

2014

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Recommended Citation

Ahlstrom, Michaela (2014) "To Be More French: Vengeance and Virtue in the recasting of people of color in the Post-Revolutionary French Empire," *Historical Perspectives: Santa Clara University Undergraduate Journal of History, Series II*: Vol. 19 , Article 8.
Available at: <http://scholarcommons.scu.edu/historical-perspectives/vol19/iss1/8>

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To Be More French: Vengeance and Virtue in the recasting of people of color in the Post-Revolutionary French Empire

Michaela Ahlstrom

Introduction

France's influence in its colonies was both indelible and unintentionally reciprocal. The French colonists who occupied new colonial territories during the Atlantic era created new cultures that were an amalgamation of the existing culture and French culture. Initially the French citizens who moved to the colonies were either male bachelors or married men without their families. The only women that Frenchmen had access to were almost always women of color. With French plantation owners and settlers in colonial states, inter-racial mixing became inevitable. According to the people of the *patrie*, France was the pinnacle of civilization and therefore superior and stronger than its colonies. In the minds of the French people, France was always separate from its colonies. Miscegenation became somewhat acceptable as long as it remained outside of France. Miscegenation in the colonies was more easily justified if the man was white and the woman was colored. However, when the purity of white French women and of the metropole was threatened by miscegenation it was thought to be a socio-political catastrophe. Through *métissage* came the "problem" of

the *métis* in French society.¹ It was too difficult to contend with a child born as both French and colored because it called into question the very notion of what it meant to be French in the 18th and 19th Centuries.

The “Pearl of the Antilles,” Saint Domingue remains central to examining historical issues regarding race and gender in the French empire. The attention of intellectuals in the 19th Century was drawn to the Haitian Revolution of 1791 as a platform for reconsidering societal boundaries with regards to race. In the years following the Haitian revolution novels and stories of the *métis* and *métissage* began to surface that have only recently been considered in historical research.² In my research I have found that these narratives share the common premise of exposing socio-cultural tensions in French colonial societies where racial separatism causes conflict in interper-

¹ For the purposes of this paper I will use the terms miscegenation and *métissage* to indicate interracial mixing in the context of sexual and or romantic relationships. The terms *métis* and *mulâtre* refer to people of mixed race born from parents of different racial origins. The term *créole* takes on a new form in the French language in that a *creole* refers specifically to a white person born in the Antilles.

² John Garrigus, “Tropical Temptress to Republican Wife: Gender, Virtue, and Haitian Independence, 1763-1802,” Conference essay, Guadalajara, Mexico. Meeting of *Latin American Studies Association*. 1997, 6. John Garrigus discusses *La Mulâtre Comme il y a Beaucoup de Blanches* in his article “Tropical Temptress to Republican Wife: Gender, Virtue, and Haitian Independence, 1763-1803.” The works that have been translated into English have also received attention such as Moreau de St Mery’s *A Civilization that Perished*, Leonora Sansay’s *Secret History*, Andres Dumas’ *Georges* and Victor Hugo’s *Bug Jargal*. The attention to these works is limited. *Le Nègre* by Balzac has little to no research attached to it.

sonal relationships. John Garrigus comments on the novel *La Mulâtre comme il ya beaucoup de blanches*. Garrigus states that this novel “was part of the post-revolutionary recasting of brown and black women from sycophantic courtesans and vile slaves to virtuous wives and loving mothers.”³ The work of Garrigus exposes the part that gender played in establishing the racial other, a concept that will also be addressed in this essay. In these narratives the conclusions are tragic, disastrous or heroic; endings that result from racial tensions. Defining people of color in society was of utmost importance to post-revolutionary thinkers because of the upheaval caused by both the French and the Haitian revolutions. The social order of France was turned on its head after the revolution of the 1780s-1790s which meant that social and political order had to be redefined in France and its colonies. The social changes that took place in the metropole were strongly linked to gender roles in the new Republican France. Likewise the changes in the colonies took on both a gendered and a racial dogma for defining status and hierarchy. In the early 19th Century writers began a long process of trying to atone for a legacy of slavery while the system still endured in different forms. These post-revolutionary stories endow their black and mixed race characters with virtue and include the complex issues of interracial love and marriage.

In this essay I will expand upon the work of John

³ John Garrigus, “Race, Gender and Virtue in Haiti’s Failed Foundational Fiction” in *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France* ed. Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall (Durham, Duke University Press, 2003) 74.

Garrigus by broadening the subject matter. Before the revolution the mistreatment of the *gens de couleur* or *métis* population, both male and female, of Saint Domingue and other colonies was justified when colonists defined this group as dishonorable and immoral. Likewise the black slave population while being defined as simplistic and docile occupied their “rightful” roles as slaves. In the early 19th century new post-revolutionary narratives were created that conversely memorialized people of color in the 18th century as either virtuous or vengeful members of society who faced racial divides in the midst of forbidden inter-racial sexuality and love.

France and the Old Regime Public Sphere

A fascinating aspect of the age of revolution is that at the same time that France was experiencing its most radical revolution, its most important colony was also experiencing revolution. It is difficult to say how connected these two events actually are. In 1763 Saint Domingue had acquired a “permanent printing works” and in the 1780s was creating pamphlets, books and newspapers comparable to the works being produced in the metropole.⁴ In mid-late 1700s France was slowly forming a public sphere. The public sphere consisted of the way of life for middle and upper class society. There was a general understanding of custom and culture that pertained specifically to acceptably “public” people. The ideals of the French public sphere were translated through the new printing capabilities to Saint Domingue. Central to the creation of the public sphere in Saint Domingue is that colonists modeled

⁴ Ibid, 75.

their version of public discourse off of the “French” public sphere.⁵ With the influx of news in the mid 1700s Saint Dominguan planters had a more comprehensive understanding of the happenings in both Saint Domingue and the metropole.

The French “public sphere” in the Old Regime revolved around the monarchy. The public sphere did not emerge in France until the beginnings of the salons, breeding-grounds for Enlightenment thinkers. The salons may have been run by *salonnières*, or female salon owners, but they were mostly occupied by men of the bourgeoisie in France.⁶ By the 1750s the Enlightenment was well underway and the salon became an ideal space for reason to reign supreme.

Femininity in the Old Regime Public Sphere

The formation of the public sphere in France emphasized paranoia surrounding “public” women. The absolutist monarchy had reached the heights of extravagance with Louis XIV. The extravagant culture of the monarchy was maintained until the revolution. The monarchy was strongly associated with femininity in that the supremacy of the king feminized men by forcing them to be submissive to the king.⁷ The court

⁵ John D. Garrigus, “Sons of the Same Father” in *Visions and Revisions of Eighteenth-Century France*, ed. Christine Adams, Jack R. Censer and Lisa Jane Graham, (Pennsylvania, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997) 138.

⁶ Jack R. Censer and Lynn Hunt, *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001) 14

⁷ Joan B. Landes, “Woman’s Voice in the Old Regime,” *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (New York: Cornell University, 1998) 17,21.

emphasized pomp and circumstance, forms of display and theater that were strongly associated with femininity. Women played central roles in advancing men in the court society. Witty women held the ear of the highest officials and men were constantly afraid of being usurped by “ambitious wives.”⁸ Women held positions of intimacy with the king or else played public roles in the court nobility. Since the king himself was not easily accessible, the nobility often represented the king as a symbol of his overall intention, character and personality.⁹ The public sphere of the absolutist monarchy put power in the hands of women that was perpetuated in subsequent decades with Louis XVI’s weak rule and Marie Antoinette’s public persona as *Madame Déficit*. Eventually noble and common men began to see the “corruption” inherent in a system dominated by women. Women’s leisure activities such as theater and opera were denounced and men who partook in these events were considered effeminate having shirked responsibilities to military and power while contributing to an ever weakening central state.¹⁰ *Philosophes* like Montesquieu argued that woman’s rightful place was in the home.¹¹ The Republican ideal of the 1790s sided with a masculine public sphere where women were relegated to the private sphere of the home and no longer present in political discourse.

⁸ Ibid, 26.

⁹ Ibid, 20.

¹⁰ Ibid, 26-27.

¹¹ Ibid, 27.

Black in the French Public Sphere?

As the elites in a colony of the great French metropole, Saint Domingue's colonists were eager to appear more French and therefore more civilized.¹² France in the 18th Century was shifting away from the effeminate centralized monarchy toward a body of strong republican men. From 1738 to 1776 black people were registered in Paris at a rate of roughly 30 per year.¹³ The increase in the presence of black people in the metropole was due to elites bringing slaves into France from the colonies. In 1762 the Admiralty of France set up an ordinance to determine how many blacks there were in France. Sue Peabody asserts that the potential reason for trying to determine the demographic statistics was in an effort to require blacks to return to the colonies.¹⁴ Ultimately, France did not want to have a significant black population. An increase of 30 per year is hardly noteworthy in Europe's most populous nation. Records also indicate that a number of wealthy *gens de couleur* were able to study in France. The demographic of Saint Domingue on the other hand in the 1700s was ever changing. A 1648 census of Saint Domingue places the number of white people at 4,411 and the number of black slaves at 3,358. These populations increased until 1779 when the populations were roughly 32,650 whites and 249,098 slaves. The binary of black and white that existed in many of the industrializing nations did not exist in Saint Domingue. There was a large population

¹² John D. Garrigus, "Sons of the Same Father" 138.

¹³ Sue Peabody, *There are No Slaves in France: The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien Regime* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 72.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 72-73.

of free black people who were usually mixed race, *gens de couleur* or free people of color numbering at about 28,000 by 1791, comparable to the population of whites in the colony.¹⁵

To be French: Race in Saint Domingue

Given the population of the French public sphere as predominantly white and male, Saint Dominguan colonists questioned the strange position in which the *gens de couleur* and *métis* population stood. Could Saint Domingue be truly French with such a large percentage of *gens de couleur* in the public sphere? In addition women of color played a significant role in Saint Dominguan culture and began to be seen as a legitimate threat by colonists. Could the strong presence of females inhibit Saint Domingue from becoming more French? The irony remains that the republican government in Paris pushed for a masculine un-egalitarian society and that Saint Domingue wanted to mirror this society. The approach of the republic was initially un-egalitarian in that it suppressed the role of women, despite the republican devotion to *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*. Saint Domingue followed the example of the metropole when it came to controlling race and gender in the colony.

The Code Noir was enacted by Louis XIV in 1685. This code set up strict guidelines for policing and care of slaves. The Code focuses on the need for slaves to be moral and Catholic, not protestant. The Code further

¹⁵ Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge MA: The Belknap press of Harvard University Press, 2004) 19.

delineated the role of the slave as completely at the mercy of the master. However, the Code also requires that slave masters take care of their slaves. Louis XIV judiciously endorsed the Code Noir's sentiment that "We desire to settle these issues and inform them [the slaves] that, even though they reside infinitely far from our normal abode, we are always present for them."¹⁶ The Code Noir also presented guidelines for manumission that would in future be revised to slow the growth of the free black population in Saint Domingue. The *gens de couleur* population was slowly formed in Saint Domingue through *métissage* between slaves and their colonist masters. *Métis* children were born of plantation owning fathers and slave mothers. Many *métis* were born into slavery. However, the Code Noir sanctioned the freeing of a woman who married a free man, along with her children. If marriage was not a part of the contract then the children of an enslaved woman would also be slaves.¹⁷ Historian John D. Garrigus writes extensively about *métissage* in Saint Domingue. Garrigus points out that the French presence in Saint Domingue throughout the early to mid 1700s saw social status as more important than race.¹⁸ The censuses of Saint Domingue reflected this fact and also reflected the Code Noir's emphasis on moral fiber.¹⁹ Many of the young planters living in Saint Domingue were either bachelors or left their families at home. Despite French emphasis on morality there was

¹⁶ "The Code Noir". *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution*, accessed September 27th 2013. <chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/335>

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ John D. Garrigus, "Sons of the Same Father" 138.

¹⁹ Ibid, 139.

a trend for these wealthy planters to form new households with the women available to them. There was an additional mystique for young men who wanted to experience the new exotic world along with its women. Toward the beginning of the 1700s most of the women available in the colony were slaves who also did not have a say in whether or not they would become the mistresses or the wives of their masters.²⁰ Themes of marriage and sexuality being necessary for the vigor of French men in the colonies can be found throughout colonial history and even to the end of the 19th Century. The *Guide Pratique de l'européen dans l'Afrique occidentale* by Dr. Barot from the 1890s also acknowledges the necessity of allowing young men to find pleasure in native women in West Africa.²¹ Dr. Barot, like many thinkers before him including D'Eichthal and Urbain in the 1830s and 40s, believed that *métissage* was a way to bring about peace between otherwise warring races. Garrigus also notes that a 1730 census mentions the *Mulâtres libres* but not the *Mulâtresses libres*.²² Mulatto or mixed race women were considered to be white assuming that they were linked to a white man. If the *gens de couleur* women could display French standards of literacy, morality and property she would also be considered white.²³ It is also important to mention that despite the disapproval of Versailles, *métissage* was not outlawed in

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Owen White, *Children of the French Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999) 15.

²² John D. Garrigus, "Sons of the Same Father" 139

²³ John D. Garrigus, "Sons of the Same Father" 139.

Saint Domingue.²⁴ The laws of the metropole did not intervene with regards to plantation owners giving land and money to *métis* people; these people were simply considered white by the colonial authorities and at this time the monarchy was relatively *laissez faire* because of confidence in the officials left in charge of Saint Dominguan affairs. As long as the colony was productive the metropole was content with the state of affairs. As a result *métis* children inherited the wealth of plantation owner fathers.

The *gens de couleur* was a growing population and improving its wealth throughout the 1700s. In the 1760s Saint Domingue was a well-established sugar colony.²⁵ The importation of slaves and the population of white colonists put the *gens de couleur* in an awkward position. The racial binary in France easily upheld social status. White planters did not like the idea of having colored people as rivals for work, especially the *petits blancs* looking to start a life in Saint Domingue. In 1764 Saint Domingue had a new governor, Charles Comte d'Estaing. This governor was extremely interested in patriotism from the colonists toward the *patrie*.²⁶ Political struggles between colonists and the *patrie* persisted. However, Saint Domingue was forming its own public sphere with more French people coming to make their way in the colony. The fear among colonists and royalists alike was that the white and creole population was losing its

²⁴ John Garrigus, "Race, Gender and Virtue in Haiti's Failed Foundational Fiction" in *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France* ed. Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall (Durham, Duke University Press, 2003) 75.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 140.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 142.

love for France. One of the issues noted by David Patrick Geggus was that some people were losing the French language to creole.²⁷ Patriotism and Frenchness needed to be enforced so the color line started to become emphasized in Saint Domingue. With the same rhetoric that was used in France, colonists claimed that Saint Domingue was dangerously feminized by the *gens de couleur* population.²⁸

Feminizing the *Gens de Couleur*

In studying the history of Haiti in the late 18th century Moreau de Saint Méry is almost always used as a reference for a white perspective on Saint Dominguan society. Moreau de Saint Méry was born in Martinique in 1750 and wrote his anthropological work on the make-up of Saint Domingue in the 1780s. The book was published in the late 1790s after the Haitian Revolution. Moreau's description of mulatto women is of particular interest. Moreau writes that the creation of the free colored population was due to "the scarcity of women, the customary ways of the Filibusters and the Bucaneers, and the alluring complaisance of the black woman."²⁹ Moreau's description of male *gens de couleur* is that they are intelligent and have a love of

²⁷ David Patrick Geggus, "Saint Domingue on the Eve of the Haitian Revolution" in *The World of the Haitian Revolution*, ed. David Patrick Geggus and Norman Fiering (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009) 13.

²⁸ John Garrigus, "Race, Gender and Virtue in Haiti's Failed Foundational Fiction" 76.

²⁹ Médéric-Louis-Élie Moreau de Saint Méry, *A Civilization that Perished: The Last Years of White Colonial Rule in Haiti, A Topographical, Physical, Civil, Political and Historical Description* (Philadelphia, Moureau de Saint Mery, 1797-1798) 73.

luxury and laziness. According to Moreau the only master of the mulatto man is pleasure.³⁰ Moreau spends more time on his description of the *mulâtresse libres* who he identifies primarily as a seducer of white men. Moreau reduces the *mulâtresse* to the level of superficiality whose only pursuit is love. The *mulâtresse* is described even in anatomical detail, that the way she moves is seductive and therefore corruptive.³¹ The *mulâtresse* takes a great deal of pleasure in jewels and clothes and is considered extravagant.³²

The favored lover dresses up his conquest, so that this splendor is the sign of a new loss of virtue...To the taste for multiplying her dresses and her jewels, is added what contributes in a big way to expense, a failure to care for them. This wastefulness leads to disdain for even the most costly things.³³

Moreau refers to the *mulâtresses* in this section as wasteful, a term used for Marie Antoinette during her reign before her deposition and execution; punishments that were partly due to her extravagance.

The wealth of the *gens de couleur* was brought on by the direct line of inheritance for plantation owners. Upon the death of a patriarch his earnings and land would go to his wife and children. *The gens de couleur* accumulated vast inheritances from previous colonial masters. The *mulâtresses* supposed sexuality and

³⁰ Ibid, 78.

³¹ Ibid, 81.

³² Ibid, 83-84.

³³ Ibid.

deceit made them powerful in the eyes of the colonials. These thoughts mirror directly the thoughts of republican France. Women had a corrupting influence on men and contributed to a despotic and effeminate monarchy.³⁴ In Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Émile* the Philosophe discerns that Sophie (a representative for all women) should be passive, weak, pleasing to the eyes, docile and charming.³⁵ When *Émile* was written in the 1750s the *ancien régime* was still intact along with the effeminate monarchy. In Saint Domingue the similar thought was that mulatto women wielded undue and influential power.

Another aspect of mulatto women that was threatening to the colonist population was their association with Vodoun. The Vodoun goddess Erzulie takes on three different forms. The form that is most relevant to the *mulatresses* is Erzulie Freda or the *mulatresses blanche*. It is important to remember that the *mulatresses'* skin color ranged from very dark to very light. Erzulie Freda seems contradictory in that she is white, she is in female form and yet encompasses the abilities of man as well.³⁶ The person of Erzulie Freda then contradicts the binary male and female and endows a woman with supposed masculine traits. Erzulie is also known in Vodoun for forcing men to serve her.³⁷ This goddess of Haitian tradition is a

³⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Book V" *Emile* trans. Barbara Foxley (London : J.M. Dent & Sons, 1911) 321-444. Originally published 1757-1760.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 332-333.

³⁶ Joan Dayan, "Erzulie: A Women's History of Haiti," *Research in African Literatures* 25 (1994): 5-31, JSTOR accessed December 4 2013. 6

³⁷ *Ibid*, 6-7.

fearsome symbol that runs against the colonists' suppositions of women's place. As Joan Dayan states, "Since Erzulie remains the most heavily textualized (and romanticized) of vodoun spirits, her representation tells us much about the risky collaboration of romance and race."³⁸ Overall, in the eyes of white colonials the goddess associated with the *mulâtresses* further categorized them as threatening to French ideals. The goddess also ran counter to the normalcy of Christian faith versus exotic vodoun which separated the *mulâtresses* further from the French ideal.

The *gens de couleur* threatened the white colonists' way of life. The *gens de couleur* were becoming wealthier and pushing out the *petits blancs*. The problem was perpetuated by powerful *mulâtresses* considered to be seductive and colonists' perception of *mulâtresses* being endowed with the supernatural powers of Erzulie Freda. According to the colonists the *gens de couleur* was a group that was increasingly effeminate. John Garrigus writes that, "in the 1770s and 1780s this feminine sexuality, described as 'un-natural' in women of mixed ancestry came to symbolize the 'foreign-ness' of Saint Domingue's free population of color."³⁹ The answer of the colonial government to the supposed power of the *gens de couleur* was to by decrease their presence in the public sphere and remove their civic abilities entirely.

Oppressing the *Gens de Couleur*

David Geggus notes that the alarm that came about with the ever-expanding *gens de couleur* population

³⁸ Ibid, 18.

³⁹ John D. Garrigus, "Sons of the Same Father" 145.

propelled colonists to create obstacles to the growth of this population.⁴⁰ Population growth might be the main reason why the colonists retaliated, but they justified it with rhetoric that affirmed beliefs in the inherent effeminate, deceptive nature of the *gens de couleur* or the *métis*. According to Laurent Dubois, certain thinkers believed that the reason for the shift from relative freedom to fortified racial divides was sex.⁴¹ The formation of the *métis* population formed racial tensions when the *gens de couleur* became powerful. Essentially the people responsible for the racial tension in a biologic way were the white plantation owners who utilized their power to gain sexual fulfillment. Further angst grew among the colonists because of the intelligence of the *gens de couleur*. Many of these *affranchis* were sent to France for education. The *gens de couleur* actually were a “civilized” group of people in Saint Domingue. A civilized population of colored people did not fit the goals and desires of the white population. The metropole began to send bureaucrats to the Antilles in 1763 to reinforce boundaries and order in the colonies.⁴² Migrants searching for work along with these bureaucrats contributed to a hostile environment for the *gens de couleur*.⁴³

⁴⁰ David Patrick Geggus, “Saint Domingue on the Eve of the Haitian Revolution” 9.

⁴¹ Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge MA: The Belknap press of Harvard University Press, 2004) 62

⁴² John Garrigus, “Race, Gender and Virtue in Haiti’s Failed Foundational Fiction” 75.

⁴³ Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution*, 64-65

Up to this point colonists and *gens de couleur* had found use for each other. They may not have always gotten along but there was an understanding that not necessarily skin color and genealogy created rank, but wealth created rank. . However, it became apparent to colonists that the racial line needed to be drawn in order to keep slaves in their place. The 1760s was the beginning of intense oppression of the *gens de couleur* population by white colonists. In the 1770s the colonial government began to crack down on manumission. It had become too common for slaves to be manumitted by masters based upon a buy out or strong relational ties.⁴⁴ The manumission crack down beginning in 1770 made it so that in 1785 there were 739 slaves freed and in 1789 there were 256.⁴⁵ Discriminatory laws that specifically targeted the *gens de couleur* came out in the 1760s also. People of mixed race were segregated in the public sphere from the white gentile public sphere.⁴⁶ Certain jobs were off limits along with clothes that only white people could wear. In the atmosphere of general hostility and a more defined color line, the *gens de couleur* were in danger of both harassment and assault. The free people of color were also prohibited from any kind of civic engagement.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ David Patrick Geggus, "Saint Domingue on the Eve of the Haitian Revolution" 8-9.

⁴⁵ Ibid,10.

⁴⁶ David Patrick Geggus, "Saint Domingue on the Eve of the Haitian Revolution" 14.

⁴⁷ Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution*, 60.

Oppression in France

Meanwhile the *patrie* dealt with its own issues of race. Under the Admiralty Ordinance of 1762 people of color had to register with the police. There were no exceptions to this mandate which meant that both free and enslaved people had to register.⁴⁸ Some colonists returned to France with *métis* children and established a life in France. Jennifer L. Palmer notes that race and class were more closely tied in France because of the black- white binary system that was normative in Eurocentric nations, a system that began to emerge in Saint Domingue in the late 1700s with the rise in the white population.⁴⁹ In France *métis* children posed a threat to the important nuclear family which only grew more important as the century progressed.⁵⁰ For *métis* children who moved to France, it was difficult for them to understand that they were not viewed in the same social class as the white elite and most of the time they were not in the same social class as their own fathers.⁵¹ *Métis* were ostracized in France and often were unable to marry because of their social status.⁵² In the case of Aimé-Benjamin Fleuriau, under the 1763 ordinance his *mulâtre* children were documented as Fleuriau's slaves. Fleuriau and his family had to work to fight the distinction which placed the *métis* in

⁴⁸ Jennifer L. Palmer, "What's in a Name? Mixed-Race Families and Resistance to Racial Codification in Eighteenth-Century France," *French Historical Studies* 33 (2010): 357-385, accessed December 4 2013, doi: 10.1215/00161071.357

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 362.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 360.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 367.

⁵² *Ibid*, 368.

the category of slave.⁵³ In France at the time, to be white was to be free, to be black in any way was to be a slave. In contrast to the 1685 Code Noir, the 1777 legislation issued by Louis XVI was more about skin color than the social status of slaves in the *patrie*.⁵⁴ The abolitionist movement in France was underway at this time as well which caused more back-lash from anti-abolitionists before it effected change. In the 1780s the government saw to it that all people of African descent carried a passport that defined their status in the French Empire. *Métissage* had never been socially acceptable in the *patrie*, but at this time it was criminalized in the metropole.⁵⁵

The fight of *Gens de Couleur*

The relative power and wealth accumulated for people of color through *métissage* faced considerable scrutiny in the mid to late 1700s in both France and the colonies. It is important to understand that the *gens de couleur* did not see themselves in the same way that colonial officials began to imagine them. The *gens de couleur* were in fact extremely influential in French military efforts to suppress rebellions in the colony and expressed immense loyalty to France. However the divide between the colonists and the *gens de couleur* grew exponentially. The *gens de couleur's* loyalty to the *patrie* was only strengthened by push and pull factors, namely the push from the plantation

⁵³ Ibid, 371.

⁵⁴ Sue Peabody, *There are No Slaves in France: The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien Regime* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 106.

⁵⁵ Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution*, 72

owners and the pull from changing perspectives in France. Factions in France had started to openly take up the abolitionist movement. The *Société des Amis des Noirs* was formed by Condorcet who pushed a platform that was even addressed at the momentous “calling of the Estates General” in Paris in 1789.⁵⁶ The *gens de couleur* were finding significant allies in the *patrie* that simply did not exist in Saint Domingue. The factions in Saint Domingue on the eve of the revolution were the *gens de couleur*, the *grands blancs*, the *petits blancs*, France and the slaves. Despite upstanding courage and citizenship, *gens de couleur* were criticized and harassed by *grands* and *petits blancs*.⁵⁷ The *metis* population of Saint Domingue did not initially fight the changes but rather tried to remain upstanding citizens. Their efforts were ignored because of the whites’ determination to categorize all *métis* as inherently disingenuous.⁵⁸

Julien Raimond was an impassioned spokesman for the cause of the free people of color. Raimond was born in Saint Domingue to a *métisse* mother and a white father.⁵⁹ Raimond had grown up in Saint Domingue and became a wealthy indigo planter until he moved to France in 1785. Raimond’s work revolved

⁵⁶ Ibid, 73.

⁵⁷ John D. Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint Domingue* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 195-196.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 196.

⁵⁹ Julien Raimond, “Observations on the Origin and Progression of the White Colonists’ Prejudice Against Men of Color” in *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean 1789-1804: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Laurent Dubois and John D. Garrigus (Boston: Bedford St. Martins, 2006) 78.

around protecting the name of the *gens de couleur* who were vilified by the colonists. Raimond argued that many white planters cared for the women who bore them children regardless of race.⁶⁰ Raimond notes that in relations between colonists and *métis* before the 1760s “there was no dishonor in knowing them, spending time with them, living with them, forming relationships with their daughters; and men of color were commissioned as officers in the militia.”⁶¹ Raimond recognized that the *gens de couleur* saw in the white population what the white population believed of the *gens de couleur*, that the opposing group did not possess virtue.⁶² The quotation from Julien Raimond brings up the complicated issue of interracial relationships during the 1780 and 1790s.

Changing Narratives

Given the deeply embedded notions of racial difference in pre-revolutionary French and Saint Dominguan society, it is noteworthy that new narratives began to surface that contradicted these popular images of the black and the *métis*, especially because they were produced in the decades directly following the French Revolution and the pivotal Haitian revolution in Saint Domingue. Saint Dominguan society had maintained relative stability until the mid-18th Century when the tremors of revolution began. The factions in Saint Domingue became more divided and more bitter as 1791 drew nearer. The narratives of the early 19th Century regarding colonial society show how inter-

⁶⁰ Ibid,79.

⁶¹ Ibid,80.

⁶² Ibid,81.

racial sexuality played out in a racialized world. These narratives use real contextual circumstances of inter-racial love and sexuality to provide a place and time to re-evaluate the images of the docile noble savage and the immoral *gens de couleur* that had been practically canonized by colonists in the years preceding the revolution.

By the year 1838 the Western world was nearing the end of a trajectory toward emancipation.⁶³ The early 19th Century was marked by steadily growing abolitionist fervor. The thoughts presented by scholars Urbain and D'Eichthal fall under the belief that the mulatto was situated in the best position to bring about relative peace. However, this was assuming that the “gendered” condition of the racial “other” remained.⁶⁴ Under gendered categories the white masculine race could keep the black effeminate race in a submissive position post-emancipation. This was necessary because of the presumed social unrest that would occur post-emancipation. As Naomi Andrews notes in her article on D'Eichthal and Urbain's letters, the mulatto shifted from a “destructive” character in colonial society to a “salvific” character.⁶⁵ If the white and black binary could become flexible then the mulatto would be able to bridge the gap between white and black; the mulatto was after-all both white and black. It is in the context of the post-revolution, pre-emancipation era that the narratives of the African and

⁶³ Naomi Andrews, “D'Eichthal and Urbain's *Lettres sur la race noire et la race blanche: Race, Gender, and Reconciliation after Slave Emancipation*,” *Project Muse, Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 2011, Vol.39(3), pp.240-258. 242

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 244.

the Mulatto began to take on new forms, appropriating old legacies in conjunction with new definitions.

Similar to Moreau de Saint Méry, a white woman, Leonora Sansay wrote a memoir of her time in Haiti, published in 1803. Sansay describes the mulatto women in “Secret History” as rivals to the white ladies who she calls “creole,” and she describes the mulâtresses as devious in their pursuits to be seductive:

Many of them are extremely beautiful; and being destined from their birth to a life of pleasure, they are taught to heighten the power of their charms by all the aids of art, and to express in every look and gesture all the refinements of voluptuousness. It may be said of them, that their very feet speak.^{66 67}

The important difference to note in Sansay’s writing is that her memoirs were written after the revolution and she described the *mulâtresses* as faithful to their lovers and virtuous while creole women are corrupt. Moreau did not mention the temperament of the *mulâtresses* before the revolution but stresses their corruptive sexuality. This is a prime example of the changing ideas about the people of color in Saint Domingue, a slow progression of change that began directly after the revolution and in the very year that Saint Domingue became Haiti and declared its independence.

⁶⁶ Leonora Sansay, *Secret History* (Philadelphia: Bradford and Inskeep, 1808) 95.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

***La Mulâtre Comme il y a Beaucoup de Blanchés,*
1803**

The novel produced in 1803 by an anonymous author, *La Mâlatre Comme il ya Beaucoup de Blanchés* is a prime example of the changing perspective on the role of the *gens de couleur* in colonial society. In this case the characters are a *mulâtresses libre* and a white creole, a much more “acceptable” pair. This title roughly translates as *The Female Mulatto like many other White Women*, hinting at an essential “oneness” between white and black women. The story is set in pre-revolutionary Saint Domingue in the 1770s. The plot revolves around the seduction of a young *femme de couleur*, Mimi and a *créole* white planter, Sylvain.⁶⁸ Contrary to the racial stereotype of white purity and mixed race impurity, it is Mimi who is both moral and virtuous. As noted by John Garrigus in his article “Tropical Temptress to Republican Wife” Moreau de Saint Méry made a point of noting the flaws of the *créole*. Moreau was of the opinion that Saint Domingue itself was becoming corrupt and that the *créole* was adding to the corruption by being controlled by baser passions, the character of Sylvain fits this description of the corrupt *créole*; Mimi is completely contrary to the popular image promoted by Moreau of *mulâtresses* as licentious and corrupting. Women of color often became the mistresses of plantation owners, not always wives. Sylvain makes it clear that he does not want their love to be public but he does want to be with her. Mimi is a woman with a French education which adds rationality to her overall persona. Addi-

⁶⁸ Anonyme, *La Mulatre Comme il y a Beaucoup De Blanchés* (Paris : L’Harmattan, 2007) Originally published 1803. Xii

tionally, Mimi is the character who adopts the most patriotism.⁶⁹ According to Mimi Saint Domingue is “*Un Pays ou la vertu semble un problème insoluble.*”⁷⁰ The author endowed Mimi with the same virtue that was claimed by French revolutionaries for French women. Mimi looks upon Saint Domingue as a whole as a dissolute society. Meanwhile Sylvain uses pretty speeches to try and get her to acquiesce to his improper proposals. For most of the novel the two characters communicate through letters. Sylvain begins the correspondence on March 18th 1773 and sends the last letter on May 9th 1775. Toward the end of their correspondence Sylvain’s passion for Mimi causes him to go to her in the night and sneak in to her private rooms. Mimi’s loss of virtue that night causes her to commit suicide, devastated by the shame of losing her honorable status and pure soul. Sylvain is tortured over his responsibility for her death and says,

*Pouvoir invincible de la vertu! Il est donc plus fort que tous les sentiments... que celui de l’amour même ! Il était réservé a Mimi de me l’apprendre, de me faire sentir les tourments qu’un seul moment de faiblesse peut causer a une âme pure. C’est moi qui la tué, moi dont la séduction a creuse l’abime qui me la dérobe...*⁷¹

The invincible power of virtue! It is but the strongest of all the intentions... like that of my love! It was reserved to Mimi to teach me how

⁶⁹ Ibid, xviii.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 131.

⁷¹ Ibid, 237.

the torments of a single moment of weakness is able to cause a single pure soul. It is I who killed her, I whose seduction hollowed out the abyss that I unveiled.

For Sylvain virtue is an impossible goal. Sylvain is deeply remorseful for taking the purity of Mimi's soul by keeping her quiet and subsequently opening a "hollow abyss" which could be seen as his sorrow. Ultimately, Sylvain realizes that Mimi's virtue was powerful and very important to her and that he could never achieve what she had achieved and he had also robbed her of that virtue. Sylvain also ends up killing himself in utter despair. The plot alone highlights the significant difference in characteristics that the author gives to the *mulâtresses* and the *créole*. The author deconstructs all of the stereotypes against the *métis* by making the *métis* character noble and female. The title *La Mulâtre* is also an interesting choice of words in that the *La* makes the title feminine and the *Mulâtre* makes the title masculine. The gender of the main character Mimi is cancelled out in the title as if the author does not see her gender as important to her character. *La Mulâtre Comme il y a Beaucoup de Blanches*, published in 1804, is one of the first narratives published after the revolutions in both France and Saint Domingue that reevaluates the common stereotypes of *gens de couleur*.

Le Nègre and Le Nègre et la Créole ou Memoires d'Eulalie, 1820s

The narratives that are primarily devoted to the theme of vengeance and unrequited love revolve around people of color who are not *métis*. In these two

novels the topic of exploration is *métissage* and the results of suppressed and unrequited love when the primary obstacle is skin color. This category is relevant because the positions of the black characters in relation to the white characters highlight the tension between race and love. The narratives that came out in the 1820s that fall under this description are *Le Nègre* by Honoré de Balzac and *Le Nègre et la Créole ou Mémoires d'Eulalie* by Gabrielle de Paban (pseudonym for Honoré de Balzac). These narratives have been hidden for many years from historic research. Honoré de Balzac was a realist French author who wrote during the 19th century about French life.⁷² In the 1820s Balzac was living in Paris and developed the plot of *Le Nègre* and *Le Mulâtre* in a matter of two years. As a connoisseur of French social life and a commentator on nuanced events Balzac found interest in the dilemmas regarding race relations. *Le Nègre* and *Le Mulâtre* are not well known works by Balzac. Balzac wrote both of these stories under different pseudonyms. According to the biographer of Balzac, E.J. Oliver, “it is this breadth in his record of life, this depth in his relation of women and men to society in all its aspects, that also distinguishes him from later novelists.”⁷³

Le Nègre, produced in 1822, is a manuscript for a theatrical performance. Balzac wrote this play at the age of 23 in Paris. In three short acts Balzac sets the main characters M. de Gerval a banker, Emilie his wife, M. de Manfred the Marquis de St. Yves and Georges the black steward of M. de Gerval in Paris.

⁷² E.J. Oliver, *Balzac: The European* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1959) 2-3.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 1.

The plot begins with Georges lamenting his position which keeps him from the woman he loves, Emilie. Georges does not explain his feelings as sad but rather angry when he proclaims,

*O son sourire et son divin accent ont mis le comble a ma rage...depuis deux ans je souffre, depuis deux ans je veille ainsi, me consumant en vains efforts pour étouffer ce feu qui brule.*⁷⁴

Oh her smile and her divine accent brings me to the limit of my rage... for two years I suffer, for two years I stay awake like this, I am consumed by vain efforts to snuff out the fire that burns.

This description of Georges as impassioned and angry is also followed by an anguished determination to remain silent; after all his love is for the wife of his employer M. Gerval.⁷⁵ Georges is unable to remain silent for long, and eventually he gives in and tells Emilie of his love for her. Emilie responds with disgust. Georges seeks vengeance for Emilie's reproach and for his inability to receive the love he desires because of his social class and skin color. Georges wins the respect of M. de Gerval and tells him that Mme. de Gerval has been sneaking away to Sevres and possibly having an affair while M. de Gerval is away.⁷⁶ While Georges' actions are hardly virtuous they are full of vengeance. *Vengeance* is a word that Georges uses

⁷⁴ Honoré de Balzac pseudonym Horace St. Aubin, *Le Nègre*, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2011) Originally Published 1822. 5

⁷⁵ Ibid, 16.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 32.

over and over again throughout the novel. When Georges is speaking, his line is prefaced with the title “Georges” however when Gerval realizes that Georges had deceived him his name becomes “*Le Nègre*.” The word *noir* translates in English to black while the word *nègre* in English translates to the word negro. The meaning behind the word *nègre* is deep and disturbing in the same way that negro is highly derogatory in American parlance. This interesting shift in name designation can be interpreted as a devastating slight on Georges and thus on all people of color for being deceitful. However, it could also be a deeper, ironic message. In calling Georges *Le Nègre* at the end of the novel, Balzac highlights the idea that race is connected to certain nefarious actions. Rather than simply being “the deceiver” Georges becomes *le Nègre*. However, Georges’ vengeance seems like a small consequence to atone for a legacy of French oppression of people of color. Additionally Georges’ anger stems from a passionate anger regarding his inability to be with a white woman whom he loves. Gerval’s trust in Georges is evident in his line, “*Ah laisse-moi t-embrasser!... de tels deuements ne sortent que des coueurs africains.*”⁷⁷ This line is also directly linked to the stereotype of the “Noble Savage African” who is endlessly devoted to his master. Georges does not say much about what he thinks and feels throughout the play except at the beginning with his soliloquy about Emilie. It is evident that the actor would bring Georges’ frustrations into his physical performance rather than verbal performance. This story also examines the fact that it was much more acceptable for a woman of color to be with

⁷⁷ Ibid, 92.

a white man in the colonies or (God forbid) France than for a black man to be with a white woman in the colonies or France.

Another novel that treats an unrequited love story between a man of color and a white woman is *Le Nègre et la Créole ou Memoirs d'Eulalie*. In this novel produced in 1825, Eulalie is a *créole* white young girl rescued from Saint Domingue during the revolution. Her rescuer is Maky, her nanny who takes Eulalie, along with her son Zambo to Benin, Africa. Although Eulalie grows up amongst the people of Benin, Eulalie was born into a *créole* white society with strict racial barriers, especially between white women and African men. Zambo confesses his love for Eulalie which she turns down, unable to accept the possibility of *métissage*. Despite the goodness and nobleness of Maky and her family for raising the white *créole* Eulalie, the racial line is still drawn.⁷⁸

Bug Jargal, 1826

Victor Hugo is best known for his profound work *Les Miserables*. However, Hugo wrote many other works including the little known *Bug Jargal* published in 1826. *Bug Jargal* is set in Saint Domingue both before and during the massive insurrection of 1791. This story opens with Captain D'Auverney telling a group of comrades about his time in Saint Domingue. Leopold D'Auverney arrives in Saint Domingue just before his twentieth birthday and just after the "disasterous decree of 15 May 1791, whereby the national assembly of France granted the free men of

⁷⁸ Gabrielle de Paban, *Le Negre et la Creole ou Memoires D'Eulalie* (Paris : L'Harmattan, 2008) Originally published 1825.

colour the same political rights as the whites.”⁷⁹ The novel proceeds to explain that the decree caused unrest in the colony amongst the white colonists and the slaves; foreshadowing of the revolution to come. D’Auverney’s principle cause for entering the colony of Saint Domingue was to meet his fiancé Marie, the niece of D’Auverney’s uncle. The story begins with the tense circumstances of an unrequited love. Marie has had recent visits from an unknown man who serenades her while hidden behind the bushes. Marie tells D’Auverney and her uncle of these strange encounters, causing both men to make plans to find him out. D’Auverney has a brief encounter with the man and finds that he must be a plantation slave. D’Auverney is both touched by the “generosity in the sentiment that had persuaded my unknown rival to spare me” but also finds that “every bone in my body rejected the revolting supposition that I had a slave for a rival.”⁸⁰ D’Auverney finds that a slave also saved the life of Marie from the jaws of a crocodile. This same slave is arrested for nobly stopping the plantation master from striking a sleeping slave with a whip.⁸¹ The slave named Pierrot, imprisoned for his insubordination is released upon Marie’s request. D’Auverney sees to it that Pierrot is released and is impressed by his kindness and virtuosity.

The plot turns on August 22nd 1791 when the slaves of the Northern Plain begin their revolt. D’Auverney’s uncle is killed and Marie is carried off by

⁷⁹ Victor Hugo, *Bug Jargal* trans. Chris Bongie (New York : Broadview Press, 2004) Originally published 1826. 70

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 73.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 81.

Pierrot. D'Auverney assumes that Pierrot has stolen her for his own pleasure and chooses to find him and Marie. In the midst of the insurgency D'Auverney joins a defensive outpost, is captured and faces the wrath of the ruthless insurrection leader Jean Biassou. It is only the noble Pierrot, now called Bug Jargal the legendary insurgent leader who can rescue D'Auverney. Bug Jargal arrives at the camp of Biassou to save D'Auverney. Biassou makes a deal with D'Auverney that he may leave for a few hours but must return. Pierrot selflessly brings D'Auverney to Marie, saddened by his inability to be with her but desiring to make her happy by reuniting her with her fiancé. Bug Jargal leaves the two alone in the forrest where Marie falls asleep. D'Auverney sneaks away and returns to Biassou to die, however is once again saved by Bug-Jargal who then rushes off to save ten more insurgents who have been captured by the whites. D'Auverney arrives at the Colonists' camp just as Bug Jargal is being executed.

The story of Bug Jargal endows the legendary slave insurgent chief with the most virtuous and noble characteristics. The character of Pierrot (Bug Jargal) is self-sacrificing, strong, and honorable while the slave master is sinister and cruel. Despite his love for Marie, Pierrot does not choose to selfishly take her for himself. In this later novel the chief protagonist is developed into a character who is seen by the narrator as remarkable. Indeed, Pierrot is remarkable based upon the standards set for people of color in the years preceding the revolution. The character of Pierrot universally de-constructs the popular image of the African slave as docile and the person of color as depraved. Likewise the character of Biassou is en-

dowed with a vengeful spirit. While Biassou's character is sinister and formidable, he does not come across as blameworthy or wrong in his pursuit for freedom from the white masters' dictates.

Le Mulâtre, 1937

In 1837 Victor Séjour wrote his short story *Le Mulâtre* or The Mulatto. As a son of a *gens de couleur* from Saint Domingue Séjour's connection to the colony and its past was strong. Of all of the accounts addressed in this essay Séjour's *Le Mulâtre* is the most chilling. The story is set in Saint Domingue before the revolution. This story addresses the issues of *métissage* on the deepest level, the virtue of a *gens de couleur*, and his ultimate vengeance for the wrongs done to him. *Métissage* lays the foundation for this entire story. Alfred the young white planter is at an auction for women from Africa. Alfred buys a Senegalese woman named Laïsa. As was customary for the beginnings of a *gens de couleur* bloodline Alfred takes Laïsa as his mistress. Laïsa's son, Georges, was born a slave. Laïsa and Georges were sent to a desolate hut on Alfred's property when the slave master tired of Laïsa's company. Georges' upbringing shows him to be an extremely loyal boy yet passionate. Georges honors his mother's dying wish that he only open the pouch with his father's portrait in it when he turns 25. Georges continues to work under Alfred becoming close to him and unaware of their relation to one another. Georges is recognized as one of Alfred's most loyal servants and is described as "handsome and

vigorous.”⁸² Georges even defends Alfred from the threat of murder, saves the life of his master and is wounded in the process. Georges’ loyalty to his master is not rewarded when Georges’ wife Zelia is solicited by Alfred. Zelia fights Alfred off until he falls and hits his head. The punishment for Zelia is death. Despite Georges’ loyalty and service to Alfred, he refuses the pleas of Georges and makes sure that the “woman, for having been too virtuous, died the kind of death meted out to the vilest criminal.”⁸³ Georges’ vengeance takes him three years because Georges’ rage cannot be tamed by anything but a death as terrible as the unjust death of Zelia. The final scene in this short story culminates in the birth of Alfred’s son, followed by Georges poisoning Alfred’s wife and forcing Alfred to watch her die. Alfred’s pleas are ignored as Georges decapitates him. Only then does George realize Alfred is his father. Georges then shoots himself and dies beside his father.

Séjour’s story shows that the nature of the mulatto is to be virtuous. George proves that he is indeed a virtuous character until he is crossed by his white master, at which point his vengeance cannot be quelled without bloodshed. Additionally, Laïsa and Zelia are characters of virtue forced into positions of immorality by the white master. The argument that is being made in “The Mulatto” is that the white man is

⁸² Victor Séjour, “The Mullatto (1837)” in *Seeds of Rebellion in Plantation Fiction*, ed. Ed Piacentino High Point University, August 28th 2007, <
<http://www.southernspaces.org/2007/seeds-rebellion-plantation-fiction-victor-s%C3%A9jours-mulatto#section8>>
Accessed March 20th 2014. 12.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 16.

the un-virtuous character. Séjour memorializes the mulatto as a man who is justified in his acts of vengeance. The unspeakable crime committed against him and his wife warrants retaliation. Séjour's depiction of Georges at the end portrays him as half crazed. The reactions of Georges are entirely brought on by the acts of Alfred. Séjour highlights the hypocrisy inherent in a system where the white man calls the *métis* immoral and effeminate when in actual fact the complacent and immoral character is the white master. The *métis* are also the "products" of the white man as much as they are the children of black women. Alfred's character and actions mirror the character and actions of the *créole* Sylvain in *la Mulâtre Comme il y a Beaucoup de Blanches*. Sylvain and Alfred occupy the position of the lustful and degenerate character whose appetites brings on the death of all the characters. In contrast to the narratives of the pre-revolutionary years, debauchery is not an attribute of the *métis*.

Georges, 1843

In 1843 Alexandre Dumas, a mixed race Frenchman, wrote the novel *Georges*. In the usual Dumas fashion this novel is a story of adventure, intrigue and vengeance. However at the core of this story is racial tension. This novel is set on Ile de France which becomes British Mauritius in the middle of the plot. While this novel is not set directly in Saint Domingue it is set in a very similar colony and deals directly with the treatment of the *gens de couleur* society. Georges Munier is the son of a wealthy mulatto plantation owner. The story begins with the humiliation of Georges' father by the wealthy white Malmédie family. Despite their relative wealth, the status of the Muniers

is diminished because of their genealogy. Dumas places Georges in the unique position of being a mulatto with very light skin. The father of Georges, Pierre Munier is described as “slightly stooped, not by age, but by consciousness of his inferior position. His frizzy hair and his coppery skin marked him out immediately as a mulatto, one of those unfortunate colonial beings who cannot be forgiven for their color no matter how much success or wealth... they might attain.”⁸⁴ Georges is extremely angry by the way that his father is treated by the Malmédies and the way that Pierre shrinks back rather than fights. Georges goes to France where he works to perfect himself in every possible way. Georges becomes an intelligent, fit and attractive young man so that when he returns to Mauritius he draws considerable attention to himself. Georges has a goal of forever changing the discrimination that is rampant in Mauritius. However, Georges also faces the obstacle of being in love with Sara Malmédie a white woman. When the Malmédies refuse to give Sara in marriage to Georges, his anger grows. Georges ends up leading an insurrection against the white elites. The insurrection ends up failing and Georges is condemned to death. However, in true Dumas fashion Georges is rescued by his father and his brother Jacques who has become a slave-trading pirate. Georges and Sara end up sailing off with Pierre and Jacques to safer lands.

The character of Georges is endowed with the traits of a hero. Dumas shows that the character and the strength of Georges are learned and that his nature is

⁸⁴ Alexandre Dumas, *Georges* (New York: The Modern Library, 2008) Originally Published 1843, 18.

not unchangeably immoral. This novel pushes many of the boundaries of racial lines in that it suggests that a white woman would accept a *mulâtre* as a husband. In all of the previous novels and stories the racial tensions within love affairs end in tragedy. In the 1840s Dumas leaves his readers with the thought that perhaps these characters will live happily despite completely different family lineage.

Conclusion

The age of Revolution was a time of immense change in society. In France the overturning of the monarchy and the strict redefinition of gender enforced drastic changes in the public and private sphere. Likewise as Saint Domingue attempted to become more French it adopted French discourse on the position of women and also endowed its citizenry with either masculine or feminine characteristics. The revolutions brought on a whole new wave of thought that forced colonists and French people alike to re-evaluate the position of people of color. The 1820s was a time of great importance for the *métis* population in that it made room for a virtuous and heroic population. As the century continued and emancipation became probable the narratives regarding race, gender and *métissage* grew more and more daring. However, despite this re-casting of the *gens de couleur* and black population, racial categorization still marked French discourse. Professor Dina Sherzer notes that France “is a country which has constructed its identity on the concept of universality, and yet particularism is thriv-

ing.”⁸⁵ Echoes of the French colonial legacy can be heard in the modern French public sphere. Evidence of existing racial tension can be found in day to day news regarding French immigration and issues with the vast and decrepit *Banlieue* of Paris, filled with people of color. Additionally with the French presence in Algiers and the reliance on colonials in WWII France’s ‘colored’ population due to immigration is immense and therefore the *métis* population has grown exponentially. To be *metis* in France is still complex because of the binary ideology that has deep roots in the nation. Similar to the situation in the United States the remnants of race discrimination still exist in social and political structures and even individual xenophobia. Surveying the history of the changing roles of the black and *métis* populations along with the changing role of *métissage* in the colonies is invaluable to understanding and re-evaluating what it means to be French today.

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⁸⁵ Dina Sherzer, “French Colonial and Post-Colonial Hybridity: Condition metisse,” *Journal of European Studies* 28 (1998): 103, accessed March 22, 2011, doi: 10.1177/004724419802800108. 104