

"MAKE A COMMON CAUSE": NEGOTIATION AND FAILURE TO  
COMPROMISE IN THE HAITIAN REVOLUTION, 1791

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## ABSTRACT

CHRISTINA MOBLEY: "MAKE A COMMON CAUSE": NEGOTIATION AND  
FAILURE TO COMPROMISE IN THE HAITIAN REVOLUTION, 1791  
(Under the direction of John Wood Sweet)

This work investigates the demands made in negotiations between white colonists, *gens de couleurs*, and insurgents in the opening months of the Haitian Revolution. It argues that, at least initially, demands for general emancipation were not made, but instead that insurgents sought the amelioration of working conditions on plantations and *gens de couleur* asked for political rights. It explores the role of on the ground interlocutors in order to explore the aims and motivations of each group, and finds that military leaders of each group were willing to make important compromises. By looking at the pragmatism, contingency, and compromise of these early negotiations, the paper seeks to complicate the trajectory toward emancipation and republicanism emphasized in the historiography. These early negotiations allow for a deeper exploration of the goals of the parties involved, one that emphasizes contingency and transformation.

To my parents, Edwin Hugh and Barbara Mobley, who instilled in me my love of history and learning.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction.....	1
II. Tousard and the <i>Gens de Couleur</i> .....	7
III. Jean François, Biassou, and the Colonial Assembly.....	32
IV. Conclusion.....	47
V. Bibliography.....	51

## I. Introduction

In 1791, a slave insurrection began that, within fifteen years, would affect the political economy of Saint-Domingue, Europe, and the Americas. In Saint-Domingue, a localized revolt aimed at changing property relations in the North Province of Haiti turned into a broad scale attack on racial hierarchy and colonial authority. In France, the Revolution escalated into a large-scale international war that pitted the French against British and Spanish invasions and domestically caused a reevaluation of racism and slavery within the empire. In the Americas, the Haitian Revolution redistributed power, people and territory when Haitian refugees fled to neighboring countries and France sold Louisiana to America. In 1804, after a truly international conflict, Haiti became the second post-colonial independent nation in the Atlantic world and the first black republic, founded upon democratic notions of racial equality. Indeed, these widespread ramifications make the Revolution's most dramatic consequences, emancipation and independence, seem inevitable. However, in the autumn of 1791, nothing was certain; the actors and their objectives remained ill defined, fluid, and unclear.

Two sets of negotiations that took place in 1791, either of which could have changed the course of Haitian history. The first was between insurgent leaders Jean François and Biassou and the Colonial Assembly, and the second between the *gens de couleur* military forces and Lieutenant Colonel Anne Louis

de Tousard.<sup>1</sup> The politics of work, labor, and political equality for the *gens de couleur* were all central issues in the negotiations, which proposed citizenship rights for *gens de couleur*, freedom for the leaders of the insurgents, three days a week free for slaves to work on their gardens, and the abolition of the whip and the *cachot*. The limited demands made by each party lend insight into the malleable goals of those engaged in the fighting, especially important power brokers, who put forward a revolutionary political project whose failure ultimately led to the solidification of battle lines and the emergence of new objectives. To understand the failure of these negotiations and the escalation of the conflict, I will explore the goals of key interlocutors, people whose positions of leadership allowed them to attempt to broker compromise. These people were: Jean François and Biassou on behalf of the insurgents; Jean Baptist Marc and César on behalf of the *gens de couleur*; and Lieutenant Colonel Anne Louis de Tousard on behalf of the colonial forces.

Examining these key interlocutors highlights three important aspects of the early development of the Haitian Revolution. First, insurgent leaders at this time were demanding not an end to the slave system but rather serious changes in

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper I will follow Laurent Dubois in using *gens de couleurs*, people of color, to include both free blacks and free people of mixed African and European ancestry. Haitian society was made up of a kaleidoscope of racial and ethnic identities, which functioned in different ways for different individuals. In addition, class and gender also conditioned the experience of the Haitian Revolution, making simple binaries like white, black, or mulatto incomplete categories of analysis. I have chosen to leave the racial terms used by my historical actors in the original French. The reader will notice that Tousard differentiates between *citoyens de couleur* (citizens of color, ie mulattos) and *nègres libres* (free blacks) in speech but not in any material way in his negotiations. M. Gros, on the contrary, does not make such distinctions in his narrative.

the labor conditions on plantations.<sup>2</sup> Second, some colonial whites, including military commanders Tousard and de Rouvray, were willing to accept some men of African descent as equals in order to keep others enslaved. Last, the negotiations failed because tensions between these leaders and their followers -- the masses of *gens de couleur*, former slaves, and planters -- made compromise unsustainable.

It is possible to reconstruct both sets of 1791 negotiations through a variety of important and underused historical sources. The first is the unexplored letterbook of Lieutenant Colonel Tousard (1749-1817), held by the Hagley Museum in Wilmington, Delaware.<sup>3</sup> Tousard, a royalist and a veteran of the American Revolution, played an important role in the early period of the Revolution as lieutenant colonel of the regiment of Cap Français. After fighting to save Cap Français from the insurgents, Tousard led his troops southeast to Fort Dauphin, which was placed geographically and politically between the insurgents and the government in the capital. This book of outgoing and some incoming correspondence covers the period from November 1791 to March 1792 and

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<sup>2</sup> Several historians have commented upon this fact, however, few have explored Jean François and Biassou's demands at length. Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848* (London ;New York: Verso, 1988), Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past : Power and the Production of History* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1995), Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti : The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), David Patrick Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies*, Blacks in the Diaspora (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> The Tousard Letterbook is an extraordinary resource because it includes not only Tousard's letters to others but often their replies to him. The Letterbook, which resides in the Hagley Museum in Wilmington, Delaware has not been used in any monograph length study of the Revolution that I am aware of, and gives an incredible perspective of the early period of the Revolution. "Tousard Letterbook," in *accession no. 892* (Wilmington, De: Hagley Museum).



contains over three hundred letters. It details his attempts to forge a partnership between *gens de couleur* and colonial whites, one that Tousard believed would save the slave system. The letters from insurgent leaders Jean François and Biassou to the Colonial Assembly provide a window into the insurgent camp, as does the account of M. Gros, a colonist taken prisoner by the insurgents who worked as their secretary during the negotiations.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the proceedings of the Colonial Assembly are richly documented and extensively excerpted in Garran de Coulon's *Rapport Sur Les Troubles De Saint-Domingue* (1797-1799).<sup>5</sup> This source provides documents the intransigence of the Assembly and the frustration of the civil commissioners. These sources allow for a deeper understanding of two sets of important debates surrounding precisely who would fight for whom and for what in the opening months of the revolution.

By looking at the pragmatism, contingency, and compromise of these early negotiations, I am seeking to complicate the trajectory toward emancipation

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<sup>4</sup> M. Gros' account is the most influential account of the early days of the revolution, and according to Jeremy Popkin, the most widely cited. Though we do not know much about the author, Gros' account, as a perspective inside the insurgent camp, has been invaluable to historians. In his narrative he particularly blames Governor Blanchelande and military commanders Marquis de Rouvray and Captain Pichon. In addition, Gros wrote his narrative and french and English. The English version, which I use here, is roughly the same as the french except for an added section explaining the Revolution in general (which his french readers would already have been familiar with) and his political stance on the subject. Mr Gros, *An Historick Recital, of the Different Occurrences in the Camps of Grande-Revier, Dondon, Sainte-Suzanne, and Others, from the 26th of October, 1791, to the 24th of December, of the Same Year. By Mr. Gros, Attorney Syndic [Sic] of Valiere, Taken Prisoner by Johnny.* (Baltimore: Adams, Samuel), Jeremy D. Popkin, *Facing Racial Revolution : Eyewitness Accounts of the Haitian Insurrection* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 105-08.

<sup>5</sup> Garran de Coulon's *Rapport* is all the more important because some of the documentation he used is no longer extant. For example, the *Moniteur de Saint-Domingue* for the relevant period, according to Jeremy Popkin (see previous note), is no longer available, having perished in a fire.

and republicanism emphasized in the historiography. Twentieth century historians have agreed that the Revolution was a watershed moment in the history of democracy and anti-colonialism, in which the values of freedom, equality, and independence were understood as universal and absolute.<sup>6</sup> Further, they have rightly explored how class distinctions, the working class mentalité, and the transformation of republican ideology functioned in the Revolution.<sup>7</sup> While the universalism of the Revolution is undoubtedly important,

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<sup>6</sup> Any historian is indebted to those who have come before and paved the way for new work, and the Haitian Revolution has benefited from an uncommon amount of excellent scholarship: C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins : Toussaint L'ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989, 1938), David Patrick Geggus, *Slavery, War, and Revolution : The British Occupation of Saint Domingue, 1793-1798* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1982), Thomas Madiou, *Histoire D'haïti* (Port-au-Prince, Haiti: H. Deschamps, 1985), Thomas O. Ott, *The Haitian Revolution, 1789-1804* (Knoxville] University of Tennessee Press [1973], 1973), Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti : The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World : The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> Carolyn Fick in *The Making of Haiti* (1990) focuses on *marronage* as a form of continuous resistance throughout slavery culminating in the Revolution. "From 1791 on," she argues, "the development of the Saint Domingue revolution from below." By looking at the Revolution through the lens of *marronage* Fick views Haiti's independence as the result of the action of the masses. Whereas previous authors, even those like James and Ott who argued for the agency of slaves, viewed the masses and unorganized, uneducated, and ineffectual, for Fick, the Revolution demonstrated "the self-determination of those diverse and ordinary individuals of whom the masses were composed. In their own way, they not only contributed to but were the very foundation of Haiti's independence." Laurent Dubois in *Avengers of the New World* (2004) argues that Haitian revolutionaries transformed Republican ideology and rhetoric in order to push universal rights to include all men, black and white. For this reason the Haitian Revolution contributed to understandings of democracy and citizenship in the Atlantic World, changing the political culture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Dubois finds race, class, and the leadership of Toussaint Louverture incomplete lenses through which to view the Revolution. In Dubois's work, it is not leaders such as Louverture that emerge as heroic, but rather, ideals of republicanism and democracy, created and driven by the slaves themselves, which inspire revolution, social transformation, and worldwide change. The work of Dubois and Fick has been very influential to my own understanding of the Haitian Revolution. I hope that through an in-depth exploration of

looking closely at the beginning of the Revolution allows for a more complex reading of the motivations of those who took up arms, and reveals how the Revolution did not mean the same thing to all people at all times.

By examining the two sets of 1791 negotiations, I wish to explore both how a localized revolt escalated into a conflict for universalist principles, as well as the way in which issues of labor and work remained central and enduring. By evaluating this early period we can understand the recurrent emphasis on quality of life, labor, and work that became channeled into republican ideology. Jean François and Biassou's demands in 1791 clearly show that they were not explicitly fighting for the end of the institution of slavery, but rather for concrete changes in the labor relationship of the plantation system. Likewise, the *gens de couleur's* short-lived alliance with Tousard's forces demonstrates the uncertainty and inchoate nature of the early fighting. These early negotiations allow for a deeper exploration of the goals of the parties involved, one that emphasizes contingency and transformation.

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the 1791 negotiations I may can build upon the already strong foundation created by their work.

## II. Tousard and the *Gens de Couleur*

The slave revolt that began on August 21st quickly developed into intense fighting across the North Province of Saint-Domingue. By November, the colony's military leaders, *gens de couleurs*, and black insurgents were all interested in negotiating an end to the fighting. Three months of bloodshed had made it was clear that colonists would not easily defeat the insurgency, which reportedly comprised 80,000 of the 170,000 slaves in the North Province.<sup>8</sup> Insurgent forces had spread throughout the plain, burning plantations, destroying equipment, and killing white colonists along the way. Colonial forces in turn killed slaves, loyal and rebellious alike, indiscriminately, taking no prisoners.<sup>9</sup> Women and children, black and white, fell victim to the warfare. One colonist described the scene: "The country is filled with dead bodies, which lie unburied. The negroes have left the whites, with stakes &c. driven through them into the ground; and the white troops, who now take no prisoners, but kill everything black or yellow, leave the negroes dead upon the field."<sup>10</sup> The war had become

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<sup>8</sup> "St. Domingo Disturbances, 14 November 1791," *Independent Chronicle and the Universal Advertiser* 1791.

<sup>9</sup> Pamphile vicomte de Lacroix and Pierre Pluchon, *La Révolution De Haïti*, Relire (Paris: Karthala, 1995).

<sup>10</sup> "St. Domingo Disturbances," *General Advertiser*, 11 October 1791.

an "exterminating war" with the two sides at a deadly stalemate.<sup>11</sup> Though a rumor existed that French ships would arrive shortly carrying troops, not all colonists were convinced that the troops would be effective when -- and if -- they arrived. It was in this context that the military commanders fighting on the ground took it upon themselves to find a way to end the fighting, by subterfuge or negotiation.

Lieutenant Colonel Tousard was ideally situated to negotiate an end to the stalemate. At Fort Dauphin he was literally at the center of both the fighting and the negotiations, positioned geographically between the insurgents and *gens de couleur*, who controlled the hills near the Spanish border, and the Colonial Assembly and Governor in Cap Français. Tousard's position was well placed in the topography; the area was "the shape of almost an island," bordered by the sea on one side and the Spanish border of Santo Domingo on another, forcing the insurgents to go through Tousard to reach the capital.<sup>12</sup> Tousard was therefore poised to play an important role in ending the fighting -- through victory or compromise.

When Tousard first arrived at Fort Dauphin, he was arrogant, ambitious, and aggressive, convinced that he could quickly defeat the upstart rebel slaves. However, he was quickly disabused of notions of easy victory. The day after he arrived, on November 17, Tousard wrote to Governor de Blancheland that his entire day had been employed with receiving compliments and expressions of joy

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<sup>11</sup> Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World : The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 116, 18.

<sup>12</sup> Lacroix and Pluchon, *La Révolution De Haïti*, 93.

from all of the local citizenry, and that he was confident he would quickly establish communication with the *gens de couleur* and rout the insurgents. For this reason, Tousard was initially unwilling to facilitate dialogue with insurgent leaders Jean François and Biassou; he believed the colonists could win outright by forging an alliance with the *gens de couleurs* currently fighting with the insurgents.

Free people of color were necessary military allies, having served in the colony's slave-hunting constabulary, the *maréchaussée*. The *maréchaussée* had been created in 1721 in order to hunt maroons and police the slave population. Following the refusal of white colonists to serve in the *maréchaussée*, administrators allowed for free people of color to join, offering them positions as full time employees of the crown.<sup>13</sup> It was, thereafter, free people of color who stood as the bulwark between white colonists and rebellious slaves, a fact that paved the way for demands of political equality and the rights of citizenship.<sup>14</sup> Service provided *gens de couleur* a salary and the opportunity for social mobility. However, a racist hierarchy governed the *maréchaussée* with free people of color serving under white officers. Socially and legally, *gens de couleur* were

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<sup>13</sup> John D. Garrigus, *Before Haiti : Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, The Americas in the Early Modern Atlantic World (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 100, 03-05.

<sup>14</sup> Julien Raimon, a prominent person of color, organized a political battle in the colony that eventually took him to Paris in 1789, where he demanded the National Assembly give rights to free people of color. White planters fought vehemently against Raimond, arguing that white supremacy was necessary to preserve the slave system. Ironically, this mindset would keep white planters from allying with the very military forces that might have restored the slave system in Saint Domingue in 1791. Dubois, *Avengers of the New World : The Story of the Haitian Revolution*, 54-55, 64-65.

subjected to increasing discrimination in the years following the Seven Years War (1756-1763), such as limitations on the type of dress and profession, and the application of racial terms to *gens de couleur* in legal documents.<sup>15</sup> During the 1780s, many free people of color began fighting for political equality, using the colony's dependence upon their military role in order to demand political rights. During the insurgents' attack of Cap Français, free people of color organized into forces and, by all accounts, fought valiantly to save the city.<sup>16</sup> Yet, despite the importance of *gens de couleur* military forces, the Colonial Assembly, decided to table the question of political rights for free people of color until after the insurrection was defeated.<sup>17</sup> Tousard's attempts to ally white forces with the *gens de couleur*, therefore, took place in the context of free people of color's demands for political inclusion and the insistence of white planters that white privilege was necessary to maintain slavery.

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<sup>15</sup> Following the loss of Quebec, which France ceded to Britain at the end of the war, French North America experienced a "hemispheric reevaluation of creole identity." Racial terminology "mulatto" and "quadroon" came into usage in the legal sphere as well as laws mandating freed slaves continue to show respect for their former masters. Free people of color could, however, own land, buy slaves, live in towns, receive and education, and practice most professions. They could not become surgeons or notaries, nor could they wear certain fabrics or garments, or attend certain theatres. Dominique Rogers has found no evidence of racial segregation being enforced in Saint Domingue. Her research found that though there were segregation laws in place, they were rarely enforced and some officials even supported the social integration of free people of color with white society. Dominique Rogers, *Les Libres De Couleur Dans Les Capitales De Saint-Domingue: Fortune, Mentalités Et Intégration À La Fin De L'ancien Régime (1776-1789)* (Unpublished Manuscript, 2005), Chapter 5. Garrigus, *Before Haiti : Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, 110, 63. Dubois, *Avengers of the New World : The Story of the Haitian Revolution*, 61, 64.

<sup>16</sup> "St. Domingo Disturbances."

<sup>17</sup> Lacroix and Pluchon, *La Révolution De Haïti*, 127.

Tousard and the commander of the colonial forces on the west of Cape Français, the Marquis de Rouvray, were willing to accept *gens de couleurs* as equals in order to preserve slavery. The military commanders attempted to convince the Assembly that giving political rights to people of African ancestry was, in fact, the only way to preserve slavery in the colony. The military commanders addressed the Colonial Assembly in early November, asserting that sheer numbers alone necessitated such an alliance. The slave population in the colony outnumbered the white 500,000 to 40,000.<sup>18</sup> "What is the white population compared to the multitude of rebel slaves?" de Rouvray asked, "Isn't this enemy enough, without continuing to provoke the freed-colored?"<sup>19</sup> An alliance with the over 30,000 *gens de couleur* would not only provide more troops for the colonists, but would deny troops and supplies to the insurgents.

Tousard followed de Rouvray arguing the Colony must acquiesce to the *gens de couleur's* demands because of the dire military situation and the desperation of his troops. "For three months the war with the slaves wages" on, he said, and "in spite of our successes, we have been less advanced than the first day." Tousard bemoaned the lack of troops. "The line of troops will be exhausted before they reach the enemy," making the only viable option retreat.

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<sup>18</sup> Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies*, 5. Population figures for Saint-Domingue come from Moreau de Saint-Méry's classic description of the colony and have been revised (lowered) slightly by David Geggus. M. L. E. Moreau de Saint-Méry, Blanche ed Maurel, and Etienne ed Taillemite, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique Et Historique De La Partie Française De L'isle Saint Domingue*, Bibliothèque D'histoire Coloniale ; Nouv. Sér (Paris, Société de l'histoire des colonies françaises, 1958., 1958).

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Madiou, *Histoire D'Haïti* (Port-au-Prince, Haiti: H. Deschamps, 1985), Annexe, 478, quoted in Dubois, 118.



"It is thus a question," he said, "less of fighting [the insurgents] than of harassing them." Tousard put forward that an alliance with *gens de couleur* was not only the best option, but also the only option. "At present," he asked, "where is the army capable of fulfilling its goal?" Where would the assembly find battle-hardened cavalry capable of fighting without succumbing to the tropical diseases that would no doubt strike down French troops? Allying with the *gens de couleur* troops was the only option. "Why do you reject the help they offer," he asked, "and prefer to see them among the number of our enemies than to count them in the number of our defenders?"<sup>20</sup> Tousard concluded by pointing out that the spirit of the French Revolution would surely cause the National Assembly to look upon the *gens de couleur* with sympathetic eyes and that they would most likely once again be granted political rights once the Assembly received news of the insurrection.<sup>21</sup> Despite Tousard and de Rouvray's cogent arguments, the Colonial Assembly remained intransigent. Nonetheless, Tousard and de Rouvray's insistence demonstrated that some colonial whites were willing to embrace some people of African ancestry in order to keep others enslaved.

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<sup>20</sup>Rouvray ["Qu'est la population blanche en comparaison de la multitude des esclaves révoltés? N suffit-il pas de cet ennemi, sans provoquer encore les gens de couleur?"] Tousard ["Depuis trois mois, dit M. de Thouzard, la guerre dure avec les esclaves, et, malgré nos succès, nous sommes moins avancés que le premier jour.... A présent, je le demande, où est l'armée capable de remplir ce but? Où trouver la cavalerie propre à ce genre de guerre? Pourquoi rejetez-vous les secours qu'ils offrent, et préférez-vous les voir parmi nos ennemis, à les compter au nombre de nos défenseurs?"] Thomas Madiou, *Histoire D'haïti* (Port-au-Prince, Haiti: H. Deschamps, 1985), Annexe, 478.

<sup>21</sup> Indeed, on May 15, 1791 the National Assembly had granted political rights to free people of color born to a free mother and father. Following intense protest from the Colonial Assembly, in September the National Assembly revoked the May decree and instead decreed that the colony itself would have jurisdiction over matters of political rights within its borders. Ultimately, Tousard's prediction proved correct and in April, 1792, the National Assembly granted political rights to free people of color.

The *gens de couleur* Tousard wished to partner with made up a significant portion of the insurgent officers who controlled the hills around Ouinaminthe, on the eastern edge of the province near the Spanish border.<sup>22</sup> At their helm was Jean-Baptiste Marc, a free black described as one who "ruled with the air of an army general" and who was reportedly well known in the area for thievery, controlled the forces at Ouinaminthe.<sup>23</sup> Second in command was a recently freed black named C  zar. White colonists could not understand why *gens de couleur* would align themselves with the revolutionary slaves. Governor Blancheland complained incredulously (and erroneously) to the Minister of the Marine that the *gens de couleur* of le Trou and Grand-Rivi  re who had joined the insurgent army did not even have "authority over [the insurgent slaves]; their leaders are all chosen from among the blacks, and not one from the *gens de couleur*."<sup>24</sup> M Gros likewise observed that the *gens de couleur* were mistrusted by the formerly enslaved. Nonetheless, whether Tousard, Blancheland, or Gros understood it or not, many *gens de couleur* did choose to side with the insurgents.

Shortly after his speech to the Assembly, Tousard took it upon himself to use his military position to negotiate with the *gens de couleur*. On November 18th, he wrote to the "Citizens of Color in the Dependence of the East" entreating

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<sup>22</sup> The history of this event comes from a memoire of an inhabitant of Ouinaminthe found in the DXXV file of the Archives Nationale in Paris, France. "M  moire fait par un habitant d'Ouinaminthe." in Fick, *The Making of Haiti : The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below*, 111.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Blanchelande au Ministre de la Marine, le Cap, 29 Sept. 1791 quote in Ibid., 112. Fick notes, however, that "the vast majority of the higher command posts in the Grand-Rivi  re area in fact went to the free blacks.," 304 n110.

them to leave the insurgents and join him. Tousard began by expressing his surprise at the alliance between the *gens de couleur* and the insurgents. "What did I learn upon my arrival at Fort Dauphin?" he began, "Citizens of Color reunited with the Brigands." Tousard described free people of color as proprietors, not slaves, and therefore economically allied with the white cause. He derided the *gens de couleurs* as "The proprietors become the instruments that serve the revolting slaves -- moaning in shame and in pain to have forgotten your ignored attachment and scorned the advice of the whites." Tousard seemed to understand that, at the beginning of the fighting, when overwhelmed by insurgent forces, free people of color might have chosen to form an alliance with them. However, with Tousard's forces now in the area, the very forces who had accepted *gens de couleur* troops in Le Cap, the free people of color should leave the insurgent camp and join with him. "Why from the instant of my arrival did you not throw yourselves into my arms?" he asked,

"I would have protected and saved you from all of the bad that awaits you if you persist in this reunion with the enflamed brigands -- you know who saved the *gens de couleur* of le Cap...Come under my orders and make a common cause with your Fathers who desire to become your brothers: come aide me in destroying a horde of brigands..."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> [A tous les citoyens de couleur de la Dépendance de L'Est, Qu'ai je appris a mon arrivé au Fort Dauphin? Des citoyens de couleur réunis aux Brigands, des propriétaires devenus les instruments dont se servent des esclaves révoltes -- gémisses [sic] de honte et de douleur d'avoir oublié vos méconnu l'attachement & méprisé les conseils des blancs -- qu'il est votre dessein & que prétendez vous? Pourquoi dès l'instant de mon arrivé d'est vous pas venu vous jeter dans mes bras je vous aurais protégé et sauvé de tous les maux que vous attendent si vous persiste dans réunion avec l'infâme brigand -- vous savez qui à sauvé les gens de couleur du Cap.... Venez sous mes ordres et faites cause commune avec vos Peres qui veulent bien devenir vos frères: venez m'aider à détruire une horde de brigands...c'est a côté du régiment du Cap qui je vous propose de combattre les ennemies...]"Tousard Letterbook," 4-5.

Tousard does not breach the issue of political rights in his letter, but he does repeatedly refer to the *gens de couleur* as property owners and that their interests were therefore opposed to those of slaves. "It is side by side with the regiment of le Cap that I propose you fight the enemies of your properties," he wrote.<sup>26</sup> Tousard invoked le Cap in order to underscore his role supporting *gens de couleur* troops who had fought in the capital. Tousard enjoined the *gens de couleur* to meet with him regarding a rapprochement. With this first letter, Tousard had taken upon himself a course of action the Assembly would not sanction, but that his position as an intermediate power broke allowed him to undertake.

Tousard's strategic good will towards *gens de couleur*, however, did not extend to the slave insurgents themselves, who Tousard arrogantly expected to easily defeat. Tousard's letter to Jean François and Biassou, written the same day as his letter to the *gens de couleur*, contrasted greatly with his praise of the *gens de couleur* to the Assembly. Tousard addressed his letter "To the chiefs of unhappy ones who for the price of the kindness of the whites carry fire and the flames in the homes of their benefactors and their fathers, it is to you who I address myself." Tousard was writing not to negotiate, but to issue an ultimatum. "A solitary instant is given you," he cautioned:

My hand, accustomed to combating you and to destroying every trace of you, [offers you] not a pardon that you do not deserve, but to help you escape the punishment that you cannot escape, if one time I march against you -- I offer to grant you passage to New England... see the end

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<sup>26</sup> ["C'est à côté de régiment du Cap que je vous propose de combattre les ennemies de vos propriétés..."] Ibid., 4.

met by Boukman<sup>27</sup> and see that which awaits you -- if my vengeance is forestalled, know that it will be a terrible vessel."<sup>28</sup>

Tousard's offer of safe passage to New England was a far cry from the demands Jean François and Biassou were making at the same moment of the Colonial Assembly. Tousard's strong words to the insurgents demonstrate that his desire to ally with *gens de couleur* was not out of racial liberalism or any aversion to slavery, but was rather a utilitarian means through which to save the institution.

The leader of the *gens de couleur* forces, Jean-Baptiste Marc, took advantage of Tousard's entreaties by claiming that his followers were mistrustful in order to secure legal confirmation of the concessions that would be granted to the *gens de couleur* in exchange for an alliance. Two days after his original letter, Tousard wrote to the "citizens of color" asking them to appoint deputies "provided with the full power to treat and compromise directly with me the means of reestablishing tranquility between them and the white citizens," as well as "the most convenient means of combating and exterminating the Brigands."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Boukman was one of the founders of the insurrection. He was killed in battle in early November, 1791. His death was mourned in insurgent camps.

<sup>28</sup> Translation my own, I have made minimal changes in order to modernize the punctuation and spelling for the ease of the reader. ["Aux chefs des malheureux qui pour prix des bontés des blancs portent le feu et les flammes chez leur bienfaiteurs et leurs pères. C'est à vous qui je m'adresse, ... un seul instant vous est encore accordé ma main accoutumée à vous combattre et à vous détruire vous traces, non un pardon vous ne le mérite pas, mais de vous aider à éviter le châtement que ne peut vous manquer, si une fois je marche contre vous -- je vous offre de vous faire passer à la nouvelle Angleterre avec un sauf conduit... voyez la fin de Boukman et voyez celle qui vous attends -- si ma vengeance est retardé, songé qu'elle sera terrible un vaisseau..."] "Tousard Letterbook," 2-3.

<sup>29</sup> ["munis de leur plein pouvoir pour traiter et transiger directement avec moi des moyens de rétablir la tranquillité entre eux et les citoyens Blancs, et [illeg.] aux moyens les plus convenables de combattre et d'exterminer les Brigands."] Ibid., 11.

Tousard then met with deputies elected by the *gens de couleur* who, according to a letter he wrote to Blancheland, left him with every hope of establishing a partnership. The deputies carried with them a letter from Jean-Baptiste Marc to Tousard. In the letter, Marc immediately positioned himself as repentant. "It is in vain," he began, "that we come to testify to you the sorrow our situation has brought us."<sup>30</sup> He continued that it was by "conduct and not their discourse" that the *gens de couleur* would prove their regret at having joined the insurgency. In the "whirlwind" of the insurrection, Marc explained, they had been "in the sad position to be able to employ only prayers and threats to prevent of larger misfortune."<sup>31</sup> With the arrival of Tousard in the area, he continued, "Finally the moment [had] arrived to avenge the white citizens our fathers and our benefactors."<sup>32</sup> However, despite this good will, Marc wrote that he would need proof of Tousard's sincerity to convince the doubters among his troops. There was enough "contrariety of spirit" among his ranks, those "who needed to be reassured" that it would be "necessary to give confidence to the mistrustful." Marc wrote that while they had nothing to ask, and only wanted to "throw themselves in [Tousard's] arms," still they required some form of proof, some agreement, with which to convince his mistrustful troops that they were not being

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<sup>30</sup> ["C'est en vain que nous viendrions vous témoigner le chagrin ou nous à plongé notre situation"] "Jean-Baptiste Marc à Tousard, 19 Novembre 1791,"Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>31</sup> ["une espèce de tourbillon ils se sont vu dans la triste position de ne pouvoir employer que les prières et le menace pour empêcher de plus grande malheur."] Ibid., 21.

<sup>32</sup> ["Enfin le moment est arrivé de venger les ... de MM les citoyens blancs nos pères et nos bienfaiteurs."] "Jean-Baptiste Marc à Tousard, 19 Novembre 1791,"Ibid.

lulled into a trap.<sup>33</sup> Whether or not Marc was convinced of Tousard's good intentions, he skillfully manipulated the mistrust of his followers in order to gain a legal Concordat with Tousard, a method Jean François likewise employed, but without success, with the Colonial Assembly.

Marc's tactic was successful and several days later a generous Concordat was signed by the deputies and Tousard. The Concordat "Authorized by the different sections of inhabitants of the Department to be bearer of an act, dressed with all their signatures, dated the 21st [of November], with the effect of cementing the inalterable union between them and the *citoyens de couleur & nègres libres*.... who from now are as brothers, [and of] being the best means of dissipated all of their anxiety, establishing an inalterable confidence and proving to all the prompt reestablishment..." of peaceful relations.<sup>34</sup> The Concordat contained this preamble as well as eleven articles, clarifying the actions of each side. The *gens de couleur* thereafter became part of the Army of the East, under the command of Tousard, keeping their own officers and leaders. Tousard was

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<sup>33</sup> It is likely here that Jean-Baptiste Marc was referring to the Ogé affair. Ogé was a free person of color who, in 1780s, travelled to the National Assembly in Paris with Julien Raimond seeking political rights for free people of color. Ogé became disillusioned with the Assembly and returned to Saint-Domingue, where he mobilized an army of supporters, who numbered in the hundreds. Troops from the capital quickly defeated Ogé, who fled to Santo Domingo but was extradited, tried and broken on the wheel along with another of his supporters, Jean-Baptiste Chavannes. Dubois, *Avengers of the New World : The Story of the Haitian Revolution*, 80,82,87-8.

<sup>34</sup> "[c]émenter une union inaltérable entre eux et les citoyens de couleur & nègres libres à répondre à toute leur demande et à prendre avec de citoyens qu'ils regardent dès à présent comme leur frères les moyens le plus propres à dissiper toute leur inquiétude, établir une confiance inaltérable & à prouver à tous le plus prompt rétablissement dans leurs foyers et dans leurs possessions d'une part.]" "Concordat entre les Citoyens de Couleur et Tousard, 23 Novembre 1791," "Tousard Letterbook," 26.

responsible for having informed the white citizens of the agreement. The *citoyens de couleur*, "for their part [said] their reunion had no cause except the public good."<sup>35</sup> Though the document did not (and could not) grant political rights, it did refer to the *gens de couleurs* as "brother" and equals, demonstrating just how far Tousard was willing to go to secure the alliance.

The document went on to stress the permanence and inalterability of the agreement. Perhaps this was in an effort to keep the Colonial Assembly from attempting to void the Concordat, which they would eventually do. In order to avoid such nullification, the Concordat clarified its legal basis -- the Decree of the 24th of September, the very proclamation Jean François and Biassou were simultaneously attempting to use in their own negotiations. When the civil commissioners, Mirbeck, Roume, Saint-Laurent, and Saint-Léger, had arrived from France in the middle of November, they were unaware of the Revolution taking place in the colony. They brought with them neither official response nor troops to fight the insurgency, but instead a decree that would be central in the negotiations taking place. The 24th of September Decree, proclaimed that while the King and the National Assembly retained control of all external matters relating to the colony, the "laws concerning the state of unfree persons and the political status of men of color and free blacks" would remain under the purview

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<sup>35</sup> ["MM les députés des citoyens de couleur ont dit à leur tour que leur réunion n'avait eu pour cause que le bien public, car la réclamation qu'ils font des lois est une chose absolument indépendante de caprices des particuliers dont l'exécution appartient particulièrement au pouvoir exécutif..."] "Concordat entre les Citoyens de Couleur et Tousard, 23 Novembre 1791," *Ibid.*, 27.



of the colony.<sup>36</sup> This repealed the earlier decree granting free people of color born to free parents political rights, and instead placed their fate into the hands of the Colonial Assembly. The Decree also importantly offered amnesty to any free person who had committed "acts of Revolution."<sup>37</sup> Thus, while the political status of *gens de couleur* remained squarely in the hands of the Colonial Assembly, the amnesty applied to all free people, and was beyond the Assembly's revocation.

The Concordat specifically stated that this amnesty was the basis of the agreement, and therefore was in accordance with metropolitan laws. Article three stated: "That the *citoyens de couleur* accept ... the decree of the General Assembly of September, that the amnesty which is accorded them will guarantee in all forms the integrity of the white citizens..."<sup>38</sup> The Concordat itself then, because it was based upon a decree of amnesty from Paris, had to be respected by white colonists.

The Concordat provided for exceptions from amnesty, however, it did so in a way that empowered the *gens de couleur* to police their own forces. The next article stipulated that the "*citoyens de couleur* asked particularly to be authorized to except from this amnesty those who they knew to be carried away with

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<sup>36</sup> Quoted in ———, *Avengers of the New World : The Story of the Haitian Revolution*, 125.

<sup>37</sup> Jean-Philippe Garran de Coulon, *Rapport Sur Les Troubles De Saint-Domingue : Fait Au Nom De La Commission Des Colonies, Des Comités De Salut Public, De Législation Et De Marine* (A Paris : De l'Imprimerie nationale, an V-VII de la République [1797-1799]), 2: 301-02.

<sup>38</sup> ["Que les citoyens de couleur acceptant avec reconnaissance L'arrêtée ....de L'assemblée générale que l'amnistie qu'elle leur accord leur fera garanti dans toute forme intégrité par les citoyens Blancs..."] "Concordat entre les Citoyens de Couleur et Tousard, 23 Novembre 1791," "Tousard Letterbook," 28.

excesses and to be able to deliver them themselves to the vengeance and the severity of the law."<sup>39</sup> By leaving the power to punish free people of color to the *gens de couleur* themselves, the Concordat deftly removed a possible avenue through which white colonists could attack the alliance. In sum, the Concordat was extremely generous to the *gens de couleur*, showing both Tousard's desperation for the alliance, as well as the amount of bargaining power the *gens de couleur* had in the context of the insurrection's success.

Tousard carefully undertook measures to empower himself to create a Concordat. Tousard justified his actions in letters to de Rouvray and Blancheland by stating that he has only acted in accordance with the law, and was acting in the best interests in the colony, and that the insurgency would soon be defeated. Tousard asserted that, while he hoped his superiors would agree with him, his actions were absolutely legal. He further claimed that the local colonists supported his initiatives. In truth, Tousard had secured their support by gathering together the white citizens of the town and surrounding plains and having them sign a document stating that they authorized him to negotiate on their behalf. Two days before the Concordat was signed, Tousard addressed the townspeople. He proclaimed that all white citizens "animated with the desire for the public good and the well-being of this Colony..." would wish to cement the union with the *gens de couleur* and would dissipate any anxiety or mistrust between the two groups. He declared the alliance to be in accordance with the

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<sup>39</sup> ["MM les citoyens de couleur demandait particulièrement d'être autorisé à excepter de cette amnistie ceux qu'ils savent s'être portés à des excès et de pouvoir les livrer eux mêmes à la sévérité et à la vengeance des Loix."] "Concordat entre les Citoyens de Couleur et Tousard, 23 Novembre 1791,"Ibid.

decrees of the Assembly and exhorted the townspeople to treat the *gens de couleur* "with a friendly heart filled with peace."<sup>40</sup> Tousard had the citizens sign an act giving him the power to carry out the Concordat. The act stated that the citizens agreed with Tousard's desire for an alliance and that they were giving him the power to carry it out. Thus, Tousard justified the Concordat to the Assembly and to his superiors both by invoking the laws of the metropole as well by getting the local citizenry to authorize his actions. In this way, Tousard empowered himself from both the bottom, the citizenry, and the top, the law, to be a power broker between the military and the *gens de couleur*.

It appears that Tousard was not the only white intermediary involved in these negotiations. In order to facilitate communication, Tousard approached another intermediary -- a white man named Gérard trusted by the *gens de couleur* --to ask him to intercede on his behalf. The true nature of Gérard's relationship with Jean-Baptiste Marc and the other *gens de couleur* is unclear. He was apparently with the *gens de couleur* and acting as an intermediary between them and local white communities. Tousard wrote to him on November 22, "The citizens of color...have made me hope that you will come today and cement, by your opinion and the confidence they have in you, the perfect agreement and intimate union that I desire to establish between them and the white citizens."<sup>41</sup> Gerard accompanied the deputies of the *gens de couleur* to the

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<sup>40</sup> ["d'un coeur ami de la paix soit rempli..."] "Adresse de M. de Tousard Commandant de la Parti de l'Est à mesieurs les Citoyens de la ville et de la pleine qui s'y trouvent réunis," *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>41</sup> [Les citoyens de couleur députés auprès de moi, Monsieur, m'avaient fait espérer, que vous viendriez aujourd'hui cimenté par votre avis et la confiance qu'ils ont en vous l'accord parfait et l'union intime que je désire établir entre les citoyens Blancs et eux. Je

negotiations, carried letters back to Jean-Baptiste Marc, and was with the deputies when they signed the Concordat. Tousard spoke of Gerard as an important part of the negotiations as a white colonist who was trusted by the *gens de couleur*. His position as an interlocutor allowed him to foster dialogue and ultimately (for a time) an alliance. Given the unwillingness to negotiate of the Colonial Assembly, the role of on-the-ground intermediaries was crucial to attempts to broker a peace settlement.

Despite the success of the negotiations, however, tensions between *gens de couleur* and white troops soon began to show, underscoring the tenuousness of the alliance and the discordance of the political goals of each group. With the signing of the Concordat, Marc and his second, C  zar aligned themselves with Tousard, who generously supplied them with as much military armament as they requested. Tousard was delighted. He praised C  zar for having saved the district from the "brigands" and even offered to write the Assembly to recommend that he receive a reward. However, Tousard quickly became angered at the bad conduct of the *gens de couleurs*, who he said were disorderly, leaving camp, taking supplies, and communicating with the insurgents without permission. Despite Tousard's assertions of well being, the actions of the rank and file belied the outward appearance of peace.

It is clear from the Concordat itself that not all members of the *gens de couleur's* forces wished to join the colonist's army. Written into the Concordat

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vous prie donc Monsieur de vouloir bien vous rendre    mon camp et j'esp  re qu'il ne fera pas difficile dans les dispositions ou je les ai trouv  s de terminer une affaire aussi avantageuse    cette d  pendance.] "Tousard to de Blancheland, 24 Novembre 1791,"*Ibid.*, 15.

was an acknowledgement of this internal division. The fifth paragraph of the document reads: "Messieurs the deputies of the *Citoyens de Couleur* said for their part that their reunion [with Tousard] didn't not have any cause but the public good, because the complaint they make of the laws is something absolutely independent of the caprice of private individuals, of which the execution belongs particularly to the executive power which has the right of coercion."<sup>42</sup> In the text, the deputies were acknowledging and separating themselves from the *gens de couleur* who were working against the alliance. As Tousard professed his trust in C  zar and Marc and entreated them to help return *ateliers* to work, he also ordered that the *gens de couleur* have no communication with the insurgents, for fear that "would let themselves be persuaded easily."<sup>43</sup> He ordered white troops to "establish a line to prevent the brigands from penetrating" colonial forces and attempting to reestablish relations with *gens de couleur*.<sup>44</sup> Later that week, Tousard's list of grievances got even longer. He issued an order that all *Citoyens de Couleur    Ouinaminthe* send all

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<sup>42</sup> ["MM les D  put  s des Citoyens de Couleur on dit    leur tour que leur r  union n'avait eu pour cause que le bien public car la r  clamation qu'ils font des lois est une chose absolument ind  pendant des caprice des particuliers dont l'ex  cution appartient particuli  rement au pouvoir ex  cutif qui    le droit de coh  ritons."] "Concordat entre les Citoyens de Couleur et Tousard, 23 Novembre 1791," *Ibid.*, 26-29.

<sup>43</sup> ["se laisser persuader ais  ment..."] Tousard to de Blancheland, 1 D  cembre 1791," *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>44</sup> [...  tablir une ligne qui [illeg.] emp  cher les brigands de p  n  trer."] "Tousard to M. Marc    Camp Ferri  , 1 D  cembre 1791," *Ibid.*, 41.

of the slaves they had taken for their own use back to their plantations.<sup>45</sup> Despite these preventative measures, many *gens de couleur* apparently continued to break Tousard's orders, suggesting that his alliance was not as popular as he wished it to be.

Tousard's public calm, however, masked more serious disobedience on the part of the *gens de couleur* and the coercive actions of Tousard, as he tried to maintain a relationship that was, by all indications, breaking down. Within ten days of the signing of the Concordat, Tousard's letters had become preoccupied with the escalation of opposition of many *gens de couleur* troops to serving under him. In response to "acts of bad faith" and "disorder" of many *gens de couleur*, Tousard issued an address to the *Messieurs des Citoyens de Couleur à Ouinaminthe* on December 2nd. "I am too convinced of the loyalty and frankness of the *Citoyens de Couleur*," he began, to believe that they would have named new deputies to him without his prior knowledge or consent.<sup>46</sup> Rather than becoming angry, Tousard would use this as an opportunity to defend his actions and to demonstrate that the best way to win rights was to align with the Colonial Assembly, "from which the nation and the laws come."<sup>47</sup> Tousard wrote to C  zar

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<sup>45</sup> ["...il est ordonn   aux Citoyens de Couleur r  uni    Ouinaminthe [illeg.] de renvoyer sur leurs habitations respectives les n  gres esclaves qu'ils ont prie pour montrer leurs gorges et faire autre services quelconque."] "Ordre, 29 Novembre 1791," Ibid., 37.

<sup>46</sup> Tousard does not explain the significance of the new deputies, but it seems likely, in view of Tousard's other complaints, that he was wary of discontent *gens de couleur* coming up the ranks who would challenge the peace established by the Concordat.

<sup>47</sup> ["Je suis trop convaincu de la loyaut   et de la franchise des Citoyens de Couleur pour croire qu'ils ayant bien r  fl  chi lorsqu'ils on nomm   de nouveaux d  put  s aupr  s de moi, je n'en suis cependant pas f  ch   puisque cela m'a donn   occasion de leur expliquer ma conduite et de leur montrer que le meilleur moyen d'assurer leurs droits et

that C  zar's men "who had run away from my camp did so, my dear C  zar, without my orders and will severely punished, I assure you always and I ask you to believe," he wrote, "that I don't suffer any disorder and that I give... severe orders to arrest all of those who have run away from my camp."<sup>48</sup> Whether or not Tousard's words were meant to be an entreaty to C  zar to help maintain order in his troops, or a warning to him that Tousard was fed up with his men's clandestine activities, Tousard's letter clearly demonstrates that the relationship between the *gens de couleurs* and himself were not nearly as harmonious as Tousard wished de Rouvray and de Blancheland to believe.

The precariousness of the alliance is further underscored by the fact that Tousard issued a Proclamation on the 4th of December addressing the *gens de couleurs*. Tousard began by defensively insisting that the "conduct of the *Citoyens de Couleur* is inexplicable, I have done for them and for the white citizens who have confided in me the interests of the *D  pendance de l'Est* everything that my conscience and my love of good has told me to do." Tousard blamed the problems of morale and disobedience on "a few instigators" who had "undertaken to mislead [*les Citoyens de Couleur*]."<sup>49</sup> "Those of you who love

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leurs [illeg.] c'est [illeg.] en rapporte a la d  cision du l'assembl  e g  n  rale a laquelle la nation et les lois viennent d'attribuer le pouvoir...."] "Address    MM des Citoyens de Couleur    Ouinaminte, 2 D  cembre 1791," Ibid., 41.

<sup>48</sup> ["Les gens qui se sont   cart  s de mon Camp l'ont fait, mon Cher C  sar, sans mes ordres et vont   tre punir s  v  rement, je vous assure toujours et vous prie de croire que je ne souffre aucune d  sordre et que je donne en ce moment des ordres s  v  res pour arr  ter tous ceux qui se seront   cart  s de mon Camp..."] "Tousard    C  zar, 2 D  cembre 1791," Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> ["La conduite des Citoyens de Couleur est inexplicable, j'ai fait pour eux et pour les citoyens blancs qui m'avaient confi   les int  r  ts de toute cette d  pendance tout ce que

disorder," he lamented, "continue to put obstacles in front of my efforts to reestablish order..." Tousard warned the *gens de couleur* not to listen to "bad advice" and that his conduct would reflect their actions. Tousard's proclamation was a mixture of good will and warnings, reflecting the tension and discordance between the white and free colored troops.

Though Tousard praised his alliance with the *gens de couleur* to de Blancheland and remained vague about infractions, it is clear that Tousard's control over Jean-Baptiste Marc and C  zar's men was tenuous at best, and that Tousard was forced to rely upon and trust these leaders. The arrival of nearly 4,000 insurgent troops to the vicinity for negotiations with the Colonial Assembly exacerbated these tensions and further eroded Tousard's control over the situation. Tousard wrote to C  zar on 5 December that during one battle on a plantation, a group of slaves killed two of his white soldiers, and then "claimed that they had orders from [C  zar] to massacre all" white troops.<sup>50</sup> Tousard's letter inexplicably ends there. It is unclear whether or not Tousard believed the accusation or not. However, two days later Tousard wrote to de Blancheland that while serving under Jean Fran  ois and Candy, C  zar and his second, No  l, had been tasked with raising all of the *ateliers* from the plantations to join the fighting, and that Tousard was now finding it very difficult to return the *ateliers* to their work. Tousard complained that though C  zar's help in fighting the

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ma conscience et l'amour de la bien m'ont dite....j'ai la douleur de voir que quelques instigateurs en cette partie de les tromp  s...Vous qui aimez le d  sordre continu  rent de mettre des obstacles aux moyens que je prends pour r  tablir l'ordre..." "Proclamation, 3 D  cembre 1791," Ibid., 43.

<sup>50</sup> ["deux blancs de mon arm  e qui ont   t   coup  s de coup de sabre sur l'habitation Babineau par les n  gres qui [illeg.] qu'ils ont ordres de vous de les massacres tous."]



insurgents was useful, many *gens de couleur* serving under him were "giving into their bad inclinations..." Jean François had arrived at l'Acul the previous Saturday with nearly 4,000 men. Though his letters to his superiors remained optimistic, Tousard's increasing concern and complaints about the "disorder" and "bad faith" of the *gens de couleur* suggests that despite the professed wishes and actions of Jean-Baptiste Marc and C  zar, a number of masses were colluding with insurgents.

Ultimately, the partnership proved untenable. After three months C  zar and his troops deserted, hiding their three best canons in the cane fields, and joined the rebel forces at Dondon. Within two days, he was attacking Marmelade with the insurgent forces. Jean-Baptiste Marc replenished his store of munitions and did likewise, turning on the garrison and helping rebel forces take control of the district shortly thereafter.<sup>51</sup> Tousard's plan had failed and by the spring of 1792, with hostilities resumed, Tousard lost much of his popular support and reputation.<sup>52</sup> It is unclear whether Jean-Baptiste Marc and C  zar always intended to desert. It is conceivable, especially in light of Tousard's accusations that *gens de couleur* were deserting camp and instructing slaves to attack white troops, that the entire event was a well-planned ruse.

It is likely, however, that many *gens de couleur*, in light of their exclusion from colonial society, were willing to join whichever side they felt would benefit them most. The *gens de couleur* had plenty of reason to be disillusioned with the

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<sup>51</sup> Fick, *The Making of Haiti : The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below*, 112.

<sup>52</sup> Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies*, 50.

colonial government, which continually ruled against and excluded them, but Tousard's words of friendship and amnesty may have seemed to promise political rights in exchange for military service. However, despite the *gens de couleur's* key role in fighting against insurgents Cape Français and Tousard's alliance, in January 1792 the Colonial Assembly nullified all Concordats with *gens de couleur* and again declared that there would be no negotiations on the status of free people of color until after the conclusion of the war.<sup>53</sup> By the spring of 1792, *gens de couleur* were also reportedly unhappy that the Decree of September 24th had revoked the political rights given to them in the 15th of May Decree.<sup>54</sup> It is in the context of these setbacks, then, that C  zar, Jean-Baptiste Marc, and their forces decided to desert Tousard and fight for the insurgents.

Tousard's desire to negotiate an end to fighting quickly brought about a drastic change in his feelings towards the leaders of the insurgent army. On November 27th, Tousard wrote to de Rouvray that he had received a letter to the Colonial Assembly from Jean Fran  ois and Biassou. Though Tousard "doubt[ed] that the General Assembly would accept the propositions of the brigands," he found their demands to be a reasonable and promising route to ending the war. Tousard summarized the letter, saying that it blamed "Jeannot [for] all crimes, and said that Jean Fran  ois and Biassou, far from being culpable, deserved rewards..." The insurgent leaders made four demands in exchange for returning slaves to "their work:"

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<sup>53</sup> Madiou, *Histoire D'Ha  ti*, 120.

<sup>54</sup> Madiou, *Histoire D'Ha  ti*, 129.

1. Freedom for all major officers...
2. General amnesty for all *nègres*
3. The ability of the leaders to retire to wherever they would like in a foreign country, if they decide to move there.
4. ... Permitting if these conditions are accepted to return quickly the slaves to their work and to refer, with regards to their fate, to the commanders of the King, whose arrival cannot be far off.<sup>55</sup>

Tousard likewise wrote to Fort Dauphin that the address "offered to return all of the *nègres* to their work..."<sup>56</sup> Tousard seemed to think that the freedom of a number of leaders was a small price to pay for returning slaves to plantations and peace to the colony. The fighting, he said, had changed his views, and quickly. "A foible that I have long had, the love of glory, I have no longer, I see that in these unhappy times one loses in a minute that which one has worked ones life to obtain."<sup>57</sup> In three short weeks, Tousard had seen himself and his forces outnumbered nearly ten to one, his men fall sick and wounded, and nearly half his healthy forces be called away to protect the capital. The properties around Fort Dauphin lay mostly in ruins, and colonists hunkered down in nearby towns for safety. Perhaps these hard realities were what had disabused the once

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<sup>55</sup> ["...l'on rejette sur Jeannot tous les crimes, et ou on dit que Jean François and Biassou bien loin d'être coupables, méritent des récompenses, cous jugés comme cela prendra. 1. La grâce pleine et entière des tous les états majors leur liberté bien et [illeg.] enregistre. 2. Amnistie générale pour tous les nègres. 3. La faculté aux chefs de se retirer ou bon leur semblera dans les pays étrangers d'ils s'y déterminèrent d'y passer. 4. L'entière jouissance des effets qui sont en leurs mains, promettons si ces conditions sont acceptées de faire rentre de suit les esclaves dans le devoir et de se référer en ce qui concerne leur sort à la décisions des commandeurs du Roi dont l'arrivée ne peur être éloignée. Voilé leur conditions, vous voyez qu'ils ne stipulent pas mal leurs intérêts. J'ai tout envoyé au Cap..." "Tousard to de Rouvray 27 November 1791" "Tousard Letterbook," 31.

<sup>56</sup> "Tousard to Messieurs de Comit'au Fort Dauphin, 26 Novembre 1791," Ibid., 34.

<sup>57</sup> ["Un foible que j'ai eu longtemps, l'amour de la gloire, je ne l'ai plus, je vois que dans ces temps heureux on perd en une minute ce qu'on a travaillé toute sa vie à obtenir."] "Tousard to de Rouvray 27 November 1791" Ibid., 32.

arrogant officer of his notions of glory. However, Tousard's change of heart was not shared in the colony and all negotiations soon failed. Just as many of the rank and file among the *gens de couleur* were unwilling to compromise, so were both the planters in the Colonial Assembly and the masses of ex-slaves, as we will see.

Though Tousard's negotiations failed, they nonetheless represent the possibility of colonial whites accepting *gens de couleur* as political equals. However, his letters show that despite the actions of power brokers such as himself, Jean-Baptiste Marc, and C  zar, the actions of the rank and file made their opposition to negotiation and compromise clear. Further, the Colonial Assembly continually refused to negotiate with *gens de couleur* or even address the issue of their rights. In response to the demands for political rights, colonists argued that granting *gens de couleur* equality with whites would undermine the institution of slavery. For, if anyone whose parent had ever been a slave could become equal with whites, what justification remained for slavery itself? Yet, in the face of the 1791 insurrection, Tousard and de Rouvray were willing to compromise on political rights for *gens de couleur* in order to save slavery. Neither they nor the Colonial Assembly, however, could abide curbing the absolute power of the master over his slave in order to regulate conditions on plantations. It appeared, then, that the primary concern of many colonial whites such as Tousard and de Rouvray was not maintaining strict racial categories, but instead, of protecting the absolute authority of plantation owners over their slave laborers.

### III. Jean François, Biassou and the Colonial Assembly

Jean François and Biassou, like Tousard, felt that the stalemate between the insurgents and the colonial forces provided the opportunity for negotiations. Like Tousard, Jean François and Biassou attempted to reach a compromise in order to end fighting. However, like the *gens de couleur* forces, divisions between the rank and file of the insurgent army and insurgent leaders were apparent from the beginning of the Revolution. The ranks of officers were almost all made of elite slaves, slave drivers or other skilled laborers, and free blacks and free people of color. The rank and file of the insurgent forces, on the other hand, were predominantly field slaves or other unskilled slaves whose interests and aspirations did not necessarily conform to those of their leaders. Almost from the beginning of the fighting, in September, insurgent leaders had expressed a desire to negotiate.<sup>58</sup> This desire culminated in negotiations in November and December between Jean François and Biassou and the Colonial Assembly, in which the insurgent leaders would propose the amelioration of, and not the destruction of, the institution of slavery. However, as with Tousard's alliance with the *gens de couleur*, Jean François and Biassou's negotiations

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<sup>58</sup> Blackburn, 194. Blackburn suggests that because the leaders of the insurgent army were elite, and therefore closer to gaining freedom, they were more intent on gaining liberty for themselves than the rank and file, who would have been willing to settle for improvements in their lives on plantations.

would ultimately fail due to the opposition of the rank and file of the insurgent army as well as that of the planters in the Colonial Assembly.

Like Tousard, Jean François and Biassou decided to use their positions of military leadership to undertake negotiations on behalf of the entire insurgency. The very same day that Tousard wrote to Jean François and Biassou, on November 17th, the insurgent leaders were holding a meeting discussing what demands they would make. Jean François had learned of the imminent arrival of the civil commissioners from France carrying legislation from the National Assembly and, he feared, troops to fight the insurgents. According to Gros, on November 17, Jean François summoned his council: "Here we are, [Jean François' counsel] said, at the end of November: the Forces, expected from France, cannot now be long before they arrive; and it will be much to our Advantage, to offer some Accommodation to the whites, to avert greater Evils; for it is to be feared, they will grind us even to dust."<sup>59</sup> Jean François' counsel prudently decided to attempt to negotiate before the arrival of troops, and they drafted demands to present to the Colonial Assembly, which they send to Tousard, who was in turn to relay the letter to the General Assembly.

According to M. Gros, Jean François and the other insurgent leaders were not fighting to end the institution of slavery. Gros described Jean François as being uncomfortable with his position of responsibility for the demands of the

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<sup>59</sup> Mr Gros, *An Historick Recital, of the Different Occurrences in the Camps of Grande-Revier, Dondon, Sainte-Suzanne, and Others, from the 26th of October, 1791, to the 24th of December, of the Same Year. By Mr. Gros, Attorney Syndic [Sic] of Valiere, Taken Prisoner by Johnny.* (Baltimore: Adams, Samuel, 1793, 1792), 39. For information on Gros' narrative, see note 4.

slaves. Gros held a high opinion of Jean François, differentiating him from the class of slaves who were fighting under him, an impression Jean François self-consciously cultivated in his letters to colonial authorities. "His reflections carried with them a degree of good sense," Gros lauded, "a fund of humanity, and a ray of genius, far superior to any sentiment that might have been expected from his kind."<sup>60</sup> According to Gros, Jean François presented himself as a reluctant leader, telling Gros he "did not intend myself a General of the Negroes: Those, who had the Power of conferring the Title, have invested me with it." To Gros, Jean François was dismissive of emancipation as a goal of the insurrection. "In taking up Arms," he said, "I never pretended to fight for the General Liberty of the Country, which, I know, to be merely chimerical..." Jean François continued that he understood the absolute "Need, France ha[d] of her Colonies, as [well as] by the Danger there would be in obtaining for this uncivilized Set of Beings, a Right, which, would be infinitely more dangerous to them, and which, would indubitably draw along with it, the Annihilation of the Colony..."<sup>61</sup> It is important to note that Jean François was technically speaking to the enemy. However, Gros was highly supportive of Jean François' efforts to negotiation and was serving as his secretary. Even if Jean François was editing his statement because Gros was a white colonist (an attorney), or if Gros was mediating Jean François' actual words, the statement is still indicative of several things. First, it is notable that Jean François did not present himself as a proponent of general emancipation or as a member of the mass of slaves, and second, that he thought the slaves who

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 42-43.

were fighting under him could be made (possibly by force) to go back to plantations.

Jean François' positioning of himself to Gros hints at tension that existed between himself and the *gens de couleur* officers on the one hand, and the slave insurgents on the other, tensions that would ultimately jettison negotiations. It seems that these tensions were exacerbated by Jean François' desire to negotiate, which he attempted to keep a secret. "It was requisite," wrote Gros, "that the Negroes who were naturally suspicious and bloody minded, should be kept in the Dark, respecting every Transaction tending to this Adjustment: Thus, they took every essential Precaution to obviate it's being known."<sup>62</sup> Within both Jean François and Biassou's forces, there were a small number of black and *gens de couleur* officers controlling much larger numbers of black slaves. For this reason, Jean François and Biassou had to temper their behavior in order to maintain their leadership. According to Gros, "the People of Colour, possessed not the Power of protecting us from the Rage of the Negroes; but they, on the other Hand, were in universal Dread of them."<sup>63</sup> It appears that the rank and file of the insurgent army was just as unwilling to compromise as the Colonial Assembly. Former slaves were unwilling to give up the liberty they had fought hard to obtain, and planters were unwilling to compromise any power over their former slaves. Thus, while Jean François and Biassou attempted to negotiate on behalf of the insurgents, the former slaves themselves were clearly unwilling to compromise the freedom they had won.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.



The letter Jean François and Biassou wrote to the Colonial Assembly showed that rebel slaves had good reason to be suspicious of their officers. During the negotiations, Jean François was first concerned for his own freedom and the freedom of his officers. Ameliorating the conditions for slaves was a secondary concern. Nonetheless, the stated goal of the insurgent army, as defined by these leaders, was concrete changes in, and not the destruction of the institution of slavery. In the beginning of December, before Jean François' camp learned of the arrival of the civil commissioners, he sent a letter to the Colonial Assembly through Tousard. Though this letter has not survived in the archives, we know from Tousard's summary of its contents to de Rouvray that Jean François and Biassou were offering to bring slaves back to plantations in exchange for the freedom of officers. Garran de Coulon, early historian of the Haitian Revolution, substantiates Tousard's summary, writing "It appears that the *nègres* generals requested from it the freedom of the principal members of their officers and some laws to improve the fate of the slaves," de Coulon wrote.<sup>64</sup> As with Tousard's negotiations with the *gens de couleur*, the arrival of the civil commissioners with the 24th of September decree, changed the legal landscape of the negotiations. The Decree of amnesty to all free persons for acts of revolution committed in the political furor of the French Revolution opened a door *gens de couleur* and slaves to try to gain concessions from the Colonial Assembly.

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<sup>64</sup> ["Il parait que les généraux nègres y demandaient la liberté des principaux de leurs officiers et quelques lois pour améliorer le sort des esclaves."] Garran de Coulon, *Rapport Sur Les Troubles De Saint-Domingue : Fait Au Nom De La Commission Des Colonies, Des Comités De Salut Public, De Législation Et De Marine*, 2:307.

The insurgent leaders attempted to exploit the amnesty of the 24th of September in order to force the Colonial Assembly to negotiate with them. Jean François and Biassou again wrote to the Colonial Assembly on the 4th of December, after he had learned of the arrival of the civil commissioners. Jean François and Biassou wrote that, in light of this new decree, they were sure that the Assembly would look favorably upon the demands they had presented in their previous letter. "We must be included in the general amnesty pronounced for all indiscriminately," they wrote.<sup>65</sup> Both Tousard and the Colonial Assembly rejected Jean François' claim that the proclamation of amnesty for acts of revolution of the 24th of September should apply to insurgents, yet Tousard did not hesitate to apply this same reasoning to the *gens de couleur* who joined his troops.

Jean François, like Tousard, argued that he was presenting the sole means of restoring slavery in the colony. He wrote that he made these demands, "in the name of the colony in danger, to ask of you the lone and unique means of restoring promptly and without loss of order in such an important colony." Of the demands they had made, however, Jean François was clear that "the first article is of absolute importance" (the first article being the freedom of himself and a number of his officers).<sup>66</sup> These first two letters are telling. Jean François

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<sup>65</sup> Dubois, *Avengers of the New World : The Story of the Haitian Revolution*, 125.

<sup>66</sup> ["Nous avons cru devoir, au nom de la colonie en danger, vous demander les seuls et uniques moyens de rétablir promptement et sans perte l'ordre dans une si importante colonie; vous avez dû peser la demande et les motifs qui l'ont dictée: *le premier article reposé (\*) est de convenance absolue.*" *"Sans doute la liberté des principaux officiers nègres."*] Lettre de Jean François Biassou, ect. à l'assemblée coloniale, du 4 décembre 1791 Garran de Coulon, *Rapport Sur Les Troubles De Saint-Domingue : Fait Au Nom De*

positioned himself as apart from, and condescending of, the slaves fighting for him. Yet, in so doing, he was able to assert that the only way to restore order was to grant himself and his officers freedom and to ameliorate the conditions of slavery, specifically, by granting slaves three free days a week and abolishing the whip and the *cachot*. Further, Jean François asserted that it was the unusual cruelty and barbarity that masters and overseers showed toward slaves that had driven them to revolt. The logical conclusion of this statement was, of course, that if the Colonial Assembly ameliorated the conditions of slavery, the slaves would return to their labor.

Jean François and Biassou attempted to use the threat of the anger of the “uncivilized” horde of slaves following them to convince the Assembly to come to the table and take their entreaties seriously. On 12 December, the insurgent leaders again wrote to the commissioners, this time stressing that the only way to restore order in the colony was to acquiesce to some of their demands. To do this, Jean François and Biassou invoked the danger of slaves being controlled by neither the colonists nor their officers. “We cannot hide from you that this undertaking [negotiating] has its dangers,” they wrote. Slaves believed themselves entitled to certain concessions because “False rumors [have made] the slaves obstinate, for example, the idea that the king has granted them three days per week.” As such, not granting the slaves their demands would be highly risky, the leaders cautioned, “[The slaves] will say they have been tricked, and the consequences can be deadly if we do not approach this operation with the

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*La Commission Des Colonies, Des Comités De Salut Public, De Législation Et De Marine*, 3:310.

greatest caution.” All of this, Jean François and Biassou asserted, meant that the Colonial Assembly’s best and indeed only course of action was “to grant liberty to all the commanders, leaving the choice to the generals because they know which of them have influence over the *nègres* either because of the fear they inspire in them or for other known reasons.”<sup>67</sup> On the surface, it appears in this letter that Jean François and Biassou were forsaking their loyal followers and that their primary goal was their own freedom. However, they were also offering a clever warning to the commissioners. By claiming that the slaves believed themselves entitled to three days a week free and that they would continue to fight unless some concessions were made to them, the insurgent leaders were in fact bargaining for on the ground improvements in slaves' lives.<sup>68</sup> Jean François'

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<sup>67</sup> "Jean François and Biassou to the Commissioners December 12, 1791," in *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Laurent Dubois and John D. Garrigus (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2006).

<sup>68</sup> Rumors that the King had granted three days a week free to all slaves had been circulation in the colony for some time. On January 24, 1791, almost a full year prior to the negotiations, there had been an uprising in Port-Salut in the North Province. *Gens de couleur* who were fighting to gain their own political rights informed slaves that the King had granted them 3 days a week free, but that planters refused to grant it to them. Nearly two hundred slaves left their plantations in the middle of the night intent on demanding these three days from their masters. This same rumor was also present at the Bois Caiman ceremony. "Appendix C: Declarations of the Salve Antoine and Sieur Fabre," Fick, 268. Though the rumor turned out to be false, the slaves, nonetheless, considered it plausible, especially in a colony where the boundary between news and rumor was never a firm one. Rather than being isolated, enslaved groups in the Caribbean "participated in a regional network of shared information. As Julius Scott has demonstrated, "through trade, both legal and illicit, and the mobility of all types of people from sailors to runaway slaves, extensive regional contact" characterized the West Indian and American colonies and facilitated the spread of information. The difference between the true and the untrue in the early modern Atlantic world was not always clear. Julius Sherrard Scott, III., "The Common Wind: Currents of Afro-American Communication in the Era of the Haitian Revolution (Caribbean)" (Dissertation, Duke University, 1986).

tactic is similar to Jean-Baptiste Marc's use of his own troops doubts to elicit a Concordat from Tousard.

Jean François and Biassou also attempted to remove blame from themselves and their followers in their next letter by claiming that the actions of the masters themselves had driven their slaves to revolt. On December 21 they again wrote to the Assembly, this time stressing the conditions on plantations. "Permit us to take the liberty to share with you our reflections on the statements made to us by the *nègres* slaves," they began, "You must know that in our role as chiefs we have a great deal of power over them.... We have been able to unite most, if not all of them."<sup>69</sup> They continued that the slaves wanted to make peace, but were afraid of two things. First, they were afraid of being tortured and executed like those who had been involved in the Ogé affair.<sup>70</sup> Second, they feared the vengeance of their masters, something they had good cause to fear. "The bad treatment of their masters," they wrote, "most of whom torture their slaves by mistreating them in all sorts of ways, taking away their two hours [of midday rest], their holidays, and Sundays, leaving them naked, without any help even when they are sick, and letting them die of misery." These deplorable conditions, the "many barbarous masters there are who enjoy being cruel to these miserable slaves," they claimed, were both the cause and the solution of the crisis. The solution was "Outlawing such harsh mistreatment, abolishing the

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<sup>69</sup> "Jean François and Biassou to the Commissioners December 21, 1791," in *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Laurent Dubois and John D. Garrigus (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2006).

<sup>70</sup> See note 29.

terrible plantation prisons [the cachots], where they stays are miserable, and trying to improve the condition of this class of men so necessary to the colony, and we dare assure you that they will take up their work once again and will return order.”<sup>71</sup> In this letter, even more so than in earlier communications, Jean François and Biassou highlighted the atrocious conditions of slavery and the barbaric treatment of slaves by their masters as the real reason for the insurrection of the slaves. By displacing blame from the slaves onto slave masters, Jean François and Biassou asserted that the rebellion was not about an end to slavery, but rather about changing certain untenable conditions of slave labor.

Moreover, the insurgent leaders’ invocation of masters’ cruelty came in the context of increasing attempts in the colony to take legal action against especially cruel masters. Though successful action was rare, it was illegal to torture and kill slaves through excessive methods, and a few planters had been deported from the colony for doing so. In 1788, a planter named Nicholas Le Jeune was investigated over claims that he had tortured two female slaves he had suspected of using poison against other slaves. Fourteen slaves from his plantation brought a complaint against him in the local court, despite his threats to kill anyone who did so. The local judges decided to investigate, and when they arrived at Le Jeune’s plantation they found the women, both of whom died soon afterward, in chains, with their legs burnt and decomposing. The box that he claimed contained poison contained only tobacco and rat droppings. Le Jeune and other colonists defended himself by claiming that any inhibition of his

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<sup>71</sup> "Jean François and Biassou to the Commissioners December 21, 1791."

total control over his chattel's bodies would fundamentally destroy a master's control over their slaves. The judges, however, argued that such harsh treatment of slaves would only result in the outbreak of revolt, and must therefore be curbed. The court ultimately bowed to pressure from colonists, and Le Jeune escaped punishment.<sup>72</sup> However, the investigation and prosecution of Le Jeune demonstrated that local courts were willing to consider the interests of slaves and challenge masters' control over their lives.<sup>73</sup>

The Colonial Assembly agreed with Le Jeune and viewed Jean François and Biassou's demands as a threat to their absolute power. The republican French civil commissioners were open to negotiating a peace settlement with Jean François and Biassou, however, their power to do so was challenged by the planters in the Assembly. The Colonial Assembly claimed jurisdiction on decisions pertaining to the slave insurgents (who were property) and refused to negotiate. On the 16 December, the Colonial Assembly issued a reply to "Emissaries of the *nègres* in revolt," stating that the Assembly, "founded on the law and by the law, cannot correspond with the people armed against the law, against all the laws" and therefore would not negotiate. The Assembly could only show mercy to repentant culprits who returned to work and could forgive those who had been forced to fight against their will.<sup>74</sup> The Assembly claimed that,

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<sup>72</sup> Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution*, 56.

<sup>73</sup> For more information of legal battles over slavery in the colony, see: Malick Walid Ghachem, "Sovereignty and Slavery in the Age of Revolution: Haitian Variations on a Metropolitan Theme" (PhD diss, Stanford University, 2001).

<sup>74</sup> ["L'assemblée, fondée sur la loi et par la loi, ne peut correspondre avec des gens armés contre la loi, *contre toutes les lois*. L'assemblée *pourrait* faire grâce à des

because slaves were the property of their masters, only the masters of the slaves and not the civil commissioners could offer them freedom.<sup>75</sup> The Assembly feared that agreeing to negotiate with, let alone freeing, *gens de couleur* and slaves who had taken up arms against whites would create "a perfect equality between them and the whites" and permanently undermine slavery.<sup>76</sup> Thus, though Jean François and Biassou claimed to be offering the Colonial Assembly a way to get slaves back to work on plantations, the assembly was fervently opposed on principle to any agreement with the insurgent leaders. This same logic was used to table any discussion of rights for free people of color. While Tousard presented giving rights to the *gens de couleur* as a path for restoring slavery to the North Province, the Colonial Assembly viewed political rights as a greater threat to their authority.

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coupables repentants et rentrés dans leurs devoirs. Elle ne *demanderait* pas mieux que d'être à même de reconnaître ceux qui ont été entraînés *contre leur volonté*. Elle sait toujours mesurer ses bontés et sa justice; retirez-vous"] Procès-verbaux de l'assemblée coloniale, du 16 décembre 1791, au matin. Garran de Coulon, *Rapport Sur Les Troubles De Saint-Domingue : Fait Au Nom De La Commission Des Colonies, Des Comités De Salut Public, De Législation Et De Marine*, 2:313. Gros, *An Historick Recital, of the Different Occurrences in the Camps of Grande-Revire, Dondon, Sainte-Suzanne, and Others, from the 26th of October, 1791, to the 24th of December, of the Same Year. By Mr. Gros, Attorney Syndic [Sic] of Valiere, Taken Prisoner by Johnny.* , 62.

<sup>75</sup> According to M. Gros, upon hearing this response from the Assembly, Biassou issued orders to kill all white prisoners in the insurgent camp. Toussaint L'Ouverture, who was then known as Toussaint of Bréda and was an aide-de-camp of Biassou's, stepped in and insisted that the prisoners must receive a court-martial and that their death would certainly end peace negotiations. Biassou later pardoned them. This is the first mention of Toussaint. Gros, *An Historick Recital, of the Different Occurrences in the Camps of Grande-Revire, Dondon, Sainte-Suzanne, and Others, from the 26th of October, 1791, to the 24th of December, of the Same Year. By Mr. Gros, Attorney Syndic [Sic] of Valiere, Taken Prisoner by Johnny.* , 63. Garran de Coulon, *Rapport Sur Les Troubles De Saint-Domingue : Fait Au Nom De La Commission Des Colonies, Des Comités De Salut Public, De Législation Et De Marine*, 2:315.

<sup>76</sup> Dubois, *Avengers of the New World : The Story of the Haitian Revolution*, 126.



The Assembly's expressed their opposition to negotiated peace in a meeting with Jean François at the end of December. A face-to-face meeting at Saint-Michèl had been arranged between the commissioners, emissaries of the Assembly, and Jean François in order to discuss the insurgents' demands. Though the Assembly was opposed to negotiations, they wished to conduct a prisoner exchange. Jean François and Biassou had great hopes of reaching an agreement at this meeting. According to Gros, "...an universal Peace was to be expected. The Whole of the Banditti wished it..."<sup>77</sup> Many white colonists accompanied the commissioners and representatives, including Bullet, who had been the owner of the slave Jeannot, whose cruelty against white colonists as an insurgent leader had resulted Jean François executing him. At the meeting, Bullet, who apparently knew that Jean François had killed his slave, found himself unable to hide his disdain for the insurgent leader. While Jean François was dismounting from his horse, Bullet grabbed the horse's bridle and struck it with a whip. Jean François quickly retreated to his own lines and considered breaking off negotiations altogether.<sup>78</sup> Bullet's attitude towards Jean François

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<sup>77</sup> Gros, *An Historick Recital, of the Different Occurrences in the Camps of Grande-Revier, Dondon, Sainte-Suzanne, and Others, from the 26th of October, 1791, to the 24th of December, of the Same Year. By Mr. Gros, Attorney Syndic [Sic] of Valiere, Taken Prisoner by Johnny*, 67.

<sup>78</sup> ["Outre ces députés à l'assemblée coloniale, plusieurs autres colons assistèrent aussi à la conférence. L'un d'entre eux nommé Bullet, qui avait été le maître du cruel Jeannot, et qui par cela même n'auront pas dû oublier que c'était Jean François qui l'avait fait punir, osa saisir le cheval de ce dernier par la bride et le frapper du fouet lorsqu'il eu descendit. Jean François se retira précipitamment vers les siens dans une juste indignation; et cette insulte qui pouvait bien n'être pas [illeg.], à en juger par les événements postérieurs, pensa rompre à jamais toutes les négociations."] Garran de Coulon, *Rapport Sur Les Troubles De Saint-Domingue : Fait Au Nom De La Commission Des Colonies, Des Comités De Salut Public, De Législation Et De Marine*, 314.

was indicative of the larger animosity toward the insurgents of the planters in the Assembly with whom Jean François was trying to negotiate. Despite the fact the Jean François was offering planters a way to save their property and restore slavery, assemblymen such as Bullet could not restrain their contempt for the self-emancipated slaves and consider a very pragmatic compromise.

The civil commissioners wished to negotiate, but were powerless in the face of the Assembly's jurisdiction over all internal matters in the colony. They nonetheless attempted to repair the damage caused by Bullet's insult and begged Jean François to come back to the meeting, which he did. Jean François repeated, in person, the demands that he had made in his letters to the commissioners, while declaring the submission of himself and his followers to the commissioners. The commissioners negotiated a prisoner exchange, which included Jean François' wife, who had been condemned to death but kept alive for fear of the consequences of executing her. Jean François released his white prisoners, including M. Gros. Biassou opposed the exchange, fearing losing important leverage over the stubborn Colonial Assembly, but Jean François wanted to make every effort for peace and, moreover, to maintain the moral high ground by making sure his behavior was irreproachable.<sup>79</sup> After the meeting, several white military officers including Tousard renewed attacks on the insurgents and on the January 12, 1792, the insurgent army renewed its offensive in the North.

Though the insurgent leaders presented their demands for the amelioration of plantation life as limited and pragmatic, their implications were

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 2:315.

far-reaching. As was perhaps clear to the planters in the Assembly, the abolition of coercive punishments would have drastically changed the institution of slavery itself. By disallowing masters complete control over their slave's lives and bodies, the seemingly pragmatic demands made by the insurgents would fundamentally changed labor relationships on the plantation. Jean François and Biassou were building upon the legal challenges against masters' authority made in the 1780s, and in the process creating an important precedent of making the politics or work central in Revolutionary goals. Labor demands would remain central to the changing ideological landscape of the Revolution. However, the narrative of M. Gros and the letters of Jean François and Biassou demonstrate that their followers had their own ideas about work, labor, and freedom, and were not willing to have their fate decided without their consent.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> For information of Jean François and Biassou subsequent careers in the Spanish Empire, see: Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida*, Blacks in the New World. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999.

#### IV. Conclusion

Both sets of 1791 negotiations presented opportunities for compromise, either of which could have drastically changed the outcome of what became the Haitian Revolution. What immediately emerges from these sources is that each side was willing to make pragmatic demands and concessions in order to end the fighting. First, negotiations between Jean François and Biassou and the Colonial Assembly raised the possibility that insurgent leaders would have agreed to attempt to escort their followers back to plantations in exchange for concrete improvements in labor conditions. The second, negotiations between the *gens de couleur* and Tousard, demonstrated that the former were willing to fight against insurgents in exchange for political rights. However, both negotiations were wrought with internal tensions and dissention and ultimately proved untenable. In the end, neither the planters nor the mass of slaves were willing to compromise, the negotiations failed, battle lines hardened, and fighting resumed.

Though the negotiations of late 1791 ultimately failed, they are important because they provide a window into the actions and aims of the insurgents, the white military forces, and the *gens de couleur* very early on in the war. Insurgent leaders demanded amelioration of the conditions on plantations, including the abolition of coercive punishments, and the freedom of a number of leaders. The *gens de couleur* strove for political rights and an end to discrimination against them, and appeared willing to fight for whichever side would benefit them most.

The negotiations show that some colonial whites, such as military commanders Tousard and the Marquis de Rouvray, could imagine embracing *gens de couleur* as "brothers" and political equals. Tousard, in particular, staked his reputation (which he subsequently lost) on a partnership with the *gens de couleur*, who joined and then abandoned him. Examining the limited nature of the early demands emphasizes the contingency and uncertainty inherent in the Revolution.

These pragmatic demands remained important throughout the Revolution. The demands made by insurgent groups throughout the early period of fighting, from 1791 to 1793, continued to center around concrete improvements in their everyday lives. During the first two years of fighting, neither general emancipation nor independence were stated goals of the insurgent army. Rather, insurgent leaders in both the North and South provinces continually asked for only the freedom of a certain number of leaders and the amelioration of labor conditions for slaves, specifically, three days a week free, the abolition of the whip and the cachot. Toussaint L'Ouverture was the first black leader to demand universal emancipation when he made it a pre-condition of his returning from Spanish Santo Domingo to fight for the French in June 1793. During the negotiations that took place in 1791 and 1792 between insurgent leaders and the Colonial Assembly and the civil commissioners, black leaders consistently demanded not general emancipation but instead liberty for themselves and the amelioration of labor conditions for slaves.

These demands continued even after general emancipation was declared in August 1793, as newly termed "cultivators" continued to negotiate and struggle with the commissioners over the labor conditions under which they would work. Furthermore, emancipation did not end unrest in Saint-Domingue. French civil commissioners Léger Félicité Sonthonax and Etienne Polverèl's drew up acts of emancipation that included coercive measures designed to ensure that former slaves returned to plantations and resumed laboring for the colony. Those still on plantations were required to remain there and all agricultural and domestic workers were prohibited from leaving their employment without permission of the local town government. Much to the commissioners' dismay, the newly designated "cultivators," rejected the commissioners' system of free labor, refusing to work under the same conditions as slavery, except for wages. Further, former slaves insisted upon more free days per week. The negotiations after emancipation demonstrate the ways in which emancipation itself could become a tool for white elites to regain control of the labor of rebellious slaves.

The continuity of demands for the amelioration of working conditions on plantations before and after formal emancipation suggests a de-centering of emancipation as a goal of the early insurgency, and instead highlights the centrality of local working conditions in the Haitian Revolution. In this way, the limited, pragmatic demands for improvements in labor conditions on plantations made by insurgents in the fall of 1791 proved to be a harbinger of things to come, and the politics of work remained central in the Revolution and in post-independence Haiti.

Studying the discourse of labor that existed alongside the language of universal rights allows us to more fully understand the Haitian Revolution and the roots of the modern Haitian state. It is my hope that by studying the goals, demands, and compromises made by each side, we may develop a fuller understanding of the aims and motivations of the people who chose to take up arms against all odds and fight.

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