Revolution's Discards: French Émigrés And Saint-Domingue Refugees In America During The Early 1790s

Carrie Le Glenn

On February 6, 1794, a group of French and American officers and citizens, including Edmond-Charles Genêt, French ambassador to the United States, celebrated the sixteenth anniversary of the Treaty of Alliance with France. Attendees enjoyed an "elegant entertainment" and proffered numerous toasts extolling the "bonds of Amity and Republicanism [that bound] France to the United States." During the toasts, Americans praised the French as their "only allies…friends…brethren, [and] fellow-freemen." Congratulating themselves as participants of successful revolutions, celebrants affirmed their desire that the "spark of Liberty…never be extinguished" and that "Democratic Societies" serve forevermore as "watchful guardians of Liberty." The tenth toast suggested that "laws and not proclamations" serve as the "instruments" of "regulation." [1] Newspapers published toasts regularly, making political affiliations food for "public consumption."[2] These celebrations belied the burgeoning tension between France and America, mainly the result of

---

[1] "Pennsylvania February 8," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), February 11, 1794.

[2] Jeffrey Pasley, *"The Tyranny of Printers": Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (University of Virginia Press, 2003), 6.

growing political radicalism in France and America's resolute neutrality proclamation. More importantly, the festivities ignored the plight of tens of thousands of French men and women at odds with France and living in exile in the United States. On the surface, exiles freely criticized the February 6th celebration, calling Genêt and anti-Federalists "revolutionary moles" who sought to "overturn...the wisdom of America's legislators."[3] More significantly, exiles from France and Saint-Domingue presented a united front that condemned the radical policies of the Jacobean government.

Scholars of the French and Saint-Domingue revolutionary exiles focus on two major thematic lines of inquiry: the first group has analyzed the process of migration; a second pool of transnational historians have analyzed the impact of the French and Saint-Domingue revolutions and their exiles on participants in the Atlantic community. Historians who concentrate on the process of migration draw insight from numerous studies on the eighteenth-century Atlantic community. Edward Whiting Fox observed two categories of French society existing prior to the Revolution of 1789, one framed on agriculture-based labor and another constructed around its Atlantic ports and based on commercial interests. France's commercial sector, according to Fox, integrated itself thoroughly into the booming Atlantic community, creating intricate and reliable networks.[4] R. Darrell Meadows builds on Fox's research and examines the French migrations of the early 1790s instigated by the French and Saint-Domingue revolutions. His research shows that pre-revolutionary bonds formed by commercial expansion aided exiles.[5] Social, economic, and kinship ties

---

[3] "On the Genetical Toasts," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), February 11, 1794.

[4] See Franklin W. Knight, eds. *Atlantic Port Cities: Economy, Culture, and Society in the Atlantic World, 1650-1850* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1991).

[5] R. Darrell Meadows, "Engineering Exile: Social Networks and the French Atlantic Community, 1789-1809," *French Historical Studies* 23 (Winter 2000): 68. See also Edward Whiting Fox, *History in Geographic Perspective: The Other France* (New York: Norton, 1971).

proved indispensable for émigrés and refugees navigating the "problems of migration, financial assistance and group identity."[6] Meadows' study clarifies the ways in which exiles maneuvered between two revolutions, but stops short of examining their experiences in America.

A second group of historians have come closer to understanding French Diaspora communities, analyzing the impact of the Haitian Revolution on the Atlantic community. Jeremy Popkin explores numerous Saint-Domingue white survivor narratives to demonstrate the tangled and sometimes blurred relationships between whites, blacks and *gens de coleur*. Popkin explains the first-hand accounts revealed the "choices confronting the actors in this great historical drama and the motives for their actions."[7] He observes that many refugees wrote their narratives while in exile, suggesting that a block of them felt it necessary to "justify a profoundly unjust and racist system."[8] While these accounts are instrumental to uncovering the impression the Haitian Revolution had on white Creoles, they offer little insight into the ways in which the revolution helped shape exile communities in America.

Ashli White considers the impact of the Saint-Domingue Revolution on the United States. She argues that Americans, coming face to face with Saint-Domingue refugees, were forced to examine the contradictions and dangers of a republic that endorsed slave societies. The presence of several thousand exiles induced Americans to create new justifications for slavery and mold a national history founded on "exceptionalism."[9] White's analysis also sheds light on the dynamic refugee communities established throughout American port cities, such as New York and Philadelphia. She notes that refugees "marked out establishments" and "acted collectively," continuing their

---

[6] Ibid., 68.

[7] Jeremy Popkin, *Facing Racial Revolution: Eyewitness Accounts of the Haitian Insurrection* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 34.

[8] Ibid., 30.

[9] Ashli White, *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 3.

religious worship and social practices in cities.[10] Although White comes closer to understanding French communities in America than her predecessors, her study does not consider the confluence of French émigrés and Saint-Domingue refugees in forming French communities. Surprisingly, the literature lacks a comprehensive study that examines the convergence of these exiles and how these displaced peoples articulated their relationship to France.

One set of sources offers a unique lens through which to examine French Diaspora communities in America during the early 1790s. French exiles published a series of French and English newspapers in major cities, including Philadelphia, New York, and Charleston. French newspapers kept French and American audiences appraised of the latest news concerning the Saint-Domingue and French revolutions, proffered opinions on the political situation in France, and promoted French consumer goods.[11] This research examines thirty-one newspaper issues, or one hundred and sixty pages, published between December 1792 and July 15, 1801. Memoirs and witness accounts supplement the personal letters, articles, advertisements and narratives published in French newspapers. Taken together, these sources reveal a dramatic scene of two categories of French exiles in communication with one another. Some refugees shared their personal stories of escape, others engaged in political discourse, while another group asked the community for support in new business ventures.

---

[10] Ibid., 28-30.

[11] Three newspapers in particular present a new outlet to examine French Diaspora communities in America, namely *Le Courier De L'Amerique*, *L'Étoile Américaine* and *L'Echo du Sud. Le Courier De L'Amerique*, a bi-weekly newspaper published in Philadelphia beginning on December 4, 1792, ran for a few months, though the cease-publication date is unknown. Claude-Corentin Tanguy de la Boissière published a bilingual newspaper called *L'Étoile Américaine* and promised to include details pertaining to the French Revolution and its "most distinguished characters." French exiles in Charleston placed advertisements in *L'Echo du Sud*, an 1801 newspaper.

America's early republic saw an explosion of print culture. Journalism historian Jeffrey Pasley notes that early republic editors performed "purposeful" roles, drumming up support for one political party or another.[12] Claude-Corentin Tanguy, newspaper editor and Saint-Domingue refugee, continued this practice and voiced strong political opinions, primarily directing invectives at French politicians and abolitionists. French publishers in America during the early 1790s indulged in greater freedom of the press than publishers in France. On September 17, 1793, the French Republic passed the Law of Suspects, making oppositional "conduct, associations, comments, or writings" punishable by death.[13] One-third of the indictments instigated by the Law of Suspects pointed back to incendiary writing or speech.[14] In America, however, exiles enjoyed freedom of the press guaranteed by the Constitution's First Amendment.

Although there are inherent concerns with using newspapers as sources, such as editor bias and news speculation, French-published newspapers reflect the presence of a ready audience.[15] In fact, exiles published at least thirteen French-language newspapers from 1790 to 1800 throughout the American Atlantic littoral. Aided by the stagecoach and the United States postal system, French newspapers participated in America's "communications revolution," a movement known for its impressive geographic reach and rapid spread of

---

[12] Pasley, 2.

[13] National Convention, *The Law of Suspects*, Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution, ed. Jack Censer and Lynn Hunt, (Fairfax, VA: George Mason University, 2001), http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/417/ (accessed December 1, 2011).

[14] Jeremy Popkin, *Revolutionary News: The Press in France, 1789-1799* (Duke University, 1999), 4.

[15] Will Slauter, "Forward-Looking Statements: News and Speculation in the Age of the American Revolution," *The Journal of Modern History* 81 (December 2009). Slauter examines eighteenth-century newspaper practices of *la speculation* and explains that writers used terms such as "risk," and "chance" to provide readers with "possible outcomes" of events surrounding the American Revolution.

information.[16] Audiences as far south as Charleston read L'Étoile by way of stagecoach. Through newspapers, dispersed clientele constructed a unique exile public sphere. Indeed, French-published newspapers present an opportunity to assess theories laid out by Benedict Anderson and more recently Robert Gross. Anderson writes that "simultaneous consumption of newspaper-as-fiction" becomes a "mass ceremony" through which an "imagined community" materializes.[17] Conversely, Gross contends that early American print culture consisted of a "mixed media [and] diverse readers and communities," subsequently undermining the simultaneity that Anderson discusses.[18] This paper situates itself between these arguments, finding that in spite of the hysteria instigated through competing interests and variegated forms of media typical of the new republic, French exile newspapers fostered community cohesion through their uniform messages of disdain for the French republic. Moreover, exile newspapers provide an appropriate starting point to answering a problem posed by R. Darrell Meadows. He writes, "As for what it meant to be "French" in a

---

[16] Richard John, *Spreading the News* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 3. John notes that by 1800, the United States Postal System delivered approximately 1.9 million newspapers. Likewise, Jeffrey Pasley observes that politicians considered newspaper key to nation building and offered discounted postal rates to publishers. See Pasley, 8.

[17] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 35. Historians of print culture have used Andersonian arguments to stress the value of newspapers in community cohesion. See Mitchell Stephens, *A History of the News* (New York: Penguin, 1988), 6. Stephens argues that societies are "sustained by the news they share." 6.

[18] Robert A. Gross, introduction to *A History of the Book in America Volume 2 - An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840*, ed. Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 13.

world in which exiles crisscrossed the multiple cultural frontiers of the Atlantic time and again, [we] can only speculate."[19]

This paper argues that through French-published newspapers, refugee memoirs and survival narratives, a French exile public sphere emerged, which manifested itself in a language of revolution.[20] By language of revolution, I mean that exiles articulated their collective identity by focusing exclusively on the pathogenic characteristics of the French and Saint-Domingue revolutions. French print culture communicated and constructed an imagined, idyllic past, helping exiles recreate former racial and social hierarchies in their temporary American communities. Saint-Domingue refugees particularly rejected French republican notions of racial equality and used various outlets of print culture to illustrate how revolutionary rhetoric caused the colony's ruin. Similarly, French émigrés narrowed their attention to the excesses of the French revolution when critiquing the republic in their writings. Through their collective grievances, exiles renounced the National Convention's version of a republican government, preferring the American Federalist model instead and shaped French communities that embraced pre-revolutionary racial and social hierarchies.

Caught in the midst of two very different revolutions, several thousand Saint-Domingue refugees and French émigrés settled in American cities. French neighborhoods emerged in cities like New York, Charleston, Boston, and especially Philadelphia up to the early nineteenth century. They shared news and personal experiences with one another, most frequently through newspapers and table fellowship. The world and former lifestyle they presented mirrored a paradise, where symbiotic and peaceful relations between slave and master existed. Out of these exaggerated and optimistic exchanges emerged a collective imagined memory, which founded itself on the racial and social practices of the former government. French exiles built

---

[19] Meadows, 30-1. When speaking of French Revolutionary émigrés and Saint-Domingue refugees collectively, I will use the term "exiles."

[20] See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger (Boston: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1989), 22.

communities throughout American cities based on this imagined memory, making notions of racial hierarchy and class central components to its success.

Refugees memorialized pre-revolutionary Saint-Domingue in printed materials by focusing on the island's economic productivity, enviable culture and peaceful relations with slaves. Jeremy Popkin observes Saint-Domingue enjoyed a privileged position in the Atlantic world, partaking in "Enlightenment culture" and reaping heavy profits for supplying half of the world's coffee and sugar.[21] Slaves constituted nearly ninety percent of the colony's population; whites comprised a meager six percent with *gens de coleur* making up the remaining four percent.[22] Refugees depicted the island as a haven filled with innumerable "riches" whose goods raised "700 millions of livres" and sustained more than "six million people."[23] Hundreds of ships lined the ports and filled the colony's stores with "precious merchandise."[24] Moreau De Saint-Méry explained, "On Sundays…one saw the Whites' Market flourishing…all sorts of dry goods and eatables…jewels, shoes, hats, parakeets, monkeys."[25] The capital of Saint-Domingue housed a library, public baths, a theatre, public gardens, and several public squares. Newspapers credited the island's prosperity to the "generous and hospitable inhabitants" whose hard work made Saint-Domingue "worthy of envy."[26] One anonymous writer underscored white generosity and recorded that "everywhere Negroes [were] well cared for, and happy." Writing in their

---

[21] Popkin, *Facing Racial Revolution*, 6.

[22] Ibid.

[23] "Island of Saint Domingo," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), February 4, 1794.

[24] Anonymous, "Mon Odyssey" quoted in Jeremy Popkin, *Facing Racial Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 68. Additional citations will read Anonymous, "Mon Odyssey."

[25] Moreau De Saint-Méry, *A Civilization that Perished: The Last Years of White Colonial Rule in Haiti* (Philadelphia: Saint-Méry, 1797-98), 111.

[26] "French Saint Domingo," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), February 4, 1794.

memoirs, plantation owners spoke of affectionate relationships with their slaves, depicting "Negroes [who] sang, and even danced" for them.[27] At the core of Saint-Domingue's economic prosperity. refugees explained, rested meaningful relationships between master and slave.

France's émigrés articulated an affinity for pre-revolutionary France, using advertisements to highlight their proximity to former royal institutions and demonstrate an unbroken connection to French consumer demands. A surgeon dentist, Le Breton, placed an advertisement in the local French newspaper asserting that he studied under the royal family's dentist, Dubois.[28] In addition to boosting his credentials, Le Breton reminded the public of their shared loss and expressed his monarchist allegiance. Another entrepreneur alluded to the quality of French services in his advertisement. The advertisement explained, "Crespin and Co….established an apothecary and drug shop, equal to those in France."[29] One publisher informed the public that he acquired two volumes of Les Petits Émigrés, a book written by Madame de Genlis, lady-in-waiting to the royal family.[30] Memories of and references to pre-revolutionary France helped construct a new community, consisting of émigrés and Saint-Domingue refugees, and based on an imagined glorified past.

Stories of death and survival bridged the divide between an imagined past and a vision for the future. Survivors printed escape narratives in newspapers or consecrated them in memoirs. In a newspaper excerpt, refugees regaled how they "escaped the rapacity of the pirates" but were "robbed in defiance of all laws, both human and divine."[31] On November 15, 1793, Moreau de Saint-Méry read that his friend from Paris, Bailly, "suffered [an] ignominious death, but [died] with a courage worthy of a

---

[27] Anonymous, "Mon Odyssey," 73.
[28] "Sundry Advertisements," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), March 18, 1794.
[29] *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), February 6, 1794.
[30] *L'Echo du Sud* (South Carolina), June 26, 1801.
[31] "To the Editor of the American Star," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), February 13, 1794.

hero."[32] Another article informed Philadelphians (incorrectly) that the Marquis de Lafayette, an American Revolutionary war hero whose "courage...never failed him" had been guillotined.[33] Exiles solidified bonds to one another through meals, conversation, and remorse. During a dinner party with Blaçon, Count de Noailles, and Talon, Moreau remarked that a storm reminded the group of "the misfortunes [they] had escaped."[34] Conversations about the guillotine often invoked emotional outbursts. Moreau recalled in his memoir the day that he succumbed to "a torrent of weeping" upon learning of a friend's passing.[35] Though the respective revolutions created different socio-economic changes to exiles, they identified two areas of overlap – each group had faced danger and experienced loss.

Apart from the psychological implications connected with survival, exiles struggled to support themselves and their families financially in America. French consuls distributed various forms of aid to refugees, including money, though this outlet of income proved unreliable due to increasing political tensions. Several Parisian politicians, including Jacques Pierre Brissot de Warville, voiced concerns over Saint-Domingue colonists' loyalty to the French republic. Some suggested that the refugees orchestrated the entire slave uprising themselves in order to undermine the republic's authority in the colony.[36] Newspapers captured the heated exchanges between refugees and the republic's representatives. Dumay, a Saint-Domingue refugee, lambasted the French consul for demanding that he quit the refugee hospital, despite his medical needs.[37] In February 1794, French ambassador Edmond Charles Genêt refused funds to refugees wanting to travel to France; rather, he encouraged

---

[32] Moreau, *Méry's American Journey*, 3.
[33] "Sundry News France," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), February 11, 1794.
[34] Moreau, *Méry's American Journey*, 92.
[35] Ibid., 140.
[36] White, 90.
[37] Dumay, "To the Editor of the American Star," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), May 1, 1794.

them to "render [them]selves individually [to France]."[38] Exiles instead sought alternative avenues of support. One thread of support for Saint-Domingue refugees came from the United States. Mr. Clark, a legislative representative, took the opposite approach of the National Convention concerning the refugees and asserted, "It is of little importance...whether the refugees...are aristocrats or democrats, papists or lutherans, they are men, and unhappy."[39] Although French émigrés did not qualify for the relief extended to Saint-Domingue refugees, they found subsistence elsewhere. Many utilized existing trans-Atlantic relationships, including "kin, friends, [or] business partners."[40] Often, these pre-revolutionary connections conferred employment opportunities, temporary housing, and loans. Historian R. Darrell Meadows explains that, "human networks...forged through trade, migration and other forms of travel...provided exiles with...crucial support, information, and other resources necessary to...survive the...exile experience."[41] New York erected a haven for upwards of one hundred exiles.[42] With the help of United States government, existing acquaintance networks, and various community programs, exiles built temporary settlements mirrored on their previous lives.

French exiles in America adhered to the strict racial hierarchies formerly established in Saint-Domingue. Ashli White notes that approximately "twenty thousand black, white, and colored refugees" migrated to America during the 1790s, some of them enslaved.[43] Creoles taking refuge in Pennsylvania, Rhode Island or New York experienced difficulty enforcing slavery due to the gradual emancipation laws that the states had passed in the 1780s. This did not discourage them, however,

---

[38] Edmond Charles Gênet, "Answer of Citizen Gênet to the Letter of the Colonists of St. Domingo," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), February 15, 1794.

[39] "Congress Extract from the Sitting of the House of Representatives, January 28th," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), February 4, 1794.

[40] Meadows, 70.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Moreau, *Méry's American Journey*, 274.

[43] White, 2.

from placing runaway slave advertisements in French-published newspapers. Madame Lavaud and Mr. Velant, residing in Philadelphia, each offered a four dollar reward to the person who provided information concerning the whereabouts of their property.[44] Advertisements categorized runaways as subaltern, placing emphasis upon physical appearance. Madame de Chambreu described her runaway as "a congo negro, curled hair, [and] fat."[45] Slave owners related other corporal marks, such as brands, to recover their lost capital. Mr. Loyaute mentioned a mark "on [the] right breast" of his "Creole Negro wench," Claudine, in his advertisement.[46] A second notice indicated that Paul, another branded slave absconded. Mr. Loyaute assured newspaper readers that both slaves were "bound to their master, agreeably to the laws of Pennsylvania."[47] Runaway slave ads reinforced community support for slavery and reaffirmed Creole mores. Writing about honor codes of the American south, historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown explains that "honor was inseparable from hierarchy" and helped to define one's position in society.[48] Slaveholding signified status and maintained a thread of continuity from pre-revolutionary Saint-Domingue.

Just as French exiles recreated pre-revolutionary societies through slavery, they reinforced notions of class through consumerism. French entrepreneurs abounded in cities like Philadelphia, often identifying themselves as Parisians, offering items that could be found back at home. Consumerism, T.H. Breen argues, accorded individuals a way to "communicate aspirations and grievances."[49] Despite their economic abjection, exiles refused to part with the luxury items that characterized

---

[44] "Four Dollars Reward," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), May 1, 1794. See also "Four Dollars Reward," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), May 3, 1794.

[45] *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), March 8, 1794.

[46] "Run Away," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), April 1, 1794.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

[49] T.H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), xiii.



their former lives. Coulaux and Perrin, for instance, made guns and pistols "of the newest fashion…from Paris."[50] Mr. Saint-Victor informed the public that his tapestry work resembled "Paris' newest fashion." Locksmiths from Paris and Cape Françoise assured the public that they could "repair all sorts of guns, turn metals" or "make all surgeons instruments." Another shop advertised "French Beds" and "sundry finished chests of drawers" while another manufactured candles.[51] French communities boasted "all kinds of fine liquors of France" as well as "French Coffee-house[s]" and "French chocolates."[52] Newspapers also marketed to women, informing them of the "good and pretty hats, sold in retail or wholesale" and "hats, of the best manufacture of Paris, looking glasses, and white silk stockings."[53] Women could purchase other adornments, such as "Wigs, tates, frisettes, cheroques, bandeaux, braids, curls and queues," from local shops.[54] Buying French items strengthened concepts of class and, as Breen explains, helped "establish a meaningful and distinct sense of self."[55] Although French exiles identified with pre-Revolutionary France through consumption of French products, their distaste of Jacobin politics physically and emotionally distanced them from France.

Exiles rebuked the French Republic's stance toward slavery. Saint-Domingue refugees maintained that the Jacobite policy allowing racial equality perverted the natural racial and social hierarchy. To them, white domination and black subjugation represented the ideal natural balance, whereas the alternative, a society based on equality, retarded progress.

---

[50] "Sundry Advertisements," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), March 18, 1794.

[51] "Sundry Advertisements," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), March 1, 1794.

[52] "Sundry Advertisements," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), February 6, 1794. See also *L'Étoile Américaine*, March 6, 1794; *L'Étoile Américaine*, March 25, 1794.

[53] Baldwin, "Chapellier," *L'Echo du Sud* (South Carolina), July 15, 1801.

[54] Monnar and Craig, "Coiffeurs, de Londres et de Paris," *L'Echo du Sud* (South Carolina), July 15, 1801.

[55] Breen, 55.

Refugees turned the Saint-Domingue slave insurrection into a public debate over race, encouraging their white, English-speaking neighbors to read about the causes of their plight in French-published newspapers. In this open discussion, refugees eschewed all culpability for the slave insurrection; rather, using newspapers and published memoirs as their open forum, refugees positioned themselves as white victims of the National Assembly (later the National Convention), innocent sufferers of their black assailants, and bystanders absolved of blame from the economic consequences of the slave insurrection. In doing so, colonists vociferously rejected the French republican model of government.

Saint-Domingue refugees censured forms revolutionary rhetoric that subverted racial values and incited the island's black and mulatto population to revolt. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen confused social and racial classes by its assertion that "Men are born and remain free and equal in rights."[56] Saint-Domingue whites banned publication of the document on the island because of its message of equality.[57] One exile condemned the document, stating that the "incendiary writings and stupid innovators" incited the slaves to rebel.[58] Similarly, a newspaper article pointed to the National Convention's "wicked principles" and "acts of tyranny" as causes of the insurrection.[59] Another exile called the French representatives in Saint-Domingue "souls devoid of sensibility" and "enemies and persecutors" of "white colonists" who had been "assassinated and burnt by the sanguinary philanthropy of Brissot."[60] Colonists defined all concessions made to the rebels as traitorous and even labeled several of the convention's

---

[56] National Assembly, *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*, in Jack R. Censer and Lynn Hunt's Liberty, *Equality, Fraternity Exploring the French Revolution* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 46. Hereafter cited as *Rights of Man and Citizen*.

[57] Popkin, *Facing Racial Revolution*, 6.

[58] Anonymous, "Mon Odyssey," 87.

[59] "French Saint Domingo," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), February 4, 1794.

[60] *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), February 4, 1794.

representatives "negrophile[s]."[61] They vehemently denied the accusations of cruelty and slave mistreatment so often issued by the Society of the Friends of Blacks. One writer proclaimed that he "recognize[d] the injustice of those written diatribes...against the poor planters of Saint Domingo! What lies! What exaggerated pictures!" [62] The revolution, refugees argued, overturned the natural balance. Slavery did not represent an inversion of society; rather, it allowed whites to reign in blacks' disposition towards savagery. Without the bonds of slavery checking black animalism, they argued, blacks posed a serious danger to whites.

By depicting black insurgents as barbaric and animalistic in their public prints, Saint-Domingue refugees simultaneously refuted black claims for equality and reinforced the colonists' case for slavery. French communities exchanged stories about "Negro" aggression using newspapers, letters and published memoirs as an outlet for public consumption. Articles offered vivid descriptions of the blacks' violence directed towards whites. One article claimed that "the sword of death...destroy[ed] all without the least mercy or distinction" and that blacks dragged whites "into frightful dungeons" where they "cr[ied] to be relieved." [63] Refugees meticulously constructed an image of blacks, removing all traces of their humanity in the process. For instance, refugees assigned animalistic qualities to the blacks, calling them "unchained tigers whose roots [remained embedded] in barbarism." [64] Others merely deduced that the "Negro" was enslaved due to the "heinousness of their race."[65]

Saint-Domingue refugees undermined black claims to humanity even further by emphasizing black and mulatto violence directed towards women and children. During the

---

[61] "Information to the Mulattoes of St. Domingo, and to their Powerful Protectors on the Continent," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), February 6, 1794.

[62] Anonymous, "Mon Odyssey," 70.

[63] "French Saint Domingo," 2.

[64] Anonymous, "Mon Odyssey," 84.

[65] S.C.E., "To the Editor of the American Star," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), March 18, 1794.

eighteenth century. French visual culture depicted black males as "infantile," "dismembered" and "incapable of military valor."[66] Mary Bellhouse explains that the French and Haitian revolutions sparked a shift in visual representations. Later eighteenth-century French visual culture identified blacks as "potential sexual competitor[s]" and "bestial rapist[s]."[67] French printed materials reflected these shifts in attitude surrounding late eighteenth-century definitions of black masculinity. Fears over unaccounted family members added to existing tensions. Plunketh, an inhabitant of Du Fond who addressed himself as "friend and fellow patriot" to Tanguy, the editor of L'Étoile, lamented that "Madame de N*** [was] in prison, and in irons these three weeks" though Plunketh had no news of Tanguy's own wife and child.[68] Women and children left in Saint-Domingue, without their white male protectors, remained unprotected against the non-white rebels. One man alluded to rape crying, "Many women, young, beautiful, and virtuous perished beneath the infamous caresses of the brigands, amongst the cadavers of their fathers and husbands."[69] Le Clerc expressed alarm when he freed a group of imprisoned white females from their black jailers, recalling how the women appeared "starved, without stockings...[or] shoes, their hair undone...almost naked."[70] Though this quotation does not necessarily insinuate rape, Le Clerc's discussion of poverty is clearly sexualized and drawn from discussions of rape. Saint-Domingue survival narratives included racist literary tropes that mirrored white Americans' own racial dispositions.[71] Apart from the potential apocryphal nature of these witness accounts, refugees warned French and

---

[66] Mary L. Bellhouse, "Candide Shoots the Monkey Lovers: Representing Black Men in Eighteenth-Century French Visual Culture," *Political Theory* 34 (Dec. 2006): 742.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Plunketh, "Aux Cayes, December 19, 1793 To Mr. Tanguy," *L'Étoile Américaine*, February 11, 1794.

[69] Anonymous, "Mon Odyssey," 74.

[70] Charles Victor Emmanuel Le Clerc, "Personal Account" in Jeremy Popkin, *Facing Racial Revolution*, 100.

[71] White, 57.

American readers of the dangers of empowered black and colored men.

Refugees also engaged in a public discussion over the economic devastation inflicted by the rebels. Prior to the revolution, the colony constituted the largest source of income for France. In a speech given to the National Assembly in March 1790, Antoine-Pierre Barnave cautioned that to "abandon the colonies, and [the] sources of prosperity will disappear."[72] Nevertheless, Étienne Polverel and Léger-Félicité Sonthonax, representatives of the National Convention, revoked slavery in Saint-Domingue in late 1793.[73] Saint-Domingue colonists decried the Convention agents. Newspapers claimed that "seven thousand millions in property [were] destroyed amidst blood and fire," while another article called the island a "land of proscription."[74] Some refugees proposed that France purposely neglected her colonies or conspired to relinquish the colonies to America. Despite assurances that "France will not abandon her colonies," refugees postulated that although the ancien regime had certain deficiencies, they fared better under an absolute monarch.[75] They asserted that "years of despotism, alleged against the former government" never "retarded the rapid increase of agriculture," whereas the Convention succeeded completely annihilating the colony.[76]

French exiles drew many parallels between the black rebels of Saint-Domingue and the revolutionaries in France. For them, the revolution confused racial lines and contaminated social classes. Weaving together news from foreign and French

---

[72] Antoine-Pierre Barnave, "Speech for the Colonial Committee of the National Assembly": Address to the National Assembly (speech, France's National Assembly, Paris, France, March 8, 1790), Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/345/ (accessed December 1, 2011).

[73] On February 4, 1794, the National Convention legitimized the agents' decision and outlawed slavery.

[74] "French Saint Domingo,"; "Boston, Jan. 8."

[75] "Extract of a Letter from Baltimore, dated Feb. 3," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), February 13, 1794.

[76] "French Saint Domingo."

newspapers, personal letters and gossip from merchants, exiles constructed a negative image of the republic in their own printed materials. A republic founded on total equality, they argued, entertained the possibility for unrestrained excess and chaos. Exiles rejected the French republic model, defining it in conversation with one another as marred by greed, violence, atheism, and judicial flaws. These themes, combined with commentary on the Jacobite government's propensity towards internal dissent and self-combustion, appeared time and again in French-published newspapers and memoirs. Sometimes editors, authors and readers exercised these points in passing remarks, but just as frequently these themes came directly from newspapers published in France or speeches from the National Convention. Clever editing, use of language and text manipulation gave the texts new shape and meaning, and underscored the revolution's propensity towards sin and chaos rather than order. By dehumanizing the revolutionaries in the same manner as the black insurgents, exiles rejected the model and legitimacy of the French republic.

French exiles designated the National Convention and its representatives as greedy and feeding off other Frenchmen and women in one of two ways: first, a group of articles depicted ambassadors as intrinsically covetous, stealing or confiscating property without a legal right; second, another selection of articles explored the violent methods used by the convention to divert private wealth to the national fund. Avarice shown by ambassadors represented, by extension, the republic's own rapacity. Therefore, when rumors emerged stating that Polverel had confiscated landed and moveable property of Saint-Domingue refugees "out of the colony…banished or not," refugees asserted that he did so for "the emolument of [himself]" as well as for "the profit of the republic."[77] Saint-Domingue refugees admonished the French ambassadors, Polverel and Sonthonax, for their colony's predicaments, citing corruption as the root cause. One article claimed that when Sonthonax left the island, he took with him "$1.6 million."[78] Another article

---

[77] Plunketh, "Aux Cayes, December 19, 1793 To Mr. Tanguy."
[78] "Boston, Jan. 8."

recounted the gluttony of a French ambassador to the Ottoman Empire. citing "four chariots…chests…wrought with gold [and] pieces of the crown of France" among his possessions.[79] Newspapers noted the corporal punishment meted out by representatives of the revolutionary government to extort goods from French men and women. Henri Grégoire, in an address to the convention, recalled, "A handkerchief had been thrown about the neck… with menaces to strangle [the man], if [the man] did not instantly furnish a certain sum."[80] Exiles suggested that the convention equated personal wealth to treason in order to legitimate confiscating property that belonged to affluent citizens. Le Vaffeur addressed the convention asserting that, "All traitors, agitators, and rich merchants…should be judged and perish under the axe of the guillotine."[81] As a result, prosperous merchants became prime targets of the convention. In a published letter to an exile in Philadelphia, one French man wrote, "At Nantes, nearly all the merchants have been guillotined" including "Mr. Bouteiller, an old man of 85 years."[82] According to L'Étoile Américaine, an additional five hundred merchants in Bordeaux perished. [83] Other excerpts removed any suggestion of the convention's humanity and instead underscored their innate and insatiable greed. In another published letter, written by Pelletier to the National Convention, read, "All the Lyonnais are overawed by terror…We everyday make some happy discoveries of gold and silver [the amount of which] will astonish you when you come to know them." Tanguy remarked that the "confiscation of the property of the

---

[79] "Riches of Semonville," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), February 15, 1794.

[80] "Extract of the Mercure Universel, 2d Year of the French Republic," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), April 5, 1794.

[81] "European Intelligence, Up to the 21st of January, 1794," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), April 17, 1794.

[82] "Extract of a Letter from France, dated January 10, 1794 to a Gentleman in Philadelphia," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), April 5, 1794.

[83] Ibid.

rich" signaled a familiar "chorus" which "most please[d]" the convention.[84]

Newspapers articulated the heinous behavior of revolutionaries, using vivid and often grotesque imagery to emphasize the degree of violence inflicted on French men and women who did not conform to the republic's ideals. One newspaper recounted how the counter-revolutionaries at Lyon met their gruesome end. After being packed into prison cells, a cannon "was discharged on the condemned…the victims fell in heaps upon each other; and…only half killed."[85] Not only did these executions violate the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen's promise to approve only "strict and obviously necessary punishments," but the image connoted disorder and inhumane torture.[86] It is worth mentioning that the language used in several excerpts invoked sympathy for those targeted by the convention (e.g. "victim") and consternation for the aggressors ("ruffians").[87] Those whom the Convention labeled rebels received heavier forms of punishments. An article included in a February 20, 1794 issue strongly invoked the language of victim and aggressor, describing rebels as having been "sacrifice[s] to the rage of the people."[88] The thirty-third issue of *L'Étoile* devoted itself entirely to these concerns. One of the stories featured on the front page involved an assault on an ordinary farmer, Citizen Gilbon. The article described Gilbon as an elderly man, father of eleven children, and farmer "who keeps three ploughs." Despite his humble lifestyle, an army detachment, described as "monsters" entered his home and "seized the body of Gilbon, dragged [him] close to the fire…applied his naked feet to the burning coals…struck, bound…and covered his head with a sack." From there, the

---

[84] "Discourse of the Deputation of the City of Lyons," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), April 17, 1794.

[85] Ibid.

[86] *Rights of Man and Citizen.*

[87] "European Intelligence."

[88] "November 26," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), February 20, 1794.

detachment robbed Gilbon and his family of the few luxuries they owned.[89]

While stories like Gilbon's reflected the army's proclivity towards torture, other articles reflected the convention's fondness of blood and excessive use of the guillotine. For instance, an extract from the *Courrier Politique* of Paris explained that, "The affair of Mans was so bloody...as far as Laval the ground was covered with dead bodies."[90] Similarly, news from London reported "bloody executions" made possible by the guillotine which "str[uck] seven heads at one stroke."[91] In yet another article, French judges complained that in Lyon, "the blood did not stream in sufficient abundance" despite "four hundred heads [being] struck off" within a month.[92] Regardless of the intended objective of these stories, either in French or other European circles, messages of excessive violence undermined the republic's claim to liberty in the eyes of French exiles.

Moreover, exiles deplored the revolutionary violence directed towards women and children. Although newspapers mentioned attacks on them in minute detail, the tropes employed by exiles deserve additional exploration. Newspaper excerpts underlined female vulnerability and virtue, not unlike the articles depicting Saint-Domingue female refugees. Narratives describing violence against children similarly undermined the republic's integrity. One newspaper referenced Olympia de Gouges' execution twice. The first article indicated that she was "guillotined, not withstanding her pleading pregnancy" and the second excerpt designated her as the "widow of Anbrey, known by his counter-revolutionary writings."[93] It is important to note that the newspaper avoided mentioning de Gouges' personal revolutionary activity, namely her play, The Slavery of Negroes.

---

[89] "European Intelligence."

[90] "France Authentic News from the Interior," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), March 25, 1794.

[91] "London, March 4," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania).

[92] "Discourse of the Deputations of Lyons."

[93] "Paris, November 4," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), February 6, 1794; "Remainder of the Principle Events in the Interior of France," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), March 4, 1794.

Rather, exile newspapers depicted de Gouges as a widow and (almost) mother. Her innocent unborn child, in the eyes of readers, fell victim to the guillotine just as cruelly as its mother. Historian Susan Klepp explains that notions of motherhood, pregnancy, and family shifted in the latter half of the eighteenth century in favor of affectionate bonds between all members of the family.[94] Children became more than objects of economic power. These shifting family dynamics may help to explain why exiles placed so much emphasis on rumors surrounding de Gouge's pregnancy. The surviving Bourbons received similar press coverage. Concerning the children and sister of the deceased king, the National Convention decreed that "the two children…be sent to prison [and] Maria Elizabeth, sister of Louis, be brought before the Revolutionary Tribunal."[95] According to a French Philadelphian newspaper, Parisians shortly thereafter demanded that the National Convention "destroy the son of Louis XVI…as a sacrifice to the safety of the people."[96] While it is impossible to fully grasp the publisher's intended message, diction like "sacrifice" denoted an uncivilized, chaotic society and underscored images of childhood innocence.

French exiles condemned the republic's de-Christianization efforts of the early 1790s, particularly the desecration of churches and assault on the ecclesia. Before 1789, the church played a central role in both France and her colonies. Churches served as centers of learning and aid to the destitute. Priests performed marriage ceremonies, baptisms, gave sacraments and buried the dead. Laws stressed Roman Catholicism even further in the colonies; the Code Noir of 1685 stipulated that slaves "be baptized and instructed in the Roman Catholic, and Apostolic

---

[94] Susan Klepp, *Revolutionary Conceptions: Women, Fertility, & Family Limitation in America, 1760-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2009), 109.

[95] "Recapitulation of the Principal Events of the Interior of France," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), March 1, 1794.

[96] "London, March 4," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), May 3, 1794.

Faith."[97] Likewise, the law required that slaveholders or those holding authority over slaves be Roman Catholic. Actions against the Catholic Church began as early as November 1789 when the National Assembly voted to requisition and sell off Church property. The Civil Constitution of the Clergy passed in July 1790 required that clergy take "an oath of fidelity" to the National Assembly.[98] The National Convention adopted stronger measures against the Church in 1793 by dismissing the Christian calendar. The de-Christianization movement of 1793, Popkin argued, "aimed to abolish it [the Church] altogether."[99]

Printed letters, excerpts in émigré memoirs, and newspaper articles decried France's de-Christianization efforts. In his November 18, 1793 excerpt, Moreau de Saint-Méry wrote "Our prayers…for all the unhappy people of France where, at this very moment, all churches and places of worship were being closed by governmental decree."[100] Exiles learned how the National Convention sequestered medieval places of worship, including Notre-Dame, and "there made a sacrifice to liberty."[101] Exiles also read about revolutionaries stripping the churches of their wealth. In one excerpt, a message to the National Convention, Cambon announced that the "national treasury [was] increased…by the gold and treasures taken from the churches."[102] The republic did not stop there; separate articles depicted violent scenes of army detachments stealing crosses from the necks of rural women and pillaging "all tombs of Saint-Denis."[103] Newspaper issues abounded with stories that alluded to "indecencies" and conversions of "ancient and august"

---

[97] Louis XIV, *The Code Noir 1685*, Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/335/ (accessed December 1, 2011).

[98] Jeremy Popkin, *A Short History of the French Revolution* (Boston: Prentice Hall, 2010), 48-50.

[99] Ibid., 83.

[100] Moreau, *Méry's American Journey*, 4.

[101] "Principal Events in the Interior of France."

[102] "European Intelligence, up to 21st of January."

[103] "Digging Up of the Body of Turenne," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), February 15, 1794; "European Intelligence, up to 21st of January."

churches "into stables" but also featured stories of assault against the clergy.[104] The de-Christianization process required that nuns, priests and bishops withdraw their allegiance to Christ, don "caps of liberty," and worship "Reason instead of Christianism."[105] Punitive measures for resistance usually involved some degree of corporal punishment. Readers learned how one "John Marie Allard, curate of Bagneau" was guillotined for "having preached up the counter-revolution," and that the military committee of Mayence executed priests along with a number of rebels.[106] Publishers articulated their condemnations carefully, incorporating articles that correlated the de-Christianization effort with sacrifices, indecencies and desecration. In doing so, exiles called into question the legality of the revolutionaries' actions.

Exile newspapers critiqued the republic's legal system, citing cases that highlighted suppressed liberties and executions for seemingly minor offenses. The case of Jean Jacques Barbot, an anti-republican writer, accentuated the yoke that the republic placed on the French press.[107] Despite the 1789 declaration that guaranteed the "free communication of thoughts and opinions," Barbot suffered execution.[108] Newspaper patrons learned that Nicholas Gornot, a baker, met death for having "secreted some bread" while the bishop Gratien refused "to conform himself to the new calendar" and faced anti-revolutionary charges as a result.[109] Other excerpts told stories of both men and women either jailed or executed for singing unlawful songs, failing to wear the revolutionary cockade, or assisting French émigrés

---

104 "Extract of a Letter from London," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), February 25, 1794; "Philadelphia, May 3," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), May 3, 1794.

105 "Principal Events in France."

106 "Extracts from the Courier Politique of Paris, and the Departments," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), March 25, 1794; "France National Convention Sunday, December 28," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), April 5, 1794.

107 "Principal Events in France."

108 "Rights of Man and Citizen."

109 "Courier Politique of Paris"; "Recapitulation of the Principal Events."

financially.[110] Émigrés reacted strongly to this news. Moreau de Saint Méry claimed in April 1794 that only "atrocious ignorance" could have sentenced Lavoisier to death.[111] An extract from a letter received from Paris exclaimed, "Never was the press less free...whoever would dare to print truths contrary to the wishes of the Convention would be guillotined."[112] By condemning these actions publicly, exiles situated themselves at odds with France and suggested that a republic grounded by excess would shortly self-combust.

Over half of the surviving issues of *L'Étoile Américaine* included some form of negative commentary about the French republic and the internal dissent. As early as December 1792, *Le Courier de L'Amerique* noticed and commented upon the seemingly "dissolution of society" in France.[113] Moreau de Saint-Méry, a one-time ardent supporter of the revolution, rejected the Jacobin government by tearing apart his Parisian National Guard grenadier hat before discarding it out a window.[114] Some émigrés directed their anger towards the political parties responsible for the division. One Philadelphian émigré wrote, "True Frenchmen will never rejoice at assassinations, demolishing of cities, or conflagrations."[115] Newspapers also featured stories of family members denouncing one another to the National Convention, underscoring the strain of political factions on kinship ties.[116] The "anecdote of Sillery" worked to this end, showing that the Revolution undermined the family unit and ran counter to the social order implemented by God.[117] A letter published in a newspaper on April 5, 1794

---

[110] De Plassan, "To the Editor of the American Star," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), February 25, 1794; "Principal Events in France."

[111] Moreau, *Méry's American Journey*, 43.

[112] "Letter from France to a Gentleman."

[113] "Foreign News," *L'Courier de L'Amerique* (Pennsylvania), December 7, 1792.

[114] Moreau, *Méry's American Journey*, 123-24.

[115] "Letter from France to a Gentleman."

[116] "Anecdote of Sillery," *L'Étoile Américaine* (Pennsylvania), March 6, 1794.

[117] Ibid.

questioned the logic driving the National Convention. It read, "I am a true Frenchman, and the misfortunes of my country sincerely afflict me...over whom are all these victories [Lyon, Toulon]? Are they not over Frenchmen?"[118]

Exiles failed to notice that a new form of French identity, born from the broken remnants of the Bastille and fire-ridden plantations of Saint-Domingue, had emerged. The revolutions systematically used legal, violent, and illegitimate means to discard reminders of pre-revolutionary France and Saint-Domingue. Yet, these revolutionary discards found ways to reconstruct their lives, preferably on their own terms. Exiles proved that they were capable of preserving their pre-revolutionary social and cultural mores while maintaining their French identity. French print culture played an instrumental role to that end, generating a public sphere that constructed an idyllic, pre-revolutionary past, embraced racial and social hierarchies, and encouraged polemic discussions about French politics. French exiles living in Baltimore, Philadelphia, New Haven, or Charleston fomented this public sphere by reading the same editorials and advertisements simultaneously or a few days apart. It was not until France's policies shifted to support pre-revolutionary social and racial hierarchies that French exiles once again, sometimes begrudgingly, reconciled themselves to the French government. Collectively, French-published newspapers provide a window into the late eighteenth-century exile experience.

❋ ❋ ❋

---

[118] "Letter from France to a Gentleman."