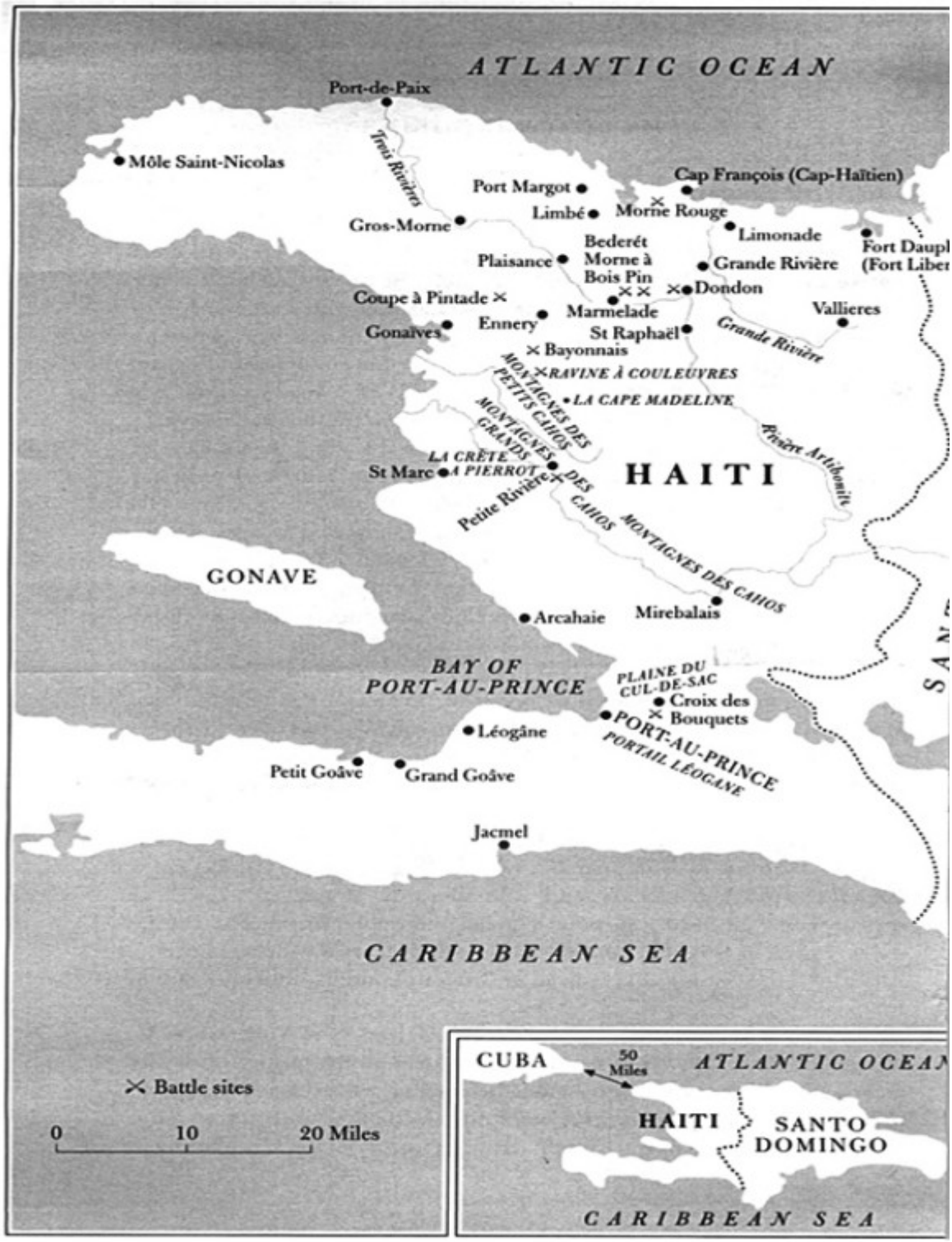
PENGUIN BOOKS

THE BLACK JACOBINS

Cyril Lionel Robert James was born in Trinidad in 1901. He early on exhibited an ardent interest in literature and cricket – two great passions that were to remain with him throughout his life. He became a schoolteacher in 1918, having received a classical British education with a scholarship to Queens Royal College in Trinidad. In 1932 James went to Britain to pursue a career as a writer and soon become cricket correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Glasgow Herald*. After reading Trotsky's recently published *History of the Russian Revolution*, he was drawn to anti-Stalinist Marxism and quickly emerged as a leading theoretician of various Trotskyist organizations, developing his own independent brand of Marxism after World War II based on the theory of state capitalism. His most significant work was *The Black Jacobins*, completed in 1938, which, along with his *History of Negro Revolt* (1937), helped to lay the basis of the post-war movement for African emancipation. In 1953 James was deported from the United States because of his political activities, under the pretext of visa violations. He returned to live in England. In 1958, on a visit to Trinidad, he was invited by Eric Williams to become editor of the weekly *Nation* newspaper, the influential organ of Williams's People's National Movement (PNM). Following a bitter break with Williams over the direction of the PNM and the collapse of the abortive West Indies Federation, James returned to England. During his life he wrote a number of classic works, including *World Revolution 1917 – 1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International* (1937); *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In* (1953); *Beyond a Boundary* (1963), a memoir and cultural study of cricket; as well as several works on historical, political, and philosophical subjects. During the seventies, he taught in the United States and lectured widely in Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean. He lived in Brixton, London, until his death in 1989.

James Walvin is Professor of History at the University of York, where he has taught since 1967. He has published widely on the history of slavery

and on modern social history. Among his books are *Black Ivory* (1994), *An African's Life* (1998), *Making the Black Atlantic* (2000) and *Britain's Slave Empire* (2000). Walvin is currently writing a history of the Caribbean.


ATLANTIC OCEAN
Port-de-Paix
Môle Saint-Nicolas
Trois Rivières
Cap François (Cap-Haïtien)
Port Margot
Limbé
Morne Rouge
Gros-Morne
Limonade
Bederét
Plaisance
Morne à Bois Pin
Grande Rivière
Fort Daupl
(Fort Liber
Coupe à Pintade
Dondon
Marmelade
Vallieres
Ennery
Gonaïves
St Raphaël
Grande Rivière
Bayonnais
RAVINE À COULEUVRES
LA CAPE MADELINE
MONTAGNES DES PETITS CAHOS
MONTAGNES DES GRANDS CAHOS
Rivière Artibonite
LA CRÊTE À PIERROT
St Marc
HAITI
Petite Rivière
DES CAHOS
MONTAGNES DES CAHOS
GONAVE
Arcahaie
Mirebalais
BAY OF PORT-AU-PRINCE
PLAINE DU CUL-DE-SAC
Croix des Bouquets
PORT-AU-PRINCE
PORTAIL LÉOGANE
Léogâne
Petit Goâve
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ATLANTIC OCEAN
HAITI
SANTO DOMINGO
CARIBBEAN SEA

C. L. R. JAMES

THE BLACK JACOBINS

TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE AND
THE SAN DOMINGO REVOLUTION

With an Introduction and Notes by James Walvin

PENGUIN BOOKS

INTRODUCTION

The history of black slavery in the Americas can be interpreted in terms of the slaves' persistent efforts to resist their bondage. But only once – in St Domingue/Haiti – did the slaves succeed in overthrowing the slave system. Under the shadow of the revolution in France after 1789, slaves in the French Caribbean colony of St Domingue rose up against one of the harshest of slave regimes in the Americas. In a protracted revolt which was, by turns, slave rebellion, anti-colonial war and race war (sometimes a mix of all three) the slaves of St Domingue became the free people of the republic of Haiti. C. L. R. James's book, *The Black Jacobins*, first published in 1938, was a pioneering account of that critical historical episode. Today, it is a classic which remains, sixty years on, the starting point for any student of the topic. Like all classics, however, *The Black Jacobins* transcends its immediate focus of interest to speak to wider, universal issues.

The heart of James's book is the slave experience. African slaves were basic to the shaping and development of huge areas of the Americas. Millions of Africans were violently recruited and shipped across the Atlantic in conditions which have come to haunt the public imagination. It is clear enough now that more than eleven million Africans were loaded onto the slave ships (European, North American and Brazilian) plying along the West African coast. In the region often million Africans survived the crossing.[1] The consequences of that complex process – African enslavement, oceanic transportation and re-settlement in the Americas – transformed three continents. Firstly, of course, Africa suffered an unprecedented enforced migration of its peoples. Secondly, parts of the Americas (notably Brazil, the Caribbean and parts of North America) were vitalized by the efforts of Africans. Thirdly, Europe found its material well-being greatly enhanced by its involvement in African slavery.[2] Today, when the study of Atlantic slavery attracts the efforts of armies of historians on both sides of the Atlantic, no serious scholar would deny the

significance of this African diaspora, and of the Atlantic economy in which it played so seminal a role. It was not always so.

Among C. L. R. James's many great achievements is the fact that he was one of the first to recognize the importance of this historical formula. Yet it took a very long time for historians to recognize his pioneering importance. The re-publication of *The Black Jacobins* – perhaps his most famous historical study[3] – allows us to reflect on the man and his book. *The Black Jacobins* has been described as one of the 'historiographical manifestoes of anti-imperialist scholarship on the eve of decolonization'.[4] Published in 1938, following path-breaking research in French archives, *The Black Jacobins* was far ahead of its time both in its focus and its approach. For a start, the history of the Caribbean and of slavery had, by the 1930s, drifted into virtual anonymity. The historiography of the region was moribund, and historians of colonial and imperial Europe concentrated their attention elsewhere. British academic historians were more likely to write about Wilberforce than the slaves. Indeed the scholarship on slavery and abolition had changed little in direction and tone for more than a century, and continued to concentrate on the rise of humanitarianism and its effective campaign in ending the cruelty of the slave system. C. L. R. James effectively turned the tide.

The Black Jacobins asserted – and illustrated – the importance of the Caribbean to the unfolding of Atlantic history. James's was an attempt not merely to shift the focus of imperial interests back to where it had once lain – in the Atlantic economy – but to explain slavery in the Americas as an integral theme in European development. The originality of James's book lies in its core argument that the revolution in San Domingo (Haiti) in the 1790s was pivotal for the whole region. Moreover in the unfolding of that revolution, the slaves were instrumental. Slaves secured their own freedom. Thus, at a stroke, the whole focus of attention was shifted onto the history of the slaves themselves. Effectively for the first time, James gave slaves an agency; *The Black Jacobins* portrayed slaves as agents in their own story rather than being the grateful recipients of the largesse of others. Today, the case seems obvious. In the 1930s it was stunningly original. It was an interpretation inspired by the author's political outlook; that of a highly educated Trinidadian Marxist who applied a West Indian perspective. It was most immediately influential on the work of his fellow Trinidadian Eric Williams whose book *Capitalism and Slavery* (which had

grown from his Oxford doctoral thesis) was published in 1944. Thereafter, however, it took a full generation for historians to come to terms with the argument. Since the 1960s a great deal of effort has been invested in seeking to illustrate the errors and flaws in the details of the argument, but the central thesis remains intact today, namely that events in the Caribbean in the last decade of the eighteenth century were pivotal.[5] Therein lies C. L. R. James's major contribution.

The West Indian slave colonies had emerged, from the mid seventeenth century onwards, on the back of imported Africans toiling primarily on the sugar plantations. The sugar industry became a remarkable source of wealth and material well-being for those involved; for shippers and traders, for merchants and financiers, and for the domestic economies of the participating European maritime powers. By turns, the Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, English and the French all sought to establish their own New World-based sugar industry. Of course, slaves produced a range of other tropical staples (notably tobacco, coffee and rice) but sugar remained their pre-eminent activity. The British islands, led by Barbados then, from the early eighteenth century, by Jamaica, established themselves as wealth-generating colonies – though not of course for the people who made it all possible: the Africans and their local-born offspring. This rise of slave-based British economic strength was paralleled by the emergence of British military and strategic power in the Atlantic. But by the mid eighteenth century they were challenged by the French, whose own slave islands (Martinique, Guadeloupe, San Domingo, St Lucia) disgorged growing prosperity to France and its maritime and mercantile groups.

St Domingue (the western part of the island of Hispaniola) soon dominated French Caribbean interests. By the mid eighteenth century St Domingue's sugar industry (and coffee industry at the higher altitudes) posed a serious threat to Jamaica's claim to be the pre-eminent slave colony in the region. Africans had been shipped into St Domingue in remarkable numbers. The 47,000 in 1720 had grown to 80,000 in 1730. Thereafter the growth was explosive: 172,000 by 1754, and rising more dramatically still between 1763 and 1789, from 206,000 to 465,429.[6] The islands' sugar and coffee plantations were teeming with (and made possible by) Africans. There had never been such a huge movement of

Africans, in so short a period, into the American colonies. It formed a volatile mix which was then ignited by events in France in 1789.

The ramifications of French ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity were dramatic enough in France. In those colonies devoted to the idea that black humanity was less than human, such ideals had a seismic effect, with shock waves rippling outwards from the French islands throughout the Americas. If equality were accepted, slavery was doomed. The ideals of democratic revolution were the solvent of the French *ancien régime*. And little seemed more archaic, more out of kilter with a European world increasingly influenced by Enlightenment ideals, and by a belief in its own attachment to progress, than the barbarism of black slavery. Here again, James saw to the heart of the problem long before others. His natural brilliance, honed by a traditional British education (lovingly described in *Beyond a Boundary*) and his researches in France in the 1930s, brought a distinctive (and up to then unique) Caribbean analysis of what happened before and after 1789.

The initial reactions to 1789 in St Domingue took the form of debates about who should represent whom in Paris. But it was a process which thoroughly destabilized a St Domingue society consisting of a huge African slave force, a ‘coloured’ middle class, a white plantocracy and a colonial government in the hands of French officials. The political turmoil in France was replicated in St Domingue, but with unprecedented consequences. As different groups squabbled – brown with white, middle class with upper class, French with colonial – the Africans seized the moment. In the growing political confusion, control over the slaves loosened and slaves rose in revolt, first in the north. Within a month 40,000 slaves had joined in and St Domingue was swiftly convulsed by slave revolt. From a complexity of inspirations – African, European, Caribbean – the slave revolt was driven forward by the destructive power of an army of ex-slaves led by an increasingly confident and tactically brilliant leadership, notably under Toussaint L'Ouverture. The old colonial and plantocratic edifice was simply swept away by black armies, which dealt similar devastating blows to invading Spanish and British forces. Parisian debates about racial equality and slave emancipation merely accelerated the ex-slaves' progress towards freedom.[7] The British were intent on taking advantage of their adversary's misfortunes and keen to add that lucrative colony to their own string of Caribbean possessions.

However, they found themselves, like the French, sucked into an unwinnable colonial war, with thousands of men succumbing to warfare and disease. A whole British army was effectively devoured by St Domingue. People at home began openly to ask the question: were the slave colonies really worth such sacrifice?

Warfare in St Domingue continued throughout the 1790s. Napoleon was determined to restore plantation slavery and to use St Domingue as a base for operations in the region. A huge new French army arrived, their main success being to lure L'Ouverture to a miserable death in France. But they faced a black guerrilla army determined to fight against the revival of slavery. The ex-slaves won, again. The depleted French forces departed for France and on 1 January 1804 L'Ouverture's successor, Dessalines, declared Haitian independence.

Haiti was the first black republic outside Africa, and the second post-colonial society of the modern era (after the USA). *En route* the ex-slaves – their armies, their leaders, their guerrillas – had defeated invading British, Spanish and French armies. It had been a stunning reversal, not merely of European arms, but of the racial fundamentals which underpinned the Atlantic system. The European masters had been defeated by their African helots in an unprecedented turn-around of racial fortunes. Slave-owners everywhere realized and feared the implications of the events in Haiti. It formed, in a violent brew of international rivalries, racial antipathies and ideological clashes, the planters' worst nightmares; of slaves seized of their own equality, armed and able to topple planters and colonial government alike.

It is an extraordinary story, and it is easy, now, to see why it caught James's attention. For a man of James's inclinations and passions – as a Marxist, anti-colonialist and an emergent spokesman for the neglected and marginalized black masses of the Caribbean – the events in St Domingue had an irresistible resonance. For a start, the language of French revolutionary fervour – of liberty, equality and fraternity – had not lost its disruptive implications for a colonial world which James sought to end. The emergence of an independent black republic in the Caribbean, from the miseries of slavery, clearly had hugely attractive intellectual and political appeal to a writer seeking both to make sense of his regional past and to point towards solutions to continuing injustices. The events of the

1790s were thus, at once, a compelling (and untold) story and a morality tale with massive contemporary implications.

Here, again, the foresight of C.L.R. James is striking. *The Black Jacobins* captures the moment when the slaves in St Domingue – the black Jacobins – unhinged not merely the French in their colonial lair, but began the disruption of the previously untroubled British system. The slave revolt of 1791 and after was the *only* successful slave revolt in the Americas. Yet there was no guarantee that it would succeed. The years between that revolt (1791) and the declaration of Haitian independence (1804) formed a story of warfare, invasion and betrayal. Of course slave revolts flared throughout the region. There were slave uprisings in other French possessions (St Lucia and Guadeloupe). Indeed no slave colony could feel secure in the teeth of such corrosive ideals and events. The British islands similarly faced slave upheaval. Everywhere colonial and plantocratic regimes feared the contagion of French ideals, and sought to prevent the arrival of refugees (black and white) from St Domingue. Jamaica felt especially vulnerable. But the violence and terror of the slave revolution in St Domingue sent thousands scurrying for safety throughout the region; to neighbouring Jamaica, to Louisiana and South Carolina and elsewhere.

Thus did C. L. R. James's black Jacobins – slaves who secured their own freedom – become the most powerful solvents of the whole slave system. Only three years after Haitian independence, the British (and Americans) ended their Atlantic slave-trade. A generation later, the British freed all their slaves. Clearly this, and subsequent emancipations, did not derive simply from the events in Haiti. But the military and political successes of the ex-slaves in Haiti stood as a permanent rebuke to the racial ideals which had shored up the slave empires of the Americas.

Here then is an epic story. In the hands of C. L. R. James it is told with a verve and an assertive swagger which speaks to the author's command both of the topic and of the broader world picture. It is a tangled story (its principal players were Africans, confronting European interests in the Americas), which might confuse and mislead a lesser author. Throughout however James displays that sure-footedness which derives from historical and political self-confidence. There are various places where the book, inevitably, displays its age. Some of James's details are wrong (historical findings and revisions in the intervening years have inevitably revised

some of the data). There are places where his assessment needs correction and revision. Through all this, however, we need to remind ourselves that James was working from a much more restricted base of historical knowledge than is available to modern scholars. Put simply, far less was known then, than now, about the events of the 1790s. But this, again, is grist to the mill. Despite all we have learned in the intervening years, despite the vast accumulation of detail and argument advanced by armies of scholars, *The Black Jacobins* remains *the* pre-eminent account. How many other historical works of the late 1930s could make the same claim?

The Black Jacobins is not simply a pioneering book which has been overtaken by subsequent scholarship. Rather, it remains a starting point and an intellectual inspiration, written by a man whose words, always worth heeding, deal with issues which are both universal and contemporary. Here then is a book which is, at once, both a discrete historical study and an entrée to a wider (and continuing) debate. It is quite simply a classic of masterly historical writing.

JAMES WALVIN

NOTES

1. For recent discussions of the figures see David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas*, Cambridge, 2000, and Herbert S. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, Cambridge, 1999.

2. The best overall recent account of this process can be found in Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery. From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492 – 1800*, London, 1997.

3. There is a strong case for arguing that his book *Beyond a Boundary* (1963) has exercised a comparable sway over a broader reading public.

4. Seymour Drescher, ‘British Capitalism and British Slavery’, in Seymour Drescher, *From Slavery to Freedom*, London, 1999, p. 369.

5. See the essays in Joseph E. Inikopri and Stanley L. Engerman, eds., *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, Durham, North Carolina, 1992.

6. Carolyn E. Frick, ‘The French Revolution in Saint Domingue’, in David Barry Gaspar and David Patrick Geggus, eds., *A Turbulent Time. The French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean*, Bloomington, 1997, p. 55.

7. David Patrick Geggus, ‘Slavery, War and Revolution in the Greater Caribbean’, *ibid*., p. 3.

FURTHER READING

For a detailed discussion of the Haitian Revolution see the essays in David Barry Gaspar and David Patrick Geggus, eds., *A Turbulent Time. The French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean*, Bloomington, 1997. A further analysis of the Revolution itself can be found in David Geggus, *Slavery, War and Revolution*, Oxford, 1982. An excellent debate about C. L. R. James's work can be found in ‘Breaking Bread with History. C. L. R. James and *The Black Jacobins*, Stuart Hall interviewed by Bill Schwarz’, *History Workshop Journal*, Issue 46, Autumn 1998. There is a good collection of C. L. R. James's writings in Anna Grimshaw, ed., *The C. L. R. James Reader*, Oxford, 1999 edn. The most recent biography of James is James D. Young, *The World of C. L. R. James. The Unfragmented Vision*, Glasgow, 1999. Finally – but best of all – anyone interested in learning more about C. L. R. James should give themselves the treat of reading *Beyond a Boundary*, 1963 (and subsequent editions).

Prologue

Christopher Columbus landed first in the New World at the island of San Salvador, and after praising God enquired urgently for gold. The natives, Red Indians, were peaceable and friendly and directed him to Haiti, a large island (nearly as large as Ireland), rich, they said, in the yellow metal. He sailed to Haiti. One of his ships being wrecked, the Haitian Indians helped him so willingly that very little was lost and of the articles which they brought on shore not one was stolen.

The Spaniards, the most advanced Europeans of their day, annexed the island, called it Hispaniola, and took the backward natives under their protection. They introduced Christianity, forced labour in mines, murder, rape, bloodhounds, strange diseases, and artificial famine (by the destruction of cultivation to starve the rebellious). These and other requirements of the higher civilization reduced the native population from an estimated half-a-million, perhaps a million, to 60,000 in fifteen years.

Las Casas, a Dominican priest with a conscience, travelled to Spain to plead for the abolition of native slavery. But without coercion of the natives how could the colony exist? All the natives received as wages was Christianity and they could be good Christians without working in the mines.

The Spanish Government compromised. It abolished the *repartimientos*, or forced labour, in law while its agents in the colony maintained it in fact. Las Casas, haunted at the prospect of seeing before his eyes the total destruction of a population within one generation, hit on the expedient of importing the more robust Negroes from a populous Africa; in 1517, Charles V authorized the export of 15,000 slaves to San Domingo, and thus priest and King launched on the world the American slave-trade and slavery.

The Spanish settlement founded by Columbus was on the south-east of the island. In 1629 some wandering Frenchmen sought a home in the little island of Tortuga, six miles off the north coast of San Domingo, to be followed by Englishmen, and Dutchmen from Santa Cruz. Tortuga was

healthy and in the forests of western San Domingo roamed millions of wild cattle which could be hunted for food and hides. To Tortuga came fugitives from justice, escaped galley-slaves, debtors unable to pay their bills, adventurers seeking adventure or quick fortunes, men of all crimes and all nationalities. French, British and Spaniards slaughtered one another for nearly thirty years, and the British were actually in possession of Tortuga at one time, but by 1659 the French buccaneers prevailed. They sought the suzerainty of France and demanded a chief and some women. From Tortuga they laid a firm basis in San Domingo and moved there. To drive away these persistent intruders the Spaniards organized a great hunt and killed all the bulls they could find in order to ruin the cattle business. The French retaliated by the cultivation of cocoa; then indigo and cotton. Already they knew the sugar-cane. Lacking capital they raided the English island of Jamaica and stole money and 2,000 Negroes. French, British and Spaniards raided and counter-raided and burnt to the ground, but in 1695 the Treaty of Ryswick between France and Spain gave the French a legal right to the western part of the island. In 1734 the colonists began to cultivate coffee. The land was fertile, France offered a good market. But they wanted labour. In addition to Negroes, they brought whites, the *engagés*, who would be freed after a period of years. So little did they bring the Negroes because these were barbarous or black, that the early laws prescribed similar regulations for both black slaves and white *engagés*. But under the regimen of those days the whites could not stand the climate. So the slavers brought more and more Negroes, in numbers that leapt by thousands every year, until the drain from Africa ran into millions.

II

The Owners

Of the three, San Domingo planters, British bourgeoisie and French bourgeoisie, the first and most important were the planters of San Domingo.

On such a soil as San Domingo slavery, only a vicious society could flourish. Nor were the incidental circumstances such as to mitigate the demoralization inherent in such a method of production.

San Domingo is an island of mountain ranges rising in places to 6,000 feet above sea-level. From these flow innumerable streams coalescing into rivers which water the valleys and not inconsiderable plains lying between the hills. Its distance from the equator gives an unusual lusciousness and variety to the natural exuberance of the tropics, and the artificial vegetation was not inferior to the natural. Field upon field, the light green sugar-cane, low and continually rippled in the breeze, enclosed the factory and the dwelling houses like a sea; a few feet above the cane-stalks waved the five-foot leaves of the banana-trees; near the dwelling-houses the branches of the palm, crowning a perfectly rounded and leafless column of sixty or seventy feet, gave forth, like huge feathers, a continuous soothing murmur; while groups of them in the distance, always visible in the unclouded tropical air, looked like clusters of giant umbrellas waiting for the parched and sun-baked traveller. In the season, mango and orange trees, solitary or in groves, were a mass of green leaves and red or golden fruit. Thousands of small, scrupulously tidy coffee-trees rose on the slopes of the hills, and the abrupt and precipitous mountain-sides were covered to the summits with the luxuriant tropical undergrowth and precious hardwood forests of San Domingo. The traveller from Europe was enchanted at his first glimpse of this paradise, in which the ordered beauty of agriculture and the prodigality of Nature competed equally for his surprise and admiration.

But it was monotonous. Year in year out, day after day, it was the same, a little greener in the wet season, a little browner in the dry. The wilder scenery was constantly magnificent, but in the colonist who had seen the same domestic landscape from his earliest hour, it awakened little response. To the emigrant who was at first charmed and exhilarated, monotony bred indifference, which could develop into active dislike, and longing for the seasons returning with the year.

The climate was harsh, and for the Europeans of the eighteenth century without modern knowledge of tropical hygiene almost intolerable. The burning sun and humid atmosphere took heavy toll of all newcomers, European and African alike. The African died, but the European ailments were dreaded by the planters whose knowledge and habits were powerless to combat them. Fever and dysentery in the hot season; cold, rheumatism, nasal catarrhs and diarrhoea in the wet; at all times a disinclination for sustained labour, fostered by the gluttony and lasciviousness bred by abundance and scores of slaves waiting to perform any duty, from pulling off shoes to spending the night.

Indulgence had the white colonial in its grip from childhood. ‘I want an egg,’ said a colonial child. ‘There are none.’ ‘Then I want two.’ This notorious anecdote was characteristic. To the unhealthiness of the climate and the indulgence of every wish were added the open licentiousness and habitual ferocity of his parents, the degradation of human life which surrounded the child on every side.

The ignorance inherent in rural life prior to the industrial revolution was reinforced by the irascibility and the conceit of isolation allied to undisputed domination over hundreds of human beings. The plantations were often miles apart and, in those days of horse-traffic and few or bad roads in a mountainous country, communication with neighbours was difficult and rare. The planters hated the life and sought only to make enough money to retire to France or at least spend a few months in Paris, luxuriating in the amenities of civilization. With so much to eat and drink, there was a lavish hospitality which has remained a tradition, but the majority of the great houses, contrary to the legend, were poorly furnished, and their owners looked on them as rest-houses in the intervals of trips to Paris. Seeking to overcome their abundant leisure and boredom with food, drink, dice and black women, they had long before 1789 lost the simplicity of life and rude energy of those nameless men who laid the foundation of

the colony. A manager and an overseer, and the more intelligent of their slaves were more than sufficient to run their plantations. As soon as they could afford it they left the island, if possible never to return, though they never formed in France so rich and powerful a social and political force as the West Indian interest in England.

The women were subjected to the same evil influences. In the early years of the colony they had been imported like slaves and machinery. Most of the first arrivals were the sweepings of the Paris gutter, bringing to the island 'bodies as corrupt as their manners and serving only to infect the colony'.[1] Another official, asking for women, begged the authorities not to send the 'ugliest they could find in the hospitals'. As late as 1743 official San Domingo was complaining that France still sent girls whose 'aptitude for generation was for the most part destroyed by too great usage'. Projects for some educational system never came to fruition. With increasing wealth the daughters of the richer planters went to Paris where, after a year or two at a finishing-school, they made distinguished matches with the impoverished French nobility. But in the colony they passed their time attiring themselves, singing stupid songs, and listening to the gossip and adulation of their slave attendants. Passion was their chief occupation, stimulated by over-feeding, idleness, and an undying jealousy of the black and Mulatto women who competed so successfully for the favours of their husbands and lovers.

To the men of divers races, classes and types who formed the early population of San Domingo had been added as the years passed a more unified and cohesive element, the offshoots of the French aristocracy. Deprived of political power by Richelieu and converted by Louis XIV into a decorative and administrative appendage of the absolute monarchy, the younger sons of French noblemen found in San Domingo some opportunity to rebuild their shattered fortunes and live the life of the country magnate now denied them in France. They came as officers in the army and officials, and stayed to found fortunes and families. They commanded the militia, administered a rude justice. Arrogant and spendthrift, yet they were a valuable section of white San Domingo society and knit together more firmly a society composed of such diverse and disintegrating elements. But even their education, traditions and pride were not proof against the prevailing corruption, and one could see a 'relation of the de Vaudreils, a Châteauneuf, or Boucicaut, last descendant

of the famous marshal of France, passing his life between a bowl of rum and a Negro concubine'.[2]

Town life is the nurse of civilization. But apart from Port-au-Prince, the capital, and Cap François, the towns of San Domingo at the height of its prosperity were little more than villages. In 1789 St Marc had only 150 houses, Môle St Nicholas, the Gibraltar of the Caribbean Sea, had only 250; Léogane, one of the most important towns in the West Province, consisted of between 300 and 400 houses laid out in fifteen streets; Jacmel, one of the key towns in the South, had only forty. Even Cap François, the Paris of the Antilles and the entrepôt of the European trade, had a population of only 20,000, of whom half were slaves. Yet Le Cap, as it was familiarly called, was a town famous in its time and in its way unique. An incessant activity reigned there, with its harbour always filled with ships and its streets with merchandise. But it too bore the imprint of savagery which seemed inseparable from everything connected with San Domingo. One of the most distinguished colonial historians, Moreau of Saint-Méry, admits that the streets were sewers and that people threw all their garbage into them. The Government begged people in vain not to commit nuisances in the street, to be careful of the disposition of 'faecal matter', not to let sheep, pigs and goats wander loose. No one paid any attention to these injunctions.

In Port-au-Prince, the official capital of the colony, the population washed their dirty linen, made indigo and soaked manioc in the water of the only spring which supplied the town. Despite repeated prohibitions they continued to beat their slaves in the public streets. Nor were the authorities themselves more careful. If it rained at night, one could not walk in the town the next day, and streams of water filled the ditches at the side of the street in which one could hear the croaking of toads. De Wimpffen called Port-au-Prince a Tartar camp, and Moreau de Saint-Méry, himself a colonial, deprecates the sharpness of the expression but admits that it was not entirely inapplicable.

Such culture as there was centred in these towns. In Le Cap there were various masonic and other societies, the most famous of which was the Philadelphia Circle, a body devoting itself to politics, philosophy and literature. But the chief reading of the population consisted of lascivious novels. For amusement there were theatres, not only in Le Cap and Port-

au-Prince, but in such small towns as Léogane and St Marc, where the melodramas and the thrillers of the day were played to packed houses. In 1787 there were three companies in Port-au-Prince alone.

What the towns lacked in intellectual fare they made up for in opportunities of debauchery – gambling-dens (for everyone in San Domingo played and great fortunes were won and lost in a few days), dance-halls, and private brothels whereby the Mulatto women lived in such comfort and luxury that in 1789, of 7,000 Mulatto women in San Domingo, 5,000 were either prostitutes or the kept mistresses of white men.

The regular clergy of San Domingo instead of being a moderating influence were notorious for their irreverence and degeneracy. In the early years they consisted chiefly of unfrocked monks. Later came a better class of priests, but in that turgid, overheated society few were able to withstand the temptations of easy money, easy living, and easy women; many of them lived openly with their concubines. Their greed for money led them to exploit the Negroes with the same ruthlessness as the rest of white San Domingo. About the middle of the eighteenth century one of them used to baptize the same Negroes seven or eight times, for the ceremony amused the slaves and they were willing to pay a small sum for each baptism. As late as 1790 another was competing with the Negro obeah-men for the coppers of the slaves, by selling charms against illness and talismans to insure the success of their petty ventures.

In the towns the great merchants and the wealthy agents of the maritime bourgeoisie were included with the planters as big whites. On the plantations the managers and the stewards were either agents of the absentee owner, or were under the eye of the planter himself and, therefore, subordinate to him. These in the country, and in the towns the small lawyers, the notaries, the clerks, the artisans, the grocers, were known as the small whites.[3] Included among the small whites was a crowd of city vagabonds, fugitives from justice, escaped galley slaves, debtors unable to pay their bills, adventurers seeking adventure or quick fortunes, men of all crimes and all nationalities. From the underworld of two continents they came, Frenchmen and Spaniards, Maltese, Italians, Portuguese and Americans. For whatever a man's origin, record or character, here his white skin made him a person of quality and rejected or

failures in their own country flocked to San Domingo, where consideration was achieved at so cheap a price, money flowed and opportunities of debauchery abounded.

No small white was a servant, no white man did any work that he could get a Negro to do for him. A barber summoned to attend to a customer appeared in silk attire, hat under his arm, sword at his side, cane under his elbow, followed by four Negroes. One of them combed the hair, another dressed it, a third curled it and the fourth finished. While they worked the employer presided over the various operations. At the slightest slackness, at the slightest mistake, he boxed the cheek of the unfortunate slave so hard that often he knocked him over. The slave picked himself up without any sign of resentment, and resumed. The same hand which had knocked over the slave closed on an enormous fee, and the barber took his exit with the same insolence and elegance as before.

This was the type for whom race prejudice was more important than even the possession of slaves, of which they held few. The distinction between a white man and a man of colour was for them fundamental. It was their all. In defence of it they would bring down the whole of their world.

Big whites and small whites did not exhaust the white population of San Domingo. Over them both was the bureaucracy, composed almost entirely of Frenchmen from France, who governed the island. The heads of the bureaucracy were the Governor and the Intendant. The Governor was the official representative of the King, with all that this implies even to this day in the administration of distant colonies. His official salary might be as much as 100,000 livres[4] a year, besides the profits common to such posts in the twentieth as well as in the eighteenth century: the granting of concessions, the acting on the quiet as agent for European merchandise in the colonies and for colonial merchandise in Europe. A French nobleman was as greedy for a governorship of San Domingo as his British counterpart for a viceroyalty of India. In 1787 the Governor was a brother to the French Ambassador in London, and he left the post of Governor to become Minister of Marine.

Next to the Governor was the Intendant, who was responsible for justice, finance and general administration, and sometimes drew a salary of 80,000 livres a year. The Governor was a soldier and aristocrat, the

Intendant was a bureaucrat, and the military and the civil were constantly at variance. But against the local whites they and their staff, the commandants in the districts and the senior officials, represented the King's authority and the commercial privileges of the French bourgeoisie. They could arrest without warrant, they could refuse to carry out the instructions of the Minister, they could force the members of the local advisory councils to resign, could grant favours, pronounce confiscations, increase taxes, in fact their arbitrariness had no legal bounds. 'God was too high and the King too far.'

The colonists hated them. In addition to their absolute power they were wasteful and extravagant, their malversations were constant and enormous, and they treated the local whites with an arrogance and superciliousness that galled these little potentates with their two or three hundred slaves. There were good and bad Governors, good and bad Intendants, as there were good and bad slave-owners. But this was a matter of pure chance. It was the system that was bad.

There was some pretence at local self-government. Both at Le Cap and at Port-au-Prince there were local councils which registered the royal edicts and the decisions of the local government. Shortly before the revolution there was also appointed a council of the richest and most powerful of the whites who were supposed to represent local opinion. But the Intendant, like the Governor in the British Legislative Councils of today, could accept or reject their advice as he pleased.

The bureaucracy, with the source of its power so many thousands of miles away, could not depend only on the two French regiments in the colony. In 1789 the functionaries in San Domingo, where the white population was about 30,000, numbered only 513. Without some mass support government would have been impossible. Bringing with them from France the traditional hostility of the absolute monarchy to the political power of the feudal nobility, the bureaucrats sought a counter-weight to the power of the planters in the small whites of town and country. The chief complaint of the small whites was against the militia which policed the districts and frequently encroached on the Intendant's administration of justice and finance. To these complaints the Intendant was always sympathetic. In 1760 one Intendant went so far as to dissolve the militia altogether and appointed syndics to carry on the local government. The colony was thrown into disorder, the Home Government

had to re-establish the militia and restore its former powers to the military. Straightaway an insurrection broke out in the island, led by the local justices of the peace, lawyers, notaries and prosecutors. The planters complained that the supporters of this rebellion were the lowest sections of the population, in one district three Portuguese Jews, a notary, a steward, a tailor, a shoemaker, a butcher's assistant and a former soldier of the ranks. The scorn of the planters is overwhelming for 'these rascals who have occasioned these troubles and of whom we can say with justice that they are the vilest *canaille*, whose fathers and mothers have been lackeys or domestic servants, or even of an origin still lower'.[5] It was not their low origin which justified the attack of the planters upon the small whites. Tailors, butchers and soldiers from the ranks were to play the decisive part in the French Revolution – and by their spontaneous efforts save Paris from the counter-revolution at home and abroad. But most of the small whites were a rabble and filled no important function in the economy of the colony. If every single one of them had been deported from the country, such work as they did could have been done by free Mulattoes, free blacks, or even slaves. They were not an integral part of San Domingo society, either by function, birth or tradition. But they were white, and as such of use to the bureaucracy. In 1771 we find the Intendant again complaining of military tyranny. Since the militia are re-established, he complains, 'the officers are every day depriving the ordinary judges of all their prerogatives.'

Here then was the first great division, that between great whites and small whites, with the bureaucracy balancing between and encouraging the small whites. Nothing could assuage or solve this conflict. The moment the revolution begins in France these two will spring at each other and fight to a finish.

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There was another class of free men in San Domingo, the free Mulattoes and free blacks. Neither legislation, nor the growth of race prejudice, could destroy the attraction of the black women for the white men of San Domingo. It was characteristic of all classes; the rabble on the shore-front, the planter or overseer who chose a slave to pass the night with him and drove her from his bed to the lash of the slave-driver next morning; a

Governor of the colony, newly arrived from France, who was disturbed at finding himself seized with a passion for the handsomest of his four black maids.

In the early days every Mulatto was free up to the age of twenty-four, not by law, but because white men were so few in comparison with the slaves that the masters sought to bind these intermediates to themselves rather than let them swell the ranks of their enemies. In those early years race prejudice was not strong. The Negro Code in 1685 authorized marriage between the white and the slave who had children by him, the ceremony freeing herself and her children. The Code gave the free Mulattoes and the free Negroes equal rights with the whites. But as the white population grew larger, white San Domingo discarded the convention, and enslaved or sold their numerous children like any king in the African jungle. All efforts to prevent concubinage failed, and the Mulatto children multiplied, to be freed or to remain slaves at the caprice of their fathers. Many were freed, becoming artisans and household servants. They began to amass property, and the whites, while adding unceasingly to the number of Mulattoes, began to restrict and harass them with malicious legislation. The whites threw as much as possible of the burdens of the country upon them. On attaining their majority they were compelled to join the *maréchaussée*, a police organization for arresting fugitive Negroes, protecting travellers on the high road, capturing dangerous Negroes, fighting against the maroons, all the difficult and dangerous tasks which the local whites might command. After three years' service in the *maréchaussée*, they had to join the local militia, provide their own arms, ammunition and accoutrements, and, without pay or allowance of any kind, serve at the discretion of the white commanding officer. Such duties as the forced upkeep of the roads were made to fall on them with extra severity. They were excluded from the naval and military departments, from the practice of law, medicine, and divinity, and all public offices or places of trust. A white man could trespass on a Mulatto's property, seduce his wife or daughter, insult him in any way he chose, certain that at any hint of resentment or revenge all the whites and the Government would rush out ready to lynch. In legal actions the decision nearly always went against the Mulattoes, and to terrorize them into submission a free man of colour who struck a white man, whatever his station in life, was to have his right arm cut off.

But by some fortunate chance, the amount of property that they could hold was not, as in the English islands, limited. Of fine physique and intelligent, administering their enterprises themselves without exhausting their fortunes in extravagant trips to Paris, they began to acquire wealth as master-artisans and then as proprietors. As they began to establish themselves, the jealousy and envy of the white colonists were transformed into ferocious hatred and fear. They divided the offspring of white and black and intermediate shades into 128 divisions. The true Mulatto was the child of the pure black and the pure white. The child of the white and the Mulatto woman was a quarteron with ninety-six parts white and thirty-two parts black. But the quarteron could be produced by the white and the marabou in the proportion of 88 to 40, or by the white and the sacatra, in the proportion of 72 to 56 and so on all through the 128 varieties. But the sang-mêlé with 127 white parts and one black part was still a man of colour.

In a slave society the mere possession of personal freedom is a valuable privilege, and the laws of Greece and Rome testify that severe legislation against slaves and freedmen have nothing to do with the race question. Behind all this elaborate tom-foolery of quarteron, sacatra and marabou, was the one dominating fact of San Domingo society – fear of the slaves. The mothers of the Mulattoes were in the slave-gangs, they had half-brothers there, and however much the Mulatto himself might despise this half of his origin, he was at home among the slaves and, in addition to his wealth and education, could have an influence among them which a white man could never have. Furthermore, apart from physical terror, the slaves were to be kept in subjection by associating inferiority and degradation with the most obvious distinguishing mark of the slave – the black skin. Few of the slaves being able to read, the colonists did not hesitate to say openly: ‘It is essential to maintain a great distance between those who obey and those who command. One of the surest means of doing this is the perpetuation of the imprint that slavery has once given.’ No Mulatto, therefore, whatever his number of white parts, was allowed to assume the name of his white father.

But despite these restrictions the Mulattoes continued to make progress. By 1755, little more than three generations after the Negro Code, they were beginning to fill the colony, and their growing numbers and riches were causing alarm to the whites.

They lived (ran a report) [6] like their forebears, on the local vegetables, drinking no wine, confining themselves to the local liquors brewed from the sugar cane. Thus their personal consumption contributed nothing to the maintenance of the important trade with France. Their sober ways of living and their small expenditure enabled them to put away most of their income every year, they accumulated immense capital, and grew more arrogant as their wealth increased. They bid for all properties on sale in the various districts, and raised prices to such fantastic heights that the whites who were not wealthy could not buy, or ruined themselves by attempting to keep pace with them. Thus, in some districts, the finest properties were in the possession of the half-castes, and yet they were everywhere the least ready to submit to statute labour and the public dues. Their plantations were the sanctuary and asylum of the freedmen who had neither work nor profession and of numerous fugitive slaves who had run away from their gangs. Being so rich they imitated the style of the whites and sought to drown all traces of their origin. They were trying to get high commands in the militia. Those who had ability enough to make them forget the vice of their origin were even seeking places in the judiciary. If this sort of thing went on, they would soon be making marriages with distinguished families, which would bind these families in alliance with the slaves in the gangs, whence the mothers of these upstarts came.

This was no cantankerous croak from a jealous colonist. It was an official memorandum from the bureaucracy to the Minister. Increasing numbers, increasing wealth were giving the Mulattoes greater pride and sharpening their resentment against their humiliations. Some of them were sending their children to France to be educated, and in France, even a hundred years before the revolution, there was little colour prejudice. Up to 1716 every Negro slave who touched French soil was free, and after an interval of fifty years another decree in 1762 reaffirmed this. In 1739 a slave served as trumpeter in the royal regiment of Carabineers; young Mulattoes were received in the military corps reserved to the young nobility and in the offices of the magistracy; they served as pages at court.[7] Yet these men had to go back to San Domingo and submit to the discriminations and brutality of the San Domingo whites. And as the Mulattoes began to press against the barriers, white San Domingo passed a series of laws which for maniacal savagery are unique in the modern world, and (we would have said up to 1933) not likely to be paralleled

again in history. The Council of Port-au-Prince, holding up the race question as a screen, wanted to exterminate them. Thus the whites could purge their system of a growing menace, get rid of men from whom they had borrowed money, and seize much fine property. The Council proposed to banish all the half-castes up to the degree of quarteron to the mountains (‘which they would bring into cultivation’), to forbid the sale of all property on the plains to half-castes, to deny them the right of acquiring any house-property, to force all those up to the degree of quarteron and all those whites who had married people of colour to that degree, to sell all their slaves within a year. ‘For,’ said the Council, ‘these are dangerous people, more friendly to the slaves, to whom they are still attached, than to us who oppress them by the subordination which we demand and the scorn with which we treat them. In a revolution, in a moment of tension, they would be the first to break the yoke which weighed on them, the more because they are richer and are now accustomed to have white debtors, since when they no longer have sufficient respect for us.’ But the colonists could not carry out these sweeping plans. The Mulattoes, unlike the German Jews, were already too numerous, and the revolution would have begun there and then.

The colonists had to content themselves with throwing on these rivals every humiliation that ingenuity and malice could devise. Between 1758 and the revolution the persecutions mounted.[8] The Mulattoes were forbidden to wear swords and sabres and European dress. They were forbidden to buy ammunition except by special permission with the exact quantity stated. They were forbidden to meet together ‘on the pretext’ of weddings, feasts or dances, under penalty of a fine for the first offence, imprisonment for the next, and worse to follow. They were forbidden to stay in France. They were forbidden to play European games. The priests were forbidden to draw up any documents for them. In 1781, eight years before the revolution, they were forbidden to take the titles of Monsieur and Madame. Up to 1791, if a white man ate in their house, they could not sit at table with him. The only privilege the whites allowed them was the privilege of lending white men money.

Short of insurrection, there was no way out of this. And until the Bastille fell the efforts of the Mulattoes to emancipate themselves assumed strange forms. De Vaissière has unearthed a story, which we can understand better after Hitlerism than we could have done before. In 1771

the Sieur Chapuzet had obtained from the Council of Le Cap a decree which gave him the privileges of a white man, his obscure career preventing any questions being raised about his origin. A little later he attempted to become an officer in the militia. Four lieutenants in the militia of the North Plain made minute researches into the records and presented an exact genealogy of the Chapuzet family, proving that a maternal ancestor, 150 years back, was a Negro from St Kitts. De Chapuzet defended himself, ‘in law and in fact’, in law because the power of deciding on the status of a citizen was the prerogative of the Government and not of private individuals, in fact because in 1624 there were no Negroes in St Kitts. Colonial history was now the terrain. With extracts from the historians the whites proved that there were slaves in St Kitts in 1624. Chapuzet admitted defeat and left for France.

Three years after, he returned, calling himself M. Chapuzet de Guérin, or familiarly M. le Guérin. Aristocrat at least in name, by means of a sponsor he again brought his case for being considered a white man before the courts. Once more he was defeated. But Chapuzet was a man of resource. He claimed that this ancestor, ‘the St Kitts Negro’, was no Negro, but a Carib, a free-born Carib, a member of ‘that noble race on whom the French and Spaniards had imposed the law of conquest’. Chapuzet triumphed. In 1779 two decrees of the Council declared that his claims were justified. But he did not get his rank. The local officials dared not appoint him. Following the publication of the decrees, the people of colour abandoned themselves to such demonstrations of joy and foolish hopes that the consequences of Chapuzet's appointment might have been very dangerous. The doors of Chapuzet's lawyer were besieged with quarterons and other fair-skinned Mulattoes seeking to have their remote slave ancestors transformed into free and noble Caribs.

The advantages of being white were so obvious that race prejudice against the Negroes permeated the minds of the Mulattoes who so bitterly resented the same thing from the whites. Black slaves and Mulattoes hated each other. Even while in words and, by their success in life, in many of their actions, Mulattoes demonstrated the falseness of the white claim to inherent superiority, yet the man of colour who was nearly white despised the man of colour who was only half-white, who in turn despised the man of colour who was only quarter white, and so on through all the shades.

The free blacks, comparatively speaking, were not many, and so despised was the black skin that even a Mulatto slave felt himself superior to the free black man. The Mulatto, rather than be slave to a black, would have killed himself.

It all reads like a cross between a nightmare and a bad joke. But these distinctions still exercise their influence in the West Indies today.[9] While whites in Britain dislike the half-caste more than the full-blooded Negro, whites in the West Indies favour the half-caste against the blacks. These, however, are matters of social prestige. But the racial discriminations in Africa today are, as they were in San Domingo, matters of Government policy, enforced by bullets and bayonets, and we have lived to see the rulers of a European nation make the Aryan grandmother as precious for their fellow-countrymen as the Carib ancestor was to the Mulatto. The cause in each case is the same – the justification of plunder by any obvious differentiation from those holding power. It is as well to remind the reader that a trained observer travelling in the West Indies in 1935 says of the coloured men there, 'A few at the top, judges, barristers, doctors, whatever their shade of colour, could hold their own in any circle. A great many more are the intellectual equals or superiors of their own white contemporaries.'[10] Many of the Mulattoes and free blacks were backward in comparison to the whites but their capacity was perfectly obvious in San Domingo in the years before 1789. It took gunpowder and cold steel to convince the San Domingo whites. And if, as we have seen, the most intelligent of them did not delude themselves about the materialist origins of their prejudice against the Mulattoes, we yet will make a great mistake if we think that they were hypocrites when they claimed that a white skin guaranteed to the owner superior abilities and entitled him to a monopoly of the best that the colony afforded.

'Upon the different forms of property, upon the social conditions of existence as foundation, there is built a super-structure of diversified and characteristic sentiments, illusions, habits of thought, and outlooks on life in general. The class as a whole creates and shapes them out of its material foundation, and out of the corresponding social relationships. The individual in whom they arise, through tradition and education, may fancy them to be the true determinants, the real origin of his activities.'[11] On this common derivation of prejudice, small whites, big whites and

bureaucracy were united against Mulattoes. It had been so for one hundred and fifty years, and therefore it would always be so. But would it? The higher bureaucrats, cultivated Frenchmen, arrived in the island without prejudice; and looking for mass support used to help the Mulattoes a little. And Mulattoes and big whites had a common bond – property. Once the revolution was well under way the big whites would have to choose between their allies of race and their allies of property. They would not hesitate long.

Such was the society of this famous colony. These were the people, and this the life, for whom in part so much blood was shed and so much suffering borne. The best minds of the time had no illusions about it. Baron de Wimpffen, who saw the colony in 1790 at the very summit of its prosperity, one day saw a slave leaning on the handle of his hoe, looking sadly into the sunset. 'What are you doing, Nazimbo?' he asked. 'What are you looking at?' Nazimbo extended his hand towards the setting sun. 'I see my own country,' he replied, and tears rolled from his eyes. 'I saw my own country there also,' said de Wimpffen to himself, 'and I have the hope of seeing it again one day, but you, poor Negro, will never see yours again.' Educated Liberal and common slave alike detested the place. A few months later de Wimpffen left and put his opinion on record. It is a fitting epitaph of that society which within three years was to be destroyed. 'Do you wish to know my final word on this country? It is that the more I get to know the men who inhabit it, the more I congratulate myself on leaving it… When one is what the greater part of the planters are, one is born to own slaves. When one is what the greater part of the slaves are, one is born to be a slave. In this country everybody is in his place.'

Prosperity is not a moral question and the justification of San Domingo was its prosperity. Never for centuries had the western world known such economic progress. By 1754, two years before the beginning of the Seven Years' War, there were 599 plantations of sugar and 3,379 of indigo. During the Seven Years' War (1756 – 1763) the French marine, swept off the sea by the British Navy, could not bring the supplies on which the colony depended, the extensive smuggling trade could not supply the deficiency, thousands of slaves died from starvation and the upward rise of production, though not halted, was diminished. But after the Treaty of

Paris in 1763 the colony made a great stride forward. In 1767 it exported seventy-two million pounds' weight of raw sugar and fifty-one million pounds of white, a million pounds of indigo and two million pounds of cotton, and quantities of hides, molasses, cocoa and rum. Smuggling, which was winked at by the authorities, raised the official figures by at least twenty-five per cent. Nor was it only in quantity that San Domingo excelled but in quality. Each coffee tree produced on an average a pound weight, equal sometimes to that of Mocha. Cotton grew naturally, even without care, in stony ground and in the crevices of the rocks. Indigo also grew spontaneously. Tobacco had a larger leaf there than in any other part of the Americas and sometimes equalled in quality the produce of Havana. The kernel of San Domingo cocoa was more acidulated than that of Venezuela and was not inferior in other respects, experience proving that the chocolate made of the two cocoas in combination had a more delicate flavour than that made from the cocoa of Venezuela alone.

If on no earthly spot was so much misery concentrated as on a slave-ship, then on no portion of the globe did its surface in proportion to its dimensions yield so much wealth as the colony of San Domingo.

And yet it was this very prosperity which would lead to the revolution.

From the beginning the colonists were at variance with the French Government and the interests it represented. The French, like every other Government in those days, looked upon colonies as existing exclusively for the profit of the metropolis. Known as the Mercantile system in England, the French called this economic tyranny by a more honest name, the Exclusive. Whatever manufactured goods the colonists needed they were compelled to buy from France. They could sell their produce only to France. The goods were to be transported only in French ships. Even the raw sugar produced in the colonies was to be refined in the mother-country, and the French imposed heavy duties on refined sugar of colonial origin. ‘The colonies,’ said Colbert, ‘are founded by and for the metropolis.’ This was not true. The colonists had founded San Domingo themselves, and the falsehood of the claim made the exploitation all the harder to bear.

In 1664 the French Government, in accordance with the custom of those days, handed over the rights of trade with San Domingo to a private company. But the monopolists either could not or would not send out all

the goods that the colonists wanted, and charged them nearly twice as much as they were accustomed to pay. The colonists revolted and the Governor was compelled to ease the restrictions. In 1722 the same thing happened. Agents received from the company the exclusive grant of the African trade, in return for supplying San Domingo with 2,000 Negroes every year. But by 1720 the colonists were needing 8,000 slaves a year, and they knew that in addition to supplying them with only one-quarter of their needs, the company would raise the price. There was another insurrection. The colonists arrested the Governor and put him in prison, and the Government had to modify the privileges of the company. The colonists saw themselves held in check by the Exclusive for the benefit of the metropolis, and as their prosperity grew they found the restrictions more and more intolerable. Political dependence on the mother-country was now retarding the economic growth of San Domingo. The colonists wished to shake off these shackles as Britain's American colonies were to shake off theirs. Thus if big whites and small whites were in permanent conflict with each other, they were united against the Mulattoes on the one hand and against the French bourgeoisie on the other. They could persecute the Mulattoes, but against the French bourgeoisie they could do nothing but rage. Long before 1789 the French bourgeoisie was the most powerful economic force in France, and the slave-trade and the colonies were the basis of its wealth and power.

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The slave-trade and slavery were the economic basis of the French Revolution. ‘Sad irony of human history,’ comments Jaurès. ‘The fortunes created at Bordeaux, at Nantes, by the slave-trade, gave to the bourgeoisie that pride which needed liberty and contributed to human emancipation.’ Nantes was the centre of the slave-trade. As early as 1666,108 ships went to the coast of Guinea and took on board 37,430 slaves, [12] to a total value of more than 37 millions, giving the Nantes bourgeoisie 15 to 20 per cent on their money. In 1700 Nantes was sending fifty ships a year to the West Indies with Irish salt beef, linen for the household and for clothing the slaves, and machinery for sugar-mills. Nearly all the industries which developed in France during the eighteenth century had their origin in goods or commodities destined either for the coast of Guinea or for America. The capital from the slave-trade fertilized them; though the

bourgeoisie traded in other things than slaves, upon the success or failure of the traffic everything else depended.[13]

Some ships took on the way wine from Madeira for the colonists and dried turtle from Cape Verde for the slaves. In return they brought back colonial produce to Nantes whence Dutch vessels took it to Northern Europe. Some made the return journey by way of Spain and Portugal, exchanging their colonial cargo for the products of those countries. Sixty ships from Rochelle and Oberon brought their salted cod to Nantes, to go to the inland market or out to the colonies to feed the slaves. The year 1758 saw the first manufactory of Indian cloth, to weave the raw cotton of India and the West Indian islands.

The planters and small manufacturers of San Domingo were able to establish themselves only by means of the capital advanced by the maritime bourgeoisie. By 1789 the Nantes merchants alone had fifty millions invested in the West Indies.

Bordeaux had begun with the wine industry which gave its ship-builders and navigators an opportunity to trade all over the world; then came brandy, also to all ports, but above all to the colonies. By the middle of the eighteenth century, sixteen factories refined 10,000 tons of raw sugar from San Domingo every year, using nearly 4,000 tons of charcoal. Local factories supplied the town with jars, dishes and bottles. The trade was cosmopolitan – Flemings, Germans, Dutchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen came to live in Bordeaux, contributing to the general expansion and amassing riches for themselves. Bordeaux traded with Holland, Germany, Portugal, Venice, and Ireland, but slavery and the colonial trade were the fount and origin and sustenance of this thriving industry and far-flung commerce.

Marseilles was the great centre for the Mediterranean and Eastern trade, and a royal decree at the beginning of the century had attempted to exclude it from the trade with the colonies. The attempt failed. San Domingo was the special centre of the Marseilles trade. Marseilles sent there not only the wines of Provence: in 1789 there were in Marseilles twelve sugar refineries, nearly as many as in Bordeaux.

In the early years most of this trade had been carried in foreign-built or foreign-owned ships. But by 1730 the maritime bourgeois began to build themselves. In 1778 Bordeaux ship-owners constructed seven vessels, in

1784 they constructed thirty-two, with a total of 115 for the six years. A Marseilles ship-owner, Georges Roux, could fit out a fleet on his own account in order to take vengeance on the English fleet for the prizes it had taken.

Nantes, Bordeaux and Marseilles were the chief centres of the maritime bourgeoisie, but Orleans, Dieppe, Bercy-Paris, a dozen great towns, refined raw sugar and shared in the subsidiary industries.[14] A large part of the hides worked in France came from San Domingo. The flourishing cotton industry of Normandy drew its raw cotton in part from the West Indies, and in all its ramifications the cotton trade occupied the population of more than a hundred French towns. In 1789 exchanges with the American colonies were 296 millions. France exported to the islands seventy-eight millions of flour, salted meats, wines and stuffs. The colonies sent to France 218 millions of sugar, coffee, cocoa, wood, indigo and hides. Of the 218 millions imported only seventy-one millions were consumed in France. The rest was exported after preparation. The total value of the colonies represented 3,000 millions, and on them depended the livelihood of a number of Frenchmen variously estimated at between two and six millions. By 1789 San Domingo was the market of the new world. It received in its ports 1,587 ships, a greater number than Marseilles, and France used for the San Domingo trade alone 750 great vessels employing 24,000 sailors. In 1789 Britain's export trade would be twenty-seven million pounds, that of France seventeen million pounds, of which the trade of San Domingo would account for nearly eleven million pounds. The whole of Britain's colonial trade in that year amounted to only five million pounds.[15]

The maritime bourgeoisie would not hear of any change in the Exclusive. They had the ear of the Minister and the Government, and not only were the colonists refused permission to trade with foreign countries, but the circulation of all French currency, except the very lowest, was forbidden in the islands, lest the colonists use it to purchase foreign goods. In such a method of trade they were at the mercy of the bourgeoisie. In 1774 their indebtedness was 200 millions, and by 1789 it was estimated at between 300 and 500 millions.[16] If the colonists complained of the Exclusive, the bourgeoisie complained that the colonists would not pay their debts, and agitated for stricter measures against the contraband.

Rich as was the French bourgeoisie, the colonial trade was too big for it. The British bourgeois, most successful of slave-traders, sold thousands of smuggled slaves every year to the French colonists and particularly to San Domingo. But even while they sold the slaves to San Domingo, the British were watching the progress of this colony with alarm and with envy. After the independence of America in 1783, this amazing French colony suddenly made such a leap as almost to double its production between 1783 and 1789. In those years Bordeaux alone invested 100 millions in San Domingo. The British bourgeois were the great rivals of the French. All through the eighteenth century they fought in every part of the world. The French had jumped gleefully in to help drive them out of America. San Domingo was now incomparably the finest colony in the world and its possibilities seemed limitless. The British bourgeoisie investigated the new situation in the West Indies, and on the basis of what it saw, prepared a bombshell for its rivals. Without slaves San Domingo was doomed. The British colonies had enough slaves for all the trade they were ever likely to do. With the tears rolling down their cheeks for the poor suffering blacks, those British bourgeois who had no West Indian interests set up a great howl for the abolition of the slave-trade.

A venal race of scholars, profiteering panders to national vanity, have conspired to obscure the truth about abolition. Up to 1783 the British bourgeoisie had taken the slave-trade for granted. In 1773 and again in 1774, the Jamaica Assembly, afraid of insurrection and seeking to raise revenue, taxed the importation of slaves. In great wrath the British Board of Trade disallowed the measures and told the Governor that he would be sacked if he gave his sanction to any similar Bill.[17] Well-meaning persons talked of the iniquity of slavery and the slave-trade, as well-meaning persons in 1938 talked about the native question in Africa or the misery of the Indian peasant. Dr Johnson toasted the next slave insurrection in the West Indies. Stray members of parliament introduced Bills for the abolition of the slave-trade which the House rejected without much bother. In 1783 Lord North turned down a petition against the trade: [18] the petition did credit to the Christian feelings, and to the humane breast, etc., etc., but the trade was necessary. With the loss of America, however, a new situation arose.

The British found that by the abolition of the mercantile system with America, they gained instead of losing. It was the first great lesson in the advantages of free trade. But if Britain gained the British Wet Indies suffered. The rising industrial bourgeoisie, feeling its way to free trade and a greater exploitation of India, began to abuse the West Indies, called them ‘sterile rocks’, [19] and asked if the interest and independence of the nation should be sacrificed to 72,000 masters and 400,000 slaves.[20]

The industrial bourgeois were beginning their victorious attack upon the agricultural monopoly which was to culminate in the Repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. The West Indian sugar-producers were monopolists whose methods of production afforded an easy target, and Adam Smith[21] and Arthur Young, [22] the forerunners of the new era, condemned the whole principle of slave-labour as the most expensive in the world. Besides, why not get sugar from India? India, after the loss of America, assumed a new importance. The British experimented with sugar in Bengal, received glowing reports and in 1791 the first shipments arrived.[23] In 1793 Mr Randle Jackson would preach to the company's shareholders a little sermon on the new orientation. ‘It seemed as if Providence, when it took from us America, would not leave its favourite people without an ample substitute; or who should say that Providence had not taken from us one member, more seriously to impress us with the value of another.’[24] It might not be good theology, but it was very good economics. Pitt and Dundas saw a chance of capturing the continental market from France by East India sugar. There was cotton and indigo. The production of cotton in India doubled in a few years. Indian free labour cost a penny a day.

But the West Indian vested interests were strong, statesmen do not act merely on speculation, and these possibilities by themselves would not have accounted for any sudden change in British policy. It was the miraculous growth of San Domingo that was decisive. Pitt found that some fifty per cent of the slaves imported into the British islands were sold to the French colonies.[25] It was the British slave-trade, therefore, which was increasing French colonial produce and putting the European market into French hands. Britain was cutting its own throat. And even the profits from this export were not likely to last. Already a few years before the slave merchants had failed for £700,000 in a year.[26] The French, seeking to provide their own slaves, were encroaching in Africa and increasing their

share of the trade every year. Why should they continue to buy from Britain? Holland and Spain were doing the same. By 1786 Pitt, a disciple of Adam Smith, had seen the light clearly. He asked Wilberforce to undertake the campaign.[27] Wilberforce represented the important division of Yorkshire, he had a great reputation, all the humanity, justice, stain on national character, etc., etc., would sound well coming from him. Pitt was in a hurry – it was important to bring the trade to a complete stop quickly and suddenly. The French had neither the capital nor the organization to make good the deficiency at once and he would ruin San Domingo at a stroke. In 1787 he warned Wilberforce that if he did not bring the motion in, somebody else would, [28] and in 1788 he informed the Cabinet that he would not stay in it with those who opposed.[29] Pitt was fairly certain of success in England. With truly British nerve he tried to persuade the European Governments to abolish the trade on the score of inhumanity. The French Government discussed the proposal amicably, but by May 1789 the British Ambassador wrote sadly that it seemed as if all the French Government's negotiations had been to ‘compliment us and to keep us quiet and in good humour’.[30] The Dutch, less polite, gave a more abrupt negative. But here a great stroke of luck befell Pitt. France was then stirring with pre-revolutionary attacks on all obvious abuses, and one year after the Abolitionist Society had been formed in Britain, a group of Liberals in France, Brissot, Mirabeau, Pétion, Condorcet, Abbé Grégoire, all the great names of the first years of the revolution, followed the British example and formed a society, the Friends of the Negro. The leading spirit was Brissot, a journalist who had seen slavery in the United States. The society aimed at the abolition of slavery, published a journal, agitated. This suited the British down to the ground. Clarkson went to Paris, to stimulate ‘the slumbering energies’[31] of the society, gave it money, supplied France with British anti-slavery propaganda.[32] Despite the names that were to become so famous and a large membership, we must beware of thinking that the Friends of the Negro represented a force. The colonists took them seriously, the maritime bourgeoisie did not. It was the French Revolution which, with unexpected swiftness, would drag these eloquent Frenchmen out of the stimulating excitement of philanthropic propaganda and put them face to face with economic reality.

These then were the forces which in the decade preceding the French Revolution linked San Domingo to the economic destiny of three continents and the social and political conflicts of that pregnant age. A trade and method of production so cruel and so immoral that it would wilt before the publicity which a great revolution throws upon the sources of wealth; the powerful British Government determined to wreck French commerce in the Antilles, agitating at home and intriguing in France among men who, unbeknown to themselves, would soon have power in their hands; the colonial world (itself divided) and the French bourgeoisie, each intent on its own purposes and, unaware of the approaching danger, drawing apart instead of closer together. Not one courageous leader, many courageous leaders were needed, but the science of history was not what it is today and no man living then could foresee, as we can foresee today, the coming upheavals.[33] Mirabeau indeed said that the colonists slept on the edge of Vesuvius, but for centuries the same thing had been said and the slaves had never done anything.

How could anyone seriously fear for such a wonderful colony? Slavery seemed eternal and the profits mounted. Never before, and perhaps never since, has the world seen anything proportionately so dazzling as the last years of pre-revolutionary San Domingo. Between 1783 and 1789 production nearly doubled. Between 1764 and 1771 the average importation of slaves varied between ten and fifteen thousand. In 1786 it was 27,000, and from 1787 onwards the colony was taking more than 40,000 slaves a year. But economic prosperity is no guarantee of social stability. That rests on the constanly shifting equilibrium between the classes. It was the prosperity of the bourgeoisie that started the English revolution of the seventeenth century. With every stride in production the colony was marching to its doom.

The enormous increase of slaves was filling the colony with native Africans, more resentful, more intractable, more ready for rebellion than the creole Negro. Of the half-a-million slaves in the colony in 1789, more than two-thirds had been born in Africa.

These slaves were being used for the opening up of new lands. There was no time to allow for the period of acclimatization, known as the seasoning, and they died like flies. From the earliest days of the colony towards the middle of the eighteenth century, there had been some improvement in the treatment of the slaves, but this enormous number of

newcomers who had to be broken and terrorized into labour and submission caused an increase in fear and severity. In 1784 the administrators, who visited one of the slave shops which sometimes served as a marketplace instead of the deck of the slaver, reported a revolting picture of dead and dying thrown pell-mell into the filth. The Le Jeune case took place in 1788. In 1790 de Wimpffen states that not one article of the Negro Code was obeyed. He himself had sat at table with a woman, beautiful, rich and very much admired, who had had a careless cook thrown into the oven.

The problem of feeding this enormous increase in the slave population was making the struggle between the planters and the maritime bourgeoisie over the Exclusive more bitter than ever, and the planters after 1783 had forced a slight breach in the straitjacket which clasped them. Having tasted blood they wanted more.

Mulattoes educated in Paris during the Seven Years' War had come home, and their education and accomplishments filled the colonists with hatred and envy and fear. It was these last years that saw the fiercest legislation against them. Forbidden to go to France, where they learnt things that were not good for them, they stayed at home to increase the strength of the dissatisfied.

With the growth of trade and of profits, the number of planters who could afford to leave their estates in charge of managers grew, and by 1789, in addition to the maritime bourgeois, there was a large group of absentee proprietors in France linked to the aristocracy by marriage, for whom San Domingo was nothing else but a source of revenue to be spent in the luxurious living of aristocratic Paris. So far had these parasites penetrated into the French aristocracy that a memoir from San Domingo to the King could say: ‘Sire, your court is creole,’ without too much stretching of the truth.

The prosperity affected even the slaves. More of them could save money, buy their freedom, and enter the promised land.

This was the San Domingo of 1789, the most profitable colony the world had ever known; to the casual eye the most flourishing and prosperous possession on the face of the globe; to the analyst a society torn by inner and outer contradictions which in four years would split that structure into so many pieces that they could never be put together again.

It was the French bourgeoisie which pressed the button. This strange San Domingo society was but a garish exaggeration, a crazy caricature, of the *ancien régime* in France. The royalist bureaucracy, incompetent and wasteful, could not manage the finances of France; the aristocracy and the clergy bled the peasantry dry, impeded the economic development of the country, gobbled up all the best places, and considered themselves almost as superior to the able and vigorous bourgeois as the white planters considered themselves superior to the Mulattoes.

But the French bourgeoisie too was proud and no members of it were prouder than the maritime bourgeois. We have seen their wealth. They knew that they were the foundation of the country's prosperity. They were buying up the land of the aristocracy. They built great schools and universities, they read Voltaire and Rousseau, they sent their linen to the colonies to be washed and to get the right colour and scent, they sent their wine for two or three voyages to the colonies and back to give it the right flavour. They, along with the other bourgeois, chafed at their social disadvantages; the chaotic state of French administration and finance handicapped them in their business. A hard winter in 1788 brought matters to a head. The monarchy was already bankrupt, the aristocracy made a bid to recover its former power, the peasants began to revolt, and the bourgeoisie saw that the time had come for it to govern the country on the English model in collaboration with its allies, the radical aristocracy. In the agitation which began the French Revolution, the maritime bourgeoisie took the lead. The bourgeoisie of Dauphiné and Brittany, with their ports of Marseilles and Nantes, attacked the monarchy even before the official opening of the States-General, and Mirabeau, the first leader of the revolution, was the deputy for Marseilles.

From all over the country the cahiers, or lists of grievances, poured in. But the French people, like the vast majority of Europeans today, had too many grievances of their own to be concerned about the sufferings of Africans, and only a few cahiers, chiefly from clergymen, demanded the abolition of slavery. The States-General met. Mirabeau, Pétion, Mayor of Paris, Abbé Grégoire, Condorcet, all members of the Friends of the Negro, were deputies, all pledged to abolition. But abolition for the maritime bourgeois was ruin. For the moment, however, the States-General grappled with the King.

While the French bourgeoisie led the assault on the absolute monarchy at home, the planters followed suit in the colonies. And, as in France, the geographical divisions of San Domingo and their historical development shaped the revolutionary movement and the coming insurrection of the slaves.

The pride of the colony was the great North Plain of which Le Cap was the chief port. Bounded on the north by the ocean, and on the south by a ridge of mountains running almost the length of the island, it was about fifty miles in length and between ten and twenty miles in breadth. Cultivated since 1670, it was covered with plantations within easy reach of each other. Le Cap was the centre of the island's economic, social and political life. In any revolutionary upheaval, the planters of the North Plain and the merchants and lawyers of Le Cap would take the lead. (But the slave-gangs of the North Plain, in close proximity to each other and the sooner aware of the various changes in the political situation, would be correspondingly ready for political action.)

Very different was the West Province, with its isolated plantations scattered over wide areas. In districts like the Artibonite, Verrettes, Mirabelais, and St Marc, there were many Mulatto proprietors, some of great wealth.

The South Province was a sort of pariah, somewhat sparsely populated, with a majority of Mulattoes. The eastern end, Cape Tiburon, was only some fifty miles from Jamaica and here the contraband trade was particularly strong.

Early in 1788 the North Province took the lead. It formed a secret committee to secure representation in the States-General. In Paris the group of wealthy absentee noblemen formed a committee for the same purpose, the two groups collaborated and the Paris noblemen refused to accept the veto of the King. At the end of 1788 the colonists summoned electoral assemblies and elected a delegation, some of whom consisted of their allies in Paris. In their cahier they claimed abolition of military justice and the institution of a civil judiciary; all legislation and taxes to be voted by provincial assemblies subject only to the approval of the King and a Colonial Committee sitting at Paris but elected by themselves. By restricting political rights to owners of land the planters effectively excluded the small whites who took little interest in all this agitation. Of the slaves and Mulattoes, they said not a word. Slaves did not count, and

the Mulattoes secured permission from the frightened bureaucracy to send a deputation to Paris on their own account. But a number of the planters at home, and quite a few in Paris, the Club Massiac, viewed this desire to be represented in the States-General with distrust. The agitation for abolition of the slave-trade in England, the propaganda of the Friends of the Negro, the revolutionary temper of France, filled them with foreboding. Representation in the States-General by a few deputies could effect nothing, and it would bring the full glare of publicity and awakening political interest on the state of society in San Domingo, which was exactly what they did not want. But while the pro-representation group were in a minority, having a positive aim they were bold and confident. Their opponents, with bad consciences and aiming only at avoiding trouble, could oppose no effective resistance. Colonial representation in a metropolitan assembly was an innovation unheard of at that time, but the San Domingo representatives, profiting by the revolutionary ferment in Paris, circumvented the objections of the King and Minister. They petitioned the nobility who cold-shouldered them. But when Louis tried to intimidate the Third Estate, and the deputies went to the tennis-court and swore that being the representatives of the people they would never adjourn, Gouy d'Arsy, leader of the colonists, boldly led his group of colonial noblemen into this historic meeting. Out of gratitude for this unexpected support, the bourgeoisie welcomed them, and thus France admitted the principle of colonial representation. Full of confidence these slave-owners claimed eighteen seats' but Mirabeau turned fiercely on them: 'You claim representation proportionate to the number of the inhabitants. The free blacks are proprietors and tax-payers, and yet they have not been allowed to vote. And as for the slaves, either they are men or they are not; if the colonists consider them to be men, let them free them and make them electors and eligible for seats; if the contrary is the case, have we, in apportioning deputies according to the population of France, taken into consideration the number of our horses and our mules?'

San Domingo was allowed only six deputies. In less than five minutes the great Liberal orator had placed the case of the Friends of the Negro squarely before the whole of France in unforgettable words. The San Domingo representatives realized at last what they had done; they had tied the fortunes of San Domingo to the assembly of a people in revolution and

thenceforth the history of liberty in France and of slave emancipation in San Domingo is one and indivisible.

Unaware of these portentous developments the colonists in San Domingo were going from victory to victory. As in France, the last months of 1788 in San Domingo had been hard. France had had to prohibit the export of grain, and under these circumstances the Exclusive was a tyrannical imposition threatening the island with famine. The Governor opened certain ports to foreign ships; the Intendant, Barbé de Marbois, agreed to the first small breaches but refused to sanction their extension. The matter went to the King's Council who repudiated the Governor, recalled him, and appointed a new Governor, with the colonists calling for the blood of the Intendant. This was the situation when on a day in September a boat sailed into the harbour, and the captain, hurrying ashore, ran down the streets of Le Cap, shouting the news of July 14th. The King had been preparing to disperse the Constituent Assembly by force, and the Paris masses, arming themselves, had stormed the Bastille as the symbol of feudal reaction. The great French Revolution had begun.