AHR Forum
Making Men: Enlightenment Ideas of Racial Engineering

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A MINOR NOBLEMAN FROM ALSACE, traveling in French colonial Saint-Domingue (present-day Haiti) on the eve of the French and Haitian revolutions, expressed surprise that “it has not already occurred to some ingenious speculator to monopolize . . . the fabrication of all mulattoes.”1 Perhaps no one had embarked upon this endeavor, the Baron de Wimpffen speculated, for fear that the metropolitan government would “take advantage of this bright idea to incorporate even the manufacture of the human race into its exclusive privilege.”2 While Wimpffen was clearly satirizing the Exclusif—the much-hated metropolitan monopoly on the trade and manufacture of natural resources and goods from the colonies—his comments reveal something that is not widely recognized about the eighteenth century: there was an understanding that the “fabrication” or “manufacture” of human beings was possible, and even desirable to some.3 Wimpffen’s words are jarring, not only because they raise the possibility that human beings could be manufactured, but also because they do so in an offhand manner, presenting it as a whimsical observation or a delicate joke rather than as a ghastly vision of control and production in which human beings are merely another raw material to be transformed. The topic of sexual relations between people of African and European descent was not an uncommon one in eighteenth-century writing about Saint-Domingue, where it was generally agreed that such unions were more prevalent than in other French colonies; Wimpffen’s comments, however, pointed beyond the usual tropes invoked against the social and

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2 Ibid.

moral ramifications of colonial métissage and libertinage (miscegenation and the de-based pursuit of sensual pleasure).

Although some masters seem to have profited from the sale of their own mulatto children, Wimpffen was presumably correct in believing that there were no actual businesses on Saint-Domingue that aimed to monopolize “the manufacture of the human race.” A decade earlier, however, two men with connections to the colonial administration—former governor-general Gabriel de Bory and a lawyer named Michel-René Hilliard d’Auberteuil—had published works calling for a similar kind of “manufacture.” In Essai sur la population des colonies à sucre (1776) and Considerations sur l’état présent de la colonie française de Saint-Domingue (1776–1777), respectively, Bory and Hilliard d’Auberteuil sketched out separate plans for the large-scale selective breeding of slaves, free people of color, and the white residents of the island. Neither viewed his project as a potential business venture; instead, each plan was envisioned as a solution to some of the colony’s most significant social, political, and military problems. Their proposals were not highly detailed; nor were they even the focus of the books in which they were included. Yet they remain of great historical importance because they appear to have been the first suggestions for large-scale selective breeding of humans that was meant to be carried out in a real time and place (rather than the fictional nowhere of utopias) and with the intention of creating a new racial hierarchy.

The existence of these plans raises new questions regarding the relationship between the development of ideas about the selective breeding of human beings and the development of ideas of race. Throughout the second half of the eighteenth century in Europe and the Atlantic world, a fundamental idea was emerging of race as a heritable and inescapable way of being that encompassed physical, moral, intellectual, and psychological characteristics and provided a basis for hierarchical differentiation. There was a considerable amount of fluidity and ambiguity within


5 Gabriel de Bory, Essai sur la population des colonies à sucre (1776), in Bory, Mémoires sur l’administration de la Marine et des colonies (Paris, 1789), 50–83; Hilliard d’Auberteuil, Considerations.

the new ideas and nomenclature, but people were gradually establishing and stabilizing many of the terms, concepts, and scientific questions that would lay the foundation for the more elaborate attempt to create a science of race in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Yet even as modern ideas of race were being formed, some people apparently believed that human beings could be constructed to fit within narrowly defined categories based primarily on skin color and civil status. The pos-

7 The many people of Saint-Domingue who were of mixed African and European descent were referred to by a great variety of names in the second half of the eighteenth century. The term mulâtre (mulatto) could be used to refer to a person who was equally of African and European descent, or nearly so. Gens du couleur (people of color) was the most general term, and affranchis (freed people) was a general term used for free people of color that emphasized their genealogical ties to slavery. People of mixed descent who looked European were often referred to as sang-mêlès (mixed-bloods), while there existed a number of terms, such as griffe and marabout, to refer to the people of mixed mulatto and African descent. By the 1780s there was an increased desire among some to fix a highly detailed and precise racial nomenclature. For the most detailed, methodical, and revealing example of this new desire, see Médéric-Louis-Élie Moreau de Saint-Méry, Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l’île Saint-Domingue, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1797–1798).
sibility of a dynamic circularity in the eighteenth century between making men and making race seems not to have been previously recognized by scholars.\(^8\)

Analysis and contextualization of these racial engineering plans can contribute to the growing body of work arguing for the significance of the French Atlantic world in the development of ideas of race.\(^9\) In fact, it suggests the value of utilizing an Atlantic framework for the study of the ideas of the Enlightenment more generally, since the plans that Bory and Hilliard d’Auberteuil proposed for Saint-Domingue were not merely metropolitan or colonial; they were Atlantic hybrids that drew upon metropolitan science and colonial ideas of social, political, and racial order, as well as actual social and political circumstances in the metropole and the colonies. While there is not yet any evidence that these proposals had a direct impact on either colonial or metropolitan discourses of breeding and race, they are dramatic and little-known examples of the extremes to which ideas on race and the reconstruction of populations had developed in the Enlightenment. They stand as the most extreme manifestations of Enlightenment ideas of racial engineering, but they were part of a larger discourse that has not been fully recognized in its breadth, its interconnections, or its relation to the “Buffonian revolution” in Enlightenment natural history.\(^10\)

The ideas that Bory and Hilliard d’Auberteuil proposed raise questions about the legacy of the Enlightenment and the development of modern biopolitics that are much too complex and wide-ranging to be answered in a single article, but their existence suggests that a significant amount of historical work remains to be done if we are to answer the question of how the Enlightenment produced such powerful discourses of inclusion based on ideas of toleration, equality, cosmopolitanism, and natural rights at the same time that it produced powerful and lasting discourses of exclusion based on the perception (and creation) of differences of race, sex, and

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8 I use the word “men” rather than “people” in order to reflect that both Bory and Hilliard d’Auberteuil focused on creating a new group of mulatto men and that this focus reflected numerous assumptions about sexual difference, sexuality, and the inheritance of characteristics in the Enlightenment.


gender. This is one of the unresolved and central questions (maybe the question) of the Enlightenment. Historical attention to these ideas and practices of political and social exclusion is particularly important in light of the recent trend of defending and reclaiming the Enlightenment—a trend that is in many ways laudable and productive, yet nonetheless threatens to create an imbalanced representation, overemphasizing the radical emancipatory ideas of the Enlightenment in a way that obscures the complexity and ambiguity of Enlightenment thought, and in fact attenuates the emancipatory potential of those radical ideas. While the prescriptive proposals for racial engineering formulated by Bory and Hilliard d’Auberteuil are not a vindication of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno’s sweeping and influential generalization that “Enlightenment is totalitarian,” they nonetheless complicate a number of the new defenses and reclamations of the Enlightenment and its legacy.

The plans conceived by Bory and Hilliard d’Auberteuil represented a historically unprecedented and distinctive approach to the transformation of populations. They shared characteristics with, but differed significantly from, the long line of utopian proto-eugenic visions of re-creating populations through selective breeding, the early modern discourse focusing on the selection of properly matched mates, the proto-eugenic medical discourse in Enlightenment France focusing on the size and strength of individuals and the population, and the development of sexual regulations in the Atlantic world intended to influence the formation of colonial populations. Unlike the utopian visions that had existed since antiquity, Bory’s and Hilliard d’Auberteuil’s proposals were centered on a real population that actually existed in the world. They were directly and explicitly prescriptive plans for re-creating the population rather than thought experiments intended to facilitate the re-evaluation of sociopolitical formations, standards, and goals. They differed from the early modern discourse on individual mate selection in looking primarily at the possibility of selectively transforming specific characteristics of individuals as well as the population as a whole, as opposed to ensuring the general health and fitness of...
the offspring of a marital match. Unlike the proto-eugenic medical discourse that developed in the second half of the eighteenth century, particularly in France, Bory and Hilliard d’Auberteuil focused on what they believed were racial characteristics (primarily skin color) in their consideration of selective breeding. Their formulations also went beyond previous attempts to shape colonial populations through the creation of laws and regulations pertaining to sex and marriage; rather than merely suggesting a ban on sex, marriage, or concubinage between people of European descent and people who were deemed to carry the “stain” of blackness (or who were Native Americans), Bory and Hilliard d’Auberteuil envisioned a role for the government in actively directing reproduction by selecting mates according to specific criteria.

While there were significant differences between their plans, Bory and Hilliard d’Auberteuil had the same goal: to create a new type of male “mulatto” soldier who would address the three primary threats to the colony. These soldiers would provide security against a British or Spanish invasion, ensure white domination through policing of the enslaved majority, and foster the white colonists’ loyalty to the metropolitan authorities by allowing for the elimination of mandatory militia service. The mulattoes of Saint-Domingue, and those to be created in the future, were presented as human instruments of empire who could be used to strengthen the valuable French colony. Eugenic projects to transform the racial composition of populations are primarily associated with the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but it appears

14 For examples of early modern texts focusing on proper mate selection, see Claude Quillet, Calilpaeedia, seu de pulchrae proles habendae ratione, poema didacticon (Leyden, 1655); and Michel Procope-Couteau, L’Art de faire des garçons (Montpellier, 1748).

15 For the proto-eugenic medical discourse in Enlightenment France, see Vandermonde, Essai sur la manière de perfectionner l’espèce humaine; and Antoine Le Camus, “Projet pour conserver l’espèce des hommes bien faits, réserver les hommes vigoureux pour la culture des terres, et augmenter le nombre des soldats,” in Camus, Memoires sur divers sujets de médecine (Paris, 1760). For this type of work outside of France, see the “medical police” project in Johann Peter Frank, System einer vollstädtigen medizinischen Polizey (Mannheim, 1779–1827).

that they had intellectual and scientific precedents in the colonial endeavors of the French Enlightenment. Bory and Hilliard d’Auberteuil were figures of the Enlightenment, and their plans fit within its broad boundaries, even though—to invoke Kant’s famous distinction—they were far from enlightened. Bory was a scientifically minded reformist who proposed numerous military and administrative reforms and drew directly on new Enlightenment understandings of nature, race, and the experimental approach to “improvement” through selective breeding. Hilliard d’Auberteuil was a legally minded reformist who drew heavily on Montesquieu’s legal and political ideas, opposed the metropolitan ancien régime hierarchy and its enshrined special privileges, articulated liberal economic arguments that were consistent with the new Enlightenment political economy, and implicitly built upon the new approaches to nature, race, and breeding. Their ideas for large-scale programs of selective breeding in Saint-Domingue are further evidence that European colonies served as “laboratories of modernity” and are yet another indication that the century of light still has its dark recesses.

Bory’s and Hilliard d’Auberteuil’s proposals were reactions to the problems that arose from the imperial struggle for Saint-Domingue and the social tensions inherent in slave colonies, but they were not merely this. They were also responses to the possibilities opened up by recent scientific developments in metropolitan France, particularly in relation to animal breeding. Scientific research had revealed two important things: that the transformative effects of climate on animal bodies could be compounded and accelerated through sexual reproduction, and that humans might be able to control this process through the systematic selection of mates. When these two realizations were extended to humans—as they often were—they revealed the radical malleability of human bodies across generations. These developments came


18 I am not aware of any secondary works that extensively treat the life and career of Bory. For more on the development of Enlightenment thought and the sciences in Saint-Domingue, see James E. McClellan III, Colonialism and Science: Saint Domingue in the Old Regime (Baltimore, 1992).


20 See the discussion in Ann Laura Stoler, Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s “History of Sexuality” and the Colonial Order of Things (Durham, N.C., 1995), 15.
out of the work being done by a group of French savants, the most important of whom was the naturalist Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon. Their endeavors from roughly the 1750s to the 1780s resulted in a reconceptualization of natural history, as it was transformed into “a science concerned with grasping the ‘history of nature.’”21 Phillip Sloan has used the phrase “Buffonian revolution” to characterize this shift to an understanding of nature as a dynamic whole that was open to historical change and driven by immanent forces. Static order and divine foresight were replaced by eternal flux and complex historical development. These ideas developed in tandem with new methodological approaches focusing on the explanation of immanent natural causes and the complex transformations of nature that defied rigid means of ordering, naming, and classifying.22 The phrase can also be extended to the way that Buffon and his collaborators and successors transformed the understanding of the human ability to control nature and remake living beings through reproduction.23

The existing scholarship on scientific ideas of human variation, “degeneration,” and bodily improvement in the eighteenth century, and on the role of these ideas in social and political thought, has focused too narrowly on theories of climate, particularly as they relate to the Hippocratic tradition in medicine.24 Theories of climate were certainly important and widespread in eighteenth-century social, political, legal, and scientific discourse; it was widely believed that climate could affect the moral as well as the physical characteristics of humans—particularly over the course of


generations—and that such changes were part of a natural process that occurred beyond the reach of human agency. It has been little recognized, however, that Buffon radicalized the understanding of human malleability by pushing beyond basic climate theory and showing that human intervention through selective breeding could accelerate, retard, or even reverse the influence of climate.  

Buffon developed these ideas primarily in his works on animals and animal generation, but he also addressed them directly in his writing about the “races” of the human species. In the case of humans, he asserted that the “mixing of races” could bring about changes “more quickly” than climate alone. Climate, Buffon claimed, produced changes in humans so slowly and gradually that it was only over long periods of time that the differences became recognizable; thus it would probably take “a great number of centuries” for people with black skin to become completely white “through the influence of climate alone.” It was only through sexual reproduction that changes to human and animal forms could be effected quickly and that they could be passed on between generations, accumulating into dramatic transformations. Through sexual reproduction, Buffon argued, black skin could be changed to white in only four generations. He maintained that climate was the initial cause of the alteration of human bodies (and therefore variation within the human species), but he thought that once these transformations had been realized, they could be manipulated to produce new combinations of characteristics. Despite the directness of Buffon’s statement, even some of the best accounts of his ideas of degeneration and race overlook or ignore this dimension of his writing. Although there is ample scholarship on the transformation of natural history in the Enlightenment, as well as a growing if disparate body of specialist scholarship that touches upon Enlightenment ideas of human breeding, there has not yet been sufficient focus on the  

25 The only secondary work I am aware of that comes close to making this point about climate theory and Buffonian ideas is Michèle Duchet, “Du noir au blanc, ou la cinquième génération,” in Léon Poljakov, ed., Le couple interdit, entretiens sur le racisme: La dialectique de l’altérité socio-culturelle et la sexualité (Paris, 1980), 177–190. Several historians of British ideas of race have emphasized that authors in the late eighteenth century came to believe that climatic influence upon the body acted more gradually and slowly than previously thought. While there is ample evidence to support this claim, it overlooks the radical implications of Buffon’s ideas of climate and breeding, as well as the significant status and influence of Buffon’s ideas, even in the Anglophone Atlantic. For the weakening of climate theory and its role in the new “weak-transmutationism,” see Harrison, “The Tender Frame of Man”; Mark Harrison, Climates and Constitutions: Health, Race, Environment and British Imperialism in India, 1600–1850 (New York, 1999); Wheeler, The Complexity of Race; and Wahrman, The Making of the Modern Self, 83–126.  

26 Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, “De la dégénération des animaux,” in Buffon, Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière [hereafter HN], 15 vols. (Paris, 1749–1767), 14: 313. Buffon went on to suggest his notorious experiment, arguing that the only way to find out how long it would take for climate alone to “reintegrate” the races of man into their original form (which at that time he believed to be blond-haired, blue-eyed white people) would be to take people from someplace like Senegal and move them to a place such as Denmark, where they would be isolated and not permitted to reproduce with the Danes. Ibid., 314.  

27 Ibid., 313.  

connections between these developments, the colonial and Atlantic contexts, and the emergence of modern “scientific” ideas of race in the second half of the eighteenth century.29

This was an important period in the development of modern understandings of race because it was the time when—in the wake of the Buffonian revolution and its secular theory of monogenesis—the characteristics of individuals (physical, moral, intellectual, and temperamental) came to be seen as heritable and alterable, and therefore manipulable by others. The belief in the innateness and immutability of human qualities was being questioned and partially undermined, as were traditional explanations of mutability that focused on the influence of celestial bodies or the maternal imagination during pregnancy. Because of developments in theories of generation, new attention directed toward breeding experiments, and new ideas about species and varieties, the conditions of possibility were transformed and it became possible to think that the development of whole populations and “races” could be affected through selective breeding. The realization that individual human bodies as well as whole populations were not only mutable but also controllable through selective breeding introduced a new conceptual and social instability. Some, including Bory, wanted to exploit this mutability to bring about “improvements” through selective intermarriage. Hilliard d’Auberteuil’s work demonstrates a different type of reaction, an attempt to exploit this very mutability and controllability in order to reintroduce stability and fixity into human types and, in a sense, create “races.” Hilliard d’Auberteuil wanted to exploit the Buffonian revolution to reassert the fixity of human types, or rather, to create a new type of fixity.

BORY’S AND HILLIARD D’AUBERTEUIL’S PLANS were each conceived as a solution to what emerged from the Seven Years’ War (1756–1763) as one of Saint-Domingue’s most contentious social and political problems among the free population: providing for the internal and external security of the island.30 This problem was most clearly

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30 Internal security was a constant concern for the whites and free people of color, who were both vastly outnumbered by enslaved people. The number of slaves, free people of color, and whites living in Saint-Domingue in the eighteenth century is quite uncertain. The last official census of Saint-Domingue in 1789 almost certainly underestimated the numbers of free people of color (and possibly enslaved people as well), registering 424,000 slaves, 30,000 whites, and 24,000 free people of color. David P. Geggus, “Slave and Free Colored Women in Saint Domingue,” in David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine, eds., _More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas_ (Bloomington, Ind., 1996), 269.
manifest in the issue of militia service, which before the war had theoretically been mandatory for every free man on the island between the ages of fifteen and fifty-five. There was particularly strong resistance to this involuntary duty from the white population, who sometimes characterized it as “white slavery.” Those whites and people of color who were wealthy enough to own slave plantations were also resentful about the loss of productivity their plantations suffered while they were fulfilling their militia obligations and the loss of labor they experienced on the occasions when their slaves were made to perform labor related to military defense, such as the construction of installations. While militia service had long been a point of conflict between the government and the free people of the island, the war changed the landscape in several ways. The animosity toward compulsory service reached new heights in the 1760s as it became invested with greater symbolic significance. It was increasingly viewed as a sign of the despotic constraint of the people, to the point that, as one governor-general complained, “the name alone of the militia creates an idea of constraint.”

But reforming the militia was not only a politically expedient means of fostering white creole allegiance, it was also seen as a military necessity in the struggle for the Americas. The loss of several Caribbean islands to the British during the Seven Years’ War highlighted both of these issues. Much as the surprising loss of Havana played an important role in the militia reforms within the Spanish Empire, the loss of the French Caribbean islands triggered a series of events that would lead to significant changes in French colonial militias. A more specialized and better-trained militia was clearly needed if the French were going to maintain long-term control of their colonies. The problem was particularly pronounced on Saint-Domingue because it was the most valuable colony in the region and was known to have a poorly trained and unenthusiastic militia. In the later stages of the war, as everyone waited for the island to be invaded by the British, Bory, then governor-general, wrote a letter to the minister in charge of the colonies, the Duc de Choiseul, predicting that the militia would provide insufficient defense against a British attack. As he dryly noted, “The English do not attack our Colonies with their militias.” There would have to be significant reform of the militia if Saint-Domingue was going to remain French. It was a question of assuaging the dissent of the white creole elite and creating a

31 On the resistance to mandatory militia service and the revolt of 1769, see Charles Frostin, Les révoltes blanches à Saint-Domingue aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles (Haiti avant 1789) (Paris, 1975); and Garrigus, Before Haiti, 109–139.
32 [Charles-Henri-Hector, Comte] d’Estaing, “Mémoire sur les finances et les milices de St. Domingue,” undated, F391, Centre des Archives d’Outre Mer, Aix-en-Provence, France [hereafter CAOM]. Many of the administrators in Saint-Domingue recognized the severity of the problem and reported it in their correspondence with the metropolitan officials. See, for example, Governor-General Gabriel de Bory to Choiseul, June 12, 1762, C9A111, CAOM.
33 Frostin, Les révoltes blanches à Saint-Domingue; and Garrigus, Before Haiti, 109–139. On the French armies during the Seven Years’ War, see Lee Kennett, The French Armies in the Seven Years War: A Study in Military Organization and Administration (Durham, N.C., 1967). On the Seven Years’ War and the subsequent reform of the Spanish military in the Americas, see Allen J. Kuethe, Cuba, 1753–1815: Crown, Military, and Society (Knoxville, Tenn., 1986); and Lyle N. McAlister, “The Reorganization of the Army of New Spain, 1763–1766,” Hispanic American Historical Review 33, no. 1 (February 1953): 1–32. On the manner in which the military reforms limited the role of free people of color, see Ben Vinson III, Bearing Arms for His Majesty: The Free-Colored Militia in Colonial Mexico (Stanford, Calif., 2001).
34 Bory to Choiseul, June 12, 1762, C9A111, CAOM.
military force that could ensure the long-term viability of the colony. Surprisingly, more than a decade later, Bory would turn to science for help in solving the problem. His *Essai sur la population des colonies à sucre* would prove to be a stunning combination of colonial administration and Enlightenment science.

Excited by new scientific experiments being conducted on animals in the metropole, specifically the work being carried out by his fellow member of the Académie Royale des Sciences Louis-Jean-Marie Daubenton, Bory suggested in his *Essai* that a “new improved race” could be produced if the island’s people were selectively bred like sheep.\(^{35}\) Focusing on mulattoes, he proposed “trying the experiments of M[onsieur] Daubenton on this portion of the human species,” adding, “this clever naturalist [physicien] has made a great number [of experiments] on sheep.”\(^{36}\) By sanctioning marriage between mulatto women and white men, banning marriage between mulatto women and black men, and enforcing criteria of selection, administrators could “improve the mulatto race” and produce a new group of men who would be well suited to take a greater role in fulfilling the military and policing duties of the colony.\(^{37}\) As shocking as Bory’s suggestion was, it has gone practically unnoticed by historians.\(^{38}\)

Bory was an officer-*philosophe* who maintained an involvement in scientific work throughout his life.\(^{39}\) After rising through the ranks of the navy to become a ship captain in 1757, he assumed the governor-generalship of Saint-Domingue in 1761, serving until near the end of the Seven Years’ War. He was relieved of his duties in 1763 and returned to live in France.\(^{40}\) Less than three years after his arrival in the metropole, the most exalted scientific body in ancien régime France, the Académie Royale des Sciences in Paris, named him an *associé libre*, a membership that gave him the freedom to work in any area of the sciences. He subsequently achieved the high naval rank of *chef d’escadre* in 1766 and became a member of the scientifically oriented Académie de Marine in Brest in 1769, a naval adviser to the Revolutionary government(s), and a member of the Institut National (the institution that replaced the Académie Royale des Sciences) in 1796.\(^{41}\) Bory served as governor-general for

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\(^{36}\) Ibid.

\(^{37}\) Ibid., 59.

\(^{38}\) The only mention of Bory’s ideas about breeding that I am aware of is a brief reference in Duchet, “Du noir au blanc,” 187.

\(^{39}\) Although he wrote on a variety of issues, in the great majority of his work he pursued subjects related to naval concerns, colonization, and the sciences, such as the mapping of coastlines, introducing the reflecting octant to France, carrying out astronomical observations to improve navigation, determining the exact position of islands such as the Azores, and evaluating the different means of improving the quality of air below the decks of ships. In addition to Bory, Mémoires sur l’administration de la Marine et des colonies, see Gabriel de Bory, *Mémoire dans lequel on prouve la possibilité d’agrandir la ville de Paris sans en reculer les limites* (Paris, 1776); Bory, “Mémoire sur les moyens de purifier l’air dans les vaisseaux,” in *Mémoires de l’Académie Royale des Sciences*, 1781 (Paris, 1784), 111–119; and J. Fr. Michaud, *Biographie universelle, ancienne et moderne*, 45 vols. (1843–1865; repr., new ed., Bad Feilnbach, 1998), 5: 404–405. On Bory’s work with the Académie Royale des Sciences and the Institut, see the documents in fols. 284–468, Fonds Français 6349, Manuscrits occidentaux, Bibliothèque nationale, Paris.

\(^{40}\) Details of Bory’s military career can be found in his personal dossier of the Ministry of the Marine, Marine C 738, Archives nationales, Paris.

\(^{41}\) While Bory did not achieve great success in the sciences with any specific discovery, creation, or analytical skill, he was a respected member of the scientific elite who was well enough established and prominent enough by the 1780s to be named to the famous committee assigned to judge the legitimacy of Mesmerism (which also included scientific luminaries such as Benjamin Franklin and Antoine...
only two years—during which time he even saw his control of the military transferred
to a more experienced commander of ground troops, the Vicomte de Belzunce—but
he had a considerable role in initiating some of the reforms that would transform
the structure and composition of the militia and policing corps of Saint-Domingue
between the Seven Years’ War and the Haitian Revolution. Bory was aware of the
unpopularity of militia service among whites, and he also recognized the need for
a more experienced and dedicated military force. He wrote to the minister sug-
02242 00003 gestion that white militia service should be abolished and that more free blacks and
mulattoes should be enlisted to form new corps. In the spirit of these suggestions,
in April 1762 he ordered the creation of a new corps of “archers” or “hunters” com-
posed of free blacks and mulattoes. The ministry approved the organization of the
Chasseurs volontaires d’Amérique, but it would not immediately approve the elimi-
nation of mandatory militia service for whites.

Even more radical than the creation of black and mulatto forces to replace white
militia service, however, was Bory’s suggestion that all enslaved mulatto men of
arms-bearing age should be freed so that they could be enlisted in military service.
As he would again in the Essai sur la population des colonies à sucre in 1776, he argued
that all mulattoes “born and to be born” should be freed; sometimes he also included
the sang-mêlé (“mixed-blood”), a loosely defined group of people of mixed African
and European descent who generally had a larger proportion of European ancestors
and lighter skin than most of the people designated as “mulatto.” While there was
a long tradition of free black and mulatto military and police service in Saint-
Domingue and the region, it was an unusual idea for mulattoes to become a special
class of people who would be exclusively responsible for the military service and
policing of the island. While free people of color made up the majority of the police
force (the maréchaussée) and the militia force of Saint-Domingue by the later part

Lavoisier). On Mesmerism and the committee, see Robert Darnton, Mesmerism and the End of the
Enlightenment in France (Cambridge, Mass., 1968). On Bory’s biography, see Michaud, Biographie uni-
59.

42 Bory to Choiseul, June 12, 1762, C9A111, CAOM.
43 See the Ordonnance du Gouverneur Général, portant établissement d’une Compagnie de Chasseurs
de gens de couleur, April 29, 1762, issued by Bory, in Médéric-Louis-Élie Moreau de Saint-Méry, Loix
See also Bory to [Choiseul], June 12, 1762, C9A111, CAOM.
44 Choiseul to Bory, July 31, 1762, C9A111, CAOM.
45 Bory to [Choiseul], July 17, 1762, ibid.
46 Bory to Choiseul, June 22, July 17, and August 22, 1762, ibid. Bory, Essai sur la population des
colonies à sucre, 55–56.
47 See Bory to Choiseul, June 12, June 22, July 17, August 22, and September 2, 1762, C9A111,
CAOM. For more on the role of slaves and free people of color in the Saint-Domingue military and
police, see Stewart R. King, Blue Coat and Powdered Wig: Free People of Color in Pre-Revolutionary
Saint-Domingue (Athens, Ga., 2001), 52–77, 226–265. Although Edward Long did not propose a plan
to breed mulattoes (he thought that they could not produce viable offspring with other mulattoes, and
he misleadingly invoked Buffon to support his point), the popular British author showed an interest in
giving them a central role in the Jamaican militia. Edward Long, The History of Jamaica; or, General
on race, see Wheeler, The Complexion of Race, 209–233. On the arming of enslaved or recently freed
people, see Christopher Leslie Brown and Philip D. Morgan, eds., Arming Slaves: From Classical Times
to the Modern Age (New Haven, Conn., 2006); Ben Vinson III and Stewart R. King, eds., The New African
Diasporic Military History in Latin America, Special Issue, Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History
5, no. 2 (Fall 2004); and Vinson, Bearing Arms for His Majesty.
of the eighteenth century, the size of those forces was woefully inadequate to ensure lasting security for the colony or even to carry out normal security duties. As Stewart King has written, "a lot of the security functions just did not get done." Bory envisioned enlarging the militia, giving it a greater role in policing, and filling all of the positions except for the few commissioned officers with people of color, thus creating a large and separate soldier class.

During the war, Choiseul summarily rejected Bory’s proposal to end mandatory white militia service, and he seems to have simply ignored the proposal to free all mulattoes. When the war ended in 1763, the metropolitan government initiated militia reforms and briefly abolished mandatory service, but by the end of the decade the issue had become even more contentious than it was before the war. The strong resistance to the militia developed into a full-blown revolt in 1769, and even though it was put down relatively quickly by the government, the question of militia service was still central to the politics of the island when Bory and Hilliard d’Aubertueil wrote their works in the 1770s. The militia was still the most potent symbol, along with the *Exclusif*, of white colonists’ displeasure with the metropolitan government. The disputes over the militia were also an acknowledgment on the part of the white community of their precarious security. They were well aware that they were vastly outnumbered by people whom they kept subjugated by threat and force, and that Saint-Domingue was a valuable colony coveted by rival imperial powers.

Bory’s *Essai* was an extension of the various military and militia-related reforms that he had attempted to bring about, with varying degrees of success, as governor-general. But now he could justify his arguments for the creation of a mulatto and sang-mêlé militia through references to new science that had recently received significant financial and logistical support from the government and that had been greeted enthusiastically by savants in Paris. He gave particular attention to Daubenton’s sheep-breeding experiments. Daubenton had risen to prominence as Buffon’s collaborator on the most important and best-known natural history work of the Enlightenment, the first fifteen volumes of the *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière* (1749–1767). When that collaboration came to an end, Daubenton was enlisted by the French government to lead a state-sponsored project to improve the quality of wool produced in France. This twelve-year endeavor would prove to be the longest, the most extensive, and probably the best-financed and most controlled selective breeding experiment in history up until that point. Not only was the project of great

48 King, *Blue Coat and Powdered Wig*, 62.
49 Choiseul to Bory, July 31, 1762, C 9A111, CAOM.
53 The sheep-breeding experiments of Jonas Ahlsström in Sweden beginning in 1723 were an important and widely known precedent; however, they were carried out on a smaller scale and were not integrated with theoretical explanation. The extensive and well-known experiments of the English breeder Robert Bakewell were very practical in orientation and also were not integrated with theories of generation or heredity. Roger J. Wood, “The Sheep Breeders’ View of Heredity Before and After
scientific interest, but it offered the possibility of providing the nation with tremendous financial gains. “The experiments of M. Daubenton have shown the way,” enthused the Marquis de Condorcet, secretary of the Académie Royale des Sciences. Condorcet saw much work to be done, but he believed that it held the potential for a “treasure, more substantial than the Golden Fleece that the Argonauts set out to conquer.”

The controlled propagation of animals had been practiced since antiquity, and in early modern Europe and the Americas it was practiced by both agriculturalists and enthusiasts of domestic animals. By the middle of the eighteenth century, however, selective breeding was only beginning to be undertaken and observed in a systematic manner, primarily by French savants such as Buffon, his friend and colleague Pierre-Louis Maupertuis, and the famed and influential naturalist René-Antoine Ferchault de Réaumur, who were attempting to understand the mechanisms that could account for the apparent heritability of certain physical characteristics. Maupertuis played a vital role in initiating this new line of inquiry, but Buffon was the most noteworthy of the savants because of the unprecedented importance he accorded to animal-breeding experiments. This followed from the central role that interbreeding played in his reconceptualization of species (which for the first time was determined exclusively by the criterion of fertile interbreeding); his use of a theory of epigenesis to build an innovative secular monogenetic theory of race, asserting that all peoples were of one species and one common origin; his conviction that crossing varieties within a species “ennobled” the species; his integration of the results of experiments with his innovative theories of epigenetic generation and variation within species; his importance and reputation as a natural historian (rivaled only by the Swedish naturalist Linnaeus); and the fact that his Histoire naturelle was one of the most popular and best-known works of the French Enlightenment.

Buffon conducted and documented an extensive array of breeding experiments from the late 1740s until his death in 1788. He also provided the most developed...
and sustained arguments for how and why humans could and should “change, modify, and improve species with time.”

He lent scientific authority to the long-held view that because of nature’s tendency toward balance, the crossing of different varieties of the same species would produce “improved” individuals, since some of the faults of the parents would cancel each other out in the offspring. Importantly, however, Buffon added to the belief in the benefits of crossbreeding the idea that humans could control the specific characteristics that would result. Through the judicious selection of mates, an entire population, such as all the sheep in France, could be bred so as to produce certain characteristics, such as greater height and strength and extremely fine and bountiful wool.

This breakthrough was not lost on the French government or on Buffon’s collaborator Daubenton, whose thorough and meticulous style had first been demonstrated in the anatomical contributions to the *Histoire naturelle* and could also be seen in his experiments with sheep. There were two specific elements of that research that made it particularly appealing for Bory and his purposes in Saint-Domingue. Daubenton was interested in crossing the “races” of sheep that had the greatest demonstrable differences between them. In pursuit of this goal, and with the considerable financial support of the government, he obtained a wide variety of sheep from as far away as Morocco and Tibet. He claimed that with these exotic animals, he had produced a new type of French sheep that rivaled the famous Merino variety in the quality and quantity of their wool. This not only gave further validation to the idea that a “race” could be improved through crossbreeding, it also may have demonstrated to Bory that if the pairs being crossed were extremely different (as people of African and European descent were thought to be), this was not a liability, but instead could be utilized for “improvement.”

Another important aspect of Daubenton’s work was his claim that the characteristics of the male animals were reproduced more strongly in the offspring. In bringing together two animals of different quality, therefore, it was important to ensure that the male was the “better” of the two. This “scientific” finding surely reflected preexisting prejudices about the dominance of male character in maintaining good lineage, but Daubenton’s findings separated ideas about the importance of male character from any explicit relation to the social world and presented them as pure and disinterested facts of science. Bory took up this idea and recounted...
it in aesthetic terms—as was common in writing about race—claiming that the “beauty” of an individual was particularly dependent on the beauty of its father. In this way, he reinforced the taboo on sexual relations between men of color and white women and was able to conserve the sexual dynamics of society in Saint-Domingue.

Bory was not the only one to wonder about the applicability of animal-breeding experiments to humans. Daubenton did not make any such speculations in his published works, but Condorcet raised the issue in his introduction to one of the pieces that Daubenton published in the proceedings of the Académie Royale des Sciences. In fact, this leap from animals to humans was not an uncommon one in the second half of the eighteenth century. Maupertuis had begun asking whether animal breeding could serve as a model for human breeding in the 1740s, and after Buffon helped transform the scientific importance of animal breeding, similar thoughts could be found scattered through specialized scientific works, medical treatises, popular natural histories, books on political economy, literary periodicals, and encyclopedias aimed at men of state. Bory and Hilliard d’Auberteuil were the first to propose that specific breeding plans be carried out in a specific human population, but Charles-Augustin Vandermonde, a young Parisian doctor at the Paris Faculté de Médecine with ties to the Jardin de Roi (where Buffon was the chief administrator), was the first to write a book applying Buffonian ideas about animal breeding to humans. His bold two-volume work *Essai sur la manière de perfectionner l’espèce humaine* (1756) drew directly on many of Buffon’s insights in the first four volumes of the *Histoire naturelle*, even borrowing passages without acknowledgment. But as astounding as Vandermonde’s work was, Bory and Hilliard d’Auberteuil went even further, suggesting that the reproduction of large groups should be regulated so that entire populations could be transformed on the basis of certain predefined goals.

complex of social, legal, and political concerns that were well beyond the narrow limits of the biological. Chief among these were issues of the inheritance of property, noble titles, and offices. On the early modern discourse of noble “race,” see Arlette Jouanna, *L’idée de race en France au XVIe siècle et au début du XVIIe siècle* (1498–1614), 3 vols. (Lille, 1976); and Aubert, “The Blood of France.”

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While Vandermonde tried to show that it was possible for individual humans to be improved through selective breeding, Bory and Hilliard d’Aubertueil accepted that it was possible, argued that highly controlled selective breeding should be carried out on a large scale on a real (and specific) population, and focused on bodily characteristics associated with the new ideas of race as the primary criterion of selection.

While Bory explicitly referenced the writings on animal breeding of the metropolitan savants, Hilliard d’Aubertueil’s debt to this work was less direct. His vision built upon possibilities that had emerged only with the Buffonian revolution. Born in Rennes in 1751, Hilliard d’Aubertueil set off for Saint-Domingue when he was only fourteen, finding work as a legal clerk. Not much is known about his youth there, but he eventually became well known in colonial circles as a man of “violent temperament” who either had trouble restraining himself or repeatedly chose not to. This “enemy of all subordination,” who often wrote with “too much fire and freedom,” frequently found himself in trouble because of his provocative rhetoric and his radical critiques of the established order. But as a still-unknown and unpublished man in his early twenties, he began writing the two volumes of Considérations sur l’état présent de la colonie française de Saint-Domingue, which appeared in 1777 and would prove to be one of the most vituperative published critiques of French ancien régime colonial policy.

In Considérations, Hilliard d’Aubertueil’s critical eye was omnidirectional. He criticized the administrators in the metropole as well as those in the colonies, the philosophes as well as the planters, slave owners as well as slaves. In retrospect, he looks like an unlikely candidate for involvement in colonial administration, but at the time he was seen as a talented young prospect with legal training and the reforming spirit necessary to take on the entrenched problems of the colonies. While

Hilliard d’Aubertueil did not articulate the theoretical (biological) underpinnings of his plan, but whether or not he had direct knowledge of the work of Buffon, he based his proposal on several assumptions that were central to, and characteristic of, the Buffonian approach to selective breeding and human variation. Hilliard d’Aubertueil assumed a theory of secular monogenesis, epigenetic generation, and the implicit belief in the inter-fertility of human varieties or “races.” These assumptions provide the basis for his conviction that human varieties as apparently different as people of African and European descent could produce fertile offspring without any sign of decreasing fertility through a lineage (as opposed to the many theorists who believed that mulattoes were infertile or of a very limited fertility that would keep them from creating a self-sustaining lineage). Furthermore, these assumptions also implied that both parents contributed physical characteristics to offspring and that acquired characteristics (such as skin color, which was initially acquired through the influence of climate) could be inherited. Most importantly, Hilliard d’Aubertueil’s plan was not based on some vague idea of the “improvement” or “perfectibility” of the human form, but rather the conviction that humans could be selected and bred (like animals) to produce specific characteristics such as skin color.


“Isle de la Grenade,” an unsigned and undated report on Hilliard d’Aubertueil’s arrest, removal from office, and deportation from Grenada, located in his personal dossier, E222, CAOM.

Mercier de la Rivière to Sartine, n.d. [1776], fol. 259, F391, CAOM.
CONSIDÉRATIONS
SUR L'ÉTAT PRÉSENT
DE LA COLONIE FRANÇAISE
DE SAINT-DOMINGUE.
OUVRAGE POLITIQUE ET LÉGISLATIF;
Présenté au Ministre de la Marine,
Par M'. H. D. L

A PARIS,
Chez Grangé, Imprimeur–Libraire, rue de la
Parcheminerie; & au Cabinet-Littéraire,
Pont Notre-Dame.

M. DCC. LXXVI.
Avec Approbation & Privilège du Roi;

Figure 3: The title page from Hilliard d'Aubertueil's Considérations.
Hilliard d’Auberteuil never achieved as high-ranking an administrative position as Bory, he did have many direct engagements with the colonial administration, including several significant positions in the legal apparatus. 74 In 1776, when he returned to France seeking publication of his long manuscript, he found support in the Bureau des Colonies of the Ministry of the Marine, earning his book the official support of the crown, the approbation & privilège du Roi (although this status was rescinded quickly after publication in response to complaints from the planters of Saint-Domingue). 75

The argument of Considérations is difficult to characterize because as a denunciatory critique it enumerated many things that it was against while often remaining vague about what it supported. It was also full of ambiguity and apparent contradiction, including Hilliard d’Auberteuil’s criticizing the baseness of slaves while also claiming that “no species of men has more intelligence.” 76 Nonetheless, it can be said that Hilliard focused on describing the current problems of the colony and showing that reform needed to be effected through new policies of trade and taxation, the elimination of the military from governance, greater involvement of white creoles in government, and a new code of laws based on firsthand knowledge of the island. 77 He emphasized that it was only through living on the island over a long period of time that one could understand the unique mœurs of the people of Saint-Domingue and how they reflected the local climate. Such intimate knowledge was necessary if one was to achieve the all-important harmony of laws and mœurs. Although Hilliard d’Auberteuil had strongly worded criticisms for white creoles, his arguments generally reflected the nascent creole identity and generally advocated the empowerment of the colony in its relations with the metropole. 78 According to Malick Ghachem, Considérations “did more than any other single work of the colonial Enlightenment to advance a jurisprudence of créolité.” 79 While many of Hilliard d’Auberteuil’s jurisprudential ideas about the interaction of laws and mœurs echoed Montesquieu—sometimes he merely copied from De l’esprit des lois—he went beyond Montesquieu and almost all contemporary jurists in asserting that not only were the mœurs of a people made by laws, but so too were their bodies. In chapters analyzing the population of Saint-Domingue and the class of affranchis (freed people, i.e., free people of color at least partially descendant from slaves), he argued that the government should literally and physically make men. These later chapters gave a new and more expansive meaning to his earlier claim that “men are what the Government make them.” 80

74 Ogle, in “‘The Eternal Power of Reason’ and ‘The Superiority of Whites,’ ” was the first to demonstrate the depth of Hilliard d’Auberteuil’s involvement with the officials of the Bureau des Colonies. 75 See the letters in F391 and E222, CAOM. On the fallout from the approbation, publication, and banning, see fols. 160–167, item 504, Joly de Fleury Collection, Manuscrits occidentaux, Bibliothèque nationale, Paris. For a detailed critique of Hilliard d’Auberteuil’s Considérations by one of his contemporaries, see D. B. [Pierre-Ulric Dubuisson], Nouvelles considérations sur Saint-Domingue, en réponse à celles de M. H. D L. par M. D. B. (Paris, 1780).

76 Hilliard d’Auberteuil, Considérations, 1: 132.

77 Ghachem, “Montesquieu in the Caribbean,” 11.


80 Hilliard d’Auberteuil, Considérations, 2: 39.
Hilliard d’Auberteuil developed his ideas about human breeding in the second volume of *Considérations*, in a chapter that focused on the *affranchis*.

He expressed his desire to see the creation of “an intermediary class between the slaves and free [white] people.” This class would need to be “absolutely distinct” from slaves, and this distinction had to be reflected through “external signs” that corresponded to the different civil statuses of whites, *affranchis*, and slaves. Skin color was the only external sign that he discussed; in fact, his entire plan revolved around transforming the skin color of free people of color into a homogeneous “yellow.” Hilliard d’Auberteuil wanted to reduce the diverse society of Saint-Domingue to three distinct groups, whose differences in civil status would be visibly apparent: blacks, who would be enslaved; whites, who would have full civil status; and the middle group, “yellow” mulattoes, who would have their freedom but would be subject to a number of segregationist laws and would be burdened with the special duty of providing security for the island and policing the enslaved majority. In the new tripartite social and civil hierarchy intended to replace the metropolitan hierarchy of the three estates, Hilliard d’Auberteuil wanted to create a rigorous correspondence between skin color and status (both social and civil).

Hilliard d’Auberteuil’s plan also would have enacted a ban on marriage between white men and any woman who still bore the “stain” of blackness. His aim was to stop white men from marrying “Négresses, Mulâtres & Quarteronnes,” but he acknowledged that such a ban could not be enforced for anyone from the sixth generation of descent from a black relative, because by that point it would be impossible to visually distinguish such a person from someone of exclusively European descent. This call to prohibit intermarriage was not exceptional for the era or the region—formal bans on marriage or concubinage between blacks and whites had been enacted in the French colonies of Guadeloupe in 1711 and Louisiana in 1724, and a variety of ordinances to criminalize or discourage such relationships were in place across the Atlantic world. Hilliard d’Auberteuil’s plan, however, was unusual in its focus on free people of color and his suggestions about what needed to be done to make these people a homogeneously pigmented intermediary group.

81 Ibid., 72–96.
82 Ibid., 88.
83 Ibid. In theory, slaves were ensured some legal protections under the *Code noir*, but the vast chasm between the letter of the law and the actualities of enforcement meant that slaves in Saint-Domingue, as in most French colonies of the period, received basically no benefit from these laws. For a detailed analysis of the *Code noir*, as well as a blistering critique of the *philosophes* and the shocking absence of the *Code noir* from the French historical record, see Louis Sala-Molins, *Le Code noir, ou, Le calvaire de Canaan* (Paris, 1987).
84 Hilliard d’Auberteuil did not oppose the segregationist laws of the 1760s and 1770s that aimed at restricting the freedom as well as the social and economic success of the free people of color in Saint-Domingue. On the laws, see Debbasch, *Couleur et liberté*; and John Garrigus, “Race, Gender, and Virtue in Haiti’s Failed Foundation Fiction: *La mulâtre comme il y a peu de blanches* (1803),” in Peabody and Stovall, *The Color of Liberty*, 78.
85 Like almost all of his contemporaries who wrote about intermarriage and mixed coupling, Hilliard d’Auberteuil addressed sexual relations between women of color and white men but did not entertain the possibility of white women having sexual relations with men of color. See for example, Hilliard d’Auberteuil, *Considerations*, 2: 83.
86 Ibid., 82–83, 95–96.
The first step toward producing this middle group was for all free black men to be married to mulatto women, and for mulatto men to marry free black women. Hilliard d’Auberteuil did not indicate how long he believed it would take for all the varieties of color of the affranchis to be balanced out into a relatively homogeneous “yellow.” Presumably this would have been a long-term project spanning numerous generations. He aimed for the near-complete elimination, presumably within several generations, of the various peoples who fell in between the extremes of black, white, and “yellow.” His second step was intended, among other things, to make the class of slaves more consistently black by granting freedom to all mulatto children—or as he referred to them, those born from the “weakness” of the white colonists. He did implicitly acknowledge that not all slaves would be of purely African descent; for instance, griffes and marabous (the offspring of one black and one mulatto parent) would continue to be born, but he regarded these people as les négres and reiterated that they needed to “remain” in slavery. He presumably believed that even though they were not strictly of African descent, their skin would be dark enough that they would be easily differentiated from the newly homogenized, free “yellow” mulattoes.

Hilliard d’Auberteuil did not discuss the military role he envisioned for the new mulatto class as extensively as Bory did, but he made it clear that they would have a special role to play in providing external security from imperial aggression and internal stability. Furthermore, their internal role would be twofold, as they would provide a social buffer separating the whites from the black slaves, and they would also compose the police units responsible for maintaining general order and hunting escaped slaves. Hilliard d’Auberteuil did not go into detail about the role the government would need to play in carrying out his vision, but it is obvious from the scope of the proposal that it would have had to be a major role. In fact, it would have been well beyond the means of government. In terms of the large number of people who would have been directly affected, the substantial number of administrators and enforcers who would have been needed, the significant amount of money it would have required, the extraordinary amount of work and resources it would have taken to gain the consent or submission of the wealthy and powerful free people of color, and the long period of time that would have been needed to bring the plan to fruition, Hilliard d’Aubertuel’s plan would have been a massive undertaking.

Among the white population of Saint-Domingue in the 1760s and 1770s, there was a growing concern with white purity that was reflected in new segregationist laws aimed primarily at containing the power and social status of free people of color. At the same time, there was a growing concern about status deception and “passing.” Hilliard d’Aubertuel was not the only one who offered a plan to ensure that no slaves could pass as free people and that no free people of color could pass for white. The archives of the Ministry of the Marine contain another such mémoire by a high-ranking official responsible for maintaining public order in late-eighteenth-century

88 Hilliard d’Aubertuel, Considérations, 2: 88.
89 Ibid., 83.
90 Ibid., 83.
91 A significant role being reserved for the government was consistent with the view expressed in other chapters, where Hilliard d’Aubertuel wrote that “the multiplication of men always depends on the government” and “men are what the Government make them.” Ibid., 44, 39.
92 See Debbasch, Couleur et liberté; and Garrigus, Before Haiti, 141–170.
Saint-Domingue, the sénéchal and lieutenant of the Admiralty of Cap Français, Jean-Baptiste Estève. Estève feared that through mixed marriage, some people of color were coming dangerously close to “our species,” and that it would eventually become impossible to detect that these people were not of purely European descent. It was therefore necessary to find means of creating greater differentiation between free people of color, slaves, and whites. He believed that regulating the free people of color was key to maintaining general order and the racial hierarchy, and to “ensur[ing] the quality of the mixed-blood race in the future.” He thus wanted to conduct a census to determine the size of the population of free people of color and then create a registration system to keep track of their numbers and locations. Estève also raised the longstanding suggestion that freed men should be given “a distinctive and external mark of their liberty.” While he believed that no one failed to find this idea promising, he acknowledged that it was not practical because there was no reliable means of ensuring that slaves could not escape and illegitimately acquire the mark.

Unlike Estève and others who fantasized about creating an external mark to be placed upon people, Hilliard d’Aubertueil wanted to change the people themselves by transforming their appearance until their bodies were immutable and transparent signs of their social and civil status. He did not merely want to change them by branding them (the common manner in which slaves were marked) or by forcing them to wear clothing that identified their position within the socio-juridical hierarchy, as was done to a degree in metropolitan France and more dramatically in the imaginary society of François de Salignac de La Mothe Fénelon’s popular book Les aventures de Téléméaque, fils d’Ulysse of 1699. Hilliard d’Aubertueil wanted to literally change who they were, so as to bring their physical appearance in line with the newly transformed social and civil categories. He was not merely attempting to change...
the skin color of the people of Saint-Domingue. He had a more radical vision of a
new colonial hierarchy for the island that would replace the three estates of ancien régime France. “Between white men,” he wrote, “there should be no other distinc-
tions than those of employment and personal merit; in the Colony, there should be
neither grand men, nobles, nor corporate bodies; there should be only free people,
freed people [affranchis], slaves, and the law.”

The project of human breeding that
he proposed was an integral aspect of creating and maintaining this new hierarchy.
He described his chapter on the affranchis as a discussion of “the means of preventing
the confusion of ranks and the mixing of classes” of free white people, freed people
of color, and black slaves.

Hilliard d’Auberteuil’s work provides a unique glimpse into the dynamic process
through which the modern idea of race came into being in the eighteenth century.
He recognized that the empirically evident differences between people were not
signs of essential and fixed differences, but were merely unstable differences that
needed to be actively stabilized, homogenized, and reproduced if they were going
to provide the foundation for a new type of durable social hierarchy. In order for
the newly developing racial categories to provide a basis for a socio-juridical hier-
archy, external signs of difference needed to be manipulated. In other words, dif-
fferences had to be reconstructed before they could be reproduced. For Hilliard
d’Auberteuil, segregationist laws alone were not enough to ensure that whiteness was
not “polluted” by the “stain” of blackness; the laws would not be effective because
they rested on the erroneous assumption that it was already possible to determine
what category a given person fit into. He wanted to change the people themselves
to make them fit within the boundaries of these categories, but in specifying what
such people would be like, he helped to define the categories and therefore the very
idea of race.

Hilliard d’Auberteuil’s plan was an extraordinary example of the social appli-
cation of the “metaphysics of presence,” which was such an important element of
French Enlightenment thought. Much as Condillac, Rousseau, Diderot, and other
metropolitan philosophes desired to find a clear and immediate means of commu-
nication that could express the true nature of things, making them manifest and
present, Hilliard d’Auberteuil wanted to create a transparent social order by making
human bodies representative of their social position, primarily through skin color.
This overburdening of skin color as the ontological representation of human dif-
ference was a significant development in the “epidermalization” of race, whereby the
external marker of skin color came to be seen as the primary marker of racial dif-

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both a customary and a legally recognized marker of social distinction (with reference to ancient pre-
cedents), see Charles Loyseau, Traité des ordres et simples dignitez (1610), in Loyseau, Les œuvres de
maistre Charles Loyseau (Paris, 1666); and Daniel Roche, The Culture of Clothing: Dress and Fashion in

99 Hilliard d’Auberteuil, Considerations, 2: 48–49.
100 Ibid., 1: 7. See also his similarly worded claim on 2: 83.
101 Building on Heidegger, Jacques Derrida made the phrase “metaphysics of presence” prominent,
particularly through his analysis of Jean-Jacques Rousseau in Of Grammatology, trans. Gayatri Chakra-
vorty Spivak (Baltimore, 1976). Jean Starobinski has a useful analysis of Rousseau’s obsession with trans-
parency in Jean-Jacques Rousseau: La transparence et l’obstacle (Paris, 1957). See also Sophia
Rosenfeld, Revolution in Language: The Problem of Signs in Late Eighteenth-Century France (Stanford,
Calif., 2001).
ference. Hilliard d’Auberteuil’s vision of creating classes of homogeneously colored people seems to have gone beyond any of the practices of external marking and identification practiced in early modern Europe or the Americas. Furthermore, there do not appear to have been any practices or proposals in the early modern Atlantic world or in Europe that went as far as his vision for the large-scale reconstruction of a population.

“SURELY NO ONE WILL MAKE US DESIRE the incorporation and the [sexual] mixing of the Races?” asked Pierre-Victor Malouet, a one-time junior administrator in Saint-Domingue who became a plantation owner and one of the most prominent French authorities on colonial affairs in the late eighteenth century. Malouet’s rhetorical question, with its overstated certainty and reactionary ring, provided its own answer. He posed the question in 1775, arguing for the need to increase the stigmatization of slavery so as to counter the desire for mixing, and therefore, as he put it, to avoid the alteration, debasement, and dissolution of individuals, families, and nations. Although it is still a little-known dimension of the eighteenth century, numerous people did desire an “incorporation and . . . mixing of the Races” that went beyond the individual desire for sexual relationships. Bory’s and Hilliard d’Auberteuil’s plans for human breeding were important examples of a nascent discourse that argued for the desirability of large-scale projects to control the reproduction of populations, but they were also useful models for understanding how a constellation of related ideas about human difference became modern ideas of race. There is no single moment or place from which a modern “scientific” idea of race arose, but it appears that the period from the 1750s to the 1780s in France and the French Atlantic colonies was crucial in bringing about significant conceptual transformation. The new understanding of the radical malleability of human bodies, as well as the ideas about human breeding that were made possible by this understanding, seems to have played a significant role in the development of modern ideas of race. The Buffonian revolution raised questions about human variation and “race” that were both exciting and troubling, particularly for people who lived in the Atlantic world or had an administrative or scientific interest there. Bory’s and Hilliard d’Auberteuil’s incorporation and transformation of metropolitan ideas about race and breeding is further evidence that, as Joyce Chaplin writes, “perhaps more than any other set of ideas, race was Atlantic.”

The fact that Bory and Hilliard d’Auberteuil published their proposals almost simultaneously in the 1770s shows that even as modern ideas of race were coming into being, both sides of the dialectic of race were already present. There was already

102 See Groebner, *Who Are You?*, 95–116. Ben Vinson mentions that when free colored militiamen in eighteenth-century New Spain were dressed as civilians, they were required to wear special clothing or accessories such as red ribbons to indicate their rank and color; Ben Vinson III, “Free Colored Voices: Issues of Representation and Racial Identity in the Colonial Mexican Militia,” *Journal of Negro History* 80, no. 4 (Autumn 1995): 172.


104 Ibid. Although this edition of the *Mémoire* was published in 1788, the passage appears in a part of the work that Malouet claimed to have written in 1775; ibid., 127.

a fundamental tension between those who wanted to increase human variation and “improve” the races through mixing and those who wanted to erect new boundaries of reproductive segregation and create new categories of differentiation. People of mixed descent—mestizo, mulatto, métis, and “hybrid”—were the clearest embodiment of this tension, and their very existence repeatedly confounded attempts to create a science of race in the nineteenth century. The management, if not the production or elimination, of people who seemed to fall between racial categories was, of course, a major force in the development of European colonial policies, ideas of race, and the eugenics movement in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The depth and directness of connections between these eighteenth-century visions of racial engineering and subsequent ideas and practices is still unclear; however, this dialectic between the belief in human mutability and the reactive assertion of immutability seems to have played an important role in establishing the contours and the tensions at the heart of the development of ideas of race and racial policies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Some of the most difficult and relevant questions about the proposals for racial engineering, however, are those related to current debates about the character of the Enlightenment and its importance to the contemporary world. A renewed attempt to defend and reclaim the Enlightenment and its legacy emerged at the dawn of the twenty-first century as a response to the interpretive excesses and misunderstandings of some postmodern and postcolonial critiques, and it took shape within the new context of the social and political tumult following September 11, 2001. While clarifications about the character of the Enlightenment and restatements of


its importance to our contemporary world are still extremely valuable, the recent defenses and reclamations at times veer toward re-entrenching the false choice that the Enlightenment must simply be embraced or denounced. While the basic contention of many of these new scholarly defenders of Enlightenment is valid—it is true that recent critics have often misunderstood and mischaracterized the historical Enlightenment, and that Enlightenment ideas of equality, toleration, intellectual autonomy, liberty, democracy, and universal natural rights still provide a strong foundation for just and equitable societies—there is the troubling prospect of a renewed “blackmail of Enlightenment,” the name that Michel Foucault gave to the “simplistic and authoritarian alternative: you either accept the Enlightenment and remain within the tradition of its rationalism, . . . or else you criticize the Enlightenment and then try to escape from its principles of rationality.”109 Not only does this present an unnecessarily polarizing choice, but it encourages the misapprehension of the complex—and often contradictory—character of the Enlightenment, and in the name of a defense, this reductive approach subtly and unwittingly attenuates the emancipatory potential of Enlightenment ideas.110

This revived specter of blackmail is particularly clear in the most polemical and influential body of work on the Enlightenment to appear since 2001: Jonathan Israel’s reinterpretation, which stresses the importance of a radical strain of thought that emerged with the work of Benedict de Spinoza and Spinozism in the late seventeenth century.111 In strong and expansive terms, Israel defends the “package” of values that he sees as the logical consequence of Spinoza’s monist philosophy. Focusing on political and social thought, generally at the expense of the natural sciences and many elements of the “science of man,” he argues for the inherent and absolute superiority of Radical Enlightenment ideas:

For anyone who believes human societies are best ruled by reason as defined by the Radical Enlightenment, ordering modern societies on the basis of individual liberty, democracy, equality, equity, sexual freedom, and freedom of expression and publication clearly constitutes a package of rationally validated values which not only were, but remain today, inherently superior morally, politically, and intellectually not only to Postmodernist claims but to all actual or possible alternatives, no matter how different, national, and Postcolonial and no matter how illiberal, non-western, and traditional. The social values of the Radical Enlight-


111 See Israel, Radical Enlightenment; Enlightenment Contested; and “Enlightenment! Which Enlightenment?”
enment, in short, have an absolute quality in terms of reason which places them above any possible alternative.¹¹²

In the stark choice that Israel presents, if you believe that “human societies are best ruled by reason as defined by the Radical Enlightenment,” then there is only one possible (logical) conclusion you can reach: you must be for the Radical Enlightenment. This choice, however, is sustained only by a representation that unduly ignores or downplays the contradictions, qualifications, and practical dilemmas posed by even the most radical Enlightenment ideas.

To best understand the Enlightenment and how we still grapple with its legacy, our analytical perspective must not become skewed toward one extreme or the other, presenting the Enlightenment as simply emancipatory or totalitarian; instead, we must approach the extremes of emancipation and domination and search for the many links that connect them.¹¹³ We must take seriously the manner in which these two extremes developed in relation to one another and the fact that our understanding of discourses of inclusion is historically incomplete and morally, politically, and intellectually impoverished if we do not understand them in relation to the ideas and practices of exclusion with which they developed. As historians continue to criticize and correct the misrepresentations of the historical Enlightenment that have become widespread and endemic in much of the academy, we must not lose sight of the fact that with light comes shadow.¹¹⁴ The Enlightenment remains “good to think with” because many of our modern notions of equality, toleration, liberty, democracy, and natural rights emerged or were reconfigured in the Enlightenment, but also because they developed in relation to troubling and persistent ideas and practices—such as exclusion based on differences (preexisting or constructed) of race, sex, and gender—that played a role in attenuating or undermining the emancipatory potential.¹¹⁵ Even for the idea of universal equality—a cornerstone of the

¹¹² Israel, Enlightenment Contested, 869; emphasis in the original. For similar statements, see ibid., v, 870; and Israel, “Enlightenment! Which Enlightenment?,” 524. “Always provided we bear in mind,” Israel writes to qualify his support of the Radical Enlightenment, that “there is no reason why one should search only in the western philosophical traditions to find the intellectual roots of, or cultural basis for, personal liberty, comprehensive toleration, equality sexual and racial, and a secular morality of equity—any less, indeed, than for grounding anti-slavery or anti-colonialism.”

¹¹³ For good reason, Daniel Gordon quoted Blaise Pascal (“A man does not show his greatness by being at one extremity, but rather by touching both at once”) for the epigraph of his excellent edited volume Postmodernism and the Enlightenment, which attempts to engage seriously with postmodern theory while rigorously interpreting aspects of the French Enlightenment and refuting many postmodern characterizations of the historical Enlightenment.


¹¹⁵ Of course, the understanding of the historical Enlightenment and “the Enlightenment legacy” are themselves historical objects that have been created and re-created since the eighteenth century. In addition to works already cited, some of the most insightful recent studies touching upon this subject are James Schmidt, ed., What Is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions (Berkeley, Calif., 1996); Schmidt, “Inventing the Enlightenment: British Hegelians, Anti-Jacobins, and the Oxford English Dictionary,” Journal of the History of Ideas 64, no. 3 (2003): 421–443; Schmidt, “What Enlightenment Was, What It Still Might Be, and Why Kant May Have Been Right after All,” American Behavioral Scientist 49, no. 5 (January 2006): 647–663; Darrin M. McMahon, Enemies of the
radical strain of Enlightenment thought—a rigorous and accurate, not to mention politically meaningful, history must remain attuned to the complex manner in which ideas of equality were always created in relation to ideas and practices of inequality. Hilliard d’Auberteuil’s plan, for instance, was a clear demonstration of the links between ideas of inclusion and exclusion based on ideas of equality and inequality, since the proposed elimination of social and legal distinctions between white residents of Saint-Domingue was contingent upon the creation and entrenchment of a new hierarchy based on racial difference. One of his goals was to limit the considerable social and economic power of some free people of color by finding a way to raise the petit blanc (the lower-status whites) above them. The racially based inequality of the new hierarchy, with its exclusion of free people of color from the highest strata of social and civil status, was the condition of possibility for the newly envisioned equality between whites.

Although we must correct the more extreme, reductive, and anachronistic statements or innuendos equating the Enlightenment with totalitarianism—whether made by Horkheimer and Adorno, Foucault, or some of their less sophisticated successors—we should not jettison Horkheimer and Adorno’s awareness of the dialectical character of the Enlightenment, with its vital focus on unintended consequences and dialectical reversals, or Foucault’s awareness of the inseparable relation between power and knowledge, freedom and domination. We must continue to combat uninformed and ahistorical arguments while acknowledging that there were those such as Bory and Hilliard d’Auberteuil who created dehumanizing plans to racially engineer human populations. Furthermore, these men and their ideas were not as exceptional as they first appear, and they were not alone among figures of the Enlightenment in drawing on the sciences in formulating plans for selective breeding. While there is much to admire about such a complex and brilliant thinker as Denis Diderot, even he—one of Israel’s “three principal architects of the Radical Enlightenment”—showed an interest in racial engineering through selective breeding. We must acknowledge this conflicted reality of the Enlightenment if we are

116 For a sophisticated treatment of the dialectic of modern equality and the argument that “a history of equality cannot be written without a history of inequality” (which also includes a brief critique of Jonathan Israel’s work and a recognition of the ambivalence of Buffon’s ideas of race and equality), see Siep Stuurman, “How to Write a History of Equality,” Leidschrift 19, no. 3 (December 2004): 23–38, particularly 33–37. The challenge, as Lynn Hunt has aptly written regarding the development of human rights, is keeping in mind “the restrictions placed on rights” while addressing the question “How did these men, living in societies built on slavery, subordination, and seemingly natural subservience, ever come to imagine men not at all like them and, in some cases, women too, as equals?” Hunt, Inventing Human Rights, 19. See also Siep Stuurman, François Poulain de la Barre and the Invention of Modern Equality (Cambridge, Mass., 2004).

117 See the discussion of the “mixing of races” in a passage that Diderot contributed to Guillaume-Thomas Raynal, Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes; see Diderot, Politique, 705–709. This passage is cited and discussed in Agnani, “‘Doux Commerce, Douce Colonisation.’” See also Diderot’s discussions of cross-breeding in Le rêve de d’Alembert, in Diderot, Œuvres philosophiques, ed. Paul Vernière (Paris, 1998), 372–385; and the voluntary proto-eugenic experiment explained by the Tahitian character Orou in Diderot’s Supplément au voyage de Bougainville, or dialogue entre A. et B., ibid., 500. Diderot knew of, and drew on, the work of Buffon; on the relationship between Buffon and Diderot’s natural historical ideas, see Roger, Buffon,
to have an understanding of its ideas that is nuanced and robust enough to inform
our contemporary debates about the role of equality and inequality, inclusion and
exclusion, rights and race. Thus we must continue to research the emergence of ideas
and practices of inclusion and exclusion within the broader framework of the Atlantic
world, since these ideas have profoundly Atlantic histories. Studying them further
from an Atlantic perspective not only will allow us to gain a better understanding
of their development, it may also transform our understanding of the Enlightenment
and the central paradox that the same movement that produced such new and pow-
erful ideas of political and social inclusion and equality also transformed ideas and
practices of exclusion and inequality.

Vartanian, “Buffon et Diderot,” in Delsol, Buffon 88, 119–133; and Kurt Ballstadt, Diderot: Natural
Philosopher (Oxford, 2008), 129–173. For the identification of Diderot—along with Spinoza and
Bayle—as one of the principal architects of the Radical Enlightenment, see Israel, Enlightenment Con-
tested, 42, 560.

118 For example, see Chaplin, “Race”; Hunt, Inventing Human Rights; Dubois, A Colony of Citizens;
Laurent Dubois, Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution (Cambridge, Mass.,
2004); and Dubois, “An Enslaved Enlightenment: Rethinking the Intellectual History of the French

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