FROM “NATION” TO “RACE”: THE ORIGIN OF RACIAL CLASSIFICATION IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY THOUGHT

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Did the modern concept of race exist in the eighteenth century? It is certain, at least, that no eighteenth-century dictionary defined “race” in the modern sense of a subdivision of the human species, identified by a shared appearance and other inherited traits. Samuel Johnson’s definitions of “race” conformed with previous English dictionaries in confining the application of this term to family lines or breeds of animals. The same is true of the Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française, where “race” is defined in the first edition of 1694 as “lignée, lignage, extraction” in relation to either families or beasts. This definition was repeated under the heading “Race” in the Encyclopédie (vol. 13, 1765), where this term is closely linked with the idea of a “noble race” or family. The first recognizably modern definition of race does not appear until the 1835 sixth edition of the Dictionnaire: “Une multitude d’hommes qui sont originaires du même pays, et se ressemblent par les traits du visage, par la conformation extérieure” (A multitude of men who originate from the same country, and resemble each other by facial features and by exterior conformity). The introduction of a similar definition of “race” in any English dictionary came even later.

It is clear, however, that the dictionaries were lagging well behind the use of “race” in science and belles-lettres. Certainly, by the mid nineteenth century, “race” had become one of the most used, and abused, terms of ethnographic

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literature. As the Scottish anatomist Robert Knox declared in 1850, "Race or hereditary descent is everything; it stamps the man." But at what point did "race" gain this currency in popular and scientific discourse? Historians of science and anthropology have often noted that the idea of race began to emerge at some point in the eighteenth century, particularly in the work of Linnaeus and of authors who advocated polygenist theories of human origin. Yet the details of this origin, and the factors that promoted a new scientific and popular language of "race," have been little studied.

I will focus here on one central and revealing development in the history of racial classification—the changing meaning of the term "race," along with the associated terms "nation" and "tribe," from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment. This evolution is marked particularly by the use of the term "race" to describe ever larger populations. Travel literature of the seventeenth century contains a wealth of detailed description of innumerable "nations" in the non-European world. Writers of the Enlightenment, on the contrary, were more inclined to dismiss these national differences as insignificant, and to describe "Negroes," "Americans," or other continental groups as "races" with essentially common traits of body and mind. Significantly, "race" and "nation" derive from the same concept of "lineage" or "stock." Yet it was "race" that ultimately became the major term of ethnographic scholarship, while "nation" was reserved to describe the political and social divisions of Europe. "Tribe," in turn, was increasingly used to replace "nation" in descriptions of "savage" peoples outside of Europe.

In our century, the close relation of "race" and "nation" has proved to be an especially volatile source of political passion and conflict. The Nazi slogan of Volksstum affirmed the absolute identity of "race" and "nation." In much "New Right" ideology, as Etienne Balibar has pointed out, "the discourses of 'race' and 'nation' are never far apart." We will see, however, that the first stage towards this modern combination was the gradual separation of "race" and "nation" during the Enlightenment. It was only at a later stage, when "race" had been established as a term for the biological subdivision of humanity, that it was rejoined with "nation" in a new and explosive mixture.

In classical and Medieval literature, the major term in ethnographic descriptions was gens—a Latin word that is usually translated as "people" or "nation." Significantly, gens connotes a common ancestry or stock (hence its etymological link with genero, to beget or produce), reflecting an ancient way of understanding a nation not as a social or political unit, but as a group of people linked by origin. Gens was therefore close in meaning to "race," understood in the traditional sense of "lineage" or "extraction." Yet the belief that humanity is divided into only four or five main "races," as was claimed in the eighteenth century, represented a significant enlargement of the ancient idea of gens. Medieval and Renaissance authors commonly found as many "peoples" as there were cities or kingdoms. According to the Medieval encyclopedist Isidore of Seville, for example, every group in Europe and elsewhere had its own national temperament: "the Romans are serious, the Greeks light, the Africans crafty (uersipelles), the Gauls proud and fierce." Following an ancient tradition, Isidore attributed these variations of character to differences in the weather and land in each region.
Africans represented a special case, for they roughly constituted a single "race" even in the traditional sense of lineage. The Old Testament indicated that all Africans—along with the Arabs and Egyptians, in many accounts—were the common descendants of Ham, the disfavored son of Noah (Gen. 9:18–29). But Europeans were also keenly aware of differences between African peoples or "nations." In Omnium gentium mores (1520), later translated as The Fardle of Facions (1555), Johann Boemus divided the people of "Affrike" not only into "Ethiopians," and "Egyptians," but also into numerous clans including "Troglodytes," "Cynnamies," "Ryzophagi" (root eaters), "Spermophagi" (seed eaters), "Illophagi" (fruit eaters), and "Ichthiophagi" (fish eaters). In later literature, there was not even agreement on whether all "Africans" were black. In his much cited compilation of Odorato Lopez's travels in Africa, Philippo Pigafetta described the Ethiopians as "of divers colours, as white, blacke, and a middle colour betwenee both: they are of a very good stature, and have a good countenance." Following Lopez, Pigafetta generally portrayed Africa not as a continent of primitive savages, but as a region of diverse and despotic monarchies, each with a complex hierarchy of nobles, priests, and royal officials.

Other accounts of this continent stressed its extremes of "bestial" degradation and partial civilization. This diversity was a major theme in John Ogilby's Africa (1670), a huge collection of previous travelers' reports. According to this work, some "nations" like the Kabangos of west central Africa and the Hottentots of southern Africa were "scarce a degree above Beasts." But Ogilby described the "metropolis" of "the Kingdom of Guinea" as a city of almost European sophistication: it is "so large, that not onely the Kings keep their Courts and Royal Residence there, but also there is a University, where Scolars Commence, and Priests receive their Orders and several Dignities." The Abyssinians, though "all Black," are especially praised as "quick spirited, and lovers of Learning and Learned Men." "The Abyssinians, yea the very Women, are diligent and zealous of Literature, taking great delight in the study of Scriptures."

Native Americans were less often described as a single "race," for there was no agreement that these peoples formed a single stock. Although the exact origin of New World peoples was a great mystery, most scholars agreed that the Americas had been populated by a number of different nations. In De omnium gentium americanarum dissertatio (1642), Hugo Grotius argued that North Americans came from Scandinavia, while Mexicans derived from Ethiopia and Peruvians from China. Another Dutch scholar, Johan De Laet, criticized Grotius's theory, and proposed instead that the New World was originally inhabited by Scythians, Spaniards, Polynesians, Welshmen (as previously claimed by David Powell), and several other nations. Only such a mixed origin, De Laet contended, could explain how "the vast multitudes of men in America differ so much in their geniuses, languages, customs and morals."

Europeans of the Renaissance and seventeenth century certainly viewed New World peoples as uniformly "savage," exceptions being made for the relatively "civilized" peoples of Mexico and Peru. Yet, as in the case of Africa, writers generally showed a lively interest in the differences between the appearances, government, and manners of various American "nations." In Historia natural y moral de las Indias (1590), José de Acosta made virtually no generalized claims about the character and appearance of indigenous Americans. He distinguished sharply between three kinds of nations in the

European explorers certainly imagined themselves as superior to all the peoples they encountered. But this sense of superiority was founded not on a race hierarchy, but on the belief that Europeans had achieved a level of civilization unknown in other nations. African and American peoples were scorned as "beastly" (or often as "rustic") to the extent that they appeared to fall short of European ideas of urbanity and sophistication. Comparisons with animals were not meant to indicate that the human race was ranked in a fixed scale determined by God or nature. The preoccupying subject of ethnographic literature was, rather, the relative sophistication of the political and social systems established in other countries. And this awareness of "national" differences outweighed anything approaching a modern tendency to identify a particular skin-color or physiognomy with a "race."

By the late eighteenth century, however, generalized descriptions of "racial" appearance and character had become one of the dominating features of travel literature and "histories" of the non-European world. Eighteenth-century authors became increasingly dissatisfied with the kind of history that distinguished finely between the customs and institutions of various nations. Such an approach, claimed William Robertson in The History of America (1770), entered into impertinent and tedious detail:

In a general history of America, it would be highly improper to describe the condition of each petty community, or to investigate every minute circumstance which contributes to form the character of its members. Such an inquiry would lead to details of immeasurable and tiresome extent. The qualities belonging to the people of all the different tribes have such a near resemblance, that they may be painted with the same features.

Rather than discuss the nations of America individually, as in earlier works, Robertson devoted himself to describing the general physiognomy and intellectual capacity of the whole "Indian race" from Canada to Cape Horn. He regarded even the Mexicans and Peruvians, the most "civilized" of New World cultures, as manifesting essentially the same brutal characteristics as the most "savage" of the American peoples. In a work of the same year, Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes (1770), the Abbé Raynal indicated similarly that tribal variations among Africans were insignificant compared with their general sameness: "the most discerning inquirers have observed, that the difference of conditions did not produce in this people varities as distinguishable as we find in the states which are situated between the Elbe and the Tiber, which are nearly of the same extent of country as the Niger and the Coanza. The farther men depart from Nature,
the less must they resemble one another.” There was some disagreement about whether the Americans or the Africans were more diversified. The French scientist Buffon argued that Africans were more various than native Americans. By contrast, Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin generalized broadly about the character of the “Negro race,” yet seemed more conscious of linguistic and cultural diversity among “Indian nations.” As in Raynal’s statement, however, Europeans of the Enlightenment were widely convinced that their own national diversity was far more significant than any comparable distinction among non-European “races.”

How do we explain this generalizing trend in European writing during the eighteenth century—this shift from a fascination with national difference to a preoccupation with “race”? Some modern scholars have argued that the doctrine of “race” was contrived deliberately in order to justify slavery and imperialism. This argument, however, ignores the extent to which the abolitionist movement itself adopted a “racial” outlook on non-Europeans. And not a few authors, such as the Abbé Raynal and the English scientist Charles White, presented Africans and other groups as biologically inferior to whites, yet denounced slavery with an energy that cannot be dismissed as merely hypocritical. Nevertheless, even without a conscious design to contrive a convenient ideology of “race,” the general influence of imperialism and slavery deprived non-European peoples of their national identities and made those differences less important to Europeans. As William Temple wrote in his 1672 Essay upon the Original and Nature of Government, Europeans had first discovered an “infinite variety and number of nations in Afric and America . . . distinguished by their several names, and living under their several Kings and Princes.” But these various nations had been “swallowed up by greater empires.” Particularly in the Americas, indigenous national territories were obliterated as all peoples became subject to a common colonial administration. Everywhere in the New World, native peoples presented a similar hindrance to the westward momentum of European civilization. And everywhere Europeans regarded these peoples as commonly “savage”—a judgment that seemed particularly accurate following the destruction of the most recognizably “civilized” cultures in Mexico and Peru.

Well before the emergence of the formal doctrine of “race,” Africans were losing their national identities to the brutal and mechanistic process of the slave trade. Slave traders and the planters did have some interest in attending to national differences between Africans. Certain peoples, such as the “Cormantines” of the Gold Coast, were considered too stubborn and rebellious to make good slaves. Wise planters knew that the wrong mixture of ethnic groups in the field could be a source of tension. In general, however, the process of shipping and marketing slaves literally stripped the signs of national difference from the bodies of Africans. In 1737, the former slave-trader John Atkins remarked in passing that “Slave-Cargoes are a Compound of different Nations.” But Atkins paid no attention to these differences when it came to describing how slaves were bought and prepared for the Atlantic voyage. Slavery subjected Africans of diverse cultures, languages, and levels of “civilization” to a uniform system of debasement.

On the plantations of America, authors considered black people only in the uprooted and dehumanized condition of slavery. In Notes on the State of
Virginia (1782), for example, Thomas Jefferson theorized about the temperament and capacities of “Negroes” solely on what he observed of his slaves. He showed little awareness of ethnic diversity among blacks, rejecting consideration of African culture as irrelevant. Africans themselves were forced to abandon their national tongues for a common Creole in order to communicate and socialize. Most obviously, defenders of the plantocracy saw the advantage of dismissing ethnic divisions among Africans as insignificant compared with their general “racial” inferiority. In a now infamous outburst of racial hatred in The History of Jamaica (1774), Edward Long observed that “in so vast a continent as that of Africa, and in so great a variety of climates and provinces, we might expect to find a proportionable diversity among the inhabitants, in regards to their qualifications of body and mind.” In fact, he went on, “a general uniformity runs through all these various regions of people; so that, if any difference be found, it is only in degrees of the same qualities.”

By Long’s time, moreover, advocates of slavery could appeal to the “scientific” theory that human “races” formed a hierarchy, with “Negroes,” “Ameri-
cans,” and other groups well inferior to the Europeans. As recent historians have indicated, this biological doctrine of race invested traditional “folk” prejudice with a new intellectual authority. Linnaeus, Buffon, Blumenbach, and other scholars converted the scattered misconceptions and antagonisms of traders and travelers into coherent systems. Before these authors, “racism” could exist as little more than a visceral distrust of physical difference, crudely expressed in degrading images and outbursts of disgust. Only with the rise of racial science could “racism” take the form of an “objective” and self-conscious conviction in the radical inferiority of certain visibly different groups.

Turning to the first uses of “race” in scientific literature, we notice, most obviously, an increasing willingness to subject the human species to the same kind of biological analysis and classification previously used only for plants and animals. As Johann Friedrich Blumenbach remarked in 1790, the human species had been generally omitted from the study of “natural history” until the early eighteenth century. The great naturalists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—Gesner, Aldrovandus, Jonston, Ray—had “embraced the history of all three natural kingdoms; everything, in fact, with the single and solitary exception of the natural history of man himself.” Only very late in the seventeenth century did some scientists consider the possibility of dividing humans into “varieties,” or “tribes,” or “races” (the terminology was still uncertain). In a short article published in an April 1684 issue of Journal des sçavans, the French scientist François Bernier distinguished between four “Especes ou Races d’hommes”—Europeans (including Persians and North Africans), black Africans, Chinese, and Lapps. He dithered about whether to call Americans a different group from Europeans and dwelled largely on the varying beauty of women in different regions. G. W. Leibniz later proposed a similar division, observing that the human species “has been altered by the different climates, as we see beasts and plants change their nature, improve or degenerate.”

By arguing that humans were no less subject to variation than plants or animals, and should be classified in an analogous way, naturalists threatened humanity’s previously lofty isolation at the top of the scala naturae. Leibniz clearly
did not intend to degrade humanity. In a critique of John Locke's 1690 *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, he strongly defended the "time-honoured" definition of the human species as "animal rationalis," arguing that all humans—"Negroes, Chinese, and American Indians"—were divided from the rest of nature by the exclusive possession of "reason." But Leibniz was prompted to this defense by Locke's argument that "reason" was no more "essential" to humans than other attributes. And it was Locke's position that increasingly gained acceptance among naturalists and authors of the coming century. In his monumental work of taxonomy, *Systema naturae* (1735), the Swedish naturalist Carl von Linné divided the species "Homo" into four "varietate" (Europaeus, Americanus, Asiaticus, Africanus) just as all other species were divided. He only briefly noted the human distinction of "reason." In the tenth edition of the *Systema* (1758), he invented a new term for our species, "Homo sapiens," and entirely omitted "reason" from his explanation of this term. Humans were not *animal rationalis*, but "animal flens, ridens, melodum, docile, judicans, admirans, sapientissimum." By describing humans as only "sapientissimum," most wise, Linné helped to justify his classification of the human species as merely one part of the natural system, legitimately classified in the same way as flora and fauna.

Some naturalists believed that Linné had gone too far in incorporating humanity into the natural kingdom. Most notably, his famous adversary Buffon defended the uniqueness and dignity of human reason in the third volume of *Histoire naturelle* (1749). But Buffon himself proposed to treat only "the exterior man, and to do the history of his body." With humanity's "interior" or spiritual nature safely set aside, Buffon went ahead to examine the "Variété dans l'espèce humaine," much as Linné had done. According to the nineteenth-century anthropologist Pierre Flourens, Buffon was the first author to examine humanity as a "species" rather than as an "individual." This praise echoed Buffon's own statement that he meant to study not just the anatomical organization of the individual, but also the whole "species" as divided into subgroups. Most important for our purposes, it was Buffon who first made systematic use of the term "race" to denominate these groups, elevating this old word to a new, eminent status in scientific nomenclature.

Buffon's preference for "race" over Linné's "variety" was not accidental: as is well known, Buffon disliked Linné's division of nature into static and "arbitrary" genera and species. Theoretically, Linné allowed for some plasticity at the subspecies level of *varietate*. Yet the rigid tables of *Systema naturae* give little indication that there is any room for change or development among the human varieties that he listed. "Race," on the contrary, suggested a family lineage of animals or humans that was by no means permanent or inflexible, but formed a veritable "history" of traits passed down through generations in innumerable different forms. This was precisely Buffon's point about "la variété humaine." Negroes, Americans, Lapps, Orientals, Europeans, and so forth represented particular stocks whose members, like those of great families, showed a considerable degree of resemblance, yet were in a state of constant variation. We might also note that the associated meanings of "race" were conveniently ambivalent. As previously used, "race" denoted the blood-lines of animals, a bestial connotation that suited Buffon's presentation of Lapps or Negroes as having "degenerated" as the result of harsh climates, poor diet, and brutal cus-
Yet "race" also commonly denoted a "noble race" or upper social caste in both French and Spanish. There was no dishonor or inconsistency in calling Europeans a superior "race."

Although roughly equivalent to Linné's *varietate*, therefore, Buffon's term "race" was meant to stress the changing nature of human difference, particularly in response to environment. For Buffon, moreover, the difference between "race" and "species" was only one of degree. Following the English botanist John Ray, Buffon argued that a "species" was only a great natural lineage whose members could produce fertile offspring. A "race" was a lineage too. But whereas the similarity between members of the same species was extremely marked and obvious (erect stature, hands, speech, and so forth), the similarities of "race" were less marked and more changeable. When, indeed, racial differences struck Buffon as especially marked, he created a new "species." For instance, Buffon observed that Lapps and other Arctic peoples were so deformed and degraded that "it seems that it is particular species in which all the individuals are stunted."

Buffon's method of human classification was thus highly inexact, relying on general impressions rather than on any precise "scientific" measurement. With his rival Linné particularly in mind, he criticized previous taxonomists for using minute criteria such as the stamens of plants and the teeth of animals to sort them into species. One should not have to trek into the wilds "microscope à la main" in order to tell one species from another. If Linné had depended on rather more obvious differences, Buffon protested, he would have avoided the absurdity of classifying the rhinoceros as a variety of elephant or snakes as a species of amphibian. Rejecting any methodology that classified according to a single criterion, Buffon argued that we must take into account the whole "ensemble" of traits. In classifying humans, we should focus not just on skin-color, but also compare stature, physiognomy, hair-type, intelligence, and the whole configuration of physical and mental features.

Below "race" was yet a further sub-division—"nation" or "peuple." The difference between "nation" and "race" was, again, only one of degree, and this caused confusion among some of Buffon's readers. In 1762, the German traveler Timotheus Merzahn von Klingstöd protested that Buffon was quite wrong to class the Lapps, Samoyeds, Eskimos, and other northern peoples as members of the same "nation," for they lived far apart and possessed very different cultures and languages. Buffon replied in his 1777 "Additions" to *Histoire naturelle* that he had not claimed that these peoples belonged to the same "nation." He had argued that they belonged to the same "race." Klingstöd's criticism was ill founded, he said, because he had misunderstood Buffon's terminology: "I have taken here, as one sees, the word *race* in the broadest sense, and M. Klingstedt takes it, on the contrary, in the narrowest sense; hence his misjudged criticism." Traditionally, as we have seen, "race" was taken as virtually equivalent to "nation" or "people." This is what Buffon calls Klingstöd's "narrow" sense. But in the new "broad" sense, introduced by Buffon, race had come to denominate groups of people inhabiting huge regions or continents. There could be considerable "national" variation within the race. But only when these variations became sufficiently pronounced, as with Hottentots and Tartars, did Buffon consider creating a new "race."
Throughout his writing, Buffon’s terminology is maddeningly inconsistent. He often seems to equate “race” with “espèce,” which doubles in French as “kind” and “species.” He also occasionally slips back into the old meaning of “race” as equivalent to a single nation joined by lineage. But it was Buffon’s new “broad” use of “race,” and his general hierarchy of species-race-nation, that most influenced later writers. This is the hierarchy cited, for example, by the abolitionist James Ramsay in a treatise of 1784: “The nations into which each race is divided, with the common attributes of race, have less apparent, yet still sufficient marks to distinguish them from others, and connect them together.” Buffon’s method was also adopted by Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, now often considered the founder of physical anthropology. In *De generis humani varietate nativa* (1775), Blumenbach generally relied on Linnaeus’ term “varietate.” In the 1795 third edition of this treatise, however, Blumenbach generally switched from “varietate” to “gens,” a term now invariably translated into German and other languages as “race.” Below the level of “gens,” Blumenbach identified what he called “national varieties” within his division of five great races — Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, American, and Malay.

As Blumenbach himself indicated, this division of races closely followed the geographical division of the earth into continents. He noted that Linnaeus was “following common geography” in finding four races. He also claimed, however, that scholars of Linnaeus’ time were greatly restricted in knowing “only four parts of the terraqueous globe.” Discoveries since that time had modified both the geographical map and the map of human races. Blumenbach added a “Malay” race due to James Cook’s discovery of eastern Australia and Oceania during his voyage of 1768–71. With the 1741 discovery of Alaska and the Bering Strait, there was good evidence that all American peoples derived from a single stock of Mongol travelers, and could be counted as a single indivisible “race.” As is vividly evident in Blumenbach’s work, the Enlightenment imagination had become dominated by the picture of great continental land masses, each, apparently, with its own color of human. The first rough continental maps had been made long before in the fifteenth century, the Age of Discovery. But general atlases of the world were not cheaply available to the public until the late seventeenth century. And it was not until the work of map-makers like Delisle and Bourguignon d’Anville that the continental outlines were delineated with any accuracy and consistency. It was this preoccupation with the *continental* division of humanity that restrained authors from identifying certain groups, such as Anglo-Saxons, “Aryans,” or Jews, as distinct “races.” Blumenbach and other scientists commented that Jews seemed physically distinct from European Christians. But the diffusion of Jews across Europe was inconsistent with a scheme that allowed only a single race per continent. For the time being, Jews remained only a “nation,” physically influenced by their Middle-Eastern heritage, their distinct customs, and their harsh life in European ghettos.

During the same era, the term “nation” was also gaining new meanings, and a new importance in political literature. Historians have widely claimed that the modern concept of a “nation,” with its associated sentiment of “nationalism,” did not exist before the eighteenth century, or even before the French Revolution. But this conclusion is valid only with considerable qualification. A roughly modern definition of “nation” appears as early as the first edition of the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie*...
Frangaise (1694): “Tous les habitants d’un mesme Estat, d’un mesme pays, qui vivent sous les mesmes loix & usent de mesme langage &c” (All the inhabitants of the same State, of the same country, who live under the same laws and use the same language, etc.). As we have seen, moreover, European travelers of the seventeenth century were sharply aware of “national” differences, which they associated with the different political systems, languages, and temperaments of various peoples. Nevertheless, recent scholars have rightly maintained that Europeans before the mid-eighteenth century identified more strongly with their monarch, their religion, or their native region than with the abstract concept of their “nation.” Only in the Enlightenment did Europeans begin to construct “imagined communities,” to cite Benedict Anderson’s happy term. This mental image of a community of like-minded individuals, sharing a “general will” or a common national “soul,” was made possible by the expansion of print-culture, which stabilized national languages and gave wide access to a common literary tradition.69

The emergent concept of the “nation” as a linguistic and cultural community was of considerable importance to the concurrent rise of a racial worldview. This significance is made clear in David Hume’s influential essay “Of National Characters,” first published in 1748. Hume’s main objective was to refute the ancient belief that the character and appearance of different nations varied according to climate and other external factors. This theory, he argued, could not explain why peoples living under virtually the same conditions—such as the ancient Athenians and Thebans, or the eighteenth-century inhabitants of St. James and Wapping—so clearly differed in temperament. Hume’s conclusion was that “national character” was formed not by climate or any natural difference, but by “moral” causes. By this he meant differences of government, economy, diplomacy, profession, and so forth—all those factors that we now call “culture” or “social environment.”

Such merely cultural factors, in Hume’s view, had nothing to do with the essential nature of peoples, and produced only changeable and superficial features of national temperament. Yet he also came to suspect the existence of deeper, more permanent traits in human nature—traits linked not to “moral” causes or perhaps even to climate, but to essential determinations of “nature” that distinguished the peoples of entire continents. As he wrote in a note appended to the 1753 version of this essay, “I am apt to suspect the negroes, and in general all the other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites.” Commenting on the paucity of “arts” and “sciences” outside of Europe, he concluded that “Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen in so many countries and ages, if nature had not made an original distinction betwixt these breeds of men.”70

For Hume, therefore, “nation” was not a biological sub-category of race or “breed,” as it was for Buffon or Blumenbach. Only race constituted a real difference embedded in “nature.” Other authors followed Hume’s example in distinguishing between what Voltaire called “nature” and “moeurs”—traits of character connected with race and those implanted solely by education and government.71 Jefferson distinguished between “racial” and cultural influences on black slaves and native Americans in Notes on the State of Virginia.72 In a pivotal discussion of nationhood in Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit (1784–91), J. G. Herder
denied the existence of biological "races" altogether. But Herder maintained that ways of thinking and feeling were profoundly molded by the particular language and tradition of each "nation."73 What these authors had in common was the belief that the concept of "race" should be wholly separated from that of "nation." "Race" stood for a biological division created by environment or originally established by God. "Nation" designated a heritage of social customs and beliefs. Both terms, we should add, had become increasingly estranged from their common, original sense of "lineage." As the term "race" was now generally used, as in the work of Blumenbach, it specifically denoted visible differences of physiology rather than a common stock.74

For the colonialized and enslaved peoples of the non-European world, these adjustments of terminology had another major ramification. In ancient Latin, "natio" was most often used to describe groups that the Romans considered barbaric.75 But with the Enlightenment redefinition of "nation" as a coherent tradition of beliefs and customs, often identified with a printed heritage, many scholars denied that "savage" communities could be called "nations" at all. As Buffon wrote, "any nation where there is neither rule, nor law, nor master, nor regular society is less a nation than a tumultuous assembly of independent barbarians, each obeying only their own particular passions."76 As we have considered, late eighteenth-century historians and travel writers increasingly dismissed "national" variations among Africans and Americans as insignificant. And this dismissal was linked to the feeling that mere bands of "individuals" without "government" or "laws" (of a European sort) did not merit the now honorific title of "nation." Loose assemblies of "savages" were best called "tribes."

Like the words "race" and "nation," "tribe" was no new coinage. Rather, it was an exceedingly old term that gained a new meaning and prominence in Western discourse during the Enlightenment. "Tribe" derives from the Latin tribus, the term for the three early peoples of Rome—the Sabin, Latin and Etruscan “tribes.” In the Vulgate Bible, St. Jerome borrowed this term to denominate the twelve “tribes” (אָבָנָה) of Israel.77 Accordingly, “tribe” was ordinarily used in the Renaissance and seventeenth century to describe the “tribes” of Middle Eastern people such as the Jews or, occasionally, the Arabs and North African Moors.78 The transferal of this term to native American people had a direct connection with this older use. Many scholars had argued that the Americans were derived in part from the Scythians and other peoples of the Middle East. In 1650, two scholars, Menassah ben Israel and Thomas Thorowgood, wrote books claiming that the Americans were descended from the ten lost tribes of Israel, a legend preserved even today in the Book of Mormon.79 This story was also reechoed in 1775 by the English trader James Adair, who pointed out that the Americans, like the ancient Israelites, were divided into “tribes.”80 This term also gained a strongly negative connotation. Samuel Johnson noted in his 1755 Dictionary that “tribe” was “often used in contempt”—as in Augustan quips about the “scribbling tribe” of Grub Street. Such contemptuous associations (possibly with anti-Semitic overtones) suggest why late eighteenth-century authors increasingly chose this word to name “uncivilised” and especially nomadic cultures. As Cornélius de Pauw wrote in his popular Recherches philosophiques sur les Américains (1768–69), "The nature of savage life necessarily brings about the creation of Tribes, & these Tribes are all enemies of each other; as we observe among the Tartars, the Arabs, the
Abyssinians, the Negroes, the Kaffirs: indeed among all nomadic nations which have dispersed in hordes. Unlike "nation," "tribe" meant only a loose family or collection of individuals headed not by a "king" but a "chief." And it was in this sense that the term began to be defined in early nineteenth-century dictionaries.

This new application of "tribe" corresponded with the more general reconfiguration of the ethnographic terms that we have traced from the late Renaissance. Not all authors adopted the new terminology with the same alacrity or consistency. Yet over the period of a century, "race" gradually mutated from its original sense of a people or single nation, linked by origin, to its later sense of a biological subdivision of the human species. "Nation" began to be used as a subdivision of "race" or, even more commonly, as a term denoting a cultural or political group of a certain sophistication. And "tribe" was lifted from its originally specialized meaning in the Bible to replace "nation" in descriptions of "savage" peoples. These changes, as we have seen, derived in part from the rise of a new science of human taxonomy. Enlightenment authors increasingly viewed *homo sapiens* as only one segment of the natural kingdom, subject to the same kind of analysis and classification previously used for the lower species. But the scientists, themselves dependent on the reports of travelers, also reflected a growing tendency of Europeans to dismiss differences among non-European communities as inconsequential. Influenced by the homogenizing pressure of imperialism and the slave-trade, their imaginations filled the vision of a great world map, European writers came to rely on generalized impressions of whole continental populations. Their own deepening sense of "national" identity, constructed from print-culture, made all non-European divisions seem trivial and uninteresting.

But this, of course, is only the beginning of the story. An inherently inexact and ambiguous term, "race" would continue to evolve and to accommodate a wide range of ideologies and political objectives. A major development in the mid-nineteenth century was the formidable and grotesquely fruitful remarriage of "race" and "nation." As Boyd C. Shafer wrote in his history of nationalism, "from the mid-nineteenth century, racial interpretations of all aspects of human behaviour multiplied and became a standard explanation for the establishment of nations and for the kind of nation racialists thought ought to be established." Pseudoscientific studies of "race," similarly, focused on racial differences between ever smaller groups. British, Irish, Saxons, Aryans, Jews, even "Americans" (that is, citizens of the United States) were all, at one time or another, vaunted or condemned as "races." The reunion of "race" and "nation" had such important consequences because of the way these terms had been redefined during the Enlightenment. "Race" now meant more than just a "lineage" or even a variation of the human species induced by climate or custom. It meant an innate and fixed disparity in the physical and intellectual make-up of different peoples. "Nation," in turn, was more than a group of people living under the same government. It was the very "soul" of personal identity, the very lifeblood churning through an individual speaking a particular dialect in one of Europe's innumerable regions. From the often violent coupling of "race" and "nation," re-fashioned in these new forms, were spawned the most virulent forms of nineteenth-century racism, and finally the political barbarities of our own century.
The last World War and subsequent calamities brought these dangers brutally to our attention. Yet we have still not freed ourselves completely from the disruptive and deluding legacy of Enlightenment racial science. The question remains, indeed, whether Buffon’s recoinage of “race” should be finally relegated to the dustbin of dangerous and useless terms. According to an increasing number of scholars, the subdivision of humankind into discrete racial types is nothing more than a “whited sepulchre,” and is based on a merely arbitrary selection of inherited traits and the roughest forms of statistically averaging. We could perhaps better speak of the “racialising” of peoples—the subjection of populations to scientifically invalid forms of classification based on an arbitrary selection of phenotypical or genetic differences. In considering the history of such “racialising,” we should, at least, see that it is by no means a permanent or unavoidable way of understanding humankind. Late Renaissance perceptions of the Other, while certainly distorted by religious prejudice and a contempt for “savagery,” lacked a real foundation in racial classification. The racial Weltanschauung that slowly emerged in the eighteenth century took shape under the social and intellectual forces of that time—an expanding imperial order, a new science, and the creation of a new, secular myth of human origin and human nature. Having found in our time that “race” was in fact humanity’s “most dangerous myth,” we can finally recover, in a new form, an appreciation for the vast and dynamic complexity of human difference.

NOTES


2. “Extraction, lignée, lignage; ce qui se dit tant des ascendans que des descendans d’une même famille: quand elle est noble, ce mot est synonyme à naissance.” (Encyclopédie: ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts, et métiers, ed. Jean le Rond d’Alembert and Denis Diderot, 35 vols. [Paris: 1751–80], 13:740). This article is by the Chevalier de Jaucourt.

3. In the nineteenth century, no edition of either Webster’s or Chamber’s Dictionary defines “race” in a modern way, despite the popularity of this term in Victorian science and ethnography. Finally, in the first edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, volume 8 (1910), two definitions of “race” authorize our familiar modern sense of this word: “A group of several tribes or peoples, forming a distinct ethnic stock” and “One of the great divisions of mankind, having certain physical peculiarities in common.”


7. The OED indicates that the idea of a common family or “race” usually predominated over the idea of a political unit in early uses of the word “nation.” This was true as late as Johnson’s *Dictionary*, which cited Sir William Temple on the meaning of this word: “A nation properly signifies a great number of families, derived from the same blood, born in the same country, and living under the same government and civil constitution” (*An Essay upon the Original and Nature of Government*, in *Works*, 4 vols. (London, 1757), 1:41). On the etymology and history of the term “nation,” see Boyd C. Shafer, *Faces of Nationalism: New Realities and Old Myths* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), 14.


9. In the introduction to his translation of Leo Africanus’s *The History and Description of Africa* (1600), 3 vols. (London: Hakluyt Society, 1896), 1:20, John Pory argued that the five peoples of Africa—the “Caffres,” Abyssinians, Egyptians, Arabians, and Moors—all derived from Ham. Sir Thomas Browne attacked the opinion that the blackness of Africans was a mark of the Curse of Ham in *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (1646), bk. 6, ch. 11. He pointed out that non-blacks, such as Egyptians and Arabs, were also in the line of Ham and that blackness was connected in no essential way to beauty or ugliness. See *Works*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes, 6 vols. (London: Faber & Gwyer, 1928), 3:242–47.

10. See *The Fardle of Facions*, tr. William Wareman (London, 1555), fols. Evii‘–Fvii‘. Boemus did cite the legend of Ham. But he also conjectured that the Ethiopians were “the originall of manne” (fol. Bvi‘). His division of Africans was echoed by William Frat in *The Discrission of the Countrye Afbrique* (London, 1554; facs. rpt. Delmar, NY: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1974), ch. 6, fols. Hvii‘–Lvi‘.


21. A consistent contrast between “rusticall” and “ciuill” peoples is particularly notable in Leo Africanus’s *The History and Description of Africa*.

22. As Anthony J. Barker has argued in *The African Link*, comparisons between blacks and apes were far less common in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century than some scholars have suggested. This thesis is actually based on a “few unstressed passages in a tiny fraction of work on Africa” (197). Such comparisons did become far more common in the late eighteenth century, as in Edward Long’s *History of Jamaica* (1775).


26. Compare Jefferson’s description of blacks and native Americans in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1782), in *The Complete Jefferson*, ed. Saul K. Padover (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1943), 630–40 and 661–66. In his splendid “A Narrative of the Late Massacres in Lancaster County, of a Number of Indians” (1764), Franklin castigated his contemporaries for failing to recognize that native Americans were divided into “nations” just like Europeans. See *Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1987), 546. But Franklin was more inclined to treat all blacks as a single race in “A Conversation on Slavery,” *Writings*, 649, and in a letter of December 17, 1763, to John Waring, *Writings*, 800.


28. See Barker, *The African Link*, 194–96. William Wilberforce was typical of abolitionists in acknowledging “the want of civilization,” though rejecting the belief that these characteristics, such as “the want of civilization,” resulted from any *innate* inferiority. See *An Appeal to the Religion, Justice, and Humanity of the Inhabitants of the British Empire* (London, 1823), 9.

29. See Raynal, *History of the East and West Indies*, 2:312. On Charles White and his opposition to slavery, see Curtin, *The Image of Africa*, 45. Other authors who both declared the inferiority of blacks yet opposed slavery include Atkins, Jefferson, Cuvier, Prichard, and Knox.
34. The Complete Jefferson, 661–66. Winthrop D. Jordan notes how laws in eighteenth-century America that singled out “Negroes” for certain prohibitions had the tendency of intensifying the feeling that blacks, slaves and non-slaves, were a distinct and alien group. See Jordan, White over Black (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1968), 80–81.
36. See Smedley, Race in North America, 171; Miles, Racism, 40.
39. “A été alterée par les differens climats, comme nous voyons, que les bêtes & les plantes chagnt de naturel, & deviennent meilleures, ou degenerent,” (Otium Hanoverium, sive Miscellenia (Lipsae, 1718), 37–38).
42. Jonathan Swift's depiction of anthropoid "Yahoos" in part 4 of Gulliver's Travels also comes to mind as a work that, in the post-Lockean tradition, troubled the old conception of humanity as animal rationalis. As shown by Laura Brown in “Reading Race and Gender: Jonathan Swift,” Eighteenth-Century Studies 23 (1990): 425–43, this episode also utilizes a number of myths about primitive “nations” in order to disrupt his reader’s vanity about the supposed superiority of European civilization and the greatness of human reason.
45. Pierre Flourens, Eloge historique de Jean-Frédérick Blumenbach (1847), in Blumenbach, Anthropological Treatises, 55.


51. “Il semble que ce soit une espèce particulière dont tous les individus ne sont que des avortons.” (Oeuvres complètes, 3:146).


53. Ibid., 19.

54. Ibid., 13.


56. “J’ai pris ici, comme l’on voit, le mot de race dans le sens le plus étendu, et M. Klingstedt [sic] le prend, au contraire, dans le sens le plus étroit: ainsi sa critique porte à faux.” (“Additions” to *Histoire naturelle*, in Oeuvres complètes, 4:649).


60. *De generis humani varietate nativa*, 3d ed. (1795), in *Anthropological Treatises*, 224.

61. Ibid., 267.

62. Ibid., 150.

63. On the importance of the discovery of the Bering Strait, see Duhet, *Anthropologie et histoire*, 263.


72. Jefferson indicated that many of the supposed "racial" traits of native Americans, such as their supposed lack of "ardour," were only the product of their hunting and nomadic culture. But he was less willing to make such allowances for blacks, whom he portrayed as mentally inferior by nature rather than by education or culture. Compare *The Complete Jefferson*, 605 and 664.


74. See *De generis humani varietate nativa*, 3d ed. (1795), in *Anthropological Treatises*, 231, where Blumenbach counts Hungarians and Lapps as members of different "races" even while admitting that they derive from the same original stock.


76. "Toute nation où il n'y a ni règle, ni loi, ni maître, ni société habituelle, est moins une nation qu'un assemblage tumultueux d'hommes barbares et indépendants, qui n'obéissent qu'à leurs passions particulières," (Histoire naturelle, in *Oeuvres complètes*, 4:636).

77. See OED.

78. See Leo Africanus, *History and Description of Africa*, 130 and 142.


83. Departing from previous editions, for example, *Le grand dictionnaire de l'Academie française* (6th ed., 1835), cites "Une tribu de sauvages" as one of its illustrations for "tribu."


TRADING PLACES

Colonization and Slavery in Eighteenth-Century French Culture

MADELEINE DOBIE

Cornell University Press
ITHACA AND LONDON
This book is about the cultural imprint of French colonization in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It considers how the establishment of offshore colonies that produced valuable tropical commodities and relied on the labor of enslaved Africans registered in works of literature and philosophy and in the sphere of material culture. To be more precise, it explores the absence of representation of these colonial outposts over the period stretching from the inauguration of the colonial venture in the early sixteen hundreds to the closing decades of the eighteenth century.

In much current literary and historical scholarship, power is located in the production of discourse. In the case of colonial power, Edward Said’s seminal book, *Orientalism*, has furnished an influential model for thinking about the interrelationships between power, knowledge, and representation. But relations of domination are not always mediated by discourse. They can also be grounded in silence, ignorance, and various modes of cultural censorship and repression. Taking a step back from the power-discourse model elaborated by Michel Foucault and later applied by Said, in this book I explore not only the corpus of representations generated by Old Regime French colonialism in the Americas and the Indian Ocean but also—and primarily—the resounding silence in which this expansion was enveloped.

A literary history of a “two-theme” or unactualized discourse might perhaps seem to be a rather strange endeavor. What I in fact examine in this book is not only the overall absence of representation but also the various detours and displacements by means of which silence spoke. Notably, I explore the complex relationship between the relative invisibility of the colonial world during a period that lasted until around 1770, and two related but far more
prominent eighteenth-century thematic fascination with "Oriental" culture, and the array of discourses devoted to the relationship between "civilized" Europeans and "primitive" societies exemplified by the indigenous peoples of the Americas. The first two parts of this book describe broad-based representational asymmetries between the limited representation of the colonial world, with its problematic dimensions of slavery and mestizaje, and the fascination invested in these two adjacent themes. It also examines specific texts and material objects in which, through processes of narrative digression or conceptual substitution, representation of the colonial world is transposed onto other geocultural contexts.

I argue that if the colonial world was sparsely represented, this was to a great extent because it was unrepresentable. During the Old Regime there was a strong cultural dissonance to portray colonial slavery, a system considered economically advantageous, but which raised moral questions. I also point to a number of other obstacles to representation, notably the absence of an established discursive framework for depicting the new diasporic environment of the colonial Americas.

Many academic studies published since the 1990s have merged the disciplines of literary analysis and social and cultural history. This book also attempts another, less familiar mode of interdisciplinarity by juxtaposing literature and material culture. This broadening of disciplinary perspective has seemed necessary for two reasons. One is that surveying a range of cultural media brings into focus patterns that are less obvious and harder to interpret when we focus only on literature or, only on foodstuffs or textiles. The second is that there is a propensity in both literary and historical scholarship to render colonial history as a web of discourses and representations. Since Old Regime French colonialism was in its core economic—since it generated far more commodities than representations—I have tried to bring cultural productions such as literature into dialogue with the material products of colonization and slavery.

In the introduction to Orientalism, Edward Said notes in passing that "the Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture" (2). He does not develop this point further, however, and instead proceeds to give an account of the relationship between Europe and the Orient that is grounded almost exclusively in the analysis of texts. Did Said mean that representational traditions cut across cultural platforms? That orientalism is manifested in objects such as furnishings and textiles as well as in texts? Perhaps. But I think that he may also have been getting at something further, and introducing an angle that on the whole is rather absent from Orientalism, which is that cultural traditions of the Muslim East materialized in Europe and Europe's cultural transfer and as a site of contact and cultural transfer is not reducible to the one-sided discursive economy of orientalism.

It is in this double sense that I examine material culture in this book. As the colonial world was not exotic in the eyes of eighteenth-century consumers—because there was no established figurative repertory for representing tropical environments or plantation societies—commodities derived from colonial sources, such as indigo, coffee, and mahogany, were often transformed into consumer goods manifesting an alluring Oriental facade. I explore this process of orientalization in two important spheres of material culture: furniture and textiles. But while I look at material objects as sites of representation, I also consider them as intersections between metropolitan and colonial histories and as potential vestiges of slave labor, one of the most fundamental but also one of the least tangible aspects of colonial experience.

This is a book about the colonial past, but also, and perhaps more significantly, it is about a somewhat neglected phase of French colonial history. Although since the late 1990s historians and social scientists have posted significant continuities between the colonial order and the contemporary era, particularly with regard to French perspectives on immigration, they have focused almost exclusively on the later French Empire in the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa. I argue that it is necessary to initiate longer genealogies and to consider how France's history of slavery, and historical disavowal of slavery, have shaped the ways in which identity and diversity are thought of in contemporary French politics and society. I suggest, in particular, that the republication of race that has been a distinctive feature of French social and political thought is rooted not only in the nation's republican tradition but also in France's complex relationship to its own history of racism, notably in the institutionalized form of colonial slavery.

This book could not have been written without the generous support of many colleagues and a number of institutions. I am thankful to Columbia University for a Junior Faculty Summer Fellowship that enabled me to conduct research in France in summer 2004, and for a research leave in 2005. During this sabbatical I had the good fortune to be a resident fellow at the National Humanities Center. I would like to thank the center's director, Geoffrey Harpham, and its able and generous staff for their assistance during my fellowship. In France I benefited from the research expertise of several colleagues. I am particularly indebted to Jacques de Cauna, who generously shared with me his knowledge of French colonial history and of the museums and archives of Bordeaux; Louis Bergès, director of the Regional Archives of the Gironde, who guided me to manuscript and published sources; Thierry Lefrançois, director of the Musée du nouveau monde de La Rochelle, an institution that has been in the vanguard of public exploration of the history of the French Atlantic; and Bernadette de Boysson, curator at the Musée des arts décoratifs de Bordeaux.
I owe a great debt to the colleagues who generously took the time to read and provide insightful feedback on various chapters. They include Vincent DeBenedetti, Pierre Force, Phyllis Hunter, Dominique Jullien, Sylvie LeFevre, Sara Meier, Emmanuelle Saada, and two anonymous readers for Cornell University Press who made valuable suggestions for improvements. I have also benefited from the opportunity to share my work with participants in several workshops and seminars. These include the Institute for French Studies seminar of New York University, for which I thank Edward Berenson and Emmanuelle Saada. I also wish to express appreciation to the Warnicke Fund at the University Seminar at Columbia University for their help in publication. Material in this work was presented to the University Seminar in Eighteenth-Century European Culture. I am grateful to Bob Belknap, Director of the University Seminars, as well as to the members of the Eighteenth-Century Seminar, who participated in a helpful discussion of my ideas when this project was at a formative stage.

I offer special thanks to the members of the Research Triangle French Studies seminar, including Keith Lucas, Don Reid, Mary Sheriff, Philip Stewart, Amouche Tatarian, and Steve Vincent, and the Columbia French Department Writing Workshop, led by Vincent DeBenedetti, for reading drafts of several chapters and offering constructive criticism.

I have presented parts of this book as lectures or at conferences and colloquia, and benefited from the valuable feedback generated by these presentations. I would like to express my thanks to Katharine Jensen, who invited me to present a preliminary overview to the French Department of Louisiana State University, and to Serge Gavronesky and Caryl Phillips, who invited me to speak at the Rockefeller Bellagio Center conference on “The Caribbean in New York and Paris.” I presented a preliminary version of chapter two at the conference “Furnishing the Eighteenth Century,” held at the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library and the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles in 2002 and with the thanks of the conference organizers, Kathryn Norberg and Dena Goodman, for inviting me to participate in this stimulating interdisciplinary exchange. I also express my gratitude to the furniture curators of the Getty, who gave us a memorable tour of their exceptional collections and materially changed the way in which I look at eighteenth-century furniture. A talk based on chapter seven was presented at a conference on the theme of literature and human rights organized by the graduate students of the Department of French and Italian of the University of California at Santa Barbara in 2008. I am grateful to Dominique Jullien and Pierre Bax for kindly inviting me to speak. Finally, part of chapter 6 was presented at the conference “Diderot Today” held at New York University in 2009. I thank the conference organizers, Lucien Nousis and Anne Denays-Tunney, for the invitation to participate.

While working on this book I had fruitful discussions and e-mail exchanges with many colleagues. I am especially obliged to Serge Chassagne, Andrew Curran, Pierre Force, Dena Goodman, Dominique Jullien, Felicia McCarren, and Philip Stewart for their input on various aspects of my project. I have also been inspired over the last few years by lively discussions about French colonialism and its varied legacies with former and current graduate students, including Navana Abeyasinghe, Olivia Harrison, Ana Lazic, Mohammed Mack, Alexandra Pericic, Erin Twobig, and Toby Winkler, as well as by stimulating conversations on a wide range of intellectual topics with my colleagues in the Columbia French Department.

John Ackerman of Cornell University Press enthusiastically embraced this project from the first moment that it was presented to him and has been a lucid and extremely forbearing editor. I am deeply grateful both for his support and for his expert editorial advice. It has been a sheer pleasure to work with the manuscript editor for this book, Susan Spector, its copy editor, Marie Flaherty-Jones, and its indexer, Dave Proux. I am indebted to them all for their professionalism and meticulous attention to detail.

This book was written over several years, and at times during the most painful personal circumstances. Many friends and family members have helped sustain me during this time, but none more so than Norman and Donna Klein, who have provided not only emotional support but also innumerable hours of child care while I was busy writing. This book is for them, and for my incomparable daughter, Miléne.

Introduction
Trading Places

Writing about France’s Caribbean colonies in his "Essai sur les mœurs" (Essay on Universal History) (1756–78), Voltaire touches on a fundamental contradiction. On the one hand he states that these islands are "lost on the map," and that their history is "lost in the history of the universe." On the other he notes that "these countries, which one can scarcely perceive on a globe, produce in France an annual circulation of sixty million in merchandise." This book is about the contradiction inherent in these two observations. In it I propose that although the island colonies that France established in the Atlantic and Indian oceans in the middle of the seventeenth century had a significant and by some measures transformative impact on the nation’s economy and material culture, their existence registered very little in cultural representations. Correspondingly I argue that these colonies have remained relatively peripheral to the writing of French history, including French colonial history.

It is often assumed that the leading figures of the French Enlightenment wrote extensively about France’s overseas expansion and the regime of colonial slavery. This is inaccurate. Despite their many contributions to the

1. Voltaire, "Essai sur les mœurs," 2:380. The first edition of the Essay was published in 1756, but Voltaire continued to edit and make corrections until his death in 1778. The passage cited above was added in the 1770s. Please note that unless stated otherwise all translations in this book are my own.

2. In his study of the "bourgeois" silence on colonial slavery, the historian Louis-Sole-Molière recalls the intense skepticism with which colleagues and students greeted his claim that Montesquieu and even Rousseau did not write extensively about this topic. Sole-Molière, "Mœurs des bourgeois," translated by John Cotter-Morgan in Dark Side of the Light, 72–73.
interrogation of political authority, their exploration of cultural difference, and their promotion of religious tolerance, until a turning point that occurred in the late 1760s, prominent thinkers such as Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, and even Diderot, for whom colonialism subsequently became a key concern, wrote little about the colonies or the system of slave labor that sustained them. When they did refer to slavery, it was predominantly in metaphorical terms, as a figure for human oppression in general, or with regard to other cultures and other historical periods. When Voltaire observes that the history of the Ancien Régime was lost in the wider history of the universe, he is tacitly acknowledging that he and other French writers had not undertaken to write their history. I would add that if we can still be surprised by how little Voltaire and the other philosophers had to say on the subject of colonial slavery it is largely because the sugar islands of France's first colonial empire have remained peripheral to the principal narratives of French history.

This book explores the origins, modalities, and historiographical and ethical implications of the cultural invisibility of the colonial world in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French culture. In readings of a broad range of literary and paraliterary texts, and through explorations of two key domains of material culture, textiles and furniture, it maps the principal ways in which the colonial world was—and was not—represented in prerevolutionary French culture.

With the exception of Quebec and Acadia (established, respectively, in 1604 and 1608), the territories of the first French colonial empire were plantation colonies devoted to the production of tropical commodities and maintained by a system of slave labor. Although the image of early French colonialism is bound up with the story of the French presence in Canada, the one French territory in which slavery was not prevalent, France's core overseas possessions lay in the Caribbean and in the Indian Ocean. They were the islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique (annexed in 1635); the western part of the island of Hispaniola, known then as Saint-Domingue and now as Haiti (first occupied by French settlers in the 1650s and officially annexed in 1697); French Guiana (established as a durable colony in 1664, following several earlier attempts); Louisiana (1699); and the Indian Ocean islands of Île Bourbon (1642) and Île de France (1715) (today La Réunion and Mauritius). These colonies, which later came to be known as the rizière colonies, primarily produced sugar, but at various junctures also yielded other tropical commodities including tobacco; coffee; cocoa; cotton; indigo; roucou (a rust-colored pigment); cochineal; vanilla; spices; various tropical hardwoods; and decorative materials such as mother-of-pearl and tortoiseshell. These products were shipped to France and then either reexported to other European nations or transformed into consumer goods for domestic consumption or export. The "circulation" of colonial merchandise (to borrow Voltaire's term) was an important source of revenue both for individual investors and for the state. Robert Louis Stein, a historian of the French sugar and slave trades, calculates that by the 1780s a full half of France's exports to other European countries was made up of colonial goods. Commercial exchanges with the colonies also provided employment opportunities for many French workers—it has been estimated that one in eight French subjects earned a living in a manner connected with colonial trade—and they were an important source of raw materials for France's manufacturing industries. Over time, imported tropical commodities transformed the tastes and consumption habits of French people of all social classes. Between 1700 and 1730, Kenneth Bunks observes, "the tropical products of the French Americas passed from covered luxuries to daily necessities." Along the same lines, Stein notes that riots broke out in Paris in January 1792, not over the shortage of bread, but rather over the rising price of sugar. When French colonies were first established in the Caribbean in the 1620s, their principal crop was tobacco, and their workforce was composed primarily of indentured servants known as engagés: a contingent of peasants, marauding workers, and destitute people who agreed, usually because of dire poverty, to bestow their labor for three years in return for passage to the Americas and the hope of one day becoming a freeholder. In the late 1650s, sugar began to replace tobacco as the colonists' primary commercial crop. With this transition, small plantations (known in French as habitation) were replaced by larger establishments, and the colonists' indentured workforce became inadequate. To augment the supply of labor, France, following the lead of other European nations, entered the Atlantic slave trade. In the 1670s and 1680s, France launched two monopoly slave-trading companies: the Senegal Company (1673) and the Guinea Company (1685). To facilitate their operations, it also seized Goree (1677), an island off the coast of Senegal that

3. The Indian Ocean colonies were also relay points for French trade with India and Indonesia, and at least for the transfer of slaves from East Africa to the Antilles. See Vaughan, Creating the Circum Island, 78.

5. Caussin, Au Temps des Bleus & Savoirs, 12.
8. On indentured servants, see Dobson, Les engagés pour les Antilles.
10. The French term habitation roughly connotes as plantation, but it has overtones that the English term lacks. By linking production with dwelling, it softens the image of the plantation, suggesting a familial community of planters and slaves engaged in a collective process of production.
11. See Bunks, 24.
French sugar business was a well-oiled machine, calibrated to keep prices low and consumption high.17

The colonies were economically important but not culturally visible. Why? One obvious answer to this question lies in the political and commercial regimes under which the colonies were administered from their founding in the mid-seventeenth century until the mid-1780s. The mercantilist principles that informed colonial policy emphasized the subordination of the colonies to the metropole, while keeping the colonial world at a certain remove. The colonies, it was held, existed to serve France. But what this meant, implicitly, was that they were not viewed as an integral part of France. A similar point could be made about the Code noir (Black Code), the body of legislation drawn up in 1685 to regulate the practice of colonial slavery. The preamble to the Code noir states that although the colonies were geographically remote, the power of Louis XIV was to be considered as present in them as in continental France. What the Code noir effectively established, however, was a regime of legal exception, a body of law that applied exclusively in the colonies, and that indeed could have no bearing in metropolitan France, where slavery was legally prohibited.

At Sue Peabody and Pierre Boulle have shown, over the course of the eighteenth century increasingly stringent laws were introduced to limit the rights of colonists to bring slaves to the metropole.18 These laws had a positive side, to the extent that they afforded some slaves who were brought to France the opportunity to sue for their freedom. But they also had the effect of keeping slaves, and by extension slavery, out of sight and out of mind in safely distant "offshore" locations. Gradually these laws came to regulate and limit not only the presence of slaves in France but also, more institutionally, the presence of black people. A key example was the Police des noirs (Black Police), established by an edict of 1777 as a mechanism for documenting the presence of blacks in France. The primary objective of this measure was clearly to reduce the number of blacks entering the metropole. This effort seems to have been successful. The historian Léo Elisabeth has shown that whereas 1,098 arrivals of enslaved black individuals were registered with the admiralty of Bordeaux during the period before 1756, in the period from 1756 to 1786 when laws were more stringent, the number dropped to 102.19 The limited presence of

13. Trouillot, Silencing the Past, 37.
15. Geggus, Abolition and Revolutionary Studies, 5.
16. French Encounters with Africans, 56.
17. See Stein, French Sugar Business, 94.
19. Cited in Eric Sagolla, Néerlandais, peuples sauvages, 29). This statistic reflects the number of blacks who were registered rather than the actual number of blacks in France in this period. Other data suggest that slave owners and free blacks sometimes evaded these controls.
enlisted and free blacks in France contrasted with the situation across the Channel, where planters regularly brought their slaves to the metropole to serve as domestic servants. Using the results of the census conducted at the time of the initiation of the Black Police, scholars including Boudle and Erick Noel have estimated that in the late 1770s there were more than four to five thousand enslaved or free blacks living in France in an overall population of around 28 million.20 In England there were perhaps three times as many in a population of around ten million. The presence of these colonial transplants is recorded in the many British family portraits that featured black domestic servants, as well as in the painter William Hogarth's well-known engravings of the "St. Giles Streetmen": destitute black men who dwelled in the London slums.21 The presence of black people in English society helped cultivate awareness of the features of colonial society, a consciousness that developed more slowly on the other side of the Channel.22

But if the political and juridical culture of Old Regime French colonialism limited the visibility of the colonies and slavery, it did not produce this marginality. As the example of the Black Police suggests, policies and laws that held the colonies at a remove were symptoms of a deep-seated reluctance to allow colonial reality to penetrate metropolitan France. In his 2007 study of the literary imprint of French colonial slavery, Christopher L. Miller asks how "culture," in the sense of the production of texts, ideas, and discourses, accommodates "culture," meaning the cultivation of tropical commodities.23 His answer: with a fairly clear conscience, and with indifference, irony, and inconsistency. I am not so sure. Though the silence surrounding a social phenomenon can certainly betoken indifference and even approval, it just as often reflects reluctance to confront or come to terms with a moral issue. Though silence clearly does not correlate with a strong ethical response (to this extent I agree with Miller), it often marks the boundary between confident acceptance and moral outcry.

Various kinds of evidence suggest that the low profile of the colonial world in French culture resulted, not from sheer ignorance or complete indifference, but rather from mechanisms of avoidance. A particularly telling pattern in this regard is the fact that until the late 1760s the colonies were represented most often and with greatest transparency in works whose authors, often participants in the colonial system, clearly felt very few qualms about slavery. By contrast, when a broader group of writers began to turn their attention to the colonies and slavery in the 1770s–80s, it was in the context of the rise of abolitionist argument. Representing the colonies entailed representing slavery, and slavery could be contemplated directly only within the discursive framework of a call for its elimination.

The representation of the colonial world in eighteenth-century literature and culture has not, until lately, been widely examined by literary scholars and theorists. The reasons for this lack of interest are easy to discern. Literary criticism tracks literature, leading to a correlation between the relative paucity of eighteenth-century representations of colonization and the comparably small number of critical interpretations. There are, however, a few exceptions. In these cases the standard procedure is to acknowledge that colonization was not widely represented in eighteenth-century French culture, and then to respond to this dearth by cataloging (and indeed, since many of the titles in question are rather obscure, excavating) the disparate works in which colonization and slavery are evoked. Since literary scholars are more accustomed to analyzing representations and discourses than to theorizing their absence, the critical reflex in a case where there are few representations to examine is to turn silence into discourse.

This is a reasonable approach, and it has helped bring to light many obscure but illuminating texts. Yet it does have the side effect of causing the representation of the colonial world to appear more extensive, less fragmentary, than it actually was. With this problem in mind, in this book I pursue a different approach. Rather than taking as my point of departure the scattered works in which colonies or slavery are evoked, I start from, and indeed insist on, the premise of a fundamental absence of representation.

Why is it important to dwell on the absence of representation? The main reason, from my perspective, is that the history of colonial slavery, like that of several other episodes of atrocity, engages us in a double ethical relation. It is necessary to contemplate not only the brutality, racism, and indifference to human life that the Atlantic slave trade entailed but also the attenuated fashion in which European societies responded to these abuses. Though this silence was not a direct cause of colonial slavery, it was certainly a condition of its possibility. It is also one of the aspects of the history of slavery that holds the greatest contemporary moral relevance. While it is now possible for us to condemn the inhumanity of colonial slavery from a safe moral vantage point—in France, for example, a law of 2001 established colonial slavery as a crime against humanity—our ethical relation to silence and avoidance is both more immediate and more complex.24 As Myriam Gottis observes,

21. See Daubmann, Hogarth's Blacks.
22. There were also more absentee planters living in England than in France. In eighteenth-century British parlance these planters were known as "sabots"—an orientalist trope—and studied as an esteemed class of social climbers. The lower ratio of absenteeism in the French context was likely one of the factors that contributed to the efficiency of the system.
23. French Atlantic Triangle, 81.
the triangle trade was "the first economy of the global market." As such it brought into existence new, transcontinental networks of production and consumption, linking workers, investors, and consumers in Africa, the Americas, Europe, and Asia. Over the course of the last four centuries, these networks have continued to expand. Today, as in the 1700s, production for the global market often entails exploitation and abuse. Though we may not participate directly in these infractions of workers’ and human rights, as consumers in the Western world we often benefit materially from them, and we are sometimes at least peripherally aware of them. As such, like seventeenth- and eighteenth-century observers of the slave trade, we are faced with ethical decisions about whether and how to respond. There are, of course, crucial distinctions to be made between today’s sweatshops and maquiladoras and the Atlantic slave trade: my purpose here is not to draw a direct analogy between the guilt-by-association produced by contemporary globalization and the historical context of slavery. I do, however, want to point out that our experience as observers of and participants in today’s global economy overlaps and resonates with that of people in previous centuries confronted by the transcendent economy of slavery.

Postcolonial readings of colonial discourse have tended either to emphasize its hegemonic consistency (as in the case of Edward Said’s analysis of orientalism) or (following the lead of Homi Bhabha) to expose its constitutive “ambivalence” by exploring patterns of hybridity and mimicry.26 The silence that shrouded colonial slavery does not fit easily into either of these interpretative frames. It clearly lacks the hypervisibility manifested by orientalist discourse. It also seems to lack the signs of ideological splitting and psychological conflict that are generally associated with ambivalence. In a rich book on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French colonial or Creole discourses, Doris Garraway suggests that postcolonial theorists have been slow to consider the representations associated with colonial slavery, it is perhaps because the commodification of human beings that such representations entailed was marked by very little ambivalence.27 On one level this seems right. But I also want to observe that silence is not necessarily the opposite of speech, and that it is not “univocal” in its meaning. Below I consider the silence surrounding colonial slavery as being symptomatic of a process of displacement. Since displacement entails the bifurcation and disruption of meaning, we can perhaps interpret it as a specific mode of colonial ambivalence.

26. Le Questionnaire des. 8.
27. Said, Orientalism, 66, "Of Ministry and Man."

To offer a literary history of the silence enveloping colonial slavery in the most literal sense would mean cataloging all the works in which slavery is not represented, or at least those in which slavery really could or should have been represented but wasn’t. This kind of negative literary history is not what I attempt, though in an appendix to this book I do give some indications regarding "absent" or fragmentary representations, particularly in relation to texts regarded as canonical works of the French Enlightenment. Instead, I consider the various ways in which silence spoke: the forms of dislocation and compen- sation through which silence was translated into representation. In specific terms I argue that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the issue of colonial slavery was regularly projected or "displaced" onto two adjacent cultural terrains. In the first part of this book, titled "East Meets West," I describe a transfer from the colonial arena to the Oriental world, a displacement that was mediated by the widespread perception of the Orient as a culture permeated by slavery. In the second, "Savages and Slaves," I propose that the Americas were predominantly depicted by French observers as a terrain of encounter between Europeans and "noble savages" or "native others." The book’s title, Trading Places, alludes not only to the commercial activities that were the raison d’être of France’s colonies but also to these two major patterns of cultural exchange. In the course of a reading of Voltaire’s Persian tragedy, Alman (1756), Christopher Miller observes that whereas Voltaire portrayed enslavement in South America (in Alman) and in the Orient (in his 1764 Oriental tale, Le blanc et le noir), he found less to say about slavery as practiced in France’s Caribbean colonies. Building on this observation, Miller suggests that Voltaire effectively overwrote the Atlantic triangle connecting France, Africa, and the Antilles with a second triangle of exotic representation anchored in the Orient and South America (74). I agree with this reading, but want to expand it considerably by arguing that the displacements that Miller identifies in the work of Voltaire reflect a much wider correlation between the sparse representation of colonial slavery and the far more extensive depiction of both the Orient and the American cultures of South America.

The French discomfort with regard to colonial society should be transposed onto representations of Oriental culture is not surprising when we consider that Europeans’ fears and desires have often been projected onto the Muslim East. As Edward Said notes in Orientalism, “The Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience” (2). In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Orient served as a mirror for the indirect observation of French society and political culture. The principal medium for this specular exchange was the discourse of "Oriental despotism": the characterization of the Orient as a region subject to authoritarian rule and distinguished by various forms of subordination. Many scholars have observed that Oriental despotism provided a framework for the indirect
exploration of the absolutist doctrines of the Bourbon monarchy.\textsuperscript{28} I will argue that because the Orient was regarded as a culture permeated by slavery, it also constituted a terrain in which another form of European authoritarianism—the regime of colonial slavery—could be indirectly explored. Locating servitude in the Orient had a number of implications. On the most basic level it shifted attention away from the colonies and projected responsibility elsewhere. Additionally, this displacement also allowed slavery to be surveyed through what might be described as a soft-focus lens. In French representations of the Orient, slavery was often depicted as a domestic, quasi-familiar institution that did not involve the physical rigors of plantation slavery, and which had some potentially recuperable social dimensions.

The second pattern of cultural substitution that I discuss in this book relates to the dominant modes of representation of the colonial Americas in eighteenth-century French culture. The New World was imagined across a range of genres and discourses, as a contact zone in which "civilized" though often "barbaric" Europeans encountered "native" and usually "savage" others. By contrast the Americas were much less often portrayed as a civilized society formed from the merger of Amerindian, European, and African cultures. "Native" others were depicted both more extensively and more sympathetically than enslaved Africans, and indeed I would argue that compassion and abundance of representation went hand in hand.

Though both Africans and Amerindians were subject to violence and enslavement in the colonial Americas, their experiences were represented in divergent ways. In eighteenth-century French culture the "black legend" of the Spanish persecution of the Amerindians stood both as an emblem of the moral failings of the conquistadores and as an indictment of the vices associated with civilization.\textsuperscript{29} Amerindians, correspondingly, were imagined to embody virtues derived not from exposure to civilized society but rather from proximity to the state of nature. Enslaved people of African descent, by contrast, were not widely portrayed as victims of European imperialism until the end of the eighteenth century, and their suffering was not woven into the fabric of any major philosophical traditions. The Valladolid debates of 1530, in which the Dominican Bartolome de las Casas locked horns with the philosopher Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda over the right of Spanish colonists to subjugate and enslave Amerindians, stand to this day as an example of public moral debate. Who now remembers the seventeenth-century Sorbonne inquiry, presided over by

Germaine Fromageau, in which the legitimacy of the African slave trade was raised as a legal question?\textsuperscript{30}

When I speak of the cultural displacement of colonial slavery onto Oriental culture or the discourse of the noble savage, I mean two different though related things. The first is that these themes occupied a far more central place in eighteenth-century French culture than the Caribbean colonies and their regimen of race-based slavery, an asymmetry that seems disproportionate when we consider the material and strategic importance of the colonial world. This kind of displacement is by no means unfamiliar. In almost every social context, certain issues command attention while others—often the most intractable social questions—remain virtually unexamined. The second is somewhat more content specific, and it mainly concerns the relationship between the colonial world and Oriental discourse. In the first part of this book I discuss a number of texts that initiate discussion of colonization and slavery, but then, by means of discursive or narrative maneuvers such as digression or disjunction, relocate the question such that the context is transferred to the Oriental world. I also point to similar patterns of displacement in the sphere of material culture, where objects constructed from raw materials derived from colonial sources were often transformed into alluring "Oriental" consumer goods.

To denote the transposition of colonial slavery onto adjacent discursive fields I predominantly use the term "displacement," a concept borrowed from the lexicon of psychoanalysis. Though my analysis of this phenomenon is only loosely based on psychoanalytic theory, I think it is perhaps helpful here to quickly summarize the main tenets of the theory of displacement elaborated by Sigmund Freud. In \textit{The Interpretation of Dreams} (1900), Freud argues that in the representational economy of dreams, "latent" thoughts of a disturbing nature are often displaced onto neutral representations that appear in the dream's "manifest" content. These manifest representations, Freud further suggests, are usually associated in some manner with the censored ideas. "Displacement" (in German, \textit{Verdrängung}) thus denotes a process of psychic censorship in which challenging ideas are replaced by related but less tendentious concerns.

In this book I draw on the concept of displacement to denote, not processes of repression and substitution occurring within the individual psyche, but rather patterns of representation and nonrepresentation occurring on a broader cultural level. Though it could certainly be argued that individual

\textsuperscript{28} See, for example, Germaine, \textit{Structure du soir}.
\textsuperscript{29} Michel de Montaigne's two essays on the New World, "Des Cannibales" (On Cannibals) and "Des Cucubas" (On Cucubas) (1575), were the point of departure for this linkage of proximity to nature and condensation of civilized barbarism.
\textsuperscript{30} De Lassett and Fromageau, "Règles sur le commerce des esclaves," This case is briefly mentioned by Russell F. Janzen in \textit{Montevideo at Paradise}, 125–26, and by David Elion Davis in \textit{The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture}, 197. The point of theologians who heard the case determined that it was only legitimate to purchase Africans who were already enslaved. There is no evidence that this rather ambiguous judgment had any impact on the conduct of the slave trade.
wrought had their reasons for not wanting to confront the issue of slavery directly (Voltaire, for example, was probably an investor in the Compagnie des Indes occidentales (West Indies Company), and Montesquieu’s Bordeaux estate did a robust trade in wine with the Antilles). I do not, for the most part, focus on personal disincentives. Rather, I examine broad asymmetries and patterns of substitution that transcended individual investments.11

Writers, of course, sometimes consciously choose to transpose questions associated with one sociopolitical context onto another, more distant arena. This was the case, for example, with the specular exchange between Bourbon absolutism and Oriental despotism to which I alluded earlier. The displaced representation of colonial slavery, however, was not a form of allegory or conscious self-censorship, but rather the symptom of largely unconscious processes. That is not to say that the topic of slavery was subject to a central mechanism of repression, a claim that would imply an overarching psychoanalytic theory of culture. Rather, I want to suggest, more loosely, that a configuration of different social, cultural, economic, and political forces prevented slavery from becoming a visible issue and diverted representation elsewhere.

Displacement is a form of cultural repression that excludes certain forms of knowledge and forecloses certain questions. But it is also a process that disrupts the production of meaning and serves as a vantage point from which it is possible to observe the workings of power. Does this mean that displacement can be viewed as a site of resistance to the forms of power embodied in colonial regimes?12 Perhaps, but I think it would be problematic to press this point too far and to emphasize semantic dissonance at the expense of the axis of repression. Displacement speaks to the silencing of the “other,” but it is not the other’s displaced speech.

Trading Places identifies two different kinds of impediment to representation, obstacles of different natures, but which often worked in tandem and produced a combined effect. One was the pressure to avoid or circumvent discussion of slavery. Slavery was widely felt to be morally problematic yet also believed to be economically beneficial. As a result, at least until the advent of abolitionism, it was either not represented at all or represented as a characteristic of the Eastern world. The second obstacle arose from a mechanism of censorship, but rather from the absence of a discursive framework. If a wide array of French observers, including travel writers, missionaries, novelists, and philosophers, all depicted the Americas as a zone of contact between Europeans and Americans rather than as a site of colonization, slavery, and métagage, it was not simply because these processes were subject to repression but also because writers lacked conceptual models and figurative repertoires for representing them. Eighteenth-century Europeans were accustomed to thinking about identity and difference in terms of culture and geography (this was, for example, the model underlying the construct of the Orient). American culture also fit easily within the established model: the Caribs and other indigenous groups could be understood as “peoples” who belonged to a specific region and who exhibited specific cultural traits. The identity of diasporic Africans, by contrast, did not lend itself to this kind of description. Today we have a rich conceptual vocabulary for speaking about colonial and postcolonial cultures: terms such as “diaspora,” “exotization,” “hybridity,” and “métagage.” Eighteenth-century writers, however, lacked these tools and had no precedent for depicting the hybrid and volatile environment of colonial societies. The absence of established discourses also impacted material culture. If artists and craftsmen orientedized furniture and other consumer goods, it was partly because there was a well-developed figurative tradition for representing Oriental culture. By contrast, the Americas constituted an aesthetic tabula rasa to which emblems and symbols had yet to be assigned.

The final section of this book takes a different form from the first two. Rather than addressing silences or displacements, it examines the shift from marginality to discursivity that occurred when, in the late 1760s, France’s colonies belatedly became objects of representation and political debate. In emphasizing this transition, one of my goals is to bring greater historical differ- entiation into the analysis of colonial representation.13 If the pervasive silence of Enlightenment writers on the question of slavery has not been more widely recognized, it is partly because scholars have tended to point to the discourses of the 1770s and 1780s as evidence of an energetic critical response. I show that although there was significant engagement with colonial questions in this period, this emphasis represented a deceptive rapture with the previous century and a half.

The coalescence of “colonial discourse” that began to take place in the late 1760s was to some extent a function of political events. In 1768, at the end of the Seven Years’ War, France lost its North American colonies in Canada (to Britain) and Louisiana (to Spain), a joint setback that prompted a broad rethinking of the nation’s future as a colonial power. Other transcontinental conflicts followed closely on the heels of this defeat. France supported the

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21. On Montesquieu’s business interests and the slave trade, see Laboratoire, Montesquieu et le problème de l’alaisage, 126, and Chéral, De Tillensia à Candolle, 251–62.
22. Sproul, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"
23. See, on this issue, Frederick Cooper, Colonization in Question, 3.
American colonies in their bid for independence, and then became embroiled in its own colonial conflict in Saint-Domingue. Together these conflicts created a new level of awareness of colonial questions.

But the establishment of the colonies as an object of representation was also the result of cultural forces. Earlier I argued that colonization and slavery only came to be widely represented by French writers when arguments in favor of the abolition of slavery began to gain ground. In the third part of this book I develop this point further to show that French abolitionism was largely predicated on arguments generated within the new field of liberal political economy. I am not the first scholar to point to connections between French liberal economic thought and French abolitionism, but I take this argument further (for it has been taken before by suggesting that economic discourse was not just an important facet of abolitionism but rather the principal conceptual register in which slavery and emancipation were discussed in France between 1765 and the French Revolution. I argue that this economic perspective was present not only where one might expect to find it—in works of political economy—but also in the fictional writing on slavery that appeared in France in the 1770s–90s.

Interest in colonial topics, and particularly in the central question of slavery, rose steadily in the 1770s and 1780s. In 1788, on the eve of the Revolution, slavery was raised to the level of a national political issue by the founding of the Société des amis des noirs (Society of the Friends of Blacks), a pressure group created to inform the public about colonial slavery and to lobby for its abolition.

Slavery was abolished in the French colonies in 1794. It would, however, be hard to see this event as the culmination of a decade of political activism. Between 1789 and 1793 slavery was discussed relatively little in the Constituent Assembly, debates over colonial affairs revolving rather around the surrogate question of whether political rights should be accorded to colonial planters and to the gens de couleur libre, or free black and mixed-race people. What triggered the abolition decree of 1794 was in fact less the emergence of a moral consensus against slavery than the dramatic events unfolding in France's most important colony, Saint-Domingue. The large enslaved population of the island, estimated to stand at around five hundred thousand by 1789, had been in open revolt since 1791. In 1793, in order to discourage its leaders from entering into an alliance with invading British forces, the envoy of the National Assembly, Léger-Félicité Sommonoux, issued a series of proclamations declaring emancipation. The law passed by the convention in 1794 was essentially a ratification of these decrees.

Emancipation lasted for barely a decade. In 1802 slavery was restored at the behest of Napoleon Bonaparte. Though it is possible to see this reversal as a consequence of the political views and foreign-policy objectives of the soon-to-be emperor, the fact that slavery continued to exist in the French colonies until 1848—a decade and a half after its abolition in the British Empire—certainly suggests a deeper-seated absence of political will. When we look closely at the abolitionist writing produced by French thinkers in the 1770s–90s, this outcome is not so surprising. The economic framing of calls for emancipation had a decisive impact on the ways in which abolition was envisaged. Most of the principal French advocates of abolition argued that emancipation should occur, not on an immediate basis, as a restitution of fundamental rights, but as a gradual, staggered process, and in such a way that the colonies' social order and economic viability would be preserved. Abolitionism is often approached as a freestanding moral discourse: the belated flowering of a critical response to slavery. But whereas it is certainly accurate to say that French writers formulated moral arguments against slavery, this body of writing also needs to be interpreted within the discursive context in which it was embedded, that is, the framework of emergent economic and political liberalism. This framework both shaped the manner in which emancipation was imagined and, I would argue, contributed to the shifting history of its political implementation.

In Discours sur le colonialisme (Discourse on Colonialism) (1950), Aimé Césaire observes that beneath the discourses and ideologies in which the colonial web is spun lies the appetite of the merchant. Colonialism is a mosaic made up of many pieces, but its core, Césaire suggests, is economic. Though the annexation of territory and the subordination or enslavement of other peoples have important political, psychological, and sexual dimensions, the first impetus for these predations is usually economic. In its early, Atlantic form in particular, colonialism was a machine of production and manufacture, profit and reinvestment, appetite and consumption. Though colonial ventures were not always profitable, either for individual planters and merchants or for the state (the economic benefits of slavery, challenged by liberal economists at the end of the eighteenth century, are still debated by contemporary historians), colonies nonetheless existed for the purpose of producing commodities and extracting profit. They were hubs in a sprawling system of economic

34. See Geggus, Haitian Revolutionary Studies, 158–70. Geggus estimates the free black and mixed-race population of Saint-Domingue in 1789 to have been around thirty thousand (5).

35. Aimé Césaire, Discourse on Colonialism, 82–83.
connections that linked commerce and manufacture, credit and employment, and that had outlets in the visible cultural domains of luxury and fashion.

Literary critics such as myself are somewhat prone to treating colonization as a disjunctive phenomenon, anchored in ideology and articulated in texts. But since Old Regime colonialism generated more commodities than texts, in this book I attempt to counteract this propensity by emphasizing the economic and commercial dimensions of colonization and slavery. As noted above, the third section of the book dealt at length with the economic discourses that framed discussion of these subjects in the 1770s-90s. In two other chapters I take what might be called a commodity-centered approach to the cultural impact of colonization; that is to say, I explore the transformative impact of colonial expansion on two prominent spheres of material culture. In chapter two I consider how the availability of an array of tropical hardwoods impacted the manufacture of furniture, a domain of material culture that has historically been closely associated with French taste and style. In chapter three I explore the impact of cotton, at first imported from India, but later also grown in the Caribbean and Louisiana, on French textile manufacture and on the realm of fashion. Textiles were the great driver of European economies in the prerevolutionary period, and changes within this industry inevitably had far-reaching social and cultural implications.

In these essays into material culture I approach decorative objects and consumer goods not as a specialist but from the vantage point of a literary scholar. That is to say, I look at textiles and furniture as representational media and make arguments that run parallel to my discussion of texts. Specifically, I suggest that in textiles and furniture we can observe representational displacements that reflect the transfer of colonial interests onto a fascination with Oriental culture. The kind of integrated approach to culture that I take in this book certainly has its pitfalls—those associated with all interdisciplinary research—but I would argue that it also illuminates structures and processes that do not come to light in more narrowly focused research. In the case at hand, for instance, it demonstrates that orientalization was not just a circumscribed tropology or intertextual paradigm but rather the symptom of a far-reaching process of cultural repression and redistribution.

In The Social Life of Things, Arjun Appadurai notes that “diversion” or “decontextualization” has long been an important aspect of European aesthetics and a key mechanism in the creation of value. When goods are removed from their original circuits of exchange, their value as commodities is often intensified. They are, so to speak, “decommodified” and reclassified as aesthetic objects. Eighteenth-century European manufacturers often produced goods that imitated those produced by foreign cultures (chinoiserie prints, japanning, imitation chinoiserie, for example) because they understood that the exchange value of this merchandise would be enhanced by the allusion to goods that were seen as cultural artifacts rather than as objects of mass consumption. Building on Appadurai’s argument, I would observe that the aesthetics of diversion are historically specific. Today the exchange value of certain commodities—case sugar, for example—would probably be enhanced by an allusion to Caribbean or tropical provenance. In the eighteenth century this association would have had little meaning or appeal. Raw materials were often “diverted” from their colonial points of origin, but only came to embody value when they were transformed into consumer goods that carried other cultural associations. In the chapters on textiles and furniture I suggest that one fairly widespread process of “re-diversion” involved the transformation of raw materials derived from tropical regions into “exotic” Oriental goods. Imported tropical hardwoods were often sculpted with Oriental motifs or used in combination with Japanese lacquer paneling. And cotton and indigo produced in the Americas were sometimes used to produce delicate chinoiserie prints.

An argument of this kind could also be made with regard to coffee, which was long represented as a product of the East even though by the mid-eighteenth century it was predominantly grown in the West.

Approaching the cultural imprint of colonization through the lens of commodities also opens up new possibilities for acknowledgments, if not the perspective, then at least the contribution of the colonized and enslaved. A central concern of literary scholarship since the late 1990s has been to get beyond the one-sidedness of colonial discourse and to include the standpoint of the colonized. In the case of colonial slavery, this pluralization of perspectives is particularly difficult to achieve because very few enslaved people had either the means or the opportunity to leave written traces of their experience. There are no known narratives or testimonies written by people enslaved in the French colonies during the eighteenth century; no “Francophones Equiano,” as Christopher Miller observes (33). The small handful of former slaves in English colonies who wrote autobiographical narratives—for example, Olaudah Equiano and Ottobah Cugoano—were emancipated and became writers after they had traveled from the Caribbean to England. The silence on the French side testifies to the effectiveness of France’s policy of keeping slaves out of metropolitan France, where opportunities for emancipation and education might have been more extensive. Though Eric Noel’s 2006 study of blacks residing in eighteenth-century France bears the promising title Being Black in France in the Eighteenth Century, the documents that Noel explicate are primarily codes of law and cultural representations, and they permit only an oblique reconstruction of the existential experience of enslaved or free black people.


But while we encounter little textual residue of the lived experience of slavery, we can point to other legacies and vestiges of enslaved peoples' lives and labor. These traces include oral sources such as folk tales, songs, oral histories, and spiritual traditions. They also include nonlinguistic traces, including buildings, institutional implements, furniture, and clothing: material objects that were made from colonial raw materials or touched by slave labor. Though these artifacts do not directly communicate thoughts or attitudes—they are vestiges of labor rather than indications of agency—they are among the few surviving residues of the daily toil that was the dominant experience of slaves in Europe's plantation colonies.

Steve O. Buckridge has observed that thinking about objects as components of a material culture "enables us to see objects as a form of visual literacy." Though furniture and textiles do not communicate ideas and mental states in the same manner as texts, they do, nonetheless, exercise what one might call material agency. By providing us with a visual image of "the past" material objects anchor the narratives of social and cultural history. Artifacts that are preserved in colonial settings (i.e., on site in former colonies) are usually integrated into a narrative of colonial history (sometimes to the exclusion of metropolitan vectors). By contrast, decorative objects preserved in the collections of metropolitan museums are generally portrayed as the vestiges of a purely national or domestic history. When we look at a washboard or mahogany table in a British or French museum, we are not generally moved to ask whether the timber was felled and loaded aboard a ship by slaves, or whether slaves grew the cotton. As Maxine Berg has observed, museums do not typically encourage this kind of questioning, preferring to direct our attention to what Igor Kopytoff calls the "cultural biography" of things, meaning issues of craftsmanship, sale, and ownership. My discussion of French material culture goes against the grain of these curatorial practices in a number of ways. By raising questions about "provenance" that go beyond the conventional criteria of artistry and ownership, I suggest decorative objects and luxury goods within a trajectory that encompasses colonial as well as metropolitan history. Adjusting the cultural framework within which material objects are studied, I try to release their potential to evoke the submerged experiences of colonized and enslaved workers.

Historiography and Critical Trajectories

Earlier I observed that the marginality of the colonial world within eighteenth-century French culture has carried over into the fields of literary and historical scholarship. I want now to return to this point and to elaborate in more detail on the treatment of the vieilles colonies in history and literary history.

It has often been claimed that a time lag besets the representation of contentious periods of history. Henry Rousso has argued, for example, that it took thirty years for the Vichy regime to become a subject of historical study in France, and about the same length of time for historians to turn their attention to the Algerian War. There is, however, a secondary point to be made in this regard, which is that scholars did ultimately return to these episodes after a twenty- or thirty-year hiatus. Since the early 1990s, the Algerian War of Independence and France's colonial presence in North Africa have been widely studied and have come to be viewed as formative periods of French history. And in recent sociological and anthropological scholarship, French rule in the Maghreb has been approached as a wellspring of French attitudes toward immigration and cultural diversity. (The militant association Indigènes de la république [Natives of the Republic], for example, speaks strikingly of a "colonial continuum.") By contrast, French colonization in the Caribbean and Indian Ocean was not, at least until the late 1990s, a topic of extensive study or political debate. For example, few questions have been raised about the legacies of France's history of colonial slavery, even though the cultural invisibility of slavery in the eighteenth century undoubtedly has some bearing on the suspicion in which the category of race is held in contemporary French politics and social thought. Given that the disavowal of race is rarely represented as the result of the overwriting of a history of racism exemplified by slavery, it seems legitimate to ask whether this disavowal actually reflects a forgetting or denial of this history.

From a historiographical perspective, the first French Empire has for the most part been treated as a colonial province, a preliminary model superseded by the more representative colonial projects of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The (in many ways excellent) Dictionnaire de la colonisation française (Dictionary of French Colonialism) edited in 2007 by Claude Lévi-Strauss, for example, begins its chronology of French colonial history in 1789, a starting point that suggests that the first 150 years of French colonialism can be subsumed under the paradigms associated with the second. As this example illustrates, in French history and public discourse the words empire and colonialism have often been used as shorthand for the series of colonial ventures initiated in 1850 with the conquest of Algeria.

There are, needless to say, some legitimate reasons for this scholarly emphasis. France and Algeria fought a brutal war of independence that affected an entire generation and which, unlike the French struggle to retain control of Haiti (1791–1801), remains within living memory. The independence of

39. A powerful account of these transmissions is given in Joan Drayn, Haitian History, and the Gods.
40. Language of Dress, 2.
41. Luxury and Finance in Eighteenth-Century Britain.
42. "Cultural Biography of Things."
43. Le Syndrome de Vichy, "Les ruines vers la guerre d'Algérie."
France's colonies in the Maghreb was followed by large-scale migration to France, a demographic event that has had a transformative impact on French society, and which now frames the writing of colonial history. But the eclipse of one colonial empire by the next cannot simply be explained away as a function of events. As Françoise Vergès writes, "These islands of sugar, which used to be known as the Vielles colonies, have been the 'repressed' of French colonialism, territories that had not been conquered militarily, where there had been slavery, and that did not belong to the great narrative of the mission civilisatrice."

Whereas French colonial rule in Africa and Asia can, at least to an extent, be dressed up in the rhetoric of assimilation and civilizing mission, France's two-hundred-year participation in the Atlantic slave trade simply does not lend itself to this kind of recuperation. There are signs, however, that the history of slavery and the surrogate issues that it raises, most notably the question of race, are now becoming less marginal to the study of French history. Since the mid-1990s more scholarship and more public discussion have focused on the first colonial empire and on France's history of slavery. Several factors have supported this shift, among them the fallout associated with the marking of two important colonial anniversaries: the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery in 1998, and the bicentenary of Haiti's independence in 2004.

When the bicentenary of the French Revolution was celebrated in 1989, almost no reference was made either to the first abolition of slavery in 1794, or to the spread of revolutionary fervor to the colonial world. These omissions generated accusations of triumphant nationalism from several quarters, and to rectify the problem the commemoration of a key anniversary in the history of slavery was planned for 1998. These ceremonies, however, in turn became controversial. French officials, led by then president Jacques Chirac, seemed primarily interested in celebrating the humanitarian vision of the Second Republic and Victor Schoelcher, the leading French advocate of abolition in the 1830s-40s. Contesting what they perceived as a metropolitan co-optation of the meaning of abolition, Antilles (who have been French citizens since 1848) complained that the state was disregarding not only the contribution of slaves to the achievement of emancipation but also the three centuries of colonial slavery that preceded abolition.

The controversy over the memory and commemoration of slavery stirred up in 1998 has continued to reverberate. In 2001, the French Senate approved a law, presented by the Guayanese deputy and 2002 presidential candidate, Christiane Taubira, that recognizes colonial slavery as a crime against humanity and imposes penalties for denigrating its status as such. In 2004, the government appointed a Committee for the Memory of Slavery charged with, among other things, introducing the history of slavery into the curriculum of French schools. In conjunction with these official measures, a number of activist groups or associations have been formed to address the history and present-day concerns of the French Antilles community. And, in 2007, life on an eighteenth-century plantation became for the first time a subject of a French television program. Three decades after the iconic U.S. series Roots, the French miniatures Tropiques amers dramatized the experience of colonial slavery.

Government initiatives and community activism have been accompanied by the publication of several studies of France's history of slavery and racial discrimination. Many of these studies—particularly those authored by French historians—have focused on the history of abolition. Some of these works have a rather official flavor, though others seek to respond to the controversies stirred up in 1998 by emphasizing the role enslaved played in achieving emancipation and by problematizing the teleological narrative that leads from slavery to abolition. They draw attention to the staggered history of abolition in the French context, to the fact that colonial slavery was abolished by France not once but three times: in 1793 (by Simón Bolívar in Saint-Domingue), in 1794 (by the National Convention), and definitively in 1848. For most of the past two centuries, the twelve-year struggle against slavery and colonial rule waged in Haiti has registered very little in either French or U.S. historiography. Although C. L. R. James's classic study, The Black Jacobins (1963), made the case that the Haitian Revolution should be seen as a world-historical event, by most measures it has been—to paraphrase Michel-Rolph Trouillot—a historical non-event (98). In conjunction with the bicentennial of Haiti in 2004, however, several new studies have undertaken to illuminate the historical significance of the overthrow of colonial rule and have emphasized the interface between the French and Haitian revolutions. This rediscovery has been spearheaded by historians based in North America who have studied Haitian history within the ambit of Atlantic history, a framework that foregrounds transnational connections among Europe, North America, the Caribbean, and Africa. To date, French historians have played a less central role

44. Monuments and Revolution, 117.
45. When a controversial law was passed in 2006 stipulating that the teaching of colonialism in French schools should acknowledge the positive role played by France, it included the qualification "particularly in North Africa." Law 2005-110, February 23, 2005, Article 4. It is hard to imagine such a republication in the case of the Caribbean, a colonial project that so obviously rested on the foundation of exploitation and servitude.
46. See Reinhardt, Claims to Memory, 1–2.
47. The theatrical drama Tropic is amers, conversion by screenwriter Virginie Boiz et bee’s Matthieu Costes, aired on France 3 in 2007.
48. See, for example, Dering, Les abolition de l’esclavage: Geogbé, Vergès, and Virieux, L’abolition de l’esclavage: Vergès, Achille Fugelagen, Etienne, French-Indian Slavery, Schmidt, L’abolition de l’esclavage. Examples include Gregg, Haitian Revolutionary Studies; De Rivas, Movers of the New World and Colonies of Oceania.
in this scholarly renewal, and it is perhaps fair to say that the place of Haiti in Atlantic history still remains to be mapped from the French side.

The expansion in the historical study of the first French colonial empire that has occurred since the early 1990s has been accompanied by a diversification of the kind of questions that are raised. To study colonial history once meant engaging in research on or in the colonies. Colony and metropole were approached as two separate entities, and research was organized around narrowly framed issues such as the demography of colonial society and the social organization of the habitation.54 Though some studies of the slave trade explored transatlantic issues such as the impact of slavery on the rise of entrepreneurial capitalism,55 most approached the trade as an extension of colonial economy.56 A central concern of recent studies, by contrast, has been to break down divides within and between disciplines by approaching metropole and colony as, in the words of Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall, a "whole composed of contiuually interacting parts."57 As we saw earlier, Peabody's book "There Are No Slaves in France" focuses not on colonial legislation on slavery but on laws bearing on the presence of slaves in colonial France. Her conclusions are echoed in another work that focuses on slaves and slavery in mainland France, Pierre Bouille's La Ruse et subterfuges dans la France de l'ancien régime (Race and Slavery during the Old Regime).58 Eric Saugera's book, Bordeaux, port négrier (Bordeaux, Slave Port), to cite another example, combines the tools of French regional and urban history with a focus on the slave trade. Saugera not only shows how the prosperity that derived from the slave trade and douanes commerce (commercial voyages between France and the Caribbean without an African leg) contributed to the urban development of Bordeaux but also points to the place of Enlightenment culture within the matrix of social relations formed by the slave trade. In La Matrice de la race (The Womb/Matrix of Race), Elsa Dorlin approaches questions of race and colonization from a point of departure in the history of science and sexuality. Through a genealogy of medicine that foregrounds the place of race and sex in the establishment of modern regimes of classification, Dorlin argues that since the mid-seventeenth century these categories have been tightly interwoven, and that both women and Africans have regularly embodied the pathological "other" against which norms of health and rationality are defined.

As Dorlin's study illustrates, a key question that has emerged in the wake of 1998 is the place of race in French history. The modern division of humanity into distinct racial subgroups took shape in conjunction with colonial slavery and remains one of the plantation system's most enduring legacies. Going against the grain of France's historical aversion to the discourse of race, in the last five years a number of scholars, as well as a several community associations, have made race and racism the point of departure for sociological analysis and political activism. The category of the "black" and the question of "black identity" formed the focal point of Erick Noël's Being Black in France in the Eighteenth Century (2006), a broad overview of texts, laws, and images relating to the presence of enslaved and emancipated blacks in Old Regime France, as well as Pap Ndiaye's La Condition noire: Essai sur une minorité française (The Black Condition: Essay on a French Minority) (2008), a thoughtful analysis of the historical role of blackness as a mode of cultural identity and as a basis for discrimination and marginalization. Whereas French social thought has traditionally emphasized the role of cultural difference in the dynamics of discrimination and marginalization, Ndiaye, in company with a few other current French scholars, focuses on the existence of minorités visibles groups whose exposure to prejudice is more directly linked to skin color than to perceived differences of culture.59 Scholars have not been alone in promoting the use of the term "black" in contemporary historical and political debates. A number of community organizations, most notably the CRAN (Conseil représentatif des associations noires de France) (Representative Council of French Black Associations), have positioned themselves as organizations representing, not French Africans or Antilleans, but French blacks.60 In light of these trends, as Myriam Cottias notes, even mainstream French media have begun to speak for the first time in terms of "la question noire" (the black question) (79).

The methodological concerns to which the historical studies of colonization and slavery published since the early 1990s attest have also been central to recent literary scholarship. As in the field of history, the slave-plantation societies of the old colonies had not, until around 2005, been widely studied by literary scholars.

50. The work of Gébriel Deben, long the most influential scholar of France's "old colonies," illustrates this point. His principal studies, including Une indigénité à Saint-Domingue à la fin du XVIIe siècle (1946) and Esclavos aux Antilles française, XVIIe-XVIIIe siècle (1974), examine the main colonial population groups and the workings of the plantation system.
51. Eric Williams's classic study, Capitalism and Slavery (1944), is the most obvious example.
52. See, for example, Basch, La route du esclavage.
53. Color of Liberties, 5.
54. This book compiles essays written between the 1980s and 2000s on a range of subjects including legislation bearing on the residence of slaves and black people in eighteenth-century France, and the construction of the category of race.
55. The place of race in contemporary French politics and social thought is also explored in Fassin and Fassin, On the question racial à la question raciale.
56. The CRAN's structured linkage of Africans and Antilleans has been rejected by some Antillean organizations, in particular the group Collectif D'DOM. During a series of heated exchanges in 2006 the association's founder, Patrick Kavan, stated that Antilleans, who have been citizens of the French republic since 1848, do not share common ground with Africans.
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critics and theorists. They were not, for example, central to the development of the corpus of postcolonial theory and criticism. As Doris Garraway suggests, one reason for this omission may be that "few of the categories and concepts current in postcolonial studies are useful in a discussion of the Old Regime culture of slavery in which the "other" was not native and there was so little ambivalence involved in commodifying the human individual" (xii). But if the "other" in postcolonial theory has predominantly been "native," it is not simply because of the emphasis placed on ambivalence and hybridity, or because of the research interests of the pioneer scholars in the field, but also because of the nature of the literary record. Rather, if narratives bearing on relations between "natives" and settlers have been more amply analyzed in postcolonial studies than narratives of colonial slavery, it is in large part because more such narratives exist. This correlation is not limited to studies with a postcolonial orientation. If we perform a survey of all literary criticism bearing on themes such as colonization and cultural encounters, we find that many more critical interpretations have been devoted to Oriental exoticism,56 and to encounters between natives and colonists,57 than to literary portraits of colonial slavery. I would contend that the main explanation for this discrepancy is simply that there are many more works in these categories to examine.

Scholars who undertake to explore the literature associated with the first French colonial empire face the preliminary problem of the dearth of relevant texts. Confronted with this lack they generally adopt one or both of these strategies. The first is to catalog all French works in which the colonies, slavery, and people of African descent are portrayed, across genres and historical periods. To give a few examples of this practice, Roger Marxer's L'Afrique noire dans la littérature française: Les premières images, XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles (Black Africa in French Literature: The First Images, Seventeenth-Eighteenth Centuries) (1965) catalogs all French representations of contact with Africa and Africans starting from the sixteenth century. Régis Antoine's Les écrivains français et les Antilles (French Writers and the Antilles) (1978) undertakes an exhaustive survey of metropolitan French and Caribbean writing on the French Antilles from the establishment of the colony to the era of negritude. And Léon-François Hoffmann's Nègre, the equality thorough though more historically bounded Le nègre romantique (The Romantic Negro) (1973) considers black figures in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French literature. More recently, Christopher Miller's tour de force study, The French Atlantic Triangle (2007), considers the place of the slave trade in French and Francophone culture from the eighteenth century to contemporary times. Emphasizing the triangulated relationships among French, African, and Caribbean writers, Miller brings a new transcontinental momentum to the established critical paradigm.

An overlapping group of studies considers the place of slavery in texts that are considered central to the social and political thought of the French Enlightenment. These include Edward Seccer's Anti-Slavery Opinion in France during the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century (1937), and two essays by the distinguished French eighteenth-century scholar Jean Ebrard.58 Seccer focuses on the latter part of the eighteenth century and on abolitionist writing, the period and genre in which we encounter the greatest number of references to slavery. Ebrard, by contrast, focuses on the overall lack of engagement on the part of the luimiers with the question of slavery. Michèle Duchet's Anthropologie et histoire au xviie siècle des luimiers (Anthropology and History in the Century of the Luimiers) (1971) is not specifically about colonization or slavery, but it touches on both issues frequently in the context of a wide-ranging study of Enlightenment anthropology. Duchet's work has been an important point of departure for the rediscovery, during the past two decades, of the Abbé Raynal's Histoire politique et philosophique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes (History of the Two Indies), the first attempt to write a history of European colonization.59

My own work is indebted to these prior studies, but as indicated earlier, I have significant reservations about the critical practice of gathering together all eighteenth-century or all "Enlightenment," references to colonial slavery. The studies mentioned above are substantial volumes that explore a wide array of texts in which slavery appears as a topic. Coverage is one of their strengths, but this breadth also tends to confer the false appearance of a strong and continuous tradition of literary representation, while correspondingly canonizing the marginal and fragmentary nature of these depictions.

Another group of literary studies of Old Regime colonization focus on the last third of the eighteenth century, when representations were, as we have seen, more abundant. This is the strategy of Edward Seccer's Anti-Slavery Opinion in France during the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century, and of Hoffmann's Nègre romantique, which focuses on revolutionary and Romantic writing, though it includes a chapter on earlier works. Translating Slavery: Gender and Race in French Women's Writing, 1785-1825 (1994), a volume edited by Doris Rash and Françoise Massardier-Kenney, anthropologist and presents critical introductions to late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century writing on slavery and race by French women. A subsequent anthology edited

57. See, for example, Dufoce, L'islam romanisé ou l'islam scandinave, Structures du roman, with, Orientalism, Race, Critical Terrain, Débats, Foreign Idols, Orientations, Orientalism in French Critical Drama.

58. See, for example, Dufoce, La conquête de l'Amérique (The Conquest of America); Halte, Colonial Encounters, British Style, L'islam romanisé ou l'islam scandinave, with, Imperial Sex; Van de Berck, Trans on Monopoly, Bouchet, Cameroon Encounters, English, European Encounters, with the New World, Roger, L'islam romanisé, with.


60. See also Duchet, Dictionnaire des deux Indes, ou, Vérification fragmentaire.
by Youonna Chassera, *Fictions coloniales du dix-huitième siècle* (Colonial Fictions of the Eighteenth Century) (2005), presents and discusses three late eighteenth-century novellas that portray the colonial world. Finally, a number of studies, including eighteenth-century scholar and anticolonial activist Yves Bénard’s *Diderot: De l’Amélique à l’anticolonialisme* (Diderot: From Atheism to Anticolonialism), and political theorist Sankar Muthu’s *Enlightenment against Empire* (2003), discuss anticolonial perspectives in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century literature.

The literary-based studies with which my own work has the greatest affinity are those that identify early French colonization as a site of cultural repression. These include Louis Sala-Molins’s *Les maîtres des lamères: Sous la raison, l’outrage* (Dark Side of the Light), which emphasizes the limited and ambivalent ways in which prominent Enlightenment thinkers responded to colonial slavery; Françoise Vergès’s *Monsters and Revolutionaries: Colonial Family Romance and Misissage* (1999), and Catherine Reinhardt’s *Cloués à la mémoire: Beyond Slavery and Emancipation in the French Caribbean* (2006). The latter two works explore points of articulation between the colonial past, notably the history of slavery, and present-day debates over citizenship and cultural identity. Bridging the surprisingly deep divide between colonial and postcolonial studies, these studies consider how the problematic memory of a colonial past dominated by slavery and racial hierarchy reverberates—often in the mode of repression—in contemporary society and politics. Vergès considers the imprint of colonial rule, slavery, and misissage in the Indian Ocean “postcolonial,” *La Réunion*. She interprets present-day tendencies such as the pursuit of assimilation with metropolitan France as manifestations of a continuing “colonial family romance” that represents France as the *mère patrie* and the colonies as her children, a narrative that obviously obscures the place of slavery in the relationship between colony and metropole (4). Reinhardt’s discussion of the memory of slavery in the French Antilles, which also straddles part and present, metropole and colony or Département d’Outre-Mer (DOM); the former French colonies of the Caribbean and Indian Ocean that remain French territories have since 1946 been classified as overseas departments or regions), explores the intertwining of historical and contemporary representations of slavery in the Caribbean and metropolitan France.

We have observed that a number of critical studies of the cultural representation of colonization focus on the relationship between slavery and (the) Enlightenment, sometimes as a process of intellectual formation marked by the development of critical philosophy or as a key period or stage of European history. Discussions of this kind have for the most part drawn the conclusion that Enlightenment philosophy “failed” to respond to the problem of slavery, though at least one study, Sankar Muthu’s 2003 book *Enlightenment against Empire*, has identified a late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century tradition of anticolonialism. To this point, scholars who have discussed slavery and Enlightenment have not gone so far as to argue that the philosophers’ lack of critical engagement with slavery undermines the idea of (the) Enlightenment, though building on the critical legacy of Adorno and Horkheimer, one could certainly make an argument of this kind.

For a number of reasons, I do not make the category of “Enlightenment” a central focus of my reflection in this book. This is mostly because the patterns of repression and displacement that I describe in the social and political writings of thinkers such as Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Voltaire are features of a wide range of texts and can also be discerned in material culture. Given this I do not think that it is particularly meaningful to speak in terms of a specific “Enlightenment” response to colonization or slavery prior to the late 1760s.

I also find that reading canonical works of political philosophy alongside fictional works, and paratextual genres such as missionary narratives, allows texts’ varied allegiances and political investments to come into focus, offering some of the historical abstraction in which the category of “Enlightenment thought” is often enveloped. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Doris Garraway’s compelling book *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean* (2005) focuses not on well-known works of Enlightenment philosophy but on subcanonical and paratextual genres. Observing that slavery and colonial misissage are among the most disavowed aspects of eighteenth-century social relations, *Libertine Colony* examines not canonical, metropolitan texts in which these encounters are sparsely represented but subcanonical genres grounded in eyewitness observation. Garraway argues that modes of writing such as missionary narratives, and the colonial descriptions and reform proposals authored by Creole magistrates, can be viewed not only at documents of colonial power but also as legacies of creolization: testaments to the participation of indigenous, European, and African populations in a common, albeit highly unequal culture (xi-xl). Taking a new approach to the metropolitan/colonial divide, Garraway considers how colonial/Creole society is represented by writers based in the colonies.

Garraway is certainly right to say that slavery, the racial structure of colonial society, and the range of desires and anxieties inspired by contact between Europeans and Africans are more extensively represented in subcanonical and paratextual genres than in canonical texts. But I want to make two observations about this argument, one bearing on canonical texts, the other on the subcanonical genres that Garraway explores. The first is that while it is accurate that the colonies and slavery do not figure centrally in eighteenth-century novels and philosophical discourses, we do encounter indirect or displaced representations of these subjects. The disavowal of colonial reality to which

61. The same may be said of Sala-Molins’s earlier work, *Le code noir ou le calvire de Canaan*. 
Garraway refers gave rise, not to a simple silence, but rather to a more complex combination of silence and displaced representation. My second point is that although the colonies are represented more extensively in empirical genres such as travel writing and missionary histories, we nonetheless encounter in these works some of the same patterns of emphasis and displacement that are features of more mainstream literature. As I discuss in chapter 4, the missionary authors whom Garraway discusses evince considerably more interest in the "native" dimensions of the Caribbean—the region's indigenous flora, fauna, and human populations—than in slaves, slavery, or the creolized societies that they were engaged in forming.

The final set of remarks that I wish to make with regard to recent scholarship on the literary imprint of colonization concerns the question of eighteenth-century discourses of race. The mid-late eighteenth century was a time of unprecedented reflection on the nature and origins of human physiological diversity. Several major Enlightenment thinkers—for example, Pierre-Louis de Maupertuis, Voltaire, the Comte de Buffon, and Cromellus De Pauv—explored questions such as whether all human beings share a common origin, and to what extent skin color and other physical characteristics are determined by climate and/or physiology and heredity. The period's leading scientific voices contested the theological arguments that had previously been marshaled to explain differences of skin color, notably the claim that the dark skin of Africans is a mark of divine punishment, and instead hypothesized natural causalities relating to climate and physiology.

In a broad sense the linkage between the theorization of race and the colonial order is self-evident. Europe's colonial expansion was obviously an important catalyst for the crystallization of the category of race. Indeed, as Colette Guillaumin has proposed, race can be understood as a signifier that has the effect of naturalizing established relations of domination such as the system of Atlantic slavery.63 This, it turns out to be surprisingly difficult to draw direct connections between eighteenth-century writing on human diversity and colonial practice.

For most of the eighteenth century the leading scientific thinkers disagreed about the nature of race. Monogenists such as Buffon squared off against polygenists such as Voltaire, and whereas some writers claimed the causes of physiological variation to be largely environmental, others searched the human body for the physiological causes of blackness. For recent scholars such as Pierre Bouille (24) and Elsa Dorlin (229) these varied explorations constitute the antecedents of "modern racism," which I take to mean the view that humanity is divided into fixed groups identified by different physiological and intellectual characteristics, and the belief that these differences are biological and inherited. Andrew Currant, by contrast, has argued persuasively that eighteenth-century French thinkers predominantly approached human diversity, not as a terrain of fixed and essential differences, but rather as a continuum or spectrum of "varieties."64 He notes, for example, that midcentury scientists were deeply preoccupied with intermediary or hybrid figures such as the nègre blanc (black abino). One of the interesting questions raised by Currant's argument, it seems to me, concerns the relationship between metropolitan racial theory and colonial practice. The theorization of race as an unstable and mutable category seems to have had relatively little impact on what one might call the applied racism of the colonial order. The racial hierarchy of the colonial plantation was put in place at a time when the justification for the enslavement of Africans revolved around theological claims. The shifting debates of eighteenth-century racial science do not appear to have led to a significant modification of this regime. Correspondingly, I would argue that, beyond the obvious fact that colonization and slavery gave rise to a reflection on race, it is not necessarily possible to correlate the colonial racial order with the currents of metropolitan science.

Over the last decade or so the colonial world has often been described as a "laboratory": a reservoir of samples and a site of offshore experimentation.65 Scholars including James McClellan and Richard Grove have shown that in the late eighteenth century, fields such as botany and environmental science were given a significant impetus by research conducted in colonial outposts. This should, in theory, also have been the case for racial science. In reality, relatively few Enlightenment theorists of race based their studies directly on colonial evidence. Scientific thinkers such as Buffon and De Pauv were essentially armchair philosophers who pondered the rich spectrum of human diversity from afar.

One exception to this rule can be found in the work of Pierre Barrère, who served as a medical doctor in Guiana, and wrote a treatise on skin color entitled Discours sur la cause physique de la couleur des nègres (Discourse on the Physical Cause of the Color of Blacks) (1741) in which he draws evidence from the dissection of the cadaver of an African slave. But Barrère also represents a confirmation of the detachment of racial science from colonial expertise to the extent that in a second, better-known work in which he surveys the history, agriculture, and population of French Guiana, he makes very little mention of enslaved Africans and says nothing at all about the causes of skin color.66 In

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63. "Rethinking Race History." 64. Grove, "Grenn Imperialismes; McClellan, Colonization and Science. 65. Nouvelle relation de la Prinece espagnole.
place of these themes, Bazère offers a detailed account of Amerindian culture, a subject that he clearly considered to be of greater interest to his readers.

The most systematic and influential French account of human diversity of the mid-eighteenth century was the one offered by Buffon in *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière* (*Natural History: General and Particular*), a pivotal contribution to the natural sciences published in fifteen volumes between 1749 and 1767, with seven volumes of supplements to follow.65 Given the scope and influence of Buffon’s work, I will briefly consider his arguments and his sources of evidence.

Buffon was deeply interested in the issue of what constitutes a species or natural grouping, and he explores this question in the context of human physiological difference in several sections of *Natural History*.66 Although he was a monogenist—that is, he accepted the theory of a single human origin—he also endorsed the idea that mankind is divided into groups characterized by different physical traits and different levels of intelligence. In designating these groups he uses a number of different terms, including “race,” but also “species” and “nation.” Buffon argues that variations among human groups are hereditary, but he also claims that they arise from the action of environment over long periods of time (“Varieties,” 405). As a result, while he points to the existence of different races, he also recognizes the existence of intermediary and hybrid groups.67

One of Buffon’s main hypotheses about race is that human beings were all originally white and that dark skin represents a process of “degeneration” from this original state. The key piece of evidence that he cites in this regard is that while there are *nigres blanc* there are no *blances nigr* (“Varieties,” 389). In the latter part of his career Buffon refined this point by turning to colonial evidence. He argues that “successive intermarriages between whites and blacks lead to lightening of the skin” (“Degeneration,” 1017–18). What is fascinating about this claim is that whereas European commentators on race in colonial milieux invariably viewed mestizaje as a process that darkened the skin, Buffon, armed with his belief in original whiteness, turned colonial taxonomy on its head.

*Natural History*’s arguments about human diversity are grounded in a wide range of scientific and travel literature, as well as in the accumulated lore of orientalism. Buffon’s methodology could be characterized as global and transhistorical, and indeed he is generally dismissive of research that he considers to be too narrow in scope. He makes it clear, for instance, that as far as he is concerned, variations in skin color are due to exposure to the sun over long periods of time, and that dissecting cadavers to locate the anatomical causes of blackness is a sheer waste of time (“Varieties,” 402–3). Perhaps for this reason, he is much more interested in the evidence provided by differences among African populations than in the information about race and inheritance that could be gleaned from the colonial world.68 Perhaps he felt that looking at the colonies as a laboratory of race would correspond to adopting a narrow historical and geographical perspective.

Since the late 1990s, acknowledgments that the category of race has been an important force in French social and political history have led several scholars to undertake genealogies that link contemporary attitudes to race to France’s history of colonial slavery. These are important initiatives, and as I have suggested, I view *Trading Places* as a contribution to this project. This said, I think that it is important to avoid conflating the history of racial thought with the history of colonial slavery. To clarify what I mean by this, let us look at the example of a recent work in this area: Elsa Dorlin’s 2006 study *Matrice de la race*. In this ambitious work Dorlin proposes that in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the “othering” of women, Africans, and the enslaved was an integral part of the inner logic of European schemes of rationality, notably in the fields of medicine and natural science. She illustrates the centrality of race and colonization to the economy of modern European thought in various ways. For example, drawing on David Hume’s essay *Of National Characters* (1748), Dorlin suggests that the colonies were a “sucre lisse,” or key site, of the fabrication of French national ideology. What she means by this is that the establishment of settler colonies paved the way for the claim that to be French is to be French anywhere: that national identity is a matter of homogeneity and not of environment (198). From my perspective this example is problematic for several reasons, one of the most important being that eighteenth-century French writers generally drew a strong distinction between the character of Creoles and that of the metropolitan French. In some versions of this scenario, Creoles were even described as having a distinctive physical appearance. It seems to me significant that Dorlin cites a British source for this idea, and I wonder whether a parallel French source could be located for the same period. In another passage, Dorlin argues that in the late eighteenth-century the question of racial mixing emerged as a “problem of the first order” (262). Yet she gives no account of this ostensibly major debate, and as a result it is not clear in

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66. These discussions are concentrated in the long essay titled “Vieilles dans l’espèce humaine” (“Varieties in the Human Species”) (III, 1749), and a later passage titled “De la différenciation des sauvages” (“On the Differentiation of the Indians”) (IV, 1749).

67. For example, Buffon describes “Hotentots” as men within the black race “who are beginning to get close to whites,” and “Mous” as whites leaning in the direction of blacks (“Varieties,” 371).
what context (other than perhaps the revolutionary struggle over the political rights of free people of color) this urgent question came to the fore. 70

In sum, the relationship between discourses of race, métagage, and national identity was less directly pegged to the colonial enterprise than one might anticipate. But I also want here to make a broader point, which is that the relationship between discourses and practices is often circuitous. In the wake of Said’s Orientalism, we have become accustomed to discerning a close relationship between colonial power and discursive formations. But while this paradigm furnishes a crucial framework for interpreting colonial authority, it needs to be supplemented with other theoretical models. Colonial power has often been exercised or articulated in the mode of discourse, but, as I aim to show, it has also often involved processes of silencing, avoidance, and displacement: mechanisms that psychoanalytic theory helps illuminate.

As stated earlier, this book does not attempt to perform a negative reading of the many eighteenth-century works in which colonial slavery is not evoked. I do, however, want to back up my contention that the issue of colonial slavery is only marginally represented in eighteenth-century literature and philosophy, a claim that is not self-evident. To this end I offer, in an appendix, a brief and by no means exhaustive overview of the representation and non-representation of colonization in eighteenth-century French literature. This essay discusses key authors and texts, and situates them in relation to major currents of representation. Many of the authors and works addressed in the appendix (for example, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, Prévost, Gouges, and Saint-Lambert) also come up for discussion in other places in this book. Others, such as Helvetius, are discussed only in the appendix. I discuss Diderot and d’Alembert’s Encyclopédie at many points, but the appendix is the only place in which I attempt to survey its contributions to the exploration of colonial questions. Readers interested in an overview of eighteenth-century French approaches to the colonial questions might find it helpful to read this essay before turning to the more specific discussions presented in the chapters that follow.

70 Dodds cites several texts that refer to métagage in the context of the struggle of Constantinople (184-85), and interprets these in light of a work that can be seen as an early instance of racialization, Charles-Augustin Vaudremer’s Étude sur la nature de perfectionner l’espèce humaine (Essay on the Means of Perfecting the Human Race). Two points must be emphasized, however. One is that métagage was being associated with oriental rather than colonial slavery, and the other is the isolated nature of the example.
Appendix

The Colonies and Slavery in Eighteenth-Century French Literature

This appendix surveys the representation and nonrepresentation of the colonial world in eighteenth-century French literature. It focuses primarily on writers viewed as leading exponents of Enlightenment social and political thought because it is in this group of texts that we perhaps most expect to discover an engagement with colonial slavery. This account is not intended to be exhaustive. It is rather an attempt to convey the overall standing of this set of questions in eighteenth-century French culture and to pinpoint key currents and tendencies. It also does not address scientific works devoted specifically to the topic of race because, as I note in the introduction, it is difficult to account for the relationship between racial thought and colonization and slavery without undertaking close readings of specific texts.

The Enlightenment figure most widely associated with the issue of slavery, both by eighteenth-century writers and by contemporary critics, is Montesquieu. In the words of Christopher Miller, “Montesquieu opened the door to a debate about slavery in France.” Yet Montesquieu’s reputation in this regard rests primarily on the slender foundation of a single chapter in Spirit of Law (book 18, chapter 5). In this passage, as I discuss in chapter 1, Montesquieu quickly transposes the issue of Atlantic slavery onto an exploration of Oriental servitude. This process of orientalization was to be a key dimension of

1. Miller, French Atlantic Triangle, 66.
Montesquieu’s influence on subsequent French writing about slavery. It could in fact be said that Montesquieu opened the door to writing about slavery as a predominantly Eastern phenomenon. In one passage of *Persian Letters*, Montesquieu’s enlightened traveler, Usbek, observes that although Europe’s princes loudly trumpeted their decision to put an end to servitude—a decision that benefited them to the extent that it curtailed the power of the feudal nobility—they abandoned this principle when they conquered new lands and realized that it was economically advantageous to have slaves to cultivate them. “Truth at one moment, error in another,” Usbek concludes, passing a judgment that could equally be applied to Montesquieu’s own rather uneven engagement with the practice of colonial slavery.2 This brief allusion to colonial slavery in *Persian Letters* is overshadowed by the novel’s much more well-developed reflection on slavery in the Orient. The novel examines several forms of Oriental servitude, including subordination to the power of a despotic ruler and the subjugation of women in the harem. In a suggestive passage, Usbek’s deputy, the chief Grand eunuch, recalls how as an adolescent he was abducted from Africa, sold, and made into a eunuch so that he could serve in his master’s harem (*Lettres persanes*, 84). But while his recollection evokes practices associated with colonial slavery, it quickly anaesthetizes them to a discussion of the trans-African/Arab slave trade, and thus to slavery in an Oriental context.

The Atlantic slave trade is addressed briefly as a moral and political issue in Claude-Adrien Helvétius’s *De l’esprit* (On Mind) (1758), a highly controversial work that was condemned and publicly burned for its atheistic leanings.3 Radicalizing Montesquieu’s account of the interconnections between law, politics, and climate in *Spirit of Law*, Helvétius lays out a doctrine whereby virtue is held to be relative to the social and political conditions of the state. Morality, he contends, consists of serving the common good within a particular society, and as a result there can be no universal moral principles. Helvétius touches on the slave trade in the context of a meditation on international justice (discourse 8: chapter 4). He argues that people are motivated by their own interests, and that if, for the benefit of the public good, these interests are counteracted by laws, such restrictions must be backed up by a system of penalties and rewards. Helvétius argues that the situation is similar in the case of states, although the solution is more difficult to achieve. States attack and exploit less powerful groups, as the relationship between Europeans and African states, and there is no international framework of punishments and rewards to keep this behavior in check.

Helvétius is lucid as to both the causes of the slave trade and their effects (he speaks about the destruction of the family and the propagation of warfare) but his presentation of these issues constitutes an explanation rather than a condemnation of an existing state of affairs. This is consistent with Helvétius’s overall method, which consists of relativizing cultural practices rather than declaring them good or bad. Moreover, since Helvétius conceptualizes utility in relation to individual states rather than as a transnational good, he also has no basis for offering a rationale for strengthening international legal protections. If slavery in the Atlantic context is addressed by Helvétius only fleetingly, the same cannot be said for Oriental slavery. Like Montesquieu, Helvétius writes about Oriental despotism and the subjugation of Oriental peoples at great length. Several chapters of *On Mind* (discourse 8: chapters 16–21) explain why despotism does not correspond to the public good, and argue that it is a type of regime that is always, in the end, overthrown. In a chapter entitled “On Slavery and the Allegorical Genii of Orientals” (discourse 3: chapter 29), Helvétius goes so far as to reject Montesquieu’s argument that slavery and subjugation are effects of climate and proposes instead a more limited sense that they arise from a specific political regime, namely despotism, and that at a certain point in their history all governments tend toward despotism and by implication toward slavery (455–59). In other words, whereas Helvétius foresees no political solution to interregional (i.e., colonial) slavery, and indeed provides no moral basis for condemning it, he both condemns Oriental servitude and presages its political implications.

Voltaire, in the eyes of Christopher Miller, is “the *philosophe* with by far the most vexed relation to the slave trade” (271). His oeuvre is of course so vast that it is impossible to summarize his writing on slavery with a few strokes of the pen. I will, however, touch on some of the principal works in which we can observe this vexed relationship. I will not discuss the numerous works by Voltaire, such as the philosophical tale *Enée* (1747), in which slavery is shown as a feature of Oriental culture.

The history of European colonial expansion is addressed more concretely in *Essay on Universal History* than in most midcentury French texts (much more so than in *Spirit of Law*, for instance). Voltaire offers a brief history of each of the French colonies and discusses specific questions such as France’s alliance with the Hérault nation. He makes it clear that he thinks that France’s most significant colonial possessions lay not in Canada, which he characterizes as a snowy wasteland, but in the Antilles, and to support this claim he presents figures on the growth and commercial importance of these settlements (2:375).4 These figures include estimates for the enslaved and free populations of Saint-Domingue, details of the rise in the purchase price of slaves over the previous quarter century, and calculations of the revenue derived annually in France from trade in colonial goods. Voltaire shows, in essence, that though the
colonies might be mere "dons on the map," their demographic and commercial significance far surpassed their physical size (2:380).

But while Voltaire seems enthusiastic about certain aspects of colonization, his overall view is negative. He complains that the short-term gains reaped from the establishment of colonies all too often translated into serious long-term problems. Like Montesquieu in *Spirit of Laws*, he associates colonization with depopulation and the global spread of diseases such as syphilis. He also blames the struggle between France and England for control of Canada for causing the outbreak of new wars in Europe (2:373-78), and argues that the wealth derived from the Antilles was of a fundamentally superficial and destructive nature (2:380).

This negative view of the consequences of colonization is given narrative form in the philosophical tale *Candide* (1759), which includes a brief indictment of the brutality of colonial slavery. Traveling through Surinam, Candide and his sidekick Cacambo encounter a "Negro" dressed in rags and missing both a hand and a leg. The man explains that his hand had been severed when his finger became trapped in a sugar mill, and that his leg was cut off by his master after he tried to run away. Drawing the crucial connection between slavery and sugar, the slave observes that "it is at this price that you eat sugar in Europe." There is no question but that in this passage Voltaire evokes New World slavery in a vivid and morally lucid way. The only qualifying observation to be made here is that the passage evokes not a French colony but Surinam, the Dutch neighbor of French Guiana, a small but significant displacement that allows Voltaire to condemn colonial slavery without directly implicating France.

Voltaire's writing on colonization and slavery is marked by a central tension. In the passage just cited and in some sections of *Essay on Universal History*, Voltaire writes boldly and scathing about the atrocities committed in the New World against indigenous people and enslaved Africans. Yet at the same time he represents indigenous Americans and Africans as both different from and inferior to Europeans. In *Candide*, for example, the chapter involving the mutilated slave is preceded by one in which the hero shoots what he thinks are some monkeys who are chasing a group of indigenous women, only to learn that the pursuers are the women's lovers (84-85). Though this episode is often read as an instance of cultural relativism, I suggest it indicates rather a predisposition to question, not the limit between the animal and the human, but rather, more narrowly, the boundary between "primitive" (i.e., African/Amerindian) peoples and primitives. A subscriber to polygenism, Voltaire argued that Africans, Amerindians, and Europeans have different origins and display distinctive physical and intellectual traits. In some places he also draws a connection between these natural inequalities and the practice of slavery.

Nature has adorned to this principle these different degrees of genius, and the characters of nations that are so rarely seen to change. It is for this reason that Negroes are the slaves of other men. They are bought on Africa's coasts like beasts, and the multitudes of these blacks, transplanted to our American colonies, serve a very small number of Europeans. (*Essay on Universal History*, 2:388)

Though Voltaire emphasizes in this passage that the slave trade was no credit to Europeans, his criticisms are mitigated by the fact that he views the inferiority of Africans as a secondary cause of slavery. This bifurcation points to one of several factors that supported the neglect of colonization and slavery in eighteenth-century culture. Though many writers found slavery to be repugnant, their underlying perception that Africans were in essential respects different from or inferior to Europeans fostered a climate of ambivalence. One hypothesis that may be entertained in this regard is that if Voltaire wrote more concretely about the colonies and the slave trade than the other leading philosophers, it was perhaps because his moral aversion was attenuated by a particularly racist view of Africans.

One might expect references to colonial commerce and slavery to abound in Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* (1751-65), the great compendium of Enlightenment thought. The work's full title, *Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (Reasoned Dictionary of Sciences, Arts, and Trades), announces a concern with manufacture, and this focus is confirmed in *d'Alembert's "Preliminary Discourse"* (volume 1, 1751), which emphasizes the seriousness with which the editors approached everything relating to industry and modes of production. The colonial mode of production and the system of enslaved labor, however, occupy a fairly marginal place in the *Encyclopédie*.

Colonial slavery is evoked in a few articles that deal with aspects of colonial production and trade, for example, "Sucrerie" (Sugar Refinery) (volume 15, 1765), and in some of the places devoted to "Agriculture and Rustic Economy." In these entries slave labor is depicted as an integral facet of colonial production, and the moral and social dimensions of the practice are generally not brought into question.

There are also many articles in which one would expect to find a discussion of slavery but none is forthcoming. These include a number of agricultural/technical articles, including "Suga" (volume 15, 1765), "Cotton" (volume 4, 1754), and "Tabacco" (volume 15, 1765). Another example is the article

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6 Speculation about the possibility between Africans and primitives was by no means limited to Voltaire. Even Buffon, an adamant monogenist, pointed to resemblances between orangutans and Hottentots, and even speculated on the possibility of sexual intercourse between them. See "Nouvelles des singes" (1766) in *Histoire naturelle, Buffon, Ouvres.*
lists the clauses of the Black Code, and provides anthropological information about the various African peoples of the Atlantic diaspora.

From the apparent discrepancy between these two articles it is possible to draw a broader conclusion about attitudes toward Atlantic slavery. What writers found most morally abhorrent was the act of enslaving free men and women, and transporting them far from their birth lands (in England, the campaign for abolition of the 1780s–early 1800s was waged almost exclusively over the banning of the slave trade.) By contrast, the use of slave labor in the colonies was legitimized by the perception that it was a necessary evil that enabled the production of valuable commodities.

The issue of colonial slavery is addressed from a more critical perspective in the article "Population," by Daniellolle. This piece, which gives voice to the eighteenth-century obsession with depopulation, identifies colonial expansion and slavery, alongside several related phenomena—conquest, luxury, the valorization of commerce over agriculture—as major causes of depopulation in the modern world. Appearing in 1766 in volume 15, "Population" reflects the emergence of liberal economic discourse on the colonies, a perspective that advocated population growth and agricultural reform over luxury and trade.

The strongest moral indictment of colonial slavery articulates in the Encyclopedia are the article "Traité des nègres" (Black Slave Trade), published in volume 16 of the Encyclopedia in 1766. It was written by the Chevalier de Jaucourt, a prolific contributor to the Encyclopedia who also penned the article "Slavery." The distance between the two articles reflects a point made above—that the slave trade around most indignation than slavery itself—but it probably also reflects a discerning shift. "Black Slave Trade" appeared ten years after "Slavery" at a moment when slavery was beginning to emerge as an object of discussion and critique.

Denis Diderot, one of the two editors of the Encyclopedia, and one of the most radical political thinkers of the Enlightenment, did not devote significant attention to the question of colonization until the last decade of his life. In his Encyclopedia article "Homme esclave" (Human Species) (volume 8, 1765), a text that argues, contra Voltaire, that all men belong to a single species and that physiological differences are a function of climate, he contributes a single sentence on the reduction of blacks to slavery by Europeans who claimed to be Christians. The fact that the article also contains some derogatory racial observations about the low intelligence of sub-Saharan Africans may explain why Diderot was not moved to press this point further. The article "Africa" (volume 1, 1751) is about Africa as a site of European commerce. Diderot shows no interest whatsoever in the "indigenous" culture or history. Curiously, though, Diderot also says little about the slave trade, which is mentioned only briefly and in a neutral tone. In the article "Cotton" (volume 4, 1754) Diderot calls for the development of the French cotton industry and, correspondingly,
for an increase in colonial production of cotton. He does not, however, reflect on the probable expansion of slavery that would be required to achieve this growth. As in many other Enlightenment texts, enthusiasm for colonial commodities overshadows criticism of the colonial mode of production.

In the early 1770s Diderot's relative indifference to colonial questions was transformed into an ardent preoccupation with them. Having been invited to contribute to the second (1774) edition of Abbé Raynal's monumental *Histoire des deux Indes*, the first sustained attempt to write a history of the commercial and colonial expansion of modern Europe, Diderot became the driving force behind the work's dynamic third edition, published in 1780. He also wrote *Supplement à Bougainville's Voyage* (1772), a meditation on cultural difference and the consequences of European expansion inspired by the navigator Bougainville's account of his voyage to newly discovered Tahiti. Finally, he revisited one of his early works, the *Bijoux indiscrets* (Indiscreet Jewels) (1748), adding two new chapters with decidedly colonial themes to this Oriental libertine novel. Diderot's intellectual journey from silence to discourse thus epitomizes the broader cultural trajectory of eighteenth-century French culture.

The famous statement that opens Rousseau's *On the Social Contract*—"Man was born free, and everywhere he is in chains"—might lead one to believe that Rousseau had a great deal to say about the most egregious contemporary case of bondage, the Atlantic slave trade. In fact, though Rousseau frequently uses the word slavery and ancillary terms such as *chained*, *yokes*, and *irons* in a metaphorical sense to denounce social inequality and political subordination, he mentions colonial slavery directly in only one place, a passage of his novel *Julie ou, La nouvelle Héloïse* (Julie; or, *The New Heloise*) (1761). While traveling the oceans of the world to overcome his doomed passion for Julie, the hero, St. Preux, witnesses with horror and chagrin the crimes committed against his fellow man on the coasts of Africa and Brazil. He writes to Julie's cousin and confidante Claire that, "I turned aside my eyes in contempt, horror, and pity, at seeing the fourth part of my fellow man turned into beasts for the service of others, I bewailed being a man." As Christopher Miller notes, Rousseau, like his protagonist, essentially turned his eyes away from this overwhelming spectacle of inequality and oppression (68).

If Rousseau's silence on the issue of colonial slavery seems particularly surprising, it is not only because of his critical approach to political authority but also because of the strong anthropological reiterations of his philosophical writings. Rousseau was well versed in the travel literature on the Americas, and in *Second Discourse* (1755) based his arguments about primitive man on the Caribs of the Antilles. Like other thinkers of his generation, however, Rousseau was more interested in the profound contrast between the indigenous people of the Americas and members of advanced, European societies than in intermediate and diaphanous figures such as transplanted African slaves, with the result that "native others" occupy a more important place in his oeuvre than displaced Africans.

Until the last three decades of the eighteenth century, colonization and slavery were, if anything, represented even less often in fictional forms such as the novel than in philosophical works that dealt in explicit terms with economic and political questions. Before 1769 there were hardly any fictional representations of French colonialism, though many tales and novels explored "adjacent" issues, such as slavery in the Oriental world and encounters between Europeans (particularly conquisadores) and indigenous Aztecs and Incas. The one major exception to this silence is the oeuvre of Abbé Prévost, who touches on French colonialism in two of his novels.

At the end of *History of Manon Lescaut* and the *Chevalier des Grieux*, the last and most famous volume of *Memoirs and Adventures of a Man of Quality* (1728–31), the two eponymous protagonists find themselves in France's fledgling Mississippi colony. Having been rounded up by the police, Manon is deported to New Orleans along with a cohort of other girls arrested for prostitution, and her doggedly faithful lover, the Chevalier de Oriens, decides to accompany her to the New World. Though the young couple attempts to make a fresh start in Louisiana, they rapidly discover that the colony is imbued with the same vices as the metropole. After a duel with the corrupt governor's nephew, the heroes flee into the wilderness where Manon, overcome with exhaustion, perishes. This denouement stands as one of the great tragic episodes of French literature. It is less often recognized as a story firmly grounded in French colonial history. After the founding of New Orleans in 1718, the monopoly trading company that controlled the colony attempted to accelerate the process of populating it by transporting vagrants, orphans, and other vulnerable members of French society across the Atlantic. They were particularly interested in single women who could be married off to colonists, and rounded up large numbers of young women, particularly prostitutes and orphans detained in public institutions. In an article devoted to representations of early colonial Louisiana, Pierre Berthiaume notes that these roundups began to create public alarm, and that accusations of summary deportations started to appear in the press.

Prévost's subsequent novel, *Célestine* (1731–39), which I discuss in chapter 4, evokes several different American colonies, including Spanish Cuba, French Martinique, and British outposts in Virginia and the Carolinas. There were a number of reasons for Prévost's unusually acute awareness of colonial geography and history. Between 1746 and 1759 he edited the *Histoire
synergy between writing on North America produced by the Jesuit fathers Lafitau (1724) and Charlevoix (1744), the Baron de Lahontan (1703), and the Dutch-born traveler, Cornelius De Pauw (1774), and the broader philosophical currents of the period. Alongside the travel literature devoted to New France developed a less well-known but nonetheless significant corpus of writing on the Antilles. The major figures of this tradition were three Dominican priests, Fathers Raymond Breton (1666), Jean-Baptiste Du Tertre (1671), and Jean-Baptiste Poirier (1722, 1742), all witnesses to and participants in the early development of the French Caribbean. To varying degrees each of these writers portrayed the Antilles as a terrain of encounter between Europeans and Amerindians.

Missionary accounts of the early Caribbean colonies dated up in the early eighteenth century and it was not until the last three decades of the century that scurvy eyewitness descriptions of the colonies began to appear. Whereas there was an almost continuous tradition of writing on New France, the representation of the Caribbean was marked by a hiatus. It fell off rapidly after there were no more "savages" to discover or convert, and it was only much later that slavery, métissage, and plantation society became significant topics of writing.

The colonial descriptions and reform proposals that started to appear in the late eighteenth century were mostly written by administrators and colonial magistrates, many of whom—for instance Michel René Hillaire d'Aubertail (1777), Pierre Victor de Malouet (1788), and Médéric-Louis-Elie Moreau de Saint-Méry (1798)—were members of the white Creole elite. Their discussions of colonial administration and the management of slaves were reformist in tone but generally favorable toward slavery. The most richly descriptive work in this category is Moreau de Saint-Méry's Topographie, Physique, Civil, Politique, and Historical Description of the French Part of Saint-Domingue, a work published in Philadelphia in 1797-98 at a time when Saint-Domingue was embroiled in revolutionary turmoil and the hierarchical universe that Moreau painstakingly describes had begun to collapse.

When considered collectively, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French texts that touch on the colonial universe can be said to manifest a number of broad representational tendencies. In addition to the small overall volume of representation, and the displacements toward the Orient or toward encounters with indigenous people on which this book focuses, it is possible to point to a few further patterns. One is that the most abundant representations, and those richest in descriptive realism, appear in works produced by writers who had direct personal experience of the colonies. These writers were generally involved in some respect in the colonial system and had few reservations about the practice of slavery.

10. See Jameson, Monographie et Faulhause, 211. According to Bruce D. Dickson, the speech was published in The Provençal in 1753, and in two other periodicals, the Luxembourg Magazine and the Gentleman's Magazine, in 1753. Origins of African-American Literature, 27.
13. Léon-François Hoffmann also makes this point, Le nègre romantique, 84.
A second important tendency is the use of slavery as a metaphor for political oppression, especially at the expense of the literal meanings of the term, the most glaring example being that of Rousseau. Finally, in many eighteenth-century works the question of slavery stands in a relation of tension to attitudes toward race. Slavery is condemned as a moral offense, but this critique is undercut by statements bearing on the moral and intellectual inferiority of the people who are enslaved. This double-sidedness is discernible, for example, in writing by the earlier Diderot, as well as in the writings of Voltaire and Rousseau.13

In the late 1760s the colonial world belatedly became a subject of representation and moral debate. Colonial issues were represented in works of economic theory, as well as in a number of fictional texts. Ultimately, during the revolutionary period, the colonies became arenas of social activism and a focus of political activity.

The gradual transition from indifference to activism occurred for several reasons. An important factor was the loss of New France in 1768 by the terms of the Treaty of Paris. It is generally said that France agreed to hand over its remaining Canadian territories to England in order to secure the restoration of its more valuable Antillean possessions, Guadeloupe and Martinique. Though this account does not fully capture the complexity of events, what is clear is that the war, the peace treaty, and the cession of Canada drew attention to the colonial world, particularly the Antilles, the last bastion of French power in the Americas. Following the loss of New France, French writers and political figures began to contemplate new colonial ventures in other parts of the world, notably Africa and Asia, to envisage colonization without slavery, and to sketch out a new vision of colonial rule: conquest undertaken in the interests of humanity, and as an extension of the French Enlightenment.

Another contextual factor was the change in French political culture that occurred in the last three decades of the eighteenth century. In the 1770s and 1780s demands for social change and political reform became less abstract and more urgent. Reformers argued less for sweeping principles and more for targeted reforms. Ultimately, the abolition of slavery came to be included among these reforms.

In the 1770s and 1780s French writers produced two main kinds of writing on colonization and slavery. The first consisted of liberal economic and political treatises, works such as Mirabeau’s *Friend of Mankind* (1757), Le Mercier de la Rivière’s *Natural and Essential Order of Political Societies* (1767), and Abbé Morellet’s *Memoir on the Present Situation of the Company of the Indies* (1769). These works provided the conceptual context for the idea that tropical agriculture could be made profitable without slavery. Thaliers including Quinson, Mirabeau, Turgot, Dupont de Nemours, and Condorcet—the French branch of the school of Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson—advocated a comprehensive rethinking of French economic policy. They called, in particular, for freedom of commerce, the termination of monopolies and the abolition of France’s convoluted system of domestic tolls and tariffs, the liberalization of modes of production (the abolition of the medieval guild system and the end of colonial slavery), and for increased investment in agriculture. Most of the writing on colonization and slavery produced between 1763 and the French Revolution was shaped by the arguments of this school. So much so, in fact, that I argue that the flowering of liberal political economy was a cultural precondition for the emergence of colonization and slavery as significant cultural concerns.

The Abbé Raynal’s monumental *History of the Two Indies* synthesized many of these ideas, and can to some extent be seen as an outgrowth of the thinking on colonization and commerce inaugurated during the previous decade. That Raynal undertook to produce a vast reference work on the history of European expansion indicates the growing interest generated by this topic. The fact that no less a figure than Denis Diderot came on board as an editor and writer for the 1774 and 1780 editions shows that the question of colonization was taking shape as an urgent philosophical issue.

The second principal genre of late eighteenth-century French writing on colonial society was sentimental fiction. Tales, novels, and plays such as Gabriel Mailhès’s *The Black Philosopher* (1764); Jean-François de Saint-Lambert’s *Zimbo* (1769); Louis-Sébastien Mercier’s *The Year Two Thousand Four Hundred and Forty* (1771); Olympe de Gouges’s *Black Slavery or, The Happy Shipwreck* (1786); Joseph La Vallée’s *The Negro at These Are Better* (1789); Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s *Paul and Virginie* (1788) and *Emmanuel and Zarile* (1792); and Germaine de Staël’s *“Mirza; or, Letters of a Traveler”* (1798) all brought a sentimental dimension to the representation of slavery.16 By portraying enslaved men and women as individuals, these texts made it possible for readers to envisage the impact of slavery in concrete, human terms.

Although these texts are heterogeneous, a few generalizations can be made about their dominant themes and about the ways in which they approach slavery. There is, first of all, significant overlap between the sentimental genre and the arguments made by economic thinkers, for instance, the claim that free labor was more productive than enslaved labor, and that sugar should be cultivated on “free” plantations in Africa. In *Emmanuel and Zarile*, Bernardin de St-Pierre had previously insisted on the issue of colonial slavery in his travel narrative, *Voyage to the Island of Mauritius*.  


16. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre had previously insisted on the issue of colonial slavery in his travel narrative, *Voyage to the Island of Mauritius*. 

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de Saint-Pierre’s play about slavery, Antony Bénot, a character based on the French-born Quaker abolitionist from Philadelphia, travels to the coast of Africa arguing for the cultivation of sugar in Africa as a means of bringing an end to the slave trade, while Stael’s short story “Mirza” is set in a sugar plantation in Senegal, an establishment founded by a former slave at the behest of an enlightened governor.

Several sentimental anti-slavery fictions contain episodes that explore the concern that abolition would spell both the end of a functioning colonial economy and the end of the rule of law. A number of others endeavor to show that, once emancipated, former slaves would remain at their stations, faithful to their masters, grateful for the gift of freedom.

In The Black Philosopher, a work that is part picaresque novel, part philosophical tale (it has been described as a parody of Candide), an African prince named Tintillo, having learned French and acquired French instruments from a traveler, is captured by a slave trader and shipped to Martinique. Conditions aboard the slave ship are bad, but the master to whom Tintillo is sold in Martinique is good (he puts his slave to work in a library). As a result, when Maroon attack the colony, far from joining in their protest, he urges them to renounce violence and return to work. Voicing enlightened French colonial views, Tintillo argues that the slaves would have suffered worse fates in war-torn Africa; that Europeans had bought them legitimately, and that if they returned to work, they would be able to earn their freedom by legitimate means. The first French work of any length to have a protagonist of sub-Saharan African origin—there was no earlier French equivalent of Codette or Oronteado—The Black Philosopher is also the fictional representation of colonial relations that comes closest to articulating a pro-slavery perspective. (Catherine Reinhardt has appropriately characterized it as an “assimilationist text.”) It is, however, far from being the only colonial fiction to suggest that freedom must be conferred from the outside, by France, or that Africans themselves bear the lion’s share of responsibility for the slave trade. Several later works that take a more active stand on abolition approach the practice of slavery in a similarly nationalistic light.

A few late eighteenth-century colonial fictions represent what at first glance appears to be the opposite dynamic: slaves wresting their own freedom from their masters through acts of maroonage. An important precursor of these depictions, as we have seen, is the speech of Moses Ben-Saam in For and Against. Maroonage also comes into play in The Black Philosopher, Olympe de Gouges’s Black Slavery, and Saint-Lambert’s “Ezoco.”

In The Tour Two Thousand Four Hundred and Forty (1771), Louis-Sébastien Mercier’s narrator imagines waking up in the Paris of the future to discover a city cleansed of the social evils that plagued his own times. During a tour of the city he comes across various statues erected in honor of the great champions of world liberty. One statue represents a black man, the fragments of twenty scepters shattered at his feet. A dedicatory plaque identifies him as the “vengeur du nouveau monde” (the avenger of the New World), and the narrator is told by his companions that this black leader “was the exterminating angel to whom the god of justice had lent his sword: he showed by example that sooner or later cruelty will be punished” (109). Mercier’s revolutionary/monarchical figure of the black avenger is revisited by Diderot in the 1774 and 1788 editions of History of the Two Indies.

As Catherine Reinhardt observes, the Maroon characters of eighteenth-century French fiction run the gamut from prototypes of the perceived violence and brutishness of Africans to eloquent mouthpieces for European values. In the majority of cases (Mercier’s and Diderot’s stand as exceptions), maroonage does not secure liberty. Rather, liberty is conferred by France or its representatives, as a manifestation of the nation’s principles. Yet despite what these fictions recount—that France, rather than Maroons, would enjoy the honor of according freedom—the presence of maroonage as a theme in late eighteenth-century French fiction suggests that slave revolts in the colonies were beginning to have an impact, not only on the colonial elite but also on distant metropolitan observers. A galvanizing episode in this regard was the revolt of Makandal, which shook Saint-Domingue in the 1750s. Before he was captured and executed in 1758, Makandal was rumored to be plotting a mass poisoning of planters by an extended network of rebellious slaves. Even after his death he remained a powerful figure in Caribbean history, revered by blacks and feared by whites. When Saint-Domingue’s enslaved population rose up in revolt on masse in 1791, Makandal served as a role model for Dutty Boukman and the rebel’s other early leaders.

A last recurrent feature of late eighteenth-century colonial fictions of which I want to take note is the interweaving of the themes of slavery and gender. As I discuss in chapter 7, two women writers of the 1780s—Stael and Gouges, authored fictional representations of slaves in which the “right of woman” (as proclaimed by Olympe de Gouges) are interconnected with the rights of the enslaved. These authors empathized with the enslaved on the basis of a shared experience of subjection, but they also tended to overlook the specificity of slavery, projecting a liberal feminist agenda onto the colonial arena. It is also not insignificant that in the convergence of revolutionary feminism and

17. Reinhardt, Cuisine to Memory, 78. See also Hoffmann, Le ‘négri romantique’, 84-85.
18. On the status of the Maroon, see Duchet, Anthropologie, 139; and Reinhardt, Cuisine to Memory, 59-60.
19. Mercier also wrote a more light-hearted work dealing with the relationship between France and her colonies, the drama L’habitant de la Guadeloupe (The Inhabitant of Guadeloupe) (1784). The play concerns a wealthy Creole who comes to Paris to choose an heir, and resolves around the differences between metropolitan and colonial perspectives on commerce, wealth, and hospitality. See Attiret, Les Caricatures français, 114-15.
20. On Makandal, see Bénot, La révolte française, 139-40.
antislavery argument, as in the merger of economic theory and abolitionism, the issue of slavery was rendered visible within the framework of a discourse with resonance for the metropolitan context. Late eighteenth-century French writers tackled the issue of colonial slavery more directly and more often than any previous generation. But they generally explored slavery in conjunction with other social, political, and economic ideas, and not as a freestanding moral and political question. Understanding this economy of thought helps us understand why the abolition of slavery in 1798–94 lasted only eight years. Historians of slavery typically relate that “Napoleon Bonaparte restored colonial slavery” by a decree of May 1802.21 But was the reality not more complex? Would it not be more accurate to say that the restoration of slavery reflected, not only the expansionist nationalism of Napoleon, but also the fundamental ambivalence of the revolutionary critique of slavery?

21. See, for example, Bérose, La déesse coloniale aux Napoléons, which (in contradiction to much of Bérose’s other work) represents Napoleon’s decree as a negation of the revolutionary period’s activism in relation to slavery. See also Hoffmann, Le nègre romantique, 15; and Kark and Masson-Renney, Translating Slavery, 2.

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