

SETTLERS, "SAVAGES," AND SLAVES: ASSIMILATION, RACIALISM, AND
THE CIVILIZING MISSION IN FRENCH COLONIAL LOUISIANA

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ABSTRACT

JEFFREY RYAN HARRIS: *Settlers, “Savages,” and Slaves: Assimilation, Racialism, and the Civilizing Mission in French Colonial Louisiana*
(Under the direction of Lloyd S. Kramer, Kathleen A. DuVal, and Jay M. Smith)

French-Amerindian interaction in the Louisiana colony forced French people to define what French identity was and who could be included in it. Some colonists believed that non-Europeans were assimilable and could—if properly educated and Christianized—become “French” like them. Others believed that non-Europeans were inferior and could corrupt French civilization if not kept in their place. Although the racist perspective eventually prevailed in mid-eighteenth-century Louisiana, the Louisiana colony represented the continuity of earlier French fantasies of assimilating Indians, as well as the deeper history of racist pseudoscience. The debate in Louisiana between Catholic assimilationists and racial essentialists presaged the later tension throughout the French empire between the French Revolution’s republican universalism and nineteenth-century pseudoscientific racism. The race debate in eighteenth-century Louisiana illuminates the Old Regime origins of nineteenth- and twentieth-century French colonial ideology and the global influence of the French colonial experience in the Gulf South.

To Galatoire's, Drago's, and Pizza Delicious; to Vicky Mirzoyan, Liz Ellis, Rob Jones,
and Heather Shapiro; to CDM, Morning Call, and all the great folks unwound at the
Neutral Ground.

To the eternal city of New Orleans. Proud to call it home.

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INTRODUCTION

An estuary is a muddled place. It is where freshwater and saltwater slosh up against each other, where marine life and land animals cavort together, and where people of all sorts pass through on their way along the littoral, upriver into the heart of the continent, or beyond the horizon and out to sea. So it was in the swampy crossroads that would be named Mobile Bay. When French colonists settled at Mobile at the dawn of the eighteenth century, their fledgling outpost quickly became a muddled agglomeration of cultures. The French themselves were a diverse bunch—metropolitans and Canadians; soldiers, missionaries, and merchants; artisans and aristocrats. So, too, were their “savage” Amerindian neighbors with whom they fought, traded, and intermarried: the Choctaws, Chickasaws, Alabama, and Catholic Apalachees already converted by the Spanish in Florida. In the course of establishing European “civilization” in colonial Louisiana, the “enlightened” French had to contend with the peoples they described as “savages” with whom they shared this cosmopolitan and alien world. French colonists attempted to define the differences between these colonial populations; yet, despite fierce debates over who and what Indians were and who could and could not be French, the French in Louisiana could reach no consensus.

This essay will argue that the defining feature of the intellectual and political climate of French colonial Louisiana was the tension between two opposed ideologies:

assimilationism and racialism. Assimilation consisted of the belief that Amerindians could and should become French. Racialism in this period encompassed an array of related beliefs. Some French people believed that Amerindians were biologically different from and inferior to French people; other Frenchmen believed that Amerindians' behavior or culture made them inferior, but implied that their behavior was pathological or unchangeable or agreed with their biological-racism confreres when the question of Indian assimilability was posed in concrete policy terms. Neither assimilationism nor racialism predominated in the Louisiana colony until the second quarter of the eighteenth century, when both structural changes in colonial society and the sudden outbreak of serious violence effectively suppressed the former and accelerated the development of the latter.

Historians examining the French colonial empire in North America have usually interpreted colonial ideology in terms of one or the other of these two systems predominating rather than in terms of the awkward coexistence of conflicting ideas. Recent colonial scholarship focusing on either assimilationism or racialism has, however, afforded insights into the development of both and, has fruitfully investigated colonially-focused alternatives to more Eurocentric interpretations of Franco-Amerindian interactions. Scholars have identified the eighteenth century as a period when the European imagination of Indians as "noble savages" had replaced older conceptions of the Indians as lesser, sub-human "barbarians." While the noble savage trope remains fundamental to Enlightenment scholarship, historians have developed more nuanced and

colonially focused interpretations of French understandings of race.¹ Europeanists have long accepted that racism was a European invention born out of the context of European overseas expansion.² However, only recently have French historians devoted more attention to the development of racial ideology in the early modern French colonial empire.³ As Pierre H. Boulle has argued, French understandings of race derived from French discourse of nobility and noble lineage and, reflected the original concept of the noble *race*'s fluidity and mutability of social categorization as much as "biological" or "natural" difference through the early eighteenth century.⁴ Although Boulle recognizes

¹ For examples of this trend in major general works of Enlightenment scholarship, see Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), and Jonathan Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man, 1670-1752* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). For this trend in Enlightenment scholarship specifically treating race, see David Bindman, *Ape to Apollo: Aesthetics and the Idea of Race in the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002). For an early departure from this trend arguing that French people did not always imagine the "savage" to be so "noble," see Olive Patricia Dickason, *The Myth of the Savage and the Beginnings of French Colonialism in the America* (Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press, 1984), 273-278.

² See Dante A. Puzzo, "Racism and the Western Tradition," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 25 No. 4 (1964), 579-584. Puzzo defined racism as the beliefs "that a correlation exists between physical characteristics and moral qualities...[and] that mankind is divisible into superior and inferior stocks" (579), and argued that racist expression took two chief forms in European colonialism: "one, that just as God had created the beasts to serve man, to provide him with food and to haul his burdens, so 'inferior' breeds of men should serve the 'white,' 'Christian,' 'superior' European; two, that the 'white,' 'Christian,' 'superior' European must serve as a mentor and guide to 'inferior' peoples" (583).

³ Instrumental in this shift of consciousness, Sue Peabody analyzes the eighteenth-century development of race as a concept and as a political issue through the treatment of race in French law courts. See: Sue Peabody *There Are No Slaves in France": The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien Régime* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). Like Peabody, historians examining race in the early modern French world have concentrated on French perceptions of and interactions with Africans rather than Amerindians, particularly in examinations of the French and Haitian Revolutions and the role of race and abolitionism within them: Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004) and *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Jeremy Popkin, *"You Are All Free": The Haitian Revolution and the Abolition of Slavery* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010) and "Saint-Domingue, Slavery, and the Origins of the French Revolution," in Thomas Kaiser and Dale Van Kley, *From Deficit to Deluge: The Origins of the French Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011); and Paul Cheney, *Revolutionary Commerce: Globalization and the French Monarchy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), particularly chapter 7, "*L'Affaire des colonies* and the Fall of the Monarchy."

⁴ Pierre H. Boulle, "François Bernier and the Origins of the Modern Concept of Race," in Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall, eds., *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France* (Durham, NC: Duke University

that metropolitan French analyses of race as a fixed biological category existed before 1700, he argues that such texts do not reflect the initiation, let alone the completion, of a general paradigm shift toward a biological conception of race—a shift that, at least in French law and literature, he identifies as having taken place in the mid-eighteenth century, specifically “between 1738 and 1763.”⁵

This periodization roughly coincides with that of Americanist and Native Americanist scholars, who have generally argued that Europeans understood Amerindians in terms of color categorization and racial essentialism starting in the late eighteenth century. Whereas among historians of early modern France there is not a highly developed analysis of differences between European racial constructions of Africans versus Amerindians, colonial Americanists have demonstrated that Europeans adopted coherent racialist interpretations of Indians significantly later than for Africans, and that in the developing discourse of color categories for Indians, “red” was not predominant over “tawny” or even “white” until the late 1700s.⁶ Nancy Shoemaker has

Press, 2003), 12-13. Boule’s work corroborates prior explanations of French nobility-derived meanings of “race” and periodization of modern French racialist thought as originating in the mid-eighteenth century. See also: Arlette Jouanna, “Race,” in Lucien Bély, ed., *Dictionnaire de l’Ancien Régime* (Vendôme, France: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996), 1045-1047; Cornelius J. Jaenen, “Miscegenation in Eighteenth-Century New France,” in *New Dimensions in Ethnohistory*, 85-86; Tzvetan Todorov, *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 96-106; and John G. Burke, “The Wild Man’s Pedigree: Scientific Method and Racial Anthropology,” in Dudley and Novak, *The Wild Man Within*, 266.

⁵ Boule, “François Bernier,” 20; Boule, “In Defense of Slavery: Origins of a Racist Ideology in France,” in Frederick Krantz, ed., *History from Below: Studies in Popular Protest and Popular Ideology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 224. In maintaining that race as a concept of fixed biological categorization was not normative before the eighteenth century, Boule supports the mid-eighteenth-century periodization of Sue Peabody’s analysis of evolving race definitions in Old Régime France.

⁶ For a succinct account of this distinction, see David Brion Davis, “Constructing Race: A Reflection,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 54, No.1 (January 1997), 15. Also, Cornelius J. Jaenen has commented that, in the French colonial case, color rhetoric describing Amerindians was a rarity in the early modern period: *Friend and Foe: Aspects of French-Amerindian Cultural Contact in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 22-23. Alden T. Vaughan argues that white

argued that Amerindians' "red" identity developed first among the Indians themselves, sometime around the 1730s, independently of French understandings of their own "whiteness."⁷ Among both those colonial America historians focusing on European settlers and those focusing on indigenous peoples, the tendency has been to view racialism and color classification—be it from European, colonist, or indigenous origins—as having emerged at mid-century at the earliest. French Atlantic historian Guillaume Aubert stands out as a critic of this model. Aubert identifies examples of racialized thought in early eighteenth-century Canada and Louisiana; however, as this essay will demonstrate, his identification of a French colonial racist zeitgeist inordinately downplays the opposing assimilationist discourse.⁸

Historians have generally identified assimilationism with early French experiences in Canada.⁹ Cornelius Jaenen has compellingly argued that the early modern French vision of transforming Amerindians into Frenchmen stemmed from Catholicism, and that, because Catholicism was the foundation of French identity, "the desire to convert the Amerindians was not clearly distinguished from the more general aim of

settlers did not view Indians as a different color from themselves until the mid-1700s, nor consistently as "red" until the early nineteenth century: "From White Man to Redskin: Changing Anglo-American Perceptions of the American Indian," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 87 (October 1982), 918, 952-953. Kathleen DuVal has noted that the development of "red" and "white" as categories did not replace the "savage"/"civilized" dichotomy in colonial discourse: *The Native Ground* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, 2006), 217. DuVal has also argued that the European colonizers did not have clearly racialized views of Amerindians, and that it was later, among early-nineteenth-century Anglo-American settlers that there developed a "well-formed racialized" worldview: *Native Ground*, 226, 229.

⁷ Nancy Shoemaker, "How Indians Got To Be Red," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 102, No. 3 (June 1997), 627-629, 633-634.

⁸ Guillaume Aubert, "'The Blood of France': Race and Purity of Blood in the French Atlantic World," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 61, No. 3 (July 2004), 457, 468-470.

⁹ See especially Cornelius Jaenen, *The Role of the Church in New France* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1976), 3, 25, 29; Jaenen, *Friend and Foe*, 79, 153, 155, 159; and Peter Moogk, *La Nouvelle France: The Making of French Canada, A Cultural History* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2000), 45-50.

assimilating them into French culture.”¹⁰ Other historians have argued, however, that this assimilationist impulse was fairly short-lived. Gilles Havard, Cécile Vidal, and Mathé Allain have claimed that the French in Canada adopted assimilationist policies to “Frenchify” and “civilize” indigenous peoples into the late seventeenth century, but that by 1700, French people had given up on dreams of integrating Amerindians into French colonial society.¹¹ Sahila Belmessous contends that, while aspects of assimilationist policies such as interracial marriage persisted in the Great Lakes outposts, colonial officials at Québec rejected assimilationism by the end of the 1600s.¹² She generalizes this trend to all of French North America, citing Louisiana administrators’ opposition to mixed marriages to argue that assimilationism was a fleeting, failed experiment that did not survive into the eighteenth century or Louisiana. Historians have thus tended to think about French views of Amerindians according to a roughly linear model: the earliest French colonists in North America sought to transform Indians into Frenchmen; later, eighteenth-century colonists not only ceased to do so, but eventually racialized the Amerindians and themselves as biologically mutually exclusive categories within a white supremacist racial hierarchy. The few scholars who have provided interpretations deviating from this model—who have suggested, as Jaenen, that

¹⁰ Jaenen, *Friend and Foe*, 155.

¹¹ Gilles Havard and Cécile Vidal, *Histoire de l’Amérique française* (Mayenne, France: Flammarion, 2003), 224-226; Mathé Allain, “Not Worth a Straw”: *French Colonial Policy and the Early Years of Louisiana* (Lafayette, LA: University of Southwestern Louisiana Press, 1988), 78, 73. See also James Axtell, “Preachers, Priests, and Pagans: Catholic and Protestant Missions in Colonial North America,” in *New Dimensions in Ethnohistory: Papers of the Second Laurier Conference on Ethnohistory and Ethnology*, ed. Barry Gough and Laird Christie (Hull, QC: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1991), 71.

¹² See Sahila Belmessous, “Assimilation and Racialism in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century French Colonial Policy,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 110, No. 2 (2005). See also Luca Codignola, “The Holy See and the Conversion of the Indians,” in Karen Ordahl Kupperman, ed., *America in the European Consciousness, 1493-1750* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 209.

assimilationism remained significant after the mid-to-late seventeenth century or, who have argued, as Aubert, that modern racism developed in French America before the mid-eighteenth century—have differed in terms of periodization but have still interpreted the ideological climate of French North America in terms of the predomination of the one ideology or the other. Jennifer Spear has examined Louisiana race discourse in terms of political polarization for and against French-Indian marriage.¹³ However, she explores the debate in terms of practices shaping ideology and emphasizes that assimilationism as an ideological program had already effectively ended in the seventeenth century.¹⁴ This essay expands on Spear’s analysis in illustrating how ideology shaped practice in the struggles between competing Indian policies in French Louisiana, and furthermore emphasizes the social and occupational diversity within both camps, whereas Spear identifies the marriage debate as a struggle between primarily racist secular authorities and clergy amenable to intermarriage.¹⁵

Contrary to an “either/or” framing of French colonial attitudes toward Amerindians, this essay argues that both the assimilationist and racist schools of thought were developing simultaneously.¹⁶ For most of the early eighteenth century—the first half of the French period in Louisiana—the colony was generally divided between French people who believed that Amerindians were assimilable and could become

¹³ Jennifer Spear, *Race, Sex, and Social Order in Early New Orleans* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 4-5, 34.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 26, 34.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 26, 33-34.

¹⁶ For assimilationism’s influence in New Orleans, see also Jerah Johnson, “Colonial New Orleans: A Fragment of the Eighteenth-Century French Ethos,” in Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon, eds., *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 19, 45, 57.

“French” like them and, those who believed that Indians were inferior, unchangeable, and could corrupt French civilization if they were not kept in their place. Although the widespread institution of African slavery in the 1720s, changes in Church leadership, and the outbreak of major Indian violence against French settlers would bring about the collapse of assimilationism and accelerate the development of biological racism, the defining feature of French colonial opinion in early Louisiana was the awkward coexistence of these diametrically opposed ideologies. This ideological tension furthermore presaged the reemergence of the same tension in later centuries and reveals the Old Régime origins of ideological conflicts within republican French colonialism. Eighteenth-century Louisiana thus developed, as much of the French empire after it, as a conflicted, muddled colony, with universalism and racism vying with each other for the soul of the French empire.

CHAPTER 1

SAVAGE SOULS, FRENCH ASSIMILATION, AND THE FIRST CIVILIZING MISSION

French colonial rule in Louisiana began with the founding of Biloxi in 1699 and ended with the partition of the colony and the cession of its territories to Spain and Britain at the end of the Seven Years' War (1756-1763). When the Le Moyne brothers, Sieur d'Iberville and Sieur de Bienville, landed on the northern littoral of the Gulf of Mexico in 1699 and claimed its sandy and swampy shores for Louis XIV, His Most Christian Majesty, King of France and Navarre, the French and French Canadian adventurers who had joined their expedition each carried with them a particular conception of "civilization." Travelers to Louisiana would distinguish between themselves and the exotic Other on the basis of manners, technology, and customs. However, the primary criterion demarcating civilization from savagery among many of these men was the most fundamental institution of French society: Catholicism. Indeed, the Gallican Church never ceased reminding its laity that adherence to Christian morality, observance of the sacraments, confession and contrition before God, and receipt of God's grace were the only things keeping Frenchmen from damnation. As the Church defined it, Catholicism gave transcendental value to French civilization. Not all clergy in Louisiana believed in the power of the Christian faith to transform heathens into Frenchmen. However, there is no indication that the bulk of the First Estate in early French colonial

Louisiana had abandoned its mission to both Christianize and “Frenchify” the “savages” as the clergy in Canada had.¹⁷ Along with important supporters among the laity, the true believers among the Catholic clergy were the main proponents of a catholic Frenchness.

The first priests in Louisiana were often enthusiastic and optimistic about the conversion of the Amerindians. In imagining a French colony of Christianized Indians, they conceived of the cultural as well as confessional transformation of the indigenous peoples of Louisiana. The Recollect Father Louis de Hennepin served in the first French forays into Louisiana with the explorer Sieur de La Salle in the late seventeenth century. Hennepin wrote at length about his adventures in Louisiana and his observations of Amerindian peoples, selling two marvelous and grossly embellished accounts of Louisiana that were read by travelers throughout the eighteenth century. Hennepin’s literary motives may have been mixed; in part, no doubt, he wanted to sell books, but he also wanted to explain his role in the disastrous expedition in which La Salle was murdered by his own men.¹⁸ Despite his opportunism and desire to exonerate himself, Hennepin’s account remains an illuminating insight into the early French missionary interpretations of indigenous peoples in Louisiana. In his first publication since the actual establishment of the Louisiana colony, Hennepin wrote of the Indians:

¹⁷ The clergy in Louisiana—some of whom came from Canada—stand in contrast to the Canadian missions, which Belmessous argues had begun to abandon assimilationism as early as the 1630s. See Saliha Belmessous, “Assimilation and Racialism in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century French Colonial Policy,” 335.

¹⁸ See Louis de Hennepin, *Description de la Louisiane nouvellement découverte au Sud-Ouest de la Nouvelle-France* (Paris: chez la Veuve Sébastien Huré, 1683), and Hennepin, *Nouveau voyage d’un pais plus grand que l’Europe avec les reflections des entreprises du Sieur de la Salle, sur les mines de St. Barbe, &c. Enrichi de la carte, de figures expressives, des moeurs & manieres de vivre des sauvages du nord, & du sud, de la prise de Quebec ville capitale de la Nouvelle France, par les Anglois*, (Utrecht: A. Schouten, 1698).

They apparently live in the darkness, without faith, without laws, and without religion, only because no one works to lead them to the light of the truth. They would doubtlessly celebrate Salvation that would be revealed to them with an inconceivable joy, and at the same time, they would have the happiness of seeing their manners softened through their commerce with a polite and generous Nation, which is led by one of the most valiant and magnanimous Kings in the world.¹⁹

Hennepin thus envisioned a transformation of Amerindian societies in which Frenchmen not only propagated their religion among the Amerindians, but elevated all other aspects of Amerindian cultures by making them less “savage” and more French.

Father Hennepin was far from the only missionary to espouse a French Catholic civilizing mission in Louisiana. A Jesuit missionary serving as the chaplain for Sieur d’Iberville’s third expedition to the Gulf in 1700, Father Paul du Ru, spent months evangelizing among the Indian societies of the Mississippi delta. In his journal, he recounted his travels through the lands of several Indian nations—Bayougoulas, Houmas, Choctaws, Natchez, Chitimachas, and Colapissas—among whom he explained basic elements of Christian doctrine, composed catechisms in Amerindian languages, put up crosses in Indian villages he visited, performed baptisms, distributed Christian icons and rosaries, and, among the Houmas, even built a church.²⁰ Although he referred to certain aspects of Amerindian cultures that he found disquieting or horrifying—such as ritual suicides and human sacrifices—and complained that some groups of Indians were lazy, du Ru identified all of the Indian practices as changeable through French intervention.²¹

¹⁹ Louis de Hennepin, *Voyage, ou, Nouvelle decouverte d'un tres-grand pays dans l'Amerique entre le Nouveau Mexique et la Mer Glaciale avec toutes les particularitez de ce pais & de celui connu sous le nom de La Louisiane* (Amsterdam: chez A. Baarkman, 1704), 2-3. Translations by the author unless otherwise indicated.

²⁰ Paul du Ru, *Journal of Paul du Ru (February 1 to May 8, 1700) missionary priest of Louisiana*, ed. and trans. Ruth Lapham Butler (Chicago: Caxton Club, 1934 [1700]), 23; 30; 1; 23; 39; 45.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 29; 38-41; 53.

Du Ru expressed confidence that the religious and political rituals that appeared fundamental to certain Amerindian cultures could be eliminated and replaced with French Catholic practices. He said of the Houmas, “their whole cult and religion....can easily be corrected by a little instruction.”²² For the Indians to become like the French, du Ru saw only a need for a French Catholic civilizing mission to educate them out of their savagery.

Jesuit priests elsewhere in the vast Louisiana colony also hinted at the civilizing mission’s success. Father Jacques Gravier, preaching among the Illinois, claimed that the Jesuit missionaries enjoyed great success there: the missionaries in Illinois “have hardly time to breathe, on account of the increasing number of neophytes and their very great fervor; for out of two thousand souls, who compose their village hardly forty may be found who do not profess the Catholic faith with the greatest piety and constancy.”²³ Although Gravier wrote in support of Sieur de Bienville, then Governor of the Louisiana colony, against other assimilationist clergy when it suited the Jesuit order’s ecclesiastical political interests, he was wholly opposed to segregationist policies. Gravier sternly protested against the division of church authority along racial lines (i.e., French parishioners under the *curé* and secular clergy, Indians under the Jesuits and regular clergy).²⁴ This founding Father of the Jesuit missions in Illinois envisioned the transformation of the “savage” Louisiana interior into a united Catholic confessional

²² Du Ru, *Journal.*, 29.

²³ Father Jacques Gravier, “Letter of Father Jacques Gravier to the Very Reverend Father Michelangelo Tamburini, General of the Society of Jesus, Rome,” March 6, 1707, Paris, in Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, 73 vol. (Cleveland, OH: Burrows Brothers Company, 1886-1901) [Hereafter “JR”], 66:123.

²⁴ Gravier, “Letter...upon the Affairs of Louisiana,” JR 66: 127-129.

community in which all Catholics—French, Canadian, Amerindian, or métis—would accept the same sacraments from the same priests as parishioners of the same churches. For Gravier, only a lack of Amerindian instruction in the Catholic faith could frustrate the cultivation of a colorblind communion of saints, and in Gravier’s Illinois, that instruction was well under way.

Father du Poisson, another Jesuit missionary, related his edifying experiences in Mississippi, where he visited the Tonica nation, and Arkansas, where he established his own mission. Years before Du Poisson’s visit, Father Davion of the Missions Etrangères had evangelized among the Tonicas, but eventually abandoned his post and was not immediately replaced.²⁵ Du Poisson noted that many of the Tonicas had been baptized by Davion, but lamented that since Davion’s return to France, the Tonica chief “bears no mark of being a Christian but the name, a medal, and a rosary.” However, his pessimistic first impressions were soon relieved. The Tonica elites knew enough of Catholicism to change his mind; Du Poisson concluded that the chief really was a Christian and that his people were disposed to Christianity. Even more encouraging signs that Davion’s work had not been in vain, several of the Tonica spoke passable French, and they told Du Poisson that they wanted another missionary stationed among them.²⁶ Upon arriving at his own assigned mission in Arkansas, Du Poisson abhorred the lack of civility among the Indians there: “I never saw...worse manners.”²⁷ Although quick to vent his frustration

²⁵ Charles Edwards O’Neill, *Church and State in French Colonial Louisiana: Policy and Politics to 1732* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966), 17.

²⁶ Father du Poisson, “Letter from Father du Poisson, Missionary to the Akensas, to Father ***,” Akensas, October 3, 1727, JR 67:309, 313.

²⁷ Father du Poisson, “Letter from Father du Poisson, Missionary to the Akensas, to Father Patouillet,” 1726, JR 67:253.

at the difficulty of his task—“Pray to God that he may give me grace to devote all the strength that I have to the conversion of the Savages; to judge humanly, no great good can be done among them, at least not in the beginning”—Du Poisson claimed that the Arkansas were approaching the sacraments and learning the faith. The “savages” of Arkansas, by the grace of God, could be converted, Frenchified, and “civilized.”²⁸

The early missionaries were not alone in their fervent belief that they had a duty to civilize the “savages” through education. Mother Superior Marie St. Augustin de Tranchepain arrived in New Orleans in 1727 with ten other nuns under her supervision to establish the first Ursuline convent in Louisiana.²⁹ Mother Tranchepain explained in her journal that the proprietors of the joint-stock company running the colony, the Compagnie des Indes, joined with the Church to encourage the establishment of her order, believing as they did that “the most solid foundations of the colony of Louisiana are those that tend to advance the glory of God and the peoples’ edification.”³⁰ Tranchepain recorded that the support she received from others in the colony gave her “great hope for the conversion of the savages” as part of her mission to care for the sick and the poor and, to educate the colony’s youth.³¹ She had good reason to be optimistic, as the Ursulines were not alone in their mission to convert and instruct indigenous peoples; as noted earlier, the Jesuits had been established in their missions upriver for decades. Nor were these nuns the first women in the colony tasked with teaching the

²⁸ Father du Poisson, “Letter from Father du Poisson, Missionary to the Akensas, to Father Patouillet,” 1726, JR 67:261-263.

²⁹ Marie St. Augustin de Tranchepain, *Relation du voyage des premières Ursulines à la Nouvelle-Orléans et de leur établissement dans cette ville* (New York: Presse Cramoisy, 1859 [1733]), 5-6.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

³¹ *Ibid.*

Amerindian “savages.” In 1704, Marie-Françoise de Boisrenaud, a teacher and an unmarried lay woman assigned to chaperone the *filles du roi* (single women paid to emigrate from France to provide wives for Frenchmen in Louisiana), recorded her enthusiastic dedication to the education of “the little savage slaves.”³²

Over the next several years, Mother Tranchepain recorded the exploits of her Sisters in their obituaries as they died, paying particular attention to their interactions with Indians. Repeatedly, her most glowing praise for her subordinates was for their ardent participation in the French Catholic civilizing mission. Sister Madeleine Mahien de St. F. Xavier had exhorted Tranchepain to do more for the education of Indian and African girls, and had worked to that end herself.³³ This nun was evidently, along with others of her Ursuline order in New Orleans, one of the members of the religious orders who took upon herself the responsibility for the conversion and welfare of the slaves—clergy who were contemptuously referred to in France and Saint-Domingue as the *curés des nègres*: “As soon as she died, there was no other sound in the house but screams and sobbing, as much on the part of our female boarders as that of the orphans, pupils, and slaves.”³⁴ Tranchepain lauded another, more senior, nun, Mère Marguerite Judde de St. Jean L’Evangile, for her work among the enslaved Indian and African children of New Orleans: “As soon as she arrived in New Orleans, she devoted herself to the instruction of

³² Marcel Giraud, *A History of French Louisiana, Volume One: The Reign of Louis XIV, 1698-1715*, trans. Joseph C. Lambert (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), 179-180; Extract from a letter of Mlle. de Boisrenaud, Archives Coloniales de France [Hereafter AC] C13A Series 1 582-583, quoted in Giraud, 180.

³³ Tranchepain, *Rélation du voyage*, 43.

³⁴ John C. McManners, *Church and Society in Eighteenth-Century France, Volume 2: The Religion of the People and the Politics of Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 521. Tranchepain, 44.

slaves, a duty which she discharged with a truly apostolic zeal.”³⁵ When Mother Superior Tranchepain herself died in September 1733, her successor as Mother Superior of the convent recognized Tranchepain’s work and complimented her as a “fervent missionary,” praising her for the same achievements she had cherished most highly in writing about her late subordinates.³⁶

When the Ursulines established their convent in New Orleans, the city was undergoing its transformation into a plantation economy as an influx of African slaves gratified, for the first time, the voracious demand for them in lower Louisiana. The nuns themselves bought some slaves at a bargain from the Compagnie des Indes and maintained an estate of their own outside the city.³⁷ However, the Ursuline lands in this period were used to produce food rather than for cash crop agriculture; while the church orders in New Orleans were complicit in African slavery, they had not yet sought to exploit plantation slavery as a lucrative moneymaking enterprise. The Ursulines sustained themselves financially the same way their sisters in France did: by taking on *pensionnaires*, women boarders, and by educating French and Canadian boarding students.³⁸ The nuns did not have regular interactions with their own slaves outside the city; their quotidian experiences with slavery consisted of instruction of other people’s slaves within the walls of their community. The only slaves in the New Orleans convent

³⁵ Tranchepain, *Rélation du voyage*, 46.

³⁶ Tranchepain, 57.

³⁷ Marie Madeleine Hachard, Letter to her Father, October 27, 1727, New Orleans, in *Voices from an Early American Convent: Marie Madeleine Hachard and the New Orleans Ursulines, 1727-1760*, ed. Emily Clark (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 42-43; 43n.17.

³⁸ Hachard, Letter to her Father, October 27, 1727, *Voices.*, 43n. 17 and Letter to her Father, April 24, 1728, New Orleans, *Voices*, 82.

were seven boarders, probably Africans, waiting to be instructed for baptism and first communion, “besides a great number of day students, female blacks and female savages who come for two hours a day for instruction” in French and in Catholic dogma.³⁹

Another of the original Ursulines in Louisiana, Sister Marie Madeleine Hachard, delighted in her duties teaching the afternoon classes and felt that, because of this educational mission fulfilling the fourth vow of the Ursuline order to provide Christian education, she and her sisters were “not useless in this country.”⁴⁰ Although Hachard taught the African and Amerindian children in a segregated classroom, the division between boarders and day students in these early years seems to be separated by slave or free status rather than “race” per se; neither the surviving writings of Sister Hachard nor other nuns of this period in New Orleans reflect the increasingly racially essentialist rhetoric from other members of the plantation society around them. Nor did the nuns necessarily view the Africans and Amerindians in their care the same way—not because they had adopted racial categories of “red,” “white,” and “black,” but because Africans were not the most coveted converts in the Ursulines’ apostolic fantasies. While the nuns enthusiastically instructed both groups of slave children, Hachard stressed her own sense of her “use” in Louisiana by describing the instruction of the ideal souls to be saved: Amerindians.

In her letters to her father back home in Rouen, Hachard imagined Louisiana as “big savage wild woods,” that, like Canada, were a landscape of martyrdom.⁴¹ Drawing

³⁹ Hachard, Letter to her Father, April 24, 1728, New Orleans, *Voices*, 82.

⁴⁰ Hachard, Letter to her Father, January 1, 1728, New Orleans, *Voices*, 74.

⁴¹ Hachard, Letter to her Father, October 27, 1727, New Orleans, *Voices*, 68.

on tales from the Canadian missions, she related to her father stories of pious Frenchmen killed by “savages,” including a priest who would be rewarded in heaven for “the ardent zeal that he showed for the salvation of the souls of his poor savages....[who] had the consolation of opening heaven to the first Christians and saints of this...nation.”⁴² Perhaps all the more so for one nun’s having her brother, the Jesuit missionary Boullenger, among the Illinois during the early days of the New Orleans convent, these Ursulines’ sense of purpose in North America, if not their everyday affairs in the colonial capital, was oriented above all else toward the conversion and education of Indians. Hachard longed to suffer for Christ as the missionaries before her to gain “for Him the souls that He redeemed at the price of His blood,” “to teach and convert these poor savages.”⁴³ While she recognized some good in the Amerindians—“very sociable for the most part”—Hachard had serious anxieties about teaching Indian children.⁴⁴ Doubtlessly referring to the role of Amerindian women as sex slaves and the “libertinage” scandals of years past of which she would surely have been aware, Hachard uneasily instructed the Indian girls in her care, “whom one does not baptize without trembling because of the tendency they have to sin, especially the women, who, under a modest air, hide the passions of beasts.”⁴⁵ However, Hachard never indicated that she thought her efforts were in vain; she believed that the convent school would “in time...produce great good for the salvation of souls” and thought the Normans back home in Rouen should take pride “in the priests and Ursuline nuns of the same city who work at all that is possible at the

⁴² Hachard, Letter to her Father, April 24, 1728, *Voices*, 88-89.

⁴³ Hachard, Letter to her Father, October 27, 1727, *Voices*, 72.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁴⁵ Hachard, Letter to her Father, April 24, 1728, *Voices*, 78.

instruction and the salvation of the souls of these poor savages.”⁴⁶ Unlike some more pessimistic clergy, Marie-Madeleine Hachard maintained a sense of purpose committed to the difficult—but not, in her view, impossible—civilization of “savage” Louisiana. The Catholic Church’s missionary zeal was thus as strong as ever, and in spite of the increasing popularity of racialism in other circles, the assimilationist basis for French colonialism was still visible among important elements of the colonial population going into the mid-eighteenth century.

There were also partisans of the assimilationist perspective outside the Catholic clergy. The most important of the early assimilationists among the laity was the French Canadian adventurer and first governor of Louisiana, Pierre Le Moyne, Sieur d’Iberville. Although he used religion for less altruistic purposes than the missionaries, Iberville nevertheless ended up siding with the assimilationists when the justification for the colonial project was put into question. During his second expedition to the Gulf in 1699-1700, Iberville recognized the efforts of the missionaries to curtail the Amerindian practices most offensive to the French, particularly the Jesuit father M. de Montigny’s intervention among the Tensas to end their supposed rituals of human sacrifice.⁴⁷ On his third voyage, Iberville personally intervened against Indian idol worship by absconding with what he supposed to be their icons, and he served as godfather to Indian children whom Father du Ru baptized.⁴⁸ To be sure, Iberville viewed religious conversion as a means of political control. He moderated peace negotiations between the Choctaw

⁴⁶ Hachard, Letter to her Father, October 27, 1727, *Voices*, 72.

⁴⁷ Pierre LeMoyne, Sieur d’Iberville, *Iberville’s Gulf Journals*, trans. and ed., Richebourg Gaillard McWilliams (Tuscaloosa, AL : University of Alabama Press, 1981 [1702]), 129.

⁴⁸ Iberville, *Gulf Journals*, 168-169; Du Ru, 1.

and Chickasaw—a war that Iberville believed to be incited by the English and prosecuted to their benefit, since they were buying each side’s prisoners of war as slaves. Upon the conclusion of the peace, Iberville implored the *Grand Vicair* of Québec and the Jesuit Superior to send missionaries as soon as possible to evangelize among the two tribes.⁴⁹ Iberville was convinced that the French colonists needed to ensure the French settlements’ protection by surrounding them with Indian powers whose loyalty to aspects of French civilization would trump their possible affinities with their fellow Amerindians. He was eager to send missionaries among the Choctaws and Chickasaws, because, he wrote, “sending missionaries will help keep them in the alliance.”⁵⁰ Iberville was confident of the success of his plans to build a Catholic bloc and he placed absolute faith in the Apalachees. These Indians were already Catholic and had joined the Catholic French in their diplomatic manoeuvres against the Amerindians and the Spanish in Florida who had converted them years before. Iberville was thus able to threaten the Choctaws and Chickasaws with his Catholic Indian allies, “our friends the Apalaches—whose tomahawks I controlled.”⁵¹ The conversion of the Indians was first and foremost for Iberville a diplomatic, military, and commercial necessity. However, Iberville and many other laypeople were also true believers in the possibility of integrating Indians into the French community.

The clearest examples of assimilationism arose from concrete policy decisions that forced French people to take a side for or against the inclusion of Amerindians in

⁴⁹ Iberville, *Gulf Journals*, 172-175.

⁵⁰ Iberville, 175.

⁵¹ Iberville, *Gulf Journals*, 173.

French social structures and institutions. The first test for such assimilation came when a controversy arose in Mobile over the religious and legal status of Indians in the town—a question that had immediate implications across the entire territory. Indian slaves constituted 40 percent of the population: 100 Indians out of a total population of 250 people.⁵² The French had bought many of these slaves as children, of both sexes and all ages, from tribes across Louisiana.⁵³ The institution of Indian slavery, albeit short-lived, produced two intimately connected controversies. The first of these controversies was the debate over whether to baptize Indian and mixed-race children who had either been bought from the surrounding tribes or born to Indian or interracial couples in Mobile. The second was the debate over whether Church and State should recognize marriages between French settlers and soldiers and Amerindian slave women. Both controversies forced the French colonists to choose between the assimilationist and racist schools of thought in colonial policy.

In the sacramental controversy in Mobile, the assimilationists carried the day, at least in determining church policy. In spite of objections from Governor Bienville, from the colony's chief financial officer, or *ordonnateur*, Jean-Baptiste du Bois Duclos, and from other administrators, the *curé* of Mobile, Father La Vente, decided to administer the sacraments to the Amerindian slaves and to perform interracial marriages. Other clergy in the colony soon followed suit in supporting Indians' integration into the French Catholic community.⁵⁴ The heads of the missionary orders outside the colony intervened as well.

⁵² Giraud, *History of French Louisiana, Vol. 1* 279.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 177-179.

⁵⁴ Giraud, *History of French Louisiana, Vol. 1*, 233. *Ibid.*, 279.

The superiors of the Missions Etrangères denounced Bienville’s “odious” campaign against La Vente, accused Bienville of being an enemy of the Church because of his own scandalous affair with an Indian woman, and called on Versailles to ban the “taking of Savage women for slaves” and “above all else to live with those women under the same roof in concubinage.”⁵⁵ The civilizing clergy were joined by important laymen, including Iberville, who, initially reluctant, committed himself to supporting a policy of interracial marriage, which officials at Versailles had supported so long as both husband and wife were Christian and were married by a Catholic priest.⁵⁶

The *curé* at Mobile, Father La Vente, decided to marry interracial couples, finding the alternative—Indian sex slave trafficking, “the principal source of public irreligion”—wholly insupportable.⁵⁷ La Vente railed against Frenchmen buying Indian women as sex slaves “under the pretext of keeping them as domestic servants” and blamed the practice for all manner of mortal sins, including the infanticide of the unions’ illegitimate métis offspring.⁵⁸ He was particularly outraged at many Frenchmen’s practice of keeping an Indian concubine until she bore a child, then trying to get rid of them both—“a scandal absolutely incompatible with the Christian life.”⁵⁹ For La Vente, not only did these unregulated, abusive relationships ruin the virtue of the unconverted Indian women, they promoted the most licentious behavior among the French; in “cabarets” and “public gaming” instead of hearing Sunday mass, the French were “almost all drunks, swearers,

⁵⁵ Les Supérieurs des Missions Etrangères au Ministre, [Fall 1708], AC C13A 02 161-163.

⁵⁶ Giraud, *History of French Louisiana, Vol. 1*, 233.

⁵⁷ La Vente, “Mémoire sur la conduit des François dans la Louisiane,” 1713, AC C13A 03 390.

⁵⁸ La Vente, “Mémoire,” 390.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 393.

and blasphemers against the holy name of God, enemies of all goodness.”⁶⁰ Frenchmen’s misbehavior imperiled Christianity among the settler population, and the settlers’ poor example undermined all missionary activity among the Amerindians.⁶¹ La Vente proposed several solutions: the importation of French people in legitimate marriages to set a positive example, the importation of single French women, and, above all, marrying Frenchmen and their (converted) concubines to integrate Indian slave women into traditional French family structures.⁶² Cognizant of the racial essentialist ideas articulated by the administrators opposed to the marriages, La Vente also sought to rebut those charges. He argued that the marriages would produce “good Christians and good subjects of the King” and dismissed biological racist fears that the children of mixed unions would be in any way degraded because of their Indian parentage: “The [children’s] blood is not altered.”⁶³ The intermarriage of Frenchmen and Indian women in Mobile, La Vente contended, would rectify Louisiana’s social problems and promote the growth of Louisiana as a socially stable, religiously observant colony.

Father La Vente’s reasoning was hardly atypical. Other clergymen in Mobile rallied to the support of the marriages, including Father du Ru, as well as the missionaries in the Illinois country, where the situation was even more pressing because there were no French women. As far as the missions in the interior were concerned, the alarmist claims of racial purists were demonstrably false and there could be no reason to oppose marriage

⁶⁰ La Vente, “Mémoire,” 390-391.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 393.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 394-395.

⁶³ La Vente, “Résumé: Mémoire sur l’état présent,” August 1710, AC C13A 02 565.

between Christians.⁶⁴ Interracial marriages, in the view of the Jesuits in Illinois, did not drive Frenchmen into savagery; they brought Indians into the Church.⁶⁵

The clergy continued to fight against Frenchmen's "libertinage" with slave women for several years to come. In the mid-1720s, Father Raphaël, head of the Capuchin order in Louisiana, complained to the Compagnie des Indes of certain administrators' hostility toward legitimate mixed marriages and meddling in the Church's efforts to regulate such relationships.⁶⁶ Raphaël criticized the secular government for the social effects of its interference: "All is disorder in the Colony with people married [in France] who are remarried here, and others who live in a scandalous debauchery with their slaves."⁶⁷ The Capuchin cleric despaired no less for the state of religion in the developing plantation society:

The instruction of black and Indian slaves is entirely neglected; the masters think only of making a profit off these unfortunates' labor without being moved to care for their salvation. Most of them die without baptism and without knowing the true God...[I]f something consoles us in our mission...it is the emulation [of us] that we notice among these poor people for the understanding of our mysteries and admission to baptism.⁶⁸

Raphaël, doubtlessly well aware of the chiefly sexual purpose of Indian female slavery, railed against "libertinage" and French sexual corruption of Amerindian victims—adding to the litany of French abuses, in the case of the Natchez post commandant Sieur du

⁶⁴ Giraud, *History of French Louisiana*, Vol. 1, 234; 344.

⁶⁵ Giraud, *History of French Louisiana*, Vol. 1, 344.

⁶⁶ Les Capucins [Raphaël] de la Louisiane aux directeurs de la Compagnie, May 16, 1724, AC C13A 08 418.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Father Raphaël, Capuchin, to the Abbé Raguét, New Orleans, May 15, 1725, AC C13A 08 399.

Tisé, notorious homosexual liaisons with, among others, a young Illinois man.⁶⁹ The Capuchin director wanted for Franco-Amerindian relationships in Louisiana to be regulated by the Church as sacramentally blessed (heterosexual) legal marriages, and resented forces of both the Louisiana secular government and private enterprises that thwarted that vision.

Powerful laymen continued to support the Catholic assimilationist vision after the Mobile sacraments controversy. Prior to succeeding Bienville as Governor of Louisiana, Sieur de La Mothe Cadillac had served as the commander of the Detroit settlement. While in Michigan, Cadillac had agitated for a general policy of assimilationism in Canada. In a memorandum to Versailles, Cadillac announced his intention to convert and Frenchify the Amerindians: “to civilize and humanize the Savages, in such a way that the majority will in ten years speak no other language but French, and thus, by this means, from pagans they will become children of the Church, and consequently good subjects of the King.”⁷⁰ Arriving in Mobile, Cadillac was horrified to find his starving soldiers living among the Indians and the men in the settlement devolving into irreligion and “disorder” because of their libertine master-slave relationships with Indian women.⁷¹ He sought to have women sent from France to help resolve the colony’s social problems.⁷² Although

⁶⁹ Raphaël to Raguét, May 15, 1725, 402; Father Raphaël to the Abbé Raguét, December 28, 1726, AC C13A 10 450-451. For the specifically sexual purpose of French enslavement of Indian women, see Julianna Barr, “From Captives to Slaves: Commodifying Indian Women in the Borderlands,” *Journal of American History*, Vol. 92, No. 1 (June 2005), 29.

⁷⁰ Sieur de La Mothe Cadillac, “Mémoire adressé au comte de Maurepas,” [c. 1700], in Pierre Margry, *Découvertes et Etablissements des Français dans l’Ouest et dans le Sud de l’Amérique Setentrionale (1614-1754)* (Paris: Imprimerie Jouaust, 1873), 139, trans. in Charles Edwards O’Neill, *Church and State*, 81.

⁷¹ Cadillac to the Minister, October 26, 1713, AC C13A 03 014, 17-18

⁷² *Ibid.*, 49-51.

Cadillac viewed European immigration as one remedy to the colony's "libertinage," he did not abandon the assimilationist ideals he supported in Canada. Responding to charges from other administrators that the missionaries had failed to convert, instruct, and civilize Indian women, Cadillac pointed out that there were only three priests in Louisiana.⁷³ He also affirmed his support for the assimilationist clergy and related their complaints against unbelieving, racist administrators to Versailles. The Jesuit Fathers in Illinois, he explained, had written to Cadillac in response to the anti-assimilationist side of the Mobile debate to rebuke the racist *Ordonnateur* Duclos by reminding him that the Catholic clergy, not the secular government, were by apostolic succession blessed with the spirit of Jesus Christ moving through them and not to be trifled with. "These Reverend Fathers asked me," the Governor added, "of what religion M. Duclos was if he was not a Jansenist. I told them that that heresy had only attacked the Church since [the Reformation], whereas M. Duclos attacked it at its birth."⁷⁴ Not only did Governor Cadillac remain a steadfast partisan of assimilation, but, like many other laymen, he derived his belief in religious and cultural conversion from an unshakeable faith in the transforming power of Christianity. In the Governor's view, to reject the possibility of Amerindian integration was one thing, but for Duclos to reject it on the basis of rejecting the Church made him as pernicious as the Devil himself.

Lay French Catholics continued to support French Catholic assimilationism in the 1720s. Writing in 1722, more than a decade after the mixed-marriage controversy in Mobile, the military officer Prosper Drouot de Val de Terre lamented French settlers'

⁷³ Cadillac to the Minister, January 23, 1716, AC C13A 04 543.

⁷⁴ Cadillac to the Minister, January 23, 1716, AC C13A 04 554-555.

“libertinage” with Amerindian women, and called for more missionaries to be sent to Louisiana to restore religion to the French as well as to propagate the faith among the Indians.⁷⁵ Like Father La Vente, he proposed to resolve the colony’s social problems by assimilating indigenous peoples into French Catholic society. His 1722 memorandum argued for the establishment of schools for Indian children and for enticing Indian nations near French posts to have some of their chiefs live among the French.⁷⁶ Drouot de Val de Terre strongly supported the social and confessional integration of métis children of French settlers and Amerindian slave women, and opposed the treatment of slave mothers of métis children as transferrable property instead of permanent family units: “The settlers who have children born of Indian women... must not be able to sell the mother or the child. It will be as much in the interest of Religion as the good of the [colony’s] establishment to give them [the métis children], at the end of a certain period of time, their liberty, which would make Indian settlers of them and bind them to us by [their own] inclination.”⁷⁷ Drouot de Val de Terre saw the conversion and instruction of Indians—both free Indians and slaves to be emancipated—as a means to transform Indians into Frenchmen, and he enthusiastically argued for assimilationism as a means to facilitate the growth of the Louisiana colony and the salvation of French and Amerindian souls.

⁷⁵ Prosper Drouot de Val de Terre, “Instructions pour la formation d’un établissement en Louisiane,” December 9, 1722, AC C13A 06 353-354.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 368.

⁷⁷ Prosper Drouot de Val de Terre, “Instructions pour la formation d’un établissement en Louisiane,” December 9, 1722, AC C13A 06 368.

Older assimilationist fantasies found new life in a 1720s compendium of reports or “Historical Journal” attributed to the military officer Jean-Baptiste Bérnard de La Harpe, though possibly written by the Chevalier de Beaurain, the royal geographer.⁷⁸ The author-compiler in their own essay at the end of the compendium argued for a monogenetic interpretation of Amerindian origins, claiming that Amerindians were descended from some group or groups of Old World people who somehow migrated to the Americas some thousands of years ago by crossing the Atlantic by sea or by crossing a land bridge from Asia to northwestern North America.⁷⁹ The author-compiler described no racial or biological distinction between Old World and New World peoples, and lent support to assimilationism by recounting a 1700 speech that he alleged was delivered by the Mantantous chief Ouacantapi to the French explorer Le Sueur in a calumet ceremony:

Here is the remainder of this great village which was formerly so numerous. All the others have been killed in war, and the few men that you see in this tent accept the present that you gave them, and have decided to obey this great chief of all nations of whom you have spoken. Thus, you no longer need look upon us as Sioux, but as Frenchmen. Instead of saying that the Sioux are unfortunate men who are not properly disposed, and who are only suited to pillaging and stealing from the French, you will say, “My brothers who do not have the proper disposition are unfortunate; we must try to change this. They steal from us, but to prevent them from doing so, I shall see that they do not lack iron, that is to say, all kinds of merchandise.” If you do that, I assure you that in a short time the Mantatous will become French, and they will no longer have the vices with which you reproach them.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Jean-Baptiste Bérnard de La Harpe, *The Historical Journal of the Establishment of the French in Louisiana*, trans. Joan Cain and Virginia Koenig, ed. and annotated Glenn R. Conrad (Lafayette, LA: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1971), 1. Louisiana historian Glenn R. Conrad notes that French historians of Louisiana Marc de Villiers du Terrage and Marcel Giraud claimed that although La Harpe signed the manuscript, the real author was de Beaurain. Conrad himself leaves the question unresolved. I find that the clear difference in tone between the author-compiler and the transcribed reports of La Harpe vis à vis the Amerindians supports Villiers du Terrage’s and Giraud’s claim that the *Historical Journal* was at least not entirely La Harpe’s work.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 179-180.

⁸⁰ La Harpe, *Historical Journal*, 39.

Implicitly open to the possibility of integration of Old and New World populations divided by space and time but not blood, the author-compiler—in describing the early French explorations of upper Louisiana—not only suggested that Amerindian peoples could become French through Catholic evangelism and commerce with the French, he suggested that the Amerindians themselves would support assimilation into the ‘superior’ French community.

Although most assimilationists believed that more French people would have to be transplanted from France to maintain civilization, they believed that Indians could and should be integrated into the community, and they took major steps toward interracial sacramental, legal, and social equality.⁸¹ Although the enemies of interracial marriage in Louisiana would eventually succeed in reversing the official policy by the 1730s, the ideals of the Catholic clergy espousing the possibility of a catholic Frenchness became the social foundation for the first generation of Louisiana settler families over the course of the early eighteenth century.⁸² Assimilated Indians in French family structures had become a fact of life in both urban and rural Louisiana, and such families would ensure that among the laity as well as among the clergy there remained partisans of the assimilationist perspective for decades to come. Born of the Catholic Church and kept alive within it, French colonial Louisiana produced a formidable group of assimilationists who could continue to challenge the rising tide of racial essentialism well into the eighteenth century.

⁸¹ Giraud, *History of French Louisiana, Vol. 1*, 338.

⁸² Belmessous, “Assimilation and Racialism in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century French Colonial Policy,” 342-343.

CHAPTER 2

SAVAGE FLESH, FRENCH BLOOD, AND THE BIRTH OF THE RACIST ORDER IN COLONIAL LOUISIANA

From the earliest days of the Louisiana colony, some Frenchmen imagined that the gulf of cultural differences between the Europeans and Amerindians was the natural and inevitable consequence of biology. "Savagery," to men such as Governor Bienville and *ordonnateur* Duclos, did not describe a curable state of ignorance for which the prescription was French Catholic enlightenment. Rather, "savagery" described a hopelessly depraved nature, whose superficial physical markers betrayed a behavioral pathology of barbarism transmitted through the bloodlines of a "red" race. Colonists who held this view therefore opposed assimilation and invented a division of humanity by color. They developed essentializing stereotypes about non-whites that justified their exclusion from French social, intellectual, or confessional life and separated them into different work regimes. The development of a racialist perspective among the Louisiana French depended first and foremost on the wholesale rejection of the belief that the only thing that made the "Savages" savage was their lack of education in the learned or revealed knowledge of French civilization. Racialists either denied the ability of the Catholic missions to Christianize the Amerindians or denied Christianity as the foundation of French civilization and thereby rejected Christianization as a path to Frenchness. The "blood and color" rhetoric of the racialist perspective developed

alongside this rejection of French Catholicism's catholicity, but it retained one fundamental premise of the assimilationist Catholic perspective: the possibility of apostasy, of losing civilization, and descending into savagery. The red man represented a threat to white civilization if integrated as "French" or if not kept in his "natural," subordinate place in the French colonial order.

The opposing racialist and assimilationist camps operated simultaneously from the beginning of the Louisiana colony. Partisans of the racialist perspective articulated their position clearly in the early controversy over Indian baptism and interracial marriage. Sieur de Bienville, like his brother Iberville, was mainly preoccupied with pragmatic questions in dealing with the Amerindians. Unlike Iberville, Bienville was totally unconcerned with the creation of a united Catholic front and the maintenance of peace among Indians allied to the French; his sole ambition was to keep them loyal to France over Britain.⁸³ Indeed, Bienville did not think highly enough of his Indian allies to hope for much else. Reporting to Versailles the murder in 1707 of a French missionary among the Natchez by Chitimacha assailants, Bienville made clear that he viewed all Amerindians as suspect: "All the Savages of this country are altogether treacherous."⁸⁴ Skeptical of the Catholic missions' ability to convert any Amerindian nations, Bienville valued missionaries—and only Jesuits at that, since he deemed them least likely to abandon their posts—solely for their utility as diplomats; it was as plenipotentiaries for French secular authority that the Governor abhorred Indian "insults" against the French in

⁸³ Giraud, *History of French Louisiana, Vol. 1*, 207; Bienville to the Minister, Fort Louis de la Mobile, February 25, 1708, AC C13A 02 094.

⁸⁴ Bienville to the Minister, February 20, 1707, AC C13A 02 011.

the form of clerical assassination.⁸⁵ Bienville did not care for missionizing and harbored, along with many Frenchmen, a deep-seated fear of Indian allies' disloyalty in conflicts with the British. He repeatedly expressed the colonists' paranoia, writing to Minister Ponchartrain that he feared that the British in Carolina were poised to attack Mobile and Pensacola with a hundred French Huguenots and 2000 "Savages" (2500 in subsequent frantic reports).⁸⁶

The Governor saw the Indians as not only an external threat, but as a corrupting force from within that, if not kept at bay, would fatally undermine French colonial society. Bienville viewed the employment of Indian servant women in Mobile households as necessary and benign, but he would not countenance officially recognized interracial marriage for fear that without the maintenance of racial hierarchy, Frenchmen—already reliant on Amerindian aid for sustenance—would 'go native' and join Amerindian communities in the wilderness.⁸⁷ He ferociously opposed the Mobile *curé* La Vente and the mixed marriages he performed, and he denounced La Vente to the Minister for marrying Franco-Amerindian couples without approval of the state and without publishing the required banns.⁸⁸ Bienville responded to La Vente's criticisms of Frenchmen keeping female Amerindian domestic slaves by claiming to Versailles that he required the Indian women to be quartered exclusively with French women and, by writing to Versailles a screed of calumnies against the priest. He accused La Vente of

⁸⁵ Bienville to the Minister, February 25, 1708, AC C13A 02 100, 109-110.

⁸⁶ Bienville to the Minister, February 25, 1708, AC C13A 02 098; Bienville to the Minister, August 20, 1709, AC C13A 02 407-409.

⁸⁷ Giraud, *History of French Louisiana, Vol. 1*, 233.

⁸⁸ Bienville to the Minister, August 20, 1709, AC C13A 02 413.

refusing to cooperate with any secular authorities, improperly administering the sacraments, profiteering, and even having been responsible for the deaths of several French children.⁸⁹ Although the two men clearly developed an abiding personal enmity toward each other, Governor Bienville fought La Vente because he had an irreconcilably different vision of Louisiana from that of the priest and likeminded clergy. Bienville did not believe in a catholic France or see Louisiana as “big, savage, wild woods” to be converted and civilized. Non-Europeans were not to be assimilated into European family and social structures; they were to be worked—as warriors holding back the English Protestants and, more importantly, as slave chattel. Bienville wanted to establish in Louisiana a plantation economy built on the backs of black and Indian slaves and, to that end, he sought either to keep Mobile’s Indians in their place or, better yet, to barter them for Africans with French slave traders in Saint-Domingue.⁹⁰ The implications of the assimilationists’ actions were anathema to Bienville’s designs; not only would his plans for a racially hierarchal plantation society be undermined, but promoting legitimate relationships between Frenchmen and Amerindians could encourage the French husbands to abandon the struggling outpost to go become “savages” themselves.

Other administrators supported Bienville’s point of view and shared many of the same anxieties. The company agent d’Artaguiette called for women to be sent from France to lure Frenchmen and Canadian *coureurs de bois* out of the wilderness and back to Mobile. D’Artaguiette claimed that there was no viable means of populating the colony

⁸⁹ Bienville to the Minister, February 20, 1707, AC C13A 02 024-026; Bienville to the Minister, [1708], AC C13A 02 173-174.

⁹⁰ Bienville to the Minister, February 20, 1707, AC C13A 02 006; Bienville to the Minister, [1708], AC C13A 02 165.

without the importation of French women, because Amerindian women were not viable partners for French settlers. Indian women, in his view, were “easy women” whose licentiousness imperiled the civilization of the very “rigorous” and rugged Canadian men—hence the “libertinage” at the heart of La Vente’s complaints. Worse, d’Artaguiette claimed that marriages between Frenchmen and Indian women only led to both partners leading the same “wayward” lives, at least until the hopelessly fickle wives left their husbands on the slightest pretext.⁹¹ Mixed marriages promoted the deterioration of French morals and even the possible dissipation of the French male population into the wilds of Louisiana away from the colonial centers of European civilization—a situation that d’Artaguiette noted menaced the colony’s viability without further encouragement.⁹²

The colony’s chief financial officer, *Ordonnateur* Duclos, also thought the only viable means of promoting the growth of the colony was to send women from France. He had no confidence in the farcical French civilizing mission’s ability to make “savages” into Frenchmen. The missionaries, in his view, were incompetent and ineffectual, and so the only Catholic Indians were the Apalachees, whom the Spanish had Catholicized before the French arrived on the Gulf Coast.⁹³ Duclos drew on these views to reject La Vente’s proposal that marriages be permitted between Frenchmen and converted Indian women. Laying out his argument to Minister Ponchartrain, he developed his argument in four parts and claimed that all of his points were based on sound examples from the

⁹¹ D’Artaguiette to the Minister, [1710], AC C13A 02 544-545; D’Artaguiette, *Mémoire pour empêcher autant qu’il est possible libertinage à la Louissiane*, Paris, September 8, 1712, AC C13A 02 799.

⁹² D’Artaguiette, *Mémoire sur la scituation de la colonie de la Louisiane*, Bayonne, May 12, 1712, AC C13A 02 803.

⁹³ Duclos to the Minister, July 15, 1713, AC C13A 03 126-127, 139-140.

Illinois country. First, he argued, Indian women would likely not want French husbands because “Sauvagesses” were not capable of sustaining French monogamy and would always prefer the “savage” freedom to change partners. Worse, these and other licentious traits were transmitted in marriages from the supposedly “Sauvagesses francisées” to their French husbands, who became “nearly Savages” themselves rather than making their wives French. Second, he surmised that only maniacal libertines would want to marry “Sauvagesses” anyway. Third, the conversion and French education of the Indian women at the missions—supposing that it was even theoretically possible—would require several years of instruction. Such a time commitment would be impossible, since Indians were not considered docile enough to commit to such an endeavor and would undoubtedly change their minds. Fourth, Duclos argued that, despite La Vente’s claims to the contrary, the offspring of such mixed marriages would not be French because of “the alteration that such marriages would make to the whiteness and blood purity of the children.” The population’s blood contamination and dilution of whiteness would gradually transform the French population into barbarians and would biologically create a “colony of mulattoes—naturally lazy, libertine, and...roguish.”⁹⁴ Not only was Frenchness inaccessible to non-Europeans and not only was French civilization in the New World vulnerable to collapse without demographic reinforcement from Europe, French identity was biological, transmissible through bloodlines and in danger of corruption and demise through race mixing.

Although the assimilationist-minded clergy had succeeded in establishing, if on an ad hoc basis, a de facto church policy of marrying mixed French-Indian couples, both

⁹⁴ Duclos to the Minister, December 25, 1715, AC C13A 03 819-823.

the home government and the Louisiana colonial administrations sought to articulate and implement clearer marriage and family policies to curtail the recognition of those relationships in the wake of the Mobile interracial marriage controversy. Louis XIV and Minister Pontchartrain had initially been favorably disposed to an assimilationist policy in Louisiana.⁹⁵ As reports trickled into Versailles of La Vente's mixed marriages, the Minister noted that the unions were "forbidden" by the colonial government, but took no action against them or against the assimilationist clergy.⁹⁶ The ministry was reluctant to intervene, no doubt, not only because the King had not pronounced definitively on the marriage question, but also because the King and his ministers did not, strictly speaking, have the authority to forbid or annul marriages officiated by Catholic clergy between two Catholic lay people.⁹⁷ Indeed, when the colonial clergy were unclear about whether the higher authorities condoned or opposed interracial marriage, they asked their ecclesiastical superiors, not secular authorities.⁹⁸ Rather than forbidding mixed unions outright, Louis XIV ordered Governor Cadillac to suppress the Frenchmen's "outrageous debauchery with the Savages...very prejudicial to religion," and, to simply make the problem go away: "His Majesty desires that Sieur de La Mothe Cadillac prevent the

⁹⁵ Spear, *Race, Sex, and Social Order*, 1.

⁹⁶ Pontchartrain, "Résumé of Bienville's letters of August 12 and September 1, 1709," with margin notes, [1709], AC C13A 02 415.

⁹⁷ See O'Neill, *Church and State*, 250. For conflicts between the French state and the Catholic Church over the regulation of marriage, see McManners, *Church and Society*, Vol. 2, 18-22.

⁹⁸ For example: Father Jacques Gravier, "Letter of Father Jacques Gravier to the Very Reverend Father Michelangelo Tamburini, General of the Society of Jesus, at Rome," March 6, 1707, Paris, JR 66:121.

continuation of these disorders and...that [His Majesty] have returned to him no further complaints.”⁹⁹

New orders came from Paris after the death of Louis XIV. The new Orleanist Regency government’s Conseil de Marine—having perused the reports on the matter from La Vente, D’Artaguiette, Duclos, et al.—rejected the proposition of peopling the colony by promoting marriages with Indian women. Although the Conseil did not officially ban mixed marriages, it issued an unambiguous missive stating that they should be avoided. Despite the fact that La Vente had been arguing against Duclos’s claims that mixed unions would produce non-white, blood-tainted children, the Conseil de Marine construed both La Vente’s and Duclos’s respective discussions of blood, color, and racialized behavior to support a new racist policy. Instead of Indian women’s religious conversion as the basis for allowing marriages to French men, the Conseil commanded that if Frenchmen were to marry Indian women, the women’s suitability should be judged according to the whiteness of her skin, “because the women of those [paler-skinned] nations are whiter [and] more industrious.” The central government in Paris had heard the arguments from both sides, and chose to conceive of Amerindians as racially inferior—the color of their skin an external marker of their “savage” behavioral pathology. While the authority of Paris—or even New Orleans—was too distant and too faint to dictate how and to whom Catholic missionaries in the interior of Louisiana would administer the sacraments, believers in a catholic Frenchness no longer had the law on their side. The metropolitan government thenceforth officially supported a racist, exclusionary policy

⁹⁹ Louis XIV, “Mémoire du Roi à Cadillac,” [1710], AC C13A 03 716. Also, Louis XIV, “Mémoire du Roi à Cadillac,” [1712], AC C13A 03 723, and “Mémoire du Roi à Cadillac et Duclos,” [1715], AC C13A 03 703.

toward the indigenous peoples of their American empire, inspired by the colonial opponents of French-Indian intermarriage.¹⁰⁰ The tendency toward racial essentialism in the corridors of power in the colony and in the metropole thus reflected the gradual, piecemeal development of racialist thought among influential segments of the colonial population.

The refutation of assimilationist ideas was prerequisite to the development of racialist ones. Ironically, disbelief in authentic Amerindian conversions had its origins, as much as in any other quarter, in inter-order ecclesiastical squabbles and the anxious writings of frustrated missionaries. Father Mermet, stationed in 1706 among the Illinois at Kaskaskia (a people who would later become the paragons of the civilizing process's success), lamented that the Illinois were, in these early days, not so civilized at all. Mermet told of Illinois "sedition" against the Jesuit missionaries—including the attempt on his fellow "black-robe" Father Gravier's life—and complained of the danger to Frenchmen and of their property at the hands of "the insolence of the Illinois."¹⁰¹ Gravier himself, undeterred by his wounds from the five arrows "which the...barbarian...shot at me in hatred of the faith," had every confidence in the Jesuits evangelism in Illinois; however, he complained at length about the ineffectiveness of many (non-Jesuit) Louisiana missions.¹⁰² In a series of denunciations inspired principally by clerical infighting, he accused Father Huvé of the Missions Etrangères at Mobile of having served

¹⁰⁰ Conseil de Marine, "Arrêt du Conseil de Marine sur une lettre de Duclos de 25 novembre 1715 concernant les mariages entre Français et Sauvagesse," September 1, 1716, Paris, AC C13A 04 255-257 [sic., novembre].

¹⁰¹ Father Mermet, "Father Mermet, missionary at Cascaskias, to the Jesuits in Canada," March 2, 1706, JR 66:53-55, 63.

¹⁰² Father Gravier to Father Tamburini, General of the Society of Jesus, JR 66:121.

as *curé* to the Apalachees for four years—hearing confessions, officiating baptisms and marriages, and administering communion and extreme unction to these Catholic Indians—without knowing “a single word” of their language. Gravier lambasted other Missions Etrangères missions, condemning Father Davion among the Tonicas for abandoning his mission and Father St.-Cosme for not having “made a single Christian among the Natche[z].”¹⁰³ Although Jesuit quips at other missionary orders did not stem from a belief that the missionary enterprise in Louisiana was doomed to failure, clerical denunciations of missionary efficacy would hardly have seemed edifying to Frenchmen not personally involved in Franco-American ecclesiastical politics.

Father Marest among the Illinois at Kaskaskia was less enthusiastic about mission life than many of his Jesuit brethren, because although he believed in French Catholic assimilationism, he believed that the Jesuit missions had to overcome not only Amerindians’ ignorance of the gospel, but also an array of stereotypical negative traits that characterized Indians’ supposed natural state before Catholic intervention. The life of the missionary, he vented in a letter to a colleague in 1712, “is passed in threading dense forests...that we may overtake some poor Savage who is fleeing from us, and whom we do not know how to render less savage by either our words or our attentions.”¹⁰⁴ Marest felt that none of his effort or zeal made “any impression on the minds of our savages” and that there could be no more daunting task than the conversion of Amerindians. Although he identified Indians with some positive traits such as intelligence, humor, and ingenuity,

¹⁰³ Father Jacques Gravier, “Letter of Father Jacques Gravier upon the Affairs of Louisiana,” at Fort St. Louis de la Louisiane, February 23, 1708, JR 66:131.

¹⁰⁴ Father Gabriel Marest, “Letter from Father Gabriel Marest, Missionary of the Society of Jesus, to Father Germon, of the same Society,” Kaskaskia, November 9, 1712, JR 66:219.

the Jesuit Father claimed that Indians were difficult to evangelize because of negative traits characteristic of all Indians: an aversion to authority, “brutal passions,” a “brutalized” ability to reason, and a propensity for indolence, treachery, deceit, insolence, ingratitude, stealing, and lust.¹⁰⁵ Despite his low opinion of Indians’ supposed natural character and doubts about his own ability to change it, Father Marest found hope for conversion and the possibility of *francisation* in the divine grace operating through the missionaries. He admitted that the mission had some “civilizing” effect: “The Illinois are much less barbarous than other Savages; Christianity and intercourse with the French have by degrees civilized them. This is to be noticed in our Village, of which nearly all the inhabitants are Christians; it is this also which has brought many Frenchmen to settle here, and very recently we married three of them to Illinois women.”¹⁰⁶ Marest claimed that these conversions and intermarriages with Frenchmen even overcame Indians’ supposed aversion to all authority to instill in them “docility and ardor in the practice of Christian virtues.”¹⁰⁷ Such positive developments gave Marest hope even for “brutal and coarse” Indian nations, such as the neighboring, formerly hostile Pouteautamis, who, he recounted, repented and asked him “to open for them the door of Heaven, which they had shut against themselves in attacking Father Gravier.”¹⁰⁸ However, the progress of French Catholic civilization in the Illinois country depended on the constant supervision of good Catholic clergy—without which the Illinois would descend quickly into their “former licentiousness”—and the edifying example of good, “enlightened” Frenchmen settling in

¹⁰⁵ Father Gabriel Marest, “Letter from Father Gabriel Marest, Missionary of the Society of Jesus, to Father Germon, of the same Society,” Kaskaskia, November 9, 1712, JR 66:219-223, 231.

¹⁰⁶ Marest, JR 66:231.

¹⁰⁷ Marest, JR 66:241.

¹⁰⁸ Marest, JR 66:285-287.

the region.¹⁰⁹ In the end, Amerindians could be made Catholic and French; however, their “civilization” required the grace of God and the judicious leadership of French clergy and laymen to overcome the agglomeration of generally negative characteristics that the Marest perceived to be the Indians’ “natural” state.

Not all missionaries considered the Church capable of overcoming the negative qualities they attributed to the Amerindians. François LeMaire, a Missions Etrangères priest on the Gulf Coast, regarded all the Indians in Louisiana as being treacherous, boastful, unfaithful, and vindictive liars and thieves.¹¹⁰ He claimed that Amerindian nations were given over to prostitution, polygamy and homosexuality, and that the Natchez in particular—although “the most civilized” Indians in the Mississippi colony—were rife with homosexual prostitution in addition to their hopeless penchant for human sacrifice.¹¹¹ Although Father LeMaire acknowledged that some Indians were nominally Christian, he did not believe that the conversion—let alone assimilation—of Amerindian populations was possible. He viewed the divinely appointed role of missionaries in America “more to be their [Indians’] advocates on the day of His wrath...than to be His agents in their conversion.”¹¹² Indeed, LeMaire regretted having administered the sacraments to these “animals,” claiming that “out of ten, I am usually sorry that I

¹⁰⁹ Marest, JR 66:265, 293-295.

¹¹⁰ François LeMaire, “Memoir of François LeMaire,” “Mémoire sur la situation présente de la Louisiane,” Pensacola, January 15, 1714, AC C13C Volume 2, Folio 134, in May Rush Gwin Waggoner, ed., *Le Plus beau païs du Monde: Completing the Picture of Proprietary Louisiana, 1699-1722* (Lafayette, LA : Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Louisiana-Lafayette, 2005), 128-129.

¹¹¹ LeMaire, 129, 133.

¹¹² LeMaire, 139.

baptized nine of them.”¹¹³ The French Catholic civilizing mission was an unqualified failure.

The perception that assimilationism and conversion were failing was not limited to such pessimistic voices among the clergy. The army engineer Franquet de Chaville, working in Louisiana from 1720 to 1724, claimed that the Catholic missionary orders had made “little progress,” and was wholly unconvinced of the Church’s supposed conversion of any Indians.¹¹⁴ Even among the Catholic Apalachee nation, Sieur Franquet de Chaville, despite being pleased the French had suppressed their practice of human sacrifice, saw no satisfactory evidence of adherence to the Catholic faith.¹¹⁵ He interpreted their religion as a modified paganism and devil worship that was derived from a bastardized Christianity: “They believe in two divinities, one good and the other evil....But they pray to the evil one to ask that it commit no evil among them.”¹¹⁶ He explained that the supposedly Christianized Indians believed in a life after death in another land where they would lack nothing, but he complained that they had no understanding of the spirituality or immortality of the soul.¹¹⁷ Franquet de Chaville summarized his understanding of the Catholic civilizing mission by recounting an anecdotal story from Illinois country: “The Jesuits established among the Illinois

¹¹³ LeMaire, 129, 141.

¹¹⁴ Sieur Franquet de Chaville, *Relation du voyage de la Louisiane fait pendant les années 1720, 1721, 1722, 1723 et 1724 par M. Franquet de Chaville, ingénieur ordinaire du Roy*, in G. Musset, ed., *Le Voyage en Louisiane de Franquet de Chaville (1720-1724)*, *Journal de la société des américanistes de Paris*, 1902, 37-38.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

attracted, for a time, a savage to hear mass, by giving him a small present. He attended. As soon as they stopped giving him presents, he never attended mass again.”¹¹⁸ Even when Catholic missionaries could cajole Amerindians into hearing their preaching, the result could only be the proliferation of barbarian heresies.

Among the laity as among the more pessimistic clergy, commentators calling into question the efficacy of the Catholic missions attributed the failure to “civilize” the Amerindian “savages” to several immutable negative stereotypes. The French sea captain Vallette Laudun, who visited Louisiana in the 1720s, described a conversation with Governor Bienville that revealed the full extent of French racialists’ stereotypes of Indians as libertines and disbelief in evangelical efforts to change them. Vallette Laudun, apart from noting that the Indians seemed to believe in an afterlife, ancestor worship, and the immortality of the soul, accepted Bienville’s explanation of Indian religion and morality:

Some days ago I asked Monsieur de Bienville about the Savages’ manners and religion. He told me that they give themselves over to all the vices, that the vice of which the Italians particularly are accused is very common among them, that there are youths who seem to have renounced their sex for practices so contrary to Nature, that they are no longer received in the company of men, and that they wear skirts of animal skins to cover themselves, like a woman, from the waist to the knee.¹¹⁹

The Amerindian thus appeared to some Frenchmen to be pathologically predisposed toward sodomy, homosexuality, and transvestism. For Vallette Laudun and Bienville, as

¹¹⁸Franquet de Chaville, *Relation*, 38.

¹¹⁹ Vallette Laudun, *Journal d'un voyage a la Louisiane, fait en 1720: Par M***, capitaine de vaisseau du Roi* (Paris: Musier, fils, et Fournier, 1768), 263-264.

for Father LeMaire, the Catholic Church's civilizing mission clearly did not appear to be working.

In many such accounts of early Louisiana, negative Amerindian behaviors were increasingly correlated with physical attributes that distinguished Amerindians from Frenchmen, developing a surprisingly modern racist categorization of peoples by color and bodily features. Franquet de Chaville differentiated the facial features of Amerindians—"beardless and disagreeable"—from those of Europeans or Africans, and attributed to the Amerindian facial type and other features he perceived common among that "race," the quality of a behavioral marker: "All the savages of this country are of a good size, dexterous, dishonest, attentive, lazy, boastful, without value, of a vacillating and fickle disposition."¹²⁰ Father LeMaire also correlated his negative Indian stereotypes with the "well-built" Amerindian's beardlessness, as well as characteristic "black hair," "black eyes," and "ruddy" [*rougeastre*] skin color.¹²¹ Few writers from the first thirty years of the French period produced as clear a biologically racialized analysis as *Ordonnateur* Duclos in his invectives against intermarriage. Nor, in this period, did color rhetoric always reflect a lack of confidence in the missions or a uniform interpretation of indigenous "savages" as being incapable of civilization. The French military officer André Pénicault characterized Europeans as "white" and Amerindians as "tawny," and equated the Amerindians' relative physical and aesthetic attractiveness with their relative whiteness.¹²² However, although Pénicault described the "savage" practices of many

¹²⁰ Franquet de Chaville, *Rélation du voyage*, 33.

¹²¹ LeMaire, "Mémoire sur la situation présente de la Louisiane," 129.

¹²² André Pénicault, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet*, 4, 35, 110.

Amerindian nations and claimed that among some, such as the Natchez, no progress had been made in Christianizing them, he identified the Apalachees and Illinois as “highly civilized” model Catholics.¹²³ Although the use of color rhetoric was inconsistent, however, the first decades of French colonial rule in Louisiana nevertheless saw a developing racialized categorization of “Savage” physical features marking “Savage” behavioral traits.

Racialism did not progress in a linear transition to later writers whose works evinced a clear identification of related, biologically transmissible physical and behavioral “racial” traits from earlier writers whose works did not. As seen in the Mobile sacramental controversy, partisans of racist exclusion emphasized wildly different aspects of “savagery”—for Bienville, the threat of Indian violence or settler desertion; for d’Artaguiette, the corruption of French morals; for Duclos, the dilution and extinction of European whiteness—and found common cause with each other in their consensus belief that they belonged to a community that could not and must not include Amerindians. Like the hodgepodge of clerics and laymen who comprised the assimilationist side of this colonial discourse, the racialists constituted a constellation of different beliefs and priorities that only when galvanized by some pressing, polarizing political conflict took on the appearance of a bloc. From the founding of the colony, the key aspects of the racist perspective—the disbelief in Indian conversions, the formulation of negative stereotypes about Amerindians, and the equation of “savage” Amerindian behavior with physical markers and bloodline heredity—were present, piecemeal or fully assembled, in arguments alleging irreconcilable differences between Frenchmen and the “savage”

¹²³Pénicault, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet*, 96, 102-103, 117, 134, 139.

Other. These discursive fragments developed in conversation with each other; however, in the 1710s and 1720s, they had not yet coalesced.

CHAPTER 3

THE TRIUMPH OF RACISM AND THE TWILIGHT OF ASSIMILATIONISM IN LOUISIANA

In the first three decades of French rule, neither the assimilationist nor racialist perspective prevailed in French interpretations of the Amerindians and their possible role in colonial Louisiana's social order. By 1730, however, the balance had shifted. The establishment of African slavery ossified previously flexible or indeterminate racial hierarchies. Changes in church leadership and certain religious orders' new complicity in and dependency on the plantation system for their economic survival deprived assimilationism of its institutional foundations within the Catholic Church. Most importantly, the first major outbreak of Indian violence against the French in Louisiana, the 1729 Natchez War, ignited widespread fear of a red/black race war that would destroy the colony.

The first importations of African slaves to Louisiana began in 1709, and over the next two decades the influx of Africans gradually displaced Indian slavery from most agricultural labor.¹²⁴ The African slave trade to Louisiana ended in the 1730s, and did not

¹²⁴ Spear, *Race, Sex, and Social Order*, 55; Daniel H. Usner, Jr., "American Indians in Colonial New Orleans," in Peter H. Wood, Gregory A. Waselkov, and M. Thomas Hatley, eds., *Powhatan's Mantle: Indians in the Colonial Southeast* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 108-109; Paul LaChance, "The Growth of the Free and Slave Populations of French Colonial Louisiana," in Bradley G. Bond, ed., *French Colonial Louisiana and the Atlantic World* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 215.

resume until after the colony's cession to Spain. However, the majority of the lower Louisiana population was black and enslaved by the mid-1720s and remained so for the remainder of the French regime.¹²⁵ By 1730, Louisiana had developed a mixed economy based on both frontier trade and plantation exports.¹²⁶ Although the majority of African slaves were concentrated in lower Louisiana, the entrenchment of African slavery deeply affected upper Louisiana as well. In Illinois, both African and Amerindian slavery increased from the 1720s onward; by the 1730s, there were twice as many African slaves in Illinois as Amerindians.¹²⁷ Although Louisiana had not yet developed into a true plantation economy, by the end of the 1720s importations, African slavery was relatively widespread and the colony's economy depended on African agricultural labor.

At the end of the 1720s slave boom, the Catholic Church in Louisiana sought, for the first time, to partake in plantation agriculture to fund its institutions. While priests had long had Indian slaves and the Ursuline nuns had bought a few African slaves to cultivate their farm outside New Orleans, church orders in Louisiana had not previously engaged in cash crop agriculture.¹²⁸ In 1727, the Jesuit Superior in Louisiana, Father Nicolas de Beaubois, excitedly announced that he was establishing a tobacco plantation in New Orleans.¹²⁹ The enormous tract of land covered most of what is now the New Orleans

¹²⁵ Spear, *Race, Sex, and Social Order*, 55.

¹²⁶ LaChance, in Bond, 207.

¹²⁷ James Pritchard, "Population in French America, 1670-1730: The Demographic Context of Colonial Louisiana," in Bond, *French Colonial Louisiana and the Atlantic World*, 185.

¹²⁸ Jay Higgenbotham, *Old Mobile: Fort Louis de la Louisiane, 1702-1711* (Mobile, AL: Museum of the City of Mobile, 1977), 538-540.

¹²⁹ Letter from Father Nicolas I. de Beaubois to Monsieur de la Loé, Secretary of the Company of the Indies, New Orleans, May 11, 1727, JR 67:271.

Central Business District and much of the Lower Garden District.¹³⁰ Whereas the Ursuline estate had been located well outside of the city and produced food for the nuns' sustenance, the Jesuit plantation was located on the immediate periphery of the city and was, from its inception, both a real estate windfall and a potentially lucrative for-profit enterprise. What separation had previously existed between urban clergy and the plantation system was no more.

Father Beaubois did not hold the same assimilationist view of non-Europeans as many Jesuit Fathers in the first thirty years of French rule; his opinions reflected the new rigid racial structures in Gulf Louisiana. He sought to Christianize the Amerindians without envisioning any possibility of making them French. To that end, he petitioned the Compagnie des Indes to forbid French settlement among and intermixing with Amerindians and established a policy of segregation of Indian missions from French parishes similar to the Indian reserve missions established in Canada in the seventeenth century.¹³¹ Beaubois furthermore believed that the inculcation of religion in indigenous inhabitants and the suppression of Franco-Amerindian "libertinage" were essential to the colony's survival because they promoted "work ethic" [*esprit du travail*], without which the colony "cannot...subsist."¹³² He sought to instill this "work ethic" not only in the hundreds of African slaves tilling his fields, but also in Indian slaves as well as free

¹³⁰ Michael Kenny, *Jesuits in Our Southland, 1566-1946: Origin and Growth of New Orleans Province*, in manuscript, Jesuit Provincial Archives of New Orleans at Loyola University, 11.

¹³¹ [Father Beaubois], "Requêtes des Pères Jésuites à la Compagnie au sujet des missions de Louisiane, avec réponses de la Compagnie," 22 January 1726, AC C13A 10 112; Beaubois, "Mémoire sur les missions de Louisiane adressé à la Compagnie des Indes par le P. de Beaubois," 1729, AC C13A 12 261-266.

¹³² Beaubois, "Mémoire," 1729, AC C13A 12 259.

Indians who visited the plantation; he wanted all such workers, enslaved and free alike, to serve as a model of Christian uprightness achieved through industry and piety.¹³³

In the early years of French Louisiana, the Jesuit Father Gravier had vehemently opposed segregation and had led the assimilationist campaign in Illinois. Whereas pressure from white society and hostile minds in the secular government could more easily thwart such a vision in Mobile or New Orleans (as they did among the Ursulines), the Jesuits themselves were the principal French authorities in Illinois. In the decades following the establishment of the Jesuit plantation in New Orleans, the Jesuit order gradually applied the new segregationist, racialized order to Illinois along with the old Canadian justifications for protecting their converts from French corruption. By 1750, the Jesuits had three missions in Illinois, two of them segregated—one exclusively French, one exclusively Illinois, and one mixed.¹³⁴ Father Louis Vivier, writing from Illinois in 1750, explained to Jesuits elsewhere that the villages in Illinois were segregated—five French and three “Savage.” His description of the Illinois settlements’ population evinced no trace of his predecessors’ assimilationism: “There are three classes [*espèces*] of inhabitants: French, Negroes and Savages; to say nothing of Half-Breeds [*Métis*] born of the one or the other—as a rule, against the Law of God.”¹³⁵ By the end of French rule and the expulsion of the Society of Jesus from France and its colonies in the 1760s, the Jesuit Fathers in Illinois had instituted total segregation in instruction and ministry to better

¹³³ John Hogan, *History of the French in Colonial Louisiana*, in manuscript, Jesuit Provincial Archives of New Orleans at Loyola University, 42; Albert Hubert Biever, *The Jesuits in New Orleans and the Mississippi Valley* (New Orleans: Hauser, 1924), 37.

¹³⁴ Father Louis Vivier, “Letter from Father Vivier of the Society of Jesus, to a Father of the same Society,” Illinois, 17 November 1750, JR 69:201.

¹³⁵ Father Louis Vivier, “Letter to Father ***,” Illinois, 8 June 1750, JR 69:145.

reflect Vivier's classification, between white Frenchmen on the one hand and, Amerindians and Africans on the other.¹³⁶

The Jesuits were not the only church order whose support for Amerindian integration failed by the 1730s. Economic and personnel changes reflecting the increasing racialism of New Orleans society gradually extinguished the Ursuline order's apostolic zeal. Of the twelve nuns and converses who had founded the New Orleans convent, eight of them were dead by 1733, including Mother Superior Tranchepain.¹³⁷ In the wake of the convent's leadership changes in the 1730s, the Ursulines of New Orleans followed the Jesuit example and developed their own cash crop plantation. By 1740, the Ursulines were fully integrated into the plantation economy around them.¹³⁸ By the 1750s, creole daughters of the plantation society had begun to enter the convent as nuns, and sisters no longer came from France to French colonial Louisiana.¹³⁹ As the population and financing of the Ursuline community changed and stricter racial categories developed in the surrounding society, the sisters' sense of purpose changed also. Missionary fervor and traces of an assimilationist disposition disappeared from the Ursuline obituaries by the end of the 1730s. Instead of lauding "apostolic zeal" as the sine qua non of a good nun and emphasizing the late sisters' connection, real or desired, to the peoples in the "big savage wild woods" around them, the New Orleans Ursulines approaching mid-century

¹³⁶ Father François Philibert Watrin, "Banishment of the Jesuits from Louisiana," report the Propaganda Fide in Rome, 1764, JR 70:233.

¹³⁷ Emily Clark, *Masterless Mistresses: The New Orleans Ursulines and the Development of a New World Society, 1727-1834* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 265-267.

¹³⁸ Emily Clark, "Patrimony without Pater: The New Orleans Ursulines Community and the Creation of a Material Culture," in Bradley G. Bond, *French Colonial Louisiana and the Atlantic World* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 102-103.

¹³⁹ Emily Clark, *Masterless Mistresses*, 265-267.

praised deceased nuns for each individual sister's private connection to God and outward expression of intense piety.¹⁴⁰

Ironically, it was in this period of decline in assimilationist rhetoric that the convent's sisters accepted Marie Turpin de Ste. Marthe, a métis woman from Illinois, as a converse. Turpin entered the Ursuline community in 1748 after growing up in a Jesuit mission with a Canadian father and Amerindian mother—the first Louisiana-born woman to join the convent. In her obituary, Mother Superior Thérèse de St. Jacques praised her “great piety,” “fervor,” and her desire to divorce herself from worldly interactions in favor of spiritual devotion: “After the death of her mother, she gave herself over to assiduous prayer, to frequent receipt of the sacraments, to [caring for] the young, and to self-mortification. She asked for her father's permission to retire from the world to dedicate herself entirely to God.” The Mother Superior reported that some people in Illinois had warned her that she would “be nothing here but our servant.” In her response to the accusation, St. Jacques did not deny the claim. Instead—demonstrating that, despite the token métis woman in their order, the Ursulines had fallen into line completely with colonial racial hierarchy—she praised the converse for dutifully accepting her proper place: “And *voilà*, Turpin replied [to those who had warned her] that all she sought was to serve the wives of Jesus Christ.”¹⁴¹ St. Jacques did not assign Turpin the status of “servant” to Christ's “wives” because she was a converse and not a full nun. The same Mother Superior wrote the obituary of another, white converse, Rose

¹⁴⁰ “Lettres Circulaires des Religieuses décédées dans le Monastère des Ursulines de la Nouvelle Orléans depuis sa fondation, le 7 août 1727,” UCANO 18: 1-32.

¹⁴¹ Marie Thérèse de St. Jacques, Supérieure, “Lettre: Marie Turpin de Ste. Marthe, converse, décédée en 1761, 20 Nov. (dans la 32 année de son age et la 12 de sa profession),” UCANO 18: 25.

Leblanc de Ste. Monique, in 1773: “she was in God’s debt for the favor of being *numbered among his wives*” [emphasis mine].¹⁴² As the reception and remembrance of Marie Turpin demonstrates, the Ursuline order in Louisiana had abandoned its earlier assimilationist disposition. Only traces remained, in the form of a half-hearted Christian universalism that in theory opened the doors of the Catholic clergy to an Amerindian nun but that in fact maintained her in a position of servitude and racial inferiority.

The Catholic Church’s newfound dependence on slavery deprived the assimilationism of its institutional foundations. Assimilationist sentiment collapsed simultaneously among the clergy and among the colonist population generally. The development of the plantation economy and the entrenchment of the white/black dichotomy had by itself begun to erode French integrationist visions for Amerindians in colonial Louisiana. However, a single event in 1729 marked the decisive shift from a colony divided over racial identity politics to a colony wholly defined by white supremacy: the Natchez Massacre.¹⁴³

In response to the French military commander’s instructions to move their settlements to make way for French, the Natchez nation on November 28, 1729 attacked Fort Rosalie (the Natchez post), killing 237 people.¹⁴⁴ When word of the attack reached

¹⁴² Marie Thérèse de St. Jacques, Supérieure, “Lettre: Rose Leblanc dite de Ste. Monique, converse, décédée le 6 février 1773 âgée de 38 ans,” UCANO 18: 32.

¹⁴³ Historians have discussed this incident using the terms “rebellion,” “revolt,” “uprising,” and “war.” For the purpose here of exploring French perceptions of the event at the time, I have conserved the appellation “massacre” as the term uniformly applied by the French people in Louisiana who are the objects of this study.

¹⁴⁴ Peter H. Wood, “The Changing Population of the Colonial South: An Overview by Race and Region, 1685-1790,” in Peter H. Wood, Gregory A. Waselkov, and M. Thomas Hatley, eds., *Powhatan’s Mantle: Indians in the Colonial Southeast* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 78.

New Orleans in December, the colony was immediately thrown into chaos—a pandemonium exacerbated by a subsequent outbreak of violence at the Yazoo post in January 1730. With the military support of their Choctaw allies, the French responded to what they regarded as a war of extermination against them by attempting to exterminate the Natchez—whose survivors fled to the Chickasaw and other nations.¹⁴⁵ Among those slain in the initial attack was the Jesuit priest stationed among the Arkansas, Father Du Poisson, who had been stopping over at Fort Rosalie en route to New Orleans when the violence broke out.¹⁴⁶ Not two months later, when the Yazoo attacked the French living among them, they also turned against the missionaries in Mississippi. Jesuit Father Doutreleau, who, though wounded, escaped and survived; Father Souel was not so fortunate.¹⁴⁷ In March 1730, the spiritual director for the Compagnie des Indes warned that the Louisiana missions might have to be abandoned, and the Jesuit Superiors wrote to Versailles asking permission to withdraw from the colony because their missions were not sustainable in light of the recent Indian violence.¹⁴⁸ Although the Natchez crisis did not, in the end, force the dissolution of the Louisiana missions, it did topple the secular government. Citing the Natchez “massacre” in its retrocession proposals as the reason for its withdrawal, the Compagnie des Indes returned the colony to Crown control in July

¹⁴⁵ Peter H. Wood, “The Changing Population of the Colonial South,” 78; Father Mathurin Le Petit, “Letter from F. Le Petit to F. Davaugour, Procurator-General of the Missions in North America,” New Orleans, July 12, 1730, in *Woodstock Letters: A Record of Current Events and Historical Notes Connected with the Colleges and Missions of the Society of Jesus in North and South America* (Woodstock, MD: Woodstock College, 1875), IV:1 151.

¹⁴⁶ Biever, *The Jesuits in New Orleans and the Mississippi Valley*, 29.

¹⁴⁷ Kenny, *Jesuits in Our Southland*, 17; Le Petit to Davaugour, IV:1 154-155, 158.

¹⁴⁸ Raguet to the Minister, March 1, 1730, AC C13A 12 425; “Supplique des Supérieurs Jésuites au Contrôleur-Général,” March 20, 1730, AC C13A 12 428.

1731.¹⁴⁹ Within two years, the metropolitan authority had removed Governor Périer from office and replaced him with the perennial head of the colonial government and notorious racist hardliner in Indian policy, Governor Bienville.¹⁵⁰ The Natchez Massacre shook the foundations of French colonial institutions. Moreover, it obliterated any fantasies of assimilating the Amerindians in French communities by instilling a hyper-paranoid race consciousness among the French.

In the aftermath of 1729, many familiar strains of anti-assimilationist discourse, such as the fear that Frenchmen would be made into “savages,” continued to pervade discussion of French-Amerindian relations.¹⁵¹ However, they were joined with new anxieties and new terms for thinking about Frenchmen and Indians. Governor Périer noted—alongside earlier religious or sexual anxieties—that a principal cause of Amerindian hostility and serious episodes of disorder was French encroachment on Indian land.¹⁵² This echoed other Frenchmen’s heightened consciousness of themselves as foreign invaders, such as Diron d’Artaguiette’s calls for the construction of fortifications to protect “us, the Foreigners” from the “Savages.”¹⁵³ French colonists also began to deviate as never before from their less pejorative moniker “Sauvage” in describing Amerindians. Beginning after the Natchez Massacre, the image of Indians as

¹⁴⁹ Compagnie des Indes, “Procès-verbal de délibération de l’assemblée générale d’administration de la Compagnie des Indes autorisant ses directeurs et syndics à proposer au roi, sous les modalités qu’il lui plaira d’ordonner, la réunion au Domaine de la Louisiane et du pays des Illinois,” January 22, 1731, AC C13A 13 250-251; O’Neill, *Church and State*, 222.

¹⁵⁰ O’Neill, 233.

¹⁵¹ See, for example, Governor Périer to the Minister, July 25, 1732, AC C13A 14 69.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ D’Artaguiette to the Minister, February 9, 1730, AC C13A 12 365.

“wild” people living outside of civilization had to compete with the rhetoric of “*barbares*” and “*barbarie*.” Amerindian “barbarians,” whether they were allies or enemies of the French, were no longer discussed as beings exterior to civilization who might potentially be included in it; they were instead increasingly portrayed rather as civilization’s antithesis.¹⁵⁴

Colonists feared that the Natchez Massacre would be the opening salvo in a race war or “*affaire générale*” in which the Amerindian nations would unite to drive the French out of Louisiana.¹⁵⁵ The Vicar-General of Louisiana and director of the Jesuit plantation, Father Mathurin Le Petit, related to a colleague the fear of Indian conspiracy in a shocked New Orleans: “The first rumors of the dreadful calamity filled all New Orleans with the greatest grief....Everybody had something to weep for: one of his relatives, another a dear friend, another his goods. As it was *with reason* feared that all the Indians had conspired against the French, nobody here thought himself safe” [emphasis added].¹⁵⁶ Le Petit thought that the Natchez “war of extermination” was confirmed as a general rising by the 1730 Yazoo attack; he and the survivors along the Mississippi “now were convinced that a great conspiracy against the French was on foot, and that they must treat with distrust all the Indian tribes.”¹⁵⁷ He alleged that the French colony’s most formidable foes, the Chickasaw, had tried to “corrupt the Illinois” and

¹⁵⁴ See, for example: Broutin, engineer, to the Company, New Orleans, August 7, 1730, AC C13A 12 408; Baron, astronomer, to the Minister, New Orleans, December 22, 1730, AC C13A 12 413; Juzan, infantry officer, “Relation de ce qui est passé au fort français des Natchez dans la Province de la Louisiane depuis le dixième May 1731 jusqu’au premier Juillet de la présente Année par le Sieur de Juzan,” ANF-SOM-DFC-Louisiane 41:25.

¹⁵⁵ Broutin to the Company, AC C13A 12 407.

¹⁵⁶ Kenny, *Jesuits in Our Southland*, 20.

¹⁵⁷ Le Petit to Davaugour, IV:1 158.

convince them to participate in the eradication of the French, but that the Illinois refused, replying that they were “of the Prayer.”¹⁵⁸ Although the Illinois were the most favorably described of the French allies because the Jesuit missions had pacified them, Le Petit still viewed them as inferior, if not barbarous; the Jesuit civilizing mission that rescued the Illinois from their “former savage state” did not develop their “simple minds.”¹⁵⁹ If Father Le Petit was unwilling to denigrate totally the Indian nation worshipping at the flagship Jesuit mission in Louisiana, he had no such qualms about accusing other allies of treachery. He viewed the most important and powerful ally the French had, the Choctaw, as being “barbarous,” “loathesome,” devoid of any respect for Christianity, and untrustworthy.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, Le Petit’s opinions were representative of many Frenchmen, who saw all Indians as suspect and, at the peak of the crisis, thought the “barbarian” Choctaws and the other Indians allies would imminently betray the French.¹⁶¹ Even the military commanders on campaign with the Choctaw held these suspicions and kept their cannon trained on friend and foe alike.¹⁶²

Worse even than the fear of a general Indian insurrection, many colonists thought the Natchez Massacre heralded an alliance between Amerindians and Africans to wipe out Louisiana’s miniscule European population. D’Artaguiette reported to Versailles the ominous observation that the Natchez spared and took alive as many black slaves as

¹⁵⁸ Le Petit to Davaugour, V:1 10.

¹⁵⁹ Le Petit to Davaugour, V:1 12-13.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁶¹ Baron to the Minister, New Orleans, December 22, 1730, AC C13A 12 413; Broutin to the Company, New Orleans, August 7, 1730, AC C13A 12 407; Delaye, “Relation du massacre des François aux Natchez-1729,” 1 June 1730, ANF-SOM-DFC-Louisiane 38:44, 63.

¹⁶² Delaye, “Relation du massacre,” ANF-SOM-DFC-Louisiane 38:44.

possible.¹⁶³ Governor Périer claimed that African slaves had helped the Natchez to plan and carry out the massacre.¹⁶⁴ *Ordonnateur* Salmon reported that the English had incited their Indian allies to raise the slaves and expel the “Whites,” and that the claim had been confirmed by the confessions of several black slaves: “They had wanted to make what few enslaved *nègres* there were among the settlers [at the Illinois posts] revolt against the French...by promising them freedom.”¹⁶⁵ The military officer Delaye claimed that not only did the Natchez seek to liberate the Africans and the Indian women, but the “barbarians” even went so far as to enslave French prisoners and “paint the French black” to mark them as being slaves.¹⁶⁶ More than ever before, French colonists had come to see their society as a rigid tripartite racial hierarchy that depended on white, French control of non-white Others and suppression of those Others’ challenges to French supremacy and usurpation—in Delaye’s case, with actual role reversal in pigmentation—of French whiteness. The specter of Amerindians raising the African slaves against the racialized social order would persist through the rest of the French period.¹⁶⁷

Although the Natchez Massacre did not represent the completion of the process by which the “French,” “Sauvage,” and “Nègre” categories were transformed into impermeable “races” identified by color, it did mark the decisive shift toward that

¹⁶³ D’Artaguette to the Minister, Mobile, 9 February 1730, AC C13A 12 363.

¹⁶⁴ Périer, “Rélacion du massacre des Natchez arrivé le 28 novembre 1729,” 18 March 1730, AC C13A 12 38.

¹⁶⁵ Salmon to the Minister, 17 July 1732, AC C13A 15 168-169.

¹⁶⁶ Delaye, 21, ANF-SOM-DFC-Louisiane 38:21.

¹⁶⁷ See François-Xavier de Charlevoix, *Histoire et description de la Nouvelle France avec Le Journal historique d’un Voyage fait par ordre du Roi dans l’Amérique Septentrionale* (Montréal: Editions Élysée, 1976 [Paris: 1744]), Tome II, 478, 499-500.

articulation of race and effectively extinguish French ideas that seriously challenged the ascent of this new racial order. Although some historians have noted that Frenchmen used “red” as a descriptor for Amerindians in Indian diplomacy before the 1730s, it is clear from sources before that decade that such occurrences were not in general use.¹⁶⁸ In their responses to the Natchez Massacre, French people identified themselves as “white” and Africans as “black,” but had only just begun to assign new labels to indigenous peoples, beginning with “barbarian,” not “red.” However, the racist rhetoric of the early 1700s had stressed skin color and other physical features to racialize Amerindian difference, and these elements coalesced into contempt for a “red” race shortly after the Natchez crisis.

After the 1730s, both writers who viewed Amerindians as biologically and theologically the same as Europeans and writers who viewed Amerindians as racially distinct conformed to the identification of Amerindians as “red.”¹⁶⁹ The Natchez conflict had accelerated the consolidation of earlier racist thought around biological ‘blood and color’ language; in the second half of the French period, the divisions between “white,” “black,” and “red” racial categories became steadily starker. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the racist school of thought in Louisiana had developed as chief components in its rhetoric biological, color-oriented visions of race. Early eighteenth-century racist ideology contained within it many of the main characteristics of later

¹⁶⁸ See Shoemaker, “How Indians Got To Be Red,” 628.

¹⁶⁹ Charlevoix, “Dissertation préliminaire sur l’Origine des Américains, in *Histoire Générale*, Tome III, 42; Vivier, “Letter from Father Vivier to Father ***,” Illinois, 8 June 1750, JR 69:145; Jean-Jacques-Blaise d’Abbadie, *Journal of Jean-Jacques-Blaise d’Abbadie*, in *A Comparative View of French Louisiana, 1699 and 1762 : The Journales of Pierre Le Moyne d’Iberville and Jean-Jacques-Blaise d’Abbadie*, trans. and ed. Carl A. Brasseaux (Lafayette, LA: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1981), 107; 110; 116; 121.

“scientific” racism, and it was the predominance—not the existence—of biological racism that would distinguish the nineteenth century from earlier eras of French expansion. The events of the 1720s and 1730s that produced a coalescence of French colonial racist ideology and precipitated the collapse of eighteenth-century assimilationism in Louisiana helped to make this predominance possible.

CONCLUSION

THE REPUBLICAN EMPIRE IN THE OLD REGIME

For the first half of eighteenth-century French colonial rule in Louisiana, neither the assimilationist nor racialist schools of thought predominated among French colonists. The colonists held competing, contradictory views of the non-Europeans living among and around them, and neither broad interpretation prevailed until the establishment of African slavery in agricultural production and a cataclysmic outbreak of Indian violence. Because of the cession of the French empire in North America to Britain and Spain following the French defeat in the Seven Years' War and Louisiana's implications for the development of race relations in United States, eighteenth-century French Louisiana, to the extent that it has not fallen into obscurity, has become the province of historians of colonial and Native America. Americanist scholars interested in black-white relations in Louisiana have understandably paid little attention to French views of Amerindians. Among scholars of Native America, the emphasis of the most important research on Louisiana has been the agency of Native peoples and their views of and interactions with Europeans; study of European views of Amerindians is not their purpose. However, Franco-Amerindian interactions in eighteenth-century Louisiana had implications beyond the shores of North America or the timeline of French rule there.

The French experience in Louisiana clearly produced a conflict over the meaning of France and the justification for French overseas expansion. The Old Régime struggle between believers in the transforming power of Christianity and partisans of racial hierarchy shaped competing views of French colonial society and also presaged the development of nineteenth and twentieth century contests between French universalism and racial prejudice. The simultaneous presence of both assimilationist and racist elements throughout the later age of Republican empire constituted a hypocritical paradox that eventually brought about the French colonial empire's collapse. Recent study of the Third Republic and its overseas empire has located the origins of the nineteenth-century French colonial civilizing mission in both the secular Republican and missionary Catholic visions of a universal France.¹⁷⁰ Examination of the attitudes toward non-Europeans held by Frenchmen and French Canadians on the ground in French North America in the eighteenth century, however, demonstrates that the French *mission civilisatrice* long predated the nineteenth century—as did French colonial race prejudice. The original assimilationist impulse in early Canada was not extinguished in the seventeenth century. It lived on in Louisiana, and remained a formidable ideological force through the first half of the French regime. Long before the era of French republican empire, long before the French Revolution, and even before the articulation of universalist principles in the French Enlightenment, French Catholics in the New World were engaged in a civilizing mission that sought to make “Savages” into Frenchmen. The Louisiana experience should compel French historians to reexamine their assumptions about the origins of French universalism. The universalist maxims that the French

¹⁷⁰ See J. P. Daughton, *An Empire Divided: Religion, Republicanism, and the Making of French Colonialism, 1880-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Republic would later seek to propagate around the world for the next two centuries had clear precedents in Old Régime imperialism. The Louisiana experience demonstrates that French universalism was a very old phenomenon that changed in form and content with the advent of the French Republic, but was not a product of it. On the contrary, the later French republican colonial elites in Algeria, Senegal, Congo, Madagascar, Tahiti, or Indochina were continuing the long-established work of colonial Louisiana's missionaries and administrators in the Old Régime.

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