadeloupe et dépendances,” March 3, 1848.



from authority figures. Withholding their consent to marry may have allowed both enslaved men and women a rare opportunity to exercise some autonomy in their private lives.<sup>95</sup>

As the reports in the *Exposé* suggested, bondswomen also tended to favor informal relationships because they provided a limited degree of security. The Crown Prosecutor of Marie Galante noted how enslaved women agreed that “marriage turned men into despots.” Informal unions, on the other hand, allowed women to dominate the men and demand gifts and material goods from them.<sup>96</sup> The Attorney-General of Guadeloupe similarly noted that all the enslaved women he interviewed unequivocally rejected marriage. Repeatedly, when he asked women why they would not marry, they all replied that if they married and their husbands beat them, they would not be able to leave.<sup>97</sup> Here, enslaved women depicted marriage as a new form of oppression, where they would be subjected to physical abuse from their husbands in addition to the overseer’s whip. Informal unions, on the other hand, enabled women to enter and leave relationships, and thus allowed them a measure of security and independence.

The low marriage rate is further compounded by the natural birth rate in the enslaved population. While overall marriage rates were low, the birth rates remained noticeably higher than the annual number of legal unions: an average of 2,465 births per year in Martinique from 1834-1847 and 2,368 births per year in Guadeloupe—suggesting that most women who had

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<sup>95</sup> *Exposé général*, 575.

“Non, les esclaves sont parfaitement libres sur ce point.”

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 579.

“Le mariage rendait les hommes trop despotes, et que dans l’état de concubinage les femmes dominaient les hommes et les trouvaient plus généraux.”

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 580.

“Les femmes: que le mariage était bon pour les blancs, que, si leurs maris venaient à les battre, elles ne pourraient pas les quitter, etc.”

children were not married.<sup>98</sup> Additionally, the average birth rate was also quite low in proportion to the total population of enslaved women.<sup>99</sup>

Presumably, slave women had long relied on various reproductive strategies to reduce the number of children they bore.<sup>100</sup> Administrators and slaveholders were aware that slaves practiced birth control, infanticide, and abortion. For example, one colonial report from Martinique, responding to an article in *La Réforme* that discussed low slave natality, admitted that perhaps up to two-thirds of enslaved women employed medicinal or herbal remedies as a strategic means of sparing future offspring from enslavement.<sup>101</sup> Scholars have shown that enslaved women throughout the Americas commonly used abortifacients since the 1500s, however the secretive nature of these practices means that it is impossible to verify if indeed two-thirds of pregnant women (or how many at all) availed themselves of these remedies in Martinique and Guadeloupe. Enslaved women procured several herbal and medicinal concoctions to end unwanted pregnancies: such as small doses of poison from the cassava root or the peacock flower (*Poinciana pulcherrima*), which came from a thorny bush that grew naturally throughout the Antilles.<sup>102</sup> Women would also feign illness to a doctor in an effort to have him prescribe a remedy that would induce abortion, which suggests widespread medical savvy and coordinated strategies for obtaining the proper prescriptions to fulfill their aims.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> See: Tables A.3 and A.6 in Appendix.

<sup>99</sup> This is discussed in Chapter One, pp. 74-7.

<sup>100</sup> Gautier traces reproductive practices in the French Antilles from the seventeenth century, see: Arlene Gautier, “Les familles esclaves aux Antilles françaises, 1635-1848,” *Population*, Vol. 55, no. 6 (Nov-Dec., 2000): 977.

<sup>101</sup> ANOM FM MAR 33/290, “Réponses sur divises articles du journal *La Réforme*,” October 20, 1831.

<sup>102</sup> Londa Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 108.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 109-10; and Moitt, *Women and Slavery*, 89-99.

Slaveholders were aware of the practice. Dessalles, for example, railed against his enslaved field worker Eulalie in 1823, who, at five months' pregnant "made her belly disappear."<sup>104</sup> In 1824, he recounted in a letter to his mother that "it was known throughout the work gang that Marie-Jeanne had very recently destroyed her child. Indeed, it was believed that she was pregnant, she had an enormous belly, which one morning was gone, to everyone's great astonishment." In the same letter, he estimated that he lost an average of 8-14 pregnancies every year because "the slave women expelled their fruits."<sup>105</sup> While Dessalles' letter is striking for offering a rare, direct reference to abortion practices among the enslaved women of Martinique, his claim that Marie-Jeanne's abortion "was known throughout the work gang" underscores Schiebinger's argument that slave reproduction was a community-based strategy. Knowledge of abortifacients, remedies, and contraceptives was secretive, communal, and by word of mouth: "passed from woman to woman, neighbor to neighbor, midwife to client," and, occasionally, the trusted male lovers or family members who might be called upon to obtain the necessary prescriptions.<sup>106</sup> While enslaved women managed their reproduction in secret, they also relied on kin and other members of the community for aid, comfort, and support.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, slave owners and colonial administrators instituted some ameliorative measures designed to encourage fertility and punish efforts to abort pregnancies or commit infanticides: such as promising freedom to women who bore six live

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<sup>104</sup> Dessalles, letter to his mother, Caf  i  re, September 13, 1823, *La vie d'un colon* Vol. 1, 97. "Eulalie...Grosse de 5 mois elle a fait dispara  tre son ventre."

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, Dessalles, letter to his mother, September 15, 1824, 128. "...que tous les ans nous avons 8, 10, 12 et 14 grossesses, mais que les n  gresses faisaient couler leurs fruits, qu'il   tait la connaissance de tout l'atelier que Marie-Jeanne venait tout dern  rement de d  truire son enfant. En effet on l'a cru grosse, elle avait un ventre   norme, qui un beau matin a disparu au grand   tonnement de tout le monde."

<sup>106</sup> Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire*, 112.

children; fiscally compensating midwives and mothers for each live delivery (and punishing them for each stillbirth); and easing some work restrictions on pregnant and nursing women—similar to planters’ efforts in the eighteenth-century to encourage natural increase.<sup>107</sup> These efforts remained futile and did little to encourage noticeable population growth. Slaveholders continued to blame enslaved women’s malfeasance in inducing abortions rather than make concerted efforts to overhaul the harsh conditions of slavery to try to encourage pregnancy.<sup>108</sup>

Childrearing seems to have been almost exclusively the domain of women, although the paucity of information makes analysis of parent-child relationships in slavery difficult.<sup>109</sup> The prevalence of female-headed households indicated that children were predominately raised by their mothers and grandmothers (and elderly women were often charged with caring for small children while their parents worked).<sup>110</sup> Even within conjugal homes where a male partner was resident, there were indications of matrifocal practices. In Martinique, for instance, Auge, a fifty-three-year-old *commandeur* and his wife, Marthe-Louise (a fifty-two-year-old cultivator) had two daughters, Augustine and Jeanne-Rose. Augustine (twenty-four and a cultivator like her mother) had three children Elisabeth, Donatien, and Elise, but no resident husband.<sup>111</sup> Likewise, the *Registres des Nouveaux Libres*, compiled after the abolition of slavery, suggest that female-headed families predominated. In the fifty-two acts that I examined for Le Moule, Guadeloupe

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<sup>107</sup> Moitt, *Women and Slavery*, 89-99; and Gautier, *Les sœurs de Solitude*, 129-30.

<sup>108</sup> Schmieder, “Histories under Construction,” 226. Dessalles referred to women who performed abortions as “criminal women.” See: Dessalles, letters to his mother, September 23, 1823 and September 15, 1824 in *La vie d’un colon* Vol. 1, 97 and 128.

<sup>109</sup> Gautier, “Les familles esclaves aux Antilles françaises, 1635-1848,” 992.

<sup>110</sup> See: the case of Marie-Rose, who was enslaved on the royal domain *La Gabrielle* in French Guiana. She was seventy-nine years old and assigned to childcare duties. ANOM FM SG GUA 107/49, *Bulletin des lois, ordonnance du roi qui déclaré libres deux cent dix-huit noirs du domaine colonial*, Saint-Cloud, October 12, 1847.

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

from August-November 1848, there were over 1,600 matrifocal households, with no visibly resident male partner, entered into the lists.<sup>112</sup> This suggests that while enslaved children might often know their fathers and live with them, their upbringing remained in the hands of matrilineal kin.

Therefore, despite the reform policies that encouraged slave marriages, the administrative reports sent from Martinique and Guadeloupe to Paris revealed that, even as amelioration efforts were underway, slave families remained predominantly matrifocal and anchored in informal unions. The government's amelioration policies did little to reshape these dynamics. Instead, enslaved persons adopted amelioration to challenge the authority of their masters and compel the colonial authorities to implement key provisions of the policies concerning the rights that they claimed for themselves—particularly manumission.

#### Manumission under Amelioration

The July Monarchy's novel manumission regulations in particular created several opportunities for enslaved people to strategize for freedom for themselves and their families—sometimes in ways that policymakers and authorities had not anticipated. Manumission had long been practiced in the French Antilles—with slaveholders bestowing freedom on enslaved mistresses and children, as well as favored workers who demonstrated particularly faithful service. Dessalles, for example, eventually manumitted his favorite enslaved valet Nicaise, who remained working for the family as a free man until his death in 1850. However, prior to the colonial reforms implemented by the July Monarchy, manumission was an expensive and

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<sup>112</sup> AN 472 Mi 10, *Registres de l'état civil des nouveaux libres de la Guadeloupe*, Le Moule, August-November 1848 (Hereafter AN 472 Mi 10, followed by commune, act, date, and entry number).

restricted process. To be legally valid, manumission required obtaining certified “freedom papers” from the colonial administration and the payment of a hefty tax.

As a result, many slaveowners elected not to pay the tax, but instead, grant a slave the status of *libre de fait* or *de savanne*. This granted enslaved persons a conditional and precarious kind of freedom, as it was an illicit manumission where they lacked official freedom papers.<sup>113</sup> A *libre de fait* or *de savanne* was therefore vulnerable to re-enslavement or an otherwise abrupt change in status if their master died. Others remained in this limbo until they, or their former masters, paid the tax or their status was somehow regulated by the colonial administration.<sup>114</sup>

After the 1831 decree, which abolished the manumission tax, the rate of legal manumissions appeared to rise. From 1832-1843, there were approximately 8,055 total manumissions in Martinique (an average of 732 per year) and 6,382 in Guadeloupe (approximately 580 per year).<sup>115</sup> Although the rate of manumissions increased overall, they remained small in proportion to the total number of slaves (see Table A.1 in Appendix). The July 12, 1832 edict, which recognized the liberty of *libres de fait* and *de savanne* (and ordered they be registered as free) further obscured these numbers.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Moitt, “Pricing Freedom in the French Caribbean,” 156.

<sup>114</sup> The rate of illicit manumissions was not inconsiderable, from 1830-1840, there were 15,174 manumission titles conferred on de facto freed slaves (see: Table 2.2 on page 152). In some cases, *libres de fait* or *de savanne* waited for decades for the formalization of their status. This happened in the case of Jean Louis Nègre, who, at seventy-five, had been a *libre de savanne* for fifteen years before he finally received freedom papers. See: ANOM FM GEN 160/1321, Conseil Privé, “Exposé des délibérations du Conseil Privé... Concernant quelques esclaves qui n’ont pu profiter des patentes de liberté qui leur avaient été légalement accordés parce qu’ils ne pouvaient acquitter la taxe;” and op. cit., “Rapport fait à Son Excellence Monsieur le Gouverneur en Conseil Privé,” Basse-Terre November 3, 1827. Rebecca Scott and Jean Hébrard discuss similar precariousities for slaves registering freedom papers in the context of revolutionary Saint-Domingue, see: Rebecca Scott and Jean Hébrard, *Freedom Papers: An Atlantic Odyssey in the Age of Emancipation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 20-49.

<sup>115</sup> Figures compiled from *Exposé général*, 601-3.

<sup>116</sup> Schœlcher, *Des colonies françaises*, 304; *Exposé général*, 600; and Bangou, *La Guadeloupe: Histoire de la colonisation de l’île*, 190-1.

Indeed, the majority of manumissions during this period were in fact formal recognitions of individuals who had already achieved *libres de fait* status and were not actually new *affranchissements* of enslaved individuals. The number of freedom papers granted in Martinique from 1830-1840 illustrate this point:

Table 2.2. Registered Freedom Patents in Martinique, 1830-1840.<sup>117</sup>

Year	Number of Titles of Liberty Given	To <i>Libres de Fait</i>	To Enslaved Persons
1830	2,282	2,175	22
1832	8,776	8,034	107
1833	2,129	1,843	742
1834	2,194	1,443	282
1835	1,072	448	749
1836	1,188	417	624
1837	998	215	771
1838	901	315	683
1839	664	78	586
1840	380	65	369
Total:	20,426	15,174	5,252

While the number of manumissions granted to enslaved persons climbed to 771 in 1837, it remained remarkably low in proportion to the total enslaved population for that year (77,459). At 5,252, the total number of manumissions for enslaved persons remained less than half the number of freedom papers given to *libres de fait* (15,174). Even in years when more enslaved persons were manumitted (1835-1840), the total number of freedom patents conferred in those years remained lower than in the years 1830-1834, when the bulk of *libres de fait* formalized

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<sup>117</sup> Figures collated from Schœlcher, *Des colonies françaises*, 305. There is some discrepancy between the total number of liberty titles per year and the numbers of manumissions for *libres de fait* and enslaved persons, which I suspect is because not every report that Schœlcher used to estimate *affranchissements* indicated whether or not the recipient of manumission papers was formalizing their de facto freedom. I have not found any other sources that directly compare the manumission titles bestowed on *libres de fait* and enslaved people.

their status. The range in the number of manumissions for enslaved persons indicated the variability and uncertainty of obtaining freedom—the practice remained very much in the control of individual slave owners. Thus, despite amelioration’s new manumission provisions, few enslaved persons actually experienced the benefits of them.

Although the statistics reflected more of a correction of the status of undocumented *libres* rather than an increase in manumissions, the amelioration policies did create some novel opportunities for enslaved persons to purchase freedom. The Mackau Law, for example, granted enslaved persons the right to negotiate with their masters to purchase manumission for their relatives (parents, grandparents, spouses and children). If owners and slaves could agree on an acceptable price, this manumission was termed *rachat amiable*, and slaves paid their masters in fixed installments. If the price was not agreed upon, the law stipulated that the royal courts in each colony form a commission to arbitrate and set prices (*rachat forcé*) for the manumission of that slave or slaves. The owner then had six months to oppose the commission’s rate, which almost unilaterally set prices that generously estimated above the average cost of an enslaved adult during this period.<sup>118</sup>

Schœlcher argued that slaveholders and *colon*-controlled commissions worked together to fix high *rachat forcé* terms in order to deliberately undermine the law’s intentions. In effect, they threatened to “make redemptions practically impossible...the slaves have almost given up on it unless the government helps them. That’s what they [colonists] wanted.”<sup>119</sup> Moreover,

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<sup>118</sup> ANOM FM GEN 40/316, “Rapports, débats, correspondances diverses concernant les lois des 18 et 19 juillet, 1848, Paris,” July 18, 1845; *Journal officiel de la Martinique*, May 26, 1847; Fallope, *Esclaves et citoyens*, 292; and Moitt, “Pricing Freedom,” 159-60.

<sup>119</sup> Schœlcher, *Histoire de l’esclavage* Vol. 2, 20. “La fixation de prix aussi énormes devait rendre les rachats presque impossibles, aussi les nègres y ont-ils à peu près renoncé, à moins que le gouvernement ne les aide. C’est bien ce que l’on voulait.”



enslaved persons who were manumitted by *rachat* were bound to work a period of time for their former masters: Article 5 of the Mackau Law established that “the slaves who, from this would be freed by *rachat* or otherwise” would be subject to a period of at least five years of indentured labor.<sup>120</sup> The archives confirm that this was standard practice for slaves freed under *rachat*. In Guadeloupe, for example, at least 733 slaves were registered as unpaid laborers bound to their former masters for up to five years.<sup>121</sup> Rather than encourage slaveholders to agree to release their slaves from bondage, the *rachat* forced enslaved persons to “abide by restrictive conditions bordering on indentureship.”<sup>122</sup> The *rachat* provisions in the Mackau Law thus reflected how metropolitan abolitionist policymakers were primarily concerned with ensuring that manumitted persons continue working.

Even with the forced labor provisions, the *rachats* set by colonial courts remained exorbitantly high. Thus, few enslaved persons could afford the price of freedom without government assistance, which was, in fact, provided.<sup>123</sup> As Moitt has demonstrated, from 1845-1846, out of a total of 205 *rachats* in Guadeloupe and 295 in Martinique, only fifteen and fourteen persons, respectively, paid for their *rachat* without government aid.<sup>124</sup> The *Journal Officiel de la Martinique* in May 1847 published a list of *rachats*, which revealed that the lowest

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<sup>120</sup> *Journal Officiel de la Martinique*, May 26 1847.

“L’art 5 de la loi du 18 juillet 1845 a établi, pour les esclaves qui, à partir de cette loi, seraient affranchis par rachat ou autrement, l’obligation de justifier pendant cinq années d’un engagement de travail, dont la validité est soumise à l’appréciation de la commission de rachat.”

<sup>121</sup> AD-G, 1 U 11, Registre des engagements des esclaves rachetés (1845-1848). These registers are in very poor condition and were difficult to work with for fear of their further deterioration. I am very grateful to Joseph La Hausse de Lalouvière for sharing his photos of this register with me.

<sup>122</sup> Moitt, *Women and Slavery*, 167.

<sup>123</sup> Fallope estimates that the average cost of an adult slave in the 1840s was approximately 900 francs. The average price set by the commission was 1,200 francs. See: Fallope, *Esclaves et citoyens*, 292.

<sup>124</sup> Moitt, “Pricing Freedom in the French Caribbean,” 165.

price for an adult male slave was 1,600 francs (estimated for the seventeen-year old Louis Sainte Claire, an enslaved domestic owned by Demoiselle Marie-Joseph Ulric in Fort-Royal). Louis Sainte Claire was responsible for 900 francs, and the government provided the remaining 700 francs from state funds earmarked for *rachats*. Prices for most other adult male slaves on the register averaged much higher, between 2,000 and 2,500 francs.<sup>125</sup>

Women tended to command lower prices (averaging 1,400-2,000 francs), with mothers and children often bundled together for one price. For example, the *rachat* listed by the commission for the twenty-year-old cultivator Céline and her son Théobald in Sainte-Luce, Martinique, was 2,400 francs. Céline deposited 1,300 francs and the state 1,100. The next entry recorded another cultivator, Lucile (twenty-four) and her daughter Marie-Jeanne, but their *rachat* is estimated at 2,050 (with Lucile contributing 1,200 francs). The price discrepancy here is likely due to the children's age difference (Théobald was seven and Marie Jeanne was three), however, it also emphasized the arbitrary price-fixing power of the *rachat* commission—and how slaves typically had to come up with more than half the funds of a very high price.<sup>126</sup>

The result was that, although the Mackau Law opened up new avenues that enslaved men and women employed to free themselves and their children, the high costs proved a formidable obstacle to widespread manumission.<sup>127</sup> This is further demonstrated by the fact that, in proportion to the total slave population, the number of manumitted persons remained low. Moitt,

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<sup>125</sup> *Journal officiel de la Martinique*, May 15, 1847. The Governor of Guadeloupe discussed the various ways in which slaves obtained nest-eggs in ANOM FM GEN 163/1327, "Rapport au Ministre," April 1847. As Jennings notes, the SFAE, curiously enough, never offered to raise or furnish funds for *rachats*, See: Jennings, *French Anti-Slavery*, 219.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.* For comparable averages of *rachats* of women and children, see: *Gazette officielle de la Guadeloupe*, May 25, 1846; and Schœlcher, *Histoire de l'esclavage* Vol. 2, 20.

<sup>127</sup> Jennings, *French Anti-Slavery*, 219-20.

for example, estimated that for Martinique in 1846 manumissions represented only 0.4 percent of the island's total number of enslaved persons.<sup>128</sup> Similar trends might be estimated for Guadeloupe: from 1845-1848 only an estimated 733 slaves (out of an average population of 89,000) achieved freedom through *rachat*.<sup>129</sup> Thus, due to cost and other difficulties, it was more common to see a single enslaved person (or an enslaved mother and one or two children) manumitted through *rachat forcé*, rather than entire families. At first glance, then, these amelioration policies failed—giving credence to Schœlcher's arguments that the Mackau Law's *rachat* provisions frustrated, rather than aided enslaved peoples' efforts to buy their freedom.<sup>130</sup> But even as *colons* coordinated to impede *rachat*, enslaved people began seeking an alternative path to freedom in the courts by suing against family separation.

#### Women's Family Freedom Suits

In his collection of letters describing slavery in Guadeloupe, the Abbé Dugoujon described a “deplorable thing to see,” which was the transportation of a number of slaves from Basse-Terre to be sold abroad. Their owners, struggling under mounting debts, had hoped to recoup their losses by selling these enslaved people for 1,650-2,220 francs in Puerto Rico (in Guadeloupe, the best price they could hope for was around 407 to 585 francs per head). Dugoujon recounted the “abundant tears” and “lamentable cries” as these “unfortunate ones” were being “torn from their families and the land where they had been born,” because of the financial speculations of their owners.<sup>131</sup> Dugoujon's account reveals how the separation of enslaved families by sale caused

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<sup>128</sup> Moitt, “Pricing Freedom in the French Caribbean,” 166.

<sup>129</sup> AD-G, 1 U 11, Registre des engagements des esclaves rachetés (1845-1848).

<sup>130</sup> *La Réforme*, December 7, 1845; and *L'Abolitionniste française*, November -December 1845, 663-9.

<sup>131</sup> Abbé Dugoujon, *Lettres sur l'esclavage dans les colonies françaises*, 97 fn1. For other examples of this practice, see: *L'Abolitionniste française*, November-December 1844, 556.

distress and suffering that largely went ignored among colonial elites but resonated with reformers who viewed family separation as one of the most egregious practices in slavery. Indeed, one of the key problems abolitionists aimed to address in the Mackau Law was strengthening Article 47 of the *Code Noir*, which forbade separating spouses and mothers from young children through sale.<sup>132</sup>

Prodded by the regime, colonial administrators began cracking down on the illicit practice of family separation. For example, in 1844 a ship owner was condemned by the Royal Court of Guadeloupe to a year in prison and a fine of 1,500 francs for illegally exporting slaves to Puerto Rico. Prosecutor Quénault argued (and the court's decision concurred) that the forthcoming amelioration measures meant that slaves could “no longer be arbitrarily removed from their homeland [and] separated from their families,” especially as the French government had more or less promised emancipation in the future.<sup>133</sup>

The most significant consequence of strengthening family separation bans, however, was largely unintentional. That is, “family separation” took on a whole new meaning during this period, as enslaved and freed women began to claim an expanded definition of what constituted “separation.” Although the *Code Noir* and the Mackau Law specifically prohibited dividing

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“C’était une chose déplorable à voir que ces infortunés versant d’abondantes larmes et poussant des cris lamentables, parce qu’on les arrachait à leur famille et au sol qui les avait vus naître. Ces esclaves n’étaient pas expulsés de la colonie comme dangereux au repos public, c’était la spéculation qui les enlevait à la Guadeloupe.”

<sup>132</sup> Article 47 of the *Code Noir* states: “Ne pourront être saisis et vendus séparément le mari et la femme et leurs enfants impubères, s'ils sont sous la puissance d'un même maître; déclarons nulles les saisies et ventes qui en seront faites.”

<sup>133</sup> *L'Abolitionniste française*, Vol. 2, 556-7.

“M. l'avocat-général Quénault a facilement démontré, et l'arrêt rendu par la cour a jugé que le délit avait été consommé; l'organe du ministère public a dit que c'était une atteinte portée à la condition des esclaves que la législation a progressivement adoucie, et qui ne peuvent plus être arbitrairement enlevés à leur patrie, séparés de leur famille... surtout au moment où la promesse de l'émancipation, émanée du gouvernement français, garantissait à ces esclaves, dans un avenir plus ou moins éloigné à la liberté entière.”

family members by sale, neither law clearly articulated a clear definition of what else constituted “separation.” Following the regime’s relaxation of manumission restrictions in 1831 (such as abolishing the registration tax and formalizing the rights of enslaved persons to purchase family members), several noteworthy freedom suits brought by women against slaveholders unfolded in the colonial and metropolitan courts.<sup>134</sup>

In most of these cases, recently manumitted women sued for the freedom of spouses and children by arguing that manumission *also* constituted an illegal separation. In essence, these women made counterintuitive claims that their manumissions had negative and illegal consequences—that is, separation from their young children and/or spouses. Thus, as the regime reformed the slave codes, particularly manumission procedures, it unintentionally created a space for enslaved and freed women to stake out new claims to freedom. But why were women particularly successful in filing illegal family separation suits in the 1830s and 1840s?

Firstly, the slave codes of the French Antilles tended to recognize enslaved fathers only if they married the mothers of their children. The *Code Noir*, for example, explicitly prevented the separation of enslaved mothers, fathers, and children only if the parents were married (in 1685, the Catholic ceremony would have been the legal foundation of the marriage).<sup>135</sup> Without a

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<sup>134</sup> ANOM FM GEN 171/1380, Baron Mackau, “Rapport au Roi,” December 1843. There were several limited paths to manumission in Martinique and Guadeloupe before the ordinance of 1831. Masters could manumit slaves by paying a tax and filing the necessary paperwork. Slave owners tended to manumit their own children, mistresses, or enslaved workers they wanted to reward for faithful service. Enslaved men could also obtain freedom through military service to the colony. Finally, enslaved men and women could secure manumission through marriage to a free person (under Article 9 of the *Code Noir*), although this practice was rare. See: Bernard Moitt, “Freedom from Bondage at a Price: Women and Redemption from Slavery in the French Caribbean in the Nineteenth Century,” *Slavery & Abolition* Vol. 26, no. 2 (Aug: 2005): 248.

<sup>135</sup> While in the nineteenth century, the Catholic marriage ceremony was customary, rather than legal (which was civil registration of a marriage in the *mairie*), the slave codes did recognize that these weddings conferred some protected status on slave families in some cases. In the *Code Noir*, enslaved men who married in a Catholic ceremony could not be separated from their wives and any prepubescent children by sale, provided they originally belonged to the same master: Article 47 states: “Ne pourront être saisis et vendus séparément le mari et la femme et leurs enfants impubères, s'ils sont sous la puissance d'un même maître; déclarons nulles les saisies et ventes qui en seront faites.”

marriage, planters could counter any freedom suit filed by men on behalf of children by casting doubt on paternity, and therefore, the validity of the case.<sup>136</sup> Secondly, women were more likely to be manumitted than men and therefore, better-placed to file lawsuits alleging illegal separation. Indeed, manumission data reveals that women were freed more frequently than men across most occupations and age groups:

Table 2.3. Select Manumissions in Martinique in 1842 by Sex, Age, and Occupation.<sup>137</sup>

Occupations	Boys under 14	Girls under 14	Men between 14 and 60	Women between 14 and 60	Men over 60	Women over 60	Total
Washerwomen	--	10	--	34	--	4	48
Cooks	--	--	5	4	--	1	10
Domestics	3	--	12	2	--	1	18
Servants, Housekeepers, and Nannies	--	11	--	40	--	3	54
Carpenters and apprentices	2	--	20	--	2	--	24
Coopers	--	--	3	--	--	--	3
Boaters, Sailors, and Fisherman	1	--	6	2	--	--	9
Tailors and Shoemakers	1	--	3	--	--	--	4
Dressmakers and apprentices	--	31	--	51	--	1	83
Masons and apprentices	--	--	7	--	--	--	7

This data is noteworthy because it demonstrates that while enslaved men and boys tended to dominate skilled occupations, women and girls employed in skilled trades were manumitted at

<sup>136</sup> Davis argues how the principle of *partus sequitur ventrum* performed a legal erasure of enslaved fatherhood: “the father of a slave is unknown to our law.” See: Davis, “Don’t Let Nobody Bother Yo’ Principle: The Sexual Economy of American Slavery,” 108. Also see: Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs*, 187-211.

<sup>137</sup> Figures collated from “Tableau des affranchissements prononcés dans les colonies françaises de 1830 à 1843 inclusivement” in *Exposé général*, 603.

higher rates than men (compare the eighty-three female dressmakers with four male tailors and shoemakers, for example). In 1842 alone, a total of 489 women and girls were manumitted, compared with 322 men and boys.<sup>138</sup> Skilled enslaved men and boys were usually in higher demand than women and girls which also explains this discrepancy. The manumission data from Guadeloupe in the same year demonstrates a similar trend:

Table 2.4. Select Manumissions in Guadeloupe in 1842 by Sex and Occupation.<sup>139</sup>

Skills, Trades, and Jobs	Men	Women	Children by parents' occupation	Total
Carpenters	20	--	--	20
Wheelwrights and Coopers	5	--	--	5
Boaters and Sailors	10	--	--	10
Blacksmiths and Gunsmiths	4	--	--	4
Masons	8	--	--	8
Tailors and Shoemakers	5	--	--	5
Dressmakers	--	31	15	46
Fishermen	6	--	--	6
Cooks	8	3	--	11
Domestics*	5	38	9	52
Washerwomen	--	27	9	36
Hawkers	--	13	7	20

As the table indicates, traditional female occupations (i.e. dressmaking, hawking, and laundry) recorded higher rates of manumission. Furthermore, enslaved female domestics—which referred to a range of responsibilities and occupations from childcare to cleaning—were sometimes able to leverage personal relationships with their owners for manumission. In the Dessalles household for example, the children’s enslaved nurse (who had accompanied Anna

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 604. Although the manumission numbers for Guadeloupe do not specify this, the “domestics” category likely included nannies and housekeepers, which were jobs almost exclusively performed by enslaved women.

Dessalles and the children for many years in France) had been manumitted some years prior to 1841. Dessalles, however, balked when his daughter Emilie and his wife Anna demanded that he pay the nurse a pension to maintain her in the metropole. “I have given this slave her freedom,” he wrote, “let her come to Martinique and I will see to it that she is cared for on my plantation. But I am not stupid enough to maintain her at a huge cost in France.”<sup>140</sup>

Enslaved female domestics could thus leverage their years of service and the intimate bonds they formed with the family to achieve manumission. In this case, the ties between the Dessalles women and their nurse were strong or affectionate enough that they sought to further compensate her. Even Dessalles did not reject the premise of providing for this formerly enslaved woman out of hand, merely the expense of doing so in France. The preponderance of manumission provisions for women’s “faithful service” in testaments further supports this claim. Some men who fathered children with bondswomen freed the children outright, as in the case of Pauline, whose 1835 certificate of manumission was registered in Anse-Bertrand by Doctor Claude Françoise Marie Hernault (presumably her father).<sup>141</sup> As these cases demonstrate, enslaved women were therefore more likely to be manumitted in the first place, even before the government relaxed manumission policies. As a result, they were usually the family member in the best position to file freedom suits on behalf of children and spouses.

While exact numbers for both islands are unknown, Schœlcher estimated that 7,698 children under the age of fourteen had been “torn from the love of family” in Guadeloupe

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<sup>140</sup> Dessalles, diary entry for February 22, 1841 in *La vie d’un colon* Vol. 2, 296-7.

“J’ai donné la liberté à cette négresse; qu’elle vienne à la Martinique, et je l’y ferai soigner sur mon habitation. Mais je ne suis pas assez bête pour l’entretenir à grands frais en France.”

<sup>141</sup> AD-G, 1 E 35/9, État-civil des esclaves, naissances, mariages, décès, Anse-Bertrand, Guadeloupe. Inscription de l’arrête accordant la liberté à Demoiselle Pauline, January 7, 1836.



between 1825-1839 through sale.<sup>142</sup> However, beginning in the 1830s, several prominent legal suits brought by enslaved and freed women argued that a parent's manumission constituted an illegal separation from children. It is no coincidence that these suits gained traction in the context of amelioration, as they gave enslaved persons alternative policies to draw upon to bolster their claims under Article 47.<sup>143</sup> Amelioration, it appears, left the colonial legal system vulnerable to new interpretations about what constituted separation from family that enslaved and freed persons exploited to sue for the freedom of their children.<sup>144</sup> As the new policies focused on issues pertaining to the family and separation of children from their mothers, they also unintentionally opened a new avenue for women to challenge the slave regime.<sup>145</sup> Although women who turned to the courts could expect a long, protracted battle, their efforts illuminate the ways in which judicial authorities were compelled to reconcile slave laws with the spirit of reform policies.

For example, the *Affaire Virginie* became something of a *cause célèbre* in abolitionist circles for being the first case of the July Monarchy to determine that manumission constituted an illegal separation of enslaved women from young children. In 1832, Virginie, an enslaved woman in Guadeloupe, was freed after the death of her owner, Madame de Bellecourt. In her

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<sup>142</sup> Schœlcher, *Histoire de l'esclavage* Vol. 2, 42.

“De 1825 à 1839 seulement, 7,698 enfants impubères, c'est-à-dire âgés de moins de douze ans révolus pour les filles, et de moins de quatorze pour les garçons, furent ainsi arrachés à l'amour de la famille dans la seule colonie de la Guadeloupe.”

<sup>143</sup> See: Schœlcher, *Histoire de l'esclavage* Vol. 2, 41-134.

<sup>144</sup> Schœlcher offers an explanation for this when he claimed that the ongoing “progress” of abolition had “opened the eyes” of “generous men within the colonies” who served as wise counsel to “free women, separated from their children who remained in slavery,” and advised them “to apply to the colonial courts for these children to be returned to them under article 47.” See: *ibid*, 44-9.

<sup>145</sup> Cowling also examines litigious enslaved women in Cuba and Brazil who marshaled free womb and manumission laws in the late nineteenth century to achieve certain concessions, like the requests to be sold to different masters to be closer to their children or for manumission. See: Cowling, *Conceiving Freedom*, 71-96.

1822 testament, Madame Bellecourt declared that upon her death, Virginie should be manumitted in recognition of her “devotion and fidelity.” In the ten years between the testament and Madame de Bellecourt’s death in 1832, Virginie had two children, Amélie and Simon. De Bellecourt, however, did not update her will to explicitly provide for the manumission of Virginie’s children. In 1832, Virginie received her freedom, however, the de Bellecourt heirs refused to free Amélie and Simon. Over the course of the next eight years, Virginie went to court to sue the de Bellecourts for the freedom of her children.<sup>146</sup>

It is at this point that the archives become unclear. To file a claim, Virginie likely submitted an initial complaint to a Crown prosecutor or the Attorney General, although whether she was prompted to do so by an abolitionist lawyer is unclear—some scholars have speculated that she was more than likely counseled by free men of color when the case wound through two court proceedings in Guadeloupe, and that Adolphe Gatine took over representation at the Court of Appeals in Bordeaux or the Cassation Court in Poitiers (although this too is uncertain).<sup>147</sup> Schœlcher has indicated that there were many men of noble abolitionist impulses in the colony (likely from the *gens de couleur* class) who helped enslaved persons file legal claims under amelioration. However, the limited trial records and lack of witness depositions in the legal archives of the French colonies has entirely obscured both Virginie’s perspective and that of much of her legal representation.

What is known is that the Virginie Case appeared before the Tribunal of the First Instance in Pointe-à-Pitre, where it was argued that under the terms of Article 47 of the *Code*

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<sup>146</sup> BNF 8-FM-3046, *Affaire Virginie, de la Guadeloupe*; *Gazette des Tribunaux*, March 1 and 2, 1841; Schœlcher, *Histoire de l’esclavage* Vol. 2, 44-9; and Moitt, *Women and Slavery*, 165-6. Amélie was born in 1826, Simon in 1829.

<sup>147</sup> Jacques Adélaïde, ed., *Adolphe Gatine, L’abolition de l’esclavage à la Guadeloupe* (Paris: Karthala, 2012), 8-9.

*Noir*, her children must be freed, as “the law that governs slavery in our *colonies posits this principle that the slave family is indivisible, at least until the puberty of the children.*” Claiming that manumission effectively separated her from her prepubescent children, the legal strategy in Virginie’s case pushed for a more expansive interpretation of Article 47 (which explicitly only prohibited the breakup of slave families by sale or seizure)—declaring that her manumission constituted a separation of her family. In November of 1844, after her initial victory had been overturned twice by the Royal Court in Guadeloupe and the Appeals Court in Bordeaux, the Cassation Court of Potiers ruled decidedly in favor of the original verdict. Virginie won her case and was awarded damages.<sup>148</sup> It was a bittersweet victory, as during the eight years of legal wrangling, Virginie’s son Simon had died so she was reunited only with Amélie.<sup>149</sup>

According to metropolitan abolitionists the legal floodgates had opened after the conclusion of the Virginie case. Schœlcher wrote “from Guadeloupe, we are told ‘The Virginie affair has had an immense reverberation here, and a certain number of individuals retained in slavery have been restored to liberty... whole families will be recalled [to the courts] and these recalls will give rise to an infinity of lawsuits.’” In Martinique, he asserted, at least thirty cases involving separation of prepubescent children from their families had been filed following the Virginie case.<sup>150</sup> Gatine declared that “the parliamentary baptism of Virginie” had an “immense reverberation” in Guadeloupe, where “already number of individuals held in slavery have been

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<sup>148</sup> Schœlcher, *Des colonies françaises*, 422.

<sup>149</sup> BNF 8-FM-3046, *Affaire Virginie, de la Guadeloupe*, emphasis in the original. “Ainsi, la loi qui régit l’esclavage dans nos colonies pose ce principe *que la famille esclave est indivisible, au moins jusqu’à la puberté des enfants.*”

<sup>150</sup> Schœlcher, *Histoire de l’esclavage* Vol. 2, 49-50. “De la Guadeloupe, on nous écrit: “L’affaire Virginie a eu ici un retentissement immense. Déjà une quantité d’individus retenus dans l’esclavage ont été rendus à la liberté... des familles entières seront rappelées, ces rappels vont donner lieu à une infinité de procès...”

set free...Our correspondences from Martinique announce the same impulse in this colony.” He recorded at least five legal suits in 1845 (three in Martinique, one in Guiana, and one in Senegal) in which women successfully liberated their children through the courts following the Virginie case.<sup>151</sup> Elsewhere, Gatine calculated that 34 families (or 120 individuals) were freed following the Virginie ruling—four from cases in Guadeloupe and ten from Martinique. Out of the fourteen total suits, eight listed women as the plaintiffs. As Gatine concluded: “*everything that we are getting today is due to the Virginie judgment.*”<sup>152</sup>

In some instances, it was enslaved women themselves (rather than their freed relatives) who issued a legal challenge to their status using the Virginie precedent. The ruling was cited in the case of Sophie, an African-born slave in Saint-Pierre who successfully won her manumission in the courts when it was proven that her mistress, Madame Dumerot, had taken Sophie’s prepubescent son to France (and freed him there). Sophie was thus doubly separated from her child by both distance and legal status. On February 25, 1848, three months before emancipation was promulgated in Martinique, the crown prosecutor in Martinique declared Sophie free.<sup>153</sup>

Another noteworthy case was that of Marie Sainte Platon, who in 1847 successfully sued for the *affranchissement* of not only her children, but also her husband François and

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<sup>151</sup> Gatine, *Causes de la Liberté. Nombreuses libérations, au cours de l’année judiciaire 1844-1845. Guadeloupe—Martinique—Guyane—Sénégal. Arrêts de Cassation.* (Paris: PH. Cordier, 1845), 2-3. For the five cases, see: 9-23. Nous sommes heureux de constater ce baptême parlementaire de l’arrêt Virginie... On nous écrit de la Guadeloupe: ‘L’affaire Virginie a eu ici un retentissement immense. L’arrêt a été pris au sérieux par notre magistrature. Déjà, une quantité d’individus retenus dans l’esclavage ont été rendus à la liberté’...Nos correspondances de la Martinique annoncent la même impulsion dans cette colonie.”

<sup>152</sup> Gatine, *Causes de liberté. Résultats de l’Arrêt Virginie* (Paris: Imprimerie de Cordier, no date but likely between 1845-1847), 3. Emphasis in the original. See: p. 1 for list of cases from Martinique and Guadeloupe (Gatine includes the Virginie judgment for Guadeloupe, which would raise the number of those cases to five and the total from the French Antilles to fifteen). “*tout ce que nous obtenons aujourd’hui est dû à l’arrêt Virginie.*”

<sup>153</sup> *Journal officiel de la Martinique*, April 8, 1848; Moitt, *Women and Slavery*, 166; and Jean-Baptiste Rouvellat de Cussac, *Situation des esclaves dans les colonies françaises: urgence de leur emancipation* (Paris: Pagnerre, 1845), 148-9.

grandchildren as well: a total of fourteen enslaved persons.<sup>154</sup> Marie Sainte and François were born on the Casse-cou plantation in Le François, Martinique, and had at least ten children together.<sup>155</sup> At forty-six years old, Marie Sainte purchased her freedom on March 23, 1840.<sup>156</sup> The memo filed in the legal proceedings stated that Marie Sainte and François shared “religious sentiments” and “aspired to legitimize their union, as well as to become free,” which implied that Marie Sainte and François were possibly aware of how marriage could provide a path to manumission.<sup>157</sup> While it is difficult to gauge whether they viewed marriage as a viable strategy for obtaining freedom for their family, it stands to reason that Marie Sainte and François were aware of administrators’ renewed attention to family separation and slave marriage policies, given how colonial authorities were tasked with overseeing moralization efforts on the plantations.

Whatever their motivations, Marie Sainte and François received the requisite permission from Mr. Desvergers de Chambry, one of seventeen co-proprietors of Casse-cou (who had also authorized Marie Sainte’s *rachat*), and married in a Catholic ceremony. The marriage was

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<sup>154</sup> Marie Sainte-Platon’s children are listed as Jean Philippe (thirty-one); Alexandre (twenty-six); Sainte-Catherine (twenty-four); Sainte-Croix (twenty-three); Adrien (twenty-two); Elisa (twenty-one); Marie Luce (sixteen); Hedwige (fourteen); and Anatole (ten). Her grandchildren are recorded as: Eldof (two, child of Elisa,) and Anna (eight), Noël (six), and Cléry (four), all children of Nancy, called Ancecy who died December 31, 1845. See: ANOM FM GEN 372/2197, Gatine, *Causes de liberté Marie Sainte Platon de la Martinique réclamant les quatorze libertés de son mari et de ses enfants ou petits-enfants, mariage entre libre et esclave, affranchissement de droit, indivisibilité de la famille* (Paris: 1847), 5.

<sup>155</sup> Interestingly, the Cassation Court noted that under “former colonial customs,” Marie Sainte’s masters would have rewarded her fecundity with manumission. See: ANOM FM GEN 372/1297, Gatine, *Causes de liberté Marie Sainte Platon*, 5.

<sup>156</sup> ANOM FM GEN 372/2197, “Esclavage—Mariage Noir—Libération d’une famille de treize esclaves,” newspaper clippings (undated and untitled).

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid*, Gatine, *Causes de liberté Marie Sainte Platon de la Martinique*, 2,

witnessed by Desvergers de Chambry and Mr. Desvergers de Maupertuis (another co-proprietor). None of the other Casse-cou proprietors opposed the wedding at the time.

The problem occurred when Madame de la Pommeraye, another Casse-cou co-proprietor, objected to Marie Sainte's claim for the freedom of François, and their thirteen children and grandchildren. Subsequently, Marie Sainte's case was heard at the Saint-Pierre Tribunal. The argument was anchored by several legal claims. First, as the enslaved François was married to a free person, he had achieved the status of *affranchi de droit* under the terms of the June 11, 1839 edict, which reinforced the *Code Noir's* prohibitions against the separation of enslaved spouses. Secondly, their children, despite having been born before the marriage, were also entitled to this status. Finally, the plaintiffs contested, three of the children (Marie Luce, Hedwidge, and Anatole) had been prepubescent at the time of Marie Sainte's manumission and therefore were entitled to freedom under Article 47 of the *Code Noir*. This case, in other words, demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the rights and privileges accorded to Marie Sainte, François, and their family under the terms of amelioration laws and the *Code Noir*.

On May 26, 1846, Judge Meynier concurred with Marie Sainte and declared that François and the thirteen children and grandchildren should be freed. This decision was immediately appealed by six of the co-proprietors to the Royal Court, which not only overturned the ruling, but also annulled the marriage between François and Marie Sainte—in itself, a tacit recognition that their marriage had provided the entire family with an avenue to freedom. The case wound up in the Court of Cassation, which finally ruled in Marie Sainte's favor in 1847, five years after the marriage and seven after her *rachat*.<sup>158</sup> The Cassation Court noted that it was unable to find any “nullity, for failing to observe the solemnities required, or for lack of consent of the slave's

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

masters” upon which it could support the Royal Court’s decision to annul the marriage.<sup>159</sup> The entire case rested on those technicalities.

Such legal terms could make or break these lawsuits. Coralie, a former slave in Guadeloupe, had four young children: Agathe, Pauline, Joséphine, and Narcisse, and they were all eventually separated by sale. In 1826, Coralie purchased her freedom for 2,642 *livres*, but her children remained enslaved: Joséphine and Narcisse with a Madame Blanchet (and then sold to a Mr. Friberg in 1829), and Agathe and Pauline remained with the Coquille Valencourt family (which had originally owned Coralie and her children). Nearly twenty years after the sales, in 1844 (in the wake of the Virginie affair), Coralie made a bid to free her children and grandchildren, arguing illegal separation. Both the Tribunal of First Instance and the Royal Court in Guadeloupe rejected Coralie’s suit, maintaining that as her children were presently adults, they were “perfectly alienable.” For unknown reasons, Coralie did not appeal her decision to the Cassation Court in France—which perhaps may have ruled in her favor, given that at the time of their sale, her children were still too young, according to the provisions of Article 47. Schœlcher intimated that there were several unfortunate cases like Coralie, in which the mother was unable to pursue further legal action and so her children remained enslaved.<sup>160</sup>

The difficulty in tracking these cases through the archives indicate that successful suits were the exception, rather than the norm, and that it is impossible to say how many slave owners

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid. For another account of the Marie-Sainte Platon case, see: Moitt, *Women and Slavery*, 171. Moitt emphasizes the court’s debate over the legitimacy of the marriage, arguing that the exceptionalism of the case is due to its legal technicalities. While the technicalities certainly were important, I argue that the fact that the Royal Court annulled the marriage when they overturned Tribunal’s first ruling indicates that it believed the marriage to be legitimate, and thus, they would have to concede that the amelioration laws would make this family free. Therefore, the case indicates how amelioration was starting to create legal loopholes where these technicalities had fraught meaning. Marie-Sainte Platon’s victory is less noteworthy for its exceptionalism and more for how the authorities implicitly recognized that amelioration laws made annulling the marriage necessary for overturning the legal basis of her claims.

<sup>160</sup> Schœlcher, *Histoire de l’esclavage* Vol. 2, 55-62.

flouted Article 47 and amelioration policies—or how many enslaved persons were unable to file similar lawsuits. Further, as the experiences of Virginie and Marie Sainte demonstrate, these legal battles could take a long time, during which their families remained enslaved. There were no guarantees that the courts would rule in their favor and these suits often hung on a technicality. François, Marie Sainte, Sophie, and Virginie, had to meet rigorously defined standards: a marriage (in the case of Marie Sainte and François) or that children were still prepubescent at the time of separation (Sophie and Virginie). Even when these cases met these conditions, the colonial courts (which abolitionists argued colluded with slaveholders) would often rule in favor of the defendants, which would in turn prolong the legal battle or even shut it down completely, as with Coralie's case.

Rather than instituting sweeping changes in manumission policies or curbing family separation, these cases reveal more about how amelioration policies had opened up new avenues for enslaved and recently freed persons to marshal reform laws in service of their own aims. Furthermore, these cases pushed for rulings based on the legal application of older slave laws (such as the *Code Noir*), in addition to the more recent policies implemented piecemeal from the metropole. Taken together, they challenged the ability of slaveholders to arbitrarily separate families. Litigants did so, paradoxically, by arguing that manumission constituted an illegal violation of family separation policies.

Taking advantage of the reformist overtures of the regime, enslaved people adopted aspects of amelioration policies to advance their claims for freedom and demand that administrators and slave owners recognize their rights under both Old Regime and new laws. This was an outcome that metropolitan reformers had not fully anticipated, although abolitionists like Schœlcher and Gatine welcomed it. Moreover, they reveal how, like anti-slavery advocates and colonial



administrators, enslaved people also centered the family in their strategies surrounding amelioration. Enslaved and freed women in particular proved adept at expanding the scope of the Code Noir’s policies on family separation by making claims that, on the surface, echoed the ameliorative priorities of the regime. In the three years between the Mackau Law and emancipation, enslaved women continued to draw on amelioration policies that limited masters’ authority to punish them—forcing courts to implement new provisions that prevented abusive treatment of enslaved women and children. In so doing, they employed family politics as a key strategy.

#### Enslaved Women and Abuse Suits, 1845-1848

On May 14, 1846, an enslaved woman named Dédée was arrested in a market in Basse-Terre after quarreling with another (unnamed) woman and “speaking injurious words” to the authorities who intervened in the fight. According to the subsequent deliberations of the Privy Council and reports from the Crown Prosecutor, Dédée was taken to the local police station where, under the orders of the police commissioner, two enslaved men tied her to a ladder, lifted her dress, and whipped her. As she was five-to six-months’ pregnant, Dédée began experiencing symptoms of a miscarriage, which were “fortunately ceased by some remedies administered by a midwife.”<sup>161</sup> Given that Article 9 of the Mackau Law prohibited “excessive” corporal

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<sup>161</sup> ANOM FM SG GUA 121/830, “Extrait du registre des procès-verbaux des délibérations du Conseil Privé de la Guadeloupe,” September 5, 1846; and op. cit. “Compte rendu de deux poursuites dirigées contre des maîtres...d’avoir exercé des sévices sur leurs esclaves,” December 10, 1846. “Dédée était alors enceinte de cinq mois. A la suite de ce châtement, Dédée éprouva des douleurs qui et aient de nature à faire craindre un avortement: mais heureusement elles cessèrent par l’emploi de quelques remèdes indiqué par une sage-femme. M. le Procureur du Roi instruit de ces diverses circonstances, fit procéder immédiatement à une enquête.”

punishment of enslaved persons, these events at the Basse-Terre police station prompted the colonial authorities to launch an investigation.<sup>162</sup>

Conflicting reports make it difficult to figure out exactly what happened. All parties agreed that Dédée was whipped by order of the police commissioner, but some asserted that her owner, Mr. Castets, had first instructed the commissioner to have her punished for her impudence. Others maintained that Mr. Castets, once informed that Dédée had been arrested and would be punished for insulting the authorities, “felt a duty to not interfere.” Further, the Crown Prosecutor noted that witness testimonies did not agree on who actually carried out the punishment. Some asserted that it was only the two enslaved men (Bacquam and Gérôme) and not the police. However, in later testimony, Dédée claimed that the police commissioner, “finding that Bacquam was not striking [her] hard enough,” took the whip from his hands and “carried out several very violent blows by himself.”<sup>163</sup> As for her condition, Bacquam testified that Dédée disclosed her pregnancy after the first blow, but both her owner and the police commissioner denied knowing that she was pregnant. The Crown Prosecutor added that he found this difficult to believe, as Dédée and her master “lived under the same roof” (implying that he could even be the father) and, in the course of her punishment at the police station, she was stripped of her clothes. Therefore, her condition, he asserted, could not have been “concealed.”<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Article 9 of the Mackau Law stated: “Tout maître qui aura infligé à son esclave un traitement illégal ou qui aura exercé ou fait exercer sur lui des sévices, violences ou voies de fait, en dehors des limites du pouvoir disciplinaire, sera puni d’un emprisonnement de seize jours à deux ans, et d’une amende de 101 fr. à 300 francs, ou de l’une de ces deux peines seulement. S’il y a eu préméditation ou guet-apens, la peine sera de deux ans à cinq ans, et l’amende de 200 francs à 1,000 francs.”

<sup>163</sup> ANOM FM SG GUA 121/830, “Compte rendu de deux poursuites dirigées contre des maîtres...d’avoir exercé des sévices sur leurs esclaves,” December 10, 1846.  
“Dédée ajoutait que M. le commissaire de police, trouvant que Bacquam ne frappait pas assez fort, avait porté lui même plusieurs coups très violents.”

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

Royal Prosecutor Layrle ordered additional proceedings should move forward against the police commissioner, stating that while, the punishment normally was not considered “excessive in regard to the number of blows given...I have shown that it constitutes an inhumane punishment, violence outside the disciplinary powers [when] inflicted upon a pregnant woman.”<sup>165</sup> Here, Layrle referenced the inhumane punishment clauses of recent amelioration legislation, which forbade masters from inflicting abuse, violence, or assault on their slaves as these punishments exceeded the “limits of disciplinary power.” However, the law remained vague on what exactly constituted “excessive punishment.” That was left to the discretion of the colonial authorities.

In this case, Layrle determined that while the blows Dédée received would not ordinarily be considered “excessive,” the fact that she was pregnant meant that her beating was illegal under the terms of new amelioration laws. Layrle’s decision to prosecute the police commissioner, therefore, reveals how, in the 1840s, colonial authorities were beginning to reinterpret the scope and intention of amelioration and classify pregnant enslaved women as a singularly vulnerable class of victims.

The account of Dédée’s arrest and punishment is significant for a variety of reasons. Firstly, it highlights how both slave owners and colonial authorities navigated conflicting punitive and legal powers over enslaved persons in the three years preceding abolition. Secondly, it also indicates the efforts on the part of colonial officials to investigate cases of abuse following amelioration laws. These investigations often revolved around cataloguing evidence of violence

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

“Ce châtement est, antérieur à l’ordonnance du 4 juin, n’était point illégal; il n’était pas non plus excessif, quant au nombre de coups donnés; mais j’ai démontré qu’infligé à une femme enceinte, il constituait un châtement inhumain, des violences en dehors de pouvoir disciplinaire.”

on the bodies of enslaved people (as with Dédée and her near-miscarriage) and gathering witness depositions. Finally, although heavily mediated through the official reports, the case of Dédée provides a window into the perspectives and motives of enslaved persons themselves, who testified to their experiences and demanded protection from colonial authorities. In sum, Dédée's ordeal and the subsequent investigation represents how enslaved people continued to grapple with the various legal implications of amelioration in order to claim protections for themselves and their families.

Women like Dédée were often the most vocal plaintiffs against slave owners in the years following the implementation of amelioration policies. As with family separation cases, these women faced daunting legal battles against their masters, in addition to the skepticism, if not outright hostility, of the colonial authorities (who often sided with the defendants or maintained that slaves' complaints of abuse were exaggerated). These women presented their bodies and injuries as evidence, gave testimonies, and appeared in the offices of local magistrates to demand an investigation into their masters for abusive treatment. In so doing, they compelled authorities, no matter how unwillingly or unevenly, to prosecute abuse cases and punish offenders under the guidelines of amelioration. In analyzing how enslaved women presented themselves and their grievances to the authorities, we can trace how they became instrumental advocates who compelled the colonial legal system to enforce amelioration protections for themselves and their families.

An examination of several key cases in Martinique and Guadeloupe from 1845-1848 reveal a somewhat uneven effort on the part of the colonial courts and administration to intervene in the most rampant cases of abuse. Before 1845, few legal policies against maltreatment were

enforced, other than a handful of clauses in the *Code Noir* and a few anemic local ordinances.<sup>166</sup>

Yet, administrative reports forwarded to Paris from the colonies highlighted in graphic detail countless instances of abusive treatment of enslaved persons. Throughout the 1830s and early 1840s, these reports indicated that masters doubled down in their brutality in the wake of several localized slave insurrections and rumors of widespread poison campaigns.<sup>167</sup>

For metropolitan abolitionists, the reports of brutality in the Antilles that trickled into France reinforced their claims that the present system was untenable—and they capitalized on cases of shocking abuse to argue that the metropolitan government should aggressively check the power of masters through reform policies.<sup>168</sup> Another additional concern was that the colonial authorities (many of whom were also slave owners) were tasked with implementing reform. In response, abolitionists argued that the colonial officials could not be trusted to act against their own interests.<sup>169</sup> There was no lack of proof for them to back up these claims.

For instance, Octave and Charles Jaham, two brothers from Fort-Royal Martinique, appeared before the Assizes Court in 1845. They were accused of several counts of mutilation and abuse of their slaves Leandre, Vincent, Jean Baptiste, Gustave, and Hortense (called Rosette).<sup>170</sup> Among the many horrifying details in the summaries of the legal proceedings, it was

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<sup>166</sup> Moitt, *Women and Slavery*, 101.

<sup>167</sup> See: Butel, *Histoire des Antilles françaises* for a general overview on unrest (and in particular pp. 337-338 on poison). For additional reports on poison, see: ANOM FM SG MAR 33/290, “Rapport à Ministre de la Marine et des Colonies,” October 20, 1831; ANOM FM GEN 186/1447 II, La Cour Royale de l’île Martinique, “chambre d’accusation,” October 23, 1844; and *La Réforme*, November 14, 1846.

<sup>168</sup> Schœlcher, *Des colonies françaises*, 27-44.

<sup>169</sup> See: *La Réforme*, December 7, 1845; and *L’Abolitionniste française*, November -December 1845, 663-9.

<sup>170</sup> For full accounts of the Jaham case, see: ANOM FM SG MAR 33/286, “Rapport de le gouverneur de la Martinique au Ministre de Marine et des Colonies,” November 13 1845; op. cit., “Copie d’une letter adressée à M. Procureur Général par le Procureur du roi de Saint Pierre,” August 23, 1845; and op. cit., “Fonds généralités, Fort Royal,” November 13, 1848. Also see: *Abolition de l’esclavage des nègres dans les colonies françaises* (Paris: Pagnerre, 1847), 2-3; and *Gazette des Tribunaux*, February 4, 1846.

noted that Charles cut off Leandre's earlobe and "forced him to swallow it." Octave forced Gustave to eat animal excrement and both siblings beat the six-year old Vincent until he was bloody and then put him in chains.<sup>171</sup> The incident that garnered the most attention in Paris, however, was the case of Rosette. The Jaham brothers punished Rosette for returning late from an errand by whipping her with a piece of cowhide and rubbing lemon and pepper into her lesions. She was then forced to lay on the ground with her "hands tied behind her back, her naked body exposed to the heat of the sun," a particularly sadistic torture that rendered her unable to walk for many weeks. Rosette claimed that she miscarried her pregnancy as a result of her ordeal.<sup>172</sup>

Rosette registered an official complaint with Pujo, the Crown Prosecutor in Saint-Pierre, who initiated criminal proceedings against the Jaham siblings. Throughout the proceedings, at least sixteen witnesses (enslaved, white, and free people of color) testified that Octave and Charles brutally punished their slaves. Rosette herself gave her account of what happened to her. Reported as speaking "loudly, vehemently," Rosette recounted how, despite her pregnant condition, she was "abused and beat up." Additionally, she claimed she "did not deserve these punishments, she never stole, nor was she a maroon. She invoked the time she had served her former master, Mr. Desfontaines, a period when she never received a blow. She recounted the torture suffered by her children, [Jean Baptiste and Vincent], her story intermingled with tears and sobs...She confirmed, in a word, all the charges of the prosecution."<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> AN CC//401, "Relevé analytique des affaires de sévices jugées aux colonies, depuis la promulgation de la loi du 18 juillet 1845," Paris, July 17, 1847.

"Que le S. Ch. de Jaham, pour punir son esclave Leandre qui venait de lui être ramené de marronnage, avait coupé le lobe d'une des oreilles de cet esclave, et l'avait forcé à l'avaler."

<sup>172</sup> *Gazette des Tribunaux*, February 4, 1846.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

In the face of an undoubtedly intimidating panel of judges who represented the interests of colonial elites like her owners, Rosette portrayed herself as a reliable, faithful enslaved woman as well as a nurturing, protective, and grieved mother. In Rosette’s account, it was only because the Jaham brothers had so disgracefully neglected to care for and feed their slaves that she instructed her sons to steal so that they would have enough to eat. This testimony thus implicitly rebuked Charles and Octave for neglecting their responsibilities as patriarchal slaveholders—they did not reciprocate faithful service with adequate care—and also emphasized her plight as a desperate mother.

Despite Rosette’s moving testimony, the reported “sympathy” with which the court received her deposition, and the mountain of evidence presented by witnesses, the colonial court acquitted the Jaham brothers “after a long deliberation.”<sup>174</sup> The outrage in Paris was palpable, and Minister Mackau demanded an investigation into how the Jaham brothers could have been acquitted.<sup>175</sup> For abolitionists, the Jaham case confirmed that island-born magistrates could not be entrusted with enforcing the punitive provisions against masters as stipulated in the 1845 law,

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“Hortense dite Rosette, esclave des frères Jaham, est introduite...Elle parle haut, avec véhémence, et dit que son fils Jean-Baptiste est mort de suites de mauvais traitements de ses maîtres, le lendemain du jour où il a été retiré de chaîne, qu’il n’avait plus la force du supporter; après sa mort il était enflé. Son autre fils, Vincent, allait mourir aussi, quand la justice l’a sauvé. Elle, enceinte, malgré son état, était maltraitée, battue excédée. Elle raconte les deux derniers châtiments qu’elle a subis: couchée à terre, la jupe relevée, en plein soleil, un assaisonnement de piment et de citron aurait été appliqué sur ses plaies, et elle aurait été obligée ensuite de vaquer à ses travaux; elle pouvait à peine marcher. Elle soutient n’avoir pas mérité ces châtiments, n’avoir jamais volé ni été marronne. Elle invoque le temps qu’elle a servi son ancien maître, M. Desfontaines, époque où elle n’a jamais reçu un coup. Elle raconte les tortures subies par ses enfants, Jean Baptiste et Vincent, en entremêlant son récit de larmes et de sanglots. Elle confirme, en un mot, toutes les charges de l’accusation.”

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> AN CC//401, Relevé analytique des affaires de sévices jugées aux colonies, depuis la promulgation de la loi du 18 juillet 1845, Paris, July 17, 1847.

strengthening their claim in the late 1840s that immediate emancipation was the only solution to these kinds of abuses.<sup>176</sup>

Other examples of the colonial courts looking the other way on post-1845 discipline cases included the attempts of creole judges to mitigate the punishment of convicted slave owners. In Guadeloupe, for example, a proprietor named Leprince was found guilty “with attenuating circumstances” for excessively punishing an elderly female slave over the age of sixty named Thémire, inflicting several severe blows on her head. Thémire’s daughter, Agacine (who had been manumitted some time earlier), took her mother, “near death,” to the Crown Prosecutor’s office, where Thémire died about an hour later. Agacine declared to the prosecutor that her mother died as a result of her beating, but the medical examiner claimed that she had succumbed to a fever and that there was “no evidence of internal injuries.” Nevertheless, in the ensuing investigation, the court was forced to acknowledge that Leprince had forced Thémire to work on tasks “incompatible with the state of her old age, strength and sometimes her health” and had, on different occasions, been known to punish her excessively. The Court, after establishing these facts, declared that Leprince had wrongly punished Thémire, but stopped short of declaring him responsible for her death and instead fined him only 200 francs—a significantly lower price than an elderly enslaved woman would command for a *rachat*.<sup>177</sup>

While the case of Leprince highlights how the colonial courts resisted fully enforcing the punitive power of the Mackau Law against masters, it also reveals how the efforts of enslaved

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<sup>176</sup> Schœlcher, *Histoire de l’esclavage* Vol. 1, 322-3; op. cit., Vol. 2, 150, and op. cit., *Abolition de l’esclavage*, 2-3.

<sup>177</sup> ANOM FM GEN 186/1446 II, “Relevé des affaires plus graves portés en police correctionnelle, Guadeloupe, #1. Leprince, Jurisdiction Correctionnelle,” (full date not given) 1846. For examples of *rachat* prices, see: *Gazette Officielle de la Guadeloupe*, May 25, 1846.

“Mais l’instruction écrite et les débats ont établi, que le prévenu avait imposé à Thémire des travaux au dessus de son âge et de ses forces, quelque fois même incompatibles avec son état de santé...”



persons to claim the protection of these policies meant these authorities were unable to avoid investigating instances of abuse altogether. In taking her dying mother to the Crown Prosecutor and testifying on her behalf, Agacine ensured that the authorities could not ignore the circumstances surrounding Thémire's death. Indeed, after the passage of the Mackau Law, many enslaved persons, cognizant of their new protections, demanded that the colonial legal system intervene to check violence on the part of their masters. As with family separation, enslaved women led the charge in filing cases of abuse—which compelled these authorities to look into matters that they might have otherwise disregarded.

Take, for instance, the case of Colombe, on the Lagrange plantation in Marigot. Colombe, a new mother with a nursing infant, muttered a sarcastic retort to the manager, Mr. O'Neil, when he chastised her for working too slowly. Overhearing her, O'Neil struck her twice with a cane, and she responded by voicing her complaints louder, declaring "You do not have the right to hit us for nothing! The other managers treat us more gently!" Colombe's outburst is remarkable. Did she understand that overseers and slaveholders could no longer corporally punish enslaved workers with impunity after amelioration? Had the other managers on the plantation been adhering to the new regulations? Given her actions in the incidents that followed, the evidence suggests that Colombe knew she had been accorded some rights and protections.

O'Neill, enraged by Colombe's defiance, struck a few times with a cane, but Colombe fought back, snatching his cane and ripping the sleeve of his coat. At this point, O'Neil "became furious, and struck her with a stick." The blow cut her lip and bloodied her face. After this beating, O'Neill forced Colombe to wear an iron bar. When the plantation manager de Pompignan learned of the incident, he ordered that Colombe be given an additional twenty-nine

lashes and wear a seven-kilogram chain on her feet. Despite Colombe's pleas for mercy, de Pompignan "was inexorable."

After this ordeal, accounts differed as to what happened next, but most agreed that Colombe, with her baby and accompanied by an enslaved man—the relationship between them is unclear—set off on foot with the chains on her legs, to lodge a complaint with the Crown Prosecutor in Saint-Pierre. On the road, however, she was stopped for not having a pass from her master permitting her to leave the plantation. Refusing to name her owner, Colombe, her companion, and her baby were imprisoned in a maroon jail, where she filed a formal complaint against O'Neil and de Pompignan, received medical treatment for her injuries, and had her chains removed. Colombe's herculean efforts to pursue her grievances to the colonial authorities forced them to take action on her behalf.<sup>178</sup>

In the ensuing investigation, O'Neil and de Pompignan claimed that they were acting within the boundaries of the law, with O'Neil testifying that Colombe was only given one lash and that the gash on her lip was the result of a punch. However, numerous witnesses rebutted their testimony. For Mr. Baffer, the official handling the case, Colombe had acted insolently. However, he also stated that O'Neil and de Pompignan had acted "illegally," citing the 1845 clause that prevented excessive punishment. Baffer continued that the "entire slave gang" had

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<sup>178</sup> *La Réforme*, April 9 and 10, 1846; and ANOM FM SG MAR 33/285, Governor Mathieu à le Ministre de la Marine, "Compte Rendu d'un affaire correctionnelle pour châtement illegal et traitement barbare et inhumain, jugée à la dernière session de la cour royale," St. Pierre, January 26, 1846.

"Le 11 octobre dernier... Colombe, esclave des héritiers Lagrange et mère d'un jeune enfant de quatre mois, se trouvait au jardin avec l'atelier de l'habitation... L'économe... Julien O'Neil ayant en occasion d'adresser quelques reproches à Colombe et de la traiter de fainéante, cette esclave répondit avec humeur qu'elle travaillait assez. L'économe fut blessé et lui donna doux ou trois coups... Vous n'avez pas le droit de nous frapper ainsi pour rien les autres économes nous traitaient avec plus de douceur, s'écria Colombe! Cet paroles irritèrent O'Neil qui lui porta de nouveaux coups et engagea une sorte de lutte avec Colombe qui cherchait à lui arracher la liane des mains, et lui avait saisi le bra. Au milieu des efforts d'O'Neil pour se dégager, son paletot se déchira à l'épaule, et, dans sa fureur, il porta à Colombe un coup de bâton... coup qui l'atteignit sur le côté gauche de la lèvre inférieure de perte de sang."

witnessed Colombe's beating and testified to its severity—which suggested that enslaved people were well aware that masters could no longer punish them with impunity. As recounted by Governor Mathieu, Baffer was particularly disgusted by de Pompignan's decision put Colombe in chains, as she was a “weak woman” and a “mother with a suckling child at the breast.” O'Neil and de Pompignan were pronounced guilty of maltreatment without attenuating circumstances and were both fined as a result.<sup>179</sup>

Colombe's case is compelling for a myriad of reasons, not the least of which is the shared assumption among colonial administrators that enslaved persons, and especially enslaved women, were acutely aware of the new protections afforded to them by amelioration legislation and that they demanded that the authorities enforce them by intervening to curtail masters who administered illegal punishments. Baffer's revulsion over Colombe's punishment is suggestive of how, in measuring the severity of the abuse inflicted on the bodies of enslaved women, colonial authorities identified them as particularly gendered victims under the terms of the amelioration laws. Like Rosette's tearful testimony in court, victimized enslaved women appeared to these administrators as “weak” and “defenseless” mothers pleading for mercy and for the wellbeing of their children.

These cases also reveal that, however unevenly or unwillingly, enslaved women compelled colonial authorities to seriously address complaints of abuse and extend the protections of the Mackau Law, often by using their positions as vulnerable mothers. Given that amelioration laws proscribed “severe” corporal punishments of women (particularly the use of chains, bars, and

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

“...de lutte qui s'était engagé aux yeux de l'atelier...il faisait remarquer que l'illégalité du châtement l'avait provoquée. Il répondait enfin à de Pompignan qu'à côté du droit disciplinaire du maîtres se trouve la répression de l'excès, et qu'il y avait quelque chose de révoltant dans ces rigueur accumulées sans pitié sur une faible femme, sur la mère d'un enfant à la mamelle.”

other disciplinary measures), enslaved women were in a position to demand the application of these laws. Hence, these cases underscored how enslaved women became instrumental advocates for themselves, family members, and each other in the colonial courts. Rosette's account provoked uproar in the metropole and generated a larger inquiry into the colonial judicial system. Agacine's decision to bring the body of her mother in front of a magistrate confronted prosecutors with visceral evidence of abuse. The testimony of Céleste persuaded colonial authorities to rule in favor of Augustine. Colombe understood that she could no longer be subjected to arbitrary corporal punishment. Her defiant decision to seek justice on foot, with chains on her legs and her infant in tow convinced a creole magistrate that such a "repugnant" beating of a "defenseless" mother could not be condoned or ignored.

These cases also highlight how the Mackau Law had little impact on curtailing acts of abuse on enslaved persons in Martinique and Guadeloupe. Indeed, authorities' decisions to enforce the law remained highly localized and varied from case to case. Colombe and Augustine received some measure of justice, while in the cases of Thémire and Rosette, the colonial court system either reduced or ignored the prescribed punishments. However, beyond demonstrating the localized and contingent application of the Mackau Law in the Antilles, these variations also illuminate the ways in which colonial authorities remained uncertain of how to improve the material and moral conditions of enslaved persons in accordance with amelioration policy without interfering too much with the authority of slave owners. The patriarchal authority of the master over his slaves became less absolute with amelioration laws in theory, but the state's authority to check the slave owner's power was messy and uneven in practice.

Conclusion: The Unanticipated Outcomes of Amelioration.

The slave societies of the nineteenth-century French Antilles, while fundamentally patriarchal and dominated by an elite white minority, were undergoing a period of transformation that was eroding the old order. Abolitionist measures implemented from the metropole further destabilized Martinique and Guadeloupe by imposing changes that unintentionally created new spaces for enslaved persons to contest the system. Amelioration failed to achieve the aims of metropolitan reformers and policymakers, who envisioned a moral reform project that would prepare slaves for emancipation by encouraging marriage and industrious labor. Instead, enslaved persons actively shaped the scope of amelioration policies demanded their application. Family and gender fundamentally shaped how both slaves and administrators understood, imposed, and adapted reform policies. Moreover, for administrators, efforts to encourage marriage or set high rates for *rachats* revealed how they remained committed to maintaining a stable and obedient labor force for the plantation regime that would withstand the tumult of any abolition project.

But for enslaved persons, amelioration provided a new context for them to push for expanded notions of their rights. Family separation took on a new legal meaning in the 1840s, as female plaintiffs challenged the courts in the colonies and metropole to include manumission as a violation of Article 47—an ironic claim that leveraged their *affranchissements* in a bid to free their families. Under the new policies regulating discipline in amelioration laws, enslaved women demanded criminal investigations into their masters, and in the process convinced some authorities to acknowledge that they were entitled to special consideration as mothers and women under reform policies. It was as Dessalles declared in 1844: “the ideas of philanthropy have come to corrupt our slaves,” in the sense that enslaved people now had “philanthropic”

policies to draw upon as they sought freedom.<sup>180</sup> In unexpected ways, then, enslaved people challenged both their masters and their authorities over the status quo. These conflicts would explode in 1848, as these groups clashed over the meaning of freedom in the republican emancipation project.

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<sup>180</sup> Dessalles, diary entry for January 11, 1844 in *La vie d'un colon de la Martinique* Vol. 3, 102.

## PART II. FAMILY POLITICS IN THE POST-EMANCIPATION ERA

### Chapter Three. “Vive le mariage! Vive la liberté!” Republican Family Politics and Revolutionary Emancipation, 1848-1852

In effort to provide damage-control after news of the 1848 Revolution in France swept through the colonies, bringing with it dangerous rumors regarding abolition, the provisional Director of the Interior of Martinique Louis Thomas Husson delivered a speech which was later published in the official gazettes that confirmed the “good news” of impending emancipation. In his remarks, which were addressed to enslaved people, Husson outlined the republican vision of post-emancipation society, in which work and public order were maintained and “married people are the most honorable and the most dignified.” He declared: “henceforth slaves will marry to have an elderly father, a mother, a wife and children, brothers and sisters, all a family to feed and care for, because then everyone will have to work as everyone will be free.” Husson then ended with a curious slogan: “Long live work! Long live marriage!” before adding the more common republican motto, “Long live liberty!”<sup>1</sup>

Husson’s speech demonstrated how, following the 1848 Revolution, colonial reformers reworked the discourse of family and morality into the republican emancipation project—with marriage as the foundation of a free and republican society. As during the French Revolution, the

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<sup>1</sup> “‘Vive le travail! Vive le mariage! Vive la liberté!’ Proclamation de Louis Thomas Husson, Provisional Director of the Interior, Saint-Pierre, Martinique, March 4, 1848,” in Myriam Cottias, *D’une abolition à l’autre. Anthologie raisonnée de textes consacrés à la seconde abolition de l’esclavage dans les colonies françaises* (Marseille: Agone Éditeur, 1998), 176-9. On April 27, 1848, the Provisional Government issued the abolition decree, however they allowed for a two-month delay in its implementation. See: AN BB/30/1125/A/296, *Décret relatif à l’abolition de l’esclavage dans les colonies et les possessions françaises*, April 27, 1848. Once news of the abolition decree arrived in the colonies, however, slave revolts and spontaneous uprisings forced administrators to implement immediate abolition. Thus, slavery was officially abolished on May 23 in Martinique, May 27 in Guadeloupe, and June 10 in Guiana.

“...les gens mariés sont les plus honorable et les plus dignes...les esclaves désormais se marieront pour avoir un vieux père, une mère, une femme et des enfants, des frères et des sœurs, toute une famille à nourrir et à soigner, parce qu’ainsi tout le monde sera obligé de travailler quand tout le monde sera libre...Vive le travail! Vive le mariage!...Vive la Liberté!”

Second Republic expanded the concept and practice of “citizenship” to include universal male suffrage. Indeed, historians have argued that the 1848 revolution marked the date when mass politics and the concept of modern republican citizenship took concrete shape in France.<sup>2</sup> What revolutionaries in the metropole soon learned was that this more expansive citizenship in the metropole had profound implications for the rest of the empire, as hundreds of thousands of Africans and Antilleans in France’s Atlantic colonies would also claim the rights of French citizenship.<sup>3</sup>

As elsewhere in the post-slavery societies of the Americas, citizenship became a crucial problem during this period, as it signified a universal concept of rights and liberation for formerly enslaved persons—even though in practice, freedpeople, officials, and planters clashed over what these rights should encompass.<sup>4</sup> Family politics framed this contestation over revolutionary citizenship during the republican emancipation project in the French Antilles from 1848-1852, as competing and gendered visions of post-emancipation politics and social order began to take shape.

Historians have often analyzed post-emancipation societies as a period during which policymakers, elites, and freedpeople grappled over conflicting visions of work and freedom. For example, Sidney Mintz has argued that former slaves reconstituted themselves as small-scale peasants in reaction to the plantation economy, although he noted that the coexistence of plantations and peasantries was marked as much by cooperation and interdependence as

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<sup>2</sup> Maurice Agulhon, *The Republican Experiment, 1848-1852* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 12-4.

<sup>3</sup> Semley, *To Be Free and French*, 6.

<sup>4</sup> For studies over contesting citizenship in the post-emancipation era Americas, see: Cooper, Holt, and Scott, *Beyond Slavery*, 1-105; Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, especially 115-78; McGraw, *The Work of Recognition*, 1-50; Semley, *To Be Free and French*, 115-59; and Scott, *Degrees of Freedom*, 30-60 and 154-88.



conflict.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, as Dale Tomich has emphasized in Martinique, post-emancipation peasantries emerged from the slave mode of production. Even at the height of sugar production, planters could not exclusively command all their enslaved workers' labor.<sup>6</sup> Compelled to feed themselves, enslaved people cultivated their own gardens, developed internal markets, provisioned the colonies, accumulated technical, environmental, and mechanical knowledge, and amassed capital as part of the logic of the slave system. These practices, which undergirded the plantation slave economy, did not disappear with emancipation. But Martinique and Guadeloupe could not make the transition to free labor societies without modifying the institutions and labor system that had governed the logic of slavery. Planters and freedpeople alike had to establish a new framework of work and production.

An analysis of family politics provides a point of entry for analyzing these competing visions of post-emancipation economic, social, and civil institutions that consequently took shape in the French Antilles. In the midst of sudden revolutionary tumult, colonial officials and metropolitan reformers seized on the legacy of abolitionist policies from the 1830s and 1840s (which were concerned with ameliorating colonial marriage, family, and work) in order to manage a stable transition from slave to free labor in Martinique and Guadeloupe. Gendered emphasis on racial fusion, moral reform, a revitalized plantation economy, and a docile labor force lay at the core of the emancipation project. Freedpeople, however, remained determined to establish the right to labor and live as they wished—which they developed through their family politics.

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<sup>5</sup> Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations*, 132-3. Holt traces a similar pattern for peasantries and plantations in Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 116-76.

<sup>6</sup> Tomich, "Rethinking the Plantation: Concepts and Histories," *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* Vol. 34, no. 1-2 (2011): 15-39; and idem., "Une petite guinée: Provision Ground and Plantation in Martinique, 1830-1848," *Slavery & Abolition* Vol. 12, no. 1 (1991): 68-91.

The conflict between these groups in republican Martinique and Guadeloupe therefore emerged from the clash between these different systems of family politics. Republicans' vision of a post-slavery plantation was anchored in the principles of marriage and virtuous labor. Freedpeople, on the other hand, developed a peasant economy, which encompassed a plurality of intimate categories and relied on family customs of land tenure. This contestation between two alternative visions of labor and family life during the brief-lived Second Republic framed the broader struggle freedpeople engaged in over the meaning and scope of freedom in the late nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

Like abolitionists reformers, republican administrators in the Antilles emphasized marriage, work, and the family as civilizing institutions that would transform enslaved persons into citizens. Echoing anti-slavery arguments, republican administrators claimed that it was not enough to just abolish slavery. Instead, they envisioned an emancipation project that would rehabilitate the colonies from centuries of enslavement and incorporate them into the new social republic, linking the 1789 principles of “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity” with the 1848 constitutional ideals of “Family, Work, Property, [and] Public Order.”<sup>8</sup> These connections between republican politics, family, and work underpinned the ideological foundation of the post-revolutionary French imperial imagination—even as they were contradictory in practice.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Jason McGraw argues for post-emancipation Colombia, that citizenship emerged from the “work of recognition” in which former slaves contributed to the meaning of citizenship: “the destruction of slavery made possible new modes of belonging for citizens who in turn fashioned practices and meanings for democratic life out of the belonging opened up by emancipation.” McGraw, *The Work of Recognition*, 4.

<sup>8</sup> Hélie, *Constitutions de la France*, 1103.

“Elle a pour principe la liberté, l'égalité et la fraternité. Elle a pour base la famille, le travail, la propriété, l'ordre publique.”

<sup>9</sup> Jennifer Heuer has argued that changes to national citizenship and family law in the early nineteenth century had created contradictions between the concept of French citizen and the duties and responsibilities associated with men and women's assigned status in the family for metropolitan citizens, immigrants, and colonial subjects that persisted through the Third Republic. See: Heuer, *The Family and the Nation*, 199-202.

Policymakers and authorities established colonial schools and national workshops, imposed sharecropping contracts, and organized public commemoration ceremonies. They believed these emancipation policies would transform enslaved persons into citizens and justified some of the more coercive regulations as expedient measures for incorporating freedpeople into the republican body politic as obedient, moral, and industrious members of the new political and imperial order.<sup>10</sup>

In particular, officials focused on promoting marriage, which they envisioned as the bedrock of the nascent post-slavery society. In the post-emancipation era, freedpeople were encouraged to marry in civil ceremonies, which abolitionists argued represented a public signification of their new status as republican citizens. Republican policymakers and administrators claimed that marriage (which stripped women of virtually all legal autonomy) would bolster the plantation economy and enable it to withstand the transition to a post-slavery order.<sup>11</sup> They also embraced interracial marriage as a symbol for racial fusion in the colonies. Racial fusion was an imperial ideology that, at its core, espoused a public order that technically accepted all colonial subjects as free and French, even as authorities reinstated many former labor and disciplinary tools to ensure continued expropriation of colonial subjects. As such, it became an integral component of republican family politics during emancipation.

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<sup>10</sup> Foucault's conceptualization of biopower has influenced my argument. See: Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, 140-3. Elizabeth Colwill's study of Toussaint Louverture's marriage encouragements in Saint-Domingue's post-emancipation labor laws demonstrates suggestive connections between the 1848 republican conceptualization of marriage as the foundation for a new labor order and the late 1790s argument that marriage and family were key to economic revitalization and labor discipline. See: Elizabeth Colwill, "Freedwomen's Familial Politics: Marriage, War and Rites of Registry in Post-Emancipation Saint-Domingue" in Karen Hagemann and Jane Rendall, eds., *Gender, War and Politics: Transatlantic Perspectives, 1775-1830* (New York: Macmillan, 2010), 75-8.

<sup>11</sup> Joan Scott has argued that French citizenship during the 1848 Revolution was consolidated on the continued exclusion of women from the vote and on the basis of men's unrestricted rights over women, which in turn enabled men across classes to acknowledge each other as equal citizens. That is, the creation of the universal French (male) citizen in 1848 was anchored in the continued subjugation of women through marriage and motherhood. See: Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 63-6.

Republican authorities' emphasis on marriage did not, however, mean that they envisioned a bourgeois separation of spheres between man's world of work and woman's domestic world for the freed population. Like British colonial officials, they did not want black women to withdraw their labor from the fields because more enslaved women than men labored in the field gangs.<sup>12</sup> Instead, they proclaimed a family politics that consecrated the role of the working mother—echoing many of the debates over women's work underway in France. As Scott has argued for the Parisian garment trade workers, the 1848 Revolution marked an era when the revolutionaries of the working-classes envisioned new systems of work and family that accommodated women's labor and addressed the social inequalities wrought by capitalism.<sup>13</sup> Republican authorities tasked with implementing the emancipation project similarly adopted a colonial ideology of the working mother in order to maintain plantation production through the family politics they espoused—encapsulated, for example, in granting cash prizes and awards to freedwomen who married, raised large families, and continued to work as field-hands on plantations.

Unsurprisingly, this republican family politics failed to resonate with freedpeople, who sought to work on their own terms and in accordance with their own norms regarding gender, labor, and family life.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, freedpeople advanced their own family politics in the wake of

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<sup>12</sup> See: Bridget Brereton, "Family Strategies, Gender, and the Shift to Wage Labor in the British Caribbean" in Scully and Paton, eds., *Gender and Slave Emancipation in the Atlantic World*, 143-61; and Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 152-3.

<sup>13</sup> Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 93-112. In France, revolutionaries aimed to effect transformational change in gendered labor relations and establish women's "right to work," although, as Scott argues, French women quickly lost this battle, as republican male citizenship was constituted on the equality of all French men, and the continued political exclusion of women. See: Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer*, 60-1. In the French Antilles, colonial authorities espoused women's work insofar as it benefitted plantation production. They rewarded women who remained working on plantations and raised large families (who also labored on the estates), but punished women who sought different work opportunities (for example, with eviction from their homes and gardens).

<sup>14</sup> In Jamaica, for example, freedpeople developed a separation of the sexes labor ideology around certain forms of heavy labor, agricultural tasks, and crops. See: Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 171.

abolition. Freed women and men demanded work arrangements that benefitted their own needs, sought better wages on other estates, and haggled with former owners over the terms of their labor contracts. As they frustrated administrators' efforts to unilaterally re-impose the plantation economy, they continued to practice customs of love and intimacy that included marriage without prioritizing it and accommodated patriarchal nodes of authority while upholding matrifocal autonomy. They created, in other words, alternative institutions that shaped the trajectory of post-emancipation labor, public order, and family politics.

Central to freedpeoples' family politics was the institution of family land, a custom of land tenure and cultivation that had evolved in slavery and anchored peasant families' autonomy after emancipation. Land allowed freedpeople to move away from the estates and create a system of holdings, inheritance, and cultivation that helped to sustain the peasant family. It represented, therefore, the opportunity for freedpeople to adhere to their own customs of work and familial ties and was a practice that colonial administrations struggled to eradicate long after abolition.

Furthermore, men and women experienced the transition from slavery to freedom in different ways, marked by race and gender.<sup>15</sup> For the formerly *gens de couleur* and enslaved, the revolution offered different possibilities—which ranged from seeking greater inclusion in metropolitan politics to the ability to look beyond the plantation for better opportunities. Elite *gens de couleur* rising to local positions of power in the new regime proclaimed racial fusion (symbolized by interracial marriage) as the aspirational principle of the republican regime in the colonies. Racial fusion was supported by republican commissioners, colonial authorities, and

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<sup>15</sup> After 1848, racial categories mostly disappeared from legal, civil, and notarial records in the French Antilles, although certain signifiers (such as place of birth, lack of surname, approximate age, and other factors) often indicated race. In using the terms “free people of color” or “free persons of color” in this chapter, I specifically mean individuals of African origin or descent who were free (by manumission or birth) before abolition in 1848. I use the terms “freedpeople,” “emancipated persons” or “formerly enslaved persons” interchangeably to refer to “*les affranchis*,” or “*les nouveaux libres*,” who were freed in May and June of 1848.

even some white planters because, while it evoked harmony and cooperation, in practice it justified the continued disciplining and expropriation of formerly enslaved persons.<sup>16</sup>

Gender also profoundly shaped this experience, as French and colonial women throughout the empire would not achieve suffrage until a century later.<sup>17</sup> Some scholars have argued that women's exclusion from the formal practice of citizenship (the vote) meant that freed women experienced a transition in oppression from the regime of slavery to gender-based repression in 1848.<sup>18</sup> However, this argument oversimplifies the ways in which freed women demonstrated a remarkable ability to navigate colonial Antillean society and politics in order to advance their and their children's interests. An examination of how planters, reformers, administrators, elites, and freedpeople clashed over their different interpretations of what post-emancipation society should be through family politics illuminates how two competing visions emerged. One was the republican family politics of fusion, marriage, the plantation, and public order, and the other, the matrifocal peasant family able to maintain some—or even full—autonomy from the estates.

#### Revolutionary Emancipation in France, February-April 1848

Fueled by frustration with amelioration policies and a recent petition campaign among working-class Parisians, abolitionists in France increasingly clamored for immediate emancipation from 1845-1848.<sup>19</sup> However, the passage of the Mackau Law had significantly stymied their political agenda. Before February 1848, most abolitionists would not have

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<sup>16</sup> Much to his father's absolute vexation, Adrien Dessalles seemed to embrace racial fusion. He socialized extensively with Bisette and other free men of color, and treated his mixed race children as full members of the family.

<sup>17</sup> Semley, *To Be Free and French*, 9.

<sup>18</sup> Cottias, "Gender and Republican Citizenship in the French West Indies, 1848-1945," 233-45.

<sup>19</sup> Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 479-80.

anticipated achieving many significant goals—if any at all—in the next legislative calendar, let alone full emancipation by April. Indeed, on February 14, a week before the outbreak of the Revolution, anti-slavery reformers planned to raise the issue of establishing a tentative timeline for abolition in the Chambers. In all likelihood, these efforts would have faced daunting resistance.<sup>20</sup> In no hurry to pass any radical measures that could further erode the support of colonial and commercial interests, Guizot and other leading politicians signaled that they would eventually consider the free womb laws proposed by the Broglie Commission—which they viewed as one of the “least costly” and most moderate of abolition plans.<sup>21</sup> The outbreak of the Revolution, however, replaced cautious and conservative legislators with liberal and radical politicians (many of whom had been abolitionists) in positions of power.

The collapse of the Orléans regime in February 1848 was the culmination of years of widespread unrest in France—following several labor uprisings, a series of bad harvests, and pervasive discontent with the regime. Trying to galvanize support for political and social reforms, Parisian-based reformers organized several banquet campaigns in 1847 and 1848 to discuss extending the franchise, tackling government corruption, and debating solutions to labor problems and poverty. When Louis-Philippe refused to champion these reforms and cancelled the banquets in February 1848, Parisian crowds mobilized and erected barricades in the streets. When the National Guard refused to defend the regime, the king abdicated.<sup>22</sup> The Provisional Government, composed of members of the Paris municipality and parliamentary opposition party

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<sup>20</sup> Jennings, *French Anti-Slavery*, 273. For a copy of Guizot’s speech to the Chamber of Deputies, where he rebuffed the possibility of passing any reform measures, see: *Le Moniteur Universel*, February 12, 1848.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 274. Also see: ANOM GEN 173/1388, Dossier of correspondence from colonial delegates Jabrun and Reizet to the President of the Colonial Council Guadeloupe, May 30 and June 29, 1847.

<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Sperber, *The European Revolutions, 1848-1851* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 2005 [first published 1994]), 116.

members, stepped in to consolidate power and stanch the swelling tide of popular insurgency in the city.<sup>23</sup>

Several abolitionists occupied prominent positions in the provisional government, including Louis Blanc, Alphonse Lamartine, Auguste Ledru-Rollin, Henri Wallon, and François Arago, all of whom were formerly affiliated with the SFAE and were intimately familiar with debates on slavery in the colonies. They saw the revolution as an opportunity to address colonial reform in earnest.<sup>24</sup> The Provisional Government quickly established the Commission on Slavery—members included Gatine, Wallon, and Perrinon—and appointed Schœlcher to lead it. They tasked the Commission with developing and proposing legislative measures to prepare the colonies for abolition.

This rapid turn of events galvanized the colonial interest groups in Paris, who feared that slavery was days away from collapse. Beginning in early March, lobbyists inundated the Provisional Government with petitions and letters. While most colonial interest groups (including planters, bankers, and metropolitan-based merchants) recognized that emancipation would be inevitable under the new republican regime, they concentrated on gaining post-abolition concessions: namely, a large indemnity, preserving labor, maintaining order, and protecting white political power in the colonies. Some even held out hope that they could expect

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<sup>23</sup> Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 494-5. On the 1848 Revolution, see: Jo Burr Margadant, “Gender, Vice, and the Political Imaginary in Post-Revolutionary France: Reinterpreting the Failure of the July Monarchy, 1830-1848,” *American Historical Review*, Vol. 104, no. 5, (Dec. 1999): 1461-96; Agulhon, *The Republican Experiment, 1848-1852*, 22-49; François Furet, *La Révolution: de Turgot à Jules Ferry, 1770-1880* (Paris: Hachette, 1988); and Jardin and Tudesq, *Restoration and Reaction*, 191-204.

<sup>24</sup> Schmidt, *Abolitionnistes de l’esclavage et réformateurs des colonies*, 320. Henri Wallon (1812-1904) wrote extensively on the subject of slavery in the French colonies and in antiquity, and served as secretary for the Commission. Alexandre August Ledru-Rollin (1807-1870) was a member of the opposition during the July Monarchy and was in favor of immediate abolition. François Arago was a republican-leaning abolitionist who became Minister of the Navy through May 1848. For more on these individuals see: Joseph Adelaïde, *L’abolition de l’esclavage à la Guadeloupe: Quatre mois de gouvernement dans cette colonie* (Paris: Karthala, 2012), 15-30.



a gradual transition to abolition. Petitioners invoked the memory of revolutionary Saint-Domingue to bolster their arguments that policymakers should proceed cautiously and deliberately (and preferably indefinitely).<sup>25</sup>

Despite these requests for further delay, the Commission spent the next six weeks drafting a comprehensive series of policies that not only abolished slavery, but also enfranchised all formerly enslaved adult males; earmarked twenty-six million francs for building institutions such as schools, national workshops, and hospitals; proposed various social security measures for the elderly and infirm; and created a Labor Day holiday. All of these proposals were adopted in full or modified form in the April 27<sup>th</sup> decree.<sup>26</sup> These proposals also illuminate how the Commission was particularly concerned with reforming work and morality in the colonies.

The chief difficulty the Commission envisioned with emancipation was persuading former slaves to not associate agricultural labor with enslavement: “on the first day of emancipation, the slaves will want to feel truly free, [and] leave the hoe, the symbol of servitude.”<sup>27</sup> Therefore, for abolitionist policymakers, it was critically important to disassociate work from slavery and reframe it as a republican project to entice former slaves to once again take up the hoe and cutlass in the cane fields.<sup>28</sup> Labor day celebrations, farming schools, and

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<sup>25</sup> ANOM FM GEN 153/1277, “Correspondance à propos de la Commission d’abolition de l’esclavage” (1848), and ANOM FM GEN 153/1276, “Questions relatives à l’association entre maître et anciens esclaves après l’abolition de l’esclavage” (1848). These dossiers include petitions from industries, merchants, and chambers of commerce in Nantes, Bordeaux, Dieppe, Saint-Malo, and Dunkerque, among others.

<sup>26</sup> Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 495-6.

<sup>27</sup> Victor Schœlcher and Henri Wallon, “Rapport fait au ministre de la marine et des colonies par la Commission instituée pour préparer l’acte d’abolition immédiate de l’esclavage” in André Julien, ed., *Esclavage et Colonisation: Colonies et Empires Collection Internationale de Documentation Coloniale* (Paris: Presse Universitaires de France, 1948), 143.

<sup>28</sup> Jennings, *French Anti-Slavery*, 276.

national workshops were designed to encourage pride in agricultural work. Family politics also became the targeted focus of these efforts.

The official April 27 abolition decree, which incorporated most of the Commission's proposals, merged abolitionists' earlier focus on morally transforming enslaved persons with republican principles. The decree declared that slavery "is an attack against human dignity" and "a flagrant violation of the Republican dogma of 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.'"<sup>29</sup> The abolition decree thus consciously mobilized the republican reforms that dominated France from February-April 1848 and attempted to translate them into a colonial post-emancipation political and social order. The abolition decree, republican reformers believed, marked a critical first step in placing colonial societies on the path to reform. To this end, the Commission borrowed heavily from the ideas and policies proposed in abolitionist discourse with the overarching aim of reforming the enslaved population, elevating them as workers, encouraging them to form families, and healing racial divisions in colonial societies.

The decrees accompanying the April 27 abolition law outlined these aims. For instance, to mediate the relationship between planters and workers, the law provided for the formation of adjudication bodies (*jurys cantonaux*), which would be composed of both proprietors and laborers in equal proportion, to arbitrate labor disagreements.<sup>30</sup> Other edicts provided for state care of the abandoned or kinless infirm and elderly in hospices, but relocated orphans to "farms or other institutions of instruction [plantations] to receive an intellectual and professional

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<sup>29</sup> AN BB/30/1125/A/296, *Décret relatif à l'abolition de l'esclavage dans les colonies et les possessions françaises*, April 27, 1848.

"Considérant que l'esclavage est un attentat contre la dignité humaine... Qu'il est une violation flagrante du dogme républicain: 'Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité.'"

<sup>30</sup> Schœlcher and Wallon, "Rapport fait au ministre," 149; *Gazette Officielle de la Guadeloupe*, July 10, 1848; and N. 289, Décret qui institue des jurys cantonaux dans les colonies, in Émile Carrey, *Recueil Complet des Actes du Gouvernement Provisoire, Février, Mars, Avril, Mai 1848* (Paris: Auguste Durand, Libraire, 1848), 325-9.

[agricultural] education.”<sup>31</sup> In these provisions, coerced labor in state workshops was cloaked in the guise of public responsibility—the decree stipulated care for the most vulnerable while incorporating them into a broader program of moral reform. Likewise, the decree ordered the creation of public schools to educate youth in “moral, civil, and political life,” and stipulated that colonial schools should emphasize the “advantages and nobility of agricultural work.” Truants were to be reported to the *mairie* and disciplined.<sup>32</sup>

The laws also created a Labor Day holiday, to be celebrated on the anniversary of emancipation, which policymakers believed would “erase” the “degradation with which servitude branded agriculture” by publicly fêting cultivators with cash prizes and parades to reward good behavior and celebrate industriousness, liberty, and morality.<sup>33</sup> The Provisional Government also established polices against vagabondage and mendicancy to clear colonial cities of social undesirables and coerce formerly enslaved persons into labor contracts with planters. Thus, the Provisional Government declared free labor the “first guarantee of morality and order in liberty,” and held mendicancy and vagrancy as irreconcilable with the social good. The decree defined beggars and itinerants as dishonorable persons to be placed in state workshops for up to six months. During their imprisonment, those convicted of vagrancy would

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<sup>31</sup> N. 287, Décret concernant les vieillards, les infirmes, et les orphelins dans les colonies, in Carrey, *Recueil Complet des Actes du Gouvernement Provisoire*, 322.

“Les orphelins abandonnés seront places dans des fermes agricoles ou tous autres établissements d’instruction publique pour y recevoir une éducation intellectuelle et professionnelle.”

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, N. 28, Décret concernant l’instruction publique aux colonies, 324.

“...la préparation de la jeunesse à la vie morale, civile et politique...”

“Le Gouvernement fera faire, pour les écoles des colonies, des livres élémentaires où l’on mettra en relief les avantages et la noblesse des travaux de l’agriculture.”

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, N.294, Décret qui institue une fête du travail aux colonies, 332-4.

“Considérant que l’esclavage a déshonoré le travail aux colonies; Qu’il importe d’effacer par tous les moyens possible le caractère de dégradation dont la servitude a marqué l’agriculture...”

be set to work as “employees for the profit of the State, in public works [and] in *disciplinary work gangs* [on plantations].”<sup>34</sup>

Emancipation thus contained several contradictions surrounding economic, social, and political development in the Antilles.<sup>35</sup> At the core of the project was an ironic sense of civic duty that policymakers imposed on freedpeople. Emancipatory citizenship proclaimed the incompatibility of republicanism with slavery even as it established coercive labor and surveillance measures designed to keep freedpeople from fully exercising their political and social autonomy. In creating and implementing republican colonial social and political institutions, it also represented the culmination of the French anti-slavery movement that had held that moralization policies would “teach” enslaved persons how to be free.

#### Revolution and Emancipation in the Antilles, March-June 1848

News of the 1848 Revolution shocked the Antilles. Dessalles, for example, recorded his utter incredulity in late March: “did we imagine our astonishment, our amazement?”<sup>36</sup> In the following days, whites, enslaved persons, and free people of color all eagerly waited for information on the new regime. Many seemed to expect that with “this Government, this measure [emancipation] will be one of the first acts of the Republic.”<sup>37</sup> An atmosphere of

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, N. 291 Décret relative à la repression de la mendicité et du vagabondage aux colonies, 330. Emphasis in the original.

“Considérant que le travail est la première garantie de la morale et de l’ordre dans la liberté.”

“Ils seront, Durant ce temps, employés au profit de l’État, à des travaux publics, dans des *ateliers de discipline*...”

<sup>35</sup> Nelly Schmidt, “L’élaboration des décrets de 1848 application immédiate et conséquences à long terme,” in Marcel Dorigny, ed., *Les abolitions de l’esclavage*, 352.

<sup>36</sup> Dessalles, diary entry for March 27, 1848 in *La vie d’un colon* Vol. 4, 26.  
“Se figure-t-on notre étonnement, notre stupéfaction?”

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

“Il n’est pas encore question de l’émancipation, mais avec ce Gouvernement, cette mesure sera l’un des premiers actes de la République.”

increasingly tense impatience permeated the cities and plantations. As one observer anxiously proclaimed: “the slaves are waiting. I believe that the Government of the Metropole must hasten to take measures to prove to them that it decided to make them citizens. *Let France remember that we are on a volcano.*”<sup>38</sup> Isolated skirmishes between enslaved persons, free people of color, and whites erupted sporadically, heightening widespread anxiety about public disorder and the mounting threat of revolutionary violence erupting at any moment.<sup>39</sup> In April, Martinique experienced riots in post offices as crowds snatched newspapers and letters out of the hands of the mail carriers, eagerly seeking the latest news from the metropole.<sup>40</sup>

In response, colonial officials agreed that the first priority was to maintain public order and mitigate expectations, particularly those of enslaved people, who were refusing to work. In vain, officials attempted to impose order. In Guadeloupe, Governor Layrle wrote to the Minister of the Navy: “in the middle of the general tranquility enjoyed by the colony, is a visible malaise that reigns in the work gangs which wait with great impatience for the announcement of freedom.”<sup>41</sup> Dessalles noted that, despite his attempts to maintain a regular regime, his enslaved workers were too “impatient to enjoy freedom... On the plantations, the slaves refuse to work, we

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<sup>38</sup> Excerpt from a letter from Pointe-à-Pitre in Julien, ed., *Esclavage et Colonisation*, 159.

<sup>39</sup> See: Dessalles, diary entry for April 3, 1848, in *La vie d'un colon* Vol. 4, 27-8, where he recorded public disorders in Marin, when a “slave threw a rock at a judge” and in the ensuing fight, a gendarme was “seriously injured.” In the same entry, he also mentioned renewed suspicions among *colons* that slaves and free people of color were preparing to poison officials and planters.

<sup>40</sup> Dessalles described one such riot after a packet boat delivered mail in Martinique. See: *ibid*, April 10, 1848, 29-30.

<sup>41</sup> Governor Layrle to the Minister of the Navy, April 28, 1848, as cited in Daniel Cleach, *Le Passage de la Société esclavagiste à la Société post-esclavagiste aux Antilles aux XIXe siècle: Colloque d'histoire antillaise: le passage de la société esclavagiste à la société post-esclavagiste aux Antilles au XIXe siècle*, edited by Henri Bangou, et., al., (Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe: Centre d'enseignement supérieur littéraire, 1969), 78.

“Au milieu de la tranquillité Générale dont jouit la colonie, il est visible qu'un certain malaise règne dans les ateliers qui attendant avec une vive impatience la liberté annoncé.”

are not able to finish this harvest, and next year's is well-compromised."<sup>42</sup> Rather than "impatient to enjoy freedom," this entry can be interpreted as evidence for how his workers already considered themselves free.

Husson (Martinique's Provisional Director of the Interior) tried to temper the problem of work stoppages by declaring to enslaved persons in April that "nothing is changed up to the present. You remain slaves until the promulgation of the [emancipation] law." In the meantime, he urged enslaved people to continue laboring "under the prescriptions of the [current] law" for their masters, stating "you have to prove that you understand that freedom is not the right to idly roam around, but the right to work for yourself."<sup>43</sup> With his reference to "vagabonder," Husson equated plantation work stoppages with vagrancy, and thus disparaged the men and women who, under the assumption they were free, were beginning to move throughout the countryside to visit each other and head for the cities.<sup>44</sup> Dessalles remarked of this increasingly visible mobility that the streets of Saint Pierre were "more congested than ever with slaves, who run about in every direction."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Dessalles, diary entry for May 20, 1848 in *La vie d'un colon* Vol. 4, 40.

"Les esclaves sont impatients de jouir de la liberté, et les hommes de couleur les poussent. Sur les habitations, les nègres refusent le travail; on ne pourra pas finir cette récolte, et celle de l'année prochaine est bien compromise."

<sup>43</sup> *Journal Officiel de la Martinique*, April 5, 1848. Husson's speech is also cited in Butel, *Histoire des antilles françaises*, 381.

"Ainsi, rien n'est changé, jusqu'à présent. Vous demeurez esclaves jusqu'à la promulgation de la loi... Jusqu'alors, il faut que vous travailliez d'après les prescriptions de la loi pour le bénéfice des maîtres. Il faut prouver que vous comprenez que la liberté n'est pas le droit de vagabonder, mais bien le droit de travailler pour soi-même."

<sup>44</sup> For examples of reports of slaves abandoning plantations and discussion of work stoppage in the southern and eastern communes of Martinique, see: ANOM FM SG MAR 56/464, Governor Claude Rostoland à le Ministre de la Marine et des Colonies, "Révolte accompagnée de meurtres et d'incendies. Abolition de l'esclavage. Situation nouvelle de la Martinique," May 28, 1848. Julie Saville traces a similar shift in the dynamic between enslaved persons and masters during the final weeks of the American Civil War in South Carolina, when the days of the old order were clearly numbered, and enslaved persons moved freely throughout the rural countryside. See: Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction*, 5-25.

<sup>45</sup> Dessalles, diary entry for May 19 and May 21, 1848, 39-40.

"Les rues sont encombrées plus que jamais par les nègres, qui les parcourent en tous sens."

Overseers and planters responded by imposing curfews and forbidding drumming and communal gatherings. However, it was clear to most observers that there was little they could do.<sup>46</sup> By early May, the violence long feared by local colonial officials and planters erupted in Saint-Pierre, Martinique, when an enslaved man named Romain decided to beat his drum, violating the manager's orders that forbade drumming on the plantation. After the manager denounced him to the mayor of Saint Pierre, Romain was arrested on May 20, and the "entire work gang" accompanied him as he was conducted to the Saint-Pierre prison—their numbers grew as both free and enslaved workers joined them.<sup>47</sup> Thousands of people armed with cutlasses gathered outside the jail, which prompted the Deputy Mayor Pory-Papy (a free man of color) to declare Romain free. Initially this seemed to appease the crowds, but riots broke out a few hours later as rumors spread that a group of whites in the city was planning an ambush. The subsequent uprising from May 20-22 left several people dead. As Dessalles described it, the conflict in St Pierre and neighboring Prêcheur forced over 300 local whites to seek refuge onboard *Le Ballochant* offshore. Convinced that there were no other options, Governor Rostoland (whom Dessalles described as "incapable") declared immediate emancipation as an emergency measure on May 23.<sup>48</sup>

As Rostoland subsequently reported to the Minister of the Navy, "the social transformation of Martinique is carried out. I had to proclaim the general emancipation of slaves

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<sup>46</sup> Semley, *To Be Free and French*, 141-3.

<sup>47</sup> Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique*, 390.

<sup>48</sup> See: Dessalles, diary entries for May 22 and May 23 in *La vie d'un colon* Vol. 4, 40-2. For further detail on the events leading to the uprising, see: Semley, *To Be Free and French*, 142-3.

in this colony to stop anarchy, fire, murder, and pillage.”<sup>49</sup> Fearing similar violence, the government in Guadeloupe followed suit, promulgating abolition a few days later on May 27. The two-month transition period as outlined in the April 27 decree thus collapsed when enslaved persons took action to force the local officials to promulgate emancipation.<sup>50</sup> Neither the colonial administrators who implemented emancipation law or the planters who decried it acknowledged that it was the revolutionary actions of enslaved people that had successfully forced their hand.

### Long Live Marriage: Republican Family Politics

It was into this volatile environment that metropolitan-appointed Commissioners François Perrinon and Adolphe Gatine arrived in Martinique and Guadeloupe, respectively, to establish the republican post-slavery order in early June.<sup>51</sup> In his instructions to the commissioners on May 7, Minister Arago outlined their duty to “peacefully inaugurate fraternity and free labor among the French colonial populations,” conferred on them the authority to promulgate all of the abolition decrees, and charged them with ensuring public order and security.<sup>52</sup> Arago directed the commissioners to keep him closely informed of their observations and experiences in the colonies. Once they arrived, Gatine and Perrinon toured the communes in

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<sup>49</sup> ANOM FM SG MAR 56/464, Governor Claude Rostoland à le Ministre de la Marine et des Colonies, “Révolte accompagnée de meurtres et d’incendies. Abolition de l’esclavage. Situation nouvelle de la Martinique,” May 28, 1848. Rostoland’s report also corroborates Dessalles’ account of the flight of whites to offshore safety. “La transformation sociale de la Martinique est opérée. J’ai dû proclamer l’émancipation Générale des esclaves dans cette colonie pour y arrêter l’anarchie, l’incendie, le meurtre, et le pillage.”

<sup>50</sup> See: Henri Wallon, *L’Émancipation et l’esclavage* (Paris: Charles Douniol, 1861), 7 for this envisioned transition.

<sup>51</sup> Perrinon was mixed-race and born in Martinique in 1812 to a woman of color, but had completed much of his education in France and had served as a Navy Artillery Officer. He had frequently corresponded with Schœlcher over abolitionism. See: Schmidt, *Abolitionnistes de l’esclavage*, 243.

<sup>52</sup> Minister François Arago “Dossier d’instructions remis aux commissaires généraux de la République avant leur départ vers les colonies, 7 mai 1848,” as published in Schmidt, *Abolitionnistes de l’esclavage*, 1003. “Réaliser cette œuvre avec succès, inaugurer pacifiquement la fraternité et le travail libre parmi les populations françaises d’outre-mer...”



person, reporting back to Paris on the conditions of the population and their ongoing efforts to establish the provisions of the April 27 decree. They oversaw the creation of the state work gangs, schools, and labor courts, and the registration of adult males on the parish electoral rolls.<sup>53</sup> Their reports from the tours reveal that efforts to implement these republican institutions and the general conditions, tensions, and problems in the weeks and months following emancipation were highly localized.

On their inspection tours of each commune in Martinique and Guadeloupe, for example, the commissioners encountered a variety of problems. Gatine observed in Abymes that the lieutenant of the gendarmerie had to expel twenty-nine troublesome workers from the Lacroix plantation.<sup>54</sup> In Martinique, addressing the problem of work stoppages in one of his first reports to the Minister of the Navy, Perrinon noted that a “few plantations had been devastated,” and he had to expel several workers who refused labor contracts but still wanted to remain living in their huts and tend to their subsistence plots. On the other hand, Perrinon continued, on other estates, workers asked him to “hasten the return of their master to his properties, which they have respected and to which they still want to remain attached as free workers.”<sup>55</sup> While these reports indicate that freedpeople responded in varying ways to the labor provisions of the emancipation

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<sup>53</sup> ANOM FM SG GUA 6/68, Commissaire Gatine à le Ministre de la Marine et des Colonies, “État de la colonie,” Basse-Terre, July 11, 1848.

<sup>54</sup> Gatine, *Abolition de l’esclavage à la Guadeloupe quatre mois de gouvernement dans cette colonie* (Paris: Chez France, Libraire, 1849), 44-5.

<sup>55</sup> ANOM FM SG MAR 56/464, Commissaire Général Perrinon à la Ministre de la Marine et des Colonies, “Arrivé du Commissaire Général de la Martinique, ses premières operations,” Fort-de-France June 9, 1848. For the difficulties he describes, see: op. cit., “Tournée du Commissaire Général dans les communes du Nord,” Fort-de-France, July 25, 1848; op. cit., “Tournée dans les communes du Lamentin et du Robert,” Fort-de-France, August 9, 1848.

“Si d’une part quelques habitations ont été dévastées, de l’autre plusieurs ateliers...pour me prier de hâter le retour de leur maître sur ses propriétés qu’ils ont respectées et auxquelles ils veulent encore rester attachés, comme travailleurs libres.”

decree—which, if Perrinon is to be believed, were conditional on their prior relationship with a planter—colonial officials were determined to universally apply the labor laws throughout each commune. The authorities did this by focusing their efforts on moralization campaigns.

In the months following abolition, the local government enjoined parish priests to preach the virtues of labor and marriage to former slaves.<sup>56</sup> For example, while delivering a sermon in Guadeloupe, Abbé Dugoujon declared to freedpeople in attendance: “you have been the slaves of men...and the Republic has made you free. Do not be slaves to bad inclinations, laziness and idleness. Go to work with ardor and perseverance, for your happiness, for your moralization, for the honor of your country and for those who lead you in the ways of salvation or those of civil and political freedom.”<sup>57</sup> Dugoujon wanted to impress upon freedpeople the importance of marriage for work and public order, proclaiming “marriage is the principle of prudence, work, and economy, the foundation of all social order, which a country that is beginning to blush with the ignominies of concubinage, after having been prey to them for a long time...is advancing with great strides on the path of regeneration.” He concluded by urging priests and officials to encourage new citizens to marry with “the sanction of law and religion.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> *Gazette officielle de la Guadeloupe*, September 5, 1848.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

“Vous avez été les esclaves des hommes, leur a-t-il dit, et la République vous a fait libres. Ne soyez pas les esclaves des mauvais penchants, de la paresse et de l’oisiveté. Livrez-vous au travail avec ardeur et persévérance, pour votre bonheur, pour votre moralisation, pour l’honneur de votre pays et de ceux qui vous conduisent des les voies du salut ou dans celles de la liberté civile et politique.”

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, October 10, 1848.

“...le mariage est encore le principe de la prévoyance, du travail, et de l’économie; le fondement de tout ordre social, et qu’une contrée qui commence à rougir des ignominies du concubinage, après en avoir été longtemps la proie, a su comprendre le véritable progrès et s’avance à grands pas dans la voie de la régénération. Voilà pourquoi nous n’avons cessé, depuis le jour où il nous a été donné de remettre le pied sur le rivage de la Guadeloupe, d’exhorter nos prêtres à engager les nouveaux Citoyens de faire consacrer leurs unions par la sanction de la loi et de la religion.”

Dugoujon's exhortations echoed those of abolitionists in the 1830s and 1840s, when they argued that promoting marriage among enslaved persons would eradicate "ignominious" informal unions and inculcate in enslaved men and women "the spirit of family and the attachment to the soil they cultivate and enrich."<sup>59</sup> This argument formed the backbone of the 1845 amelioration legislation that was designed to encourage enslaved people to form legitimate families, maintain deferential obedience to authority, and work industriously. Marriage as a moral injunction was rendered visible in the following lithograph designed in 1847 in a piece of abolitionist propaganda for the colonies:



IMG 3.1. *Mariages des esclaves, achat de dessins lithographiés pour être envoyés aux colonies, 1847*<sup>60</sup>

<sup>59</sup> *Revue des Colonies*, August, 1835, 76.

“S’il est avantageux à la Société colonial d’améliorer le moral des esclaves, il ne l’est pas moins de leur inculquer l’esprit de famille et l’attachement au sol qu’ils cultivent et fécondent.”

<sup>60</sup> The Minister of the Navy commissioned this lithograph for priests to distribute copies of it among enslaved peoples in the colonies. There were 1,000 copies ordered on June 21, 1847. For the purchase order and the lithograph, see: ANOM FM GEN 372/ 2197.

Originally commissioned in the wake of the Mackau Law as part of the government's effort to promote marriage as amelioration policy, this lithograph provides key insight into how policymakers understood marriage as a civilizing process. The enslaved bride and groom are sumptuously dressed in European wedding clothes, with the bride appearing meek and deferential to her spouse. The soldier with the bayonet in the background reminds the viewer of the colonial law and order. The Catholic ceremony injects an aura of sanctity and morality—the marriage is a sacrament performed in a church and blessed by the priest. Witnesses include both whites (presumably, the master and his family) as well as other enslaved persons who are similarly attired in fancy European clothing—suggesting harmonious relations between the plantocracy and their enslaved workers. The happy harmony in this image is anchored thus anchored by this social hierarchy.

The foreground depicts an enslaved family, identified by their bare feet, who represent the patriarchal family unit that awaits the bride and groom. The enslaved wife gazes adoringly at her husband and their three children—her serenity conveys domestic bliss. In the background of the image, the elderly and smiling enslaved couple kneeling together in prayer represent the culmination of a life of moral order that had been anchored through a happy and stable marriage. Taken together, the lithograph projects an image of marriage as the embodiment of racial harmony, patriarchy, and moral sobriety that metropolitan abolitionists envisioned would prepare the enslaved population for the responsibilities and duties of freedom.

With emancipation, this abolitionist vision of marriage as a civilizing tool transformed into a colonial republican family politics that was affixed to work, property, and public order. Perhaps the most comprehensive summary of republican family politics is found in a priest's published sermon to the "New Citizens of Guadeloupe." Monseigneur Guyard wrote: "You

know that society is not able to subsist without order, obedience to the law, respect for property, and love of work.” These were the four most fundamental civic duties to which all freedpeople should adhere. Furthermore, Guyard added, “you know that after a day’s work, you will find relaxation and true happiness only in a durable and holy union with a virtuous woman, who will give you children, who will pay you for your devotion with gentle caresses and later will acquit their debts to you by caring for and loving you in your honored old age. Well, I am sure among those of you who have no family, you will want to create one according to the desires of society and the dictates of religion.”<sup>61</sup>

Thus, order, obedience, property, and labor were civic responsibilities anchored in marriage and family. Guyard depicted marriage and parenthood as institutions that recreated labor, property, and order because they rejuvenated the worker (which in turn, regenerated the colony). The worker’s love of and devotion to his family were their own rewards—and ensured the reproduction of the labor force as his children would grow up to become workers themselves in order to “care and love” him in “honored old age.” Marriage to virtuous women, contracted according to the “desires of society,” would therefore reconstitute civic life. To work and to marry, then, Guyard implied, should be the goal of all freed persons who desired to be truly free.

Many reformers were optimistic that, unlike amelioration, the moralizing measures behind republican family politics would naturally progress in tandem with the emancipation

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<sup>61</sup> “Allocution du préfet apostolique Guyard,” in Oruno D. Lara, ed., *La liberté assassinée: Guadeloupe, Guyane, Martinique, et Le Réunion en 1848-1856* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2005), 585.

“Vous savez que la Société ne peut subsister sans l’ordre, l’obéissance aux lois, le respect pour la propriété et l’amour du travail. C’est vers ces quatre devoirs du citoyen que vous dirigerez sans cesse les regards et les efforts de votre liberté. Vous savez qu’après une journée de travail, vous ne trouverez de délassément et de bonheur vrai que dans une union durable et sainte avec une femme vertueuse, qui vous donnera des enfants, lesquels paieront votre dévouement par de douces caresses, et plus tard acquitteront leurs dettes envers vous en entourant de soins et d’amour votre vieillesse honorée. Eh bien, je suis sûr, ceux qui parmi vous, n’ont pas encore de famille, voudront s’en créer une selon les désirs de la société et le préceptes de la religion.”

project. Schœlcher, for instance, argued in 1849 that freedpeople had “made more progress toward civilization in fifteen months than in the last fifteen years of slavery, despite all the laws rendered in vain during this period to improve their lot.” Indeed, he asserted, freedpeople recognized that marriage was the cornerstone of post-emancipation social life, stating that “legitimate unions, of which there were almost no examples of during slavery, are now very frequent among negroes. They view marriage as the consecration of their new and happy condition: ‘We are free, we marry,’ they say.”<sup>62</sup> There would be more marriages, Schœlcher asserted, if they were less expensive—that is, if freedpeople understood that they did not need to celebrate lavish weddings and if the government reduced or eradicated the expensive cost involved in registering and notarizing marriage certificates.<sup>63</sup>

It is difficult to parse the claim of expensive frivolity alluded to in Schœlcher’s characterization of black weddings. Certainly, many couples celebrated a marriage with a wedding feast—even in slavery. The 1840 slave wedding party Dessalles described in his diary was, by his own account, an extravagant affair.<sup>64</sup> While the slave wedding at *Nouvelle Cité* reflected more on Dessalles’ status as a benevolent, wealthy, master, rather than on the tastes of the enslaved bride and groom, the way he describes the festivities as a matter of course in his account implies that such ceremony and pomp in slave weddings were not unheard of.

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<sup>62</sup> Schœlcher, *La vérité aux ouvriers*, 277.

“Ils ont fait plus de progrès vers la civilisation en quinze mois que pendant les quinze dernières années de l’esclavage, malgré toutes les lois vainement rendues dans cette période pour améliorer leur sort... Les unions légitimes, dont il n’existait presque pas d’exemple du temps de l’esclavage, sont aujourd’hui très-fréquentes parmi les nègres. Ils regardant le mariage comme la consécration de leur nouvelle et heureuse condition: ‘Nous libres, nous mariés,’ disent-ils.”

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

“Ils se formerait bien plus des liens réguliers encore si la misère n’était extrême, car les travailleurs des Antilles ont le préjugé de se croire mal mariés à moins de faire de grandes noces.”

<sup>64</sup> Dessalles, diary entry for January 11, 1840 in *La vie d’un colon* Vol. 2, 229. This wedding is discussed in detail in Chapter Two, pp. 126-7.

Indeed, Governor de Mogès in 1839 made a similar observation about the opulence of some slave weddings when he observed one on the Mailles plantation. He wrote that “the newlyweds displayed a luxury, the details of which are amazing and make you smile or groan.” In this particular ceremony, for example, the bride and groom seemed to have wanted a “large parade on horseback, with parasols and to change into completely new outfits three times during the day of the ceremony.” While he acknowledged that such “sumptuous slaves, rich in the industry which they exercise under the protection of their masters,” were undoubtedly the “exception and not the rule,” these displays of wealth, luxury, and ceremony indicated that “the common slave has risen to a certain degree of well-being.”<sup>65</sup>

For the post-emancipation period, historian Raymond Boutin has described the marriage feast as an opportunity to “display one’s wealth, put on one’s dresses and hats to be admired, to make love, to drink, to sing, and to dance,” indicating that they were community celebrations where one dressed their best and gave lavish feasts, to signal both status and generosity.<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, anthropologist Michael Horowitz recounted a secret wedding in a peasant community in twentieth-century Morne-Paysan Martinique. A peasant couple sneaked off early one morning to marry at the local church, away from prying eyes in their village, and then carried on with the rest of their day as usual. They were ashamed to share their news, Horowitz

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<sup>65</sup> ANOM FM SG MAR 7/88, Gouverneur de Mogès à le Ministre de la Marine et des Colonies, “Au sujet d’une visite générale dans l’île, Saint-Jacques,” March 15, 1839.

“Il est telle habitation, dans laquelle je me suis arrêté (M. Peter Mailles)... Dans cette même habitation, à l’occasion d’une noce, les mariés ont déployé un luxe dont les détails étonnent et font sourire ou gémir, en voulant, par exemple, avoir un nombreux cortège à cheval, avec des parasols, et changer trois fois de costumes entièrement neufs, pendant la journée de la cérémonie. Assurément, ces fastueux esclaves, riches de l’industrie qu’ils exercent sous la protection de leurs maîtres, son tenu tête de leur classe, en composant l’exception et non la règle; mais ces exemples aident, cependant, à concevoir que le commun des esclaves s’est élevé à un certain degré de bien être...”

<sup>66</sup> Raymond Boutin, *La population de la Guadeloupe de l’émancipation à l’assimilation (1848-1946)* (Guyane: Ibis Rouge Editions, 2006, 247.

claimed, because they could not afford a large fête—indicating that, even for the rural peasantry, wedding celebrations were supposed to be somewhat expensive.<sup>67</sup> Perhaps in the case of the post-emancipation French Antilles, then, freedpeople tended to delay marriage until they could acquire the material means to establish and maintain a household (such as a house and a garden). Equally likely, however, was that marriage was just one of many possible conjugal options accepted and practiced among freedpeople.

For republican reformers and policymakers, however, expensive black weddings impeded their vision of family politics from taking effect in the colonies. Indeed, colonial officials viewed marriage and the patriarchal family as the foundational institutions that rendered freedpeople legally recognizable. In June, Commissioner Gatine directed local magistrates to inscribe Guadeloupe's new citizens into the civil registers, where they were to be given surnames. The resulting *Registres de l'état civil des nouveaux libres de la Guadeloupe*, compiled by the mayors of each commune, constituted legal recognition of freedpeople and their new civil and political rights. In these entries, the notaries not only entered the new surnames of each freed person, but also their approximate or actual age, occupation, place of birth, and residence—often in ways that rendered “the constitution of families” visible.<sup>68</sup> That is, former slaves were often given the same surname if they had children together, and these family ties are made explicitly clear throughout the registers. Taken together, they reveal several perplexing and striking insights into how colonial officials attempted to impose a patriarchal family structure on former slaves and

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<sup>67</sup> Horowitz, *Morne-Paysan, Peasant Village in Martinique*, 52. Scholars of Jamaica have argued that marriages among freedpeople there tended to be for couples who had acquired some means and wanted to attain a certain degree of respectability. See: Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 170-1; and Besson, *Martha Brae's Two Histories*, 282-9.

<sup>68</sup> Fallope, *Esclaves et citoyens*, 367-9 (also for an overview of how the colonial administration organized the registration of freedpeople).



how freed men and women constructed their own intimate bonds during the immediate post-abolition period.

For instance, in Pointe-à-Pitre, notary Charles Leger registered former slaves Louis, Constance, and Marie, all listed as living in the city (whether or not they lived together is unclear). Louis, a forty-one-year-old blacksmith, had been born in Africa, as had Constance, a thirty-eight-year-old laundress. They recognized Marie, a fourteen-year-old hairdresser, as their daughter, and Leger gave all three the “patrimonial name of Gelcount,” despite the fact that Louis and Constance were not married.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, in Abymes, deputy mayor Zénon registered François, Cécilia (called Zéline), and their daughter Joséphine. Although the inscription notes that François lived on the Boisripeaux plantation, while Zéline and Joséphine lived on L’Esperance plantation, Zénon gave all three the surname Miné.<sup>70</sup> The entry is not clear as to the nature of the relationship between François and Zéline. They could have been living separately because they belonged to different masters or had otherwise been separated while enslaved. Perhaps they considered themselves a family unit without requiring either co-residence and/or monogamy, and Zéline and François “visited” with each other. However, it is equally plausible that they were no longer in a conjugal union and were separated by choice. The circumstances of their relationship, however, did not seem to affect Zénon’s decision to consider them together as an indissoluble nuclear family unit: the categories he ascribed to freedpeople could not accommodate the possible range of intimate and familial arrangements.

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<sup>69</sup> AN 472 Mi 13, *Registres de l’état civil des nouveaux libres de la Guadeloupe*, Pointe-à-Pitre, Act 1, August 28, 1848, entries #12-14.

<sup>70</sup> AN 472 Mi 1, *Registres de l’état civil des nouveaux libres de la Guadeloupe*, Abymes, Act 2, August 31, 1848, entries #35-37.

Some of the most suggestive entries occur when single mothers registered themselves and their children without male partners, giving colonial officials no choice but to register them under matronyms rather than patronyms. Take, for example, the case of Emélie, called Marie. Fifty-five years old at the time of emancipation, she was born on the property of the Widow Tardif in the commune of Gosier, Guadeloupe. Alexandre Kayser, mayor of Gosier, gave Marie the surname Dino. During her registration, Marie Dino claimed four adult children: Sylvestre, Sabine, Anne-Marie, and Sabin. All four children worked as cultivators on the same estate, and were also given the surname Dino, thus conferring upon Marie and her family legal personhood under the same matronym.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, in Le Moule fifty-two-year-old Toinette, called Petite, recognized her children Joachine, Marie Catherine, and Fanchonnette (all of whom lived on the Zévallos plantation). Twenty-six-year-old Joachine also recognized her seven-year-old son, Théodore. And so, mother, three daughters, and grandchild were all given the surname Flamel.<sup>72</sup> These examples of matrifocal families are hardly singular. Just in the case of Le Moule from August to November 1848 alone, the registers contain over 1,600 entries of matronyms conferred on female-headed households.<sup>73</sup>

The registers also indicate that not all freed men and women rejected marriage. Marginal entries added to the registers in later months and years demonstrate that some mothers and fathers united by surnames did eventually marry. This was the case with Michaux and Julienne on the Couronne plantation in Le Moule. Michaux and Julienne declared their children (Monlouis and Rose) and all were given the surname Galtier. On April 30, 1850, Michaux and

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<sup>71</sup> AN 472 Mi 5, *Registres de l'état civil des nouveaux libres de la Guadeloupe*, Gosier, September 2, 1848, Entries #9-13.

<sup>72</sup> AN 472 Mi 10, Le Moule, Act 14, September 8, 1848, Entries #37-41.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, Actes 1-53.

Julienne Galtier again entered the Le Moule civil records again when they legally married, conferring legitimacy on Monlouis and Rose.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, on August 29, Leger inscribed a forty-six-year-old carpenter named Régis from Pointe-à-Pitre, who was given the surname Roval. On the following day Leger also inscribed Julie, a twenty-eight-year-old African, and her children Augustine, Juliette, Mirtile, Constance, and Aléxandre. Following this entry, Leger wrote, “here intervened Mr. Roval (Régis)...inscribed yesterday in the present register, who declared along with the named Julie recognition of their children, the named Augustine, Juliette, Mirtile, Constance, and Aléxandre.” Julie and her children were also given the “same patrimonial name of Roval.” On October 9, 1849, Régis and Julie Roval legally married and recognized their children.<sup>75</sup>

While little else can be known about the Roval family, records suggest that freed people, unlike officials, did not necessarily regard these marriages as indissoluble.<sup>76</sup> Colonial administrators and observers noted that when freedpeople did marry, they sometimes sought to dissolve their marriages after a short period of time in order to enter into new relationships. For instance, a mayor in Guadeloupe reported that when performing a wedding, he remembered that he had married the groom to another woman six months’ previously. Astonished, the mayor asked him if his wife was dead, and the man replied, “No, she is in Marie-Galante. That woman

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid, November 14, 1848, Entries #6-9.

<sup>75</sup> AN 472 Mi 13, Pointe-à-Pitre, Acte 2, August 29, 1848, Entry #104 and Acte 3, August 30, 1848, Entries #179-184.

“Ici est intervenu le sieur Roval (Regis) inscrite à la date du jour d’hier, n#104, [sous] le présent registre, lequel aussi que la dite Julie a reconnu comme elle pour leurs enfants, les dits Augustine, Juliette, Mirtile, Constance, et Aléxandre, et nous avons donné aux dite Julie, Augustine, Juliette, Mirtile, Constance et Aléxandre le même nom patronymique de Roval. ”

<sup>76</sup> Kaye has argued that different categories of intimacy imposed different obligations and expectations between black partners in Mississippi, and that neither monogamy nor permanent conjugality were expected in some arrangements. See: Kaye, *Joining Places*, 51-2.

was no good; [so] I left her. This one is better.” The mayor refused to complete the marriage, and nothing else about the couple and abandoned first wife can be known.<sup>77</sup>

Temporary marriages, informal unions, polygamy, and other intimate arrangements not only reflected the myriad ways in which freed men and women constituted their families, but also shaped post-emancipation family politics as they conflicted with elites’ visions of marriage and post-colonial society. This included the ideology of racial fusion—an imperial vision for social hierarchy in the post-emancipation French Antilles.

### The Family Politics of Racial Fusion

Even as they stressed marriage as a moral injunction to freedpeople, republican legislators in the metropole and administrators in the colonies were equally concerned with how whites and free people of color would adapt to a post-slavery society. Slave owners in particular had to undergo a moral transformation during republican emancipation as, according to Schœlcher, “the quality of master becomes incompatible with the title of French citizen.”<sup>78</sup> Former masters had to renounce their despotic dispositions and embrace their formerly enslaved workers in the spirit of republican fraternity. Reformers thus turned to the ideology of racial fusion, which had been articulated by free people of color as they campaigned for civil rights in the 1820s and 1830s.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Edmond du Hailly, “Les Antilles françaises: En 1863 souvenirs et tableau, la vie créole, le travail libre et l’émigration,” *Revue des deux mondes* Vol. 48, no. 4 (15 December 1863): 863. The author transcribed the groom’s answers in creole: “Li à Marie-Galante. Femme-là pas bon; moi quitté li. Talà meilleure.”

<sup>78</sup> Schœlcher and Wallon, “Rapport fait au ministre,” 145.

<sup>79</sup> See: ANOM FM SG GUA 107/750, “Pétition des Hommes de Couleur de la Guadeloupe;” Mondésir Richard, *Observations sur le projet de loi relatif aux droits civils et politiques des hommes de couleur des colonies françaises* (Paris: Imprimerie de Auguste Mie, 1833); and “Sur la fusion des Races” in *Revue des Colonies*, October, 1836, 183.

After slavery, republicans (including free men of color like Bissette and Perrinon) envisioned racial fusion as a way of bridging acrimonious social divisions in the colonies. The “fusion of the diverse classes of the population in our islands,” declared Schœlcher, would mean no more special “privileges for anyone, liberty [and] equality for all, this is the realization of fraternity.”<sup>80</sup> During their civil rights campaigns, free people of color adopted interracial marriage as a symbol for the “merger” of the white and black races that would erase “color prejudice” and reinforce social hierarchies based on class, not race. It had a similar meaning for policymakers in 1848, who viewed fusion—and interracial marriage—as a means of making former slaveowners and colonial elites republican French citizens.<sup>81</sup>

Interracial intimacy between white men and black and mixed-race women had long been tolerated in slave societies—as these relationships recreated white male patriarchal domination and ascendancy.<sup>82</sup> Interracial marriages between these groups, however, were practically nonexistent among elite *colons* and relatively rare among poor whites. When such interracial marriages did occur, they caused much consternation on the part of the colonial authorities because they threatened racial hierarchy.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Schœlcher, *La vérité aux ouvriers*, 304.

“...la fusion des diverses classes de la population de nos îles...Plus de privilèges pour personne, liberté, égalité pour tous, c’est la réalisation de la fraternité.”

<sup>81</sup> This marks a departure from miscegenation laws in the U.S., the British West Indies, and Spanish Americas where sex was a tool for managing unequal race relations. See: Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 41-111; Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 17-76; Juanita de Barros, *Reproducing the British Caribbean: Sex, Gender, and Population Politics after Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 16-39; and Verena Martínez-Allier, *Marriage, Class, and Colour in Nineteenth-Century Cuba: A Study of Racial Attitudes and Sexual Values in a Slave Society* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 11-41 and 103-19.

<sup>82</sup> Beckles, *Centering Women*, 22-58; Baptist, “‘Cuffy,’ ‘Fancy Maids,’ and ‘One-Eyed Men;’” Rape, Commodification, and the Domestic Slave Trade in the United States,” 1619-50; Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs*, 319-66; Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 12-49 and 69-106; and Garraway, *The Libertine Colony*, 194-292.

<sup>83</sup> See: Schloss *Sweet Liberty*, 40-5, for a discussion of the 1807 marriage petition of Arisy, a *petit-blanc* who requested to change his racial status to *gens de couleur* in order to convince the parish priest to perform the marriage

Although white men commonly engaged in sexual relationships with free and enslaved women of color, *colons* rejected interracial marriage throughout the nineteenth century, considering it both scandalous and a threat to white ascendancy.<sup>84</sup> For example, Dessalles' oldest son, Adrien, made his father apoplectic when he expressed his intention to marry a young woman from a Martinican family named Lydie Ballain. Dessalles believed several rumors that Lydie and her mother had engaged in multiple interracial affairs and launched a virulent attack on the entire Ballain family in his diaries, claiming that they were all "descended from mulattos." In his tirades, Dessalles did not just slander Lydie—he disparaged multiple generations of Ballain women. He wrote that her "mother and aunt had children with negroes and mulattos, and many of these children are still alive. The Ballain ladies have a *horrible* reputation, and the one that Adrien wants to make his wife has rotten morals."<sup>85</sup>

As proof of Lydie's bad behavior, Dessalles accused her of "having a child" as a result of an interracial affair, one that "Mrs. Ballain had made disappear."<sup>86</sup> He was further scandalized that Adrien had been permitted to sleep at the Ballain home during the course of one of his visits

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rites between Arisy and a free woman of color in Martinique. For more on interracial sex and marriage in France and the colonies, see: Cottias, "La séduction coloniale: Damnation et stratégies aux Antilles, XVIIe- XIXe siècle," 125-40; Garraway, *The Libertine Colony*, 194-239; Heuer, "The One-Drop Rule in Reverse?" 515-48; and Spear, "Colonial Intimacies: Legislating Sex in French Louisiana," 75-98.

<sup>84</sup> Scholss, *Sweet Liberty*, 152-83; and Garraway, *The Libertine Colony*, 194-290. Gad Heuman argues that in Jamaica, women of color, with rare exceptions, could not marry their white male partners, and prohibitions on interracial marriages served to reinforce racial hierarchy. See: Heuman, *Between Black and White: Race, Politics, and the Free Coloreds in Jamaica, 1792-1865* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), especially 72-80.

<sup>85</sup> Dessalles, diary entry for July 27, 1839 *La vie d'un colon* Vol. 2, 197. Adrien eventually decided not to marry Lydie Ballain, much to Dessalles's relief.  
"...sur le prétendue mariage de mon fils avec M<sup>lle</sup> Ballain...Je ne survivrai pas à une telle honte! M<sup>me</sup> Ballain sort de mulâtres, la chose n'est que trop vraie; sa mère et ses tantes ont fait des enfants avec des nègres et des mulâtres: plusieurs de ces enfants vivent encore. Les demoiselles Ballain ont une horrible réputation, et celle dont Adrien veut faire sa femme a des mœurs gâtées."

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, diary entry for November 10, 1839, 217.  
"...tout le monde savait que M<sup>lle</sup> Lydie avait fait un enfant que M<sup>me</sup> Ballain avait fait disparaître."

to his intended—for him, the entire Ballain household was akin to a brothel. As the vitriol behind Dessalles’ condemnation implies, rumors of a *colon* woman’s sexual impropriety, especially if it transgressed racial categories or resulted in mixed-race children, had profound consequences. The mere whisper of interracial relationships and sexual impropriety on the part of elite white women rendered them “inappropriate” marriage partners—because such women’s “rotten morals” threatened the superior political and social status of white elites.<sup>87</sup> However, when Adrien engaged in sex with enslaved women, Dessalles did not interfere.<sup>88</sup> As the behaviors of Dessalles and Adrien demonstrate, interracial marriage in the colonies threatened political, social, and racial hierarchies while interracial sex (between white men and black and mixed-race women) tended to strengthen them.

In the aftermath of abolition, however, officials and reformers embraced interracial marriage as a symbol of racial fusion in the new republican order and rejected informal unions between white men and women of color as setting an improper moral example for the lower classes. In one striking example, a local judge in Guadeloupe was relieved of his position in 1855 and sent back to France for failing to set a “good moral example” by living openly with a mixed-race woman. This marked a notable shift away from the government’s previous policy of tolerating or ignoring these liaisons.<sup>89</sup>

Instead, republicans embraced marriage—particularly interracial marriage—and legitimated their informal unions, with administrators frequently leading by example. In Fort-de-

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<sup>87</sup> Schloss discusses how white women’s sexuality was carefully controlled and mediated to preserve white supremacy in Martinique in Schloss, *Sweet Liberty*, 102.

<sup>88</sup> See: Dessalles, diary entry for August 21, 1837, in *La vie d’un colon* Vol. 2, 57.

<sup>89</sup> AD-G, *Dépêches ministérielles* N. 283 Letter from the Minister of the Navy and Colonies to the Governor of Guadeloupe, May 30, 1855.

France on March 16, 1848, in a Catholic ceremony of “great pomp” Husson (the same colonial official who preached marriage as a republican virtue to slaves) publicly married his mistress, a woman of color with whom he had five children that he legally recognized the year before. Observers agreed that the Husson marriage (an event “marked by great solemnity”) was an impressive “act of propaganda for fusion.”<sup>90</sup>

After emancipation, some elite *colons* did marry their mixed-race mistresses, as in the case of fifty-three-year-old Joseph Thorp, identified as a government contractor who married his forty-four-year-old mixed-race partner Eliza Labat. In their marriage contract (witnessed by colonial officials and property owners in Fort-de-France) Joseph and Eliza recognized their five children: Laurent Améde, Jean William, Louis Charles, Elizabeth Laure, and Rose Elizabeth Lucius.<sup>91</sup> However, while this marriage can be viewed as embodying the ideology of racial fusion, it also reinforced the class divisions that underpinned Antillean societies. Even as Thorp and Eliza legally sanctified their interracial family, they also merged various assets that they brought to the marriage (underscoring how both were wealthy proprietors). Thorp owned property and a sugar factory in Fort-de-France. Eliza was identified as a property owner and merchant in the marriage contract. Both the bride and groom were literate enough to sign the register alongside the notary and their witnesses (all proprietors), another indication of their shared economic and social status. The Thorp-Labat marriage perhaps symbolized racial fusion, but it also reflected a consolidation of property and wealth that accompanied upper-class family mergers.

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<sup>90</sup> Gilbert Pago, *Les femmes et la liquidation du système esclavagiste à la Martinique, 1848-1852* (Guadeloupe: Ibis Rouge Editions, 1998), 83.

<sup>91</sup> ANOM IREL, *État-Civil Fort-Royal, Martinique*, Acte #265. “Marriage du S<sup>r</sup> Thorp et D<sup>elle</sup> Eliza Labat,” May 10, 1848. For another reference to the Thorp-Labat marriage, see: Pago, *Les femmes et la liquidation du système esclavagiste*, 83.



Other elite whites continued to resist racial fusion in all its forms despite any shared social or economic privileges. Dessalles, who never recognized any of his illegitimate children, flew into a rage when Adrien acknowledged his mixed-race daughter Palmire in public company and allowed her to accompany him to events and social gatherings. During one such event, Dessalles's "blood boiled up" when Cyrille Bisette addressed Palmire as "Mademoiselle Dessalles" and Adrien refused to correct him and "just laughed about it." Later, Dessalles admonished his son that "I had legitimate children and I would never allow anyone to usurp their name." For Dessalles, when Adrien introduced Palmire as his daughter and exposed "such immorality to the light of day," he had "committed a grave breach of morality" that shamed the family. Adrien, however, refused to give in to his father on the matter, declaring that the Dessalles name was "his to give" and continued to treat Palmire as a Dessalles daughter. He also refused to end his associations with other *gens de couleur*, leading Dessalles to deplore how "my son embraces fusion in a manner that frightens me and will very often place me into such predicaments."<sup>92</sup>

It is difficult to say how much Adrien embraced racial fusion or how much he delighted in angering his father—if Dessalles' diaries are taken at face value, the two men were not close and rarely got along, with Adrien taking particular pleasure in needling his father. What these

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<sup>92</sup> Dessalles, diary entries for October 27 and May 13, 1849 and in *La vie d'un colon* Vol. 4, 146 and 121. "Bisette avait à sa droite Palmire, sa bâtarde, qu'il appelait tout le temps 'M<sup>lle</sup> Dessalles.' A ces mots, mon sang a bouilli, et avec colère je lui [Adrien] ai observé qu'il aurait dû reprendre M. Bisette. Il m'a répondu qu'il tenait fort peu à cela et qu'il en avait ri. L'indignation s'est emparée de moi et je le lui ai exprimé en termes forts. Je lui ai dit que j'avais des enfants légitimes et que je ne souffrirais jamais qu'on usurpât leur nom. Il m'a dit que ce nom lui appartenait et qu'il pouvait le donner. Je lui ai demandé si son état de reconnaître cette fille: dans ce cas, je ne resterais pas 24 heures sous le même toit que lui. Vous devriez avoir honte, ai-je ajouté, de montrer au grand jour une immoralité semblable. Que signifie cette impudeur de vous faire suivre de votre bâtarde et de la présenter partout? N'est-ce pas une atteinte grave à la morale, et n'est-ce pas surtout vous moquer de votre famille?"

"Adrien est revenu hier de la Trinité avec un jeune mulâtre qui avait fait le voyage avec lui... Mon fils adopte la fusion d'une manière effrayante, et je lui vaudrai très souvent de pareils désagréments."

incidents do reveal, however is Dessalles' fervent belief that the supremacy of whites rested on the strict separation of the races and in preventing illegitimate children from integrating into the household. Adrien, Pierre Cardin, and other *colons* might accept fusion to a greater or lesser extent, however, Dessalles embodied how other elite whites vehemently rejected the new political and social order.

Many formerly free people of color also viewed fusion less as a harmonious union between races and more as a means through which a post-emancipation social hierarchy—with elites on top and freedpeople on the bottom—could be constituted. While they heralded emancipation, elite free men of color also feared that freedom would result in widespread disorder if freedpeople were not carefully controlled. Bisette, for example, believed that elite men of color and whites had a patriarchal responsibility to “improve” former slaves and “prepare” them for freedom. In return, he wrote, freedpeople had an obligation to work and imitate the moral example of elite classes: “I want nothing to slow the betterment of the black races among nations of European origin; on the contrary, I believe more than ever the need to make them happy races; to continue paternal care... Let us not embitter them... by inflammatory declamations... [and] retain the feeling of affectionate respect that today characterizes their attachment to their masters.”<sup>93</sup> In Bisette's argument, the “betterment” of the “black races” hinged on continued patriarchal relations between formerly enslaved persons and slaveholders. In encouraging harmonious cooperation between proprietors and cultivators, Bisette maintained,

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<sup>93</sup> Bisette, *Réfutation du livre de M.V. Schœlcher sur Haïti* (Paris, 1844), 51.

Ne croyez point qu'en arrivant aux conclusions qu'une logique rigoureuse m'a contraint d'en poser, je veuille ralentir en rien l'amélioration du sort des races noires chez les nations d'origine européenne; au contraire, je crois plus que jamais à la nécessité de rendre ces races heureuses; de continuer les soins paternels, prodigués maintenant à leurs enfants dès le berceau, donnés avec affection et reconnaissance à cette seconde enfance; à la vieillesse des travailleurs, dont la vie laborieuse a mérité secours et bienfait... Abstenez-vous seulement de les aigrir et de les révolter par des déclamations incendiaires; nous conserverons ainsi le sentiment de respect affectueux qui caractérise aujourd'hui leur attachement pour leurs maîtres.”

racial fusion would inevitably follow, enshrining the civil rights of all while maintaining the political and social power of the few.<sup>94</sup>

Indeed, Bissette repeatedly promoted the ideals of discipline and moral reform to freedpeople in an attempt to stress “civilization” as a precursor to citizenship. Dessalles recounted a fraught moment at banquet held in Bissette’s honor when several freedpeople behaved “inappropriately” by “throwing themselves on the meat and bread distributed to them.” Their behavior prompted Bissette to call them “savages” and admonish them: “the more I try to elevate you, the more you lower yourselves. You make me ashamed! Aren’t I a negro like you? So do like I do and imitate the whites; that alone will civilize you... What does this drum mean? Do you see the whites using it for their dances? Take up the violin, like them, and then my daughters and I will join your dances.”<sup>95</sup>

Despite Bissette’s attempts to demonstrate a common bond with the assembled party (“Aren’t I a negro like you?”), this incident reveals more about how race relations in slavery created immense social and economic differences that were especially pronounced during the republican emancipation project. Bissette’s admonition highlighted the wide disjuncture between elite men of color, who had lived in France, attended white parties, and embraced European norms, and freedpeople, whose monotonous diets under slavery rarely included luxuries like meat and for whom the drum had significant cultural meaning. Indeed, the May 1848 uprising in

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<sup>94</sup> See: *Revue des Colonies*, September 1840.

<sup>95</sup> Dessalles, diary entry for December 4, 1849, *La vie d’un colon* Vol. 4, 151.  
“Les nègres affamés se sont jetés sur les viandes et les pains qu’on leur distribuait. Bissette a été tellement mécontent qu’il leur criait: Que faites-vous, mes amis? Vous agissez comme des cannibales, comme des sauvages! Plus je cherche à vous élever, plus vous vous abaissez. Vous me faites honte! Ne suis-je pas nègre comme vous? Faites donc comme moi, imitez les Blancs; seuls ils vous civiliseront... Que signifie ce tambour? Voyez-vous les Blancs s’en servir pour leurs danses? Comme eux, prenez le violon, et alors mes filles et moi nous mêlerons à vos danses.”

Martinique that had resulted in the hasty promulgation of emancipation was sparked by the arrest of the enslaved Romain for playing his drum.<sup>96</sup>

It also reveals how, for Bissette, the purpose of fusion was to teach former slaves their proper place in post-emancipation society—the lower working classes. Indeed, in encouraging freedpeople to emulate whites, Bissette arguably employed fusion as a mechanism for reinterpreting old social and economic logics in which both elite whites and free people of color elites retained their status. “Imitate the whites” meant agree to their labor demands and embrace their moralization campaigns. Dessalles approved of this “admirable diatribe,” precisely because he understood that this was Bissette’s message.<sup>97</sup>

Therefore, unlike the discourse of *mestizaje* during the nineteenth-century wars for independence in Latin America, fusion in the republican French Antilles was not exactly a celebration of a shared mixed-race identity—despite the efforts of reformers to advocate for fusion as the basis of republican colonial politics.<sup>98</sup> Indeed, celebrated instances of racial fusion—such as the interracial marriage between Husson and his mistress or Thorp and Labat—functioned as a means of reinforcing key social hierarchies while reforming the racial divisions that had prevented the consolidation of propertied interests. And for freedpeople, Bissette’s encouragement to mimic whites underscores how elites envisioned racial fusion as a tool for reinforcing plantation production and agricultural labor—in ways that would have profound consequences for colonial administration in the late nineteenth century. In this way, interracial

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<sup>96</sup> Semley, *To Be Free and French*, 142-3.

<sup>97</sup> Dessalles, diary entry for December 4, 1849, *La vie d’un colon* Vol. 4, 151.  
“...cette admirable harangue...”

<sup>98</sup> See: Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 43-69 and 112-40.

marriage and racial fusion strengthened the paternalistic social dynamics that underlined republican family politics.

### Competing Freedom Institutions: Plantation and Family Land

In July 1849, the National Assembly voted to grant an indemnity to slave owners, allotting six million francs in cash and 120 million francs in five percent bonds, which Robin Blackburn estimated to be approximately one half the value of their enslaved workers.<sup>99</sup> For planters, this partially mollified their demand for compensation. For metropolitan policymakers, the indemnity was necessary for reviving colonial economies. Schœlcher, for instance, believed that compensation was essential for stimulating currency circulation and facilitating labor arrangements between proprietors and workers.<sup>100</sup> Rather than allow for the break-up of large plantations in favor of land redistribution to freedpeople (and therefore a transition to peasant production), most republican officials believed that plantation agriculture could be resuscitated through a labor system based on association contracts.

In France, the association was a cooperative organization of labor and production developed by workers in the 1830s in response to the ruthless, individualized competition of industrial capitalism.<sup>101</sup> During the Revolution of 1848, Blanc adopted many of these workers' association plans at Luxembourg Palace, when workers and employers assembled to sort out a new organization of labor into democratic and inclusive corporations for the working classes.<sup>102</sup> In the colonies, association was imagined as a cooperation of agrarian workers—freedpeople

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<sup>99</sup> Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 501.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 501-2.

<sup>101</sup> Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 93; Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France*, 162-93 and 243-77; and Charles Tilly and Lynn Lees, "Le Peuple de juin 1848," *Annales ESC* Vol. 29 (1973): 1061-91.

<sup>102</sup> Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 96-7; and Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France*, 236 and 251-65.

laboring together as field and factory hands to cultivate and process sugar, coffee, and other tropical commodities (as opposed to laboring in supposed isolation as peasants eking out a subsistence on small plots of land). Other than the fact that field and factory workers were to be given a share of the yields or production, there was little in association that was different from slavery. Planters still owned the land and commanded a labor force that was tied to the estates. The whip may have been abolished, but the rhythms of work remained nearly the same. Nevertheless, republican policymakers and colonial officials espoused association as a powerful mechanism for promoting freedpeoples' moralization and public order.

For instance, Schœlcher argued in favor of preserving large plantations and hiring rural workers to cultivate and process cane together. He asserted that the “association has such powerful virtues that even slave labor performed thus in common presents an aspect less sad than the solitary and dismal labor of our peasants.”<sup>103</sup> Addressing widespread concern that once freed, former slaves would find agricultural labor repugnant, reformers argued that fair work arrangements (made with the family needs of freedpeople in mind) would convince former slaves to return to plantation work.<sup>104</sup> Fears that freedpeople were abandoning the estates in droves were expressed frequently in the French Antilles, similar to other post-emancipation societies.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Schœlcher, *Des colonies françaises*, 23.

“L’association a des vertus si puissantes que même le travail esclave fait ainsi en commun, présente un aspect moins triste que le travail solitaire et morne de nos paysans.”

<sup>104</sup> Schœlcher and Wallon, “Rapport fait au ministre,” 143.

<sup>105</sup> See: Douglass Hall, “The Flight from the Estates Reconsidered: The British West Indies, 1838-1842,” *Journal of Caribbean History* Vol. 10 and 11 (1978): 16-24. Further, Holt argues that freedpeople in Jamaica sought to buy or lease land, but that this did not necessarily entail a “flight” from the plantations, as many workers supplemented farming with seasonal wage work on the estates or continued to live on plantation lands. See: Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 143-68.

Some officials believed that these concerns about the collapse of labor were overblown. Gatine for example proclaimed the “spirit” of former slaves to be “excellent at heart,” and that “the newly freed is not an enemy of work, as the detractors of the blacks have always maintained; he works ardently in his garden to make money for the products that he brings to the city, and we are convinced of this by the influx of commodities” to the villages and cities.<sup>106</sup> Other officials, however, remained less convinced of this productivity. For example, *Le Courier du Havre* reprinted an account of how, during his tours of Guadeloupe in October and November 1848, Governor Fiéron chastised a gathering of cultivators for socializing with one another instead of being at work.<sup>107</sup> In the immediate post-abolition period, policymakers, administrators and planters therefore remained anxious about harnessing the productive power of freed workers to revitalize the plantation economy.

The freedpeople who remained working for their former masters had to consider the often-onerous terms that contracts imposed on them. In association, workers were given shares of plantation products, including sugar, rum, food crops, and products from livestock, which they were responsible for growing, cultivating, and harvesting. They were also typically given the right to remain in their huts or cabins on plantation property, as long as all members of the

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<sup>106</sup> ANOM FM SG GUA 6/68, Commissaire Gatine à le Ministre de la Marine et des Colonies, “État de la Colonie,” Basse-Terre, June 28, 1848.

“L’esprit des ateliers est excellent au fond: le nouveau libre n’est pas ennemi du travail, comme l’ont toujours soutenu les détracteurs des noirs; il travaille même avec ardeur dans son jardin, pour faire argent des produits qu’il apporte à la ville, comme on peut s’en convaincre par l’affluence des denrées.

<sup>107</sup> *Le Courier du Havre*, November 25, 1848.

family contributed to plantation work in some way.<sup>108</sup> Both officials and planters hoped this association would stop the decline of sugar, land values, and production after 1848.<sup>109</sup>

Colonial officials urged freedpeople to enter into association as a way of maintaining production, with mixed results. Often, they emphasized that contracts would guarantee cultivators a measure of security for themselves and their families. Gatine highlighted the ways in which the contracts would materially benefit cultivators and their families by guaranteeing steady employment and future rewards. “I would recommend to you the association,” Gatine proclaimed, as “the wage would make you live day to day; this is not enough: we must think of the future. In the association, you will find not only livelihoods, but also, the necessary resources to surround yourselves with a family, for raising your children and becoming proprietors yourselves.”<sup>110</sup> Association, he implied, would guarantee long-term security and the material improvement of freed men and women necessary for raising families.

Association contracts that were negotiated between proprietors and cultivators typically incorporated all members of the freed family, save for young children. For instance, a six-year contract filed on April 6, 1850 in Le Moule set the terms between the Zévallos family and thirty-one workers on the Saint-Quentin plantation. Of these thirty-one individuals, thirteen were children and six of the women were identified as married to male workers. There were six family

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<sup>108</sup> ANOM FM SG MAR 56/464, *Project d'Association formulé sous l'approbation du Commissaire Général, pour l'exploitation des usines à sucre de la colonie* (Imprimerie M. de Bellefontaine et Cie.) Place and date of publication unknown.

<sup>109</sup> Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 501.

<sup>110</sup> “Proclamation du Commissaire general de la République Gatine à la Guadeloupe, June 1848,” in Schmidt, *Abolitionnistes de l'esclavage et réformateurs des colonies*, 1015-6.  
“C’est l’association que je vous recommande, le salaire vous ferait vivre au jour le jour; ce n’est pas assez; il faut songer à l’avenir. Dans l’association, vous trouverez non seulement des moyens d’existence, mais aussi les ressources nécessaires pour vous entourer d’une famille, pour élever vos enfants et devenir vous-mêmes propriétaires.”



units listed in total, which included parents and children, as well as a married couple raising a nephew and a nuclear family with a resident adult sibling. The contract stipulated that Mr. Zévallos was responsible for providing land, livestock, and some technical instruments (although the workers needed to furnish their own hoes, cutlasses, baskets, and other farming tools), while farmers were responsible for cultivating cane fields and attending to livestock. All male laborers over eighteen were given 100<sup>th</sup> of all the plantation products, males between fifteen and eighteen and all females older than eighteen a 150<sup>th</sup> share, and boys between twelve and fifteen and girls fourteen to eighteen a 200<sup>th</sup> portion of all products. Boys under twelve and girls under fourteen could be employed on the plantation as long as both their parents and the proprietor agreed.

Aside from the incorporation of workers' entire families into this association contract, Zévallos also stipulated that associated cultivators were not permitted to host anyone from outside the plantation at their homes or let guests stay overnight. This gave Zévallos the right to control who entered the property, maintaining the pre-abolition practice of closely surveilling workers. Ironically, although Schœlcher and other reformers proclaimed the benefits of "cooperative" labor in association compared with the miserable isolation of the peasant, the Zévallos contract indicates how planters prevented freed workers from maintaining ties with the wider community.<sup>111</sup>

Larger provision fields farmed in common replaced individual garden plots on the Saint-Quentin plantation, with each cultivator responsible for farming a fixed number of acres. Half of the total harvest belonged to the owner and half to the workers who were instructed to divide crops among them according the same rates for shares of the cane. Other association contracts,

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<sup>111</sup> ANOM DPPC Notaires (hereafter NOT) GUA 815, Furcy Douillard, notary, Le Moule, Guadeloupe. "N. 14 Dépôt des pièces par M de Zévallos et autres, et reconnaissance d'écritures," April 6, 1850.

such as the one re-printed in the *Gazette Officielle de la Guadeloupe* between Citizen Urbain Petit-Moustier and an unspecified number of cultivators for the Ducharmoy plantation, offered different terms on garden plots. Article five of the contract stipulated that Petit-Moustier was required to furnish “each associated cultivator with a hut and garden,” rather than the common foodstuff plot of the Saint-Quentin contract.<sup>112</sup>

Despite the promises of administrators, association between planters and cultivators did not guarantee security, steady employment, or access to land. Many plantation owners decided to cut their losses and sold or leased their properties following abolition, which jeopardized the livelihoods of the field hands. For example, take the leasing agreement to Mr. Joseph Buant (a former plantation manager and proprietor) in Saint-Esprit, Martinique, on February 30, 1850. Article eight of the Buant contract stipulated that, after the lease took effect, the cultivators attached to the plantation were guaranteed only half the yields of the upcoming sugar harvest (which they had to manufacture at their own expense).<sup>113</sup> Additionally, while contracts typically allowed for every individual cultivator to quit the association before it expired, he or she would usually have to forfeit all rights to the upcoming harvest, and they and their families were required to vacate their homes within twenty-four hours of giving notice. These terms discouraged associated families from seeking improved terms or better opportunities elsewhere.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Acte d'association passé entre le Citoyen Petit-Moustier, propriétaire de l'habitation-sucrerie Ducharmoy et les Citoyens travailleurs de son atelier, July 6, 1848. Printed in the *Gazette Officielle de la Guadeloupe*, July 10, 1848.

<sup>113</sup> ANOM DPPC NOT MAR/914, Notary minutes of Louis Marie Adolphe Desloriers-Lilette, Saint-Esprit Martinique, “N. 17, Bail à ferme d'une sucrerie par M. Michel Lantibois Cabagne à M. Joseph Buant,” February 30, 1850.

<sup>114</sup> AD-M 3E1/67, Jean Victor Joyau, Notary in La Trinité, Martinique, “Louage d'industrie pour l'exploitation de l'habitation Desmarinières située à la Trinité, entre M. Bally...et les cultivateurs de la dite habitation,” January 16, 1850.

Given these conditions, therefore, it was difficult to persuade freedpeople to enter association contracts, especially if they could find work in the cities or establish themselves on their own land plots through purchase, leasing, sub-leasing, or squatting. Those who wished to remain on the plantations in order to continue to live in their homes and communities and tend to their gardens employed a variety of tactics to force proprietors to agree to wages, rather than association. Continuing practices from slavery, freedpeople stopped or slowed down work if planters refused to bargain with them. “The negroes came out of their cabins late,” complained Dessalles in the winter of 1849, because “they are concocting a new plan: to be paid wages.”<sup>115</sup>

Not surprisingly, proprietors saw this as evidence for freedpeoples’ insolence and misguided understanding of freedom. As Dessalles bitterly complained of the decrease in productivity among the cultivators in his association: “workers believe that because they are free, they do not have to honor any of their obligations. They take days off whenever they feel like it and without permission; if one criticizes such behavior, they show great astonishment and ask you with the greatest self-assurance whether they are not free. Reasoning with them in their own interest and with the utmost patience has as yet been unavailing to make them understand their duties and their rights.”<sup>116</sup>

A month later, faced with the troubling prospect of declining sugar prices, Dessalles decided to experiment with sharecropping arrangements for some of his workers. This arrangement of *colonage partiaire*, or sharecropping, differed from association in that tenants rented tracts of land from the proprietor and were paid through a portion of the sugar they

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<sup>115</sup> Dessalles, diary entry for January 12, 1849 in *La vie d’un colon* Vol. 4, 102.

“Les nègres sont sortis tard de leur cases; ils méditent un projet: c’est celui de se faire mettre au salaire.”

<sup>116</sup> Dessalles’ Letter to the Director of the Interior, Sainte-Marie, December 17, 1848, in *Sugar and Slavery Family and Race*, 239. This is an unfinished draft of a letter to the Director of the Interior found among Dessalles’ papers and it is unknown if it was ever completed and sent.

cultivated (and all sharecroppers were expected to produce sugar). According to Dessalles, sharecropping promised better returns than association: “Adrien thinks this is the surest way to get out from under it [their ongoing financial troubles], and I am going to try it. France has compromised everything by emancipating the blacks without having first organized a system of work.”<sup>117</sup> In July of 1849, Adrien informed the workers of *Nouvelle Cité* that the association had been dissolved and that they had to agree to sharecropping contracts. Some of Dessalles’ workers, including Nicaise, actually used this sharecropping system to rent more lands than they could cultivate themselves in order to sublease to other cultivators.<sup>118</sup>

On the other hand, republican policymakers acknowledged that freedpeople were understandably suspicious of association and sharecropping contracts because they viewed these arrangements as a new form of compulsory labor. According to Schœlcher, freedpeople considered them “a resumption of slavery or disguised slavery, and this idea would cause great disruption in the colonies. I am convinced that the negroes will be intractable on this point, and that any attempt which does not have for its object a clear and definite freedom, cannot suit them.”<sup>119</sup> Schœlcher blamed “sulking planters” for freedpeople’s unwillingness to enter into association or sharecropping arrangements, claiming that as soon as proprietors stopped “inspiring the distrust of the blacks,” fairly-negotiated contracts would be possible.<sup>120</sup> Others like

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<sup>117</sup> For association: Dessalles, diary entry for January 12, 1849, in *La vie d’un colon* Vol. 4, 102.

“...devenir colons partiaires. Adrien pense que c’est le plus sûr moyen de s’en tirer; je vais essayer. La France a tout compromis en émancipant les noirs sans avoir organisé le travail auparavant.”

<sup>118</sup> Dessalles, *Sugar and Slavery, Family and Race*, 253 fn12 (for how Nicaise, La Disette, and Césaire subleased sharecropping tracts).

<sup>119</sup> Schœlcher, *La vérité aux ouvriers*, 228-9.

“...Le travail obligé serait considéré comme une reprise de l’esclavage ou comme un esclavage déguisé, et cette idée jetterait une grande perturbation dans les colonies. J’ai la conviction que les nègres *se montreront intractables sur ce point*, et que toute tentative qui n’aura pas pour objet une liberté bien nette, bien définie, ne saurait leur convenir.”

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*, 229.

Gatine, maintained that former slaves preferred wage work over everything else because they saw immediate profits of cash in hand rather than in kind. Consequently, they had to learn the value of long-term farming rather than immediate reward in order to embrace association or sharecropping.<sup>121</sup>

While Schœlcher, Gatine, and other policymakers acknowledged the reasons for freedpeoples' recalcitrance, they continued to encourage workers to accept contracts rather than demand wages. Gatine instructed his agents to go directly to the plantations to try to combat anti-association sentiment among field hands.<sup>122</sup> During his political campaign, Bissette endeared himself to proprietors like Dessalles by exhorting freedpeople to accept planters' terms: "Bissette, surrounded by all my farm workers, dispensed the most admirable advice to them. He vaunted the advantages of association and sharecropping and thundered against working for wages."<sup>123</sup>

Despite these exhortations, observers complained that production continued to plummet: "Our plantations are abandoned," complained Mr. Rochoux, president for the Association for the Defense of the Sugar Industry in Guadeloupe, "weeds devour the hope of a good harvest...the cane rots for lack of hands to manufacture it, workers, abruptly snatched from slavery without

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"C'est aux propriétaires eux-mêmes à faire ce qu'ils attendent de l'autorité; l'organisation du travail ne peut résulter que de leur accord avec les cultivateurs, que du consentement des uns et des autres, à des conditions avantageuses pour les uns et pour les autres. Et l'on y arrivera facilement, lorsque les planteurs ne boudront plus l'émancipation, lorsqu'ils cesseront de nourrir la funeste espérance de lois d'intimidation pour les affranchis, lorsqu'ils n'inspireront plus de défiance aux noirs, en traitant de meneurs tous ceux qui les éclairent sur les engagements à contracter, et qui règlent leurs comptes d'association."

<sup>121</sup> ANOM FM SG GUA 6/68, Commissaire Gatine à le Ministre de la Marine et des Colonies, "État de la Colonie," Basse-Terre, June 28, 1848.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Dessalles, diary entry for November 26, 1849 in *La vie d'un colon* Vol. 4, 149.

"Bissette, entouré de tous mes cultivateurs, leur a adressé les conseils les plus admirables. Il a beaucoup vanté le colonage et l'association, et a tonné contre le salaire."

guidance, indulge in all the impressions of their ignorant naïveté and constantly threaten public order and peoples' safety." As a result, he continued, "discouraged landlords emigrate, the commerce of the cities is destroyed. Everywhere there is the dreadful spectacle of disorder, bankruptcy, and misery."<sup>124</sup> While colonial interest groups may have resignedly accepted abolition, they railed against what they viewed as a slipshod abolition decree that did not resolve important matters, such as the organization of work, before emancipating enslaved people.<sup>125</sup> They therefore mobilized their influence on local officials in order to control post-emancipation labor and restrict the rights of freedpeople. In particular, they sought to prevent freedpeople from leaving the plantations to set up subsistence farms elsewhere.

The perceived failure of association was ascribed to freedpeoples' unwillingness to embrace work, order, and property, and by extension, republican civil life. As Husson wrote to the Governor of Guadeloupe in 1851: "the cultivators only work irregularly, because they know that the proprietor is obligated to be satisfied with that; the lack of hands [a fixed labor force] is therefore the real root cause of evil." The report also asserted that the declining number of regular agricultural laborers was rooted in freedpeople's "tendency for isolation," meaning their preference for withdrawing to peasant subsistence agriculture outside the confines of the large

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<sup>124</sup> ANOM FM SG GUA 7/71, "M. Rochoux, président du Comité Central à le Ministre de la Marine et des Colonies," Pointe-à-Pitre, September 9, 1848.

"Nos habitations sont abandonnées on n'obtiennent qu'un travail interrompu; la végétation parasite dévore l'espérance d'une belle récolte dont la Providence semblait vouloir nous favoriser; les cannes mûres pourrissent faute de bras pour les fabriquer; les travailleurs arrachés brusquement à l'esclavage, sans guide, se laissent aller à toutes les impressions de leur ignorante crédulité et menacent sans cesse l'ordre public et la sécurité des personnes. Les propriétaires découragés, émigrent, le commerce des villes est anéanti. Partout le spectacle affreux du désordre, de la faillite, de la misère."

<sup>125</sup> ANOM FM SG MAR 11/108, "A M. Le Rédacteur en Chef du National," Paris, July 11, 1848. Published critique of Schœlcher written by Augustin Pécou, a politician in Martinique to the Chief Editor of *Du National*, July 11, 1848.

sugar plantations.<sup>126</sup> While officials and elites saw vice, indolence, and malicious tendencies motivating freedpeople to reject plantation work, a closer look at their shift toward peasant cultivation reveals their deeper struggle to ensure the support and independence of their families.

The complaint that freedpeople “abandoned” the plantations to revert to an African barbarism was a pervasive trope that planters and colonial officials espoused in post-emancipation Caribbean societies. As Mintz has argued in his analysis of the Caribbean peasantry, the break between plantation and peasant farm was rarely so prominent. As he argues, the two systems of plantation and peasant production co-existed in conflict, but they also depended on each other for mutual survival. Peasants relied on seasonal plantation labor for wages or a crop share to help make ends meet, and the grand estates consumed the provisions that these farmers cultivated. In decades following slavery, most of the conflicts between proprietors and peasants emerged as competition over limited resources—such as infrastructure, irrigation, and government aid. Plantations usually persevered in these conflicts.<sup>127</sup>

Freedpeoples’ efforts to establish small independent farms required the mobilization of family members’ labor and resources. Bridget Brereton has argued that freed women, especially mothers, spearheaded the departure from plantations in Barbados and the Leeward Islands.<sup>128</sup> Thomas Holt has further emphasized how, during apprenticeship in the Jamaica, (1834-1838),

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<sup>126</sup> ANOM FM SG GUA 14/154, “Copie d’une lettre adressé par le Directeur de l’Intérieur Husson au Gouverneur de la Guadeloupe,” December 9, 1851.

“Les cultivateurs ne donnent qu’un travail irrégulier parce qu’ils savent que le propriétaire est obligé de s’en contenter; le manqué de bras est dont la véritable cause première du mal... Un autre fait qui tend à aggraver le mal en diminuant chaque jour le nombre des bras employés à la grand culture, c’est cette tendance à l’isolement qui se révèle de plus en plus chez le noir et que signalent d’une manière unanime tous les rapports qui me parviennent depuis mon arrivée dans la colonie.”

<sup>127</sup> Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations*, 131-56. Also see: Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 143-76.

<sup>128</sup> Brereton, “Family Strategies, Gender, and the Shift to Wage Labor in the British Caribbean,” 145.

women rejected planters' efforts to co-opt more of their labor in exchange for food, clothing, or medical care.<sup>129</sup> Nursing and pregnant women, as well as mothers of young children, typically opted out of sharecropping arrangements in favor of working on their own plots of land or establishing themselves as market vendors, itinerant sellers, and in other businesses. After apprenticeship, purchasing and cultivating small plots of land became central to former slaves' strategies to distance themselves from plantation work. Both Brereton and Holt emphasize how, in these British colonies, the preferred family strategy was to secure land that the extended family farmed in common and to rely on the seasonal wage work of adult men and women in the family for extra income.<sup>130</sup>

In Martinique and Guadeloupe, sharecropping and association contracts revealed a similar tendency among planters to co-opt whole families into the estate rather than allow for the development of a seasonal wage labor market comprised of adult (predominantly male) family members. Unlike in Barbados or Jamaica, where planters would withhold customary food rations to young children in order to coerce parents into performing more labor or even contracting their minor children, French associations typically required proprietors to provide these services to dependents as well as the aged and infirm relatives of associated cultivators.<sup>131</sup> However, planters still found ways to pressure parents to associate their young children in these contracts by stipulating incentive clauses for greater shares of sugar or foodstuffs in exchange for parents

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<sup>129</sup> Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 162-3.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, 153.

<sup>131</sup> See: "Acte d'association passé entre le Citoyen Petit-Moustier, propriétaire de l'habitation-sucrierie Ducharmoy et les Citoyens travailleurs de son atelier, July 6, 1848," as printed in the *Gazette Officielle de la Guadeloupe*, July 10, 1848.



agreeing to hire out their daughters under fourteen or sons under twelve.<sup>132</sup> No wonder then that, as in Jamaica and Barbados, freedpeople in Martinique and Guadeloupe displayed an overwhelming preference for family land and seasonal wage labor over association—land of their own kept their families from being pulled too far into the orbit of plantation work.

This development of family-oriented peasant subsistence agriculture was central to post-emancipation social life throughout the Caribbean. In particular, cultivating small plots of land held in common by kin (“family land”) became foundational to rural work, community relationships, settlement, and organization. These plots of land were typically wedged among plantations, inalienable, and held in common by all members of the family. Further demonstrating the influence of freed women in developing these peasant institutions, family land was most commonly passed on to the next generation through the maternal line. Due to the varied and small size of parcels, family land was not the economic backbone of post-emancipation life and could not sustain rural peasant communities on its own. Nevertheless, scholars have argued that family-land symbolically provided a tenuous—and fiercely guarded— independence among freedpeople and their descendants.<sup>133</sup>

In the French Antilles, there is much to suggest that family land (either on or outside the plantations) became a main goal of freed men and women. Indeed, the cultivation of garden plots escalated tensions between proprietors and cultivators—with planters arguing that gardens belonged to the estate and freedpeople claiming that they had rights to them because they had farmed them since slavery. Dessalles recounted his anger over the actions of Jean-Bart, “a former

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<sup>132</sup> ANOM DPPC NOT GUA/815, Notary minutes of M. Furcy Douillard, Le Moule, Guadeloupe, “Dépôt des pièces par M. de Zévallos et autres,” April 6, 1850.

<sup>133</sup> Besson, *Martha Brae's Two Histories*, 127-57.

cultivator on my plantation,” who “permitted himself to come and snatch food from his old garden” on the estate. This garden was likely Jean-Bart’s subsistence plot when he worked as a slave on the plantation and he would have planted and grown the crops on it. For this trespass, Dessalles planned to lodge a formal complaint with the justice of the peace (though it is unclear if he followed through on his threat).<sup>134</sup> He also described an incident in 1855 when a farm worker named Galibi was beaten up by three other workers after he picked a full basket of fruit off some trees. From the description of the account, it seems as though Galibi had been trespassing on the gardens of one or all of these other workers, who had cultivated the fruit trees since slavery.<sup>135</sup>

Throughout the Antilles, planters and officials alike complained that freedpeople continued to live in their huts, work their garden plots, and concern themselves with their own land without providing much, if any, labor on the estates. This stemmed, colonial authorities believed, out of a fundamental misunderstanding on the part of freedpeople of the rights of property and liberty. Attorney General Bayle Mouillard of Guadeloupe noted that “in Goyave, a man named Jean Baptiste called Toutou told Mr. Revest that the negroes would revolt *if he imposed on their food plots*. That the Government, in giving them freedom, should know that they would no longer work the cane.”<sup>136</sup> *Colons* also viewed freedpeople who avoided plantation

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<sup>134</sup> Dessalles, diary entry for March 8, 1849 in *La vie d'un colon* Vol. 4, 110.

“Jean-Bart, ancien cultivateur de mon habitation, s’est permis de venir arracher des vivres dans son ancien jardin. Plainte va être portée aux juge de paix.”

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, diary entry for September 19, 1855, 304. Mimi Sheller has discussed the particular significance of trees to enslaved and freed people. See: Sheller, *Citizenship from Below*, 187-94.

<sup>136</sup> ANOM FM SG GUA 7/71, Correspondence from Attorney General Bayle Mouillard to the Governor of Guadeloupe, Basse-Terre, December 10, 1848. Emphasis in the original.

“A la Goyave un nommé Jean Baptiste dit Toutou a dit à M. Revest que les nègres se révolteraient *si l’on imposait leurs plantations en vivres*. Que le Gouvernement en leur donnant la liberté devait savoir qu’ils ne travailleraient plus la canne.”

work in favor of family farming as having no regard for the sacred rights of property. Dessalles recorded his disgust when, playing dominoes at a neighbor's home, he overheard the "newly emancipated say haughtily that Bissette is coming to the colony only to give them land."<sup>137</sup>

Even republican reformers acknowledged the difficulties they faced in correcting freedpeoples' assumptions about their homes and gardens. Writing on his tours throughout the communes, Gatine emphasized that he tried to impress on former slaves that their:

...huts belong to the proprietor, like the gardens, because they are on his land and, in general, built at his own expense...you can never stay in the huts or destroy them without his consent. But the proprietors, if you work for them either by wages or association, will leave you the enjoyment of the huts and gardens that you will cultivate on Saturdays and so you will be better off than white workers in France.<sup>138</sup>

With workers beholden to the whims of the proprietor in association or even in full-time wage work and permitted to cultivate their own lands only on Saturdays, Gatine's vision for a "better" life than white metropolitan workers for the rural workers of Guadeloupe borrowed heavily from the labor organization schemes of slavery. Freedpeople were well aware of it. And so, republican arguments in favor of plantation work largely failed to resonate with cultivators in the post-emancipation period. Rural workers continued to strive for land, a family, and community life outside the limits of the estates.

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<sup>137</sup> Dessalles, diary entry for March 8, 1849 in *La vie d'un colon* Vol. 4, 110.

"Les nouveaux affranchies dissent hautement que Bissette ne vient dans la colonie que pour leur donner des terres."

<sup>138</sup> "Proclamation du Commissaire general de la République Gatine à la Guadeloupe, June 1848," in Schmidt, *Abolitionnistes de l'esclavage et réformateurs des colonies*, 1015-6.

"Les cases appartiennent au propriétaire, comme les jardins, parce qu'elles sont sur son terrain, et, en général, construites à ses frais. Dans le cas même où des matériaux auraient été fournis par vous ou par des tiers, le propriétaire peut s'opposer à l'enlèvement de ces matériaux, s'il offre d'en payer la valeur; en sorte que vous ne pouvez jamais, sans son consentement, rester dans les cases ou les détruire. Mais les propriétaires, si vous travaillez chez eux, au salaire, ou par association vous laisserons la jouissance des cases et des jardin que vous cultiverez le samedi; et ainsi vous serez mieux partagés que les ouvriers blancs en France."

At its core, the conflict between association contracts and family land represented a wider contestation between administrators, reformers, planters, and freedpeople over the different social and economic institutions they envisioned after slavery. Family politics functioned as the site through which this struggle occurred. Reformers pressured former slaves to enter into association and sharecropping by emphasizing how it would benefit the needs of families—even as freedpeople recognized that these contracts did little else other than co-opt the labor of whole families for the benefit of the estates. Through exploitative contracts, planters used any means available to command the full labor-power of a cultivator’s family. Freedpeople, on the other hand, mobilized their family labor-power to carve out spaces of autonomy outside the purview of plantations—recognizing that independent property ownership could guarantee some independence from the estates. Family land plots represented a fulfillment of freedom’s potential and peasant subsistence a safeguard against coercive labor measures. These systems continued to shape the structure and function of family life over the course of the late nineteenth century.

#### Conclusion. The End of Republican Emancipation

The republican emancipation project came to an end as it began: with a sudden political regime change in the metropole. President Louis-Napoleon was declared emperor in 1852, and France once again became an Empire. This political change effectively put an end to republican experimentation in both the metropole and the colonies. Republican reformers, politicians, policymakers, and colonial officials were either forced into exile or fell from political power. Colonial elites welcomed Louis-Napoleon as a new representative of their interests and the Second Empire rolled back many of the civil rights (such as the franchise) briefly enjoyed by the laboring populations in the colonies and the metropole. Under the new regime, provisions were made for colonial planters to import indentured immigrants from Europe, Africa, China, and

India to replenish their labor supply. Given the tumultuous brevity of the Second Republic, therefore, it is difficult to assess how republican emancipation affected quotidian family life among the freed populations of Martinique and Guadeloupe in the immediate years following abolition. Nevertheless, the legacies of republican family politics in the 1848 emancipation project shaped the ways in which freed men and women clashed with colonial administrators over the course of the late nineteenth century.

Chapter Four. “We are living in a different age:” Labor, Gender and Family Politics from  
Emancipation to the *Fin de Siècle*

Former slaves behaved differently after the abolition of slavery in 1848—much to the astonishment of colonial authorities and elites, the ways of the old order appeared to have crumbled overnight. Interactions between former slaves and former masters in the Dessalles household, now composed primarily of Pierre and his formerly enslaved domestic servants, highlight the sometimes-volatile confrontations that occurred during this transition.<sup>1</sup>

On April 10, 1855, Dessalles recorded how Rosélie, the wife of his formerly enslaved son Saturnin, (Dessalles referred to her as Madame Saturnin in the diaries), confronted him the previous day with “a thousand impertinences” in his own home. According to Dessalles. “she wanted to defend all those who have wronged me [his formerly enslaved workers”] and told him: “We are living in a different age...you do not have the right to take precedence over anyone.” Dessalles’ angry reaction was viscerally palpable: “I could not restrain myself and told her to f-k off!”

After this confrontation, Dessalles declared that he would not speak to or see Madame Saturnin again, “unless she repairs her insolence with public apologies.” He then lamented that this event had damaged his relationship with Saturnin, who he declared to be “a fool who is preparing for cruel heartache.”<sup>2</sup> From Dessalles’ perspective, this was a double-edged offense: from Madame Saturnin who challenged his authority, and from Saturnin who failed to properly

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<sup>1</sup> By the 1850s, Anna Bence Dessalles had died and the adult Dessalles children were living with their own families, although Dessalles still saw them with relative frequency.

<sup>2</sup> Dessalles, diary entry for April 10, 1855, in *La vie d'un colon* Vol. 4, 299-300. Saturnin married Rosélie in 1851. “Hier, j’e eu l’honneur d’être insulté chez moi par M<sup>me</sup> Saturnin, qui est venue me débiter mille impertinences: —Nous sommes dans un siècle différent, m’a-t-elle dit. Vous n’avez le droit de primer sur personne. Elle a voulu defendre tous ceux qui ont eu des torts envers moi. Je n’ai pu me retenir et je l’ai envoyée faire f...! Je suis bien décidé à ne plus remettre les pieds chez elle, à moins qu’elle ne répare son insolence par des excuses publiques. Saturnin est un sot qui se prépare de cruels chagrins.”

control his wife. For Dessalles, having a formerly enslaved woman (and unacknowledged daughter-in-law, no less) challenge him—in defiance of all forms of patriarchal power—was simply intolerable.

The Dessalles household was a microcosm of the post-emancipation French Antilles, in which tensions between freedpeople and former masters living “in a different age” erupted in fraught and contentious ways. It also highlights one of the key transformations in the French empire following abolition. To an extent, Madame Saturnin was right: freedpeople and former slaveholders were “living in a different age.” For the first time in Martinique, at least, the civil rights accorded to colonial subjects were nominally identical, regardless of race or previous status as enslaved or free—technically, former slaveholders could “no longer take precedence over anyone.”<sup>3</sup> As Dessalles’ explosive reaction indicates, however, the interests and hierarchies of the old political and social order did not readily adjust to these ideals. His behavior reflected what scholars of both the first and second abolition in the French empire have argued: that colonial elites sought to maintain in the post-emancipation era the systems of domination that they had forged during slavery.<sup>4</sup>

Further, Madame Saturnin’s declaration that Dessalles no longer had the “right to take precedence” over his workers was a direct assault on his slaveholding ethos, and, indeed, Dessalles’ behavior in the weeks following this altercation with his daughter-in-law reflects a

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<sup>3</sup> Guadeloupe had briefly experienced republican citizenship and emancipation from 1794-1802. See: Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens*, especially 171-249 and 317-24.

<sup>4</sup> David Geggus, “The Caribbean in the Age of Revolution” in David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, eds., *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, 1760-1840* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2010), 83-100; David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour, and National Independence in Haiti* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 71-107; Dale Tomich, “Visions of Liberty: Martinique in 1848,” 164-72; idem, “Une petite Guinée: Provision Grounds and Plantation in Martinique, 1830-1848,” 68-91; Vèrges, *Monsters and Revolutionaries*, 55-71; and Fallope, *Esclaves et Citoyens*, 372-410.

larger scramble to reassert his authority as a paternalistic master. This fight between an elite male *colon* and a freed woman had little implications beyond their immediate world. But as it played out, it encapsulated the much wider contention between former slaveholders to reassert power through a racial social hierarchy and freedpeople to establish autonomy following slavery.

Three days after the incident, Dessalles wrote that one of the Saturnin children, young Théodorine, admonished him: “Godfather, you swore at my mother.” When Dessalles pressed her to tell him who told her this, the child answered, “Mama, who was weeping.” Théodorine’s confession further inflamed Dessalles’ anger at Madame Saturnin: “How can a mother put a three-year-old child in such confidences? I must separate myself from all these people, and sacrifice these young children, whose hearts I hoped to mold. I will suffer much, but it would be abnormal to want to keep with me the children of a woman who has committed so many wrongs toward me.”<sup>5</sup> Whether or not she was aware of it in her distress, Madame Saturnin had further insulted Dessalles’ paternalistic sensibilities by telling her young daughter how her “godfather” had cursed at her mother—making him seem the ogre in the eyes of a child he doted on rather than the respectable and benevolent male relative who hoped to “mold her heart.” Because of all

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<sup>5</sup> Dessalles, diary entry for April 12, 1855, in *La vie d'un colon* Vol. 4, 300.

“Hier soir, la petite Théodorine m'a demandé

—Parrain, vous jure maman moi.

—Sa qui dit vous sa? lui ai-je demandé.

—C'est maman qui té ca pleurait

J'avoue que je suis resté stupéfait. Comment une mère peut-elle mettre un enfant de trois ans dans de pareilles confidences? Je dois me séparer de tout ce monde-là, et faire le sacrifice de ces jeunes enfants, dont j'espérais former le cœur. J'en souffrirai beaucoup, mais il y aurait anomalie à vouloir conserver auprès de moi les enfants d'une femme qui s'est donné tant de torts à mon égard.”

Although Théodorine addressed Dessalles as “godfather,” he was actually her grandfather, (although he never acknowledged this). Enslaved persons sometimes requested that members of their masters’ families serve as godparents to baptized children, so the fact that Dessalles was Théodorine’s godfather reflected a long custom of creating relations of dependency and patronage. Their kin relationship, combined with the child’s young age, perhaps had softened Dessalles’ feelings toward Théodorine and the other Saturnin children, giving rise to his hopes that he might “mold their hearts” (despite the near-constant clashes with their parents).



these “wrongs” that challenged his authority in the household, Dessalles was prepared to completely write off his mixed-race family.

Two weeks later, another incident would change his mind. Théodorine had been suffering for several days with a fever, and Dessalles finally relented and instructed Saturnin to bring his wife to take care of her (she had not been welcomed back in the house since the initial fight). When Madame Saturnin arrived, distressed over her daughter’s condition (“like a madwoman”), Dessalles got up from the dinner table and yelled at Saturnin, “scolding” him to behave properly (and, presumably, to control his wife). Dessalles, overcome with sorrow “to see this little girl go,” then threw himself on his bed “and had an attack of the nerves there.”

After this incident, the Saturnins probably recognized that they needed to placate Dessalles before they could attend to their daughter. They brought Théodorine to Dessalles, who hugged her before saying goodbye, but he avoided talking to her mother, as he was still waiting for her to “fix her wrongs.” Théodorine eventually recovered, but it was not until May 9<sup>th</sup>, a month to the day after the whole fight began, that Dessalles begrudgingly forgave Madame Saturnin—and even then, only after the intervention of Chéry Magloire, a friend and free man of color who moved in Dessalles’ social circles.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, he decided that Madame Saturnin would “no longer take care of my household, which she neglected too much.”<sup>7</sup> It was not until

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<sup>6</sup> The relationship between Dessalles and the Magloire family is not clear—they only appear in the diaries a handful of times. Chéry, unlike the rest of the Magloire family, seemed to behave deferentially to Dessalles, which would have mollified his attitudes on racial hierarchy. He otherwise wrote disparagingly about others in the family, so it is not clear why Chéry Magloire was so convincing in this case.

<sup>7</sup> Dessalles, diary entry for April 21, 1855, in *La vie d'un colon* Vol. 4, 300.

“Depuis quelques jours, la petite Théodorine était souffrante; la fièvre s'en étant mêlée, j'ai engagé Saturnin à la conduire à sa mère... A midi—nous étions à table, cette mère arrive comme une furibonde; je me lève de table et je vais en prévenir Saturnin qui, d'une voix forte, la gronde et l'engage à se conduire avec convenance. Désolé de voir partir cette petite, je me jette sur mon lit, et j'ai là une crise de nerfs. Saturnin et sa femme me portent l'enfant, je la reçois dans mes bras; et pour éviter de parler à cette mère, je me tourne vers Saturnin et l'invite à s'en aller avec son enfant. Je n'adressai jamais la parole à cette femme tant qu'elle ne réparera pas ses torts. Enfin, ils sont partis. J'ai passé une heure aux pieds de mon Christ, et me voilà plus calme.”

the following year in April 1856 that he wrote, “M<sup>me</sup> Saturnin is back in my good graces, and I have every reason to believe she will never lose them again.” It is unclear if this final word on the matter was because Madame Saturnin demonstrated enough contrition or because Dessalles had softened more toward his mixed-race family after living with them for several years.<sup>8</sup>

Dessalles’ dramatic account of this year-long feud with his daughter-in-law is worth recounting for what it reveals about family, social tensions, and the struggle to create new relations of power and rights in the absence of slavery. Former masters strove to maintain control and “take precedence” over their workers without being able to claim ownership over their persons. Like republican policymakers espousing the moralizing influences of marriage and labor, planters like Dessalles hoped to “mold the hearts” of freedpeople and their children in a way that, presumably, would convince them to embrace new forms of deference and exploitation. In Dessalles’ case, the fantasy of “molding” hearts and minds shattered with the outspoken defiance of a freed woman. Dessalles had no recourse but to use coercion to try to compel the Saturnins to defer to him after Madame Saturnin destroyed the fiction of former slaves yielding to a former master. Dessalles’ actions—throwing Madame Saturnin out of the house, admonishing Saturnin, and keeping the children separated from their mother—were all manipulative tactics intended to force Madame Saturnin to capitulate. The resolution of the issue—the intercession of another man on behalf of Madame Saturnin and perhaps some outwardly contrite behavior—conformed to Dessalles’ patriarchal sentiments, and he was eventually satisfied that proper order had been permanently restored.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, diary entry for April 18, 1856, 313.

“M<sup>me</sup> Saturnin est rentrée dans mes bonnes grâces et j’ai tout lieu de croire qu’elle ne les perdra plus.”

Yet this incident was so fraught *precisely* because Madame Saturnin had attacked the core of Dessalles' patriarchal slaveholder ideology. By extension, her actions mirrored what Dessalles would have perceived as the emancipation project's attack on colonial social and racial hierarchy. The mixed-race Dessalles-Saturnin family had been created from a slaveholder's exclusive rights to enslaved women's bodies.<sup>9</sup> In the post-emancipation period, Madame Saturnin's efforts to challenge Dessalles' authority over her family and the workers on the estate underscore how freedpeople (and especially freed women) were no longer upholding any pretense of the old order. For them, the times had changed, and no former master could take "precedence over" a former slave. Although Madame Saturnin acquiesced to some of Dessalles' irascible behavior (for example, bringing him the sick Théodorine for a paternal embrace before taking her away to recover), it is worth noting that Dessalles never revealed whether or not she apologized to him publicly, as he had initially demanded. Given his volatile behavior throughout, if Madame Saturnin had submitted on that score, he likely would have mentioned it in the diary.

Thus, despite the fact that she lost her job as Dessalles' household manager, Madame Saturnin seems to have won the longer fight. Her actions speak to the transformations taking place within the broader post-emancipation context, as formerly enslaved people seized what possibilities their newfound freedom afforded to them.<sup>10</sup> But it also underscores how freedpeople

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<sup>9</sup> Trop was the mother of Saturnin and another domestic enslaved worker in the household. She was the daughter of Fortunée, an enslaved woman who had been with the Dessalles family at least since the French Revolution, and who had served Dessalles' parents. For gender ideologies in American slave societies, see: Davis, "Don't Let Nobody Bother Yo' Principle: The Sexual Economy of American Slavery," 103-27; Lisa Ze Winters, *The Mulatta Concubine: Terror, Intimacy, Freedom and Desire in the Black Transatlantic* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2016), 1-25; Garraway, *The Libertine Colony*, 194-239; Beckles, *Centering Women* 2-37; and idem., "Freeing Slavery: Gender Paradigms in the Social History of Caribbean Slavery," in Brian Moore, et., al., eds., *Slavery, Gender, and Freedom: The Dynamics of Caribbean Society* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2001), 197-231.

<sup>10</sup> Rosamunde Renard, "Labour Relations in Martinique and Guadeloupe, 1848-1870" *The Journal of Caribbean History* Vol. 26, no. 1 (Jan: 1992): 37.

struggled for recognition of their rights and to maintain the autonomy that supposedly had been granted unreservedly with the title of *citoyen* after abolition.

The dynamics of the Saturnin-Dessalles fight thus highlight how family politics, race, and gender shaped the transition to a post-emancipation order in the late-nineteenth-century French Antilles. Firstly, family politics framed the struggle between colonial administrators, planters, and freedpeople over post-emancipation labor and civil rights. As authorities and planters employed a variety of coercive mechanisms designed to co-opt the labor of the freed family for the plantations, freedpeople responded by drawing on their family politics to circumvent these restrictive laws.<sup>11</sup>

Secondly, although racial categories legally disappeared in the French empire following the abolition of slavery (to the present day, France formally remains “race blind,” although racism prevails), white metropolitan and colonial officials and elites who lived, traveled to, or imagined the French Antilles explicitly conflated black workers with slavery.<sup>12</sup> Colonial elites associated black family practices (such as matrifocality and informal unions) with incorrigible behavior and conflated the black worker with the enslaved worker, which in turn justified the continued exploitation of freedpeople. Dessalles’ expectation that Madame Saturnin should defer to his authority—and his anger and actions when she failed to do so—thus underscores how elite whites struggled to maintain their control over black workers.

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<sup>11</sup> For comparative restrictions enacted in post-emancipation Jamaica, Brazil, and the United States see: Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 115-43; Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet*, 412-64; Woodruff, *American Congo*, 74-109; Naro, *A Slave’s Place, a Master’s World*; 153-176; McGraw, *The Work of Recognition*, 73-99; and Paton, *No Bond but the Law*, 83-155.

<sup>12</sup> On race-blindness and racism in France, see: Gwenaële Calves, “Color-Blindness at a Crossroads in Contemporary France,” in Herrick Chapman and Laura Frader, eds., *Race in France: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Politics of Difference* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004); 219-26; and Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall, eds., *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France*.

Thirdly, the fight demonstrates the ways in which freed women played an integral role in the conflicts over race and labor that erupted between colonial elites and freedpeople during this “different age.” Even as black women were marginalized by the racialist and gendered policies that colonial and metropolitan elites espoused, their labor, entrepreneurialism, and reproduction were key to preserving freedpeople’s post-emancipation autonomy in Martinique and Guadeloupe.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, by studying freedwomen in the late-nineteenth-century French Antilles, we can understand how they employed their labor and family politics to build enduring social and cultural institutions in the face of exploitative colonial policies.<sup>14</sup>

Like the efforts of French abolitionist and republican reformers during the July Monarchy and Second Republic, late-nineteenth-century colonial authorities and planters devised a variety of mechanisms to maintain a dependent plantation labor force after freedom. Unlike abolitionist and republican reformers, however, late-nineteenth-century colonial authorities overtly reformulated family politics to justify the expropriation of freedpeople’s labor. To this end, elite whites and colonial authorities developed racialist and gendered arguments—which targeted the

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<sup>13</sup> See: Doris Garraway, “Race, Reproduction and Family Romance in Moreau de Saint-Mery’s Description...” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* Vol. 38, no. 2 (2005): 227-46; Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries*, 185-243; Cottias and Fitte-Duval, “Femme, Famille et Politique dans les Antilles Françaises de 1828 à nos Jours,” 77-8; Cottias, “Gender and Republican Citizenship in the French West Indies, 1848-1945” 233-45; Larcher, *L’autre citoyen*, 127-68; and Gautier, *Les Sœurs de Solitude*, 261-2.

<sup>14</sup> I draw on scholars such as Mintz and Besson who argue that that women (and gender roles more broadly) were integral in Caribbean culture-building and creolization in the post-emancipation period. In particular, Besson’s focus on family land and Afro-Caribbean family structures in Jamaica demonstrates the creative processes they employed to appropriate and overturned European cultural institutions. See: Besson, *Martha Brae’s Two Histories*, 9-10 (for Caribbean cultural institution building) and 16-18 (for gender and culture). For a select and incomplete list of seminal scholarship on African-American, Afro-Caribbean, and Afro-Brazilian cultural and social institution building, see: Mintz and Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture*, especially pp. 42-84; Stephan Palmié, ed., *Slave Cultures and the Cultures of Slavery* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995), especially 12-39; Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations*, 131-250; Sweet, *Recreating Africa*, 31-58; idem., *Domingos Álvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); João Reis, *Death is a Festival: Funeral Rites and Rebellion in Nineteenth-Century Brazil* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003) 39-65; idem., *Slave Rebellion in Brazil*, 93-128; and Karasch, *Slave Life in Rio de Janeiro*, 214-253.

family—to justify their encroachment on freedpeople’s post-emancipation civil rights. Thus, between the 1850s and the early 1900s, colonial authorities reformulated the discourse of family politics in order to accommodate policies of racial domination.<sup>15</sup>

Even before the collapse of the Second Republic, planters and authorities had begun to recast the abolitionist republican discourse of citizenship for freedpeople for their own purposes. They claimed that freed men and women had to learn the values of free labor, marriage, and moral order—conveniently, by remaining at work on the estates. Although abolitionist reformers and republican policymakers did turn to coercive measures in the republican era, they also relied on persuasion to convince freedpeople to return to the plantation during the Second Republic. However, beginning in the 1850s, colonial elites began to argue that freedpeople’s mobility, autonomy, and supposed “hatred” of productive labor (defined as plantation commodity production) could only be curbed through compulsory and regulatory measures that would tie the freed family to sugar cultivation. These authorities maintained that exploitative labor policies, enforced by the colonial police and planters, would effectively transform idle and unproductive freedpeople into productive and docile colonial subjects.

In developing this discourse, authorities and elites explicitly racialized freedpeople’s labor and family customs—implicitly or explicitly associating certain categories of work and intimacy with former slaves—which justified the continued exploitation of formerly enslaved workers. Over the course of the late nineteenth century, then, authorities and elites abandoned abolitionist moralization campaigns (such as marriage encouragement) and dropped the pretense of egalitarian citizenship that—nominally, at least—underpinned the republican discourse of

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<sup>15</sup> Françoise Vergès traces a similar phenomenon in post-emancipation Réunion. See: Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries*, 68-71.

racial fusion.<sup>16</sup> Instead, colonial authorities and elite whites strengthened asymmetrical, rigid, and racialized social hierarchies that were designed to keep freedpeople tied to plantation production.

Family politics provided the tools with which planters and authorities attempted to accomplish this aim, a process significantly informed by both race and gender. Although race had disappeared as a legal category throughout the empire after 1848, racial discrimination remained socially entrenched.<sup>17</sup> This was also the case in the French Antilles. As authorities drafted policies that punished freedpeople for vagrancy and other work violations, used the courts to discipline freedpeople who stepped out of line, and wrote accounts of quotidian post-emancipation rural and urban life, they implicitly and explicitly linked what they viewed as “unproductive” labor, sexuality, and reproduction to black men and women.

In response, freedpeople developed a family politics of alternative social and cultural customs that both drew on and competed with the norms policymakers and planters dictated. They sought to buy land that they then farmed in common with relatives, engaged in family-run businesses, and legalized their kin ties (often blended and matrifocal) in the civil registers of their communes. Gender was essential to this process, as freed women were central agents in building these family politics. By shedding light on how black women interacted with the colonial administration in order to advance and protect their own interests, we can thus examine

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<sup>16</sup> Although Bissette’s exhortations to freedpeople to “imitate the whites” in order to “be civilized” indicates how racial fusion was already beginning to crystalize as a discourse of racial hierarchy that placed black freedpeople in an asymmetrical relationship with whites and *gens de couleur* in the immediate post-emancipation era. See: Chapter Three, pp. 216-8.

<sup>17</sup> See: Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*, 14-23; idem., “Redefining ‘Frenchness’: Citizenship, Race Regeneration, and Imperial Motherhood in France and West Africa, 1914-40,” in Clancy-Smith and Gouda, eds., *Domesticating the Empire*, 65-83; Janet R. Horne, “In Pursuit of Greater France,” in op. cit., 21-42; Osborn, *Our New Husbands Are Here*, 141-60; and Cooper and Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, 2-3.

their integral role in using family politics to claim rights for freedpeople in post-emancipation Martinique and Guadeloupe.

### Post-Emancipation Repressions

The post-emancipation state quickly dismantled former slaves' hopes that the revolutionary government would re-distribute small plots of land (either from a breakup of the estates or in granting them exclusive rights to their garden plots). Instead, republican commissioners pressured freedpeople to accept association or sharecropping contracts.<sup>18</sup> The commissioners also helped evict workers who tried to remain in their homes to cultivate their kitchen gardens on plantation properties without agreeing to these labor arrangements.<sup>19</sup> For example, Perrinon, during his tours of plantations in central Martinique, evicted a freedwoman from her house and garden on the Laguigneraye plantation in Lamentin. He decided to "make an example" of her because she refused to come to any work agreement with the landowner and "sowed bad advice" (presumably to other cultivators regarding the contracts).<sup>20</sup>

As this case indicates, even before Louis-Napoleon's coup, restrictions on the political and social rights of new citizens in Martinique and Guadeloupe were already well underway during the Second Republic. Fearful of mass politics and under the pretext of maintaining order, local authorities censored most newspapers (other than the official bulletins). Beginning in 1848,

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<sup>18</sup> With the onset of indentured immigration from the 1850s onward, some planters decided to switch to day rates. Association and sharecropping are discussed in Chapter Three, pp. 221-36.

<sup>19</sup> See: ANOM FM SG Amérique 8, "Répression d'émeutes de 1848 à la Martinique: Destruction de cases d'habitation Marchet," (undated); and ANOM FM SG MAR 56/464, "Rapport du Commissioner-General Perrinon à Ministre de la Marine et des Colonies," August 19, 1848.

<sup>20</sup> ANOM FM SG MAR 56/464, Commissaire Perrinon à le Ministre de la Marine et des Colonie, "Tournée dans la communes du Lamentin et du Robert," Fort-de-France, August 9, 1848. Also, for freedpeople remaining on plantation lands to work their garden plots, see: Dale Tomich, "Visions of Liberty: Martinique in 1848," 165. "J'ai fait un exemple en ordonnant la sorite, sous un délai de [un?] jour, d'une femme qui refusait tout accommodement avec le propriétaire, qui semait les mauvais conseils et qui prétendait se maintenir à son [?] l'habitation en possession de sa case et de son jardin."



local police forces had been expanded to pursue those accused of vagrancy and arrest mendicants. *Jurys cantonaux* governed labor disputes, and although they were partially composed of rural workers, there is not much evidence to suggest that the latter were able to successfully counter the efforts of large property owners and administrators to force freedpeople back to the plantations.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, planters insisted that freedom had resulted in deserted plantations and a collapse of public order.<sup>22</sup>

When Louis-Napoleon consolidated his power as emperor in 1852, Martinique and Guadeloupe lost political representation in the metropole. Between 1852 and 1870, the colonies lacked a free press, the right to assembly, or representation.<sup>23</sup> While the new regime made no attempt to rescind emancipation, as with Napoleon I, it aggressively bolstered the interests of the planters.<sup>24</sup> The colonial officials dispatched by the Minister of the Navy to the Antilles embarked on a mission to revitalize the plantations and promote economic growth by disciplining the local workforce—mirroring efforts in the metropole to consolidate state authority and encourage development.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> For these repressions and *jurys cantonaux*, see: Renard, “Labor Relations in Martinique and Guadeloupe, 1848-1870,” 43-6. Also see: *The Antislavery Reporter*, December 2, 1850, 195 and March 1, 1851, 40. The records of the *jurys cantonaux* have disappeared entirely from the archives, there are only passing references to them and how they adjudicated cases in the administrative reports sent from the colonies to the Minister of the Navy in Paris.

<sup>22</sup> See: ANOM FM SG GUA 5/59, Attorney General Rabou, “Acte d’accusation. Administration de la Justice,” Basse-Terre, February 14, 1850; and *Gazette des Tribunaux*, September 21, 1850.

<sup>23</sup> Ulrike Schmieder, “Martinique and Cuba Grande: Commonalities and Differences during the Periods of Slavery, Abolition, and Post-Emancipation” *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, Vol. 36, no. 1 (2013): 103.

<sup>24</sup> Horowitz, *Morne-Paysan, Peasant Village in Martinique*, 13.

<sup>25</sup> Roger Price, *The French Second Empire: An Anatomy of Political Power* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 54-251.

During this period, the colonial administration escalated their attempts to prevent freedpeople from leaving plantations.<sup>26</sup> Governors and their magistrates expanded vagrancy laws, instituted *livrets* (workbooks), and imposed a head tax (per person on every inhabitant of the colonies), all of which punished freedpeople who sought land away from the estates.<sup>27</sup> As Governor Gueydon of Martinique wrote in a memo to the Department of the Interior: “the aim of the new provisions [work policies] is therefore...to succeed in promoting, protecting and reducing the tax burden on good people; [and] to pursue, to catch, to punish the lazy and the vagabonds.” Indeed, Gueydon maintained, they were a “means of moralizing the masses and raising to the dignity of free men those who unfortunately have kept the habits of slavery.”<sup>28</sup>

By “vagabonds,” “the lazy,” and those who “kept the habits of slavery,” Gueydon meant freedpeople employed in any occupation other than plantation cultivation.<sup>29</sup> For instance, freedpeople who sought to move to the cities for better-paying jobs found themselves unable to leave their communes, their movements restricted by interior passports that had to be first

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<sup>26</sup> For comparative struggles between former slaves, authorities, and planters over labor and land in the post-emancipation Americas, see: Roger Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 40-105; Hall, “The Flight from the Estates Reconsidered: The British West Indies, 1838-42,” 7-24; Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 115-178; Scott, *Degrees of Freedom*, especially pp. 216-72; Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction*, 102-42; and Jean Besson, “Squatting and Postslavery Peasantization,” in Jean Besson and Janet Momsen, eds., *Caribbean Land Development Revisited* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 135-146.

<sup>27</sup> ANOM FM SG MAR 145/1227, “2eme trimestre 2/1853, 191, 3eme trimestre/1856, 1514.”

<sup>28</sup> *Bulletin Officiel de la Martinique*, N. 1610, 8 janvier 1855, 62 and *Le Moniteur de la Martinique*, January 11, 1855.

“Le but des dispositions nouvelles est donc, comme vous le voyez, d’arriver à favoriser, à protéger, à dégrever les bons; à poursuivre, à dégrever les bons à châtier les paresseux et les vagabonds. Il s’agit bien moins...d’une mesure fiscale que d’un moyen de moraliser les masses et d’élever à la dignité d’hommes libres ceux qui ont malheureusement conservé les habitudes de l’esclavage.”

<sup>29</sup> I have yet to find one case in the archives where a “sans profession” person of means or a *petit blanc* (a racial status which can be recognized in the archives by place of birth, occupation, marital status, and/or status as “fils/le legitime,” surname, and/or several middle names) was prosecuted for vagrancy.

stamped by the local magistrate before they could lawfully leave—a system that very much resembled the pass under slavery. Except unlike the pass, freedpeople had to pay for a stamp.<sup>30</sup>

Freedpeople who remained in their communes—but on lands that they acquired through squatting, informal sub-leasing, or customary rights of access—also became a target. For instance, during the 1855 census, Napoléon Bontemps, the Director of the Interior in Martinique, instructed the census takers to show “the greatest respect for the inhabitants whose properties you will have to list...Only ask for title deeds from those who are not known to be property owners...When you have doubts...you will demand that they produce their titles.”<sup>31</sup> Bontemps’ meaning is in no way concealed in these instructions. The properties of “inhabitants” treated with the “greatest respect” were the estates belonging to former slaveowners or the farms of whites or formerly free people of color “known” publicly as small-scale proprietors before abolition. Those “who are not known” to own property had to prove their status through title deeds or formal leasing and sharecropping agreements.

Bontemps instructed census takers to be especially suspicious when they observed properties with more occupied dwellings and lands than workers in the estate’s fields. He told them “the aim, in a word, that you must strive for is to tax all individuals who take refuge on certain properties to live in a better-disguised laziness and vagrancy, which they cover up through their residence on an agricultural dwelling, the exploitation of which they seem attached to while they

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<sup>30</sup> *Bulletin Officiel de la Martinique*, N. 1610, January 8, 1855, 62; and *Le Moniteur de la Martinique*, January 11, 1855; and Renard “Labour Relations in Martinique and Guadeloupe, 1848-1870,” 47. Also see: AD-GUA, 1 N 20. *Conseil Général de la Guadeloupe*, November 29, 1862, for debates on the interior passport.

<sup>31</sup> *Le Moniteur de la Martinique*, January 11, 1855. “Vous montrerez les plus grands égards pour les habitants dont vous aurez à recenser les propriétés; vous ne demanderez habituellement les titres de propriété qu’à ceux qui ne seront pas notoirement connus comme propriétaires, cependant quand vous aurez de doutes votre droit est entier et vous exigerez la production de ces titres.”

are there, in reality, only as tenants, not as serious settlers...irregularly paying their dues with a few days of bad work.”<sup>32</sup> Ironically, Bontemps implicitly recognized freedpeoples’ agricultural productivity on their own tracts, but unilaterally categorized them as “lazy,” transient, and temporary settlers who refused to labor industriously (or deliberately performed poor work) on the plantations. Like most other colonial elites, Bontemps maintained that the only productive labor for formerly enslaved cultivators was sugar cultivation.

Thanks to extensive police surveillance networks and a court system staffed by planters eager for forced labor, vagrancy was one of the most-prosecuted crimes during this era.<sup>33</sup> Freedpeople who were self-employed in occupations from farming to fishing to bread bakers were snapped up by police and accused of being vagrants.<sup>34</sup> Freedpeople were also arrested for stealing crops—a crime which, if they refused to work on the estates was applied to their own garden plots on plantation lands.<sup>35</sup> Adults were usually sentenced to several months or even years in prison while

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

“Le but, en un mot, que vous devez vous efforcer d’atteindre est de frapper d’impôt tous les individus qui se réfugient sur certaines propriétés pour y vivre dans la paresse et dans un vagabondage d’autant mieux déguisé, qu’il est couvert par leur résidence sur une habitation agricole à l’exploitation de laquelle ils paraissent attachés tandis qu’ils ne s’y trouvent, en réalité, qu’à titre de locataires, de colons peu sérieux...irréguliers payant leur redevance au moyen de quelques journées de mauvais travail.”

<sup>33</sup> Policing was handled by the commune militia forces, and organized by a system of lieutenants, sergeant-majors, sub-lieutenants, and corporals. See: *Bulletin Officiel de la Martinique*, August 21, 1848 and *Gazette Officiel de la Guadeloupe*, November 20, 1848.

<sup>34</sup> See: the list of convictions for the Tribunal of the First Instance in Marie-Galante in *Gazette Officielle de la Guadeloupe*, January 18, 1861. Police surveillance of labor was not confined to the interior of the colonies, but also the seas. See: idem., August 9, 1861, for the case of César Lusine, a forty-six year old sailor born in Africa and living in Sainte-Rose, Guadeloupe, condemned to a fine of ten francs, levied by the navigation police. Also see: vagrancy convictions passed by the Tribunal of First Instance in Fort-de-France in *Le Moniteur de la Martinique*, January 14, 1855, (all of those convicted were day laborers, cultivators, barbers, beggars, or not listed with any occupation). Interestingly, one of the women convicted of vagrancy, Elise Bonne in Lamentin, was also charged with public indecency, assault, and violence. The charge of “délits d’outrage public à la pudeur” could imply that she was arrested for prostitution, in addition to vagrancy and assault. She was sentenced to a year in prison and five years of police surveillance, the longest punishment out of all cases covered in this issue of the paper (most convicted of vagrancy served prison terms of six months or less). This suggests that urban police employed the full weight of vagrancy laws in their efforts to clear “social undesirables” out of the cities following emancipation.

<sup>35</sup> See: the list of convictions for the Tribunal of the First Instance in Pointe-à-Pitre, in *Gazette Officielle de la Guadeloupe*, February 12, 1861. Eighteen-year old Romba, a farmer born in Africa, was sentenced to two months in

juveniles were placed in “corrections houses.” In reality, most adolescent and adult persons convicted of vagrancy were sent to work on estates or on public works projects.

Authorities also levied head taxes as a way to keep the rural population from moving to urban areas, creating a financial burden that compelled freedpeople to work on the estates, and otherwise impose regulatory order.<sup>36</sup> An annual payment levied per individual, the head tax was higher on those living in the cities and environs than in the rural areas—as in Guadeloupe, where taxes for Le Moule or Point-à-Pitre were double or even triple the rate of the country head tax.<sup>37</sup>

No matter the rate, the head tax often imposed a sufficiently onerous cost on freedpeople that it required them to seek out additional work. The tax further had the advantage of helping the authorities produce more accurate population counts and identify all members of the population by recording taxpayers in separate rolls.<sup>38</sup> As was the case elsewhere in the post-emancipation Caribbean, the head tax was exceedingly unpopular—petition campaigns, direct appeals to the governors, and even revolts marked resistance to the tax and other punitive labor laws.<sup>39</sup>

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prison for stealing crops. Similar charges for “theft from the fields” were levied in Martinique, see: *Le Moniteur de la Martinique*, January 18, 1855. Dessalles recorded instances of “theft” in former slave gardens, see: Dessalles, diary entry for March 8, 1849 in *La vie d’un colon* Vol. 4, 110; and op. cit., diary entry for September 19, 1855, 304.

<sup>36</sup> Elites explicitly described the tax as creating an “artificial need” for freedpeople to work. See: J. de Crisenoy, *Étude sur la situation économique des Antilles françaises* (Paris: Guillaumin et Cie, 1860), 48. For a comparative example of taxes levied on freedpeople in Jamaica, see: Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 202-13.

<sup>37</sup> *Bulletin Officiel de la Guadeloupe*, July 13, 1849. See also: Renard, “Labour Relations in Martinique and Guadeloupe, 1848-1870,” 44. For example, in 1849, the head tax was 15 francs in Pointe à Pitre, 12 francs in Basse-Terre, and 10 francs in Le Moule (collectively, the commercial hubs of Guadeloupe). In the rural areas, the personal tax hovered around 4.50 or 5 francs per inhabitant.

<sup>38</sup> De Crisenoy, *Étude sur la situation économique des Antilles françaises*, 52.

<sup>39</sup> In Saint Lucia, for example, a tax revolt of approximately two hundred freedpeople, and led by “refugees from Martinique” led to a clash with the Governor and 3<sup>rd</sup> West India regiment. The police commissioner was seriously injured, and seven freed men and women were killed. See: *The Antislavery Reporter*, May 1, 1849, 80.

Through these repressive policies, the administration restricted any form of labor considered unproductive to plantation production. In doing so, they relied on mechanisms inherited from slavery (such as the pass) and also imposed novel restrictions and burdens. Taken together, they facilitated authorities' efforts to restrict peasant farming, curbed the growth of an itinerant, seasonal labor population moving between country and city (where jobs were more lucrative), and compelled freedpeople to labor on the estates in order to acquire the cash or crops required to pay the head tax.<sup>40</sup> Freedpeople who resisted or evaded these policies were arrested, slapped with fines, and thrown into state workshops to work off these infractions.

Unsurprisingly, these simmering social and economic tensions periodically erupted in violence, protest, and revolts over the nineteenth century. In the months following abolition, planters remarked on freedpeople's palpable "insolence" and disobedience. Dessalles, for example, had drafted a letter to the Director of the Interior, complaining of his workers' impertinence. He was especially irate over the behavior of freed women: "the women in particular are irascible...they mock everything one tells them, are always ready to forget their obligations, and freely express all their passion and their anger" (presumably to Dessalles and other *colons*).<sup>41</sup>

Accustomed to sexualizing, exploiting, or receiving deferential treatment from the women they owned under slavery, white men seem to have been especially stunned by black women's behavior and comportment in post-emancipation society. Dessalles' fight with Madame Saturnin exemplified this, but he recounted numerous other incidents of outspoken and

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<sup>40</sup> Renard, "Labour Relations in Martinique and Guadeloupe, 1848-1870," 50-1; Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 202-13.

<sup>41</sup> Pierre Dessalles' Letter to the Director of the Interior, Sainte-Marie, December 17, 1848, in *Sugar and Slavery, Family and Race*, 239. The origin and purpose of this letter was discussed in Chapter Three, fn107.

“insubordinate” freed women.<sup>42</sup> He lamented in August 1848 how “negro women are especially affected with insolence,” they paraded in front of him “stopping and looking at you with disdain to provoke your anger, and then they will indulge in all the most biting insults.”<sup>43</sup> Such “disorderly” conduct not only angered white men, it provoked unrest in the work gangs: “Joséphine said horrible things and incited her fellow workers to disorder.”<sup>44</sup> In yet another incident, Dessalles noted his anger when a freed woman demanded that he provide her with farming tools, and how she rendered a “thousand insults” when he refused.<sup>45</sup> In these incidents, the newfound ability of freed women to “freely express” their opinions, to ignore the commands of former masters and mock them openly, and to comport themselves in ways previously denied to them under slavery, perhaps emphasized more than anything else, how vociferously freedpeople resisted elites’ attempts to exploit them in the new order.<sup>46</sup>

Freedpeople did not stop at verbal insults, but often used violence to push back against repressive laws. For example, the recorded deliberations of the Privy Council in Guadeloupe recounted how, in December 1858, a crowd of workers protested the recently-imposed pass law

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<sup>42</sup> Thavolia Glymph describes a similar process in the United States in her analysis of white women’s reactions to their enslaved domestic laborers leaving their households with no warning after emancipation (especially their stunned disbelief that freedpeople had little interest in employment in their former owners’ homes and fields). See: Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 144-5.

<sup>43</sup> Dessalles, diary entry for August 23, 1848 in *La vie d’un colon Vol. 4*, 72. “Les négresses surtout sont d’une insolence affectée: elles passent et repassent devant moi sans rien dire, s’arrêtant et vous regardant avec dédain pour exciter votre colère, et alors elles se laisseront aller à toutes les injures les plus mordantes.”

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, diary entry for September 11, 1848, 77. “Joséphine a tenu d’horribles propos et a excite ses camarades au désordre.”

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, September 9, 1848, 75. “...mille injures.”

<sup>46</sup> Although he was emphasizing the dynamics between freed men and women in his analysis, Steven Hahn has noted that verbal insults and public shaming practices were a favored tactic of black women when organizing political campaigns. Public anger allowed black women to powerfully contribute to the development of community-based and grassroots political culture in the U.S. See: Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, 227-8.

by marching on the town hall in Capesterre with their cutlasses, threatening to kill the mayor.<sup>47</sup>

Similar incidents occurred in Le Moule and Anse-Bertrand, where workers participated in demonstrations and refused to hand over passes to plantation managers for their signatures.<sup>48</sup>

Martinique experienced similar unrest. In July 1859, a series of fires was deliberately started in the commune of Sainte Anne—which destroyed considerable portions of the grand Brafîn and Des Grottes plantations. Governor Candé, only recently appointed to his post, declared that the fires were “obviously caused by malice” and a direct attack on his authority, “a kind of bravado and a defiance thrown in my face.”<sup>49</sup> When he arrived to survey the damage, Candé learned from Brafîn that only ten of the 150 workers had helped him put out the flames; the rest of the work gang “refused to help him.” The fire, which Brafîn maintained could have been “easily extinguished at the beginning,” ravaged many of the houses on the property—although not the personal effects of the cultivators, which had been moved before the fire had started (confirming, for Candé, the extent of the plot).<sup>50</sup> Fires—whether accidental or

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<sup>47</sup> ANOM FM SG GUA, 108/757, “Délibérations de Conseil Privé, sixième séance, 2 décembre 1858.”

<sup>48</sup> Renard, “Labour Relations in Martinique and Guadeloupe, 1848-1870,” 55.

<sup>49</sup> ANOM FM MAR CORR 68, Gouverneur Contre-Amiral Antoine Marie Ferdinand de Maussion de Candé à le Ministre de la Marine, “N.25 Cabinet du Ministre. Mesures prises sur l’habitation Brafîn, tournée...” July 27, 1859. “Pour ma lettre en date du 12 de ce mois, #22, j’annonçais à Votre Excellence qu’au moment de me mettre en route pour une tournée dans l’Île, j’avais appris qu’un violent incendie dû évidemment à la malveillance, venait d’éclater dans une habitation du Sud appartenant à M. Brafîn... C’était en quelque sorte une bravade et un défi qui m’étaient jetés à la face.”

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

“Je fis rassembler les travailleurs et, après en avoir fait faire l’appel, je priaï M. Brafîn de me désigner ceux qui s’étaient fait remarquer par leur zèle à porter secours. Sur les 150 présents, il ne put m’en désigner que dix, et encore quatre d’entre eux étaient-ils étrangers à l’Habitation. Je leur fis des compliments sur leur bonne conduite, leur promis une récompense que je leur ai envoyée depuis, et témoignai hautement à M. Brafîn tout mon étament de voir un aussi petit nombre de gens venus à son aide. Il me répondit, toujours en présence de l’atelier, que l’incendie eût pu être facilement éteint au commencement, mais que la presque totalité de son atelier s’était refusé à porter secours. J’ai fait alors appeler une douzaine d’hommes pris au hasard, mais en y comprenant ceux qui m’avaient été signalés, et, après leur avoir reproché leur conduite, je leur fis subir moi-même un interrogatoire, pendant lequel j’en fis arrêter six que j’envoyai à bord de l’ardent.”



premeditated—continued to plague the colonies. Particularly devastating events almost always fanned rumors that former slaves were trying to ruin, eradicate, or drive whites from the Antilles.<sup>51</sup>

The largest insurrection occurred in southern Martinique during the transition to the Third Republic in September 1870, which directly stemmed from unequal treatment of blacks and whites under the law. Tensions flared that June, when the Assizes Court of Fort-de-France sentenced a black man named Lubin “from a good family in the South,” to five years’ transportation to Cayenne for having assaulted a white creole (who was also well-connected, as he was an aid to a navy marshal). While the exact reasons for the fight are unclear, the sources indicate that this was an otherwise unremarkable skirmish between two men who both “shared the blame” for their involvement. The sentencing, however, angered Lubin’s family and riled public opinion among black residents in the island (and even alarmed the metropolitan courts, which commuted the sentence to five years’ imprisonment on the island, rather than transportation). The damage, however, had been done, and black residents mobilized in protest of racial inequality. In part spurred by the leadership of black women who today are compared to the defiant *pétroleuses* of the Paris Commune —such as folkloric Martinican hero Lumina Sophie dite Surprise—insurgents retaliated by burning plantations and taking over Fort-de-France, declaring an independent republican Martinique. The revolt was bloodily suppressed by

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<sup>51</sup> Schœlcher recounted an 1871 fire in Pointe-à-Pitre, which devastated many local businesses. He argued that although the fire was in Guadeloupe, rumors quickly spread in Martinique that blacks were trying to ruin whites and force them to leave the colony. See: Schœlcher, *Polémique Coloniale, (1882-1885) suivie de discours et articles divers* Vol. 2 (Paris: E. Dentu, Libraire-Éditeur, 1886), ix.

“En 1871, une épouvantable calamité frappa la Guadeloupe: la ville de la Pointe-à-Pitre fut dévorée par un incendie. Les honnêtes gens de la Martinique (non de la Guadeloupe) affirmèrent aussitôt que ‘c'était le résultat d'un crime, que les trois quarts de la population de la Guadeloupe étaient animés des intentions les plus perverses — le mot d'ordre est donné: il faut ruiner la race européenne, afin de l'obliger à fuir de la colonie.’”

both French troops and elite white and mixed-race civilian volunteers, and the insurgents were arrested, executed, or condemned to transportation and forced labor.<sup>52</sup>

A year after the 1870 insurrection, former Governor of Martinique Menche de Loisne claimed that the rebellion stemmed from simmering anger over unequal treatment of blacks and whites before the law. He wrote, “the colored races, especially the black race, were very much upset by the judgment of the Assizes Court. They said loudly that if the black man had been beaten by a white man and forced to stay in bed for a month, the [white] culprit would have been sentenced to fifteen days in prison.”<sup>53</sup> Schœlcher also confirmed this assessment. As he put it, blacks were justifiably angry that they were treated by the authorities as “malefactors” for simple infractions and often “chained by police” and punished to the harshest extent of the law—punishments never meted out to whites. In particular, the use of the chain as a tool of discipline was a galling reminder of slavery—when black bodies, both male and female, were subjected to such forms of punishment by slave owners with impunity.

Further, as Schœlcher noted, the indiscriminate application of old punishments on black people without regard to gender contributed to widespread anger at the police: “blacks complain all the more strongly that they alone and even their wives are subjected to this useless humiliation [chains].” Quoting the remarks of black Martinican Mr. David, Schœlcher reported that white women were never chained for the worst crimes, such as “subjecting...Indian workers

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<sup>52</sup> For the insurrection and its leaders, see: Gilbert Pago, *L'histoire tragique de Marie-Philomène Roptus dite Lumina Sophie dite Surprise, 1848-1879, femme-flame de l'insurrection du sud de 1870 en Martinique* (Matoury: Ibis Rouge, 2008); idem, *Insurrection de Martinique, 1870-1871* (Paris: Syllepse, 2011); and Odile Krakovitch, “Le rôle des femmes dans l'insurrection du Sud de la Martinique en Septembre 1870” *Nouvelles Questions Féministes*, No. 9-10 (Spring, 1985): 34-51. For the *pétroleuses* of Paris, see: Gay Gullickson, *Unruly Women of Paris: Images of the Commune* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 159-90.

<sup>53</sup> Charles Menche de Loisne, *Insurrection de la Martinique, 22 septembre-1er octobre* (Paris: E. Dentu, Libraire-Éditeur, 1871), 3.

to atrocious tortures,” while “two negro women were being taken to jail in chains” for not having “their livrets in order.”<sup>54</sup> Taken together, these examples of unequal treatment of whites and blacks under the (nominally race-blind) law, emphasized the extent to which racialized hierarchies remained entrenched in Antillean societies—upheld by the state’s willingness to violently suppress the black population in the name of “public order” and production.<sup>55</sup>

In sum, under the Second Empire, colonial authorities and elites aggressively upheld the interests of planters, who required a fixed labor force to maintain production, and relied on a variety of disciplinary measures to accomplish their aims. Indeed, colonial officials maintained that such measures were necessary to establish the rule of law in a post-slavery society. As the official press of Martinique declared in 1855, policies such as *livrets*, taxes, domestic passports, and the census aimed to: “classify the entire population, defend it against its own tendencies, and to contain everything, men and things, within legal limits. Frankly, isn’t such a measure generous, intelligent, [and] civilizing? Shouldn’t it get the approval of all sensible men, of all those who seriously want the good of the country?”<sup>56</sup> The answer, according to freedpeople, was

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<sup>54</sup> Schœlcher, *La Grande conspiration du pillage, de l’incendie et du meurtre à la Martinique* (Paris: Lechevalier, Éditeur, 1875), 92 fn1.

“Une réforme que l’on attend de l’esprit de justice qui anime la direction des colonies est d’obliger ses représentants à renoncer à cet usage, souvenir d’un temps néfaste, d’enchaîner et de menotter les noirs comme des malfaiteurs de la pire espèce lorsqu’ils sont arrêtés pour une cause même de simple police, ainsi qu’on le voit dans cette occurrence. Les noirs s’en plaignent d’autant plus vivement qu’eux seuls et même leurs femmes sont soumis à cette humiliation inutile, Qu’une femme blanche, nous écrit l’un d’eux, M. Davis David, soit coupable d’avoir fait subir à ses travailleurs Indiens d’atroces tortures, on ne l’enchaîne pas, je n’y trouve point à redire, mais ce qui me révolte, c’est que j’ai vu deux négresses que l’on conduisait à la geôle enchaînées, pourquoi? parce que leurs livrets n’étaient pas en règle.”

<sup>55</sup> Augustin Cochin, *Abolition de l’esclavage* (Paris: Jacques LeCoffre, 1861), 227.

<sup>56</sup> *Le Moniteur de la Martinique*, January 25, 1855.

“de classer la population entière, de la défendre contre ses propres tendances, et de toute contenir, hommes et choses, dans les bornes légales. Franchement, une telle mesure n’est elle [sic] pas généreuse, intelligente, civilisatrice? Ne doit elle [sic] pas obtenir l’approbation de tous les hommes sensés, de tous ceux qui veulent sérieusement le bien du pays?”

no. As freedpeople's family politics of labor and land reveal, they continued to bedevil the efforts of authorities and planters to restore the plantation order.<sup>57</sup>

### The Family Politics of Labor and Land

Freedpeople struggled against administrators' attempts to impose moral law, labor discipline, and public order in various ways; however, family politics remained the key terrain on which this conflict unfolded. Evidence from officials' correspondence over repressive post-abolition labor laws indicate that freedpeople responded to them by sidestepping the state's efforts to count, discipline, and surveil them. In spite of workbooks, domestic passports, passes, and taxes—all designed to record and restrict the movements and activities of freed men and women—freedpeople continued to adopt different names or nicknames in civil and church records, which frustrated authorities' efforts to classify the population and control the labor force.

“You see every day, in fact, individuals baptized under one name, married under another, entered on the tax rolls under a third, and unknown under all these names,” Governor Gueydon complained in a missive on new methods of census collecting to the Minister of the Interior. “You see others deceiving justice by presenting themselves before her with different names... Today, this confusion of names is a deep evil.”<sup>58</sup> Using family records compiled by church and state, such as baptism and marriage certificates, the census, and tax rolls, freedpeople evaded systematic attempts to regulate their activities. Adopting various aliases and nicknames created confusion in the demographic records. For example, frequent miscounts in the statistical

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<sup>57</sup> Renard, “Labour Relations in Martinique and Guadeloupe, 1848-1870,” 44, and 50-51; and Jacques Adélaïde-Merlande, *Les origines du mouvement ouvrier en Martinique, 1870-1900* (Paris: Karthala, 2000), 41-100.

<sup>58</sup> *Bulletin Officiel de la Martinique*, N. 1610, 8 janvier 1855, 62. This letter was also published in *Le Moniteur de la Martinique*, January 11, 1855.

reports annually dispatched to the Minister of the Navy indicate the real difficulty officials had in achieving an accurate count of persons by commune on two islands that, taken together, are less than 11,000 square miles.

The confusion about names and population numbers poses yet another methodological problem when tracing families, birth rates, baptisms, marriages, and other civil records in the archives.<sup>59</sup> As J. de Crisenoy wrote in his economic study of the French Antilles, the head tax represented one way through which administrators tried to curtail the ability of freedpeople to evade police surveillance by using aliases. He noted that the head tax would “force the negroes to adopt a name,” since, theoretically, a separate tax could be levied on each name they previously used.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, freedpeople continued to adopt various names, nicknames, and surnames when filing civil records. It stands to reason that freedpeople who changed their names at important milestones, such as a marriage or baptism, understood that they could perhaps avoid punitive labor or escape surveillance by manipulating the state’s efforts to impose legal categories on their families.

For instance, at the time Gueydon was drafting his memo, efforts were still underway in Martinique and Guadeloupe to finish inscribing all former slaves into the civil registers of each commune with their new surnames—and freedpeople were well aware of the state’s efforts to meticulously record their names and family ties. Marriages, child recognitions, and legitimations

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<sup>59</sup> For example, the 1858 census in Martinique was particularly problematic. See: *Statistiques Coloniales*, 1858.

<sup>60</sup> de Crisenoy, *Étude sur la situation économique des Antilles françaises*, 52. On the “simple needs” of “lazy” freedpeople, de Crisenoy quotes Governor Gueydon of Martinique on the same page. “Cet impôt avait un autre avantage, c’était celui de forcer les nègres à adopter un nom; car avant cela ils en portaient souvent trois ou quatre dont quelquefois pas un n’était leur véritable, qu’ils ignoraient, et c’était pour eux un moyen de se livrer au vagabondage et de se soustraire à la surveillance de la police. Du moment où ils se virent obligés de payer autant de fois l’impôt qu’ils avaient pris de noms différents, ils trouvèrent que c’était un luxe un peu cher et en adoptèrent un, ce qui contribua beaucoup à rétablir l’ordre dans les registres de recensement.”

were carefully recorded across the civil registers, with margin entries in the *Registres de l'état-civil des nouveaux libres* noting these milestones for particular individuals. Furthermore, these records identified when and where freedpeople were inscribed with a civil identity, which was laboriously recorded in front of them. As freedpeople answered questions about their lives—where were they born? How many children did they have and what were their names and nicknames? Were they married? What was their occupation? —perhaps they understood how officials' efforts to give them a civil identity could also be used against them.<sup>61</sup>

But rather than give credence to the fact that freedpeople were perhaps strategizing to evade the police and planters desperate to keep them confined to their communes and working on the plantations, authorities and elites held that the practice of changing names was a barbarous remnant of slavery. According to Gueydon, “under the former regime...it did not matter to the slaves that one called them by one name or another. They had no interest in having their seldom legitimate children bear their names; Besides, they had no civil status, no patronymic names. Under the current regime, this detestable tradition of the past has the most disastrous consequences.” Therefore, he continued, the police were indispensable for maintaining order and regulating the activities of “criminals” through the power of new work and tax laws, “but with the police, you can't change customs, you can't reach a whole population.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> AN-Paris, 472 Mi series, *Registres de l'état civil des nouveaux libres de la Guadeloupe*. Communes closely analyzed in the archives included Le Moule, Pointe-à-Pitre, Petit Canal, Gosier, and Abymes.

<sup>62</sup> *Bulletin Officiel de la Martinique*, N. 1610, 8 janvier 1855, 62; and *Le Moniteur de la Martinique*, January 11, 1855.

“Sous le régime ancien, l'homme pouvant être possédé par l'homme, il importait peu aux esclaves qu'on les appelait d'un nom ou d'un autre. Ils n'avaient aucun intérêt à ce que leurs enfants, rarement légitimes, portassent leurs noms; ils n'avaient point, d'ailleurs, d'état civil, point de noms patronymiques. Sous le régime actuel, cette détestable tradition du passé a les plus funestes conséquences...La police est un moyen d'action indispensable pour atteindre les criminels; mais avec la police on ne peut modifier les mœurs, on ne peut atteindre toute une population.”

Even Gueydon's dismissive comments give credit to how freed families that did not conform to the patriarchal legal norms that marked the standards of French civil identity (marriage, legitimate children, patronymic surnames), caused "disastrous" chaos in the midst of administrative efforts to impose social order. Gueydon's sentiments were echoed several days later in *Le Moniteur de la Martinique*: "these slaves were therefore very legitimately and very liberally called to enjoy all the natural, civil, and political rights...to the full enjoyment of that quality of French citizens." However, the article continued, the transition from slavery to citizenship had not been seamless, as it "was necessary to look internally at society, composed of the debris of two heterogeneous societies [freed and enslaved]; we had to prove the difficulties of this fusion that all wishes called for, that all hearts waited for impatiently, but whose matters had not been sufficiently elucidated."<sup>63</sup> The article maintained that key characteristics of the slave society continued to disturb post-emancipation society—notably, informal unions.

In fact, the same article declared, "the family did not exist in concubinage." Indeed, such practices prevented freedpeople from experiencing the "bonds of solidarity, by blood and by honor, all those who bear the same name, all those who are ultimately of the same family." On the other hand, in informal unions, "the colonial slaves had and could only have between them those bonds which society does not recognize, bonds which they often honor by the rigorous practice of domestic virtues." While acknowledging that informal unions were constituted by "rigorous" domestic and intimate practices and customs, *Le Moniteur de la Martinique* proclaimed that a systematic census and the new labor policies would (finally) begin to lay the

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<sup>63</sup> *Le Moniteur de la Martinique*, January 25, 1855.

"Ces esclaves furent donc très légitimement et très libéralement appelés à jouir de tous les droits naturels, civils, et politiques...le plus complet à la jouissance pleine et entière de celle qualité de citoyens français..."

"Mais, cette justice faite, il fallut regarder dans l'intérieur de la société, nouvelle composée de débris des deux sociétés hétérogènes; de fallut sonder les difficultés de cette fusion que tous les vœux appelaient, que tous les cœurs attendaient impatientement, mais dont les matières n'avaient pas été suffisamment élucidées."

foundations for an ordered society from the disordered remnants and old practices of the recent past. The society of freedom was one organized on legally constituted families of agricultural workers—part of the reason why, the article acknowledged, the colonies had botched efforts of bestowing patronymic names on freedpeople. In the “rush” to sanctify freedom, they had fast-tracked the process and therefore there were numerous errors in the post-emancipation census.<sup>64</sup>

Administrators combined their efforts to police the freed population with the application of legal norms and social policies based on the patriarchal family as the normative household structure. With that in mind, Bontemps clarified in his census instructions: “With regard to women, you will refrain from requiring those who are under the authority of a husband and those who live in the homes of their father, mother, and guardian to appear before you. Register them through the documents presented by their husband, father, or guardian. But if you have any doubts, you will take all the information you deem useful before registering them.”<sup>65</sup> In essence, defer to the power of the male patriarch, who served here as the link between the private interior of the home and the outside world of the political and the social. But if census takers suspected that the head of household was hiding something about his family, they were allowed to question all persons in the household before counting them. Presumably, this rule was not exercised with

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

“La famille, en effet, n’existe point dans le concubinage... Les esclaves des colonies n’avaient et ne pouvaient avoir entre eux que de ces liaisons que la société ne reconnaît pas, liaisons qu’ils honorent souvent par la pratique rigoureuse des vertus domestiques; mais ils ne connaissaient pas, ils ne pouvaient pas connaître cette solidarité qui relie entre eux, et par le sang et par l’honneur, tous ceux qui portent le même nom, tous ceux enfin qui sont de la même famille.”

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

“En ce qui concerne les femmes, vous vous abstenrez d’exiger que celles qui sont sous puissance de mari et que celles qui vivent dans la maison de leur père, mère, et tuteur se présentent devant vous. Vous les immatriculez sur la présentation des pièces faits par leur mari, père, ou tuteur. Mais si vous avez quelques doute vous prendrez, avant de faire l’immatriculation, tous les renseignements que vous jugerez utiles.”



white or elite mixed-race families (so long as the latter noticeably adhered to patriarchal gender and family norms), but was utilized in the case of female headed-households and freed families.

While they relied on coercive mechanisms and invasive measures, authorities also combined punishment with incentives to encourage productive plantation labor and moralization. One method was through prizes, such as cash bonuses and medals, distributed in public ceremonies to commemorate “good” workers. The bronze, silver, and gold medals were inscribed with “reward for morality and zeal of work” and a likeness of Louis-Napoleon. Cash prizes of up to twenty francs were also bestowed on some recipients.<sup>66</sup> These awards commended both diligent labor and moral family life. All of the recipients had remained as devoted workers to former masters or on plantations, and many of them were singled out for having married and legitimated children. They were thus publicly praised for being good, loyal workers in legitimate marriages and for raising their children to be a dependable generation of future sharecroppers.<sup>67</sup>

For example, when Jean-Louis Guston, a plantation worker in Lamentin, Guadeloupe, was commended in 1858, it was noted that he was a “husband; father of five children: since emancipation, he has not ceased, by his conduct and his good advice to cultivators to do the most good on the plantation.” This included the amount of sugar he produced as a cane grower and his trustworthiness: Guston was lauded for safekeeping a “sum of 100 doubloons and some very

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<sup>66</sup> *Bulletin Officiel de la Martinique*, September 2, 1852. In this year, there were 4 gold, 25 first-class silver, 25 second class silver, and 70 awards of 20 francs dispersed in Martinique.

“Les médailles présenteront, sur une face, l’effigie du Prince-Président de la République, et, sur l’autre, le nom des concessionnaires, avec cette inscription: Récompense de la moralité, du zèle, et du travail.”

<sup>67</sup> It is unclear if these awards were distributed in a public ceremony (although the fact that some were awarded on holidays and the emperor’s birthday suggest this was possible). Distribution varied by commune; some recipients received their medal or cash prize directly from the mayor, and in other cases it is not clear. All recipients, however, were lauded in the official gazettes.

important papers” when his proprietor was obliged to leave the property for a few days.<sup>68</sup> Fathers like Michel LaPlaine in Marie-Galante were praised for being good husbands and raising their “families with a love of work.”<sup>69</sup> Fevriette Birald, a sharecropper on the Birmingham plantation in Guadeloupe, is a particularly interesting case. She was rewarded for producing a hearty crop of sugar and, in 1851, bringing back to the plantation “six members of her family, who left in 1848. She employs them in the cultivation of her cane.” Here, Birald is fêted as a devoted field worker who restored her family to the virtues of sugar cultivation, but her case can also be read differently. Rather than devoted to the general production of the plantation, Birald could have been acting as the female head of her household and securing labor for her family in her own portion of the cane fields.<sup>70</sup>

Prizes were also distributed to freedpeople who agreed to remain with planters despite any financial hardships or setbacks incurred on the estates. This was the case of Lesgild, called Mulâtre in Grand-Bourg, who was awarded a first-class silver medal in 1861 for “devotion during several fires.—Irreproachable conduct.—Hardworking and loves to give good advice.—Father of an honorable family.”<sup>71</sup> As the head of an “honorable family” who remained attached

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<sup>68</sup> *Gazette Officielle de la Guadeloupe*, October 29, 1858.

“Marié; père de cinq enfants; il n’a cessé, depuis l’émancipation, par sa conduit et ses bons conseils aux cultivateurs, de faire le plus grand bien sur l’habitation’ le premier Il a donné l’exemple d’une plantation de cannes pour son compte...le propriétaire de l’habitation, oblige de s’absenter pour plusieurs jours, laisse à Guston la garde de sa propriété, lui confia une somme de cent doublons et lui remit ses papiers les plus importantes.”

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, October 29, 1858.

“Bon époux. Élève sa famille dans l’amour du travail...”

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, October 26, 1858.

“D’une intrépidité rare au travail. Cultive les cannes au colonage partiaire. A fait, en 1851, onze barriques de sucre et en fera vingt cette année. A remmené sur l’habitation six membres de sa famille qui étaient partie en 1848. Elle les emploie à la culture de ses cannes. (Présenté par le maire).”

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, August 13, 1861.

“Dévouement dans plusieurs incendies—Conduite irréprochable. Laborieux et aimant à donner des bons conseils.—Père de famille honorable.”

to a plantation, Mulâtre embodied all the virtues of the freed cultivator. Like the manumission spectacles in other slave and former slave societies, work medals singled out certain virtues—most frequently, association or sharecropping, marriage, and a large family of future cultivators—as the epitome of freedpeople’s new civil identity while rejecting other forms of labor and family customs.<sup>72</sup>

The ideal freed person was therefore the industrious sharecropper with a large and legitimate family who labored for years by his side. This was embodied in the sixty-five-year old driver Jeannot Cyrille, who was awarded a second-class silver medal in 1861 for “never leaving the Saint-Sauvere plantation [Capesterre] where he was born. Excellent father of a family, he was able, through his savings, to create a small inheritance for his children, *and although having become a property owner, his work and that of his family remain at the service of those whom he served before emancipation.*”<sup>73</sup> Cyrille had just enough autonomy to put aside a nest-egg and patch of land for his family (similar to the *pecule* that enslaved parents could bequeath to their children under the amelioration policies of the July Monarchy).<sup>74</sup> However, they still needed to work for the Saint-Sauvere proprietors to earn enough to get by. Given that Cyrille and his family remained on the same plantation where they had been born as enslaved persons, little seems to have changed for this rural working family in the post-emancipation period.

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<sup>72</sup> For example, the public manumission ceremonies in Colombia. See: Jason McGraw, “Spectacles of Freedom: Public Manumissions, Political Rhetoric, and Citizen Mobilisation in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Colombia,” *Slavery and Abolition* Vol. 32, no. 2 (June, 2011), 269-88.

<sup>73</sup> *Gazette Officielle de la Guadeloupe*, August 13, 1861. Emphasis mine.  
“Chef d’atelier (Capesterre), âgé de 65 ans: Jeannot n’a jamais quitté l’habitation Saint-Sauveur où il est né.—Excellent père de famille, il a pu, par ses épargnes, créer un petit patrimoine à ses enfants, et, quoique devenu propriétaire, son travail et celui de sa famille sont restés acquis à ceux qu’il servait avant l’émancipation.”

<sup>74</sup> See: Chapter One, pp. 97-8.

Indeed, administrators punished formerly enslaved parents who sought to keep their children away from the plantations. Under the administration of Governor Phillipe Touchard in Guadeloupe, Director of the Interior Husson introduced a series of repressive laws that prevented freedpeople who lived in the countryside from sending children to schools in the cities.<sup>75</sup> Parents of white children, on the other hand, sent them to Pointe-à-Pitre, Saint-Pierre, and abroad for education.<sup>76</sup> Taking similar strides, Martinique passed laws classifying orphans as “apprenticed” workers on private plantations or state-run properties. Extended family or fictive kin (such as godparents) who “have cared for orphans in their infancy” would only be allowed to continue raising them on the condition that they could prove that the children “are employed in useful work.”<sup>77</sup>

Orphans’ female kin were especially important for securing apprenticeships or otherwise proving that they could suitably provide for children and keep them off the state or private plantations. For example, in Guadeloupe thirty-year old Jeannette Henri, a *marchande*, secured a contract of engagement for the eight-year-old orphan, Sainte Luc, in her care. The contract does not specify if there is a kin relationship between Jeannette and Sainte Luc, only that she received custody of the child after his mother (Marie Triffant) was exiled to Cayenne for an unspecified crime. Jeannette had negotiated an apprenticeship for Sainte Luc with a “master worker in the

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<sup>75</sup> *Bulletin Officiel de la Guadeloupe*, December 2, 1857. Also see: Elizabeth Heath, *Wine, Sugar, and the Making of Modern France: Global Economic Crisis and the Racialization of French Citizenship, 1870-1910* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 26-7 for the Touchard/Husson restrictions in Guadeloupe.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid* and Hearn, *Two Years in the West Indies*, 138.

<sup>77</sup> *Le Moniteur de la Martinique*, April 5, 1855. Heath discusses the reconstitution of agricultural schools during the Third Republic in Heath, *Wine, Sugar, and the Making of Modern France*, 170-2. “Ceux qui auraient soigné les orphelins dans leur première enfance pourront être autorisés à les conserver chez eux, à la charge de justifier que les enfants sont employés à des travaux utiles...”

mechanical profession,” giving the child “the means to improve his position.”<sup>78</sup> Similarly, in 1867, Marie Françoise (called Louise) certified her custody of her grandson, Charles Louis Jules Bayé, whose mother had died of cholera in 1865. Louise affirmed that she would clothe, feed, and provide for the education of her grandson until he reached the age of majority or was married.<sup>79</sup> Through the intercession of female relatives (fictive or extended), Sainte Luc and Charles Bayé were kept from the state-run orphanages that were little more than forced child and adolescent labor for the benefit of plantation production.

Taken together, policies on orphans and childhood education granted authorities and planters the ability to co-opt the labor of the black family and ensure the reproduction of an economically dependent work force without slavery. Rather than the principle of *partus sequitur ventrem* that reproduced slavery through the mother’s womb, these policies restricted the upward social and economic mobility of freed families. The rural workforce was to be maintained by restricting children’s opportunities to successfully leave the plantation behind them.<sup>80</sup>

The annual statistics on agricultural production, compiled by the Ministry of the Navy, further reflect this struggle over peasant versus plantation production. Between 1850 and 1880, the number of hectares designated for foodstuff cultivation—manioc, bananas, greens, and potatoes grown by small farmers who were typically freed persons—generally remained between 11,000 and 13,000 in Martinique (or between 0.74 and 1.30 hectares per cultivator employed in foodstuff cultivation). Guadeloupe, on average, had about half that number of hectares for

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<sup>78</sup> AD-GUA, 1 E dépôt 267, *Enregistrement des contrats travail: consentement parentaux pour engagement de mineurs, 1852-1869*, Entry #1.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, Entry #32,

<sup>80</sup> Brereton, “Family Strategies, Gender, and the Shift to Wage Labor in the British Caribbean,” 150-4; and Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 151.

foodstuff production, around 6,000 to 10,000 hectares (with hectares per worker hovering consistently between 0.44 and 0.58).<sup>81</sup> On both islands, sugar remained king, but peasant cultivation also remained relatively steady:

Table 4.1 Decennial Sugar v. Foodstuff Cultivation in Martinique

Year	Total Hectares under Sugar Cultivation	Sugar Hectares per Worker	Total Hectares under Foodstuff Cultivation	Foodstuff Hectares per Worker
1850	15,085	0.55	12,731	1.30
1860	20,083	0.63	11,368	0.74
1870	18,832	0.57	12,745	0.80
1880	19,364	0.57	13,406	0.84

Table 4.2 Decennial Sugar v. Foodstuff Cultivation in Guadeloupe

Year	Total Hectares under Sugar Cultivation	Sugar Hectares per Worker	Total Hectares under Foodstuff Cultivation	Foodstuff Hectares per Worker
1850	15,335	0.58	7,597	0.58 <sup>82</sup>
1860	17,892	0.44	6,270	0.58
1870	17,735	0.45	9,455	0.58
1880	24,207	0.47	10,432	0.44

<sup>81</sup> Figures compiled from Le Ministère de l'Algérie et des Colonies, *Tableaux de population, de culture, de commerce et de navigation, pour l'année...la suite des tableaux insérés dans les notices statistiques sur les colonies françaises* (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1858-1890).

<sup>82</sup> In this year, the statistics report collapses all workers employed in the cultivation of foodstuffs, coffee, cacao, cotton, spices, tobacco, and indigo together, so the number of workers employed only in farming food is probably much lower than the number indicates here. In any case, many small farms in the post-emancipation Caribbean combined a variety of crop cultivation (food and some sugar, coffee or tobacco, for example). See: Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations*, 180-250. Further, the rate of expansion of sugar in Guadeloupe compared with Martinique does not necessarily indicate a higher rate of success in forcing cultivators into sugar production. David Northrup notes that the 1843 earthquake, which had destroyed a significant number of Guadeloupe's plantations and factories, actually ended up benefitting the sugar industry in the post-emancipation period, because it accelerated the transition to a more efficient system of production. See: David Northrup, *Indentured Labour in the Age of Imperialism, 1834-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 34.

This data indicates that, while sugar cultivation managed to remain the most dominant agricultural enterprise in the post-emancipation period, it could not quash foodstuff farming altogether, which tended to be small-scale family cultivation.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, the number of hectares per worker in foodstuff farming was consistently higher than sugar hectares per worker in Martinique, and more or less equivalent in Guadeloupe. The data therefore reveals that the expansion in the number of hectares cultivated for sugar cane during this period did not necessarily extinguish small family farms, but rather, indicates the likelihood that plantations expanded into forested and other under-utilized lands.<sup>84</sup>

Indeed, the colonial administration did not discourage foodstuff farming—they just maintained that sugar cultivation should remain freedpeoples' primary employment. Some authorities believed that freedpeople should rent small parcels of property for food cultivation as a corollary to their work on the estates (and to keep the cost of labor cheap, as workers would be expected to grow their own provisions). And, while officials deemed the head tax a necessary measure to keep cultivators working in sugar, they had mixed opinions on property taxes levied on small farms, since they produced the islands' food supplies and were thought to be instrumental in teaching former slaves the value of proprietorship.<sup>85</sup> Guadeloupe levied an unpopular tax on foodstuff cultivation while Martinique did not, and this likely also played a role in the divergence in hectares per worker in foodstuff cultivation between the two islands.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Le Ministère de l'Algérie et des Colonies, *Tableaux de population, de culture, de commerce et de navigation, pour l'année...years 1850, 1860, 1870, and 1880.*

<sup>84</sup> For corresponding decrease in forested and unused lands for these same years, see: *ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Fallope, *Esclaves et citoyens*, 359-63.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

Throughout the late nineteenth century, freedpeople sought to acquire land by any means, including squatting, leasing and subleasing, paying exorbitant costs per hectare, and establishing free villages.<sup>87</sup> As scholars have argued, post-emancipation landholding allowed freedpeople to sustain their communities through subsistence and cash-crop farming. But smallholding was important beyond economic autonomy from plantations as it enabled cultural and social customs to flourish. Patches of land, or a house and yard, could literally embody kin lineages (through family burial grounds), keep extended family together, and provide spaces for congregation and socialization.<sup>88</sup>

Freedpeople acquired small plots of land through a combination of strategies, from purchasing or renting property to appropriating lands abandoned by planters, or simply tending to their customary gardens on plantations. In many cases, the cultivation of sugar on the estates occurred in tandem with foodstuff cultivation on family plots, as many freedpeople remained with the lands they had tended in slavery. They found themselves paying their rents either through day or seasonal labor in the cane fields, or through cash earned from marketing their ground provisions, poultry, and livestock. Either method provided planters with some of the requisite labor or capital for continued sugar production.<sup>89</sup> In this respect, the French Antilles illuminates Mintz's thesis that post-emancipation Caribbean economies were creolized hybrids that depended on the mutual growth and interdependence of peasant farming with plantation production.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> ANOM FM GEN 127/1105, "Procès-verbaux des séances de la Commission du régime du travail aux colonies, 1873-74, Première séance, 21 mars 1873." Hereafter Report of the Commission du régime du travail.

<sup>88</sup> Jean Besson, "Squatting and Postslavery Peasantization," 138-9; and Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations*, 225-50.

<sup>89</sup> Renard, "Labour Relations in Martinique and Guadeloupe, 1848-1870," 38.

<sup>90</sup> Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations*, 43-58 and 131-46.



The Third Republic, established during a period of international crisis and war in France in 1870, gradually rolled back some of the coercive labor policies imposed during the imperial period, although it did little to address the rigid and racist social hierarchies that these policies engendered. Republican colonial authorities and metropolitan policymakers—including Schœlcher recently returned from exile in London—revisited the Antillean labor problem and proposed various measures for balancing the economic needs of planters with the political and social autonomy of workers. They recognized that the labor laws imposed under Louis-Napoleon were “too severe,” but also maintained that key provisions, (such as the *livret*) had helped “maintain work and assured to sugar plantations an easier [labor] recruitment.”<sup>91</sup> However, they also acknowledged the importance of land to freed families—noting that the high prices for land parcels proved how “expensive the desire to own was,” and asserting that “the constitution of the family for the freed man dates from this period” when they tried to acquire land at any cost.<sup>92</sup>

However, colonial administrative roles remained largely in the hands of white *colons* and metropolitan functionaries. As late as 1879, Schœlcher complained that “little has changed” to break the power of the “colonial aristocracy.” In Martinique, for example, judges, police commissioners, customs officials, and the bureaucrats staffing the Department of the Interior were overwhelmingly white. As Schœlcher noted, “we count 9 justices of the peace, all white. Out of 10 police commissioners, 8 were white. The Administration of the Interior is occupied by

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<sup>91</sup> Report of the Commission du régime du travail. The Commission was presided over by Vice-Admiral Fourichon, a deputy in the National Assembly and members included Schœlcher, the elected representative of Martinique. “Les peines édictées par les Décrets qui ont commenté la loi sont trop sévères. L’application du livret rendue dans le but évident de maintenir le travail et d’assurer aux habitations sucrières un recrutement plus facile...”

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, December 8, 1873.

“Dès qu’ils ont préféré quelques économies, les noirs créoles ont acheté des terres et à quel prix. On a ne payer la terre jusqu’à 15 ou 20 f. la gaullette, or il y a 421 gaullettes dans un hectare. Ces prouve à quel degré le désir de posséder était développe chez eux. La constitution de la famille pour l’affranchi date de cette époque...”

18 persons, 14 are white.” In Guadeloupe, this racial divide was even more starkly pronounced. All police commissioners, bureaucrats in the Department of the Interior, and three-fourths of the justice department were white. Thus, as Schœlcher summarized the situation, the white population “does not compose a tenth of the population,” but they occupied virtually all positions of authority despite, the fact that people of color “undoubtedly count as many capable, educated, and perfectly reputable men as their rivals.”<sup>93</sup>

Under the Third Republic, colonial citizenship, inclusion, and freedom thus continued to be conditional for the black population, and the struggle for economic independence and social autonomy continued. Planters replaced the *livret* with fines levied for bad work (or “bad attitudes” while at work) and debited wages to pay off workers’ lines of credit at the plantation shops, which charged exorbitant interest (similar to the “plantation towns” of the post-war American South).<sup>94</sup> In short, most black Martinicans and Guadeloupeans saw little real change in their political, social, or economic situations following the collapse of the imperial regime—so much so that, during the global sugar crisis in the 1880s, wages remained close to what they were in 1848—while unemployment levels were even worse.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Schœlcher, *Polémique coloniale*, Vol. 2, xv-i. It is interesting to note that Schœlcher is also relying on old racial categories to make his point: “les deux classes de couleur” evokes the categories of formerly freed people of color and freedpeople as distinct social and political categories.

“l’aristocratie coloniale;”

“Le passe avait encore si peu change en 1879 aux colonies...qu’à la Martinique, où l’on comptait 9 juges de paix, tous étaient des blancs; Sur 10 commissaires de police, 8 étaient des blancs; A l’administration de l’intérieur, occupant 18 personnes, 14 étaient des blancs; A celle de la justice, occupant, depuis le procureur général jusqu’aux commis-greffiers, 42 personnes; 36 étaient des blancs; Au service de la perception des impôts, sur 14 employés, 11 étaient des blancs; A celui des contributions directes, sur 9 employés, 8 étaient des blancs; A la Guadeloupe, même iniquité; Sur 13 juges de paix, 11 blancs; 9 commissaires de police, tous blancs; Dans l’administration de l’intérieur, les chefs et sous-chefs, au nombre de 7, tous blancs; Dans celle de la justice, comprenant 33 personnes, 26 blancs. Cela, dans des pays où la classe blanche ne forme qu’un dixième de la population...[les deux classes de couleur] comptent incontestablement au tant d’hommes capables, instruits et de parfaite honorabilité que leurs rivaux.”

<sup>94</sup> Woodruff, *American Congo*, 74-110.

<sup>95</sup> Schmieder, “Martinique and Cuba Grande,” 103; and Albanie Burand, *La vie politique à Saint-Pierre de la Martinique de 1848 à 1902* (Matoury: Ibis Rouge, 2002).

Furthermore, elites on both sides of the Atlantic continued to racialize the black population in the Antilles—singling out the black peasant family as the epitome of laziness and vice. Victor Meignan summed up this perspective in his 1882 travel memoir on the West Indies. Touring the countryside near Fort-de-France, Meignan wrote of the overwhelming variety of mangoes, guava, coconuts, bananas, and breadfruits, all from gigantic trees growing amidst verdant jungle foliage—a “real paradise on earth.” But he disparaged the “hut, or rather, a low, black and smoky hut, made of bamboo and sugar cane straw.” The farmers who lived in one house Meignan and his companions rode by included “two or three skinny and naked children...[and] a little further down sleep a man and a woman...similarly attired.”<sup>96</sup> The male and female cultivator dozing naked in the hot afternoon sun (probably after intercourse, Meignan implied) while their neglected children ran pell-mell around the “black and smoky” bamboo and cane hut, represented, for the author, nothing but barbarism and wasted economic potential.

As Meignan saw it, rather than improving their home and working diligently during the day, to cultivate crops and take care of their children, the farmer and his partner indulged their basest whims and consigned their family to live in squalor. His account of the free farms contrasts starkly with traveler Lafcadio Hearn’s description of the little “cottages” of plantation field hands, “each in a little garden planted with bananas, yams, couscous, camanioc, choux-caraïbes, or other things,—and hedged about with roseaux d’Inde and various flowering shrubs.”<sup>97</sup> For

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<sup>96</sup> Victor Meignan, *Aux Antilles: Ouvrage enrichi de huit gravures dessinées par Breton, d’après des photographies et des croquis de l’auteur, deuxième édition* (Paris: E. Plon et Cie, 1882), 73 and 76.

“...véritable paradis terrestre”

“Dans cette cour se trouve aussi une cabane, ou plutôt une cahute basse, noire et enfumée, faite de bambous et de pailles de cannes à sucre. Près de cette cahute jouent deux ou trois enfants aussi maigres que nus. Un peu plus loin dorment à terre un homme et une femme, puis je me permettre de le dire? ornés de la même absence de vêtements,...”

<sup>97</sup> Lafcadio Hearn, *Two Years in the French West Indies* (New York: Harper Brothers: 1890), 191. Hearn was a travel correspondent and writer sent to Martinique by *Harper’s Magazine* in the 1880s. His lengthy travel memoir written during his travels in Martinique is an unparalleled source of information on quotidian life in the colony—

Meignan, the free peasant was hidden away in the “verdant jungle foliage” accessible only by a narrow road, while in Hearn’s account, the distant plantation buildings loom just out of sight of the homes of the “hired” hands renting from the planter—which perhaps made their dwellings seem more appealing or orderly to the European perspective.

During this same jaunt through the Martinican countryside, Meignan reports encountering cultivators— “yawning in the sun, eating a banana”— who ask him for money. Annoyed, Meignan asked one of them why he did not work on one of the nearby sugar factories, which were always looking for employment. “*Moi libre,*” the cultivator responded animatedly, “*moi posséder petit coin de terre, et moi content.*” Here, the unnamed cultivator declared that his patch of land ensured him a happy independence, if not a financially comfortable life. An exasperated Meignan, however, concluded, “I do not pretend that the idle blacks of Martinique are bad people, who may at some point harm the colony. I only see that they are completely useless; that their small fragmented properties, whose fragmentation produces no wealth because none are cultivated...expand to where the sugar cane could grow and where it should grow.”<sup>98</sup>

He was not alone in his assessment. Members of the Commission du régime du travail in Paris claimed in 1873 that freed peasants required very little to live on. The Commission observed that peasants largely grew their own food to subsist on and would work only enough to

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especially in the cities. It’s interesting to note that in this description, Hearn did not recount the presence of any of the field hands—presumably they were at work or in the privacy of their homes, implying respectable productivity, in contrast to Meignan’s account of the farmers sleeping outside during the day.

<sup>98</sup> Meignan, *Aux Antilles*, 76-77. Emphasis mine.

“D’autres bâillent au soleil, en mangeant une banane; beaucoup nous demandent l’aumône. “Mais, si tu as besoin, dis-je à l’un d’eux, pourquoi ne travailles-tu pas? Il y a près d’ici beaucoup de sucreries dans lesquelles on pourrait t’employer.- Moi libre, s’écria-t-il immédiatement, mais, je dois le dire aussi, sans apparence de rancune ni de forfanterie; moi posséder petit coin de terre, et moi content...Je ne prétends pas que les noirs oisifs de la Martinique soient de mauvaises gens, pouvant à un moment donné nuire à la colonie. Je constate seulement qu’ils y sont d’une complète inutilité; que leurs petites propriétés morcelées et dont le morcellement ne produit aucune richesse parce que pas une n’est cultivée, que ces petites propriétés, dis je, se répandent là où pourrait pousser et où devrait pousser la canne à sucre.”

make a small wage of 1 franc or so a day for the incidentals—that the freed man “devotes to his toilette, as you know, he fancies a black coat and his wife likes jewelry.”<sup>99</sup> Here, the Commission implied that some soap, a nice set of clothes, and a few baubles were enough to satisfy the materialism of the freed peasant (and further, suggests that the low wages that freedpeople could expect to earn as a day-rate field hand was justified by their perceived few wants).

Toward the final years of the nineteenth century, some colonial authorities (such as Governor Noël Pardon in Guadeloupe) embraced the notion of the concession system to encourage freedpeople to engage in smallholder farming and replace most of the plantation workforce with immigrant labor. Under the concession system, the backbone of the rural economy would therefore be a dual labor structure, with indentured laborers on the estates and industrious nuclear families (under the leadership of a male patriarch) on smallholding farms that would produce foodstuffs for local consumption. Under Pardon’s proposed concession system, married men and their families would be given a few hectares of land to farm. This, Pardon argued, would encourage black peasants to develop a love of property that would result in more productive labor and social order. It would also inculcate a spirit of marital responsibility in men and women who would adhere to the nuclear family model.<sup>100</sup> Thus, Pardon’s proposed concession system—which was never adopted—reimagined the family politics of labor in ways that strikingly departed from the vision of republican commissioners and abolitionists who promoted association as a mechanism to prevent freedpeople from lapsing into peasant subsistence.

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<sup>99</sup> Report of the Commission du régime du travail, troisième séance. December 8, 1873.  
“...qu’il consacre à sa toilette, car vous le savez, il a le goût de l’habit noir et sa femme aime les bijoux.”

<sup>100</sup> Elizabeth Heath, “Creating Rural Citizens in Guadeloupe in the Early Third French Republic” *Slavery & Abolition* Vol. 32, no. 2 (June, 2011): 301-2. Also see: ANOM FM SG GUA 101/720, Dossier of reports from Governor Pardon, 1894-1895.

However, while Pardon's proposition on the surface seems aligned with black cultivators' efforts to establish themselves and their families as small-scale farmers, its envisioned marriage incentives (land distribution would ideally be granted only to married men and their families) discursively drew on the same arguments that had informed metropolitan and colonial policies since abolitionism. Freedpeople's full inclusion in civil society remained conditional on their adopting certain family norms and institutions. Therefore, as scholars Elizabeth Heath and Myriam Cottias have insightfully argued, policies such as the concession system justified the continued political exclusion and social marginalization of black workers (especially women) throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>101</sup> An examination of how freedpeople interacted with civil and criminal law in this period better reveals the ways in which they achieved recognition (albeit limited) of their informal family customs and institutions from colonial authorities and elites. This analysis highlights the ways in which freedpeople were able to build an alternative family politics that enabled them to establish and maintain some degree of autonomy.

#### "Informal" Family Cultures in the Colonial Legal System

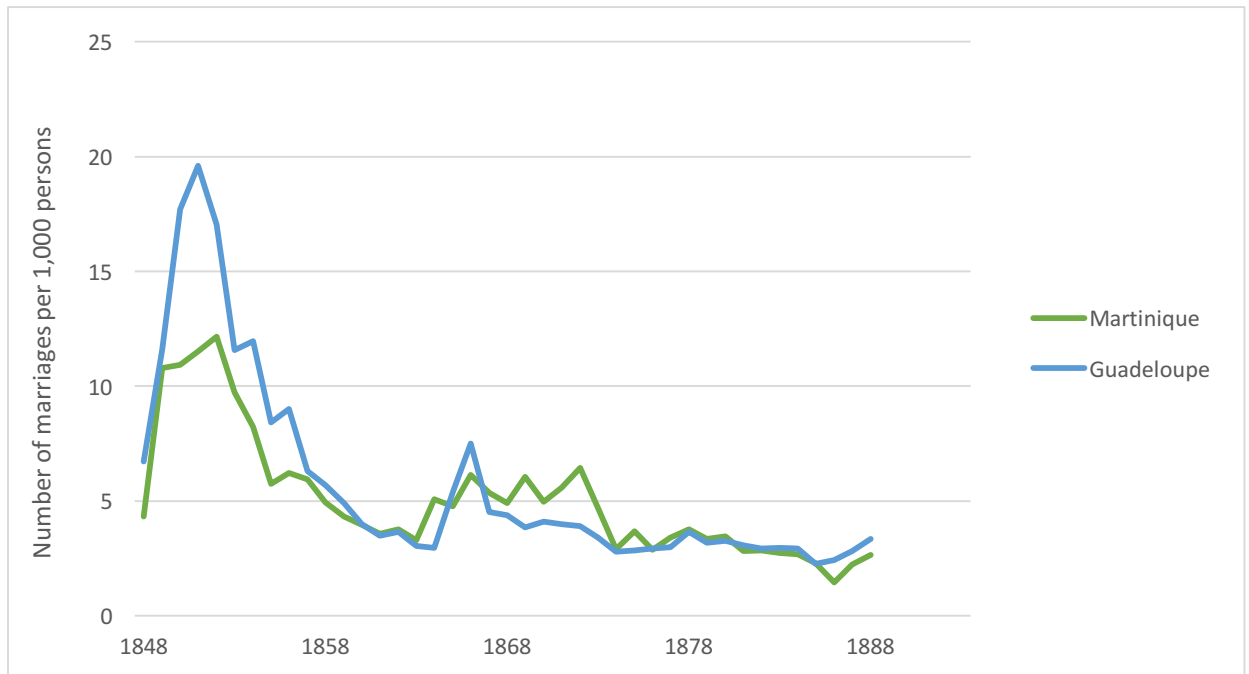
Despite the efforts of republican colonial officials to urge freedpeople to marry in order to consecrate their freedom, legal unions remained relatively rare in the post-emancipation era. After a spike in marriage rates following abolition, the annual rate of marriage precipitously declined in both islands.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Heath, *Wine, Sugar, and the Making of Modern France*, 83-115; and Cottias, "Gender and Republican Citizenship in the French West Indies," 233-45.

<sup>102</sup> Boutin, *La population de la Guadeloupe*, 249-50; Cottias, "Gender and Republican Citizenship in the French West Indies, 1848-1945," 2.

Chart 4.3. Marriages in the French Antilles, 1848-1888<sup>103</sup>



As the chart demonstrates, the precipitous fall in marriage rates per 1,000 persons occurred by the late 1850s, a mere five years or so after abolition in 1848.<sup>104</sup> Even the slight upticks on each island in the late 1860s and early 1870s are not necessarily representative of an increase in marriages among freedpeople. For example, from 1871-1881 in Martinique, when the marriage rate increases, the number of marriages between those classified as “*nouveaux libres*” remained less than half of the total number of marriages (specifically, only 360 out of 870 in 1871 and 357 out of 1,011 in 1872).<sup>105</sup>

<sup>103</sup> Marriage rates were compiled from the *Ministre de la Marine et des Colonies, Statistiques Coloniales pour l'année...*, for the years 1848-1888. Although these reports were published annually, they are woefully fragmented (and, at times, incorrect, which department bureaucrats noted in the footnotes of the data). Despite their flaws, they are the most comprehensive source of compiled demographic data on the colonies).

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, 279; Fallope, *Esclaves et citoyens*, 373-7 and 614-5.

<sup>105</sup> The reports from Martinique only calculated the rate of marriage among “*anciens libres*” and “*nouveaux libres*” sporadically. I do not have this information for every year, nor do I have these categories for Guadeloupe. I also do not know how the Martinican authorities counted marriages between formerly free and former slaves without

Further, the average number of marriages during these years remained low in proportion to the rate of children born to unmarried women. For instance, between 1855 and 1859, when the governors' census reports categorized the total number of annual births as either "legitimate" or "illegitimate," there were, on average, 2,690 children born annually to women classified as single mothers, compared with 1,828 children born to married couples in the same years.<sup>106</sup> Given that the population as a whole increased steadily in the late nineteenth century, the number of children born to non-married parents far outweighed the number of legal marriages.

When marriages did occur among freedpeople, they were typically between men and women who had many children together over a long period of time. The Soliveau-Aselli family illustrated this trend. In October 1849, fourteen months after they had been inscribed in the *Registres des nouveaux libres* in Le Moule, Guadeloupe, sixty-two-year-old carpenter Louison Soliveau married forty-six year old Cécée Aselli. With their legal union, Soliveau and Aselli legitimized their six children: Flore (called Clarine), Louis, Claurine, Méran, Mérose, and Louisonne (the feminized version of her father's name).<sup>107</sup> In August of 1848, Jean Monnerot, the mayor of Le Moule, bestowed the surname Aselli on Cécée and her children. At that point, the oldest daughter Clarine was twenty-nine, indicating that the conjugal relationship between Cécée and Louison had begun by 1819, if not earlier.<sup>108</sup> For thirty years, then, while enslaved,

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racially inscribing them as former slave or formerly free. For these years, however, the spike in marriages seems to not have been driven by freedpeople, if we take the report's summations at face value.

<sup>106</sup> Calculated from census data in Le Ministère de l'Algérie et des Colonies, *Tableaux de population, de culture, de commerce et de navigation, pour l'année [1855, 1856, 1857, 1858, 1859], la suite des tableaux insérés dans les notices statistiques sur les colonies françaises* (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1858, 1859, 1860, 1861, and 1862). See: Tables A.9 and A.10 in Appendix for these population numbers.

<sup>107</sup> ANOM IREL, *Régistres de l'état civil du commune Le Moule*, Entry #104, "Mariage de Soliveau (Louison) et de Aselli (Cécée)," October 2, 1849.

<sup>108</sup> 472 Mi 10, *Régistres des Nouveaux Libres de la Guadeloupe*, Le Moule, Acte 4, Entry #22 on August 25, 1848 and Acte 5, Entries #19-24 on August 26, 1848. Clarine had at least one child, named Charles, but there is no indication that she or any of the other Aselli children later married.



Cécée and Louison had nurtured a relationship and a large family that they then legally constituted in 1849—although the children had received Cécée’s surname at registration, rather than their father’s name. For the Soliveau-Aselli family, marriage could have represented legitimation (certainly this was the case in the eyes of the state), but it likely did not drastically alter how they lived together or loved each other.

While little else is known about the case of the Soliveau-Aselli family, other couples often blended their families together, combining their children from previous relationships and with each other into one extended unit, as with the case of the Handel-Borel family. Azaï, a former enslaved woman on the Matignon Carrère plantation in Le Moule had five children by three different men. Azaï and all her children were given the surname Handel in September 1848.<sup>109</sup> Mason Victor Garsonnet recognized three of them—Euphrasie, Jeannille, and Stéphanie—as his natural children in April 1850.<sup>110</sup> Pierre Mistral, a cultivator, recognized Azaï’s youngest, Cécilia dite Elisa, as his natural daughter in May 1850, along with another child named Piau Yémessen.<sup>111</sup> A Daniel Borel married Azaï Handel on May 28, and Félice, the remaining daughter, was recognized and legitimated in their marriage contract.<sup>112</sup> As all of the

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid, Acte 21, Entries #37-42, September 20, 1848.

<sup>110</sup> ANOM IREL, *Régistres de l'état civil du commune Le Moule*, Entry #85, “Reconnaissance d’enfants naturels par Garsonnet (Victor) au profit de Euphrasie, Jeannille et Stéphanie,” April 23, 1850. Of interest is that the recognition act did not list the surname “Handel” for Garsonnet’s children, but identified them by entry number in the registres des nouveaux libres for that same commune. The entry makes no mention of Azaï.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, Entry #117, “Reconnaissance d’enfants naturels par Mistral (Pierre) de Handel (Cécilia dite Elisa) et de Yémessen (Piau),” May 20, 1850. Both children were recorded by name and surname in this entry, in contradistinction to the Garsonnet declaration. Piau Yémessen was claimed by her grandmother, Flore Piau, as her mother Mélie had died before emancipation. It is probable, then, that Pierre Mistral did not live with either of his children. See: 472 Mi 10 *Régistres des Nouveaux Libres de la Guadeloupe*, Le Moule. Acte 47, Entries 8-9, November 4, 1848.

<sup>112</sup> ANOM IREL, *Régistres de l'état civil du commune Le Moule*, Entry #74, “Mariage de Borel (Daniel), et Handel (Azaï),” May 28, 1850.

children were under the age of fifteen at the time of the marriage and had been living with their mother when emancipated, it is likely that they continued living with their stepfather and stepsiblings. Even more interesting is the timing of the civil recognitions and marriages in this case. Did the upcoming nuptials between Handel and Borel motivate Garsonnet and Mistral to file official paternity recognitions of their children to maintain a legal kin connection to them after the Handel-Borel union? Did Garsonnet and Mistral want to ensure that their children would inherit property from them as well their mother? In any case, it stands to reason that freedpeople understood how the civil codes could be used to strengthen the claims, obligations, and responsibilities inherent in family ties.

Some couples who legally married also separated with greater frequency than whites.<sup>113</sup> In addition to separation, legal divorce was common in the French Antilles following the 1884 Naquet law.<sup>114</sup> Colonial administrators and elites thus frequently rebuked former slaves for misunderstanding the sanctity and durability of marriage. Metropolitan travelers to the islands as late as the 1880s remarked how “marriages do take place [among people of color] sometimes; but these unions, besides being very rare, have little chance of lasting.”<sup>115</sup> As a result, they argued, black women who entered into these unions and had children were often abandoned by capricious men. This perception was likely exacerbated by the fact that female-headed households were highly visible in the post-slavery French Antilles, while fathers were rendered

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<sup>113</sup> See: Edmond du Hailly, “Les Antilles françaises: En 1863 souvenirs et tableau, la vie créole, le travail libre et l’émigration,” *Revue des deux mondes* Vol. 48, no. 4 (15 December 1863): 863. This wedding ceremony is discussed in detail in Chapter Three, p. 213.

<sup>114</sup> Boutin, *La population de la Guadeloupe*, 277. For the divorce law in late nineteenth-century France, see: Alfred Naquet, *Le divorce* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1881).

<sup>115</sup> Meignan, *Aux Antilles*, 56-7.

“Ces mariages ont bien lieu quelquefois; mais ces unions, outre qu’elles sont très-rares, ont peu de chance de durée...”

legally invisible unless they married their children's mothers or officially recognized their children before a notary. Observers emphasized the visibility of the apparently single mother who embodied the sad state of social and moral affairs in the French colonies. Hearn, for example, wrote: "it is very common to see in the local papers such announcements as: *Enfants légitimes*, 1 (one birth announced); *enfants naturels*, 25."<sup>116</sup> These categories of "legitimate" and "natural" children emphasized the hyper-visibility of illicit sex and the social consequences that ensued.

As Hearn described the singing of local washerwomen working at the river in Saint Pierre, he reflected on how sex and motherhood left freed women vulnerable to abuse from sexually insatiable and fickle men. As he described the washerwomen, many of whom were unmarried mothers: "it is well worth while to hear them sing... a melancholy chant—originally a Carnival improvisation made to bring public shame upon the perpetrators of a cruel act;—but it contains the story of many of these lives—the story of... women temporarily united to brutal and worthless men in a country where legal marriages are rare. Half of the creole songs which I was able to collect during a residence of nearly two years in the island touch upon the same sad theme."<sup>117</sup>

Here, Hearn focuses on the tragic figure of the abandoned mother (one of the songs he transcribed recounts the story of a mother and child thrown out of a man's house in a storm after he tired of their relationship:

It was I who washed and ironed and mended;—at nine o'clock at night thou didst put me-out-of-doors, with my child in my arms,—the rain was falling—with my

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<sup>116</sup> Hearn, *Two Years in the French West Indies*, 327.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 248-9.

poor straw mattress upon my head! Doudoux! thou dost abandon me!...I have none to care for me.<sup>118</sup>

The song, as Hearn understood it, depicted the plight of a woman who provided domestic and reproductive labor for her male partner—washing, mending, and ironing. When the man tired of her (as the song implies), she was turned out of the house with her child and her belongings with little care for their well-being. Hearn interpreted the song as a melancholy indication of how informal unions compelled black women to take up menial labor to support their natural children (similar to the Saint Pierre washerwomen who sang these chants).

However, as Hearn himself mentioned, the origins of such sad love songs were rooted in carnival practices of publicly shaming those who transgressed social norms (in this instance, the “worthless men” who abandoned their children and conjugal partners).<sup>119</sup> This suggests that freedpeople—especially black women—did censure men who totally abnegated their paternal responsibilities. Further, as scholars of the post-emancipation Caribbean have argued, the bourgeois European ideal of marriage—a legally and spiritually sanctified and enduring relationship between man and woman, that resulted in lifelong co-residence and a patriarchal framework in which husbands and fathers worked and provided while wives and mothers performed domestic labor full time—was “impractical” for most freedpeople during the post-emancipation era.<sup>120</sup> Moreover, while women were vulnerable to abandonment, there is little evidence to suggest that marriage would have prevented this.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 248.

<sup>119</sup> For carnival celebrations in the French Antilles see: Semley, *To Be Free and French*, 131-41.

<sup>120</sup> Barrow, “‘Living in Sin’: Church and Common-Law Union in Barbados,” 47-70; and Boutin, *La population de la Guadeloupe*, 247; De Barros, *Reproducing the British Caribbean*, 52-66; Besson, *Martha Brae’s Two Histories*, 277-312; Sheller, *Citizenship from Below*, 239-80; Clarke, *My Mother Who Fathered Me*, 61-80; and Horowitz, *Morne-Paysan*, 51-8.

<sup>121</sup> As with the case of the groom and his abandoned wife in Chapter Three, p. 213.

On the whole, informal unions remained the most common romantic or sexual arrangement for freed men and women in the post-slavery period. However, unlike the administrators who complained that marriage was temporary for freedpeople, there is much evidence to testify to the deep endurance of freedpeople's family bonds that enabled relatives to withstand financial hardships or medical emergencies and provide the necessary goods for important life milestones. For instance, accounts from observers and travelers to the Antilles indicate that the freed family often combined resources to support each other. Hearn recounted a confirmation celebration in Grande Anse, when processions of black and mixed-race girls (no whites, he noted, who were instead confirmed in Saint Pierre or Morne Rouge) dressed in white shoes, robes, and veils that "had been obtained only by the hardest physical labor and self-denial of poor parents and relatives: fathers, brothers, and mothers working with cutlass and hoe in the snake-swarmed cane-fields;—sisters walking barefooted every day to St. Pierre and back to earn a few francs a month."<sup>122</sup> The family pooled scant resources to ensure that children could participate in the important sacraments while wearing the required dress.

Hearn also noted, with astonishment, the degree to which black families would care for extended relatives, particularly during epidemics, such as when smallpox rapidly ravaged Saint Pierre in 1887.<sup>123</sup> According to Hearn, "if the patient have no means, all contribute: what the sister or brother has not, the uncle or the aunt, the godfather or godmother, the cousin, brother-in-law or sister-in-law may be able to give. No one dreams of refusing money or linen or wine or anything possible to give, lend, or procure on credit." Even children educated in good schools or brought up like whites ("dressed and accomplished like them") would "voluntarily leave rich

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<sup>122</sup> Hearn, *Two Years in the French West Indies*, 138-9.

<sup>123</sup> Semley, *To Be Free and French*, 129.

homes to nurse some poor mulatress or capresse in the indigent quarters of the town, because the sick one happens to be a distant relative. They will not trust others to perform this for them;— they feel bound to do it in person.”

For Hearn, these efforts to care for extended kin sprang from noble but ignorant impulses that, if left unchecked by sanitation laws, would render the “city...[into] one vast hospital.”<sup>124</sup> From his perspective, black families were all-too willing to sacrifice for each other, to the detriment of public health. Reading beyond his account, we might understand these instances of sacrifice and care as an indication of how black families remained tightly integrated with each other—maintaining relationships with extended kin could literally be a survival strategy for the poor and working classes.<sup>125</sup> These examples of how freedpeople took caretaking duties seriously, especially during times of hardship, also illuminate a broader interpretation of “family” beyond the nuclear patriarchal households envisioned in official discourse. For freedpeople, family included extended kin of poor and insufficient means and all relatives were culturally expected to contribute funds, goods, and even their labor in times of crisis.

Further, accounts of family life in the French Antilles all testify to the central role of women in raising children and providing financially for the household. Throughout the post-emancipation era, the rate of births outside legal marriage and the number of matrifocal households remained high. Female-headed families were a hyper-visible institution. In Le Moule, for example, over 1,600 women with children received matronyms from notary Jean

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<sup>124</sup> Hearn, *Two Years in the French West Indies*, 229.

<sup>125</sup> In Jamaica, Edith Clarke discusses the placement of children with kin who could care for them and Holt noted that in the post-emancipation period, freed parents sought to physically remove their children from the plantations by placing them with family in the cities. It raises the question of how many of these children “raised like whites” by wealthier kin in the cities originally came from rural areas or even went to the countryside during an epidemic to care for family who remained there. See: Clarke, *My Mother Who Fathered Me*, 113-4; and Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 151.

Monnerot in the *Registres des nouveaux libres de la Guadeloupe*. Although some of these women later married the father of some or all of their children, the children's last names were not changed following the marriage, which effectively established a matrilineal line of descent for many formerly enslaved families and their descendants.<sup>126</sup>

Thus, while the “base of the new social contract” proposed by the colonial authorities in the post-emancipation was a “patronym” that “designated them [freedpeople] as individuals, in order to remove ‘all the deplorable traces of slavery,’” in practice, the new foundation of post-slavery Antillean societies was predominantly matrifocal.<sup>127</sup> This foundation could also accommodate a variety of family arrangements—including temporary or permanent partnerships with different men (the Handel-Borel family discussed earlier is a case in point). And yet, while establishing legal kin ties through marriage and/or recognitions did theoretically formally organize parents and children into a nuclear household, in practice, the framework was still too rigid to accommodate the family customs of freedpeople. This included fictive or extended kin, adoption, temporary unions that produced children, and the incorporation of step-children and grandchildren into the matriarchal household.

The Siette-Zégrette-Pagnol family highlights the tension between these practices and civil law. At the time of abolition, Rosie, a slave in Le Moule, had several children who remained enslaved, plus a daughter named Prudence, who had been manumitted on June 6, 1842, at the age of twelve, by Auguste Montauban (presumably the owner of the rest of the family), and given the

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<sup>126</sup> In Martinique, annual statistics reports on the population frequently (although not always) estimated how many marriages were conducted between freedpeople and how many children were legitimated by these unions (the data submitted by the colonial administration in Guadeloupe did not record this information). See: the Martinique population charts in: Le Ministère de l'Algérie et des Colonies, *Tableaux de population, de culture, de commerce et de navigation, pour l'année... la suite des tableaux insérés dans les notices statistiques sur les colonies françaises* (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1848-1890).

<sup>127</sup> Cottias, “Droit, justice, et dépendance dans les Antilles françaises (1848-1852),” 549-50.

surname Zégrette.<sup>128</sup> Six years later, Rosie and all of her remaining formerly enslaved children were also given the surname Zégrette in the *Registres des nouveaux libres*, in recognition of the fact that they were related to a young free woman of color.<sup>129</sup> To complicate this dynamic, Rosie had another freed relative, her sixty-three year old mother, Siette, who then officially recognized Rosie as her daughter in March of 1851, and later consented to Rosie's marriage in the following month.<sup>130</sup> That April, Rosie married Alexandre Pagnol, which legitimated three of their children (Pierre Louis, Prudence, and Marie Rose).<sup>131</sup> Rosie's fourth child, eighteen-year-old Marie Françoise, was not recognized by this marriage act, and presumably, had a different father.

The web of kinship at the heart of the Siette-Zégrette-Pagnol family demonstrates the complexity of establishing legal family ties according to the norms of the French colonial state. It shows how freedpeople used civil law (recognitions and marriages) to repair any ruptures in the family caused by separations under slavery, but it also raises more questions than answers about how freedpeople marshaled these legal conventions to establish families recognized under the law. For example, did Siette play a role in her granddaughter Prudence's manumission or provide her with a home and support afterward? Why was Prudence (and then her mother and siblings) given a common surname and why did Siette not have one at all? Was the family separated during slavery or had living and working in the urban environment of Le Moule (Alexandre was a fisherman, Rosie a washerwoman) enabled them to remain together, despite a manumission in

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<sup>128</sup> ANOM IREL, *Régistres de l'état civil du commune Le Moule*, Entry #40, "Transcription de liberté de Zégrette (Prudence)," June 6, 1842.

<sup>129</sup> 472 Mi 10, *Régistres des Nouveaux Libres de la Guadeloupe*, Le Moule, Acte 8, Entries #113-116, August 30, 1848.

<sup>130</sup> ANOM IREL, *Régistres de l'état civil du commune Le Moule*, Entry #60, "Reconnaissance d'enfant naturel par Siette, au profit de Zégrette (Rosie)," March 19, 1851.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid. Entry #107, "Mariage de Pagnol (Alexandre) et Zegrette (Rosie)," April 29, 1851.



1842 and another manumission much earlier? Given the eight-year gap between Marie Françoise and her half-sister Marie Rose, did Rosie and another man share a home and life together with Prudence and Pierre Louis, the children of Alexandre? Was Alexandre the father of any of these children in the first place or had he simply recognized them as such because he had agreed to adopt them as his own, perhaps even wanting to ensure that they would inherit property from their mother after he married her? Insight into these family dynamics elude the archives, precisely because they could not be incorporated into French civil law where patriarchal marriage and reproduction between one man and one woman in a nuclear household was the only normative legal framework.

During the Second Empire and Third Republic, moreover, elites and colonial authorities consistently viewed these complicated family customs as the consequences of promiscuity. They maintained that unregulated sex between black men and women without legal responsibility led to fatherless children, suffering mothers, and widespread immorality. They seized on opportunities to exhort freedpeople living in informal unions to change their behavior. For example, in June 1850, Counselor Alphonse Garnier wrote of a case tried before the Assizes Court in Fort-de-France: “we had to judge a son accused of hitting his mother... The reputation of the son is very good, that of the mother, very bad.” The son, identified as Louisy, was acquitted owing to several factors. The judges were ill-disposed to the plaintiff’s “bad reputation” and there were no eyewitnesses; plus Louisy won further approbation by conducting himself modestly and appropriately throughout the proceedings.

Louisy was therefore spared a criminal penalty, but the court admonished him by declaring: “never forget that on every occasion a son must respect his mother, to aid and assist the one who protected one’s childhood.” According to Garnier, the president of the tribunal then

rebuked Louisy for concubinage: “do not forget that it is your illicit relations with Rosélia that brought you to these...sufferings.” He further exhorted Louisy to “leave in the past and the shameful habits of slavery, all the whims, the uncertainties, and the disappointments of concubinage. With freedom, which is the daughter of order and good morals, and in taking the title of French citizen, [you must] aspire to the dignity of marriage, a civil contract which the Christian religion has raised to the level of a sacrament.” Nevertheless, Garnier then noted that, an hour after the court delivered its verdict, he spotted Louisy and Rosélia kissing each other “very tenderly” in the streets.<sup>132</sup>

The Assizes Court thus established clear links between the vices of extra-marital sex and immoral behavior. That a young man of “good” reputation and “modest” comportment would strike his mother indicated how informal unions (perhaps combined with the immoral behavior of the victim herself, given she had a “very bad reputation”) could wield a deeply corrupting influence on social mores. Moreover, this case illustrates how colonial officials viewed concubinage as one of the main “shameful habits of slavery, when men and women were denied the right to legally sanctify their unions, they were condemned to live in vice, ignorance, and “sufferings” as a result.

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<sup>132</sup> The diary of Counselor Garnier is available in: G. Debien, *Journal Du Conseiller Garnier à La Martinique et à La Guadeloupe 1848-1855* (Fort-de-France, Martinique: Société d’histoire de la Martinique, 1969), 233. “Nous avons à juger un fils accuse d’avoir frappé sa mère...La réputation du fils, très bonne, celle de la mère, très mauvaise. Il a eu acquittement. Le président B...a adressé à ce jeune homme une exhortation qui a diminué le mauvais effet que l’acquittement pouvait produire... En outre vos favorable antécédents, votre tenue modeste pendant ces tristes débats, ont déterminé votre acquittement. N’oubliez jamais qu’en toute occasion un fils doit respect à sa mère, aide et assistance à celle qui protégea son enfance. Ne perdez pas de vue que ce sont vos relations illicites avec Rosélia qui vous ont amené sur ce banc de douleur. Laissez dans le passé et les honteuses habitudes de l’esclavage, tous les caprices, les incertitudes et les déceptions du concubinage. Avec la liberté qui est fille de l’ordre et des bonnes mœurs et en prégnant le titre de citoyen français, aspirez à la dignité du mariage, contrat civil que la religion chrétienne a élevé à la hauteur d’un sacrement. Une heure après dans les rues j’ai rencontré Louisy et Rosélia qui s’embrassaient fort tendrement...”

Colonial authorities often perceived freed women's crimes as motivated by sexual jealousy or unrequited love—and prosecuted many freed women for violence against property and persons that they viewed as the unhappy, yet inevitable, result of informal unions. For instance, Philoèmene Ladilas, a twenty-one-year-old farmer in Lamentin, was suspected of setting fire to the home of her former partner, Vertèse Mailard, and his new resident partner Lalina Edouard, while they were sleeping. Police and prosecutors suspected Ladilas because Mailard had “abandoned her” for Edouard when Ladilas became pregnant. She had threatened them in the days before the fire, reportedly saying that she “was resolved to do [something bad] even if the child I carry in my bosom suffocates me.” But the court was unable to render a guilty verdict in her case, as a witness claimed Ladilas was at home when the fire started.”<sup>133</sup> It is unknown what happened to Ladilas, Mailard, or Edouard after the verdict, or who the witness was who testified on Philomène's behalf.

Such incidents, sometimes sensationalized in the transatlantic press, again reinforced local elites' conviction that informal conjugal unions inevitably led to violence and disaster. *La Liberté* recounted an incident in Canal, Guadeloupe, in which a woman named Petite-Sœur was condemned to forced labor in perpetuity for setting fire to the hut of Fatima, a cultivator in the same parish. The article asserted that Petite Sœur had been living for many years with a man named Lucien, who decided to marry another woman named Dédée and, “crushed by this conduct and motivated by jealousy, she conceived, we are assured, the notion to prevent the marriage by burning the cabinet that held the engagement clothes.”<sup>134</sup> The fire then spread to

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<sup>133</sup> ANOM FM SG MAR 163/1490, “Accusation d'incendie volontaire de maison habitée, Philomène Ladilas.” “Je dis tous les jours que j'avais faire et je ne fais pas, mais aujourd'hui je ferai à que je résolu, dùt l'enfant que je porte dans mon sein m'étouffer.

<sup>134</sup> ANOM FM SG GUA 7/77, *La Liberté*, January 4, 1851. It is unclear what the relationship between Fatima and Dédée was, but it is probable that they were either mother and daughter or otherwise shared some close kin relation, in order for Dédée's engagement clothes to be held in Fatima's home.

neighboring homes. Violence in black families was thus consistently blamed on immorality, and authorities lamented the corrupted morals of the men and women who appeared before them.

However, it is also possible to also read these legal archives for insight into how freedpeople, and freed women in particular, turned to the courts for protection when threatened with violence. The court system allowed women to exercise their civil rights—a process that had been largely denied to them under slavery. While in slavery, there were extraordinary cases of enslaved women who successfully filed legal claims against their owners for abuse and family separation, emancipation marked a new period in which women could demand that the courts recognize their right to be protected against battery, assault, and violence.

For example, Désirée Moracide had been dealing for some time with her volatile son Anthénor Gévelle, who had long adopted “the habits of drunkenness” and would “insult” and “hit his mother after drinking, but when he sobered up, he would beg and obtain her forgiveness.” Mother and son went through this cycle many times, until September 1866, when a drunk Anthénor punched Désirée because he was angry over a meal she had prepared for him. Terrified and hurt, Désirée “ran from the house and called for help,” while Anthénor destroyed the furniture in the home. A few days later, this “unnatural son” followed his mother to where she was staying in Basse-Pointe and “addressed her with new insults.” The description of Anthénor as “unnatural” is an interesting phrase, given the fact that he was an illegitimate, and, therefore, a natural child. This wording in the legal brief implied a connection between illegitimacy, immorality, and dangerous behavior.

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“La citoyenne Petite-Sœur de la même commune [Canal] est condamnée aux travaux à perpétuité pour avoir, dit-on, mis le feu à la case de Fatima cultivatrice comme elle sur l’habitation Delville. Petite Sœur vivait depuis de longues années avec Lucien qui avait formé le projet de se marier avec Dédée. Froisse de cette conduite, stimulée par la jalousie, elle aurait conçu assure-t-on, le projet d’empêcher ce mariage en brulant l’armoire qui renfermait les hardes de fiançailles.”

After this latest incident, it appears as though Désirée had finally had enough and filed charges against Anthéonor. In his summation of the case, the Attorney General reported that Désirée Moracide attended the hearing and “repeated the serious accusation she made against her son,” noting that “*her tears showed the judges that the intervention of justice had only been requested [in this matter] because the mother was exhausted of patience and kindness.*” Anthéonor was sentenced to a year in prison, which the Attorney General noted was “not in proportion to the severity of the crime,” but Anthéonor’s drunkenness was considered an “attenuating circumstance.”<sup>135</sup> Désirée, although an unwed mother, demonstrated the cherished virtues of maternity—patience, kindness, and vulnerability—and so, her request that the courts punish her son was considered to be motivated by desperation.

That the Attorney General made note of her demeanor in court is instructive (such information is rare in similar legal summaries dispatched to the governor). It suggests that Désirée’s projection of a suffering mother had won the sympathy of the judges. Even the Attorney General’s statement that “the sentence was not proportional to the severity of the crime,” and his efforts to highlight how Désirée admirably fulfilled her domestic responsibilities (such as making her ungrateful son lunch, even when he was drunk), indicates that he was

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<sup>135</sup> ANOM FM SG GUA 152/998, “Audience du jeudi 21 février, Anthéonor Gévelle coups à sa mère;” and op. cit., Procureur-Général, “Compte rendu des assises de la Basse-Terre du 1<sup>er</sup> trimestre 1867. April 17, 1867. Emphasis mine.

“Anthéonor Gévelle, qui avait contracté depuis longtemps des habitudes d’ivresse, adressait à sa mère naturelle, Désirée Moacide toutes les fois qu’il se trouvait sous le coup de la boisson, les injures les plus grossières. Déjà même il avait frappé sa mère, mais revenu à la raison il avait imploré et obtenu son pardon...Le 26 septembre dernier, Anthéonor Gévelle entra chez sa mère et lui demanda à déjeuner...Comprenant le danger qu’elle courait, Désirée fit un dernier effort, se leva et se précipita hors de la case en appelant au secours. Après cette scène, Anthéonor, comme s’il n’avait pas épuisé sa colère, s’attaqua aux meubles et brisa tout le mobilier qui se trouvait dans la maison. Quelques jours après, ce fils dénaturé revenait sur l’habitation la Basse-Pointe où se trouvait sa mère et lui adressait de nouvelles injures. Aux débats, Désirée Moracide a répété l’accusation si grave qu’elle avait portée contre son fils et ses larmes ont montré aux juges que l’intervention de la justice n’avait été demandée que parce que la mère était à bout de patience et de bonté. La Cour a rendu un verdict de culpabilité et elle a condamné Anthéonor Gévelle à un an d’emprisonnement...La peine ne semble pas proportionnée à la gravité du fait reproché à Anthéonor Gévelle, mais son état d’ivresse qui ne pouvait servir d’excuse, atténuait sensiblement l’énormité du crime. ”

possibly moved by her plight. Perhaps the real or imagined absence of a father and partner in the household made the judges and attorney general particularly disgusted with Anthénor's "unnatural" behavior toward his mother, as they might expect him to then embody the patriarchal ideals enshrined in European bourgeois gender roles. Another factor that remains ambiguous is whether or not Désirée realized—and thus, used to her advantage—that her suit might elicit such sympathetic considerations if she publicly presented herself as a long-suffering and patient mother. Similar cases of sons beating their mothers were prosecuted over the course of the nineteenth century, and cases of violence against black women and girls appear frequently in the court minutes and administrative reports.<sup>136</sup>

This disjuncture between freed family dynamics in practice and elite conceptions of family norms mirrors a key problem in Caribbean studies posed in Jean Besson's scholarship: that Antillean and European institutions are simultaneously disparate and entangled. Colonial administrators, colons, and metropolitan observers despaired that the informal unions, matrifocality, and other family structures incited disorder in the general population. Fires, assaults, and other forms of violence against properties and persons were either implicitly or explicitly attributed to "concubinage" and vice. Freedpeople, however, mobilized their family politics vis-à-vis the intricacies of the legal system to gain state recognition of their extended kin networks and even protection from some of this violence. The result was a constant friction between and accommodation of these competing cultural institutions in civil law in the French Antilles.

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<sup>136</sup> See: ANOM 6DPPC/930, Cour d'Assises de Saint-Pierre, Martinique, 1873-1877, "État des doubles-minutes des arrêts de condamnations provinces par la Cour d'Assises de l'arrondissement de Saint-Pierre, île Martinique, Durant la session du 1er trimestre, 1873," Entry #1, Anténor Mondésir Olivette and Entry #2, Léopold Nanin; and ANOM 6DPPC/911 Cour d'Assises de Fort-de-France, 1849-1855, "Affaire Dodale," February 19, 1849.

For example, colonial officials, though seeking to create patriarchal families from former slaves, found themselves granting women and their children and grandchildren matronyms—in effect enshrining matrifocal family practices in the *états civils* of the French Antilles. Again, and again freed men and women overwhelmingly employed a variety of intimate categories to structure their lives in addition to legal marriage. This allowed them a greater degree of flexibility in constituting their families, often composed of children from previous relationships. Yet, as paternity recognitions demonstrate, freedpeople proactively ensured that the civil law would formalize ties to their natural children—in effect, achieving public state recognition of family norms that could not be easily transposed on European conventions. And so, the role of black women in ensuring the economic and social maintenance of the family also took on an important public dimension, particularly in the urban centers of Martinique and Guadeloupe.

#### Black Women's Labor and Entrepreneurialism After Freedom

Black women were integral agents in this process of cultural institution-building in Martinique and Guadeloupe, and their domestic and productive labor helped the freed family pull away from estates. Informal unions more frequently provided a measure of independence and opportunity that black women would not be able to legally maintain in marriage. Remaining legally *célibataire* allowed women to preserve several rights that formal marriage would strip away—such as the right to contract, own property, and keep the profits of their work. Given that many of these women were often not officially recognized by fathers or married to husbands, they could evade different forms of patriarchal authority in the Civil Code. This became especially important when freed women wanted to contract in their own names, rather than through a father, husband, or guardian (particularly in property transactions).

Notary records provide a window into freed women's efforts to safeguard their investments or preserve their land rights if they purchased or leased land with a male partner. Take for instance, the case of Demoiselle Marie Noël, called Nègresse and Mr. Louis Manette, who together purchased approximately two and a half acres of land together from Mr. Laillault, a proprietor in Le Moule.<sup>137</sup> This contract reveals little about the nature of the relationship between Nègresse and Manette, but the sale provides an example of how a single woman could claim property rights by contracting in their own right. Black women like Nègresse entered into contracts to buy or lease property in their own names and contributed their own capital to do so—without relying on male relatives, guardians, or husbands to negotiate on their behalf. Like their counterparts in the British West Indies, black women in the French Antilles sought to buy or lease property to produce locally-consumed foodstuffs as well as crops (tobacco, spices, banana, and cacao) for export overseas. Land, in other words, offered black women many different opportunities for economic gains.<sup>138</sup>

Cash-poor women could also acquire property from bequests—the practice of white men leaving property to the black or *métisse* women working in their households had continued after slavery. For example, in March 1853, proprietor Charles Nicolas de Rataz, from Trou-au-Chat Martinique, named Justine Fénélon (his “housekeeper for many years”) as his legatee, bequeathing to her “all moveable and immovable property that I will leave upon my death” in “recognition of her good care of me.”<sup>139</sup> While there is no inventory included in order to assess

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<sup>137</sup> ANOM DPPC NOT GUA/815, Entry #53, “Vente de terre pour M. Jules Laillault à M. Manette et Demoiselle Marie Noël,” September 28 1850.

<sup>138</sup> See: Veront M. Satchell, “Women, Land Transactions and Peasant Development in Jamaica, 1866-1900,” in Shepherd, et., al., eds., *Engendering History: Caribbean Women in Historical Perspective*, 213-32.

<sup>139</sup> ANOM DPPC NOT MAR 917, “Testament de M. de Rataz,” March 21, 1853.



how much Justine inherited from de Rataz, the fact that she inherited his entire estate is telling. Justine's ability to leverage a relationship with her employer (and, likely, lover), to secure a bequest was not an uncommon practice for single black women working as domestics.

That said, intimate relationships between whites or wealthier free people of color and freed women that led to bequests and property transactions in their favor were not always clearly sexual or romantic. Many women with property made bequests or donations to freed women—particularly for faithful domestic service or because of fictive kin ties crafted through godparentage. Madame Marie Félicité Portland dictated her testament to the notary Furcy Douillard in March of 1860 with one sole recipient: “I give and bequeath to the young lady Eurème Estoriac, known as Perrine, who lives with me, half of the portion of land that I own in the commune of Le Moule, and the wooden hut covered in straw which is on it.”<sup>140</sup> It is not clear what happened to the other half of Portland's land, and this is the only testament she filed in Le Moule. But for Perrine, the independence and possibilities that a small piece of land and a hut offered after living with (and presumably working for) Portland must have represented tangible upward mobility.

Perrine's inheritance offered the chance to live and work like numerous other freed women in rural Martinique and Guadeloupe who cultivated land, owned small homes, and remained somewhat independent of sharecropping.<sup>141</sup> The nature of the relationship between Perrine and Portland is unknown—they could have been servant and master, related, or even

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<sup>140</sup> ANOM DDPC NOT GUA 825, Entry #18, “Testament de la Dame Portland,” March 8, 1860.

“Je donne et lègue à la demoiselle Eurème Estoriac dite Perrine, qui demeure avec moi, la moitié de la portion de terre que je possède en la commune du Moule, et la case en bois couverte en pailles qui se trouve dessus.”

<sup>141</sup> Jennifer Palmer traces a similar phenomenon among free woman of color in the eighteenth-century. See: Jennifer Palmer, “The Fruits of Their Labours: Race, Gender, and Labour in the Eighteenth-Century French Caribbean,” *French History* Vol. 32, no. 4, (December 2018), 471-92.

sexual partners.<sup>142</sup> Regardless, the relationship produced real material advantages for Perrine. This was similar to the stipulations of another testament filed in Le Moule that year when Agathe Angebert declared Mr. Ambroise Ouabon, cultivator on the Daudouin plantation her sole beneficiary.<sup>143</sup> It is not clear what property Angebert had or what the relationship was between herself and Ouabon (it is likely they were intimate partners), but here, we have the transfer of property from a woman to a man. If Angebert and Ouabon were conjugal partners, she clearly had her own property and means of support. As in the case of Perrine, this ambiguous relationship was formalized in law with the transfer of property after death.

Black women have long been studied as the backbone of post-emancipation Caribbean economies. Like free women of color in the port cities under slavery, black women working in urban spaces were integral to local economies—which were in turn plugged into the international trade networks that spanned the Atlantic.<sup>144</sup> Black women in Martinique and Guadeloupe were no exception. They leveraged their labor skills to carve out independent livelihoods for themselves and their families, owned property, and ran businesses from farms to boarding houses to brothels.<sup>145</sup> Especially in urban areas, women could find various skilled, semi-skilled, and

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<sup>142</sup> I have no concrete evidence of sexual relationships between white or free women of color and their female slaves or servants in the French Antilles, but other scholars have documented cases elsewhere in the Americas. See: Lamonte Aidoo, *Slavery Unseen: Sex, Power, and Violence in Brazilian History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 67-110.

<sup>143</sup> ANOM DDPC NOT GUA 825, “Testament de la demoiselle Agathe Angebert,” December 31, 1860.

<sup>144</sup> Semley, *To Be Free and French*, 127; and Dominique Rogers and Stewart King, “Housekeepers, Merchants, Rentières: Free Women of Color in the Port Cities of Colonial Saint-Domingue, 1750-1790,” in Catterall and Campbell, eds., *Women in Port: Gendering Communities, Economies, and Social Networks in Atlantic Port Cities* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 357-97; Karasch, *Slave Life in Rio de Janeiro*, 185-215; and Carla Freeman, “Reinventing Higglering across Transnational Zones: Barbadian Women Juggle the Triple Shift,” in Consuelo López Springfield, ed., *Daughters of Caliban: Caribbean Women in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 68-96.

<sup>145</sup> Dessalles, for instance, frequented the boarding house of Mademoiselle Anna during the autumn of 1854, a time he spent gambling and visiting with his children and acquaintances in Fort-de-France and its environs. It is unclear if Mademoiselle Anna’s business doubled as a brothel. See: Dessalles, diary entry for November 9, 1854, in *La vie d’un colon* Vol. 4, 292.

unskilled occupations such as market vendors, seamstresses, porters, and food hawkers—typically jobs that had deep roots in the urban markets and day labor systems (*journaliers* and *patronés*) of slavery.<sup>146</sup> Usually, these jobs allowed them to set day rates for their labor and negotiate directly with their clients on terms of service, and many of these positions enabled women to work off the plantations (although it is also true that the system of passes and taxes on small land parcels and vendor licenses passed during the early years of the Second Empire hampered the ability of women to cultivate and sell their garden products for consumption).<sup>147</sup>

*Porteuses* are perhaps the most frequently cited example of laboring women conducting (mobile) business. The *porteuses* were female vendors who carried goods and foodstuffs to and from the interior of the islands to the port cities and were integral to the local and export economy. As Hearn described it, “nearly all the transportation of light merchandise...is effected upon human heads. At some of the ports, the regular local packets are loaded and unloaded by women and girls—able to carry any trunk or box to its destination.”<sup>148</sup> According to his account, a young girl or woman became a *porteuse* because it was a family business. Mothers would teach their four-and-five-year-old daughters to carry small bowls of rice or jugs of water on their heads and, by the age of ten, girls would be able to carry “a tolerably heavy basket...containing a weight of from twenty to thirty pounds; and is able to accompany her mother, sister, or cousin on long peddling journeys,” around fifteen miles a day. An adult *porteuse* could carry up to 150

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<sup>146</sup> Semley, *To Be Free and French*, 127.

<sup>147</sup> The 1857 laws in Guadeloupe focused in particular on restricting the movement of women to the cities. See: *Bulletin Officiel de la Guadeloupe*, December 2, 1857. Also see: “Paper Read by Monsieur Victor Schœlcher, on the Results of Emancipation in the French West-India Colonies,” at the London Anti-Slavery Conference, President Samuel Gurney, November 29 and 9, 154 in the Appendix to the *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 1854, 14.

<sup>148</sup> Hearn, *Two Years in the French West Indies*, 103.

pounds and earn approximately thirty francs a month by walking fifty miles a day, selling her own goods or on commission for craftsmen and farmers in the countryside.<sup>149</sup>

Like other white men writing about women of color in the West Indies, Hearn describes the *porteuse* as seductive and sexual. But her sexuality was rooted in her work—her “swinging hips” and “half naked dress” combined with her athleticism and grace all resulted in a lithe body: “all, whether ugly or attractive as to feature, are finely shapen [sic] as to body and limb. Brought into existence by extraordinary necessities of environment, the type is a peculiarly local one—a type of human thorough-bred representing the true secret of grace: economy of force.”<sup>150</sup> The description of the *porteuse* was focused entirely on the animalistic (she is compared to a rare and prized thoroughbred) sensuality of her body—the beauty of her face took on a secondary importance. She embodied a raw sexuality precisely because of the backbreaking and demanding physical labor she performed. In this respect, Hearn echoed the language that slave owners and travelers to the slave societies of the Americas employed when describing female slaves, which envisioned black women as embodying (almost monstrous) strength and athleticism.<sup>151</sup>

Like the African women that European mariners encountered in their travels along the West African coast, Hearn’s *porteuse* symbolized a rigorous sexuality that both attracted and repulsed the (male) gaze. However, as Morgan argues, in the era of early modern slavery, the half-naked African mothers stooped in field labor with suckling children on their “hanging breasts,” symbolized the production and reproduction of white wealth (in commodities and

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 104-5.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>151</sup> Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 12-49.

future slaves).<sup>152</sup> In the post-slavery French Antilles, on the other hand, the *porteuse* evoked racial hierarchy and colonial wealth.

That is, for elites, the bustling, overburdened *porteuses*, “yellow, red, [and] black” moving gracefully through Saint Pierre on business as the sun flashed across their “yellow feet,” and illuminated the “tint the red limbs take in,” represented what Edward Baptist has described as the phenomenon of white men fetishizing racialized female bodies “marked by the past of their own...power.”<sup>153</sup> But rather than the enslaved black and brown female body, which for Baptist symbolized white domination and mastery, the free *porteuse* embodied the racialized hierarchies that produced colonial wealth in the absence of slavery. The “two *chabines*—golden girls: the twin-sisters who sell silks and threads, and foulards; always together, always wearing robes and kerchiefs of similar color,” simultaneously evoked a fetishized and racialized sensuality that was made all the more attractive by the color and vibrancy of their clothes and the rich fabrics they sold.<sup>154</sup> Their “golden skin” that flashed red and yellow in the sun as they carried over a hundred pounds of merchandise on their heads inextricably tied their race and sexuality to labor and the local economy.

There are other parallels between enslaved African women and the *porteuse*—especially regarding childbirth. Highlighting the endurance of the *porteuses* as they moved rapidly between country and city, Hearn recounted an incident in Saint Pierre when a shopkeeper, expecting a delivery from a *porteuse* he contracted with, grew concerned when she was “more than an hour late.” He:

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<sup>152</sup> Morgan, ““Some Could Suckle over Their Shoulder,”” 186-9.

<sup>153</sup> Baptist, “‘Cuffy,’ ‘Fancy Maids,’ and ‘One-Eyed Men,’ Rape, Commodification, and the Domestic Slave Trade in the United States,” 1648.

<sup>154</sup> Hearn, *Two Years in the French West Indies*, 119

...sent out messengers in all directions to make inquiries. It was found that the woman had become a mother when only half-way upon her journey home... The child lived and thrived—she is now a pretty chocolate-colored girl of eight, who follows her mother every day from their mountain ajoupa down to the city, and back again,—bearing a little trait upon her head.<sup>155</sup>

Although Hearn included this anecdote as a testament to the *porteuse*'s trustworthiness and endurance, it also illustrates the association of certain types of backbreaking, physically crippling labor (*porteuses* could no longer perform their work after forty or so) with the centuries-old trope of black women incapable of feeling the pain of childbirth.<sup>156</sup> Indeed, this child supposedly “thrived,” following in the inexhaustible rhythm of her mother’s footsteps. For Hearn, black women worked long and hard, and raised their black daughters to do the same. From this perspective, arduous and menial labor was the natural course of life for black women.

While it is impossible to reconstruct the perspective of the *porteuse* and her daughter beyond the description Hearn provides, his account demonstrates how black mothers assumed much of the responsibility for training their children in a skill or trade that would enable them to secure a livelihood as adults—even if an onerous one. Maybe they even dreamed of establishing themselves as independent traders or proprietors of a family business in their own right. Indeed, many *porteuses* “with a particular talent for selling... eventually make themselves independent in many instances;—they continue to sell and bargain in person, but hire a young girl to carry the goods,” or passed the porter duties onto daughters and other female kin. In effect, they became petty entrepreneurs who opened up their own shops or stalls, leaving the grueling work of carrying and walking to younger generations.<sup>157</sup> For some, then, the grueling work eventually

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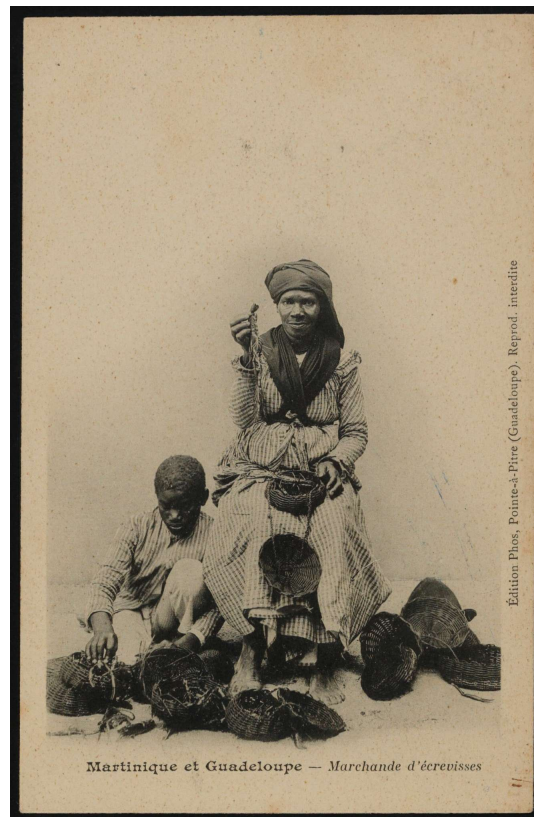
<sup>155</sup> Hearn, *Two Years in the French West Indies*, 111-12.

<sup>156</sup> Morgan, ““Some Could Suckle over Their Shoulder,”” 184-8.

<sup>157</sup> Hearn, *Two Years in the French West Indies*, 114.

paid off as they could build an independent business through their savings and accumulated skills.

Outside of the *porteuse*, visual depictions of black women's labor emphasize how urban working mothers were critical in handing down their trades and business to their children:



IMG 4.1. *Marchande d'écrevisses*<sup>158</sup>

This photograph, for example, taken in Pointe-à-Pitre at the beginning of the twentieth century, depicts a *marchande* who specialized in selling crayfish. She is assisted by a young male adolescent (probably her son). While little more can be known about this vendor and the young boy, it stands to reason that they might be engaged in a family enterprise (perhaps an absent adult male or father labored as a fisherman in the city, and this was his partner and child, responsible for selling the catch). The absence of men in most archival images portraying women working

<sup>158</sup> AD-GUA, 5 F1 75/1, *Marchande d'écrevisses*. Exact date unknown, listed as “début XXe siècle.”

with children, as in this instance, emphasized how women were depicted as essential to training future generations of laborers. Perhaps as they walked between city and country and back again buying and selling their wares, or sat side-by-side for long hours at the market, mothers and children shared conversation, gossip, and secrets, and otherwise renewed intimate family bonds through their cooperative labor.

Another gendered occupation was the urban *blanchisseuse*, who worked at least “thirteen hours” a day, knee-deep in icy water. Hearn maintained that the washerwomen of Saint Pierre charged “fair rates;—it is false economy to have your washing done by the house-servant;—with the professionals your property is safe. And as cheap as her rates are, a good professional can make from twenty-five to thirty francs a week; averaging fully a hundred francs a month,—as much as many a white clerk can earn in the stores of Saint-Pierre.”<sup>159</sup> Like *porteuses*, *blanchisseuses* could achieve social recognition as dependable workers and turn a substantial profit through her labor—securing for herself and her family a more or less independent livelihood through a small business on par with the economic success of educated and skilled *petits blancs*.

Other late nineteenth-century travelogues describe urban marketplaces as women’s spaces. The newly constructed iron-covered market in Saint-Pierre, as Dutch tourist Gerrit Verschuur wrote in 1894, was filled with “negro women displaying their charms and their fish.” These women wore “brightly colored costumes [that] compete with the velvety, shimmering tons

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<sup>159</sup> Hearn, *Two Years in the French West Indies*, 244 and 246. In her case study of black washerwomen in the post-slavery U.S. South, Tera Hunter has demonstrated the ways in which organized black women’s labor was essential to the functioning of the southern economy and black political mobilization. In Hearn’s account, it is not clear if the black washerwomen of St Pierre set competitive prices together (as did the washerwomen in Hunter’s study), but the collective work-day that Hearn describes at the river suggests a large degree of interdependency and cooperation, similar to the U.S. See: Tera Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom*, 74-97.



of the fruit in their baskets.”<sup>160</sup> Other black women, “pipes in their mouths,” stocked up on their bread provisions and the tantalizing and wafting scent of it (both pipes and bread) tempted Verschuur and his companions inside.<sup>161</sup> Wearing bright, “shimmering” colors while smoking, buying, and selling, Verschuur described the market women as both commodities peddling charm and appeal, and the vendors and consumers whose activities structured the economic logic of the market. As with Hearn and Sonthonnax, the black women in Verschuur’s account are explicitly linked to marketing through race—embodying the contradicting characteristics of feminine charm (coyly selling fish) and masculine, uncivilized manners (smoking pipes over loaves of bread).

Such romanticized depictions of key professionals in the urban female working class—porters, market vendors, and washerwomen—belie how, for most elites, their hyper-visible labor in cities was explicitly racialized, which justified the continued exclusion of former slaves and their descendants from the civil life of the city. Depictions of female coalers starkly illuminated this discourse. For example, the Lyonnais entomologist L. Sonthonnax, who traveled to the Caribbean from Marseilles in 1895, remarked of the female porters who helped carry coal onto the ship and unload baggage onto the docks of St. Pierre, Martinique:

Let us imagine nearly 200 negresses occupied in this work, parading without interruption; the whole boat is invaded, there is not a free gangway, it is impossible to circulate without colliding with this flood of female porters, ascending and descending, moving from the quay to the boat and from the boat to the quay. These miserable workers, some barely dressed in real rags, blackened

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<sup>160</sup> G. Verschuur, *Voyage aux trois Guyanes et aux Antilles* (Paris: Hachette, 1894), 13.

“Nous faisons nécessairement le tour du marché promenade indispensable dans chaque colonie, et je remarque que Saint-Pierre aussi a fait des progrès. Un marché en plein air de modeste envergure a fait place à une grande construction en fer, où les négresses étalent leurs charmes et leurs poissons. Leurs costumes aux couleurs voyantes font concurrence aux tons veloutés et chatoyants des fruits que contiennent leurs corbeilles.”

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

“Pendant que notre ami essaie ses casques, et que des négresses, la pipe à la bouche, font leurs provisions de pain, je fais un tour dans la boulangerie, dont les fourneaux m'envoient des caresses brûlantes.”

by their work and by the rain, carry on their heads, all day long and under the blazing sun, baskets of coal whose dust does not, in truth, change much the color of their complexion, but rather adds to their figure an aspect of poverty and savagery of which one has no idea. Along with this, the deafening noise of the negroes striking their hands on primitive drums to encourage them to their task.<sup>162</sup>

Here, Sonthonax clearly invites the reader to associate black coal dust (and menial labor) with teeming crowds of working black women, rendered “savage” by their poverty and occupation, driven to work only by the “deafening” beats of “primitive drums.” The author’s perception of coalers as poor, miserable, savage, and animalistic—the reader is struck by the sense that Sonthonax is describing an army of teeming ants—underscore how he inscribed them as racially other, peripheral, and inferior.

However, reading between the racialist language that linked coal dust to the complexion of the female dockworkers and focused on their ragged clothing and frenetic work pace, Sonthonax unintentionally gives the reader the sense of the integral role these female coalers and dockworkers played in the choreography of the embarkation and disembarkation of ships in port. Athletic and strong, the porters carry baskets of coal as they climb, descend, and “parade without interruption” along the gangways of the ship. The use of the drum suggests an organized and disciplined choreography of work. The female porters are unskilled laborers, and perhaps “miserable” in their “poverty,” but they are efficient and integral agents in ensuring the ports run smoothly. This labor force is especially essential in Saint-Pierre, the commercial capital of Martinique until the eruption of Mount Pelée in 1902. The city’s lifeblood relied on the

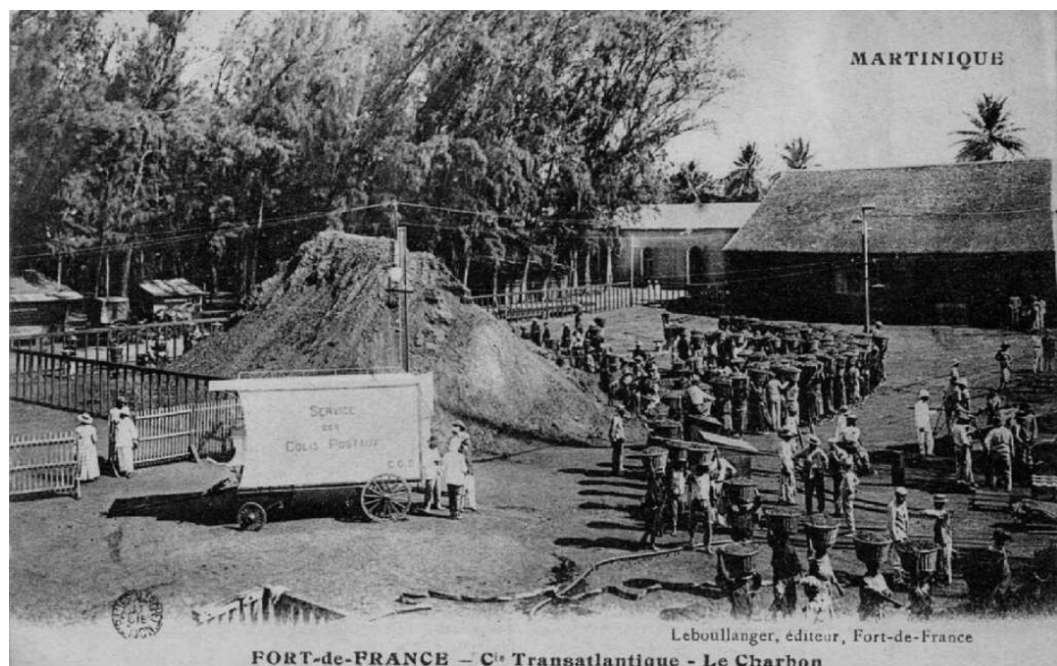
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<sup>162</sup> L. Sonthonnax, *Deux mois aux Antilles françaises* (Lyon: Imprimerie De A. Rey, 1898), 2-3.

“Qu'on se représente près de 200 négresses occupées à ce travail, défilant sans interruption; tout le bateau est envahi, pas une passerelle de libre, impossible de circuler sans se heurter à ce flot de portefaix féminins, montant et descendant, qui va du quai au bateau et du bateau au quai. Ces misérables travailleuses dont les unes à peine vêtues de véritables loques noircies par leur travail et par la pluie, transportent sur leur tête, pendant toute la journée et sous un soleil de plomb, des paniers de charbon dont la poussière ne modifie pas beaucoup, à vrai dire, la couleur de leur teint, mais ajoute à leur figure un aspect de misère et de sauvagerie dont on a pas [sic] idée. Avec cela le bruit assourdissant des nègres frappant de leurs mains sur de primitifs tambours pour les encourager à leur tâche.”

synchronized circulation of goods and people in and out of its ports and seafront shipping houses.

The steady and coordinated movement of commerce and peoples in and out of the port cities thus depended on the labor of women—as Hearn noted, the “steamers of the *Compagnie Générale Transatlantique*, are entirely coaled by women, who carry the coal on their heads, singing as they come and go in processions of hundreds; and the work is done with incredible rapidity.”<sup>163</sup>



IMG 4.2. *Martinique. Fort-de-France. Compagnie Transatlantique. Porteuses de charbon.*<sup>164</sup>

Although this image was taken in the early twentieth-century, it depicts the same bustling and rhythmic labor of the female coalers described in these travel accounts. In the right foreground and background of this image, teams of women carry baskets of coal on their heads, headed toward the waiting steamships of the *Compagnie Transatlantique* docked in Fort-de-France.

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 104.

<sup>164</sup> AD-MAR 2Fi 1264, Carte postale, *Martinique. Fort-de-France. Compagnie Transatlantique. Porteuses de charbon*. Date unknown, early twentieth century.

While there are some male porters working as well, the hustle and bustle in this image is conveyed by the movement of women. The photograph thus reveals how the circulation of goods and people via steamships to and from the French Antilles depended on the steady movement of women and their baskets of coal. Indeed, steamships are not even depicted here, only the labor of the women who serviced them.

Taken together, these European-produced travel accounts share an almost-obsessive focus on the labor of black women—indicating the extent to which their work became thoroughly racialized and gendered by the end of the nineteenth century. Women of color performed the arduous, dirty, and exhausting jobs that were integral to the local economies, but also considered as inextricably linked to slavery. As Hearn, Sonthonax, Verschuur, and others described it, the washerwoman, the porter, the market vendor, and the coaler working in tandem to the “beat of the drum,” appear as continuities from the pre-abolition era. Nevertheless, these accounts do demonstrate how black women carved out many different avenues to autonomy through their labor, business savvy, and relations with kin in the post-emancipation era. Through arduous work, grit, determination, and commercial know-how, Martinican and Guadeloupean women carved out an autonomous space for themselves in public life that colonial elites had not anticipated.

#### Conclusion. A Different Age?

Madame Saturnin’s provocative declaration that “we are living in a different age” after slavery was, in some respects overly optimistic. In many ways, the gendered and racial politics of labor in the post-emancipation period marked continuity rather than a rupture, between slavery and freedom. Colonial administrators, planters, and metropolitan reformers coordinated throughout the Second Empire and Third Republic to impose coercive laws designed to fix

freedpeople, their families, and descendants to rural plantation labor. Vagrancy laws, census collection, workhouses, taxes, and other artificial financial hardships all combined to maintain and reproduce a class of poor and black cultivators. Much like the struggles that occurred between enslaved people and colonial elites in the wake of the slave amelioration policies of the 1830s and 1840s, these post-emancipation labor policies were imposed on and fought through, family politics.

However, one of the crucial breaks between the pre-and post-slavery periods—which perhaps gives credence to Madame Saturnin’s assertion—was located on the ability of freed women to claim a space in the economic and social institutions of colonial life. In response, colonial and metropolitan elites explicitly and implicitly racialized and gendered women’s work and reproduction, linking freed women with slavery through the turn of the century.

Nevertheless, women established themselves as the legal heads of their families, sought the intervention of the courts for protection and aid, and used their labor and business acumen to shape freedom’s promise of economic mobility and social autonomy. In this respect, they visibly and actively shaped both labor and family politics after slavery.

## Epilogue. “The taste of family:” Multiethnic Working Families after Slavery

Freedpeople and former masters were “living in a different age” in the post-emancipation French Antilles for additional reasons beyond abolition and the construction of a new social order in the absence of slavery. Tens of thousands of immigrants, predominantly from South Asia, arrived from across the world to work on the plantations of Martinique and Guadeloupe. Over the late nineteenth century, planters clamored for indentured immigrants as an alternative to paying wages to freedpeople. Planters believed that immigrants, contracted for their labor for a period between five to seven years, would provide the inexpensive (and, more importantly, the fixed and bound) labor they wanted on the estates.<sup>1</sup> And so, from 1853 to the turn of the century, nearly 100,000 indentured immigrants from South Asia, Africa, and China arrived in the French Antilles (see Table A.11. in Appendix).<sup>2</sup>

Even as indentured immigration exploded during this period, it also provoked widespread anxiety among colonial elites over assimilation, disorder, and disruption. As the majority of immigrants were predominately young, male, and single, colonial officials and planters grew concerned with disciplining and controlling this new population of men—as numerous charges of uxoricide, conjugal violence, homicide, alcoholism, arson, sabotage, work stoppages, and assault were levied against indentured male workers in the Assizes courts of Martinique and Guadeloupe.<sup>3</sup> Colonial officials also worried about freedpeople’s supposed “antagonism” toward

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<sup>1</sup> *Gazette Officielle de la Guadeloupe*, October 15, 1854.

<sup>2</sup> A small minority of these immigrants were European, although colonial administrators discouraged European immigration, as recruits were mostly skilled artisans or unskilled workers predominately from the urban poor and so, were considered unsuited to agricultural labor. See: Fallope, *Esclaves et citoyens*, 370. Also see: ANOM FM SG MAR 130/1177, Gouverneur Vaillant à Monsieur le Ministre de la Marine et des Colonies, “Au sujet de rapatriement de 3 immigrants européens,” June 13, 1852.

<sup>3</sup> For uxoricide, violence, assault, and theft, see: ANOM FM SG GUA 152/998, “Compte rendu des assises de la Pointe-à-Pitre du premier trimestre 1867,” April 17, 1867; ANOM FM SG MAR 163/1490, “Compte rendu des assises de Saint-Pierre, session de 4ème trimestre, 1876;” ANOM FM SG GUA 25/238, “Sous-Inspecteur de

immigrants, as freed workers were forced to compete for increasingly low wages as a result of indentureship.<sup>4</sup> In sum, colonial elites simultaneously hailed indentured immigration as the solution to the plantation economy's labor problem while also expressing concerns that this solution introduced newfound social disruptions that threatened public order. They often expressed these anxieties through a discourse of family politics.

Looking beyond the concerns of colonial elites, however, offers insight into how indentured immigrants helped shape what Mintz has defined as the Caribbean plantation society "frontier." Mintz defines the Caribbean frontier as composed of a cluster of multiethnic populations, organized by the demands of plantation production. The frontier is thus reconstituted through continuous contact between many different peoples brought to work on the

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l'Immigration F.S. de Touchimbert à le Chef du Service," Basse-Terre, May 25, 1881; ANOM FM MAR 138/1251, "Accusation d'homicide volontaire, Narayanin, fils de Mardin et de Sambaye Cour d'Assises de Saint-Pierre, 4<sup>ème</sup> session de 1868;" ANOM FM SG GUA 180/1116, "Commissioner de l'Immigration Hueguenin à le Directeur de l'Intérieur," Pointe-à-Pitre, June 7, 1859; ANOM FM SG GUA 152/998, "Compte rendu des assises de la Pointe-à-Pitre du 1<sup>er</sup> trimestre 1868," April 15, 1868; ANOM FM SG GUA 72/545, "Extrait du registre des procès-verbaux des délibérations du Conseil Privé de la Guadeloupe et dépendances," December 18, 1869; ANOM FM SG GUA 142/935, "Compte rendu des assises de la Pointe-à-Pitre du 3<sup>me</sup> trimestre 1879," January 23, 1880; and ANOM FM SG GUA 18/207, "Chambre d'agriculture de l'arrondissement de la Pointe-à-Pitre, Présidence de M. P. Dubos, Séance du 3 Juin 1882."

For complaints of alcohol abuse and narcotics use and "criminal behavior" among immigrants, see: ANOM FM SG MAR 130/1170, "État de situation des immigrants, 4<sup>ème</sup> trimestre 1859;" and ANOM FM SG GUA 180/1116 Gouverneur de la Guadeloupe à Ministre de le Marine, "Rapport mensuel du Commission de l'Immigration au sujet des immigrants existent actuellement sur les habitations de la Guadeloupe Basse Terre, le 12 mai, 1859."

For arson, sabotage, and running away, see: ANOM FM SG GUA 152/998, "Le Président des Assises Falie à M. le Gouverneur," Basse-Terre, April 8, 1868.

For work stoppages, see: ANOM FM SG MAR 130/1170, Immigration Commissioner à le Directeur de l'Intérieur, "Rapport à l'appui de l'État de situation des immigrants pour le 2<sup>eme</sup> trimestre," Fort-de-France, August 10, 1857. Walter Rodney also argues that filing group complaints was an effective tactic for immigrants to demonstrate their grievances publicly, especially when they carried their tools with them and walked into town together, which he argued "constituted a picket line." See: Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People*, 153.

<sup>4</sup> ANOM FM SG GUA 180/1116, dossier of monthly reports on immigrants in Grand-Terre, from Immigration Commissioner Huguenin to the Director of the Interior, Basse-Terre, 1856-1859; and ANOM FM SG MAR 130/1170, "Le Commissaire de l'Immigration à le Directeur de l'Intérieur," December 23, 1857.

estates over centuries of colonialism.<sup>5</sup> As multiethnic, multiracial, and polyglot populations were compelled to live, work, and confront one another in the small island worlds of the Caribbean, they created rural plantation communities by accommodating each other's cultural and social practices. In the context of the late-nineteenth-century French Antilles, therefore, considering indentured immigrant workers (and the family and community dynamics they created) thus permits us to pose questions about the ways in which they participated in what Besson has defined as post-slavery Caribbean cultural institution-building—and specifically, the dynamics of family politics among the laboring populations.<sup>6</sup>

An in-depth study of the indentured immigrants who arrived in Martinique and Guadeloupe over the course of the post-abolition era is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, given their significance for late-nineteenth-century plantation labor in the French Antilles, it is necessary to contemplate immigrants' role in shaping the post-emancipation family politics of colonial authorities, elites, and freedpeople as indentured workers joined the laboring populations on each island. How did indentured immigration factor into efforts of colonial authorities and planters to discipline, control, and racialize the working populations of Martinique and Guadeloupe through family politics? What new (real or perceived) problems did indentured immigration pose for those elites intent on shoring up the plantation economy at all costs and how did this shape their attempts to control the post-emancipation laboring populations?

Fleeting archival evidence available about the lives and experiences of indentured immigrants in Martinique and Guadeloupe also creates an opportunity to raise questions about

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<sup>5</sup> Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations*, 53.

<sup>6</sup> Besson, *Martha Brae's Two Histories*, 5-36.



the kinds of family lives that indentured immigrants and freedpeople created over the course of the late nineteenth century and the cultural, intimate, and social institutions that workers more broadly built in rural agrarian communities. Posing these initial questions about the role indentured immigrants played in the post-emancipation family politics of work and public order raises important research possibilities for assessing how the rural laboring populations created vibrant communities outside the bounds of the plantation over the course of the late nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

In this way, consideration of how South Asian indentured immigrants and their families and communities were crucial actors in furthering the social and cultural development of rural plantation societies recalls Mintz's conceptualization of Caribbean plantation societies as "frontiers." What kinds of family politics begins to emerge if one considers some of the ways in which South Asian immigrants encountered freedpeople, planters, and colonial officials in the post-slavery rural French Antilles? Can we locate evidence for how South Asians labored, loved, and socialized among themselves and with their freed neighbors in the archival evidence produced by colonial authorities, planters, and imperialist policymakers?

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<sup>7</sup> Scholars of indentured immigration in the French empire have argued that South Asian immigrants had largely assimilated by the twentieth century, and identified strongly with metropolitan France and creole cultures (indeed, resident descendants of immigrants became fully-fledged French citizens). These studies have shown how South Asians in the French colonies adopted syncretism between Hinduism, Islam, and Catholicism, married into creole society, formed nuclear, rather than joint-family, households, and discontinued the caste system. See: Singaravélou, *Les Indiens de la Guadeloupe: étude de la géographie humaine* (Bordeaux: Deniaud, 1975); J.F. Dupon, "Les immigrants indiens de la Réunion. Evolution et assimilation d'une population," *Cahiers d'Outre-Mer*, Vol. XX (1967): 49-88; and Raymond Boutin, *Vivre ensemble en Guadeloupe: Un siècle de construction* (Matoury: Ibis Rouge, 2009), 218. For debates on creolization and assimilation among Indo-Caribbean communities across the post-emancipation Americas, see: Lai, *Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar: Chinese and Indian Migrants to the British West Indies, 1838-1918*; Lopez, *Chinese Cubans: A Transnational History*; Dabydeen and Samaroo, eds., *Across Dark Waters: Ethnicity and Indian Identity in the Caribbean*; Patricia Mohammed, "The 'Creolization' of Indian Women in Trinidad," in Verene A. Shepherd and Glen L. Richards, eds., *Questioning Creole: Creolisation Discourses in Caribbean Culture*; Hintzen, "Race and Creole Ethnicity in the Caribbean," in op. cit., Munasinghe, *Callaloo or Tossed Salad? East Indians and the Cultural Politics of Identity in Trinidad*; Singh, *The Ramayana Tradition and Socio-Religious Change in Trinidad, 1917-1990*; and Williams, *Stains on My Name, War in My Veins: Guyana and the Politics of Cultural Struggle*.

## The “Scarcity of Women” as an Indentured Labor Problem

On the 1875 voyage of the *Chetah*—a convoy ship bound for Guadeloupe that had embarked 351 indentured South Asian men, women, and children in Calcutta—Dr. Défait, the naval doctor in charge of caring for the passengers during the journey, noted in his report that: “when the coolies had embarked, I noted by consulting the ad hoc register that very few were (formally) married.” Out of sixty-six women, only sixteen had been married before the voyage and yet, “each of the others [women] produced a husband to me, saying he was given to them at the depot.” Défait, like many other naval doctors on numerous similar voyages, decided to let couples in these “depot marriages” remain together for the journey, and thus recognized these arrangements as conjugal relationships.<sup>8</sup> As he noted, “in India, women who lose their husbands are not able to remarry; which means that when left to themselves, they fall into a deep misery: by emigrating, they remarry, and have a relatively happier existence.”<sup>9</sup> Such “depot marriages,” Défait thus implied, resulted in a happier labor force (or at the very least, helped him maintain order during the *Chetah*’s voyage to Guadeloupe).

Indeed, immigration officers, colonial authorities, and planters encouraged unions between male and female South Asian workers as much as possible. These elites claimed that unattached South Asian men naturally tended to vice and dissipation during their time in the

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<sup>8</sup> ANOM GEN 136/1174, Dossier *Chetah*, “Rapport du Dr. Défait,” 1875. Additionally, Verene Shepherd argues that the “depot marriage” often provided a measure of security for South Asian women as they traveled to the Caribbean, as they could then rely on male protection from sexual predation. However, it is equally likely that some immigrants did form lasting relationships during the journey: the shared experience of a convoy may have cemented intimate bonds. See: Shepherd, *Maharani’s Misery: Narratives of a Passage from India to the Caribbean* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2002), 10-11 and 78-80.

“Quand les coolies eurent embarqué, j’ai constaté en consultant le registre ad hoc que très peu étaient mariés... et cependant chacune des autres m’ exhibait un mari, en me disant qu’on le lui avait donné au dépôt.”

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

“Dans l’Inde, les femmes qui ont perdu leur mari ne peuvent plus se remarier; ce qui fait que livrées à elles mêmes elles tombent dans une profonde misère: en émigrant elles remarient, et ont une existence relativement plus heureuse.”

sugar colonies. Single men, authorities and proprietors maintained, were prone to drinking, partying, narcotics, and other habits deemed dangerous to the public order.

However, unlike the 1860 Heathen Marriage Ordinance 10 that prescribed the legal terms for marriages between immigrants in the British Caribbean, French policy made few special dispensations for regulating marriages among immigrants (other than permission for marrying had to be granted from the governor and privy council).<sup>10</sup> Indeed, French colonial officials seemed to have embraced “depot marriages,” (or other forms of informal unions) for the indentured immigrant population—a far cry from abolitionists’ efforts from the 1830s to the early 1850s to reform the colonies by discouraging “concubinage” in favor of marriage. As the convoy ships arrived in the Antilles, colonial administrators and planters were less concerned about informal unions negatively shaping the morals of their new workforce than they were about an imbalanced sex ratio causing problems for the health and discipline of male workers.

As scholars have demonstrated, the indentured immigrant population in the French Antilles consistently maintained a skewed sex ratio throughout the nineteenth century. For example, David Northrup estimated that, out of all the indentured immigrants sent to the French Antilles during this period, 66% were men, 24% were women, and 10% were children.<sup>11</sup> Colonial officials frequently complained that “the absence of women” was “one of the vices of Indian immigration” as they believed that the imbalanced sex ratio negatively affected the health,

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<sup>10</sup> *Bulletin Officiel de la Guadeloupe...pendant l'année 1867*, “N. 270, Arrêté du Gouverneur promulguant dans la colonie les sénatus-consulte du 2 juillet 1867, relative au mariage des immigrants dans les colonies de la Guadeloupe, de la Martinique et de la Réunion,” (Basse-Terre: Imprimerie Du Gouvernement, 1869), 349-50.

<sup>11</sup> David Northrup, “Indentured Indians in the French Antilles. Les immigrants engages aux Antilles françaises,” *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer*, Vol. 87, n. 326-327 (2000): 250.

discipline, and productivity of South Asian males.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, officials blamed “the absence of women” for enfeebling the South Asian male workforce. As Commissioner of Immigration Mounerot reported in Martinique in 1859: “the deprivation of women is one of the most real causes of the deterioration of their [male indentured workers’] health; almost everywhere I have noticed many subjects who have been stunted due to masturbation. They are almost always people incapable of rendering any service, who desert the plantations and come to the head office to complain about the slightest annoyance they feel on the plantations.”<sup>13</sup> Echoing metropolitan moralists, who associated masturbation with the vices and dissipation of working classes, Mounerot maintained that such practices prevented the development of a robust colonial labor force.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, Mounerot maintained that celibacy sapped South Asian men of their vitality and health, rendering them useless workers unable to handle the demands of rigorous work. Male immigrants therefore complained needlessly about “annoyances” on the plantations. Rather than focus their energy on productive labor, male immigrant workers besieged the Immigration Bureau with petty complaints and grievances. For French colonial authorities, then, male South Asians’ complaints regarding plantation management or discipline were rooted in the absence of

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<sup>12</sup> ANOM FM SG GUA 180/1116, Gouverneur de la Guadeloupe à Ministre de le Marine, “Rapport mensuel du Commission de l’Immigration au sujet des immigrants existent actuellement sur les habitations de la Guadeloupe Basse Terre, le 12 mai, 1859.”

“...l’absence des femmes constituait un des vices de l’immigration indienne”

<sup>13</sup> ANOM FM SG MAR 130/1170, Commissioner of Immigration Mounerot à le Directeur de l’Intérieur, “Rapport sur la situation des immigrants, pendant le 1er trimestre de 1859,” Fort-de-France, le May 12, 1859.

“La privation de femmes est une des causes les plus réelles de la détérioration de leur santé; presque partout j’ai pu remarquer de nombreux sujets étiolés par suite de masturbation. Ce sont presque toujours gens incapables de rendre aucun service, qui désertent les habitations et viennent ou chef lieu, se plaindre à la moindre contrariété qu’ils éprouvent sur les habitations.”

<sup>14</sup> For masturbation as a working-class vice in France, see: Andrew J. Counter, “Bad Examples Children, Servants, and Masturbation in Nineteenth-Century France” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* Vol. 22, no 3 (Sept., 2003): 403-25.

available women—and not grievances such as inadequate food rations, lodging, or medical care that could account for any perceived muscular degeneration or illness.<sup>15</sup> From officials' perspective, therefore, the absence of women encouraged disorder because it engendered vice, dissipation, and illness—and by extension, labor disruptions.

Indeed, securing a steady labor supply of seasoned immigrants seems to have been a problem. Most planters found it difficult to keep indentured workers beyond the years stipulated in their contracts—as many immigrant men sought to return home as quickly as possible and refused to sign on for a second indenture term after their first concluded. Governor Bonfils noted in 1858 that such attitudes were driven primarily by the “scarcity of women who accompany them [male workers] to the Antilles and the isolation in which they find themselves.” Without women, South Asian male immigrants could expect to have “relations only with his employers and the individuals of his caste,” motivating them to return home immediately after their contracts expired.<sup>16</sup> “Relations” in this context implied both intercourse as well as social ties to other workers on the estates. Isolated from the community connections that conjugal

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<sup>15</sup> For example, in 1884, British South Asian subjects in Guadeloupe sent petitions to the Governor of Madras and the British consul that recorded complaints about a lack of food, inadequate housing, and poor medical care during their indenture. Based on the fact that it seems to have been translated in British India on August 19, 1884, it appears to have made its way to the British authorities, but it is unclear how the French responded (if they did at all). See: ANOM GUA 56/399, “Humble petition des habitants de l’Inde, actuellement immigrants résidant dans la colonie française de la Guadeloupe.”

<sup>16</sup> ANOM FM SG GUA 56/399, Gouverneur Bonfils à Son Altesse Impériale le Prince chargé du Ministère de l’Algérie et des Colonies, à Paris, “Situation du Immigrants au 1er décembre 1858,” Basse-Terre, December 13, 1858.

“Cette catégorie d’immigrants offrira donc de rares exceptions de travailleurs renouvelant leurs engagements dans la Colonie... Cette disposition s’explique par la position que leur fait la rareté du femmes qui les accompagnent aux Antilles et l’isolement dans lequel ils se trouvent... L’Indien vit donc seul à la Guadeloupe et n’y a de rapports qu’avec ses engagistes et les individus de sa caste.”

relationships would presumably engender, immigrants prioritized serving out their indenture terms and returning home with enough wealth to attract wives.<sup>17</sup>

Officials also complained that the paucity of women incited too much competition between men over the women who were available—which caused disorder in the work gangs. As Hugh Tinker has argued for the British West Indies some indentured immigrants practiced a “crude sense” of polyandry, in which several men would lodge together with a woman who was required to provide domestic and sexual services to all of them. Others, he claimed, extracted exorbitant bride prices—with some immigrant fathers “selling” their daughters to multiple men.<sup>18</sup> Still, other scholars have noted that the sex imbalance empowered women with greater agency in choosing temporary or permanent conjugal partners. Unlike in South Asia, conditions in the Antilles allowed women to leave the relationships and the men that no longer suited them. The result was that men who did manage to find partners or wives (or even arrived with families) had to invest a considerable part of their salaries and efforts in maintaining their conjugal relationships.<sup>19</sup>

Because of these conjugal practices, officials in the French Antilles complained, crime, conflict, and violence occurred in immigrant communities. For example, in 1867, a Madrasi worker named Moutayen, indentured to the Port-Louis plantation in Marie-Galante, stole some

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<sup>17</sup> While historiography on South Asian indentured immigration has demonstrated that male immigrants frequented Afro-Caribbean prostitutes or engaged in other temporary sexual relationships with local women, they tended to prefer South Asian women for long-term relationships. See: David V. Trotman, “Women and Crime in Late Nineteenth-Century Trinidad,” *Caribbean Quarterly* Vol. 30, no. 3/4 (Sept-Dec, 1984): 62.

<sup>18</sup> Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830s-1920* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 203-4. Also see: David Northrup, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism 1834-1922*, 124-5.

<sup>19</sup> See: Brij V. Lal, “Veil of Dishonour: Sexual Jealousy and Suicide on Fiji Plantations,” *The Journal of Pacific History* Vol. 20, no. 3 (July 1985), 139-41; and Rhoda Reddock, “Freedom Denied: Indian Women and Indentureship in Trinidad and Tobago, 1845-1917,” *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 20, no. 43 (Oct, 1985): WS-80.

money and other valuables from his co-worker, an immigrant named Nagamoutou. The reason for the theft was financial distress wrought by his expenses. Moutayen, Attorney General Partarrieu maintained, had been living for a long time above his meager means and “at the time of the theft...maintained two women at the same time.”<sup>20</sup> Moutayen’s financial troubles therefore stemmed from his struggles to invest in two intimate relationships. Although it is unclear in Partarrieu’s summation if Moutayen’s mistresses were also South Asian (or knowingly shared Moutayen), the report implicitly links such sexual behavior to crime and disorder within immigrant communities as men vied with and stole from each other to keep their conjugal partners. Thus, Antillean officials repeatedly urged the Immigration Bureau to take proactive measures to find young, single female immigrants who were well-suited to labor.

These arguments linking the dearth of South Asian women to the insubordination of immigrant men found ready ears in the highest levels of the colonial administration. Governor Bontemps in Guadeloupe encouraged efforts to recruit more “well-constituted women” who had “been employed in working the land” to encourage male laborers to settle down as docile workers.<sup>21</sup> By “well-constituted,” Bontemps meant women both accustomed to agricultural labor and who would not readily abandon their husbands upon arrival to the Antilles. Industrious,

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<sup>20</sup> ANOM FM SG GUA 152/998, “Compte rendu des assises de la Pointe-à-Pitre du premier trimestre 1867,” April 17, 1867.

“Ce système auquel Moutayen s’est constamment attaché dans le cours de la procédure a été renversé aux débats. Il a été prouvé d’abord que Moutayen qui, depuis longtemps n’avait touché pour son travail que de très faibles sommes, qui faisait depuis l’époque du vol des dépenses relativement excessives, qui entretenait deux femmes à la fois, qui jouait et qui perdait toujours, ne pouvait pas avoir 50 francs d’économie. Il a été prouvé ensuite que jamais Nagamoutou n’avait joué chez Moutayen et que la seule fois que ces deux hommes avaient joué ensemble (c’était chez un tiers) Moutayen avait perdu.”

<sup>21</sup> ANOM FM SG GUA 180/1116, Gouverneur de la Guadeloupe à Ministre de le Marine “Rapport mensuel du Commission de l’Immigration au sujet des immigrants existant actuellement sur les habitations de la Guadeloupe,” May 12, 1859.

“...femmes bien constituées...ayant été toutes employées déjà au travail de terre.”

healthy, and meek South Asian women, Bontemps asserted, would curb the excess energies of male immigrants and ensure that plantation production would progress harmoniously.

However, as the reports from the convoys stressed, recruiting enough women to fill demand remained difficult during the late nineteenth century. Despite the sex ratio of twenty-five women for every hundred men established in the Anglo-French Convention (a treaty which allowed the French to recruit workers from British India), and efforts of French immigration recruiters to attract women, male immigrants continued to outnumber the women.<sup>22</sup> Further, colonial officials often considered the South Asian women who did immigrate as “unsuitable” for a variety of reasons—they were perceived to be promiscuous (or even prostitutes), too frail, old, sickly, or not accustomed to agricultural labor.<sup>23</sup> This created several problems, ranging from an inability to maintain a stable labor force to the perceived physical deterioration of the immigrant workforce.

Given that administrative correspondence complained of “disorderly” South Asian immigrant men until well into the late nineteenth century, officials’ requests to recruit “suitable”

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<sup>22</sup> The Anglo-French Convention, signed between Britain and France in 1861, stipulated a ratio of twenty-five women for every hundred male immigrants on ships departing from British India to the French colonies. It is worth noting, however, that Britain also had trouble maintaining this sex ratio in its own colonies, see: Verene Shepherd, *Maharani’s Misery*, 6-7.

See: “Décret Impérial portant promulgation de la convention conclue, le 1er juillet 1861, entre la France et la Grande-Bretagne, pour régler l’immigration de travailleurs indiens dans les colonies françaises. (Bull. Off. 959, n 9415) 10 août 1861” in *Journal du Palais par une Société de Juriconsultes et de Magistrats. Lois, Décrets règlements et instructions d’intérêt général suivis d’annotations, année 1861* (Paris: Bureaux de l’administration, 1861). Hereafter, 1861 Anglo-French-Convention.

“Art 16 : Chaque contingent devra comprendre un nombre de femmes égal, au moins, au quart de celui des hommes. A l’expiration de trois ans, la proportion numérique des femmes sera portée à un tiers ; deux ans plus tard, à la moitié, et, deux ans après, la proportion sera fixée telle qu’elle existera pour les colonies britanniques.”

<sup>23</sup> For reports about frail, sickly, elderly, or promiscuous female immigrants, see: ANOM FM SG GUA 59/411, “Immigration Guadeloupe, Documents périodiques, Rapports du Protecteur, 1885-1899,” March 22, 1882, which complained of immigrant women of a “very advanced age, who die the most in the course of the journey.” The survivors who “arrived in the colony, cannot be of any service.” For administrators complaining about prostitution, see: ANOM FM SG GUA 25/238, Dr. Dhoste, “Rapport médical sur le voyage du Bruce, chargé d’Indiens, de Calcutta à la Guadeloupe,” April 20, 1882.



women seem to have been consistently difficult to put into practice. Nearly twenty years after Bontemps first wrote to the Minister of the Navy in 1859 about the lack of “suitable” South Asian women in the colonies, the General Council of Guadeloupe deliberated the problem as presented in the reports of Immigration Commissioner Huguenin. The Council resolved to urge immigration agents to undertake new measures to procure South Asian women of respectable quality who could inculcate in their men the responsibility of family life:

In his latest report, Mr. Huguenin states that most of the inhabitants recognize that the proportion of women...is insufficient, while it is true that women do not give a quantity of work equal to that of men, it appears that in the interest of morality it would be desirable to increase their number. If it is true that Indians are inclined to indulge in disorders which compromise their health and often render them incapable of work, it would be advantageous to all points of view to introduce to the Antilles a greater number of women of their race who, chosen with discernment, would contribute to giving the immigrants the habits of order and the taste of family.<sup>24</sup>

Strategically recruiting South Asian women to inculcate in male immigrants “the habits of order and the taste of family,” on the surface, echoed anti-slavery discourse that argued that enslaved people required the moralizing influence of family life to prepare for emancipation.

However, the Council’s emphasis on importing women as a means to an end—the reconstitution of the (male) immigrant labor force through healthy sexual intercourse and reproduction (which would render them fit for work), strikes a different note than reformers of previous decades who viewed the moral reform of both enslaved men and women as integral to the emancipation project. Although naval doctors and immigration officials complained that

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<sup>24</sup> AD-GUA, Délibérations du Conseil général, session de 1877.

“Dans son dernier rapport M. Huguenin énonce que le plupart des habitants reconnaissent que la proportion des femmes déterminée dans la convention conclue avec la compagnie maritime est insuffisante, les femmes ne donnent pas il est vrai une quantité de travail égale à celle des hommes, il paraît que dans l’intérêt de la moralité il serait à désirer d’en augmenter le nombre. S’il est vrai que les Indiens soient enclins à se livrer à désordres qui compromettent leur santé et les rendent souvent incapables de travail, il y aurait avantage à tous les points de vue à introduire aux Antilles un plus grand nombre de femmes de leur race qui, choisies avec discernement, contribueraient à donner aux immigrants des habitudes de l’ordre et le goût de la famille.”

many South Asian female immigrants were promiscuous, morally suspect, and problematic, colonial authorities emphasized the need for selecting “with discernment” already “respectable” women as recruits.<sup>25</sup> These “well-constituted” women would be the reforming influence on South Asian men that would transform them into orderly, disciplined, and healthy workers.

While colonial authorities in the Antilles repeatedly expressed the need for recruiting more women since the late 1850s, they had little to show for it by the turn of the century. As a result, it is difficult to assess the degree to which indentured immigration, compared with abolition, shaped the racist and gendered family politics espoused by these colonial officials in the post-emancipation era. Preliminarily, what seems distinctive about the case of immigrant workers, was how colonial elites narrowed their focus on improving the male workforce—in contrast to, for example, officials’ efforts to equally reward freed men and women who remained working on plantations in the post-emancipation era with work medals and cash prizes.<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, colonial officials, like those who sat on the General Council of Guadeloupe, claimed that, by inculcating immigrants with “family values” and recruiting “suitable women,” they could accomplish a series of aims. They believed that importing more women would lessen sexual jealousy and competition among men (which would in turn curb violence and crime). They hoped that South Asian women would gently encourage their men to abandon bad habits, provide a healthy outlet for their sexual gratification, and, therefore, positively transform the

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<sup>25</sup> Dr. Gaigneron’s report, for example, he argued that female immigrants should be inspected at the depots in Pondicherry and Karikal to restrict the cases of venereal disease, despite the practice of not infringing on their modesty. He noted that this requirement should be waived only for “virgins, duly married women, [and] mothers,” but the “prostitutes who are in large numbers among the immigrants” should be rigorously screened. See: Dr. M. L. A. Gaigneron, chirurgien principal de la Marine, délégué du gouvernement, “Immigration indienne. Rapport sur le voyage du trois-mats *Le Suger* transportant un convoi d’indiens immigrants de Pondichéry à la Guadeloupe” in Ministère de la Marine et des Colonies, *Revue Maritime et Coloniale* Vol. 5 (Paris: Librairie de Challamel Ainé, 1862), 719-20. Hereafter Gaigneron Report.

<sup>26</sup> See: *Gazette Officiel de la Guadeloupe*, October 26, 1858.

well-being of a degenerated working class. Female immigrants were therefore not expected to work as much or as productively as immigrant men, but colonial officials viewed their peripheral sexual and domestic labor as essential for stabilizing the rural workforce—and thus, for upholding the plantation order.<sup>27</sup>

### Conjugality and Integration in the Rural French Antilles

But how did these tens of thousands of men and women traveling across two oceans for work and opportunities integrate into French Antilles and how did they shape post-emancipation family politics? What kinds of social and cultural customs did they help build in these plantation societies? Fragmentary evidence testifies to the rich contributions South Asian workers made to rural social and community life over the course of the late nineteenth century and offers suggestive possibilities for considering how this cultural institution building shaped the post-emancipation family politics of the laboring populations.

As scholars of South Asia have argued, families in the subcontinent encompassed a multiplicity of dependent and extended kin relationships.<sup>28</sup> For example, the joint family system—an extended household in which sons and their families remained in the patriarchal home while daughters were expected to integrate into the families of their husbands—created a complex web of obligations and hierarchical relations anchored in male and parental authority.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> AD-GUA, Délibérations du Conseil général, session de 1877.

<sup>28</sup> See: Indrani Chatterjee, ed., *Unfamiliar Relations: Family and History in South Asia* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004).

<sup>29</sup> Lomarsh Roopnarine, *Indo-Caribbean Indenture, Resistance and Accommodation, 1838-1920* (Barbados, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago: University of the West Indies Press, 2007), 76-86. For the joint family system, see: Leo Davids, “The East Indian Family Overseas,” *Social and Economic Studies* Vol. 13 (1964): 383-96; and Pauline Mahar Kolenda, “Region, Caste and Family Structure: A Comparative Study of the Indian ‘Joint’ Family,” in Milton Singer and Bernard S. Cohn, eds., *Structure and Change in Indian Society* (Chicago: Aldine, 1968), 339-96.

As historians have shown, these joint-family structures and customs tended to disappear in Indo-Caribbean communities. The social, communal, and familial lives of immigrants were profoundly shaped by the difficult process of adapting to the rules and logic of the indenture system as well as a period of acclimatizing to both their creole and immigrant co-workers on the plantation. Among South Asian immigrants living and working together on the plantations, there was considerable diversity in languages, customs, and religions and thus, many cultural and social norms imported from India could not last long when immigrant men and women had to form community bonds outside caste and religion.<sup>30</sup>

Similar to how captive Africans experienced the Middle Passage, South Asian immigrants established fictive kin ties with their shipmates that they nurtured in the Antilles.<sup>31</sup> On the plantations, immigrant workers lived in the abandoned slave quarters, often in single-room dwellings. Because of the skewed sex ratio, single South Asian men with no resident families tended to predominate in rural immigrant communities—and several unattached men would often share a single home or room in the former slave quarters on the estates.<sup>32</sup> The paucity of South Asian women in Martinique and Guadeloupe, as well as a tendency for immigrants to practice endogamous conjugality, thus profoundly constrained and shaped the structure of Indo-Caribbean families.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> See: Roopnarine, *Indo-Caribbean Indenture, Resistance and Accommodation*, 76-86. Also see: Leo Davids, “The East Indian Family Overseas,” *Social and Economic Studies* Vol. 13 (1964): 383-96; and Lai, *Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar*, 121-2.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 81.

<sup>32</sup> ANOM GUA 180/1116, “Rapport mensuel du commissaire à l’immigration,” April 9, 1858 describes how indentured immigrations were often lodged in former slave dwellings, as on the Bullock plantation in Petit-Canal.

<sup>33</sup> Mangru, “The Sex-Ratio Disparity and Its Consequences under the Indenture in British Guiana” in *India in the Caribbean*, 211-30.

For resident South Asian families, they were often unable to recreate their joint-kinship households on the estates—instead, the nuclear family appears to have been the norm. Therefore, immigrant nuclear families would often live together in a single hut:<sup>34</sup>



IMG 5.1. *Famille d'Indiens Travaillant La Canne à Sucre. Guadeloupe.*<sup>35</sup>

This photograph depicts a South Asian immigrant family in Guadeloupe employed (or indentured) in sugar cane cultivation. It is a nuclear family—while some of the children are young adolescents, there are no other adults other than the father and mother, indicating that any extended kin likely did not live with them in their hut (pictured behind them).

<sup>34</sup> Juliette Smeralda-Amon, *La Question de l'immigration indienne dans son environnement socio-économique Martiniquais, 1848-1900* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996), 183; and Boutin, *La population de la Guadeloupe*, 204.

<sup>35</sup> AD-GUA, 5 FI 94/7. *Famille d'Immigrants Indiens. Guadeloupe*. Date unknown, listed as “début XXe siècle.”

Also noteworthy in this image are the clothes. While obviously a poor family accustomed to outdoor and arduous labor, they wore clothes similar to the ones of freed laborers—simple skirts, trousers, straw hats, and long-sleeve tunics. In particular, the *mouchoirs* on the mother and oldest daughter resemble those worn by freed women.<sup>36</sup> If indentured, the family would have been given these clothes by their *engagistes*, as stipulated in contracts. However, the mother's tobacco pipe (rather than an elongated opium pipe) indicates that she shared a habit with the laboring market women described in Caribbean travel literature.<sup>37</sup> Taken together, the appearance of the family in this photograph suggests a degree of assimilation into the habits and customs of the rural workforce.

It also highlights the precarity and poverty that indentured workers faced. As it is likely that only the parents were indentured, the labor of the children on the sugar estates would have helped supplement the meager wages of the parents (approximately 12-13 francs a month for the father and 10 for the mother). If members of the family missed a day of work due to illness or other reasons, these wages would have been docked—to up to two days' cut pay for every day of absence.<sup>38</sup> Unlike freed families, who turned tried to turn to plantation labor as a means of supplementing their income, indentured immigrant families and their children faced even greater barriers to establishing themselves off the estates.

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<sup>36</sup> For the stipulated clothing, see: ANOM FM GEN 125/1093, "William Lawless à le Gouverneur de la Martinique," Saint Pierre, March 7, 1874. Also see: 1861 Anglo-French Convention, Article 13.

<sup>37</sup> Verschuur, *Voyage aux trois Guyanes et aux Antilles*, 13.

<sup>38</sup> See: Northrup. "Indentured Indians in the French Antilles," 255; and Smeralda-Amon, *La Question de l'immigration indienne dans son environnement socio-économique Martiniquais*, 181.

Archives reveal little about how indentured immigrants married and established a conjugal household—other than the required dispensation from the governor.<sup>39</sup> For South Asian couples, the bureaucratic requisites of civil marriage ceremonies, combined with language barriers and illiteracy, created little incentive for them to sanctify their marriages according to French law. Immigrants likely considered any marriage ceremonies celebrated according to their customs and rituals as valid, whether or not they legally registered them. Especially for Hindu couples, as Basdeo Mangru has noted, the performance of the religious marriage ceremony had long served as an act of legal recognition in rural India.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, as Edith Clarke’s study of family life in Jamaica observed, South Asian parents would arrange marriages for their adolescent children that were celebrated with either traditional Hindu and Muslim rites (depending on the religious affiliation of the families)—and brides would then join the household of their husbands’ families. Up to 25% of these marriages, Clarke estimated, were eventually dissolved, with women opting to cohabit with another partner—and this second union was usually an enduring relationship.<sup>41</sup> These conjugal patterns indicate, therefore, that both the customs of South Asian traditional marriage and creole cohabitation were practiced.<sup>42</sup>

Indeed, evidence suggests that indentured workers both practiced their own marriage customs and adopted new conjugal norms that French authorities recognized only as “concubinage.” For example, of the twenty-eight total paternity declarations filed by South Asian men from 1853-

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<sup>39</sup> *Bulletin Officiel de la Guadeloupe...pendant l'année 1867*, “N. 270, Arrêté du Gouverneur promulgant dans la colonie les sénatus-consulte du 2 juillet 1867, relative au mariage des immigrants dans les colonies de la Guadeloupe, de la Martinique et de la Réunion,” (Basse-Terre: Imprimerie Du Gouvernement, 1869), 349-50.

<sup>40</sup> Mangru, “The Sex-Ratio Disparity and Its Consequences under the Indenture in British Guiana,” 214.

<sup>41</sup> Clarke, *My Mother Who Fathered Me*, xxi.

<sup>42</sup> For Afro-Caribbean social and cultural conjugal customs, see: Besson, *Martha Brae's Two Histories*; 277-312; and Horowitz, *Morne-Paysan, Peasant Village in Martinique*, 51-8.

1888 in Macouba, Martinique, only one man was recorded as not living with the mother of the children (compared with the other twenty-seven paternity recognitions).<sup>43</sup> In the case of this apparently non-resident partnership, the father (an immigrant named Nagamatou) had four children with the same woman (Narou), suggesting their intimacy lasted over several years, whatever the status or outcome of the relationship.<sup>44</sup>

For many South Asian women who came to the French Antilles, indentured immigration offered an escape from a bad marriage or domestic situation in India and a chance to start anew. Like other South Asian women throughout the indenture system, female immigrants in the Antilles seemed to have enjoyed greater agency in selecting male partners—from the depot marriages to the temporary conjugal unions that they entered and dissolved as they chose.<sup>45</sup> For some of these women, adopting the nuclear Indo-Caribbean family structure in the French Antilles perhaps created new opportunities for economic and social autonomy.

However, other scholars have maintained that South Asian immigrant women faced new restrictions in the Americas. According to Jo Beall, low pay and menial labor prevented indentured women from acquiring the skills or experience required to advance themselves

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<sup>43</sup> ANOM IREL, *Régistres de l'état civil du commune Macouba*, 1872, Entry #114, "Reconnaissance de Narou, Jean Baptiste par le Sr. Nagamoutou;" Entry #115, "Reconnaissance de Narou, Abraham par le Sr. Nagamoutou;" Entry #116, "Reconnaissance de Narou, Marie Lucia par le Sr. Nagamoutou;" and Entry#117, "Reconnaissance de Narou, Jean, par le Sr. Nagamoutou." The South Asian women living with men were typically identified in the birth registrations or paternity declarations made by fathers as "domiciliée avec lui [the father]." In each of these entries, Narou is identified as "domiciliée en cette dite commune sur la habitation Bijon, and not explicitly with Narou and her children.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. Note that these children had been given their mother's name for their surnames in the birth registrations, which was the case for the over 250 first-generation children registered by their mothers in Macouba between 1854 and 1888. As with the *Registres des nouveaux libres*, then, colonial officials continued the practice of bestowing matronyms on the children of South Asian women whenever these women made a declaration of birth in the *état-civil* without an apparent male partner.

<sup>45</sup> See: Brij V. Lal, "Veil of Dishonour: Sexual Jealousy and Suicide on Fiji Plantations," 139-141; and Reddock, "Freedom Denied," WS-80.



materially or bargain for better working conditions. Therefore, for most indentured women, one of the few ways out of the indenture system was to find and settle for a male partner who would be able to save enough to make it out of his indenture.<sup>46</sup> As a result, immigrant women may not have experienced the restrictions of the joint family system overseas, but they were still constrained by a calculus of family politics that was inextricably tied to the plantation. Many of these women, as a result, sought to improve their chances of upward mobility by entering into relationships with men who amassed some savings and material goods during their indenture.

Regardless of whether or not they achieved upward mobility through conjugal unions, South Asian women appear to have played an integral role in the family finances. As observers in the French Antilles noted, women literally carried the family savings account on their persons. As Hearn described one South Asian mother in his travel account:

A coolie mother passes, carrying at her hip a very pretty naked baby. It has exquisite delicacy of limb: its tiny ankles are circled by thin bright silver rings... The mother's arms are covered from elbow to wrist with silver bracelets,—some flat and decorated; others coarse, round, smooth with ends hammered into the form of viper-heads. She has large flowers of gold in her ears, a small gold flower in her very delicate little nose. This nose ornament does not seem absurd; on these dark skins the effect is almost as pleasant as it is bizarre. This jewellery [sic] is pure metal;—it is thus the coolies carry their savings,—melting down silver or gold coin, and recasting it into bracelets, ear-rings, and nose ornaments.<sup>47</sup>

For Hearn, the “coolie mother” represents everything that is bizarre, unfamiliar, and yet attractive about the South Asian community of Martinique. Her jewelry is fascinating because of its unusual designs (“viper-headed” and textured bangles and large gold flowers as piercings)

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<sup>46</sup> Jo Beall, “Women under Indenture in Colonial Natal,” in Surendra Bhana, ed., *Essays on Indentured Indians in Natal* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 1991), 91. Also see: Verene Shepherd, “Indian Women in Jamaica, 1845-1945” in Frank Birbalsingh, ed., *Indenture and Exile: The Indo-Caribbean Experience*, 100-7.

<sup>47</sup> Hearn, *Two Years in the French West Indies*, 77-8.

and the way she displays them on her body (covering elbows to wrists and in her nose). Although “pleasant,” the layers of jewelry on “dark skins” is delineated as a tangible marker of difference. Indeed, her baby’s “tiny ankles...circled by thin silver rings” help emphasize these “bizarre” customs. However, taken together, mother and child literally embodied the material wealth of their family—publicly “carry[ing] their savings.”

South Asian immigrants in the Caribbean often opted to convert their cash earnings into gold and silver jewelry. For those who repatriated, gold and silver was easily portable, and reports of convoys of repatriated immigrants indicate that South Asian families who returned to Pondicherry, Karikal, and Calcutta declared many pieces of jewelry in addition to cash before undertaking the voyage. The 1865 convoy of the *Paul Adrien* from Pointe-à-Pitre to Pondicherry, for example, embarked 295 South Asian passengers carrying jewelry with an estimated total value of 5,000 francs.<sup>48</sup> Out of the 295 passengers, fifty-seven were women, who likely carried the majority of their families’ savings on their bodies.<sup>49</sup>

For these women, displaying their jewelry perhaps also signaled status to other immigrants. The variety of bangles, earrings, nose-rings, and other adornments on women and children conveyed both the wealth of the family and respectability:

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<sup>48</sup> ANOM FM SG GUA 15/157, Immigration Commissioner Noirtin à le Director de l’Intérieur de la Guadeloupe, “Avis d’un depart du Paul Adrien,” July 16, 1865.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, Immigration Commissioner Noirtin, “État nominative des immigrants Indiens qui doivent être embarqués sur le navire Le Paul Adrien pour être repatriés,” Pointe-à-Pitre, July 15, 1865. Of the remaining passengers, 189 were men and 49 were children.



IMG 5.2. *Groupe de Femmes et de Jeunes Filles Indiennes*<sup>50</sup>

Although this photograph dates nearly twenty years after Hearn's travels through the French Antilles, it is a rich visual depiction that invites comparison with his description of the South Asian mother. A group of South Asian women are gathered together, covered in their finest, richest cloth that is styled in traditional fashions and adorned with silver and gold jewelry—the layered bangles, necklaces, earrings, and nose-rings that Hearn described cover their arms, ears, necks, and faces. It is not clear where these women are (while the photograph belongs to the departmental archives in Guadeloupe, it is printed as a postcard for Martinique). Given the probable date of the photograph, it is possible that these women had not been indentured but, rather, born on or brought to the island as young children and raised by their immigrant parents,

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<sup>50</sup> AD-GUA 5 FI 94/6, *Groupe de Femmes et Jeunes Filles Indiennes*, date unknown but “début XXe siècle.” It is not clear if this photograph depicts female South Asians in Martinique or Guadeloupe.

who maintained some of their cultural and social customs. Thus, for indentured immigrants, gendered roles within the household (control over the purse strings, for example) in the Antilles likely offered a means of preserving some cultural and social traditions from India or perhaps an opportunity to build new ones in diaspora.

Perhaps intimate family relationships—particularly sexual intimacy—also allowed immigrants to establish new cultural and social institutions through relationships with freedpeople and their descendants. Research in notary records of rural communes indicates that long-lasting interracial unions between black and immigrant workers did occur, despite reports of high rates of endogamous conjugality among South Asians.<sup>51</sup> For instance, on May 10, 1881, Raymond Frontier, a cultivator “born and residing in Macouba” married Marie Elizabeth Salmon, a “cultivator born in India...twenty-six years old, the natural and recognized daughter of Miss Allamellon, approximately forty years old, also a [Indian] cultivator residing in the same place [Grand-Rivière].”<sup>52</sup>

Raymond was the natural and recognized son of Joseph Frontier (deceased) and Reubine Batel (living in Macouba). The marriage was contracted according to French civil law—the couple, their surviving parents, and witnesses all duly appeared at the *mairie*. The notary recorded the affirmative consent of the bride and groom, and read the contract under the terms of the civil code. The witnesses, all native to Martinique, included a carpenter, a proprietor, and a

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<sup>51</sup> Trotman, “Women and Crime in Late Nineteenth-Century Trinidad,” 62.

<sup>52</sup> ANOM IREL, *Régistres de l'état civil du commune Macouba*, 1881, Entry #49, “Mariage de Sieur Frontier (Raymond) et la demoiselle Salmon (Marie Elizabeth).”  
“Le sieur Raymond Frontier, cultivateur, né et domicilié au Macouba, majeur, âgé de 25 ans, fils naturel reconnu de feu sieur Joseph Frontier, de son vivant cultivateur, aussi domicilié au Macouba, et la demoiselle Reubine Batel, âgée de 40 ans, cultivatrice, domiciliée au même lieu, le dit-sieur Raymond, Frontier, procédant du consentement de la demoiselle sa mère ici présente et expressément consentante d’une part. Et la demoiselle Marie -Elizabeth Salmon, cultivatrice née dans l’Inde, domiciliée au Macouba, majeure, âgée de 26 ans, fille naturelle reconnue de demoiselle Allamellon, âgée d’environ 40 ans, aussi cultivatrice, domiciliée au même lieu.”

sailor (the groom's brother). Raymond and Marie Elizabeth also recognized their two daughters, Victoire Salmon (age five) and Ambrosine Salmon (age three). The birth of both daughters had been registered under Marie Elizabeth's maiden surname in the *état civil*. Further, at the time of the marriage, Marie Elizabeth was four months pregnant with the couple's third daughter Philomène Frontier. Over the course of the next five years, the couple would have three more children (Polycarpe, François, and Pierre).<sup>53</sup>

The marriage contract and birth registrations are the only places where traces of the Frontier-Salmon family may be found in the archives, and they provide very little insight into the dynamics of this multiethnic family. The fact that Marie Elizabeth had a surname that differed from her mother, but that her father is not listed in the marriage contract, suggests that Allamellon, like many other South Asian female immigrants, left an untenable situation in India—such as poverty, famine, or a bad marriage or family situation.<sup>54</sup> Marie Elizabeth, on the other hand, was most likely a child or adolescent when she accompanied her mother Allamellon to Martinique, and it is not clear if she was indentured.

In Victoire's birth registration, for example, Marie Elizabeth is not even identified as South Asian, just a "cultivator in the Grand Rivière hamlet." However, in Ambrosine's entry three years later, Marie Elizabeth is listed as "a liberated Indian immigrant" (the same designation given to immigrants who completed their indenture contracts).<sup>55</sup> The absence of an indenture

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid. For the birth certificates of their first two children, see: op. cit., 1876, Entry #144, "Naissance de la demoiselle Salmon (Victoire);" and op. cit., 1879 Entry #68, "Naissance de la demoiselle Salmon (Ambrosine)." For the remaining children, see: op. cit., 1881, Entry #142, "Naissance de la demoiselle Frontier (Philomène);" op. cit., 1883, Entry #74, "Naissance de le Sieur Frontier (Polycarpe);" op. cit., 1885, Entry #15, "Naissance de le Sieur Frontier (François);" and op. cit., 1886, Entry #132, "Naissance de le Sieur Frontier (Pierre)."

<sup>54</sup> Shepherd, "Indian Women in Jamaica, 1845-1945," 100-7; Northrup, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism*, 124; and Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*, 202-4.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 1876, Entry #144, "Naissance de la demoiselle Salmon (Victoire);" and op. cit., 1879, Entry #68, "Naissance de la demoiselle Salmon (Ambrosine)."

contract or other identifying records makes it difficult to trace where Marie Elizabeth and Allamellon came from, the circumstances they left behind, and the ways in which mother and daughter integrated into the rural community of Grand Rivière in Macouba. Although Marie Elizabeth followed in her mother's footsteps as a cultivator, if she arrived in Martinique at a very young age, she most likely learned creole and possibly French, especially if she attended the local school and socialized with Afro-Caribbean children and adolescents in the area. She certainly felt comfortable enough in rural Martinican culture to enter first into a sexual relationship with Raymond (as was common in laboring Afro-Caribbean families in the late nineteenth century) and then into marriage constituted under French civil law.<sup>56</sup>

The Frontier-Salmon family had enduring roots in the region during the twentieth century: Philomène Frontier died in the neighboring commune of Basse-Pointe in December 1967.<sup>57</sup> However, little else can be known about the internal dynamics of the Frontier-Salmon family, as well as countless other multiethnic and interracial families that were created as indentured immigrants integrated into the Antilles. But these multiethnic families raise important questions about the contributions of both indentured immigrants and freedpeople to post-emancipation family politics and social and cultural institution building on plantation "frontiers," which offers important avenues for future research on Antillean family life and labor during this period.

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"...demoiselle Marie Elizabeth Salmon...cultivatrice, domiciliée en cette commune, au hameau de la Grand Rivière."

"...demoiselle Marie Elizabeth Salmon...cultivatrice immigrante indienne libérée, domiciliée en cette commune, au hameau de la Grand Rivière."

<sup>56</sup> For Afro-Caribbean social and cultural conjugal customs, see: Besson, *Martha Brae's Two Histories*; 277-312; and Horowitz, *Morne-Paysan, Peasant Village in Martinique*, 51-8.

<sup>57</sup> ANOM IREL, *Régistres de l'état civil du commune Macouba*, 1881, Entry #142, "Naissance de la demoiselle Frontier (Philomène)," (margin inscription).

For colonial officials and proprietors, indentured immigration represented a last-ditch effort to resuscitate the large-scale production of the estates, even as the presence of South Asian immigrants in Martinique and Guadeloupe evoked their fears of disorder, degeneration, and violent upheaval in the economic and social system. For South Asian immigrants, the experience of migration and settlement was marked by ruptures in the social and cultural customs that previously structured their family lives. Future research should endeavor to take up the question of how indentured immigrants and freedpeople—through both cooperation and conflict—engaged in a process of cultural and social institution building on the Caribbean frontier to ensure their survival and autonomy in post-slavery rural societies. The multiethnic family would mark a fitting place to begin this inquiry.

APPENDIX: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Table A.1. Populations of Martinique and Guadeloupe, 1831-1847<sup>1</sup>

Year	Martinique			Guadeloupe		
	Free (Includes whites and <i>gens de couleur</i> )	Enslaved	Total Population	Free (Includes whites and <i>gens de couleur</i> )	Enslaved	Total Population
1831	23,417	86,299	109,716	22,324	97,339	119,663
1832	28,464	82,873	111,337	23,355	99,464	122,819
1833	34,493	79,767	114,260	25,810	99,039	124,149
1834	36,766	78,233	114,999	28,743	96,684	125,427
1835	37,955	78,076	116,031	31,252	96,322	127,574
1836	40,043	77,459	117,502	32,059	95,609	127,835
1837	41,546	76,012	117,558	33,244	94,591	127,835
1838	41,052	76,517	117,569	34,935	93,349	128,284
1839	40,733	74,333	115,066	36,360	93,646	130,005
1840	41,746	76,403	118, 149	37,300	94,109	131,419
1841	42,681	75,225	117,906	37,604	93,558	131,162
1842	43,350	76,172	118,575	37,803	92,639	130, 469
1843	45,193	75,136	120,329	37,815	92,322	130,157
1844	45,765	76,117	121,882	38,550	91,831	130, 381
1845	46,432	76,042	122,474	39,130	90,997	130, 127
1846	47,352	75,339	122,691	40,429	89,341	129,778
1847	48,271	72,859	121,130	41,357	87,752	129, 109

<sup>1</sup> Figures collated from: Alex Moreau de Jonnés, *Recherches statistiques sur l'esclavage colonial et le moyens de le supprimer* (Paris: Imprimerie De Bourgogne et Martinet, 1842); *Notices statistiques sur les colonies françaises imprimées par ordre de M. le Vice-Amiral de Rosamel, Ministre secrétaire d'état de la marine et des colonies*, (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1837); *Tableaux et relevés de population, de cultures, de commerce, de navigation, etc.* Multi-volume, years consulted 1839, 1843-1844, 1845-1846, and 1847-1848 (Paris: Imprimerie Royale 1839-1848); *Tableaux de population, de culture, de commerce, et de navigation, etc. formant, pour l'année 1849, la suite des tableaux insérés dans les notices statistiques sur les colonies françaises* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1852); Boutin, *La population de la Guadeloupe*, 127; Philip Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 79; and Tomich, *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 142. These are the raw population numbers used to calculate birth, death, and marriage per 1,000 rate for Tables A.3-A.8.



Table A.2. Estimated Number of African Captives Disembarked in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana, 1800-1831<sup>2</sup>

Date	Estimated Number
1800	3,698
1801	2,409
1802	2,656
1803	4,402
1804	2,115
1805	2,785
1806	1,778
1807	1,742
1808	311
1809	475
1810	970
1811	513
1814	637
1815	1,476
1816	2,715
1817	4,155
1818	2,692
1819	5,267
1820	7,755
1821	8,580
1822	8,155
1823	2,410
1824	4,713
1825	4,548
1826	4,483
1827	6,670
1828	6,201
1829	5,640
1830	2,460
1831	833
Total:	103,244

<sup>2</sup> Voyages Database. 2019. *Voyages: The Transatlantic Slave Trade Database*. <http://www.slavevoyages.org> (accessed March 22, 2020).

Table A.3. Births in Martinique, 1832-1847<sup>3</sup>

Year	Births: Free Population	Free Births per 1,000	Births: Enslaved Population	Enslaved Births per 1,000
1832	913	8.29	--	--
1833	997	10.32	--	--
1834	1,202	4.84	2,232	1.79
1835	1,397	9.74	2,485	2.87
1836	1,208	3.55	2,340	1.42
1837	1,390	3.83	2,303	-3.78
1838	1,442	7.70	2,376	-1.02
1839	1,441	-2.04	2,390	0.89
1840	1,497	9.32	2,376	6.28
1841	1,499	4.50	2,390	2.71
1842	1,541	2.88	2,594	-0.11
1843	1,577	7.99	2,595	7.66
1844	1,564	6.38	2,661	9.72
1845	1,579	2.93	2,349	-0.62
1846	1,535	2.43	2,468	2.67
1847	1,596	2.27	2,352	1.39

<sup>3</sup> Figures for Tables A.3-A.8 collated from the decennial lists in *Tableaux et relevés de population, de cultures, de commerce, de navigation, etc.* (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1839 and 1847).

Table A.4. Deaths in Martinique, 1832-1847

Year	Deaths: Free Population	Deaths: Enslaved Population
1832	677	--
1833	641	--
1834	1,024	2,092
1835	1,027	2,261
1836	1,066	2,230
1837	1,231	2,592
1838	1,126	2,454
1839	1,524	2,324
1840	1,108	2,114
1841	1,307	2,418
1842	1,416	2,541
1843	1,216	2,015
1844	1,272	1,921
1845	1,443	2,396
1846	1,420	2,267
1847	1,390	2,251

Table A.5. Marriages in Martinique, 1835-1847

Year	Marriages: Free Population	Free Marriages per 1,000	Marriages: Enslaved Population	Enslaved Marriages per 1,000
1835	194	5.11	15	0.19
1836	214	5.34	22	0.28
1837	180	4.33	15	0.20
1838	196	4.77	8	0.10
1839	178	4.37	42	0.57
1840	197	4.72	40	0.52
1841	186	4.36	20	0.27
1842	204	4.71	21	0.28
1843	235	5.20	26	0.35
1844	247	5.40	17	0.22
1845	218	4.70	52	0.68
1846	233	4.92	25	0.33
1847	243	5.03	46	0.63

Table A.6. Births in Guadeloupe, 1832-1847

Year	Births: Free Population	Free Births per 1,000	Births: Enslaved Population	Enslaved Births per 1,000
1832	877	9.38	2,558	8.92
1833	956	4.53	2,588	2.17
1834	963	2.64	1,810	-1.70
1835	1,092	5.63	1,894	-2.92
1836	1,076	4.62	1,891	1.04
1837	1,113	2.50	1,857	0.25
1838	1,087	-5.50	2,246	5.51
1839	1,173	5.39	2,489	3.85
1840	1,134	2.92	2,219	-1.64
1841	1,190	-2.50	2,662	-2.03
1842	1,125	-7.96	2,847	-4.07
1843	1,190	-9.71	2,590	0.38
1844	1,093	-0.91	2,621	3.06
1845	1,236	0.18	2,698	-1.95
1846	1,246	0.37	2,358	-3.78
1847	1,194	-3.19	2,564	-5.75

Table A.7. Deaths in Guadeloupe, 1832-1847

Year	Deaths: Free Population	Deaths: Enslaved Population
1832	658	1,671
1833	839	2,373
1834	887	1,974
1835	916	2,175
1836	928	1,792
1837	1,030	1,883
1838	1,279	1,732
1839	977	2,128
1840	1,025	2,373
1841	1,284	2,852
1842	1,426	3,224
1843	1,557	2,555
1844	1,128	2,340
1845	1,229	2,875
1846	1,231	2,696
1847	1,326	3,069

Table A.8. Marriages in Guadeloupe, 1835-1847

Year	Marriages: Free Population	Free Marriages per 1,000	Marriages: Enslaved Population	Enslaved Marriages per 1,000
1835	198	6.32	14	0.15
1836	218	6.80	11	0.12
1837	179	5.38	19	0.20
1838	161	4.61	10	0.11
1839	182	5.01	16	0.17
1840	207	5.55	18	0.19
1841	210	5.58	57	0.61
1842	200	5.29	54	0.58
1843	294	7.77	63	0.68
1844	276	7.16	58	0.63
1845	296	7.56	53	0.58
1846	260	6.43	41	0.46
1847	298	7.21	101	1.15

Table A.9. Resident Populations and Marriages per 1,000 in Martinique, 1848-1890.<sup>4</sup>

Year	Men and Boys	Women and Girls	Total Resident Population	Total Marriages	Marriages per 1,000
1848	56,580	63,777	120,357	520	4.32
1849	57,342	64,136	121,478	1,310	10.78
1850	57,961	64,859	122,820	1,342	10.93
1851	58,307	65,394	123,701	1,428	11.53
1852	58,063	65,432	123,495	1,502	12.16
1853	60,099	69,582	129,681	1,263	9.74
1854	62,544	71,551	134,095	1,102	8.22
1855	63,316	72,198	135,514	778	5.74
1856	63,761	72,699	136,460	850	6.23
1857	64,328	73,185	137,513	816	5.93
1858	64,142	73,404	137,646	682	4.95
1859	65,589	73,807	139,396	605	4.34
1860	62,822	73,848	136,670	543	3.97
1861	62,143	73,848	135,991	485	3.57
1862	61,613	73,404	135,017	508	3.76
1863	61,465	73,888	135,353	445	3.29
1864	62,957	74,716	137,673	698	5.07
1865	63,585	75,524	139,109	663	4.77
1866	62,065	75,942	138,007	846	6.13
1867	64,157	77,556	141,713	759	5.36
1868	73,310	77,385	150,695	740	4.91
1869	74,002	78,923	152,925	926	6.06
1870	74,656	79,271	153,927	763	4.96
1871	75,151	80,957	156,108	870	5.57
1872	74,989	81,810	156,799	1,011	6.45
1873	75,423	82,382	157,805	739	4.68
1874	76,139	83,061	159,200	464	2.91
1875	76,845	83,986	160,831	594	3.69
1876	77,498	84,497	161,995	468	2.89
1877	77,367	84,415	161,782	552	3.41
1878	77,782	85,079	162,861	612	3.76
1879	78,323	85,927	164,250	550	3.35

<sup>4</sup> Population numbers for Table A.9 and A.10 were compiled from: Ministère des Colonies, *Statistiques coloniales pour l'année...[1837-1896]* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, years 1837-1896).

\*Resident populations do not usually include immigrants, troops, government functionaries and their families, or others classified as members of the "population flottante." These were counted separately. In some years, the colonial administration counted them as part of the resident population.

\*\*There are no statistics available for the year 1889 in Martinique, because of a fire in Fort-de-France, which rendered the colonial administration unable to conduct a census that year. See: op. cit., 1889, 81 fn1.



Table A.9, Continued

Year	Men and Boys	Women and Girls	Total Resident Population	Total Marriages	Marriages per 1,000
1880	78,978	87,122	166,100	573	3.45
1881	79,332	87,849	167,181	471	2.82
1882	79,162	87,826	166,988	477	2.86
1883	79,239	87,880	167,119	456	2.73
1884	79,396	88,283	167,679	449	2.68
1885	80,235	88,997	169,232	389	2.30
1886	84,861	90,894	175,755	257	1.46
1887	85,541	91,537	177,078	396	2.24
1888	84,694	91,169	175,863	466	2.65
1889	--**	--	--	--	--
1890	84,694	91,169	175,863	--	--

Table A.10. Resident Populations and Marriages per 1,000 in Guadeloupe, 1848-1890

Year	Men and Boys	Women and Girls	Total Resident Population	Total Marriages	Marriages per 1,000
1848	60,777	68,273	129,050	866	6.71
1849	60,691	67,781	128,472	1,489	11.59
1850	61,042	67,943	128,985	2,283	17.70
1851	62,170	70,640	132,810	2,605	19.61
1852	58,576	66,358	124,934	2,129	17.04
1853	58,927	66,817	125,744	1,455	11.57
1854	60,656	68,564	129,220	1,545	11.96
1855	60,734	69,386	130,120	1,096	8.42
1856	61,854	69,703	131,557	1,187	9.02
1857	63,974	69,118	133,092	839	6.30
1858	64,964	69,196	134,160	762	5.68
1859	67,278	71,775	139,053	682	4.90
1860	65,371	71,231	136,602	546	4.00
1861	66,123	71,946	138,069	480	3.48
1862	66,939	71,562	138,501	505	3.65
1863	66,441	72,389	138,830	422	3.04
1864	66,926	72,579	139,505	415	2.97
1865	63,231	68,781	132,012	711	5.39
1866	60,936	67,014	127,950	959	7.50
1867	60,689	65,599	126,288	570	4.51
1868	60,946	65,038	125,984	551	4.37
1869	61,640	67,094	128,734	494	3.84
1870	64,452	67,114	131,566	540	4.10
1871	64,736	68,301	133,037	532	4.00
1872	66,501	69,810	136,311	533	3.91
1873	67,862	71,258	139,120	475	3.41
1874	69,329	72,181	141,510	395	2.79
1875	69,699	73,065	142,764	406	2.84
1876	70,933	74,484	145,417	427	2.94
1877	72,816	75,668	148,484	444	2.99
1878	75,088	78,393	153,481	564	3.67
1879	76,287	79,429	155,716	496	3.19
1880	77,907	80,563	158,470	517	3.26
1881	78,799	81,552	160,351	492	3.07
1882	78,210	81,505	159,715	470	2.94
1883	78,402	81,839	160,241	472	2.95
1884	78,344	81,828	160,172	467	2.92
1885	80,393	81,469	161,862	365	2.26
1886	81,718	83,017	164,735	402	2.44

Table A.10, Continued

Year	Men and Boys	Women and Girls	Total Resident Population	Total Marriages	Marriages per 1,000
1887	82,428	83,564	165,992	468	2.82
1888	72,405	76,666	149,071	500	3.35
1889	73,057	77,285	150,342	568	3.78
1890	82,704	83,057	165,761	--	--

A.11. Number of European, African, South Asian, and Chinese Indentured Laborers in  
Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana, 1853-1888<sup>5</sup>

Date	Europeans	Africans	South Asians	Chinese	Total
1853-1860	188	12,700	17,099	2,129	32,116
1861-1870		5,862	22,217		28,079
1871-1880			26,206		26,206
1881-1888			10,811		10,811
Total:	188	18,562	76,333	2,129	97,212
Percentage:	<1%	19%	79%	2%	

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<sup>5</sup> Table from Northrup, "Indentured Indians in the French Antilles," 267. On the same page, he provides a further breakdown of South Asian immigrants by colony. During this same period, Guadeloupe absorbed a total of 42,408 South Asian workers, Martinique 25,732, and Guiana 8,199.

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