

“His Most Paternal Chest”: Bourbon Royalism and the Death of Paternalism in Nineteenth-Century Martinique

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“His Most Paternal Chest”: Bourbon Royalism and the Death of Paternalism in
Nineteenth-Century Martinique

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Thesis under the direction of Professor Lauren Clay

This paper explores the connections between Bourbon Royalism and the death of paternalism during the Restoration Era and the July Monarchy in Martinique. Martinican planter Pierre Dessalles meticulously recorded his opinions on slavery and French and Martinican politics in his journal from 1811 to 1856. One of the many things that make his journal distinctive was his annual commemorations of Louis XVI’s execution by French revolutionaries. This paper explores why Dessalles mourned Louis XVI’s death and why he idealized the *ancien régime* as an era of political stability, while Frenchmen rejected absolutism in favor of republicanism. I argue that, with the execution of the paternalist Louis XVI, Dessalles could no longer claim to be a paternalist master to his slaves. This loss of power was exacerbated by slaves, inspired by the Haitian Revolution, who poisoned their masters’ livestock in the 1820s. By examining the politics of elite whites, scholars can better understand not only the impact of the Haitian and French Revolutions, but also differences in colonial and metropolitan politics.

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Introduction

Each year on January 21 in his 1837 to 1856 diary, Martinican planter Pierre Dessalles mourned the execution of Louis XVI at the hands of French revolutionaries and the subsequent downfall of the French metropole and its Caribbean colonies.¹ Dessalles believed that the regicide created political instability in France, leading to constant shifts in regime as revolutionaries strove to regain the country's former "tranquility." According to Dessalles, these revolutionaries sought in vain, because nothing could "take the place of the paternal authority of [France's] ancient kings."² For the majority of the diary's timespan, kings ruled France and its colonies, but in Dessalles's mind, these kings did not fully understand how to properly govern the colonies, nor could they restore the Old Regime.

As France's central government evolved throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, Dessalles consistently believed that local officials were more capable of governing Martinique and its large slave population than metropolitan officials, as Frenchmen were not familiar with the unique constitution and needs of African slaves. Louis XVI, he imagined, respected colonial sovereignty, particularly a slave owner's autonomy in governing his slave population; colonial officials representing France's new kings did not. In fact, Louis XVI's pre-Revolutionary Martinican subjects felt that the royal government often overstepped its boundaries when regulating colonial affairs, a sentiment which led to tense relations between

¹ For the English translation of the diary, see Pierre Dessalles, *Sugar and Slavery, Family and Race: The Letters and Diary of Pierre Dessalles, Planter in Martinique, 1808-1856*, ed. Elborg Forster and Robert Forster (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995). The complete published diary is comprised of four volumes. See Pierre Dessalles, *La Vie d'un colon à la Martinique au XIX^e siècle*, présenté par H. Frémont et Léo Elisabeth, 4 vols (Courbevoie: Cauchard, 1984).

² Pierre Dessalles, *Sugar and Slavery, Family and Race: The Letters and Diary of Pierre Dessalles, Planter in Martinique, 1808-1856* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 95.

metropole and colony in the years before the French Revolution.³ This paper addresses why Dessalles fashioned a distinctive memory of Louis XVI and idealized the monarch's relationship with the colonies, a topic which sheds light on the broader issue of political divisions between France and its colonies over the challenge of the post-Revolutionary settlement. I argue that when the paternalist monarch Louis XVI was executed, Dessalles and his fellow Martinican planters lost the model for their own paternalistic rule over their slaves. Dessalles mourned the death of French paternalism, while many residents of the French metropole increasingly modeled the state on republicanism and the rhetoric of universal rights in the nineteenth century.

Pierre Dieudonné Dessalles belonged to a family which had been one of Martinique's wealthiest since the mid-eighteenth century. Dessalles was born in France sometime in the 1780s but considered himself to be a Martinican, preferring to spend his time on the island. After his father died in 1808, Dessalles spent the vast majority of his time in Martinique running his family's two plantations: La Nouvelle Cité, a sugar plantation, and La Caféière, a small coffee plantation. The two plantations were located in the middle of Martinique's most fertile land, which only served to compound the Dessalles family's wealth and prestige; when he married the daughter of the island's interim chief judge, Martinique's Captain General Villaret-Joyeuse and the Colonial Prefect Laussat served as Dessalles's witnesses.⁴ Even planters as wealthy as Dessalles, though, were not immune to the economic downturn in the 1830s, and because of their elite status, they were more intimately connected with metropolitan politics.

³ See Gabriel Debien, *Les colons de Saint-Domingue et la Révolution; essai sur le club Massiac (août 1789-août 1792)* (Paris: A. Colin, 1953); Charles Frostin, *Les révoltes blanches à Saint-Domingue aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles (Haïti avant 1789)* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2008).

⁴ Rebecca Hartkopf Schloss, *Sweet Liberty: The Final Days of Slavery in Martinique* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 46-7. I have not been able to find a birth year. He died on a visit to France in 1857.

Dessalles's voluminous letters and diary demonstrate that he "was a reflective and opinionated person."⁵ In addition to recording weather changes or daily tasks, Dessalles reflected on Martinican society, social conventions, slaves, the colony's future, and his own goals and family obligations. The extant letters, written primarily to his mother who resided in France, are from 1808 to 1834, and the diary exists from 1837 to 1856 and did not cease when he visited France from 1826 to 1827, and again from 1844 to 1845. His writings are so voluminous that an edited version, compiled by his descendants, fills four volumes. But his diary remains little studied, primarily because the French Atlantic has been little studied compared to the British and Spanish Atlantic Worlds.⁶

The few scholars who have taken an interest in the diary are Rebecca Hartkopf Schloss and Elborg and Robert Forster. Together, the Forsters edited and translated the French version of the letters and diaries into English, producing a single volume of Dessalles's writings for English readers. The authors' introduction praises the diary's worth as a primary source, briefly mentioning the questions it raises about paternalism, religion, and Creolization, but they do not describe any issue in great detail. Rebecca Hartkopf Schloss's 2009 book *Sweet Liberty: The*

⁵Forster and Forster, *Sugar and Slavery, Family and Race*, 3.

⁶ For historiographies addressing the state of scholarship for the French Atlantic, see Christopher Hodson and Brett Rushforth, "Absolutely Atlantic: Colonialism and the Early Modern French State in Recent Historiography," in *History Compass* 8, no. 1 (2010): 101-117; Cécile Vidal, "The Reluctance of French Historians to Address Atlantic History," in *Southern Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (2006): 153-189. Most scholars who study the French Caribbean focus their attention on Saint-Domingue. For more on Martinique, see Rebecca Hartkopf Schloss, *Sweet Liberty: The Final Days of Slavery in Martinique* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Dale W. Tomich, *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar: Martinique and the World Economy, 1830-1848* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990). For more on Saint-Domingue, see *The World of the Haitian Revolution*, ed. David Patrick Geggus and Normal Fiering (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: the Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2005); Jeremy D. Popkin, *You Are All Free: the Haitian Revolution and the Abolition of Slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Laurent Dubois has also studied Guadeloupe in detail. See Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004). Myriam Cottias leads the French Atlantic field in France. See Myriam Cottias, *D'une abolition, l'autre: Anthologie raisonnée de textes consacrés à la seconde abolition de l'esclavage dans les colonies françaises* (Marseille: Agone Éditeur, 1998). Because little work exists on Martinique, I will occasionally draw from secondary sources about Saint-Domingue out of necessity.

Final Days of Slavery in Martinique uses Dessalles as one of her major primary sources to illuminate the broader Creole desire for social control as emancipation loomed over the horizon, but she does not explore Dessalles's ultra-royalist politics.⁷ This paper uses Dessalles's diary and letters to bring to light the political culture of Martinican French Creoles during the Bourbon Restoration and the July Monarchy. It is impossible to discuss the entire significance of the diary in a single paper; thus, I will focus on white colonial memory of the paternalist monarch Louis XVI and the idea of Bourbon legitimacy.

Dessalles's commemorations of Louis XVI shed light on political differences between Martinicans and Frenchmen, particularly over memories of the French Revolution and political opinions on the current state of French politics. For example, while Dessalles refused to forget the 1793 regicide, French men and women, particularly in Paris, increasingly questioned the legitimacy of the Bourbon Restoration and July Monarchy kings.⁸ In addition, Dessalles was part of a population that was "a garish exaggeration...of the ancien regime in France," while French society under the Bourbon Restoration and July Monarchy turned increasingly bourgeois and the nobility continued to lose the power it held before the French Revolution.⁹ In this sense, Dessalles was alienated from Frenchmen, even while he considered himself to be "French" and had cultural allegiance to France.

⁷ A few other historians have used the diary in studies of plantation colonies in the Caribbean. See Miranda Spieler, *Empire and Underworld: Captivity in French Guiana* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012); Robert Forster, "Three Slaveholders in the Antilles: Saint-Domingue, Martinique, and Jamaica," *The Journal of Caribbean History* 36, no. 1 (2002): 1-32.

⁸ For the Bourbon Restoration's crisis with this "crisis of legitimacy," see Sheryl Kroen, *Politics and Theater: The Crisis of Legitimacy in Restoration France, 1815-1830* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). Jennifer E. Sessions has argued that the monarchs of the July Monarchy sought to establish legitimate rule by expanding into Algeria. See Sessions, *By Sword and Plow: France and the Conquest of Algeria* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

⁹ C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), 57. For more on French society and politics during the Bourbon Restoration and the July Monarchy, see Guillaume de Bertier de Sauvigny, *The Bourbon Restoration*, trans. Lynn M. Case (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1966); Sarah Maza, *The Myth of the French Bourgeoisie: An Essay on the Social Imaginary, 1750-1850* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

This political and cultural split illuminates Ann Stoler's discussion of differences between European communities in colonies and Europeans residing in metropolises in her book *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*. Stoler critiques previous scholars of colonialism for constructing a static colonizer/colonized divide, and she overcomes this binary by treating race, including whiteness, as a protean social category.¹⁰ Similarly, Alice Conklin critiques historians of West Africa for depicting French rule as monolithic and unchanging; she instead deconstructs the *mission civilisatrice* of a particular group of people within a delineated time period.¹¹ Building on Conklin and Stoler, I aim to complicate the idea of "whiteness" in the Martinican context, but in a different way. Rather than deconstructing colonial racial and political categories, I illuminate the political differences constructed by French Creoles between themselves and their metropolitan counterparts and why these political differences existed. By understanding the politics of French colonialism in Martinique, historians can better understand how former European colonies came to be politically, culturally, and economically distinct from their metropolises—often to the dismay of European leaders who hoped to craft the world in their image.

Dessalles remembered Louis XVI's reign fondly not only because the French Caribbean had been **on edge** since the Haitian Revolution, but also because when Louis XVI died, so did the paternalist model of French power. In her 1993 book *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, Lynn Hunt outlined the French monarchy's use of paternalism to shore up power over French subjects. The French state was styled as a "family," with the monarch as the father and French subjects as his children who obeyed their benevolent father. When French

¹⁰ Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 13.

¹¹ Alice L. Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 3.

revolutionaries executed Louis XVI, they did not only execute a single man; they also executed hundreds of years of French history and a tradition of paternalist kings. According to historian Sarah Hanley, this had particular implications for all French families, as the paternalistic power of a single king served to bolster the paternalistic power of fathers over their families.¹² With the symbolic execution of paternalism in France, paternalism as a whole was replaced by a new political model. But for a planter like Dessalles, who styled himself as a father figure to his many slaves, the destruction of this model, coupled with the ever-present threat of slave rebellion, contributed to his idealization of Louis XVI.

I used a single source, rich in its complexities and rare in its depth, to illuminate the political split between Martinique and France. Due to time constraints, I could not read the four volumes in their entirety. I read all of volume one, which contained Dessalles's extant correspondence, and, through Hathi Trust, used key word searches to explore the remaining three volumes, searching for words such as "Louis XVI," "le roi," "Bourbon," "l'emancipation," "l'abolition," and "les nègres." For more specific terms, such as "Louis XVI" and "Bourbon," I received about twenty to thirty hits, but for more general terms such as "l'abolition" and "les nègres," I received two to three hundred hits. In order to establish how representative Dessalles was of the elite Martinican planter population, I have also read the few issues of the *Gazette de la Martinique* that are available online through the French National Archives, and a group of petitions signed by the population which were included in the French diary's appendices.

While studying a single person in depth has its drawbacks, I apply a framework used by Peter S. Seaver in his 1985 book *Wallington's World*, which uses the extensive writings of a

¹² Sarah Hanley, "Engendering the State: Family Formation and State Building in Early Modern France," *French Historical Studies* 16, no. 1 (1989), 4-27.

single man to explore the world of Puritan urban artisans. In justifying his use of an individual's writings, Seaver argues that

His life is important, then, not because he was a typical London Puritan artisan—the very fact that he wrote so much renders him inevitably exceptional at the least in that respect—but rather because what we know about early seventeenth-century artisans, Puritan or otherwise, is largely statistical in nature, and Wallington's papers offer a unique opportunity to gain some insight into the thought and attitudes of one such artisan toward himself and his world, his family and friends... toward the revolution in England which he thought was the great manifestation of God's will toward his children in his time.¹³

Applying this framework to Dessalles, we can use him, an untypical French Creole in that he kept an exhaustive written record of his personal life, to study the worldviews of a single man and establish how representative they were by comparing them to other elite planters throughout the Caribbean, who mourned the loss of supposed unquestioned paternal power during the Age of Revolutions and slave emancipation. Using his diary, historians of France, the French empire, and the Atlantic world can enhance their understanding of political divisions between metropole and colony, a split which manifested itself in Dessalles's diary in his annual commemorations of the paternalist monarch Louis XVI.

A World Upended by Racial Strife

Throughout the entire span of the diary and letters, it is clear that Dessalles was daily confronted with a new world fraught with violent threats from independent Haiti, slave poisonings and rebellions, a poor sugar market, and, in his mind, incompetent French officials—a world in which he felt Martinique had no discernible future. He was particularly concerned about the prospect of his mother returning to Martinique to improve her health. In his frequent letters to her, he constantly entreats her to stay away from Martinique: “I repeat again, my dear

¹³ Peter S. Seaver, *Wallington's World: A Puritan Artisan in Seventeenth-Century London* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 13.

Maman, do not ever think about returning to Martinique, whatever the state of your health. It is better to die in one's bed than to run the risk of being massacred. I do not believe that this country will perish right away, but it seems impossible to me that it can last for long."¹⁴ He saw only "misery" in "poor Martinique's" future."¹⁵ His inner struggle to cope with a changing world led him to idealize a former era which, in his mind, was a time of peace and prosperity, with slaves dutifully obeying their masters and metropolitan officials respecting the unique needs of the colonies.

Anxiety concerning Haiti's proximity to Martinique frequently surfaces throughout the diary, particularly when other masters uncovered plots to overthrow white control and establish a black republic. In an 1811 letter to his mother, he describes a free mulatto who had worked for Henri Christophe, the first president and king of Haiti, and who traveled to Martinique to "raise the Negroes and the mulattoes against the whites" with the assistance of compatriots from Curaçao.¹⁶ Again in 1822, in the aftermath of a slave revolt which left seven whites dead, he was certain that it was "absolutely a copy of what happened in Saint-Domingue."¹⁷ These fears surface again and again throughout his correspondence and diary, particularly when Charles X officially recognized Haiti as a free republic in 1825 and when France abolished slavery in 1848.

Dessalles was particularly concerned that the Martinican slave poisonings that occurred in the 1820s were at least inspired by, if not directed by, former slaves from Haiti. Whatever the inspiration, this series of poisonings worried plantation owners more than in the past because they seemingly occurred with alarming frequency and ferocity. In 1822 Dessalles carefully

¹⁴ Forster and Forster, *Sugar and Slavery, Family and Race*, 50.

¹⁵ Pierre Dessalles, *Journal, 1837-1841*, vol. 2 of *La Vie d'un colon à la Martinique au XIXème siècle*, présenté par H. Frémont et Léo Elisabeth (Courbevoie: Cauchard, 1984), 91.

¹⁶ Pierre Dessalles, *Correspondance, 1808-1834*, vol. 1 of *La Vie d'un colon à la Martinique au XIXème siècle*, présenté par H. Frémont (Courbevoie: Cauchard, 1980), 32.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 73. For more on fears of Saint-Domingue in North America, see Ashli White, *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

tracked the spread of slave poisonings on neighboring plantations, nervously anticipating the day when poisoning would strike his plantation. He informed his mother that “The Lamentin district is currently enflamed; the poisoning there has frightfully ravaged the place. Lasalle and Borck have taken large losses.”¹⁸ One female planter, Miss Littée, had 6 slaves arrested for poisoning, and Lasalle wrote to Dessalles expressing his indignation when a man suggested that an epidemic was circulating on Lasalle’s plantation and no poisoning actually occurred.¹⁹ Martinican planters were intimately aware of the slave resistance occurring on surrounding plantations.

When Dessalles suspected that the poisonings hit his plantation, he quickly disciplined the slaves he suspected of committing the violence and threatened the rest of his slaves to frighten them from perpetuating the poisons. When he found a poisoned mule on his plantation, he harshly punished the slave who cared for the animal: “Tonight I gave 40 lashes to the head muleteer.” He also “warned the laborers, the animal caretakers and the chief muleteer that each of them would receive this punishment each time an animal died.”²⁰ His harsh punishments demonstrate that he felt the slave poisonings to be a real threat, fearing the decimation of his livestock—which would be costly to replace if the poisoning continued—and the possibility of his slaves poisoning fellow slaves or, in an extreme case, his slaves poisoning himself. Slave poisoning occurred in the era before the French Revolution, but nineteenth-century Martinican plantation owners, according to historian John Savage, “claimed that slaves were poisoning their white masters, something they insisted had not occurred in the pre-revolutionary era.”²¹ After

¹⁸ Dessalles, *Correspondance*, 65.

¹⁹ Dessalles, *Correspondance*, 124, 121.

²⁰ It is unclear if Dessalles administered the lashes, or if he ordered another slave or overseer to do so. Dessalles, *Correspondance*, 119.

²¹ John Savage, “‘Black Magic’ and White Terror: Slave Poisoning and Colonial Society in Early 19th Century Martinique,” in *Journal of Social History* 40, no. 3 (Spring 2007): 637. See also Savage, “Between Colonial Fact and French Law: Slave Poisoners and the Provostial Court in Restoration-Era Martinique,” *French Historical Studies*

the French and Haitian Revolutions, Martinican planters experienced increased resistance on the part of their slaves, not only through slave insurrections, but also through the “black magic” that poisoning employed.

Slave owning Martinicans could also look to international events to corroborate the idea that slave resistance was on the rise. Louis-Philippe brought a definitive end to the clandestine French slave trade in the early 1830s, and Britain passed the act to abolish slavery in 1833. Atlantic sugar colonies also declined in importance as their major export crop, sugar harvested from sugar cane, lost importance with the rise of the European-produced sugar beet. This historical backdrop, coupled with the supposed spike in slave poisonings, contributed to the sense that the colonies had been irrevocably altered by the age of revolutions and the fear that Martinique was descending into chaos.

Dessalles was not the only Martinican planter who felt that France and its colonies were descending into chaos. Other planters experienced the ravages of poisoning and slave rebellions and also felt the dangers of the newly established Haiti. French abolitionist Victor Schoelcher, who was the first French abolitionist to visit Haiti and advocated for emancipation in the French West Indies, corroborated Dessalles’s claims that other Martinican planters experienced the ravages of slave poisonings in his 1842 book *Des colonies françaises: abolition immédiate de l’esclavage*. In a discussion of poisoning on Martinican plantations, Schoelcher describes the racist ideas planters had about Africans; they asserted that “the black man will always poison,

29, no. 4 (fall 2006): 565-94. In this article, Savage argues that French Creoles and metropolitan administrators remained divided over who had the appropriate jurisdiction for punishing convicted slave poisoners: the master or metropolitan representatives. This conflict became a powerful symbol of the divide between metropolitan administration and colonists who desired more autonomy. I build on Savage’s analysis by examining the political culture of this divide through the lens of Bourbon Royalism. For more on poisoning, see Diana Paton, “Witchcraft, Poison, Law, and Atlantic Slavery, in *The William and Mary Quarterly* 69, no. 2 (April 2012): 235-264.

whether he is free or enslaved.”²² A man named Monsieur Villemain told Schoelcher that a black man “starts fire to burn and poisons to poison; this is from an instinct without reflection and that fear alone can contain.”²³ Martinican planters as a whole were daily faced with the ravages of the French Revolution, particularly when slaves began to sabotage their masters’ livestock and property with the aim of emancipation in mind.

To protect themselves against rebelling slaves, planters argued for increased colonial power in governing race relations, an argument that fits into a larger cycle of tensions between metropolitan officials and sugar planters who believed that their colonial needs were not fully understood by Europeans. Schloss’s *Sweet Liberty* explores the tensions between planters such as Dessalles and the metropolitan officials sent to Martinique to govern the local government and economy. The conflicts between these two groups “show the limits authorities faced when trying to implement metropolitan policies and the persistent power of local Creoles.”²⁴ Two issues of contention were the increasing freedom of *gens de couleur* and Creoles’ ability to run their own judicial courts, particularly when planters felt threatened by slave poisonings and insurrections. When the metropolitan government, facing increased pressure from the nineteenth century’s world power, Great Britain, extended full rights to *gens de couleur* in 1833, relations between Creoles and metropolitan administrators worsened.²⁵ After Charles X abolished Martinique’s provostial court in 1826 to assert metropolitan power over the colony, colonists viewed the abolition “as yet another infringement on their formal and informal power on the island.” Under Charles X and Louis Philippe, Martinicans such as Dessalles “had increasingly seen their power erode while, in their minds, Martinique’s *gens de couleur* gained in economic

²² Victor Schoelcher, *Des colonies françaises: abolition immédiate de l’esclavage* (Paris: Éditions du C.T.H.S., 1998), 125.

²³ *Ibid.*, 125.

²⁴ Schloss, *Sweet Liberty*, 5.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

and political stature and enslaved workers became increasingly violent.”²⁶ Combined, these two forces served to alienate Dessalles and his fellow elite white planters from metropolitan administrators on the island.

Other Martinicans also felt that the metropole interfered too greatly in plantation life and colonial politics. When Dessalles and his fellow planter Jacques Lalanne petitioned the governor in 1840 to lift the new obligations that forced masters to obey regulations for slaves’ spiritual welfare, they were also claiming that the metropole had overstepped its boundaries in governing the colony. Because metropolitan officials and priests were not familiar with the unique racial structures of the colony, especially the supposed inability of blacks to internalize religious ideals, they proclaimed a law that would harm the plantation system and ultimately be impossible to enforce. In addition, when minister of the marine Baron Guillaume Hyde de Nauville suggested that only metropolitan Frenchmen, not Creoles, be selected to serve on Martinique’s judiciary council, Dessalles and the other Martinican councilors resigned **en masse**.²⁷ Other Martinican planters **appeared** to have agreed with Dessalles: Martinique was a place of potential and actual violence, and the metropole did not respect the colony’s racial hierarchy. One Creole even “obtained an audience with the King” to inform him of “the sad position of the colonies and their need for protection from the Government.”²⁸

These tensions served to alienate Dessalles and his fellow Martinican planters from the metropole. As a planter living in the colonies, Dessalles was daily faced with frightening reminders of the horrors the age of revolutions inflicted on white colonist, especially slave resistance through poisoning and acts of violence. To try to reestablish control over slaves and

²⁶ Schloss, *Sweet Liberty*, 108.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 124. Very few published primary sources from Martinique discuss the politics of Martinicans other than Dessalles. I will explore unpublished sources in the ANOM in June 2013.

²⁸ Dessalles, *Journal, 1837-1841*, 88-9.

gens de couleur, Dessalles and his fellow Martinicans argued for increased independence from the metropole in governing plantations and slaves. These efforts would only serve to further split colony and metropole and would lead Dessalles to reflect back on an era in which the metropole respected Martinique's ability to govern its own affairs.

Louis XVI's "Paternal Chest"

The chaos of a changing world, one in which Dessalles felt he had no discernible place, led him to idealize Louis XVI's reign as one of peace and understanding. While Dessalles was a legitimist and lived under the Bourbon Restoration, he did not idealize Louis XVIII or Charles X as good monarchs who understood the unique needs of the colonies. He did not outwardly praise the politics of either of these monarchs, hinting at a less than enthusiastic support, at least compared to his fawning praise of Louis XVI as a virtuous monarch. This is because the restored Bourbon kings faced a fundamentally different world than Louis XVI did; indeed, "When the Bourbons returned they faced nothing less than the task of reclaiming their exclusive right to rule France, in a world where such a right no longer existed."²⁹ Instead of regaining absolute control, the monarchs faced Frenchmen exposed to political ideals such as liberty and equality and a new world power: Great Britain. From the start of the Restoration, Louis XVIII, in order to contend with rising British power, had to promise to discourage the slave trade and even tacitly outlawed it in 1815. This was not the *coup de grace* for the Bourbon Restoration in Dessalles's eyes, however, as the Bourbons tacitly complied with the continuance of a "clandestine" illegal slave trade.³⁰ Louis XVIII's and Charles X's efforts to adapt to the

²⁹ Kroen, *Politics and Theater*, 7.

³⁰ Tomich, *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar*, 56.

changing world, which threatened the colonies' livelihoods to some extent, made Dessalles less than enthusiastic about their rule, but he still supported the Bourbons.

His legitimism is made clear by his hatred of the Orleanist Louis-Philippe who was put on the throne during the July Monarchy. In 1832, Dessalles was removed from his position as Martinican attorney-general because he refused to sign a law which banished Charles X and his family from France and its colonies. He explained his reasons to his mother: "To attach my name to such an iniquitous act would have been a disgrace...I have sworn loyalty to the government of Louis-Philippe, and I will remain loyal [but]...to my last breath I shall wish, in the interest of France, for the principle of legitimacy to triumph."³¹ Even seven years after the ascension of the Orleans family to the throne, Dessalles did not accept them; when he read about the pregnancy of the Duchess of Orleans in the *Gazette de la Martinique*, he wrote in his diary, "This infamous race will long live, unfortunately for France."³² If he did not have high hopes for the survival of France and Martinique under the Bourbon Restoration, he certainly did not believe usurpers to the throne could save Martinique from its downward spiral.

Based on limited evidence in the diary, Dessalles was not the only planter who favored the Bourbon monarchs over the Orleanist monarchs. In 1837, Dessalles received a visit from the Count Le Vassor de la Touche who de described as "a frank and loyal character, a good colonist and a friend of legitimacy."¹ In 1842, Dessalles dined with the family of Monsieur de Percin, and the dinner party "Drank to the health of Henri V: may he soon return to the throne of his ancestors!" Spending the evening with legitimists was a comfort for Dessalles, who wrote that "I am never as content as I am when I find myself among honest and loyal men who boast the

³¹ Forster and Forster, *Sugar and Slavery, Family and Race*, 83.

³² Dessalles, *Journal, 1837-1841*, 69.

principles of Legitimacy.”¹ These two entries suggest that other Bourbon legitimists lived in Martinique. Dessalles was not completely alone in his political leanings.

But the question remains as to why Dessalles singled out Louis XVI for his annual commemorations. Why not mourn, for example, the death of Louis XIV, who centralized France under one ruler and visually glorified himself and, by extension, France in Versailles? The answer lies in the psychology of regicide. When the Jacobins guillotined Louis XVI, they aimed to execute not only a monarch but the *ancien regime* as a whole. But they also gave Louis XVI “potent symbolic value” by “attributing to Louis the unusual sacred status of a sacrificial victim who possesses the supernatural ability to purify and regenerate the nation through his own death.”³³ In short, Louis XVI was elevated to a higher status than he had previously held, one which could redeem the nation. His death did not purify France, though; instead, his death “[left] in its wake political chaos, moral confusion, and a deep and disorienting historical discontinuity.”³⁴ This left his memory open to commemorations and idealization.

Dessalles faithfully commemorated Louis XVI each year on the date of his execution. A typical entry follows the example of an 1837 entry: “Today forty-four years ago Louis XVI, the best of kings, the most humane man, was led to the scaffold by the ferocity of his people. What a crime! Since this atrocity, France has never been tranquil, constantly changing government. She searches in vain to replace the paternal authority of her ancient kings.”³⁵ This entry, along with the other annual commemorations, clearly demonstrates the high esteem in which Dessalles held Louis XVI. It is true that under the monarch’s reign, France and its colonies were more

³³ Susan Dunn, *The Many Deaths of Louis XVI: Regicide and the French Political Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 4. For more on the psychology of regicide and Louis XVI in the French Revolution, see David P. Jordan, *The King’s Trial: Louis XVI vs. The French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Kroen, *Politics and Theater*; Michael Walzer, *Regicide and Revolution: Speeches at the Trial of Louis XVI*, trans. Marian Rothstein (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

³⁵ Dessalles, *Journal, 1837-1841*, 17.

stable; a single ruler existed to whom Frenchmen had to obey, a system which allowed for no citizens but which ensured stability. In addition, comparatively little racial strife occurred, as the Saint-Domingue revolt had yet to occur. But in idealizing this period, Dessalles also did quite a **bit of forgetting** the negative aspects of Louis XVI's reign. In the 1760s, planters rebelled against the monarch's attempts to centralize metropolitan control over colonial politics, and in 1784 and 1785, Versailles passed two ordinances that restrained the powers of Saint-Dominguan planters on their property, actions which immediately spurred fierce resistance from colonial whites. Two colonists, members of the Chamber of Agriculture in Saint-Domingue, even traveled to France in 1788 to protest the increasing restrictions on planters' authority.³⁶ Dessalles fashioned a unique memory of Louis XVI, one in which he was the best of monarchs while in reality, contention existed between the monarch and his French Caribbean subjects.

In the above entry, the word "paternal" is significant, demonstrating that Dessalles thought of Louis XVI as a father figure. He was not alone in this; in 1811, when Martinique was under British control, Dessalles and a number of other planters signed a petition addressing the king of Great Britain, expressing a desire to lay their worries "on His Majesty's paternal chest."³⁷ Schloss argues that these petitioners often used "familial language" in their petitions to the British king. This language surfaced again in 1812, when they described themselves as "adopted

³⁶ Gabriel Debien, *Les Colons de Saint-Domingue et La Révolution: Essai sur le Club Massiac* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1953), 30, 55-56. Little literature exists on the French colonies before the French Revolution. What does exist focuses on Saint-Domingue. See also John D. Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

³⁷ Schloss, *Sweet Liberty*, 51. Schloss argues that Martinicans conceived of British rule as a way to increase their own colonial power; a major political or cultural shift did not occur during this brief period. In addition, even though Martinique was under British rule during the French and Haitian Revolutions, its planters still paid close attention to French events and thought of themselves as French. Dessalles's father even wrote a book that chronicled Martinique's history during the French Revolution. See Pierre-François-Régis Dessalles and Henri de Frémont, *Historique des troubles survenues à la Martinique pendant la Révolution* (Fort-de-France: Société d'histoire de la Martinique, 1982).

children of Great Britain.”³⁸ Elite white Martinicans employed paternalistic rhetoric to present themselves to the British king, while Dessalles used it more specifically in commemorating Louis XVI, who was, in his eyes, the most paternalistic king.

Given the contours of French history, this is not entirely surprising, as pre-Revolutionary French monarchs explicitly aimed to present themselves as paternalistic figures. They were the head of the French family, and their children could approach them with all matter of concerns—the monarchs could even heal scrofula with a simple physical touch.³⁹ Louis XVI’s ministers made special efforts to present the monarch as a good father, portraying him and Marie-Antoinette “as examples of virtue and benevolence—the good parents—rather than in old-style dynastic glory.”⁴⁰ His ministers did this in response to changing ideals of leadership in Europe, particularly in France, in the eighteenth-century. With the rise of the new realm of public opinion, philosophes such as Rousseau insisted on limits to a king’s power, as men were capable of maturing from children in need of benevolent guidance into autonomous citizens.⁴¹ This shift ended the image of the king as a distant, harsh ruler, instead melding him into a benevolent father who led his children until they were fully matured. Of course, this model helped bring about the French Revolution, when the French “children” decided they were no longer children and no longer in need of Louis XVI’s paternalism. Thus, an attack on a king’s right to power became “an attack on excessive paternal authority as well.”⁴² This had implications beyond the French monarchy. The Legislative Assembly “dismantle[ed] paternal prerogatives and made it

³⁸ Ibid., 64.

³⁹ Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 43.

⁴⁰ Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 20.

⁴¹ Ibid., 18.

⁴² Ibid., 40.

part of the effort to establish contractual obligations between individuals.”⁴³ The foundations of relations among Frenchmen were fundamentally altered.

This had huge implications for planters such as Dessalles, who not only presented themselves as children of paternalistic monarchs, but imagined themselves as benevolent fathers to their adoring slaves. In his book about sugar masters in antebellum Louisiana, Richard Follett describes Creoles’ image of “their independent mastery of an economic, social, and racial world.” While celebrating themselves as intelligent and skillful enterprisers, they also “presented themselves as paternalistic stewards.”⁴⁴ He considered himself to be a benevolent father to his slaves, one who could positively affect their moods. When poisoning was first discovered on his plantation, he punished the muledriver—punishment was something good fathers had to do in order to teach their children—and “exhorted [the slaves] to patience and obedience.” Judging from his letter, the rest of the slaves were not saddened by the punishment given to the mule driver; “They [were] all submissive, upset, and full of zeal” to stop the poisonings from continuing.⁴⁵ Here, Dessalles clearly considered himself to be an effective leader of his people. He even gave his slaves dances and entertainment; in his mind, he cared for their wellbeing and happiness. He also called the slaves “mes negres”—not “les negres”—hinting that he had possessive feelings towards them.⁴⁶

But what truly demonstrates that he thought of himself as a paternal slave owner was his deep attachment to a young slave named Nicaise. Indeed, his attachment was so strong that some historians have speculated that Nicaise may have been his son or even homosexual partner, even

⁴³ Ibid., 41.

⁴⁴ Richard Follett, *The Sugar Masters: Planters and Slaves in Louisiana’s Cane World, 1820-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 8.

⁴⁵ Dessalles, *Journal, 1837-1841*, p. 20.

⁴⁶ Pierre Dessalles, *Journal, 1842-1847*, vol. 3 of *La Vie d’un colon à la Martinique au XIXème siècle*, présenté par H. Frémont (Courbevoie: Cauchard, 1985), 30.

though Dessalles insisted he was only his manservant.⁴⁷ Whatever his relationship to Dessalles, Nicaise accompanied his master on trips to France and even dined with his master; the two had an extremely close relationship, at least in Dessalles's opinion. When Nicaise stole some of his master's money, which was meant to pay the violinists hired for his slaves' dance, Dessalles lamented that "My young Negro Nicaise, who I love as a child," showed such ingratitude to his kind master. Dessalles forgave Nicaise because "I have a weakness for him," and his personal philosophy that "You must show indulgence to these young people" so that they may be governed effectively in the future.⁴⁸ Dessalles clearly demonstrates his paternalism in these passages. Dessalles could not bring himself to physically punish the slave he loved as his own child, instead verbally reprimanding him until he begged for forgiveness because he believed it would be a more effective way to discipline his childlike slave.

Even if Dessalles hesitated to physically harm Nicaise, he did not show the same generosity toward other slaves, especially those who may have been guilty of poisoning livestock. In times of trouble, such as the poisonings or during rebellions, he would curse the "diabolical and treacherous" race Martinicans had to govern, but, as a whole, he did not consider his own slaves to be bad people he could not trust. Like Saint-Dominguan slave masters, Martinicans "argued that *their* slaves...were different from the rebellious ones."⁴⁹ Dessalles believed that his slaves were not evil; if a slave acted against him, it was because he or she was led by a *mulatre* or a *gens de couleur*, the true committers of evil on the island. When the slaves of Monsieur de La Guigneraye refused to work after learning that they would soon be emancipated in 1848, Dessalles did not believe that they made this decision on their own;

⁴⁷ Forster and Forster, *Sugar and Slavery, Family and Race*, 19.

⁴⁸ Dessalles, *Journal, 1837-1841*, p. 22-3.

⁴⁹ White, *Encountering Revolution*, 139.

instead, “They listened to bad advice.”⁵⁰ His own slaves had what he described as good dispositions throughout the period of emancipation.⁵¹ When his slaves briefly stopped working, it was because his overseer relaxed his “severity” and “excited them against me.”⁵² Without proper paternal guidance, slaves fell into bad behavior. In order to be good workers and good people, they needed the leadership of their father, in this case, Dessalles. If his slaves were led properly and shielded from *mulâtres*, they would not rebel against their master.

Dessalles’s overall trust in slaves’ docility was complemented by a blatant dislike, even hatred, of *mulâtres* and *gens de couleur*. In 1825, he wrote that, since the French government had taken steps to ensure the equality and liberty of the “vain” *gens de couleur*, the population had grown “more insolent” than ever before.⁵³ Similarly, after encountering a free *mulâtre*, he complained of members of this “horrible race” who were “arrogant and insolent in their prosperity.”⁵⁴ He even at least partly blamed slave insurrections on the negative influence of *mulâtres*, such as one named Fauvel who “plotted to seize the General and proclaim independence for Martinique” in 1812.⁵⁵ These two groups were especially dangerous in 1848. A group of *negres*, who could no longer resist slavery in towns due to white resistance, were “driven by bad *mulâtres*” to scatter throughout the countryside and continue their resistance, which was a direct threat to plantation owners like Dessalles.⁵⁶ A mere two days later, a group of *gens de couleur* threatened violence to Nicaise in an incident which a clearly affronted Dessalles describes in great detail. Dessalles had such intense dislike for these two groups because they affronted Martinique’s racial hierarchy. His complaints usually centered on individuals who were

⁵⁰ Pierre Dessalles, *Journal, 1848-1856*, vol. 4 of *La Vie d’un colon à la Martinique au XIX^{ème} siècle*, présenté par H. Frémont et Léo Elisabeth (Mayenne: Manutention, 1986), 39.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵³ Dessalles, *Correspondance*, 156. Should I put more race theory in here?

⁵⁴ Dessalles, *Journal, 1837-1841*, 17.

⁵⁵ Dessalles, *Correspondance*, 36.

⁵⁶ Dessalles, *Journal, 1848-1856*, 34.

“arrogant,” meaning they made no attempt to give Dessalles the respect he felt he deserved as an elite white planter, or were “horrible” and “bad,” as they were not guided by a benevolent father figure. In addition, *mulâtres* were direct and very physical evidence that the racial hierarchy had failed in the most intimate of ways. These people refused to fit into the ideal social system Dessalles envisioned, which would produce good fathers and obedient slaves and would justify his own economic and political position as an elite white.

Dessalles fashioned a distinctive memory of Louis XVI as an ideal ruler who respected colonial sovereignty and the unique racial structure of Martinique. He singled out Louis XVI over other former French monarchs because he was the last paternal ruler of France, and without the paternal model the French monarch offered, Dessalles could not legitimately present himself as a fatherly figure to his slaves. Dessalles hoped that the restoration of the Bourbon monarchs to the French throne would restore paternalism, and therefore metropolitan and colonial stability, to France and its empire, but his hopes were continuously dashed as the monarchs of the Bourbon Restoration granted more power to *gens de couleur* and bended to the ever increasing power of Great Britain.

Alienation from Priests, Metropolitan Administrators, and Frenchmen

According to historian Sheryl Kroen’s *Politics and Theater*, the French government during the Bourbon Restoration actively tried to dissuade French men and women from commemorating the death of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. By pursuing this “politics of forgetting,” they aimed to encourage the French population to forget the French Revolution and the threat to monarchical authority it presented, thereby solidifying the power of the restored Bourbon monarchs. In contrast, the Catholic Church actively encouraged French men and

women to remember and commemorate the regicide. By establishing the regicide as a collective sin, priests hoped to pull more men and women into their congregations, which would reverse the recent trend of declining Church attendance numbers. Given the Church's emphasis on remembering Louis XVI, one would assume that Dessalles was an ardent Catholic and firm supporter of the hierarchical nature of the Catholic Church. In reality, though, he had a contentious relationship with the Catholic priests who lived and ministered in Martinique.

In general, Dessalles was a religious man; while his diary does not detail his specific religious beliefs, he did attend Mass on a weekly basis and provided his slaves with minimal spiritual care. But practicing the Catholic faith did not cause Dessalles to automatically agree with all priests' actions, particularly when French priests demonstrated their ignorance of Martinican race relations. In a letter to his mother, Dessalles criticized a priest named Abbé Brizzard because

he gave communion to six free men of color at François, all of them rich. These same individuals were also confirmed. But a week later, the provost's court went to François to examine a rash of poisonings. The six men were compromised, convicted of poisoning, and by now must have been beheaded. The horror of it! Such ease in bestowing trust and giving out the sacraments right and left is dangerous; these gentlemen of the clergy should be a little more circumspect.⁵⁷

An issue which inflamed Dessalles and his fellow planters alike was an 1840 ordinance which bestowed extensive new rights on slaves and mandated government oversight of private plantations. The ordinance allowed clergy to visit plantations at least once a month to ensure the master provided for slaves' spiritual welfare; mandated admission of enslaved Martinicans above age four to free schools; allowed teachers to teach at nearby plantations; encouraged marriage among slaves; and ordered a fine for any planter who refused to receive a priest or teacher on his plantation. Metropolitan administrators used French priests to shore up their own power over

⁵⁷ Forster and Forster, *Sugar and Slavery, Family and Race*, 56.

Martinican planters. Unsurprisingly, Creole planters found this ordinance to be a huge affront to their authority on their plantations. Dessalles called this ordinance “distressing” and, with a close Creole friend named Jacques Lalanne, wrote a letter to the governor to express his concerns with “the dangers of its execution.”⁵⁸ The final draft of the letter, which was signed by several other Creole planters, argued that the ordinance threatened “the most sacred right of property: a right that the ordinances and the edicts of our Kings have consecrated in the most formal manner.”⁵⁹ These new laws blatantly disregarded the tradition of France’s former monarchs, hinting that Creoles were less than pleased with the July Monarchy and its colonial representatives.

Even if Dessalles was a legitimist, loyalty to the hierarchical *ancien regime* did not force him to blindly follow the Catholic Church; if anything, he was more critical than admiring of the Church and its representatives in Martinique. This is because, in his mind, priests were associated with the metropole and its disconnect with colonial needs. Because the priests trained in France, they had little experience with slaves, *gens de couleur*, and plantation masters. In fact, it appears that Dessalles and the clergy disagreed on blacks’ ability to be religious and follow the tenets of the Catholic Church. When Abbé Brizard gave communion to the six *gens de couleur*, Dessalles revealed his true thoughts about blacks’ ability to be religious: “The people of color and the negroes have no belief in the truth of religion; they are thinking about one thing only, and that is the destruction of the whites and the overthrow of the government.”⁶⁰ Indeed, “to hope that religion will civilize the Negro is to believe in miracles.”⁶¹ The issue of race and metropolitan control after the 1840 ordinance split Dessalles from the Catholic clergy. As

⁵⁸ Dessalles, *Journal 1837-1841*, 248.

⁵⁹ Schloss, *Sweet Liberty*, 186.

⁶⁰ Forster and Forster, *Sugar and Slavery, Family and Race*, 56.

⁶¹ Dessalles, *Journal, 1837-1841*, 36.

historian Joseph F. Byrnes argues, "As a cultural phenomenon, religion can change its meaning from one era to another and from one area to another, but there is an *identity* that endures... The form and the content of religious activity may change or may remain the same: form can persist while content changes, and content can persist while form changes."⁶² Belief and practice can be separate, and in Dessalles's mind, they were.

Priests and metropolitan administrators were not the only figures from which Dessalles felt alienated; he also felt a marked difference between himself and Europeans, particularly abolitionists and those who thought of the colonies as lesser than metropolises. When Dessalles hired a Frenchman to work as an accountant on his plantation in 1822, he wrote to his mother, "If you see Madame Montard, tell her that her son is full of eagerness and good will. I find it necessary to temper his severity. One notices that Europeans, who cry out so loudly against the barbarity of the colonial planters, are usually much harsher than the Creoles themselves. This is because they do not know the infernal race whom we have to guide..."⁶³ Because Europeans, whether they be accountants, priests, or administrators, were not familiar with the unique constitution of blacks, they could not possibly understand Martinique or the French Caribbean colonies as a whole. Perhaps this was the reason some Europeans became abolitionists. Abolitionists did not understand many things about the colonies or blacks as a whole. If they did understand the race, they would know that "If the Negro is free, his entire life would be dedicated to theft and pillage."⁶⁴ Feeling alienated from seemingly all Frenchmen, Dessalles began to look back to Louis XVI's reign as an era during which France and its colonies possessed a mutual understanding of one another. Not even the religion of France could unite

⁶² Joseph F. Byrnes, *Catholic and French Forever: Religious and National Identity in Modern France* (Philadelphia: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2005), xvi.

⁶³ Forster and Forster, *Sugar and Slavery, Family and Race*, 46.

⁶⁴ Dessalles, *Journal, 1837-1841*, 257.

Martinique to the metropole in Dessalles's mind; priests, administrators, and Frenchmen were equally incapable of understanding the needs of plantations masters and slaves.

Culture and Politics

Based on the limited evidence printed primary sources from Martinique offer, it appears that other plantation owners mourned the lost days of *ancien regime* France, commemorating the Bourbon monarchs and regretting recent rises in slave resistance. Nonetheless, it appears that Dessalles's annual commemorations were distinctive in Martinique and possibly the greater French Caribbean; it is hard to imagine that another planter would have celebrated Louis XVI in such a dedicated way. Even if Dessalles was singular in his commemorations, they merit further studies by historians because they illuminate the political split between Martinique and France. Historian Ann Stoler describes internal divisions among European communities in Northern Sumatra in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, arguing that "colonial cultures were never direct translations of European society planted in the colonies, but unique cultural configurations."⁶⁵ Her ideas of colonialism can be applied to Martinique, especially given the presence of a strong Creole culture in the colony. Martinique was distinct from France in many ways. It had a different geography and climate; a hugely different economic structure, reliant on the production of sugar and coffee instead of manufactured goods; and a diverse racial population. Combined, these factors produced a distinctive colonial culture and racial hierarchy. It also led to tensions between colony and metropole, "pitt[ing] them against policymakers in the metropole as much as against the colonized."⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Ann Laura Stoler, "Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule," in *Colonialism and Culture*, Nicholas Dirks, ed. (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 321.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 321.

She also claims that there was no homogenous European community; instead, Europeans were internally divided over issues of class. Whites did not unite over a fear of the “Other,” in Martinique’s case the small population of natives and the large population of Africans and African Creoles. Instead, whites were divided by economic status, leading to divisions within the European community. Stoler’s model does not work completely for Martinicans, however. While she argues that Europeans were culturally and politically divided from the metropole, in Martinique Creoles such as Dessalles were at least partially connected culturally and politically to the metropole. Dessalles’s family lived in France for years, preferring the metropole to the colony, and his wife and daughters dressed in the latest French fashions even when they were residing in Martinique. In 1823, Dessalles praised the beauty of Paris in the spring: “What a beautiful and agreeable season! How Paris and its surroundings enchant in this time!”⁶⁷ He also called Paris “The city of all ages”⁶⁸ and sent his children and wife to France, believing that they could be better educated there than in Martinique: “I will travel in two years to France, this trip is indispensable, I must establish my wife in Paris for the education of my children.”⁶⁹ Even though he preferred to spend most of his time at his Martinican plantations, he also maintained cultural ties to the metropole.

Dessalles and other Creole planters, most of whom split their time between France and the colonies, may have wanted to overcome the stereotype that Creoles were culturally inferior to metropolitan residents by asserting their French culture. This sense of inferiority was especially prevalent in New Orleans, as anthropologist Shannon Lee Dawdy outlines in *Building the Devil’s Empire*. French officials founded New Orleans as an Enlightenment city, wishing to create an ideal French city on the banks of the Mississippi River. Within a mere few years, though, “New

⁶⁷ Dessalles, *Correspondance*, 81.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 88.

Orleans gained a reputation as a wild town and a colonial failure,” one with a “predilection for ‘disorder’” and “a corrupt moral economy.”⁷⁰ According to Doris Garraway, islands in the French Caribbean also failed to live up to French expectations, and Creoles became the “colonial other” in the early modern period, not Africans.⁷¹ Martinicans like Dessalles may have been trying to prove that they were Frenchmen and not of a lower social class by traveling to France and claiming cultural allegiance to the metropole. Perhaps denigrating Europeans for their lack of understanding of colonial racial and economic structures was a way of arguing that Europeans could be inferior to Creole knowledge. Martinique was French, not an inferior Creole society.

While cultural allegiance existed, however, political allegiance with the French government and Frenchmen as a whole was often missing in the colony. After 1830, Dessalles and other Martinican legitimists did not support the Orleanist “race” and hoped for the Bourbons to be restored to the throne. They also believed that the government did not provide adequate support for Martinican planters, particularly in the arenas of slave governance and economic protections from the increasingly popular sugar beet. They also were alienated from the greater French population. In his book *Press, Revolution, and Social Identities in France, 1830-1835*, Jeremy D. Popkin studies the newspapers that proliferated in 1830 to understand broader social identifications throughout France, arguing that “The members of all the period’s social groups were necessarily scattered and unable to speak for themselves in a unified way, but a newspaper could take their place and articulate their views.”⁷² Using a broad collection of newspapers as a window into French social life, Popkin determines that, after the Revolution of 1830, self-

⁷⁰ Shannon Lee Dawdy, *Building the Devil’s Empire: French Colonial New Orleans* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 2-3.

⁷¹ Doris Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), xii.

⁷² Jeremy D. Popkin, *Press, Revolution, and Social Identities in France, 1830-1835* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 15.

conscious bourgeoisie and working classes emerged. With this emergence, “long-standing institutions bec[ame] discredited ‘old regimes,’ and previously revered rulers [were] relabeled as tyrants and despots.”⁷¹ Such social changes in France served to further alienate Dessalles from the broader French population, as Frenchmen increasingly turned away from “despots” like Louis XVI in favor of a more republican government. Thus, Dessalles and his fellow legitimists were politically separated from the metropole, even though they largely claimed cultural allegiance to France.

Conclusion

Of course, paternalism was not unique to Martinique or even the French Caribbean; planters in the American South, for example, also claimed to be paternalists. In his 1998 book *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry*, Philip D. Morgan compared the shift from patriarchal authority to paternalism on plantations in the Lowcountry and the Chesapeake in the late eighteenth century, when masters began thinking of their slaves less as submissive bodies and more as “contented and happy” people.⁷³ A rise in humanitarianism led to the criticism of the most cruel and violent planters and praise for those who rewarded their slaves for good behavior and punished justly. In this system, close bonds could be built between master and slave, bonds similar to the one Dessalles believed he shared with Nicaise. This stands in stark contrast to the patriarchy that characterized these areas in the earlier part of the eighteenth century, a system in which plantation owners thought of themselves

⁷³ Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 284. An example of a paternalist in Virginia is Landon Carter who, as Morgan states, “seemed always to be threatening, cajoling, and punishing his slaves for actual or suspected transgressions. At the same time, he could invoke a shared humanity between master and slave” (293). See Rhys Isaac, *Landon Carter’s Uneasy Kingdom: Revolution and Rebellion on a Virginia Plantation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). For more on paternalism and patriarchy, see Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery: 1619-1877* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993); Follett, *The Sugar Masters*; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

as “all-powerful father figures.” But this father figure was markedly different from how paternalists viewed themselves; patriarchy possessed a “cruel and authoritarian core”⁷⁴ while paternalism was marked more by sentimentality and perceived generosity. Paternalists saw their authority “grounded less in the tradition of divine right than in voluntary, consensual terms.”⁷⁵ Of course, slave masters defined “consensual” and “voluntary” very differently from their slaves. In Dessalles’s mind, since he treated his slaves with what he represented as a firm kindness, and given the race’s inability to properly care for itself, he had a right to authority over his slaves.

While plantations of the American South and the French Caribbean shared similar styles of paternalism, the models for each were markedly different. Morgan attributes the rise of American paternalism to a more affectionate family environment, humanitarianism, rising evangelicalism, and romanticism. He also speculates that tendency to use appeals rather than threats in trying to exhort slave labor may have resulted from planters’ decreased power on their domains during the American Revolution.⁷⁶ But French Creoles’ main source of paternalist inspiration would have been pre-Revolutionary French monarchs, particularly Louis XVI who so carefully molded himself into a father-like figure to his people, not a distant ruler. Louis XVI and his ministers responded to a national and international trend toward regarding children as separate individuals in need of education and care until they were ready to become autonomous from the family. Americans and French Creoles may have both responded to similar international movements, but French Creoles had a very clear model of an ideal paternalistic leader in Louis XVI. After that model was destroyed, and in the immediate aftermath of Haitian independence, it was difficult for plantation owners such as Dessalles to legitimate their continuing paternalist

⁷⁴Ibid., 276.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 295.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 284.

rule in their minds. Paternalism had failed in France and Saint-Domingue, and it could quite possibly next fail in Martinique.

In searching for a restoration of Bourbon monarchs to the French throne, Dessalles and his fellow Bourbon sympathizers longed for a return of paternalist authority to France and its empire. When French revolutionaries executed Louis XVI, they did not guillotine a single man; they executed the French monarch's self-proclaimed paternalism, declaring it was no longer a legitimate political system. Paternalism never returned to France, as republicanism and anti-monarchism continued to grow as political forces in the first half of the nineteenth century. Martinican planters, though, longed for the restoration of paternalism as a political force because, without it, they could no longer claim to have complete authority over their slaves. Using Dessalles's annual commemorations to the paternalist Louis XVI, we can understand that Martinicans and residents of the metropole disagreed on the nature of power, a discord that primarily resulted from the existence of slavery in the colonies.

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