

PORTRAITURE, REVOLUTIONARY IDENTITY AND SUBJUGATION:
ANNE-LOUIS GIRODET'S CITIZEN BELLEY

by

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B.A., The University of British Columbia, 1991

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
Department of Fine Arts
Art History Programme

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

September 1993

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ABSTRACT

During the French Revolution, portraiture played an important role in the forging of identities for the new ruling class. In my thesis I will examine a portrait painted in 1797 by Anne-Louis Girodet of Jean-Baptiste Belley, a black who held a position as deputy to the French National Assembly for the colony of Saint Domingue, between the years 1794 to 1797.

Slavery was abolished in France in 1794. Girodet's portrait of Jean-Baptiste Belley has been seen by both contemporary and later critics as a celebration of the abolition of slavery, and as symbolizing the French Revolution's ideals of liberty and equality. However, the portrait also highlights the underlying controversy which the Revolutionaries faced: how to reconcile the Declaration of the Rights of Man with the firmly stated commitment of the Revolutionary government to uphold a colonial empire.

The French had declared the abolition of slavery because they needed the slaves to form an army for the defense of the colony of Saint Domingue, which was threatened by military attacks from the British and the Spanish. Hence, with the abolition of slavery, there was created a new black military ruling class in Saint Domingue. Considering the powerful position of the blacks in Saint Domingue, there were fears in France that the colony, with the support of the British, might declare its independence.

With the changing status of blacks, from slaves to French

citizens and soldiers, and with the growing uncertainty about French rule in Saint Domingue, Girodet was faced with the task of creating the image of a new black citizen, and of mediating that image in terms of the anti-Jacobin, conservative mood of the Directory, and in terms of the threat embodied in the black military leaders.

In Girodet's portrait, Belley is included in a French Revolutionary elite; he is represented as a reassuring, non-threatening representative of the colonies. However, Girodet also conveys Belley's position as an outsider, whose marginality and difference is epitomized in the portrait itself. I will argue in my thesis that Girodet's portrait of Belley represents and defines a racial hierarchy which could justify the continuation of colonialism and the subordination of blacks, and I will try to show how Girodet represents this hierarchy by a subtle manipulation of the imagery, rhetoric and myth which had been used to define power during the French Revolution.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Maureen Ryan, and my second reader, Dr. John O'Brian for their guidance and assistance during the preparation of this theses. In addition, I would like to thank my fellow students and my family for their continuing support and encouragement throughout my project.

INTRODUCTION

During the French Revolution, portraiture played an important role in the forging of identities for what in effect was the new ruling class, creating images of the Revolutionary leaders as men of authority, guided by virtue and reason and hence justified in their seizure of power after the demise of the King and the ancien régime. But portraiture could also serve to qualify power. It is in this light that my thesis will examine a portrait painted in 1797 by Anne-Louis Girodet of Jean-Baptiste Belley (Fig. 1), a black who held the position of deputy to the French National Assembly for the colony of Saint Domingue¹ from 1794 to 1797.²

Jean-Baptiste Belley was a freed slave who had been born in the French colony of Senegal, at Goré. Before his election to the National Assembly, he had served as a captain and commander in the French Revolutionary Army in Saint Domingue.³ Belley was one of the deputies representing Saint Domingue at the session of the National Convention on February 4th, 1794,

¹France was Europe's chief supplier of colonial produce. The prosperity of Bordeaux and Nantes derived from colonial commerce; with 465 000 slaves, Saint Domingue was the largest and most productive colony in the Caribbean in 1789. See Robin Blackburn, The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery: 1776-1848 (London, New York: Verso, 1988) 163.

²Hugh Honour, The Image of the Black in Western Art. IV. From the American Revolution to World War I. 1. Slaves and Liberators (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989) 104, 106.

³Honour, 104; Blackburn, 224.

when slavery was abolished in the French colonies⁴. Girodet painted the portrait in 1797,⁵ shortly after Belley had lost his seat in the Assembly, and it was exhibited in 1797 at the Exposition de L'Élysée, where it seems to have been entitled simply Portrait de nègre.⁶ The portrait was shown at the Salon in 1798,⁷ at which time it was entitled Portrait du C. Belley, ex-représentant des colonies, the 'C' standing for Citoyen.⁸ The bust which Belley leans on in the portrait represents Abbé Guillaume-Thomas Raynal, who was famous for his stance as an abolitionist, and for his publication Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes, first published in

⁴Blackburn, 224.

⁵It is not known whom the portrait of Belley was originally commissioned for. Honour, in The Image of the Black in Western Art, writes that "Nothing is known of the circumstances in which the portrait was painted, whether it was commissioned by Belley himself or conceived by Girodet as a semiallegorical image of blacks freed from slavery as a result of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution." Honour, 106.

⁶Honour, 106.

⁷Girodet submitted two portraits to the Salon of 1798, the portrait of Belley, and a portrait titled Jeune Trioson. Initially, both seem to have been rejected, for reasons that are unclear. See Honour, 106. A letter of Aug. 6th, 1798, signed by A-L. Girodet "ancien pensionnaire à l'École des arts à Rome," registered a protest regarding the exclusion of the works. See Girodet 1767-1824. Exposition du deuxième centenaire (Paris: Musée de Montargis, 1967) 20.

⁸Honour, 106.

1770.

The portrait of Belley has been seen by modern critics such as Hugh Honour, as a celebration of the abolition of slavery in the French colonies, and as symbolizing the French Revolutionary ideals of liberty and equality. Thus Honour writes in The Image of the Black in Western Art,

Girodet fixed the moment when, during a brief inclusion of Saint Domingue in the 'République Une et Indivisible' a Black could acquire a kind of French naturalization in art, far from any exoticism, in a political, philosophical, and exclusively secular climate of ideas.⁹

Certainly Salon critics who reviewed the portrait in 1798 saw the painting as an illustration of the progress the French Revolution had brought to the situation of the black colonial population. One critic wrote

. . . Debout, un homme de couleur, ex-représentant des colonies, s'appuie contre un piedestal sur quel le buste de Raynal en marbre blanc s'élève . . . C'est un des tableaux les plus scavamment (sic) peints que je connaisse; je conseille à plusieurs artistes d'interroger ce tableau, il fera leur désespoir ou leur génie. J'irai souvent rêver devant ce portrait. Que d'objets sublimes; Raynal; la liberté des nègres et le pinceau de Girodet.¹⁰

And another reviewer of the Salon of 1798 argued

C'est une idée heureuse d'avoir placé ce représentant appuyé contre le piedestal qui porte le buste de Raynal, l'éloquent avocat des hommes du couleur. S'il eut embrassé cette image, sa crée (sic), on eut pu intituler

⁹Honour, 110.

¹⁰Collection de pièces sur les beaux-arts (1673-1808) dite Collection Deloynes, vol. 20 (Paris: Bibliothèque National, 1980) 539-540. The Deloynes Collection provides an archive of Salon criticism.

ce tableau hommage de la reconnaissance.¹¹

What these Salon evaluations reveal is that the portrait of Belley could be read in terms of a French national, Revolutionary identity which encompassed, unproblematically, the nation's former black slaves.

However, as will emerge in my examination of Belley's portrait, there were profound contradictions around French colonialism and the movement for the abolition of slavery, contradictions which were part of the controversy which faced the French Revolution itself: how to justify a regime which proclaimed universal human rights, while it at the same time set itself up as the guardian of private property. The Revolutionary leaders, following 1789, faced a contradiction in that they had proclaimed universal liberty, but were unwilling to grant it when it was perceived to threaten the interests of the ruling classes. This contradiction was expressed by the deputy to the National Assembly, Honoré Gabriel Mirabeau, who wrote in his publication, Courrière de Provence,¹² concerning the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man:

A simple declaration of the rights of man, applicable to all people and all ages of history, to every moral and geographical point on the surface of the globe, was no

¹¹Collection Deloynes, vol. 20, 538-539.

¹²Courrière de Provence was published in 1789, 1790, and 1791. Antonia Vallentin, Voice of the Revolution (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1948) 529.

doubt a great and splendid concept; but it seems that before thinking in such generous terms of the code that should be applied to other nations, it might have been a good idea if the basis of our own had been . . . agreed upon . . . Every step the Assembly takes in expounding the rights of man, we shall see, will result in it being struck by the abuses that could ensue if these rights were made available to the people; and often prudence will result in these abuses being greatly exaggerated. Hence we find these numerous restrictions . . . added to each of the articles of the Declaration--restrictions . . . which replace rights with obligations and substitute fetters for liberty, conditions which . . . will result in man being tied down by details of state administration instead of being left to enjoy his natural liberty (underlining mine).¹³

As I will be arguing in this thesis, similar contradictions also play a role in Girodet's portait of Citizen Belley. Specifically, the portrait highlights the underlying controversy facing Revolutionary France: how to reconcile the Declaration of the Rights of Man with the firmly stated commitment of the Revolutionary government to uphold a colonial empire, particularly in view of emerging Black Jacobinism and black aspirations to power and control in the colony of Saint Domingue.

This controversial aspect of the image was in fact hinted at by a third Salon critic who, commenting on Girodet's portrait, remarked on the juxtaposition of the white marble head of Raynal with the dark figure of Belley. This critic complained:

¹³Albert Soboul, The French Revolution, 1787-1799: From the Storming of the Bastille to Napoleon (New York: Vintage Books 1975) 178.

La translation du noir au blanc n'est pas menagé; il aurait fallu ramener l'oeil par gradation, ce qui aurait ajouté plus d'harmonie à ce portrait.¹⁴

Such formal criticism, by drawing attention to what the critic perceived as a disharmonious "translation from black to white," conjures up associations with incompatibility and opposition, which in turn disrupt the image of Revolutionary unity and equality between the French and the black citizenry of its colonies.

Due to the abolition of slavery and the ensuing changing relationship between France and Saint Domingue, Girodet, in the portrait of the black deputy Jean-Baptiste Belley, was faced with the task of mediating colonial and racial discourses, as well as Revolutionary ideology. The result was, as I will be contending, an image where the emphasis is subtly shifted away from power, to stress instead a reassurance in regard to the protection and safeguarding of French imperial and colonial interests.

Edward Said writes about the creation of the discourse of the 'Other' in Orientalism, that "Orientalism is not a fact of nature; it is made,"¹⁵ and he defines this discourse of the 'Other' in relation to the society which produces it:

. . . Orientalism is not a mere political subject matter or field that is reflected passively by culture,

¹⁴Collection Deloynes, vol. 20, 541-542.

¹⁵Edward Said, Orientalism (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) 5.

scholarship, or institutions . . . It is rather a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic . . . texts; it is an elaboration . . . of a whole series of "interests" which . . . it not only creates but also maintains; it is, rather than expresses, a certain will or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world. Indeed, my real argument is that Orientalism is-- and does not simply represent--a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with "our" world.¹⁶

In the same way, the portrait of Belley, as a portrait of a colonial black deputy, forms a part of the attempts by the participants in the French Revolution to define and create a new, colonial subject, in order to "control, manipulate and incorporate what is a manifestly different world." And, just as "Orientalism has less to do with the Orient than it does with 'our' world," Belley's portrait also forms a part of the process of the French Revolution coming to terms with the inherent contradictions between the professed Revolutionary commitment to liberty and equality, and the commitment to preserve the hegemony and power of France over its overseas colonies. It is against this background that Belley's portrait would have constituted meaning for its viewers in 1797 and 1798.

As Belley's portrait has not yet been analysed in its historical context, it is the purpose of my paper to establish how the portrait addressed and negotiated contemporary

¹⁶Said, 12.

discourses around colonialism, emancipation, and theories of race, to produce a vision of a political contribution to Revolutionary France by its colonial population, a contribution which would accord with and support French colonial policy. In short, and in opposition to earlier readings,¹⁷ what my thesis argues is that Girodet's portrait of Belley represents and defines a racial hierarchy which could justify the continuation of colonialism and the continued subordination of blacks. Girodet represents this hierarchy through his allusions in the portrait to 18th century conceptions and prejudices pertaining to 'race,' and by a subtle manipulation of the imagery, rhetoric and myth which had been used to define power during the French Revolution.

¹⁷In addition to Hugh Honour, whom I have already cited, historians such as George Levitine and George Bernier have discussed this image without, to my mind, an adequate assessment of French Revolutionary ideology.

CHAPTER ONE

I Ironies of the Abolitionist Movement; Abbé Raynal and Abbé Grégoire

Abbé Guillaume-Thomas Raynal, whose bust Belley leans on in the portrait, had first published his Histoire philosophique et politique in 1770. This work had been immensely popular, and had gone through thirty editions before 1787.¹⁸ The work was conceived as a historical and geographical study, and as a celebration of the French colonial empire, which is born out by the fact that Raynal was connected to the Colonial Bureau, and for a time received a subsidy from that office.¹⁹ However, the Histoire philosophique et politique, came, especially during the French Revolution, mainly to be celebrated as a humanitarian, abolitionist document. The fame of the work rested on the few anti-slavery passages which it contained, in one of which Raynal claimed:

. . . there is no reason of state that can authorize slavery . . . Whoever justifies so odious a system, deserves the utmost contempt from a philosopher . . . He who supports the system of slavery, is the enemy of the

¹⁸Daniel Whitman, "Slavery and the Rights of Frenchmen: Views of Montesquieu, Rousseau and Raynal," French Colonial Studies, Number 1 (Spring 1977): 25.

¹⁹Blackburn, 170.

whole human race.²⁰

Calling on sovereigns of Europe to uphold the cause of humanity, Raynal warned against the inevitability of slave uprisings:

If then, European nations, interest alone can exert its influence over you, listen to me once more: Your slaves stand in no need of your generosity . . . in order to break the sacrilegious yoke which oppresses them. Nature speaks a more powerful language than philosophy or interest . . . (there are) indications of the impending storm; and the negroes only want a chief, sufficiently courageous, to lead them on to vengeance and slaughter. Where is this great man to be found, whom Nature, perhaps, owes to the honour of the human species? Where is this new Spartacus? . . . Then will the black code be no more; and the white code will be dreadful . . .²¹

Yet, in view of Raynal's close connections to the French Colonial Bureau, the abolitionist sentiments ascribed to him need to be questioned. Indeed, in a later pamphlet for the government, Administration sur la colonie de Saint Domingue, of 1785, Raynal revealed an altogether different attitude toward the concept of universal freedom and universal rights. In this work, Raynal maintained that the Africans lacked the ability to manage freedom, and argued that until there appeared among them a Montesquieu, they would be better off as labourers for the whites in the overseas colonies than staying in their own countries in Africa where they would be the

²⁰Raynal, Guillaume-Thomas, Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies (Glasgow: Mackenzie, 1811) 311, 312.

²¹Raynal, 316.

victims of robbery and ferocity.²² Raynal also wrote that black Africans benefited from being transported from the harsh climate of Africa to what he described as the more temperate Antilles.²³ In a particularly revealing passage, Raynal stated

Sans doute il seroit beau de n'aller chercher ces hommes stupides et féroces que pour les éclairer sur leurs droits, sur leurs intérêts et de les rendre à la nature plus libres et plus heureux . . . Il semble que (la philosophie et l'humanité) pourroient nous pardonner également d'aller prendre sur l'autel du despotisme les plus absurdes de ses victimes renaissantes pour en faire des laboureurs.²⁴

In this text Raynal condones slavery--although in a 'humanitarian' gesture he goes on to demand that the Black Code, a law from 1685 which legalized slavery and declared the slaves to be the property of their owners,²⁵ be applied to protect the nation's slaves.²⁶

The shift in Raynal's position in this 1785 pamphlet has been explained by the fact that the earlier work, Histoire philosophique et politique, was written as a collaboration, and that the anti-slavery passages were possibly not written

²²Whitman, 29.

²³Whitman, 29.

²⁴Raynal, cited in Whitman, 29.

²⁵William Cohen, The French Encounter with Africans. White Response to Blacks, 1530-1880 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980) 52.

²⁶Whitman, 28.

by Raynal himself, but by aids or subsequent editors.²⁷ However, Michèle Duchet, in her Anthropologie et histoire au siècle des lumières, has shown that Raynal used governmental memoranda and correspondence as sources for his Histoire politique et philosophique, and that his work therefore constituted a reiteration of government policy on the questions of colonial administration and slavery.²⁸ Already by the 1760s and the 1770s the French government and the Colonial Bureau had become aware of the fact that the harsh conditions imposed on French slaves had caused widespread desertion among them.²⁹ The Colonial Bureau had concluded that the colonies needed to be defended against the French planters themselves, and that the system of slavery had to be reformed to avert an economic collapse.³⁰ Therefore, in the interest of colonial productivity, the planters had been exhorted by enlightened administrators to adopt a virtuous conduct toward their slaves. P. Poivre, intendent for îles des France, wrote as early as 1767:

. . . la vertu seule assure la conservation des êtres libres et raisonnables. Elle peut seule fonder des sociétés durables . . . Les maîtres sensibles au cri

²⁷Whitman, 29.

²⁸Michèle Duchet, Anthropologie et histoire au siècle des lumières. Buffon, Voltaire, Rousseau, Helvétius, Diderot (Paris: Francois Maspero, 1971) 130.

²⁹Duchet, 147.

³⁰Duchet, 150.

tendre et puissant de l'humanité outragé, goûteront le plaisir délicieux d'adoucir le sort de leurs malheureux esclaves. . .³¹

A governmental memorandum of 1776, which had advocated a more lenient treatment of black slaves, had argued that

Le nègre bien traité, bien nourri, travaillerait mieux, vivrait plus longtemps, et la fécondité des femmes suffirait pour remplacer ceux qui mourraient . . . Il est d'autant plus intéressant d'éclairer le propriétaire à cet égard, que l'espèce s'épuise et viendra insensiblement à manquer tandis qu'elle pourrait se soutenir, se multiplier même dans nos îles par sa seule reproduction.³²

Against this background the construction of Raynal as the liberator of French slaves emerges as both arbitrary and self-serving.

Anti-slavery opinion became organized in France 1788, with the founding of the Société des amis des noirs. However, those sympathetic to abolition also saw themselves as representatives of national interests, and the first concern of the members of the Amis des noirs was French national authority and the integrity of the nation, including its colonial empire.³³ Even after the Declaration of the Rights of Man, adopted by the National Assembly on the 26th of August 1789,³⁴ French economic interests were considered before the

³¹Poivre, quoted in Duchet, 149.

³²Duchet, 153.

³³Blackburn, 169-70.

³⁴Soboul, 176.

question of the liberation of the nation's slaves. The Marquis de Condorcet, who was one of the founding members of the Amis des noirs,³⁵ wrote in Journal de Paris on December 28th, 1789:

Nous espérons que l'Assemblée nationale, qui a décrété tous les hommes libres et égaux en droits, ne souffrira pas plus longtemps l'achat et la vente d'aucun individu de l'espèce humaine. Nous croyons que l'on pourrait par la suite abolir entièrement l'esclavage et supprimer dès à présent la traite sans ruiner les colonies . . .³⁶
(emphasis mine)

The Amis des noirs had begun as an anti-slavery organization, but the emphasis of the group soon began to centre instead on the issue of civil rights for the free mulattoes or gens de couleur. The Amis des noirs argued for the rights of the free gens de couleur, as a first step in a gradual process that would, it was believed, eventually lead to the emancipation of the slaves. Rights given to this group were to initiate a process which would ultimately enable the black slaves to assume the responsibilities of freedom.³⁷

One of the most outspoken members of the Amis des noirs was Abbé Henri Grégoire, bishop and politician and a member of the French National Assembly. But Abbé Grégoire's writing and speeches at the time of the French Revolution also reflected

³⁵Blackburn, 170.

³⁶Condorcet, quoted in Elisabeth and Robert Badinter, Condorcet (1743-1794). Un Intellectuel en politique (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1988) 294.

³⁷Blackburn, 169-70.

the pragmatic strategy of gradual emancipation, to the extent that he not only favoured the granting of civil and political rights to the free gens de couleur as a first step toward the abolition of slavery, but justified his support of this measure by referring to the usefulness of the free gens de couleur as allies of the whites in helping to control the slaves in the colonies. In 1789, in a memoir to the Revolutionary National Assembly, Abbé Grégoire referred to this issue:

Et quels sont ces hommes que le mépris consume? La plupart ont acquis leur liberté à titre honorable, les uns par de sages économies, d'autres l'ont obtenu de leur maîtres, dont ils avaient captivé l'estime. Citoyens laborieux, ils font fleurir les plantations, il y a parmi eux de grands propriétaires, ils augmentent la masse des richesses coloniales, et partant concourent à la prospérité de l'état. Personne n'est plus agile pour gravir les mornes, et ramener les nègres maroons; ils sont un sûr appui contre l'insurrection des esclaves . . . ³⁸ Les gens de couleur faisant seuls la sûreté de la colonie contre les révoltes et le marronnage, il est au moins très impolitique de leur ôter la considération nécessaire pour contenir les esclaves. Loin donc que le préjugé qui pèse sur les sang-mêlé soit utile à la colonie, il faut au contraire leur donner du relief, cimenter l'union entre eux et les blancs, et leurs efforts combinés maintiendront plus efficacement la subordination.³⁹

And Grégoire continues, now mentioning the remaining black population,

J'observe d'abord que la traite, déjà plus difficile, ne peut plus se soutenir longtemps. La population africaine s'épuise annuellement par des exportations nombreuses . . . les amis des noirs . . . méditent d'amener

³⁸Frank Paul Bowman, L'Abbé Grégoire, évêque des lumières (Paris: Éditions France-Empire, 1988) 54.

³⁹Bowman, 61.

graduellement les esclaves à la liberté; leurs efforts seront couronnés du succès. Encore quelques années, et dans nos annales il restera seulement le souvenir d'un forfait dont une posterité plus sage rougira pour les générations antérieures.⁴⁰

Hence, in the name of national stability in 1789, Abbé Grégoire proposed civil rights for the free gens de couleur, while only alluding to a gradual abolition of slavery, and advocating humanitarian alleviation of the condition of the slaves until the opportune moment when they could be given their freedom:

Une conséquence rigoureuse de ce qui précède, c'est que la rejection des gens de couleur menace l'état d'une secousse capable de l'ébranler; si au contraire vous combléz l'intervalle qui les sépare des blancs, si rapprochant les esprits, vous cimentez l'attachement mutuel de ces deux classes, leur réunion présente une masse de forces plus efficace pour contenir les esclaves, dont sans doute on allegera les peines, et sur le sort desquels il sera permis de s'attendrir, jusqu'au moment opportun pour les affranchir.⁴¹ (underlining mine)

Two engravings from Raynal's Histoire politique et philosophique, "Allegory of Nature," 1774, and "Esclaves conduits par des marchands," 1780 (Figs. 2 and 3), exemplify these attitudes toward slavery in the latter part of the 18th century. The engraving "Allegory of Nature" is accompanied by a description which states:

Nature, represented by a woman, nurses at the same time and with the same interest a white child and a black child. She looks compassionately on Negro slaves seen in the distance working in sugar mills where they are

⁴⁰Bowman, 62.

⁴¹Bowman, 64.

mistreated by those who govern them.⁴²

Hence this image calls up the present cruelty of slavery, but with hopes for the future in the figure of Nature suckling her black and white children alike. In the engraving "Esclaves conduits par des marchands," the merchant driving shackled slaves is depicted in archaic dress. Therefore the image removes the question of slavery from the immediate present. The suggestion is, then, that slavery belongs to an archaic, 'uncivilized' past, and will, with the passage of time, constitute only, as Grégoire put it, "le souvenir d'un forfait dont une posterité plus sage rougira pour les générations antérieures."

II Racial Theory and Racial Prejudice in the 18th Century

This fundamentally conservative attitude toward slavery and emancipation which persisted even after the Declaration of the Rights of Man in France in 1789, was in part made possible by the creation of prejudiced and stereotypical views of blacks which had been formed in the 18th century by writers such as Abbé Prevost, Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon, Francois-Marie Arouet Voltaire, and Dominique Harcourt Lamiral. Abbé Prevost, in Histoire générale des voyages, originally published in 1745-1747 and republished in a cheaper edition in

⁴²Cited in Honour, 54-55.

1746-1787, wrote that "The Negroes in general are given over to incontinence," and that "Since they are naturally sly and violent they cannot live in peace with each other."⁴³ Buffon, in his L'Histoire naturelle, published between 1749-1788, described Africans as "idle and inactive, having passion only for women and lacking any sense of imagination or innovation;" according to Buffon, "Africans become debauched at an early age, and exhaust themselves with too frequent sexual intercourse."⁴⁴ Voltaire, in "Essai sur les Moeurs," of 1756, wrote concerning the intelligence of blacks that while it may not be of another kind of ours, it is far inferior. They are not capable of great attention, they reason little, and do not seem made for either the advantages or disadvantages of our philosophy.⁴⁵

Dominique Harcourt Lamiral, deputy for the French colony of Senegal in the National Assembly, writing in 1789, described the blacks as deprived by nature "of all moral character; they only have instincts . . . "⁴⁶ A Supplement, published in 1780, to Diderot's and d'Alembert's Encyclopedia of 1751-1766, which included an entry on "Afrique," expressed most clearly the prevailing stereotypical attitudes toward Africans and their institutions:

⁴³Prevost, quoted in Cohen, 66.

⁴⁴Buffon, quoted in Cohen, 67.

⁴⁵Voltaire, quoted in Cohen, 85.

⁴⁶Lamiral, quoted in Cohen, 69.

The government is nearly everywhere bizarre, despotic, and totally dependent on the passions and whims of the sovereign. These peoples have, so to speak, only ideas from one day to the next, their laws have no principles . . . no consistency other than that of lazy and blind habit. They are blamed for ferociousness, cruelty, perfidy, cowardice, laziness. This accusation is but too true.⁴⁷

Hence the popular literature of the time suggested, again and again, that the societies of black Africans, as observed by Western writers and travellers, lacked systematic organization and firm laws.

However, it was the new 18th century natural sciences which provided the most serious and lasting foundation for a hierarchical ordering of the human 'races.' Eighteenth-century scientific thought and research into the human body had already come to provide, in the decades preceding the French Revolution, the tools for both qualifying human equality and for postulating a hierarchical order for different 'races' of humankind. As Tzvetan Todorov has pointed out, when traditional social hierarchies are overturned as a result of democratic movements, and discrimination hence cannot be carried out on the basis of established ideological systems, physical, and 'racial'

⁴⁷"Afrique," Encyclopédie, Supplement, I (Amsterdam, 1780) 194, quoted in Cohen, 68. This supplement was a clever attempt to trade on the popularity of the Encyclopédie, but except for sharing two collaborators, d'Alembert and Marmontel, it had little in common with its predecessors. See Cohen, 308.

differences come to form the basis for discrimination.⁴⁸ With late 18th century humanist ideology, which claimed that all human beings were created equal, the traditional, popular racist arguments were not any longer a sufficient base for discrimination, and there arose the need to establish 'racial' differences in a 'scientific' way. This became possible because of a new confidence and trust in the abilities of science to discover 'truths' about human nature, origins and evolution. With the development of the natural sciences, as Ernst Cassirer has noted, there emerged alongside the "'truth' of revelation, a new, independent 'truth' of nature, which was believed to be revealed, not in God's words, but in his works."⁴⁹ Thus anthropological research from the 1770s onward could proceed on the presumption that race questions were empirical issues, issues in which anatomical data and physiology were presumed to be decisive, taking precedence over all philosophical, ethical, and theological tenets.⁵⁰

Such scientific enquiry of the period was in particular

⁴⁸Tzvetan Todorov, "'Race,' Writing, and Culture," "Race, Writing and Difference, ed. Henry Louis Gates (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985) 372.

⁴⁹Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of the Enlightenment, transl. Fritz C.A. Koelln and James P. Pettergrove (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1951) 42.

⁵⁰Phillip L. Sloan, "The Idea of Racial Degeneracy in Buffon's 'Histoire Naturelle'", Racism in the Eighteenth Century, ed. Harold E. Pagliaro (Cleveland and London: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973) 310.

concerned with the human anatomy.⁵¹ The question of intelligence was becoming more important, as 'natural reason' was increasingly conceived to be a prerequisite for political rights, and the human skull became an important focus for providing an 'objective' measure for intelligence.⁵²

Craniologists analysed the size and the shape of the skulls of men and women, whites and blacks, hoping to find answers to the much debated question whether or not the intellectual capacities of women and 'primitive' peoples were equivalent to those of European men.⁵³ For instance, the Dutch anatomist Petrus Camper had compared facial angles of whites and blacks, and had shown that there were clear differences, a finding which could then be interpreted to assert that different cranial structures could have an influence on moral and intellectual faculties.⁵⁴

The 18th century had in particular witnessed an intensification in the research into the origins of the human

⁵¹Londa Schiebinger, "The Anatomy of Difference: Race and Sex in Eighteenth-century Science," Eighteenth-century Studies, vol. 23 (1990): 388-389.

⁵²Londa Schiebinger, "Skeletons in the Closet: The First Illustrations of the Female Skeleton in Eighteenth-Century Anatomy," The Making of the Modern Body; Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century, eds. Thomas Laqueur and Catharine Gallagher (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1987) 64.

⁵³Schiebinger, "Skeletons in the Closet" 64.

⁵⁴George Stocking, "French Anthropology in 1800," Isis 55 (1964): 142.

'races.' Scientific interest in finding a historical and naturalistic explanation for the origins of the different 'races' coincided with the need to find a theory which would justify European domination over the rest of humankind. However, the superiority of Europeans in comparison with other peoples had to be established without overtly contradicting the new humanistic tenets, as well as the teaching of the Church, that all human beings were created equal.⁵⁵ The new theory which achieved this was formulated by Buffon in his L'Histoire naturelle (1749-1788). Buffon developed a hypothesis which integrated the traditional thesis on a monogenist, single origin of humankind and subsequent historical diversification of the 'races' due to environmental determinism, with an epigenetic, biological theory of development through which it could be asserted that humans and other organisms had actually been created as different during historical time.⁵⁶ According to Buffon, the gradual but cumulative influence of geography, environment, and food,

⁵⁵Sloan, 295-296.

⁵⁶Buffon's theory was largely based on the research of his contemporary and fellow scientist, Pierre de Maupertius. The key ingredients of Maupertius' synthesis, combining a return to a mechanistically conceived epigenetic theory of development, a particulate theory of inheritance, the reliance on semi-Newtonian concepts of force and attraction and the new twist given to classical environmentalism in explaining racial origin, can all be seen to reappear with modification in Buffon's analysis of the questions of generation and origin of races in L'Histoire naturelle of 1749. See Sloan, 298-302.

operating on the hereditary material transmitted from one generation to another was a possible explanation for the origin of the different 'races' from a common historical root.⁵⁷ Buffon posited that humankind, although originally descended from one common source,⁵⁸ had, as the earth's population had grown and spread to other continents, undergone changes brought on by geographical, environmental, and nutritional factors.⁵⁹ Buffon's principles thus supplied a foundation upon which it could be subsequently argued that the different human 'races' were the products of the impersonal forces of nature, not of original Divine Creation, and that due to biological, although not 'original,' differences, there existed 'natural' hierarchies among them.⁶⁰

Buffon's theory also posited a geographical hierarchy as a way of classifying and analyzing races; the peoples who lived in the most temperate areas, at a certain distance from

⁵⁷Sloan, 300.

⁵⁸Buffon's theory was monogenist, postulating a unitary origin for all human 'races' in opposition to the other prevailing theory, the polygenist theory, according to which the 'races' had originated separately. Both theories could be construed to 'prove' the superiority of the white 'race' and the inferiority of the blacks--the polygenist theory by arguing that the blacks were from the beginning created as different, and the monogenist theory by arguing that blacks, although originally created the same as whites, had degenerated from the ideal norm. See Cohen, 13, 86.

⁵⁹Sloan, 307.

⁶⁰Sloan, 307.

the equator, like Europeans, Turks, Greeks, and Persians, were argued to represent the ideal of the human race:

Le climat le plus tempéré est depuis le 40e degré jusqu'au 50e . . . c'est aussi sous cette zone que se trouvent les hommes les plus beaux et les mieux faits; c'est sous ce climat qu'on doit prendre le modèle ou l'unité à laquelle il faut rapporter toutes les autres nuances de couleur et de beauté.⁶¹

According to Buffon, peoples living north and south of these areas had degenerated from the ideal norm, and he compared the achievements of these peoples with the achievements of the 'great civilized nations' in a negative manner:

Comparez en effet la Nature brute à la Nature cultivée; comparez les petites nations sauvages de l'Amérique avec nos grands peuples civilisés; comparez même celles de l'Afrique . . . voyez en même temps l'état des terres que ces nations habitent, vous jugerez aisément du peu de valeur de ces hommes par le peu d'impression que leurs mains ont faites sur leur sol; soit stupidité, soit paresse, ces hommes à demi brutes, les nations non policées, grandes ou petites, ne font que peser sur le globe, sans soulager la Terre, l'affamer sans la féconder, detruire sans édifier, font user sans rien renouveler.⁶²

Significantly, however, Buffon's theory, according to which changes had become hereditary over time, also stressed that it would be possible for the 'degenerated races' to return to the original, ideal condition of humankind. He argued that degenerated races could be restored to the purity of the original type by being transplanted to the more

⁶¹Buffon, cited in Duchet, 255.

⁶²Buffon, quoted by Sloan, 319.

temperate zones.⁶³ Hence it was Buffon's theory, as much as economic exigency, which would have formed the basis for Raynal's contention, in his pamphlet of 1785, that blacks would benefit by being transported from the harsh climate of Africa to the more temperate Antilles.⁶⁴

Central to Buffon's argument was the stress on the slow, imperceptible nature of the evolution of the 'races':

Ces changements ne se font que lentement,
imperceptiblement . . . le grand ouvrier de la nature est
le Temps . . .⁶⁵

Thus the monogenist, environmentalist, and epigenetic theory would also have formed a base for the concept of gradual emancipation formulated by French abolitionists such as Abbé Raynal and Abbé Grégoire.

Equally important to the way in which Buffon's 'science' was used for social and political theories was that the natural historian also emphasized the importance of customs and traditions, "les moeurs," as an important factor in shaping the human races,⁶⁶ thus linking the concepts of racial evolution and culture. Buffon's observations on environment and culture were also echoed by Abbé Grégoire, who wrote in

⁶³Sloan, 308.

⁶⁴Whitman, 29.

⁶⁵Buffon, cited by Sloan, 305.

⁶⁶Duchet, 257.

1780:

What likeness can be found between whites, enlightened by truths of Christianity . . . enriched by the discoveries and information of all ages, and stimulated by every species of encouragement, and blacks, deprived of all these advantages and devoted to oppression and misery.⁶⁷

The idea of the evolution of civilization was especially taken up by the founder member of the Société des amis des noirs, the Marquis de Condorcet, who believed that emancipation of slaves marked an important step in the progress of human civilization.⁶⁸ But Condorcet also, akin to Raynal and Grégoire, stressed the necessity for gradual change in the status of French slaves, and emphasized that such slaves would need a lengthy period of tutelage before they could exercise the responsibility of freedom.⁶⁹ In particular, Condorcet stressed that as slavery was such an intolerable injury to human nature, emancipation should be approached carefully.⁷⁰ He therefore echoed Buffon's concept of cultural and social environment as influential in the evolution of the human 'races'; the inhuman environment of slavery would have robbed the slaves of a 'civilizing' influence, and would hence have made them unfit for the exercise of freedom if it were granted

⁶⁷Grégoire, cited in Cohen, 75.

⁶⁸Keith Baker ed., Condorcet; Selected Writings (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1976) 211.

⁶⁹Blackburn, 171.

⁷⁰Blackburn, 171.

them too suddenly. Condorcet believed in a hierarchy of cultures, and claimed in his Esquisses d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain (written in prison in 1793, and published in 1796): "All peoples whose history is recorded fall somewhere between our present degree of civilization and that which we still see among savage tribes."⁷¹ But he also held that all nations, through education and progress, would eventually reach the level achieved by the most enlightened nations, (for Condorcet, represented by the French and the Anglo-Americans) because Europeans would convey to the rest of the world "the example of liberty, the Enlightenment, and reason of Europe."⁷² As these arguments testify, the notion of gradual change in the situation of the colonial blacks--as well as their continued subordination--could, unproblematically, be incorporated into the Enlightenment ideology of universal human progress.

Buffon's theories thus helped to reconcile the contradiction between Revolutionary egalitarian rhetoric and the French desire for continuous colonial domination. These theories, not surprisingly, would have allowed Europeans to continue their exploitation of the colonies for an unlimited time in the future, under the justification that they fulfilled a civilizing mission in the name of progress for the

⁷¹Condorcet, cited in Baker, 214.

⁷²Cohen, 177.

dominated 'races.' 'Emancipation,' as the enlightened philosophes would have seen it, is illustrated in the engraving "Soyez libres et citoyens," (Fig. 4) in Benjamin Frossard's La Cause des esclaves nègres, of 1789.⁷³ In this image, halfnaked⁷⁴ black men and women, shown as subjects receiving the gift of freedom, kneeling before a crowned allegorical personification of France, seem to testify to the continued willingness of the blacks to subordinate themselves to French power and French guidance.

III The Abolition of Slavery in 1794

In 1789, the National Assembly consisted of about one thousand members, of whom one-hundred and fifty were owners of colonial property; the number of those whose interests were linked to colonial commerce and administration would have been even higher.⁷⁵ The National Assembly was a bourgeois body with a significant proportion of its property-owning members

⁷³Benjamin Frossard advocated the abolition of the slave trade as a practical first step toward the gradual elimination of slavery, and his La Cause des esclaves nègres constituted an appeal to conscience and reason; however, as Honour notes, his book met with little success, judging from its rarity. See Honour, 80.

⁷⁴ Nakedness was associated with a low level of civilization; Buffon wrote about the early inhabitants of the earth that they were naked in body and soul. Buffon: 1788-1988 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1988) 275.

⁷⁵Blackburn, 167.

benefiting from colonial production and trade.⁷⁶ Moreover, the voices of the Amis des noirs were being silenced by the establishment of a special committee created in 1790 to deal with colonial issues.⁷⁷ In view of the 'extreme delicacy' of these issues, the method of election had ensured that no supporters of the Amis des noirs had been elected to the committee.⁷⁸

The Committee on the Colonies consisted of colonial deputies and proprietors and of deputies from the maritime centres--in other words it was made of individuals who had interests in the French overseas holdings.⁷⁹ The committee's recommendation in March 1790, introduced by Antoine Barnave, a member of the National Assembly, was clearly pro-slavery:

The National Assembly does not make any innovation in any of the branches of commerce between France and the colonies . . . it puts the colonists and their property under the safeguard of the nation and declares guilty of treason whoever seeks to foment risings against them.⁸⁰

Even the Jacobin deputies were not specifically interested in Abolition. As Robin Blackburn has noted, the issue of civil rights for the free gens de couleur in the colonies was raised by Jacobin deputies in the National

⁷⁶Blackburn, 167.

⁷⁷Blackburn, 175.

⁷⁸Blackburn, 178.

⁷⁹Blackburn, 178.

⁸⁰Barnave, cited in Blackburn, 179.

Assembly mainly in order to put to the test the principles of the Declaration of the Rights of Man.⁸¹ In May 1791, a limited decree granting civil rights to free gens de couleur who were born to free parents, was passed by the Assembly.⁸² Yet even this limited decree, which would in any case only have affected a small number of individuals in Saint Domingue, was itself rescinded in September of the same year by Antoine Barnave, because of pressure from colonial deputies and colonial interests.⁸³

Hence the 1794 declaration of abolition of slavery in France and its colonies was neither due to the efforts of the abolition movement, nor to the Revolutionary ideals of liberty and equality. In fact, France was, in the end, forced to grant the abolition of slavery because of slave rebellions, begun in 1791 in Saint Domingue, and because of threats to the French colony from Spanish Saint Domingue⁸⁴ and from the British, as well as threats from counter-Revolutionary forces, consisting of mulatto and white planters, within Saint Domingue itself.⁸⁵

⁸¹Blackburn, 188.

⁸²Blackburn, 188.

⁸³Blackburn, 190.

⁸⁴The eastern half of Saint Domingue was occupied by the Spanish, and the western half by the French. See Blackburn, 205.

⁸⁵Blackburn, 203, 215.

The history of Saint Domingue during the Revolutionary period is important in the context of an analysis of Girodet's portrait of Belley. On January 31st, 1793, France had declared war on Britain and Spain, who were threatening the Revolutionary regime in France as well as in its overseas dominions. By 1793, rebellious slaves in Saint Domingue had become organized and armed; Toussaint L'Ouverture,⁸⁶ a former slave, had taken command and had allied his slave army with the Spanish, who had colonized the eastern half of the island.⁸⁷ In July 1793, Spanish forces had advanced across a broad front in the North, reaching deep into French territory.⁸⁸ The French Commissioner in Saint Domingue, Légér Felicité Sonthonax, lacked the troops to defend Saint Domingue, and he realized that he had to depend on the black rebels and the slave population for the defence of the island, or risk losing the colony to the Spanish and the British. In order to secure the support of the slaves and to persuade Toussaint L'Ouverture's rebel army to join the French Republican forces, the Commissioner unilaterally announced the abolition of slavery on August 29th, 1793.⁸⁹ Légér Sonthonax

⁸⁶Spelled variously as L'Ouverture or Ouverture.

⁸⁷Blackburn, 205.

⁸⁸Blackburn, 216.

⁸⁹Blackburn, 216-17.

was a committed Republican and a Jacobin,⁹⁰ and his decision to emancipate the slaves was in accord with the enlightened ideals of the French Revolution. However, Sonthonax' choice of timing for emancipation underlines, as well, his concern for the upholding and defense of the 'indivisible' French Republic.

The delegation from Saint Domingue which appeared before the National Assembly in Paris on February 4th, 1794, to demand ratification of Sonthonax's decree,⁹¹ consisted of a white colonial, a mulatto and a black--Jean-Baptiste Belley. The white delegate made a passionate speech defending the general liberty which had been decreed in Saint Domingue, and pointed to the opportunity for a Revolutionary counter-offensive which would be possible with the aid of the freed slaves.⁹² The British were an imminent threat to the colony, and the Assembly knew that a large British fleet had recently been dispatched to the West Indies. In a state of revolutionary fervour, the Assembly supported the French commissioner's decree and itself declared the abolition of slavery in the French colonies.⁹³ The motion was carried by

⁹⁰C.L.R. James, The Black Jacobins (London: Allison and Busby, 1980) 181.

⁹¹Blackburn, 224.

⁹²Blackburn, 224.

⁹³Blackburn, 224.

acclamation, and the Jacobin deputy Georges-Jacques Danton proclaimed in a speech to the Assembly:

Representatives of the French people, until now we have decreed liberty as egotists for ourselves. But today we proclaim universal liberty . . . Today the Englishman is dead . . . Pitt and his plots are done for! France, until now cheated of the glory, repossesses it before the eyes of an astonished Europe, and assumes the preponderance which must be assured her by her principles, her energy, her land and her population! Activity, energy, generosity, but generosity guided by the flame of reason and regulated by the compass of principles and thus assured forever of the recognition of posterity.⁹⁴

Emancipation, declared during a time of Revolutionary fervour, came to acquire the significance of a symbolic act, embodying the Enlightenment spirit of the French Revolution⁹⁵ and defining and legitimizing a new France. The Declaration of Emancipation also took place at a time of deeply felt popular hostility toward the excesses of private property, a time when the crucial support of the colonial slave system, namely the respect for the slaveholders' property, was being undermined by Revolutionary rhetoric.⁹⁶ However, the main impetus in the Declaration of Emancipation was the need to ensure victory over Spain and England in Saint Domingue, so as to keep the colony in French hands.⁹⁷ In fact, the

⁹⁴Danton, cited in Blackburn, 225.

⁹⁵Blackburn, 261.

⁹⁶Blackburn, 223.

⁹⁷Blackburn, 258.

proclamation of the abolition of slavery was seen as too precipitous by many who supported abolition but believed that emancipation should be a gradual process. Abbé Grégoire, for example, called the decree a "disastrous measure . . . with the effect in politics of a volcanic eruption in the physical world."⁹⁸ His statement effectively underlined the 'scientific' underpinning of racial theory by recalling the earlier cautions of the abolitionists who had articulated doubts about the capabilities of the black slaves to assume the sudden responsibilities of freedom.

Significantly, too, despite the political situation and the threat to the colonies, blacks could still be imaged as subordinated to white rule. An engraving commemorating Abolition in 1794, inscribed with the words of Voltaire: "All mortals are equal; it is not birth but virtue that makes the difference,"⁹⁹ (Fig. 5) demonstrates this point. This illustration commemorating emancipation shows an allegorical representation of Reason measuring two men of equal height, one black and one white, and declaring them as equals;¹⁰⁰ however, the Frenchman is represented in uniform, in contrast with his half-naked black 'equal.' Thus in this image power is shown as being in the hands of the French, and the

⁹⁸Honour, 83.

⁹⁹It is not clear how widely this image was circulated.

¹⁰⁰Cohen, 142.

engraving illustrates an attempt, in 1794, to reconcile the idea of the liberation of slaves with the continuing subordination and exploitation of blacks as plantation labour.

IV The New Directory and the Black Jacobins in Saint Domingue

The period of the Directory saw a call for national reconciliation, and for a return to order. The Directory which took power in France in 1795 after the fall of the Revolutionary government, was a comparatively conservative body, concerned with the privileging and safeguarding of property in reaction to the upheavals during the earlier Revolutionary years. Property rights which had been limited by the Jacobin government in 1793,¹⁰¹ were assured in the Directorial Declaration of Rights of Year III (1795), which stated that

Property comprises the right to enjoy and dispose of one's goods, revenues and the fruits of one's labour and

¹⁰¹In September 1793, the Sans-Culotte section had asked the National Convention to decree that a maximum should be passed for personal fortunes, and that any one individual should not be allowed to hold more than one maximum. Robespierre, in his speech on a new Declaration of Rights in April 1793, had stated that property was not a natural human right but a right defined by law: "Property is the right of each citizen to enjoy and dispose of that portion of the possessions of a society which is guaranteed to him by law." Laws of October 1793 and January 1794 ensured that inheritance would be equally divided. In June 1793 it was stipulated that property must be made available to those who did not own any, and that emigré land was to be sold off in small lots. A law of June 1793 authorized the free sharing out of common lands to every citizen in the commune. See Soboul, 395.

industry . . . The cultivation of the soil, all production, every means of work, and the whole social order rests upon the maintenance of property.¹⁰²

As Soboul notes, this was the equivalent to sanctioning the full exercise of economic freedom.¹⁰³ The right to vote was restricted to those who paid taxes, and to become an elector, one had to fulfil certain property requirements.¹⁰⁴ Boissy d'Anglas, in his preamble to the draft of the new Constitution of 1795, expounded the tenets of the new order and emphasized that absolute equality was a misleading ideal:

Finally, you must guarantee the property of the wealthy . . . civic equality is the sum total of what rational man may demand . . . absolute equality is a chimera: its existence would posit a complete equality in intelligence, virtue, physical strength, education and fortune in all men . . . If you grant unreserved political rights to men without property, and if these men ever find themselves seated among the legislators, then they will rouse up agitations . . . without fearing their consequences; they will establish . . . harmful taxes on commerce and agriculture . . . In the end, they will precipitate us into violent convulsions from which we have barely emerged.¹⁰⁵

One of the main tasks facing the Directory was the rebuilding of the economy. Central to this was the bringing about of a revival of colonial production and trade after the years of rebellion and warfare which had devastated Saint

¹⁰²Soboul, 468.

¹⁰³Soboul, 468.

¹⁰⁴Soboul, 468.

¹⁰⁵Boissy d'Anglas, quoted in Soboul, 454.

Domingue since 1791.¹⁰⁶ The policy of the Directory regarding the colonies was one of assimilation,¹⁰⁷ however, French domination in Saint Domingue had eroded with the Revolution and with the freeing of former slaves.

Several developments are important here. Soon after the abolition of slavery in 1794, Toussaint L'Ouverture joined the French Republican Government of Saint Domingue and supported its fight against the Spanish and the British.¹⁰⁸ With L'Ouverture's help, the Government had managed to repulse the Spanish, and to hold the British at bay.¹⁰⁹ In April 1796, L'Ouverture was proclaimed Lieutenant Governor of the Colony of Saint Domingue by Governor Etienne Laveaux, who spoke of him as "this black Spartacus, the Negro who Raynal prophesied would avenge his race."¹¹⁰ L'Ouverture then proceeded to establish his own position of power by eliminating French colonial authority; he suggested that both the Governor,

¹⁰⁶International trade had suffered, and French exports had been reduced by half since 1789. Saint Domingue had practically ceased to export sugarcane, and the French commercial fleet had been reduced to two hundred ships from the two thousand before the Revolution. See Georges Soria Grande histoire de la Révolution française, vol. 3 (Paris: Bordas, 1988) 1438.

¹⁰⁷Jean-Pierre Biondi, 16 Pluviose An II; les colonies de la Révolution (Paris: Édition Denoël, 1989) 135.

¹⁰⁸Blackburn, 221.

¹⁰⁹Blackburn, 221, 228.

¹¹⁰Wenda Parkinson, 'This Gilded African.' Toussaint L'Ouverture (London: Quartet Books, 1978) 102.

Laveaux, and the Commissioner, Sonthonax, become deputies for Saint Domingue to the Paris National Convention.¹¹¹ After having been elected, Laveaux departed for France in October 1796, and the reluctant Sonthonax was forced by L'Ouverture to depart in August 1797,¹¹² leaving Toussaint L'Ouverture the most powerful leader in Saint Domingue. At this time L'Ouverture also began peace negotiations with the British without consulting the French authorities.¹¹³ The French Directorial government was by now suspicious of L'Ouverture, and afraid that he might declare Saint Domingue independent.¹¹⁴ There had been reports in France that the colony was in a state of anarchy,¹¹⁵ and spokesmen for the colonial planters in the National Convention called for the restitution of order in Saint Domingue;¹¹⁶ the deputy Villaret-Joyeuse demanded a military regime as the only one that could save Saint Domingue, and "save the unhappy whites from the daggers of the Negroes."¹¹⁷ Villaret-Joyeuse was joined by Viennot Vaublanc, the chief spokesman for colonial

¹¹¹Biondi, 139.

¹¹²Parkinson, 106, 108.

¹¹³Blackburn, 238.

¹¹⁴James, 193.

¹¹⁵Blackburn, 238.

¹¹⁶James, 194.

¹¹⁷James, 192.

planters in the National Convention, in a demand that the colony be put under siege until the peace.¹¹⁸ In response, Toussaint L'Ouverture sent a letter to the Directory in November 1797, where he declared the loyalty of Saint Domingue's black population toward France, but where he also warned the French government against the re-institution of slavery. In this letter L'Ouverture emphasized black military power--however, he also referred to the avowed principles and ideals of the French Revolution, which had given Saint Domingue's blacks the right to assert their claim to control in the new political order

. . . But no, the same hand which has broken our chains will not enslave us anew. France will not revoke her principles . . . she will not permit her sublime morality to be perverted, those principles which do her most honour to be destroyed . . . But if, to re-establish slavery in San Domingo, this was done, then I declare to you it would be to attempt the impossible: we have known how to face dangers to obtain our liberty, we shall know how to brave death to maintain it.¹¹⁹

L'Ouverture, having assumed the position as the chief spokesman for Saint Domingue, concluded the peace negotiations with the British in July and August 1798. At this time the British invited L'Ouverture to establish an independent kingdom in Saint Domingue, and the British press hinted that L'Ouverture was about to desert France.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸James, 193.

¹¹⁹Toussaint L'Ouverture, cited in James, 197.

¹²⁰Blackburn, 239.

Following the military involvement of the colonial blacks on the side of the French against England and Spain, a new image of blacks as competent and self-confident leaders and soldiers had thus begun to emerge. This can be seen in two engravings figuring Toussaint L'Ouverture (Figs. 6 and 7). In the image in Figure 6 there is a sense of authority in the black general's manner of surveying the two workers in front of him, and the image can therefore be read as alluding to the power which the general exercises over the workers. However, and particularly in view of the proud and defiant postures and facial expressions of the workers who seem to face the general as their equal, this image can also be seen to allude to the shared determination of Saint Domingue's former black slaves to defend their freedom. This feeling of determination to uphold a newly won freedom is rendered especially poignant by the prominent, long sabre which L'Ouverture holds in his hand in both illustrations. This type of image connected with the emerging perception in France that the new status of Saint Domingues' freed black slaves, or the new Black Jacobins as they were called, could constitute a threat to French power and sovereignty.

CHAPTER TWO

I Representations of Revolutionary Virtue in France

With the changing status of blacks, from slaves to French citizens and soldiers, and with the growing uncertainty about the French situation in Saint Domingue and fears that the colony might separate, Girodet was faced, in the portrait of Belley, with a complex set of tasks. Girodet had to redefine the image of blacks as constituted in contemporary travel literature and illustrations, and create the image of a new black citizen and political leader. He had to mediate that new image in terms of the threat of colonial independence, in terms of the avowed commitment of the French Revolution to equality, and in terms of the anti-Jacobin conservative political mood of the Directory.

Because Belley had been a soldier in the French army in Saint Domingue, he would have been associated with Toussaint L'Ouverture's military, and he would therefore also have been seen as a potential 'Black Jacobin.' In order to understand how Belley's status as a French citizen and soldier and as a deputy for Saint Domingue was undermined by Girodet, I want to compare the portrait of Belley with portraits representing French Jacobin deputies, like Maximilien Robespierre, portrayed in 1791 by Mme. Labille-Guiard (Fig. 8), Honoré Gabriel Mirabeau, portrayed in 1790 by an anonymous artist

(Fig. 9), and Bertrand Barère de Vieuzac, portrayed in 1793 by Jean-Louis Laneuville (Fig. 10).

After the fall of King Louis XVI and with him of the ancien régime, the idea of a severe, uncompromising civic virtue had become the single most important foundation for the new Revolutionary leaders to justify their power. During the ancien régime, the King had been seen as the incarnation of power, which was believed to have emanated from God and become materialized in the Kings body. But with the Revolution and the overthrow of the concept of the sacral body and the sacral state, power, as Dorinda Outram has noted, came to be conceived as a more abstract entity.¹²¹ Hence, with the end of the ancien régime and with the creation of new Revolutionary institutions, the creation of discourses of validation for the new state and its leaders was a necessity.¹²² These discourses were centered around ideals of the law as an expression of the general will; the nation was declared to be sovereign and all the citizens, whether in person or through their representatives would have a right to contribute to the formation of the state.¹²³ However, as sovereignty in the form of the general will could not be

¹²¹Dorinda Outram, The Body and the French Revolution. Sex, Class and Political Culture (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989) 74.

¹²²Outram, 29.

¹²³Soboul, 177.

represented, it was constituted as being embodied in individual virtue as a constitutive element of the new state.¹²⁴ Therefore the French Jacobins had represented themselves, and had been represented in portraiture, as rational, restrained leaders of the French people, and as physical incarnations of virtue and of the general will.

Dorinda Outram has examined the process of the creation of a Revolutionary identity and she has in particular emphasized the agency and the intentions of the Revolutionaries themselves.¹²⁵ Critiquing Michel Foucault, Outram writes in The Body and the French Revolution. Sex, Class and Political Culture that Focault's

'political bodies' act as symbols of social and political orders, exhibiting sites for displays of state force. The body is seen in his account from the outside. The individual's construction of selfconsciousness does not appear as an issue.¹²⁶

And Outram writes further:

To see bodies as symbols, metaphors and locations for the exhibition of power, and to ignore the extent to which they afford lived experience to their possessors, or are indeed created by those possessors . . . represents a profoundly coercive understanding of the physical experience."¹²⁷

Outram notes that the French Revolutionaries constructed for

¹²⁴Outram, 76.

¹²⁵Outram, 20.

¹²⁶Outram, 18.

¹²⁷Outram, 20.

themselves identities of Stoic masculinity, with the aim of projecting a sense of inner self-sovereignty and control over individual passions and desires.¹²⁸ Through representing themselves as being in control of their own passions, the Revolutionaries thus distanced themselves from the rule of the ancien régime and aristocracy, which were seen to have allowed individual passions to take precedence over government interest.¹²⁹ Furthermore, this expression of control would also have served to distance the Revolutionaries from the violence of the Revolution.

Revolutionary portraiture strove to represent the new leaders of the French people in a manner which would indicate that the deputies had internalized virtue, reason and control. That such inner character could be read from the exterior appearance of the physical body was supported by the new empiricism of the 18th century. In 18th century empirical science, the traditional binary concept âme-corps, which had designated a division between soul and body, came to be substituted by the concept moral-physique which denoted the unity of the physical and the moral in the human body.¹³⁰

¹²⁸Outram, 72.

¹²⁹Outram, 74.

¹³⁰Sergio Moravia, "'Moral'-'physique': genesis and evolution of a 'rapport'", Enlightenment Studies in Honour of Lester G. Crocker, eds. Alfred J. Bingham and Virgil W. Topazio (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation at the Taylor Institution, 1979) 164-7.

Baron d'Holbach wrote in Système de la nature of 1770:

On a visiblement abusé de la distinction que l'on a fait si souvent de l'homme physique et de l'homme moral. L'homme est un être purement physique; l'homme moral n'est que cet être physique considéré sous un certain point de vue, c'est-à-dire, relativement à quelques-unes de ses façons d'agir dues à son organisation particulière.¹³¹

Another writer, Benjamin Maublanc, professor at the École centrale, wrote in Considérations sur l'homme, published in Paris in 1797:

Il existe effectivement une relation si exacte entre les diverses opérations dont nous sommes susceptibles, que nos facultés morales sont entièrement subordonnées à nos facultés physiques. Un homme aura toujours dans l'esprit plus ou moins de vivacité, à proportion qu'il se trouvera dans le jeu de ses organes plus ou moins de régularité et d'énergie.¹³²

And a third writer, Antoine Joseph Pernety, in his work of 1776-1777, La Connoissance de l'homme moral par celle de l'homme physique, wrote that morality could actually be recognized from an individual's outward, physical characteristics:

Ce que nous venons de dire, semble ne regarder que le physique de l'homme; mais le moral y est tellement lié qu'ils sont inseparables: aussi le moral n'est pas moins reconnaissable par les signes physiques extérieures.¹³³

The theory that character traits could be read from an individual's outer appearance, bearing, and behaviour was most

¹³¹D'Holbach, quoted by Moravia, 167.

¹³²Maublanc, quoted in Moravia, 168.

¹³³Pernety, quoted by Moravia, 165.

prominently expressed by the Swiss physiognomist Johann Kaspar Lavater in his work Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntniss und Menschenliebe, written in 1775-1778, and translated into French in 1781-1803. Lavater stressed the importance of seeing in the outward body and countenance of individuals the manifestations of their inner characteristics, and he wrote:

All bodies which we survey appear to sight under certain forms and superficies. We behold these outlines traced which are the result of their organization.¹³⁴

and further

. . . there must be a certain native analogy between the external varieties of the countenance and form, and the internal varieties of the mind. Shall it be denied that this acknowledged internal variety among all men is not the cause of the external variety of their forms and countenances? Shall it be affirmed that the mind does not influence the body, the body does not influence the mind? After repeated observation that an active and vivid eye and an active and acute wit are frequently found in the same person, shall it be supposed that there is no relation between the active eye and the active mind?¹³⁵

In the beginning of the French Revolution, the theories of Lavater had been especially influential, inciting portraitists to concentrate their attention on physical

¹³⁴Johann Caspar Lavater, Essays on Physiognomy, for the Promotion of the Knowledge and the Love of Mankind, vol. 1, transl. Thomas Holcroft (London: G.G.Y. and J. Robinson, MDCCCLXXXIX) 12.

¹³⁵Lavater, 22.

appearance as an expressions of the character of the model.¹³⁶ Hence Robespierre, Mirabeau and de Vieuzac are not portrayed, as had been traditionally the custom, in surroundings which would have reflected on their social position, their tastes or their occupations; rather, it is their individual characters, of benefit to the Revolution, which are stressed through a system of physical or bodily signs.¹³⁷

In the portrait of Maximilien Robespierre, the sitter's inner character is implied in the pose and bearing of the deputy: Robespierre is portrayed standing straight and upright, in a stance that serves to signify his steadfastness and self-control in face of the Revolutionary challenge, and, not unsignificantly, there is a sense of restraint in the hand resting calmly on the hilt of the sword. Robespierre was well known for identifying himself with Jean-Jacques Rousseau and with Rousseauean virtue,¹³⁸ and his portrait also emphasises this link: Robespierre's gaze confronts the viewer with its openness, as if to signify honesty and trust, and the figure

¹³⁶Philippe Bordes and Régis Michel, eds., Aux Armes et aux arts! Les arts de la Révolution 1789-1799 (Paris: Éditions Adam Biro, 1988) 121.

¹³⁷Bordes and Michel, 121.

¹³⁸Carol Blum, "Rousseau's concept of 'virtue' and the French Revolution," Enlightenment Studies in Honour of Lester G. Crocker, eds. Alfred J. Bingham and Virgil W. Topazio (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1979) 30.

in its simple garments is delineated clearly, as if evoking a Rousseauean discourse of truth and transparency.¹³⁹

Revolutionary virtue was also frequently conveyed through allusions to antiquity, particularly through a perceived identification with classical Stoicism and with Roman Republican heroes and great men.¹⁴⁰ Mirabeau sought identification with the Roman consul Brutus, who had sacrificed the lives of his sons for the good of the state.¹⁴¹ Thus in the portrait of Mirabeau, a continuity is established between the French deputy and classical Republican morality in the reference to Brutus in the bust represented to Mirabeau's right, and in David's painting Lictors Bringing back to Brutus the Bodies of His Sons, of 1789, in the

¹³⁹Bordes and Michel relate the clarity of Revolutionary portraiture to the Rousseauean discourse on virtue. Bordes and Michel, 121.

¹⁴⁰Robert Herbert discusses the relation of the French Revolution to antiquity: "The very meaning of 'revolution,' borrowed from astronomy earlier in the eighteenth century, is the return to a position already established by the cyclical impulsion of history. The French believed . . . that history had turned full circle and that ancient prerogatives of liberty, immutable rights and basic forms of social organisation first established in Graeco-Roman times, were being reconstituted in the present. This is why there was a 'new classicism' in art, this is why an utterly new style, unconnected with the past, is unthinkable for the Revolution, which instead boasted of 'regeneration,' of 'reform' and of rebirth'. Robert Herbert, "Neo-Classicism and the French Revolution," The Age of Neo-Classicism (The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1972) lxxiii.

¹⁴¹Robert Herbert, David, Voltaire, Brutus and the French Revolution. An Essay in Art and Politics (New York: The Viking Press, 1973) 74.

background.

In turn, in the image of Barère de Vieuzac who was a member of the Committee of Public Safety in 1793 and 1794¹⁴², the Revolutionary virtue of the deputy is established by a reference to the new law, the embodiment of an abstract 'moral right,' which was defined in opposition to the arbitrary right of kings. De Vieuzac is portrayed as addressing the National Assembly and holding in his hand legal documents, pertaining to the trial of Louis XVI.¹⁴³ In addition, the member of the Committee for Public Safety is portrayed against an empty background which serves to isolate him from the reality of the proceedings of the National Assembly as a whole.¹⁴⁴ The stress is therefore on his personal qualities as a responsible, law-abiding Revolutionary citizen as much as on his institutional and political role. Indeed, the emphasis on his isolation and on his enunciation of the new law suggest the feeling of the deputy as the personification and embodiment of the morality and justice of the Revolution itself.

¹⁴²Soboul, 304-5, 420.

¹⁴³Barère was one of the deputies who voted for the execution of the King, and the documents in his hand pertain to the legal order of the King's execution. See French Painting 1774-1830: The Age of Revolution (Exhibition sponsored by the Detroit Institute of Arts, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the Réunion des Musées Nationaux, Paris, 1975) 524.

¹⁴⁴Bordes and Michel, 121.

Thus distinguished in the portraits, the French deputies convey a sense of reassurance, virtue, and control, calculated to distance them from the violence of the Revolution, and to justify their claim to the leadership of the nation.

II The Imaging of the Colonial Deputy

When Belley lost his seat in the National Assembly in May 1797, he was replaced by another black deputy from Saint Domingue, Etienne Mentor.¹⁴⁵ Mentor's politics were different from those of Belley. In 1793, he had supported the whites in the colony in their power struggle against Saint Domingue's mulattoes.¹⁴⁶ When Mentor succeeded Belley in the Council of Five Hundred, he denounced Toussaint L'Ouverture, the black Saint Dominguean general who had played such a crucial role in the events leading up to the declaration of the abolition of slavery. At this time of conservative reaction, when a collaborationist like Mentor had been elected to represent Saint Domingue, the exhibiting at the Salon of a portrait of Jean-Baptiste Belley would have represented a disturbing reminder of the emotionally charged moment in the National Assembly in 1794, when slavery had been abolished in the French colonies and when blacks for the first time had gained the right to political representation--a moment when

¹⁴⁵Honour, 106.

¹⁴⁶Honour, 109.

the ideals proclaimed by the French Revolution had truly seemed to have become reality. At a time when France was retreating from the rhetoric of Revolutionary equality, and when Toussaint L'Ouverture was suspected of plans to declare Saint Domingue independent,¹⁴⁷ Girodet, exhibiting at the Salon before a newly conservative French public, was thus faced with a complex challenge: while keeping in mind Belley's status as a potential future leader in Saint Domingue, Girodet would have had to downplay the threat of subversion which would have been associated with the former soldier and Black Jacobin, while at the same time recognizing Belley's position of power.

At one level, Girodet's portrait relates to established images of French Revolutionary authority--appropriate to the depiction of an ex-deputy. Girodet represents Belley sympathetically, as a tall, slender man of confident demeanour, his gaze serious and thoughtful, his face lined with age and experience, and his body leaning in a gentlemanly pose against the bust of Raynal. Belley, according to his former official position as a deputy in the National Convention, wears the signs of his rank: the tricolor sash around his waist and the tricolor plumes in his hat.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, the dignity accorded this representation is underlined

¹⁴⁷James, 193.

¹⁴⁸Honour, 106. See also Bordes and Michel, 79.

by the fact that the portrait is three quarter length, when habitually portraits of blacks had been confined to heads and busts.¹⁴⁹

As in the portraits of the French Jacobins, Robespierre, Mirabeau, and de Vieuzac, morality and virtue are emphasised. Girodet was well acquainted with the ideas of Johann Caspar Lavater,¹⁵⁰ and he was interested in strong moral characterization, which he seems to have considered the primary aim of the portraitist.¹⁵¹ Girodet himself wrote that

The painter, ingenious disciple of the learned Lavater, also observes the countenance, the colour, the shape of the face. He distinguishes the stupid man from a coxcomb, a fool from a wise man . . . The painter lifts up the impenetrable veil of the hearts . . . and discovers the weaknesses, the defects, the serene countenance of a virtuous man . . . genius often sparkles without beauty, grace reveals itself in incorrect features . . . Michelangelo was ugly . . . but this ugliness was the ugliness of a great man . . .¹⁵²

Interpreted in the sense of Lavater's theory,¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹Honour, 110.

¹⁵⁰George Levitine, Girodet-Trioson: An Iconographical Study (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1978) 65.

¹⁵¹Levitine, 304-5.

¹⁵²Girodet, quoted in Levitine, 304. Levitine's reference is Girodet-Trioson, Oeuvres posthumes, ed. P.A. Coupin (Paris: Renouard, 1829) vol. 1, 393-4. I have been unable to locate this work.

¹⁵³In his sympathetic depiction of Belley's face it is evident that Girodet did not share the racial prejudice found in Lavater, who wrote in Essays on Physiognomy: "Calm reason

Belley's calm face and sympathetic features call up the artist's reference to "the serene countenance of a virtuous man." They express thoughtfulness and an intelligent awareness: Belley seems to be contemplating the future and the tasks awaiting him in Saint Domingue, possibly alluded to in the landscape and the ocean constituting the background in the portrait.

But in further comparing Belley's image with the portraits of the French Jacobins, it is evident that while Belley is portrayed as incarnating virtue and dignity like the French deputies, he is also shown as lacking their heroism, their energy, and their power. In reference to Lavater's notion of the correspondence between an "active and vivid eye and the active and vivid mind," or of outer vivacity as denoting inner energy, Belley's placid countenance and leaning pose seem rather to convey a sense of exaggerated relaxation, even lethargy. This contrasts with the representation of the French deputies. In the portrait of Mirabeau, a sense of determination is conveyed in the hand clenched over the

revolts at the supposition that Newton or Leibniz ever could have the countenance and appearance of an idiot, incapable of a firm step, a meditating eye; of comprehending the least difficult of abstract propositions, and of expressing himself so as to be understood; that one of these in the brain of a Laplander conceived his theodicea; and that the other in the head of an Esquimaux, who wants the power to number farther than six and affirms all beyond to be innumerable, had dissected the rays of light, and weighed worlds." Lavater, 24.

documents on the desk, and a feeling of energy is suggested in the swift movement of the body. Likewise, the portrait of Barère de Vieuzac conveys Revolutionary determination in the taut pose, in the way the sitter's gaze confronts the viewer, and in the way his hand clasps the documents of the law.

Belleys is portrayed in a sensuous, Praxitelean¹⁵⁴ pose, with a stress on masculine sexuality; the emphasis on the genital area is further enhanced by the position of the right hand, sharply outlined against the yellow chamois of the breeches. This mode of representation could be interpreted simply as denoting masculine virility.¹⁵⁵ However, in the context of 18th century racial stereotyping, this manner of representation could also have called up the sexual proclivity typically (and problematically) ascribed to blacks; indeed, in the context of the constitution of Revolutionary identities, which had emphasized restraint and control over passions, the stress on sexuality could also have carried connotations of excess. Moreover, the emphasis on sexuality, in conjunction with Belleys relaxed and even aristocratic bearing, could also have evoked associations to the perceived sexual freedom

¹⁵⁴Robert Rosenblum refers to Belleys pose in Girodet's portrait as 'Praxitelean.' Robert Rosenblum and H.W. Janson, 19th Century Art (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1984) 65.

¹⁵⁵This reading is not to exclude the homoerotic aspect of the image. However, an interpretation along those lines would involve a different study, which is presently beyond the scope of this paper.

of ancien régime royalty and aristocracy. Such associations would have had important implications during the Revolution and during the Directory. Dorinda Outram has noted that monarchies were seen as having been corrupted by the feminine, and that, in the last quarter of the 18th century the ancien régime was understood to have been dominated by women who, through their sexuality, had ruled over Kings, and hence over the conduct of governments.¹⁵⁶ Boudoir politics, the exchange of political gifts for sexual favours, were seen both as a cause of the weaknesses of the old regime, and as a justification for the Revolution itself.¹⁵⁷ To the degree that power in the old Regime was ascribed to women, the Revolution was committed to an anti-feminist rhetoric, and Jacobin male politicians could find in this rhetoric an escape from the guilt arising from the destruction of the French monarchy; what looked like a sacrilegious act had in fact been a crusade for virtue and a purging of the female from the body politics.¹⁵⁸ The production of male political embodiment, in the sense of Stoic, masculine control, (which can be seen in the representations of the French Jacobin deputies described above), was to be read as a process of exclusion of and differentiation from the feminine--from the 'unnatural fury

¹⁵⁶Outram, 125.

¹⁵⁷Outram, 125.

¹⁵⁸Outram, 125.

and physical violence' of the women of the Revolution, and also, significantly, from 'feminine' unrestrained, uncontrollable sexuality.¹⁵⁹ This differentiation of the masculine from the feminine had also been made possible through 'scientific' research, which had postulated the biological incommensurability between the sexes;¹⁶⁰ and this kind of differentiation, incidentally, formed part of the larger movement for the creation of a separate identity for the white European male, differentiating him, not only from women, but from blacks and all other men and women.¹⁶¹

Belley is thus represented in the portrait as both

¹⁵⁹Outram, 126-28.

¹⁶⁰Thomas Laqueur writes that in the context of the social upheavals of the 18th century, and the question of womens' political rights, there had emerged a new science on sexuality. In pre-Enlightenment times, sexuality had been seen as a social category, but during the 18th century sexuality came to be seen in an ontological light. The pre-Enlighthenment metaphysics of hierarchy in the representation of women in relation to men had, in the 18th century, been replaced by an anatomy and physiology of incommensurability; biological difference, instead of similarity, was now stressed. Thomas Laqueur, Making Sex. Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990) 6-8.

¹⁶¹Schiebinger, in "The Anatomy of Difference: Race, and Sex in Eighteenth-Century Science," 387-405, has shown how notable 18th century researchers in anatomy focused their research on the bodies of European women and black men, as a part of a general trend to establish significant differences between European men and all other men and women. This movement coincided with the period of the great social upheavals of the French Revolution, when the French male bourgeoisie, while proclaiming universal rights and equality, assumed power for itself but denied it to women, to blacks and the poor.

possessing and lacking the qualities needed for political leadership. The deputy from Saint Domingue is portrayed as possessing Revolutionary virtue and dignity--reassuring qualities for an ex-representative who is presumably returning to political life in the colony. But the image also implies that in the black deputy the instinctual and the sensual still persist, in a way that threatens Stoic, heroic and controlled masculinity. Indeed, as a public portrait of a French Revolutionary deputy, Girodet's emphasis on sensuality would have been especially striking in the aftermath of the Jacobin cult of virtue and restraint, emerging as it did at a time when the Directorial leaders stressed authority and control as a part of the new policy of enforcing a return to order.¹⁶²

III Directorial Return to Order

By 1798, the observation by Boissy d'Anglas in 1795, that "absolute equality was a chimera," had become accepted as a reality in political and national life. The period of the Directory no longer insisted on absolute equality, but only on equality before the law.¹⁶³ The ideology of liberal

¹⁶²Soria, in Grande histoire de la Révolution française, vol. 3, 1429, writes about the changing politics during the Directorial period: "Or la singularité de la Directoire est de mettre en lumière le caractère autoritaire de la République bourgeoise, et de ne pas occulter les mesures socio-économiques prolongeant la Révolution."

¹⁶³Soboul, 468.

capitalism had replaced the ideals of the early Revolution, and social and political hierarchies were being reinstated. Importantly, the Revolutionary slogan of '*Liberté, égalité, fraternité*' had been changed to '*Liberté, égalité, propriété*', as an engraving representing the three Directorial leaders of 1797, Barras, Reubell, and Revellièvre-Lépaux (Fig. 11) makes clear.¹⁶⁴ The three leaders stand under a headgear which appears as a cross between a helmet and a liberty cap, and which bears the inscription '*Liberté, égalité, propriété*'.

The Revolutionary leaders' self-identification with virtue, Stoicism and with the Republican heroes of antiquity was comparatively shortlived and these practices became rapidly attenuated after the collapse of Jacobin rule in 1794.¹⁶⁵ Revolutionary virtue had lost its importance as a justification for power, and the idea of virtue as inherent in the political leaders themselves had come to be abandoned.¹⁶⁶ Dorinda Outram suggests that Revolutionary Stoicism collapsed because the middle class conquest of and redefinition of the public realm had been so complete; by 1799 there was no longer

¹⁶⁴As noted above, the new Directorial legislation promoted economic freedom and unlimited property rights. See Soboul, especially 467-469.

¹⁶⁵Outram, 87.

¹⁶⁶'Virtue' was still important, and private portraiture continued to adhere to Lavater's notions of inner character as visible in outward appearance. However, in French political life, the demand that power be justified by virtue began to be replaced by the concept of power as inherent in a hierarchy.

a need for roles which linked virtue inexorably to the creation of the just state, because individuals were no longer faced with the extreme political situations of the Revolution.¹⁶⁷ Extending the argument, the impression of virtue inscribed onto Belley's facial features would no longer have carried its earlier moral weight and its connotations of a new kind of justification for Revolutionary power; instead such virtue would have aligned Belley in 1797 with a Revolutionary idealism, that was already passé. Yet, in the context of French colonial history, 'virtue' had carried other connotations as well. As I noted previously, the enlightened French administrators had stressed virtue as a desireable characteristic in French colonial planters, as an important factor in managing the colonial labour force. Consequently, the black leader, inscribed with virtue and reason, is, in a similar fashion, expected to rule over his new black subjects with virtue and compassion--in other words, he is to continue the tradition of an 'enlightened' French colonial policy.

Following 1795, the Directorial leaders no longer saw themselves as embodiments of the general will, but as the chosen representatives of the people, and as forming a new

¹⁶⁷Outram writes that through changes in the nature of the state itself, the belief that power was located in the symbolic bodies of individuals, whether monarchs or their middle class successors, began to be abandoned, and the institutions of government began to foreshadow the impersonal, unethical states which were to emerge in the 19th century. Outram, 87.

governing class, apart from the people.¹⁶⁸ As a result, the imagery of political power changed and Directorial deputies to the National Convention were increasingly represented as members of an established ruling class. New hierarchies were defined within the ruling groups, and denoted by the visible display of rank through official uniforms.¹⁶⁹ An engraving of 1799 of one of the Directorial leaders, Paul Barras, "Barras in the costume of a Director," stands as an example (Fig. 12); here the emphasis on the costume and its details is calculated to distinguish an official position within a political hierarchy. In contrast, the representation of Belley, who also had held an official position in the Directory, differs significantly: Belley's tricolor sash and plume, which should have denoted his rank, as well as his power, are represented less as official attributes, than as sensuous objects; the intricately folded silk of the sash, and the sensuously rendered feathery plumes draw attention to

¹⁶⁸ Bryant T. Ragan and Elizabeth A. Williams eds., Recreating Authority in Revolutionary France (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992) 76-78.

¹⁶⁹ Lynn Hunt has shown how the search for appropriate Revolutionary costume incorporated the ambiguities of Revolutionary politics. Hunt discusses how early Revolutionary design of official custom, meant to establish a new egalitarian, national identity, also came to respond to the need to produce new political differentiations and hierarchies during the later Revolutionary years and during the Directory. See Lynn Hunt, Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984) 74-86.

their material, decorative qualities rather than to their official signification. The allusion therefore is that the sensuous aspects of the elegant trappings of Belley's new position compete with the deeper implications involved in French citizenship and representation.

Yet, just as the French deputies had constructed their identities as the new citizens of France, the former slaves and black Republicans of Saint Domingue were also actively constructing their own, Revolutionary identities. C.L.R. James, in The Black Jacobins, writes that the blacks in Saint Domingue were filled with an immense pride at being citizens of the French Republic, 'one and indivisible,' which had brought liberty and equality into the world; Toussaint L'Overture was known for his French Revolutionary patriotism, and always addressed his countrymen as 'Citoyen.'¹⁷⁰

Such Revolutionary identity is, however, in the context of Paris of the Directorial period, subtly negotiated in the title of Girodet's portrait of Belley. It is interesting to recall that the original title of the portrait, when it had been exhibited at the Élysee Palace in 1797, had been simply Portrait de nègre.¹⁷¹ Although the circumstances around the change in title, from Portrait de nègre to C. Belley, between 1797 and 1798, are not known, the fact that the title was

¹⁷⁰James, 154.

¹⁷¹Honour, 106.

changed indicates, in itself, the importance attached to it. The title Portrait de nègre clearly defines Belley in terms of race, not political status. But the reference to 'citoyen' carried subtle associations as well. The use of the title 'citoyen' had diminished during the Directory. Since 1795 after the fall of the Terror when the Thermidoreans had taken power and Jacobinism had been outlawed, the use of the Revolutionary title 'citoyen' had gradually begun to be replaced within the upper social groups, by the traditional appellation 'monsieur.'¹⁷² Hence the term 'citoyen,' when used in 1798, would have drawn particular attention to itself and to its meaning. While ostensibly alluding to Revolutionary equality, the term 'citoyen' effectively called attention to the very recent origin of citizenship for former black slaves, thereby underlining the recent political developments in Saint Domingue which such status had facilitated. At the same time, the reference to Revolutionary citizenship could also have served as a reminder that Belley and the people of Saint Domingue had obligations as new citizens of France, in particular to defend and uphold the interests of the nation.

Thus Girodet, in the portrait of Belley, managed to undermine Belley's position by a skilful manipulation of the Revolutionary attributes of power. The reference to virtue

¹⁷²Soria, vol. 3, 1352.

would, in the colonial context, have referred to colonial obedience and control, rather than to Revolutionary ideals; the sensuousness in the rendering of the official signs of Belley's status would have lessened their authoritarian impact; and the reference to citizenship was double-edged, evoking the problematic of current Saint Dominguean politics that threatened France.

IV The Portrait of Belley and Directorial Fashion

Belley's attire in the portrait seems to accord with the appearance expected of a dignified French citizen during the Directorial period, as can be seen in a comparison with David's portrait of Monsieur Seriziat, of 1795 (Fig. 13). The black deputy's appearance is restrained, and there seems to be no apparent artifice nor luxury. However, Belley's attire seems just a touch too new and brightly coloured, the watch at his waist is a fraction too polished, and the chamois of the trousers is too clinging, too velvety and just a shade too yellow. In addition to the sensuous rendering of the draped sash and the feathers in the hat, there is a brightness in the colours and textures in Belley's clothes, which serves to conjure up a sense of luxury, and which contrasts with the deeply serious facial features and expression of the former deputy. Moreover, Girodet, while portraying Belley as a Republican citizen, has included an earring. Body ornament,

which during the Revolutionary years was seen as denoting artifice, display and disguise, reminiscent of the ancien régime, was not permitted in the dress of a French citizen, striving for an impression of authenticity and transparency.¹⁷³ During the Revolution, dress practices like make-up, jewellery, and artificial hair, which had been common to both sexes before 1789, had begun to be confined to women, hence sharpening the differentiation of the male heroic Revolutionary citizen from the feminine.¹⁷⁴ As ornament, the earring would not have belonged with the official image of a French citizen, a deputy to the National Convention.

These subtle allusions to excess would have recalled the inclinations during the Directory to luxury and frivolity in dress and manners among the new bourgeoisie. With the new 'democracy,' class boundaries had become blurred, and the new bourgeoisie strove to adopt the freer manners and elegant dress of their former superiors.¹⁷⁵ This new freedom, after the constraints of the Terror, had been epitomized in the revealing clothing of fashionable bourgeois women, ironically termed the merveilleuses, and in the flamboyant manner of

¹⁷³Outram, 156.

¹⁷⁴Outram, 155-6.

¹⁷⁵This group was separate from the bourgeoisie of the ancien régime, and consisted largely of individuals who had created their wealth by acquiring nationalized property and by furnishing the military. See Soria, vol. 3, 1483.

dress of their masculine counterparts, the incroyables (Fig. 14).¹⁷⁶ The freer styles common among women included fashions à l'antique, which had originated in ideals of Revolutionary simplicity as opposed to ancien régime opulence, but had evolved as well into a parody of antique dressing following 1795. The new fashions among men comprised tight breeches, long jackets, high collars--and also earrings,¹⁷⁷ as an engraving, "Les Croyables. Au Tripot," of circa 1800, shows (Fig. 14). But the society of the merveilleuses and the incroyables was not only distinguished by their extravagant dress; it was also associated with sexual licentiousness and prostitution, and was as such frequently caricatured in prints and paintings of the late 1790s.¹⁷⁸

My argument here is that there is a special irony in Girodet's imaging of Belley's dress and pose. In order to convey the sense of Belley's 'otherness,' Girodet, however subtly, inscribed him with exactly the same qualities which,

¹⁷⁶For a general discussion of costume and dress during the Revolutionary years, see Douglas A. Russell, Costume History and Style (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1983) especially pages 314-316. In this context, it would be important to be able to assess precisely the significance of the emergence of the merveilleux and the incroyables. However, in-depth work has not yet been done on this aspect of Directorial society.

¹⁷⁷French Caricature and the French Revolution, 1789-1799 (Los Angeles: The Grunwald Centre for the Graphic Arts, University of California, 1988) 265.

¹⁷⁸French Caricature and the French Revolution, 1789-1799, 264-5.

during the Directorial period, distinguished the newly democratized 'upstart' French bourgeoisie: sensuality and the taste for luxuries. Belley would therefore have been associated with a group of French individuals who were deemed as aspiring to, yet not having attained, a mastery of social codes.

In other words Girodet, in order to represent Belley as an outsider, had shown him as only being able to imitate, not be, a 'real' French, Republican leader. Homi Bhabha has written in "On Mimicry and Man; the Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse":

It is as if the very emergence of the 'colonial' is dependent for its representation upon some strategic limitation or prohibition within the authoritative discourse itself. The success of colonial appropriation depends on a proliferation of inappropriate objects that ensure strategic failure, so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace.¹⁷⁹

In Belley's portrait, the 'inappropriate objects'--the sensuous emphasis inscribed onto Belley's body, the just a touch too brightly coloured new clothes, the earring--while ensuring the 'failure' of the appropriation of the colonial, also constitute the menace, a menace however, which lies not in 'otherness,' but in 'sameness'. As the newly confident and self-conscious Saint Dominguean black French citizens were in

¹⁷⁹Homi Bhabha, "On Mimicry and Man; the Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," October. The First Decade, 1976-1986, eds. Annette Michelson et al. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1987) 319.

the process of assuming a power for which, in the eyes of the French, they were not deemed to be prepared, the black deputy is imaged as being in the danger of sliding into the exaggerated 'freedom' of dress and manners, displayed by the Directorial 'upstart' bourgeoisie.

But there is also in the portait a sense of difference and 'otherness' which can be seen to be epitomized in the attention Girodet gives to Belley's earring. The golden earring can, as I have shown, be seen at one level as a part of the 'excess' manifested in Belley's elegant clothing; at another level, however, it can be seen as alluding to racial and cultural 'otherness.' Georges Levitine's interpretation of Belley's portait is helpful in this context. Levitine has interpreted the image as characterizing Girodet's "new idea of poeticized masculine portraiture, with its mood of melancholy isolation and lyrical echoing of nascent Romanticism."¹⁸⁰ Belley's earring, as alluding to his not too distant past in Africa, and to his early days of slavery, would have played an important role here in conjuring up Romantic notions of the exotic 'Other,' while simultaneously emphasizing a feeling of cultural difference and of distance from European Enlightenment and Reason. The earring then, can be seen to address and evoke a notion of the 'primitive past' in which the non-European 'races' were still seen to exist. Belley is

¹⁸⁰Levitine, 316.

therefore associated, not only with the qualities of excess among the aristocracy of the ancien régime and the new Directorial bourgeoisie, but also with a realm of 'otherness-- both of which would have served to qualify his suitability for Revolutionary leadership in 1797.

CHAPTER THREE

I Raynal; French Power and French Civilization

Raynal's name is inscribed prominently on the bust beside Belley, therefore alluding to his important role in the portrait. As Raynal had died in 1796, or one year before Girodet painted the image of the former representative for Saint Domingue, the significance of the portrait can be seen as a eulogy to Raynal, as much as a portrait of the black deputy. That is, Girodet's painting of C. Belley serves to celebrate Raynal's role in the emancipation of French slaves, with Raynal standing as a symbol for French Revolutionary ideals. However, Raynal is represented not only as the liberator of the blacks but also as their protector. Since L'Ouverture's rise to power in 1796-1797, a major fear in Paris had been that L'Ouverture's possible declaration of independence could, in view of his close ties with the British, lead to eventual British control over Saint Domingue.¹⁸¹ But the British had not abolished the slave trade, and they had upheld slavery in their colonies. Hence the representation of Raynal's bust next to Belley is particularly important. In order to remain free, it is implied, Saint Domingue's blacks have to remain under French protection and under continued allegiance to France. Raynal's

¹⁸¹Blackburn, 239.

bust thus signifies for a French audience in Paris the continued willingness of the overseas colony to lean on France, just as Belley in the portrait leans on Raynal.

Raynal's bust also stands as a reminder of French authority, justified by French civilization. The antique bust draws attention to civilization as an extended process, as an ancient heritage created over the centuries. The bust seems to point to time as the creator of civilizations, hence echoing Buffon, who had posited that the non-European 'races' could achieve European levels of evolution, but that this development would have to take place over an extended period. In this respect, Raynal's representation as an antique bust with unseeing eyes implies timeless truths which France possesses, and which legitimize French guardianship over the colonies. The portrait suggests that sudden revolution and emancipation will not bring Belley and his people to European levels of development and civilization; rather, just like Europeans before them have done, Belley and Saint Domingueans must first go through a long, slow 'civilizing' process. As part of this development, French civilization is to be transmitted through Raynal's guidance and Belley's sense of responsibility, beyond the ocean in the background, to benefit the colonies: hence, Belley seems to be thoughtfully gazing into a distant future, contemplating the gradual evolution of his people.

Imagery from classical Roman antiquity had been a central element in Revolutionary ideology.¹⁸² Busts of Junius Brutus, such as J. Boiston's Brutus of 1792 (Fig. 16), which was placed in the National Assembly in 1792, had dominated public spaces during the early Revolutionary years,¹⁸³ and the Brutus cult had continued throughout the Revolution. However, during the Directorial period, the interest in Roman Republican antiquity and the emphasis on stern Revolutionary morality were waning.¹⁸⁴ At the times when the Brutus image was still displayed, its meaning and symbolism had changed. In 1796 when the Pope, after Napoleon's Italian conquests, had been forced to sign an armistice with France, war reparations had included the Brutus bust from the Capitoline in Rome.¹⁸⁵ The Capitoline Brutus took a central place in the last great festival of the French Revolution, in July 1798, when the Italian art treasures, received as war indemnity, were paraded

¹⁸²Thomas Crow, "The Oath of the Horatii in 1785. Painting and Pre-Revolutionary Radicalism in France," Art History I, 4 (1987) 448.

¹⁸³Robert Herbert, David, Voltaire, Brutus and the French Revolution, 90.

¹⁸⁴Robert Rosenblum, Transformations in Late Eighteenth-Century Art (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967) 89.

¹⁸⁵Herbert, David, Voltaire, Brutus and the French Revolution, 118.

through Paris.¹⁸⁶ Significant to the political mood of the Directory was the fact that this last festival commemorated the fall of Robespierre and of the Reign of Terror in 1794.¹⁸⁷ Moreover, the Capitoline bust was accompanied in the parade by the motto "Rome is no longer Rome. She belongs to Paris."¹⁸⁸ Hence the reference to Republican virtue, with which the Brutus figure had originally been associated, had been eschewed in favour of a reference to French imperial power. In this context of French conquest in Europe and the political situation in the colonies, Raynal, and the reference to Roman antiquity, take on a particular meaning. Thus, although the two Salon critics whom I quoted at the beginning of my paper, saw Raynal as the liberator of French slaves and as an embodiment of Revolutionary ideals, the significance of this sculptural form in the portrait must also be seen as pertaining to the new French imperial power--a power that could repress, not only Revolutionary passions, but also Revolutionary ideals.

With this in mind the white marble bust, prominently placed in the upper left hand corner of the picture and

¹⁸⁶Herbert, David, Voltaire, Brutus and the French Revolution, 118.

¹⁸⁷Herbert, David, Voltaire, Brutus and the French Revolution, 118.

¹⁸⁸Herbert, David, Voltaire, Brutus and the French Revolution, 118.

elevated above Belley, can be seen to contrast with, and rival in its impact the dark figure of the former deputy.

Underlying such pictorial status given to Raynal is that the Salon critic who had referred to a problematic, unharmonious "translation from black to white" in Belley's portrait, also had alluded to the lack of strength in the representation of Belley's head

. . . aussi a-t-il mis une grande intelligence dans la composition, la tête a beaucoup moins de force
 . . .¹⁸⁹

This critic in 1798 drew attention to the juxtaposing of the two heads in the painting and to the difference in scale.¹⁹⁰ This comment raises an important point about Girodet's image. Unlike Mirabeau who, in the anonymous portrait of 1790 is figured in a dominant position and is not overshadowed by the bust of Brutus, Raynal's prominent presence does not allow Belley to stand alone; independent agency is submitted to tutorship and control. In Mirabeau's portrait antiquity is seen as an inspiration to political liberty, whereas in Belley's portrait the sculptural form and its antique mode serve to suppress and qualify these ideals.

¹⁸⁹Collection Deloynes, vol. 20, 541-542.

¹⁹⁰The difference in the size of the two heads would also have called up 18th century studies which had compared skull sizes and assumed that a bigger skull indicated a superior intellect. See Shiebinger, "Skeletons in the Closet: The First Illustrations of the Female Skeleton in Eighteenth-Century Anatomy," 43, 64.

During the last years of the 18th century, the cult of antiquity had shifted from Roman themes to an emphasis on what was known as the more refined 'Greek' style.¹⁹¹ Girodet's portrayal of Belley in a relaxed Praxitelean pose, reminiscent of classical Greek antiquity and of the adulation of the ideal male form, would have served to differentiate him from the controlled, Revolutionary masculinity and Stoicism of the Republican 'Roman' citizen, alluded to in the antique bust of Raynal. Robert Rosenblum has noted that during the time of the Revolution, the classical world was moulded to meet different demands, and that artists of the period relied heavily on artistic historicism.¹⁹² Within this context the seeming 'eclecticism' in Girodet's image in which a stern Roman bust is juxtaposed to the 'Praxitelean' Greek pose of Belley, is not, I would argue, accidental. Girodet was well versed in the traditions of antiquity,¹⁹³ and his use of a classical vocabulary must be seen against the background of a specific political situation. The opposing of two traditions of antiquity, the Republican Roman in the head of Raynal, with the 'refined' Greek in the body of Belley inscribes a sense of political difference which would have been meaningful in the context of Revolutionary France; the Roman theme would have

¹⁹¹Rosenblum, 182-3.

¹⁹²Rosenblum, 10, 34.

¹⁹³Levitine, 9.

signified active, Republican politics, while the Greek reference would have signified an area of aesthetic connotations, not so directly connected with political life. And this subtle sense of aesthetic distancing from the current political situation would have been, furthermore, enhanced by the representation of the idealized landscape in the background, a landscape which, through its archaic, 'classicizing' character, would have overshadowed the real oppression inherent in France's imperial overseas expansion.

II Girodet, David, and Revolutionary Radicalism

In this context of the discourses around antiquity, it is important to note Girodet's well known rivalry with Jacques-Louis David. Girodet, who had worked in David's studio and had assisted in David's history paintings, had endeavoured to establish himself as an artist independent of the Davidian school.¹⁹⁴ Unlike David, Girodet was no revolutionary. Girodet came from a family strongly attached to a monarchical milieu and he had lost his feudal rights during the Revolution.¹⁹⁵ He had spent the years 1790-95 in Italy, where he had tried to distance himself from political events in the Revolutionary years, and on his return to France he had participated in the general reaction which followed the years

¹⁹⁴Levitine, 95, 106.

¹⁹⁵Levitine, 25, 97.

of the Terror.¹⁹⁶ The portrait of Belley, with its reference to antiquity, can therefore also be seen as Girodet's answer to David's Revolutionary cult of a heroic Roman past.

The lack of harmony in the "translation from black to white," which an anonymous Salon critic, cited at the beginning of this study, had complained about, can be related to the "awkwardness" which critics had seen in David's painting The Oath of the Horatii (Fig. 17), of 1785.¹⁹⁷ Crow, in his analysis of David's Oath of the Horatii, and of 18th century critical responses to the painting, assesses David's refusal to blend ('fondre') and merge objects in his paintings. As Crow notes, 'fondre' signifies the subordination of a world of distinct objects to a unified process of seeing, and he quotes an anonymous Salon critic who wrote in 1787

c'est par l'opposition des objets entr'eux plutôt que par ce que les peintres appellent la magie du clair-oscure qu'il cherche à produire des effets.¹⁹⁸

Crow argues that the word to attend to in this passage is 'opposition,' and that the objects in the world David conjures up appear as opposite, separate, equivalent, without the "connecting glue of 'clair-oscure.'"¹⁹⁹ And writing about the

¹⁹⁶Levitine, 97-100.

¹⁹⁷Crow, 459.

¹⁹⁸Crow, 461.

¹⁹⁹Crow, 460-461.

visual expression of a new, revolutionary order in David's The Lictors Returning to Brutus the Bodies of his Sons (Fig. 19), he adds:

David can be said to have made dissonance and discontinuity into elementary constituent elements of picture making. And this is entirely appropriate to a subject which concerns political and emotional conflicts which admit of no immediate resolution . . . 'un nouvel ordre naît de l'excès du désordre même.'²⁰⁰

Although David's art of the 1780s had dealt with "political and emotional conflicts which admit of no immediate resolution," his cult of antiquity had nevertheless indicated heroic, Republican ideals, and a faith in superior morality as being the catalyst for change and for the emergence of a more just and reasonable society. In the Oath of the Horatii and in The Lictors Bringing Back to Brutus the Bodies of His Sons, as Crow has demonstrated, David had celebrated a new honesty and clarity signified by the 'awkwardness' in the representation of the figures and the composition, and thus given form to a critique of ancien régime sensibilities and refined tastes, and indirectly of the old political regime.

Crow's concept of the lack of 'glue' which could bind the picture together is enlightening in the context of the disharmonious "translation between black and white" in Girodet's portrait of Belley. In Girodet's portrait, too, the unmodulated transition from black to white can be seen to

²⁰⁰Crow, 466.

signify an attempt to express in a visual language a new political climate and a feeling of the controversies which France was faced with in the Revolutionary situation. However, in opposition to David's radicalism, Girodet, in the context of Directorial reaction to the 'excesses' of the Revolution, can be seen to emphasize instead the difference, the chasm between oppositional elements, and to point out, almost cynically, how unrealistic it was to believe that a new order could be born, in just one Revolutionary decade, from the disorder of the old. In this reading, the unharmonious "translation between black and white" constitutes in Girodet's painting a barrier, a sign of distance, and a sign of the necessity to slow down the too sudden breakdown of difference in status between the French and the former slaves of the colonies.

CONCLUSION

Girodet's portrait of Citizen Belley emerges as a sign of the French desire to retrieve a form of power over Saint Domingue for France at a time when such authority was seen to be slipping away. The image of Belley, as a representation of a new identity for blacks, could serve to secure French interests in the colony by the co-optation into French imperialist ideology of those individuals whom France now needed to use in order to secure colonial domination.

In the new political context in Saint Domingue after abolition, the French could no longer exercise power over the black population through the earlier system of slavery. However, France could assert its dominance and right to leadership by subscribing to a 'racial' hierarchy supported by 18th century racial theories, and through the claim to be in possession of a superior civilization.

As I have been arguing, the power which Belley's status should have conferred on him is curtailed and qualified in Girodet's portrait. To follow Homi Bhabha, and to relate his general insights in "The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism," to the representation of Belley, the 'narrative' of colonial discourse inscribed onto the body of the colonized individual erases the cultural originality of the colonized and functions

as a means of surveillance and control.²⁰¹ Belley's identity and experience as a black Saint Dominguean soldier and potential Revolutionary are erased, and he is represented as a colonial subject, whose French citizenship serves to subdue rather than liberate, leading him to support the very power with which he is subjugated.²⁰² In Girodet's portrait of Belley, French civilization is inscribed onto the body of the black deputy, but in such a way as to convey the message that the essence of that civilization is still lacking. The portrait implies that Belley is at the same time included and excluded in a French Revolutionary elite; he is represented as a reassuring, non-threatening and responsible representative of the colonies, while his difference and distance from 'real' French civilization is stressed. In this context it is important to recall--and to elaborate on--Dorinda Outram's analysis of the agency of the subject in the constituting of self-identity. The subject has, as Outram notes, an important role in the constituting of self-identity. However, it must also be remembered that such self-identities are created

²⁰¹Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism," Out There. Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures, eds. Russell Ferguson *et al.* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1990) 73.

²⁰²Bhabha analyses in the depth the colonial relationship and shows how the colonized subject actually supports the continuation of colonial power. Bhabha, "The Other Question. Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism," 76.

within the confines of contemporary ideologies and that they can--as Belley's portrait shows--be manipulated and distorted to serve the various interests embedded in these ideologies.

Belley's portrait does not only stand as a reassurance regarding French domination over its colonial empire. The portrait also conveys a sense of reassurance in regard to the question of Revolutionary and Enlightenment ethics. The universality of Enlightenment ideology and ideals was not questioned in the 18th century--it was assumed by proponents that the non-European 'races' would 'evolve,' and would eventually take their place as equals alongside European peoples. What was questioned in the period, however, was the moral commitment of the French Revolution and of its political leaders to work toward true equality. The question which Mirabeau had already raised concerning the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man, and which had subsequently haunted Revolutionary politicians, was: did the French live up to the Revolution's ideals of liberté, égalité, fraternité?

Girodet's portrait of Citizen Belley, in the skilfully manipulated representation of the black deputy from Saint Domingue, provided, in 1797, a reassuring answer to that question. The portrait, in its composition and details, articulated a justification for French imperial and colonial power--a justification which was, ironically, based in arguments provided by Enlightenment 'science' and 'reason.'

The problem of what Benedict Anderson has called "the inner incompatibility of empire and nation,"²⁰³ and which involved the clash of French imperialism and Saint Domingue's aspiration to greater independence and self rule, is solved in the portrait of Belley by a reference to racial and cultural evolution, and to the slow pace of human progress.

Belley's portrait represents an attempt to close out concepts of black independence and black supremacy in 1797. The portrait celebrates French civilization and its authority, and the prominent bust of Raynal serves as a reminder of the necessity of a period of French tutelage as a precondition for black liberty and rule. Thus Girodet's portrait of Citizen Belley is as much a portrait of French imperial expansion and its justification, as a portrait of French Revolutionary ideals and of the black deputy from Saint Domingue.

²⁰³Benedict Anderson's phrase, quoted by Homi Bhabha in "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," 320.



Fig. 1 Anne Louis Girodet Trioson. Portrait of Jean-Baptiste Belley. 1797. Oil on canvas. 63x45". Musée Nationale du Château de Versailles.



Fig. 2 Frontispiece for Volume IV of G.T. Raynal,
Histoire philosophique et politique des Européens
dans les deux Indes. 1774. "Allegory of Nature."
Line engraving by Charles Gaucher after Charles
Eisen. 140x90mm.



Fig. 3 Frontispiece for Volume X of G. T. Raynal, Histoire philosophique et politique des Européens des deux Indes. 1780. "Esclaves conduits par des marchands." Line engraving by Nicolas de Launay after Jean-Michel le jeune. 148x91 mm.



Fig. 4 Frontispiece for B. Frossard, La Cause des esclaves nègres. 1789. "Soyez libres et citoyens." Line engraving by Charles Boilly after Pierre Routhier. 140x95 mm.



Fig. 5 Illustration after emancipation in 1794, proclaiming racial equality. Hennin Collection. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

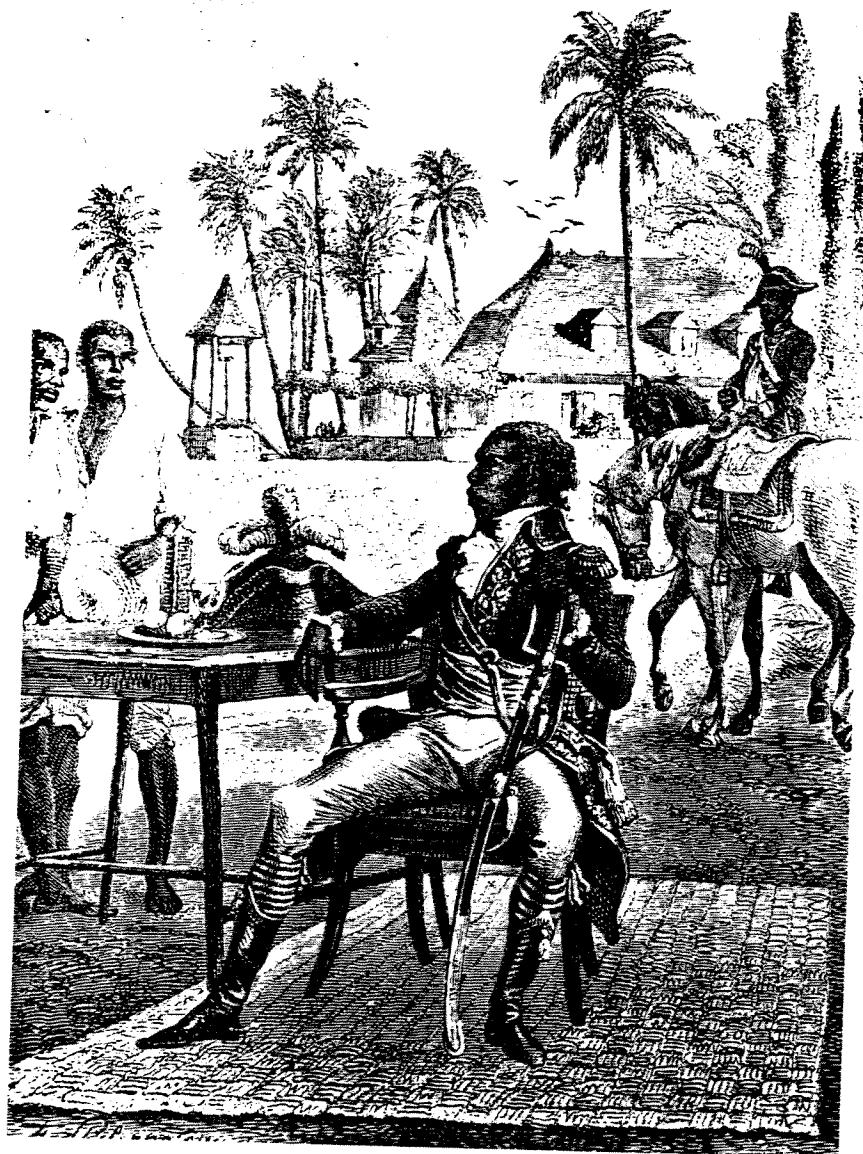


Fig. 6 "Toussaint L'Ouverture." Engraving. Musée de la Marine.



Fig. 7 "Lieutenant Governor, 1796. Toussaint L'Ouverture."



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Fig. 8 Mme. Labille-Guiard. Portrait of Robespierre. Circa 1791. Private Collection.



Fig. 9 Honoré Gabriel Mirabeau. 1790. Anon. Oil on canvas. London, The Duke of Hamilton.



Fig. 10 Jean-Louis Laneuville. Portrait of Bertrand Barère de Vieuzac. 1792. Bremen, Kunsthalle.



Fig. 11 "La trinité républicaine. Barras, Reubell, et la Révelliére-Lépaux." Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.



Fig. 12 "Barras in the Costume of a Director. Year VII (1799)." Drawn by H. Le Dru. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. Collection of Prints.



Fig. 13 Jacques-Louis David. Portrait of M. Seriziat. 1795.

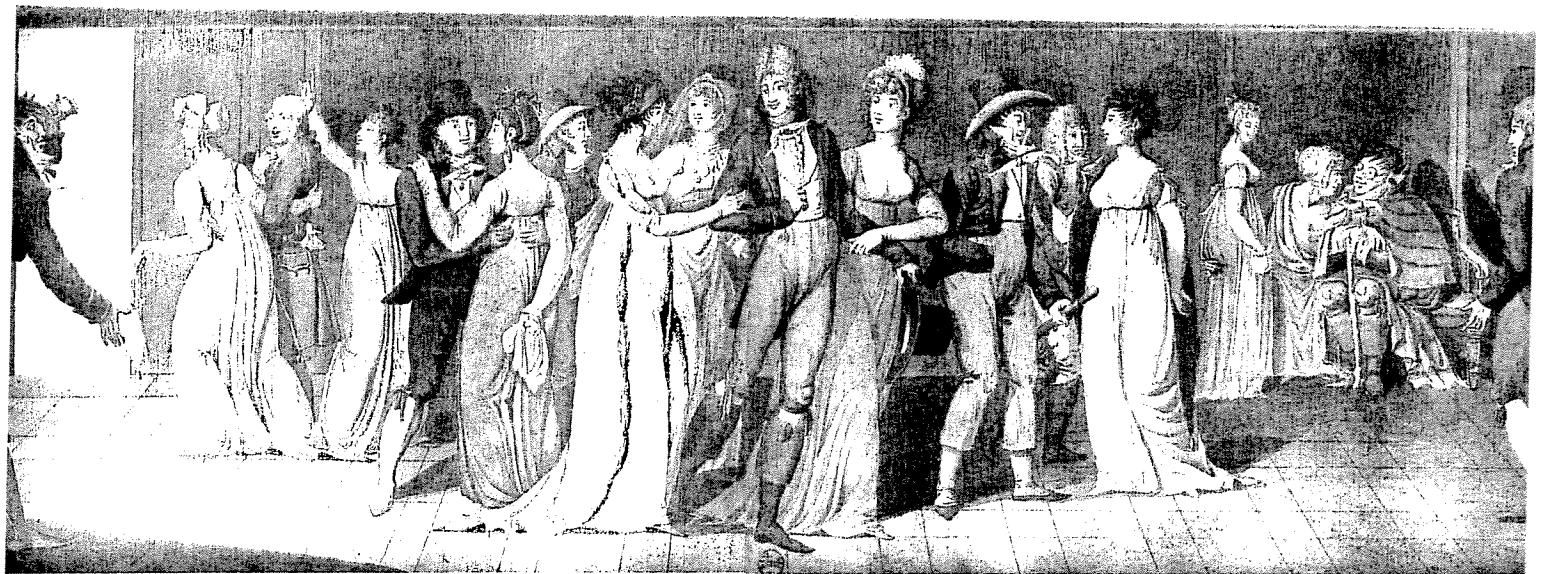


Fig. 14 "Le Rez-de-chaussée du Théâtre Montansier au Palais-Royal." Aquarelle by Boyer. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.



Fig. 15 "Les Croyables. Au tripot." Circa 1800. Etching.
277x332. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.



Fig. 16 Joseph Boiston. Brutus. 1792. Marble. 86 cm.
Tours, Musée des Beaux-Arts.

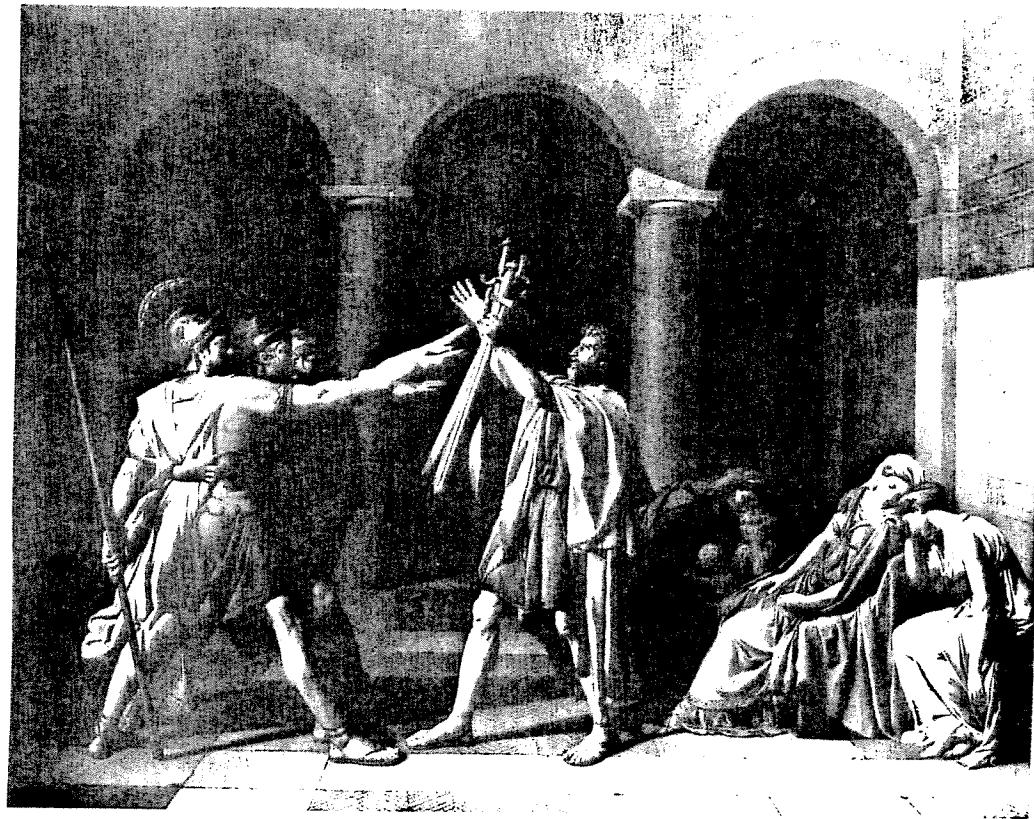


Fig. 17 Jacques-Louis David. The Oath of the Horatii. 1785.
Oil on canvas. 330x445. Louvre, Paris.



Fig. 18 Jacques-Louis David. Lictors Returning to Brutus the Bodies of His Sons. 1789. Oil on canvas. 325x423. Louvre, Paris.

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