

The Anatomy of Blackness

*Science & Slavery in
an Age of Enlightenment*



ANDREW S. CURRAN



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The Johns Hopkins University Press
Baltimore

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Printed in the United States of America

Johns Hopkins Paperback edition, 2013
2 4 6 8 9 7 5 3 1

The Johns Hopkins University Press
2715 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21218-4363
www.press.jhu.edu

The Library of Congress has cataloged the hardcover edition of this book as follows:
Curran, Andrew S.

The anatomy of blackness : science and slavery in an age of Enlightenment /
Andrew S. Curran.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-1-4214-0150-8 (hardcover : acid-free paper)

ISBN-10: 1-4214-0150-9 (hardcover : acid-free paper)

1. French literature—18th century—History. 2. French literature—19th century—
History. 3. Blacks—Race identity. 4. Travel writing—History and criticism.
5. Blacks in literature. 6. Africa—In literature. I. Title.

PQ265.C87 2011

840.9'352996—dc22 2010050254

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN-13: 978-4214-0965-8

ISBN-10: 1-4214-0965-8

*Special discounts are available for bulk purchases of this book. For more information,
please contact Special Sales at 410-516-6936 or specialsales@press.jhu.edu.*

*To the memory of my father,
Thomas C. Curran*



Contents

<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xiii

Introduction: <i>Tissue Samples in the Land of Conjecture</i>	I
---	---

Defining *le Nègre* 6 / The New Africanist Discourse after 1740 11 /
 The Contexts of Representation 15 / Representing Africanist Discourse 18 /
 Anatomizing the History of Blackness 26

I Paper Trails: <i>Writing the African, 1450–1750</i>	29
---	----

The Early Africanists: The Episodic and the Epic 32 / Rationalizing Africa 38 /
 The Birth of the Caribbean African 48 / Jean-Baptiste Labat 58 / Labat on
 Africa 62 / Processing the African Travelogue: Prévost's *Histoire générale des*
voyages 67 / Rousseau's *Afrique* 70

2 Sameness and Science, 1730–1750	74
-----------------------------------	----

The Origin of Shared Origins 76 / Toward a "Scientific" Monogenesis 79 /
 Historicizing the Human in an Era of Empiricism: The Role of the Albino 87 /
 Creating the *Blafard* 95 / Buffonian Monogenesis: The *Nègre* as Same 105 /
 Blackness Qualified: Breaking down the *Nègre* 107 / The Colonial African and
 the Rare Buffonian *Je* 113

3 The Problem of Difference: <i>Philosophes and the Processing of</i> <i>African "Ethnography," 1750–1775</i>	117
--	-----

The "Symptoms" of Blackness: Africanist "Facts," 1750–1770 118 / Montesquieu
 and the "Refutation" of Difference 130 / The Nagging Context of Montesquieu's Anti-
 slavery Diatribe 133 / Voltaire: The Philosophe as Essentialist 137 / Voltaire and the

Albino of 1744 142 / Voltaire, the *Nègre*, and Human Merchandise 145 / Processing Africa and Africans in the *Encyclopédie* 149 / The Preternatural History of Black African Difference 157 / Teaching Degeneration: Valmont de Bomare's *Dictionnaire d'histoire naturelle* 162

4	The Natural History of Slavery, 1770–1802	167
	The Hardening of Climate Theory and the Birth of New Racial Categories circa 1770–1785 169 / Toward a Human Biopolitics circa 1750–1770 176 / The Politics of Slavery in the <i>Encyclopédie</i> 181 / Mercier and Saint-Lambert and the New Natural History 186 / The Syncretism of the 1770s: Grappling with “Nature’s Mistreatment” of the <i>Nègre</i> 190 / Anti-slavery Rhetoric in Raynal’s <i>Histoire des deux Indes</i> 194 / The Era of Negrophilia 199 / Epilogue: The Natural History of the <i>Noir</i> in an Age of Revolution 204	
	Coda: <i>Black Africans and the Enlightenment Legacy</i>	216
	Notes	225
	Works Cited	275
	Index	295

Preface

From its inception, I was convinced that this book would require an explanatory preface. After all, it confronts the reader with the same set of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century beliefs about black Africans that the Academy has been deconstructing for the past forty years. The people who ultimately read this book will often find the unpleasantness of the past in these pages, and without the same mediation that university professors generally provide their students as a matter of course.

The Anatomy of Blackness has three overlapping narratives. The first relates how eighteenth-century naturalists and philosophes drew from travel literature to discuss the perceived problem of human blackness within the nascent human sciences. The second describes how a number of now-forgotten anatomists revolutionized the era’s understanding of the black African by emphasizing both the supposed liabilities of this group and the corresponding “advantages” of whiteness. The third charts the shift of the slavery debate itself, from the moral, mercantile, and theological realms toward that of the black body itself.

Not unexpectedly, such an approach reveals more about Europeans (and their secondary construction of themselves) than it does about real Africans. Readers should bear in mind that this is not a book about black African agency, or about how Africans grappled with the realities of European aggression and mercantile exploitation in Africa. Nor is it a book about how men and women of African descent undertook their own revolution at the end of the eighteenth century, appropriating and deploying a series of republican ideals that certainly had not been imagined with them in mind. In a word, this study focuses on the *textualization* of the black African.

During the course of this project, several people asked me if I thought my method might inadvertently “ventriloquize or replicate” some of the era’s structures of oppression; one person suggested that I should use more sensitive racial or ethnic categories when writing about black Africans. Such “en-

lightened" terminology, of course, serves a number of worthwhile functions in contemporary society. Not only do these expressions explicitly acknowledge the right of ethnic or racial groups to choose their own names; they also allow these same constituencies to construct their identities as they see fit. But progressive terminology is, alas, poorly suited to a study that seeks to recover the full texture of what French eighteenth-century thinkers referred to as the *nègre*. And this brings me to the wounding one-syllable word that I have just typed: *nègre*. In his now well known book *Nigger: The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word*, Randall Kennedy explains that his primary intention in examining this derogatory term was to put "a tracer on [it]" in order to "report on its use, and assess the controversies to which it gives rise."¹ While Kennedy's combination of history and individual testimony differs from my own approach, his desire to force his reader to think through the content and contexts of racialized terms certainly echoes my intent as well.

Like Kennedy, I have avoided both euphemism and paraphrasing when citing eighteenth-century writers. I have, for example, specifically steered clear of translating *nègre* into "Negro," because to do so would be to inflect what was a French and therefore Catholic-inspired construct with its British-Protestant equivalent. Likewise, in keeping with eighteenth-century typography and practice, I generally do not capitalize *nègre*, which would confer a false and misleading dignity on a concept that often had very little at the time.² In fact, I capitalize *nègre* only when this is unequivocally done in the text being discussed. This is the case, for example, in Abbé Henri Grégoire's *De la littérature des Nègres* (1808), where capitalization presumably serves the author's larger politics of humanization. This also seems to obtain when the word *nègre* was cited alongside other, more often capitalized, human categories, such as *Chinois*.

Similarly, in discussing eighteenth-century thinkers, I have also employed the specific language that they themselves used to refer to the so-called *nègre*. When I cite the monogenist Pierre-Louis de Maupertuis's discussion of the black African, for example, I use the term "variety." When I quote from Voltaire, I cite the more trenchant markers that he used, "race" or "species." Although perhaps initially a little confusing, this ultimately allows the reader to absorb the meanings of these troublesome categories (variety, race, species) within the specific eighteenth-century contexts in which they appeared. I would hope that this approach is much more effective than simply stating that some (but not all) biblically minded thinkers initially referred to the *nègre* as

a "people"; that many Buffon-influenced naturalists tended to use the botanical term "variety"; that a number of thinkers employed the zoological term "race" in order to emphasize the anatomical or conceptual separation of human categories; and that the most extreme polygenists often claimed that the African was *a different species*.

This clinical treatment of the European representation of black Africans may raise objections among certain scholars. Some may argue that what I have dubbed the *anatomizing* of Africanist discourse emphasizes and explains European ideas at the expense of the damage done to Africans themselves. Others might add that this method tends to exculpate the Enlightenment era from the legacy of slavery and racism, from what Emmanuel Eze rightly identifies as the "highly ambiguous relationship of Enlightenment philosophic and scientific reason to racial diversity in the eighteenth century."³

My intention in writing this book actually has nothing to do with either of these objectives. Indeed, by freeing Enlightenment-era thinkers from what is often portrayed as a monolithic thought system, I hope to recover the eighteenth-century individual's ability not only to be a passive participant in Africanist discourse, but to absorb, react, and contribute to the overall representation of the African. In my opinion, this method has several advantages over more rigid genealogies or single-legacy histories. By examining the representation of Africans on the level of individual thinkers or groups of thinkers, one can more effectively chart the ambiguous relationships among Enlightenment universalism, the equally strong constraints of the era's proto-ethnography, and the economic imperatives of slavery. In contrast, by envisioning the writings of the philosophes—not to mention the most offensive pro-slavery thinkers—as nothing more than a linear and overdetermined set of ideas, we not only underestimate the intellectual autonomy of these writers or philosophers but mitigate the responsibility of the so-called Enlightenment-era mind. While it may seem paradoxical, moving away from full-scale indictments of the era and focusing on the "exquisite sophistication of eighteenth-century writing" may actually be the best way of illuminating the obscure aspects of an era whose primary metaphor was one of light.⁴

Acknowledgments

During the past four years, I have been lucky enough to discuss this book with a wide range of superb scholars, among them Charlemagne Amegan, Wilda Anderson, Stephen Angle, Srinivas Aravamudan, Sophie Audidière, Robert Bernasconi, Dan Brewer, Michel Delon, David Diop, Madeleine Dobie, Dr. Alan Douglass, M.D., Julia Douthwaite, James Delbourgo, Alex Dupuy, Rick Elphick, Demetrius Eudell, Brian Fay, Lynn Festa, Alden Gordon, Ruth Hill, Marianne Hobson, Jean-Marc Kehrès, Joan B. Landes, Natasha Lee, Christopher L. Miller, Jill Morawski, Ourida Moustefai, Dr. James Norris, M.D., John C. O'Neal, Julie Perkins, Michael Roth, Elena Russo, Pierre Saint-Amand, Joanna Stalnaker, Jim Steintrager, Tony Strugnell, Mary Terrall, Ann Thomson, Kate Tunstall, Flore Villemin, Roxann Wheeler, Jim Windolf, and Kari Weil. Conversing about this project with such irreplaceable friends and talented colleagues has been immensely useful and pleasurable.

Among those people who helped me during the final stages of this project, I must single out Josiah Blackmore, Catherine Gallouët, Paul Halliday, Jason Harris, Thierry Hoquet, Peter Mark, and Pernille Røge, for reading significant portions of the typescript. Each of these careful readers (a specialist of early-modern Portugal, a French eighteenth-century specialist, a legal historian, a scholar of Christian thought, a philosopher, an Africanist, and a historian of colonial trade practices) pushed me in new directions. Special thanks also go to Peter Dreyer, whose exemplary copyediting extended well beyond the norm. I also want to recognize Patrick Graille who, as was the case for my first book, engaged deeply with the whole project by phone, e-mail, and in person over the past four years. This manuscript also benefitted from the tenacious and intelligent readership of Gedney Barclay, Delia Casa, Emma Drew, Katie Horowitz, Julia-Jonas-Day, and Nathan Marvin. Among those close friends and family who played an important role in this process, I would like to recognize Carolyn Curran, Jennifer Curran, Anne and Walter Mayo, Tom Cushing, and Zhaoxun and Yulan Zhang.

Much of what is found in this book would not have been possible without generous support from various foundations. Initial research was made possible by a National Endowment for the Humanities grant. Later stages of the book, undertaken both in France and in the United States, were facilitated by fellowships and travel money from the Mellon Foundation, the Thomas and Catherine McMahon fund, the Société Valmont-Bomare, and the New York Academy of Medicine. My home institution, Wesleyan University, also provided substantial institutional support for this project.

I have also received precious help from numerous librarians at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the New York Public Library, and the respective libraries at Brown, Cornell, Yale, Dartmouth, and New York Universities during the past four years. In addition to recognizing these institutions and their generous staff members, I would also like to single out Suzy Taraba and Valerie Gillispie at Wesleyan University's Special Collections and Archives for helping me out on numerous occasions. I also want to thank Arlene Shaner at the New York Academy of Medicine's rare book room for her attentive and knowledgeable help.

My colleagues in Wesleyan University's Department of Romance Languages have also been terrific interlocutors during the past four years. In particular, I would like to thank Michael Armstrong-Roche, Robert Conn, Fernando Degiovanni, Antonio Gonzalez, Christine Lalande, Typhaine Leservot, Ellen Nerenberg, Julie Solomon, and Daniela Viale, for taking an active interest in my project.

I shall always be indebted to Trevor C. Lipscombe and Matt McAdam at the Johns Hopkins University Press for supporting this book so strongly. Along the same lines, I would also like to express my gratitude to the Voltaire Foundation at the University of Oxford for permission to reprint portions of two articles that appeared in *SVEC*. I am equally indebted to the editors of *History and Theory* for the same courtesy.

The Anatomy of Blackness

Introduction

Tissue Samples in the Land of Conjecture

Those who have wanted to disinherit *les Nègres* have used anatomy to their advantage, and the difference of color gave rise to their first observations.

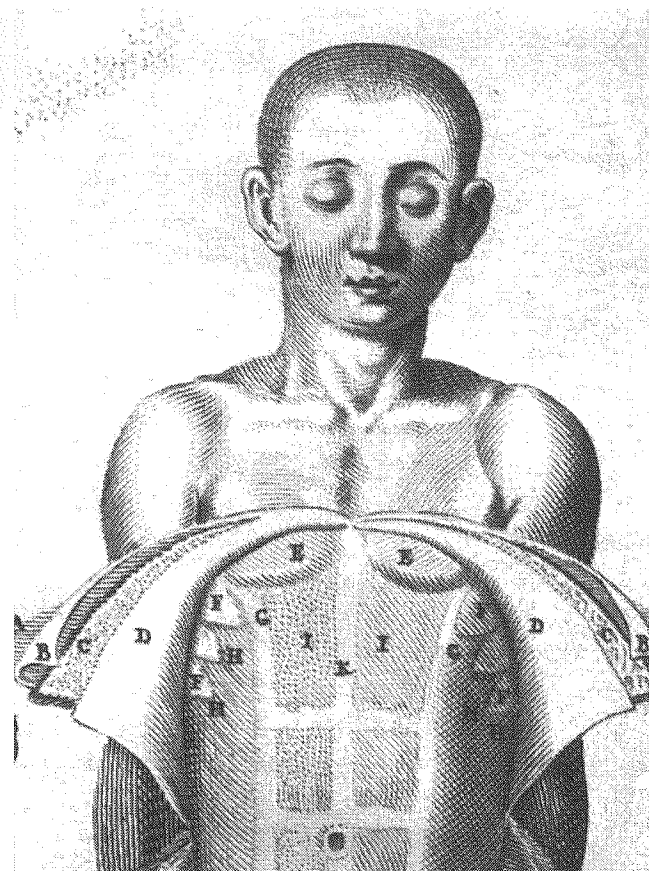
ABBÉ HENRI GRÉGOIRE, *DE LA LITTÉRATURE DES NÈGRES* (1808)

In 1618, the influential Parisian anatomist Jean Riolan the Younger became the first person to seek out the precise source of the blackness within African skin. Borrowing his general method from Vesalius himself, Riolan blistered the skin of a black African man with a chemical agent. He then removed the seared specimen and painstakingly examined its various strata.¹ Some sixty years after Riolan conducted his experiment, Marcello Malpighi used a similar method to identify the actual layer of skin where dark pigmentation is found: the *rete mucosum*, or Malpighian layer. During the same decade, the famous Dutch anatomist Antoni van Leeuwenhoek also examined a sample of black skin under a microscope, asserting that blackness came from what he identified as dark scales.² And, as the eighteenth century began, the French anatomist Alexis Littre added his own contribution to this series of experiment-based speculations regarding African physiology. Recounting his dissection of the sexual organ of a black African male in the 1702 *Histoire de l'Académie royale des sciences*, Littre asserted a causal relationship between air and the appearance of blackness.³

While climate theory and scripture had long provided the overarching

frameworks for the explanation of blackness, pointed enquiry into the specific nature of African pigmentation began with early-modern anatomy. During the Enlightenment era, much of this investigation into the supposed structures of blackness increasingly took place alongside more sweeping conjecture regarding the precise nature and significance of the African variety. Although there had been earlier and isolated speculation regarding the origin of the *nègre*, by the 1730s an increasing number of naturalists, anatomists, and religious writers began debating this question much more intensely and from a variety of perspectives. In 1733, in the *Journal de Trévoux*, or *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire des sciences et des beaux-arts*, the Jesuit priest Auguste Malfert advanced a potentially heretical theory of blackness that seemingly asserted that humans with different morphologies and pigmentations had different origins.⁴ Three years later, a certain Monsieur de J*** also published a widely read theory in the same religious journal positing the deleterious effects of climate on the African (and the African's color).⁵ Interest in this subject reached a high point in 1739 when the Académie royale des sciences de Bordeaux focused Europe's attention on human blackness by offering a prize for the best essay addressing the following question: "What is the physical cause of *nègres'* color, of the quality of their hair, and of the degeneration of the one and of the other?"⁶

The Bordeaux prize inspired a wide range of European thinkers to speculate on the anatomical and conceptual status of blackness. Among the many biblical, anatomical, and environmentalist explanations for this phenomenon that were submitted to the Académie royale (I shall return to these essays in chapter 2), the most influential was provided by Pierre Barrère, a Perpignan physician. In contrast to many of the other essayists, Barrère eschewed biblical exegesis and vague environmental generalizations in lieu of a pointed analysis of the African body based on dissection studies that he had conducted on slaves while in Cayenne; this authoritative approach allowed Barrère to transcend the limitations of skin analysis and write about blackness as an overall physiological phenomenon. Rejecting earlier static theories of pigmentation that limited themselves to the existence of particular cutaneous structures (e.g., Malpighi's *rete mucosum*), Barrère theorized that the *nègre* had an "abundant" darkened bile, which coursed through his body, staining the blood and the epidermis. His essay, entitled the *Dissertation sur la cause physique de la couleur des nègres*, ultimately appeared in print in 1741; a number of naturalists, most



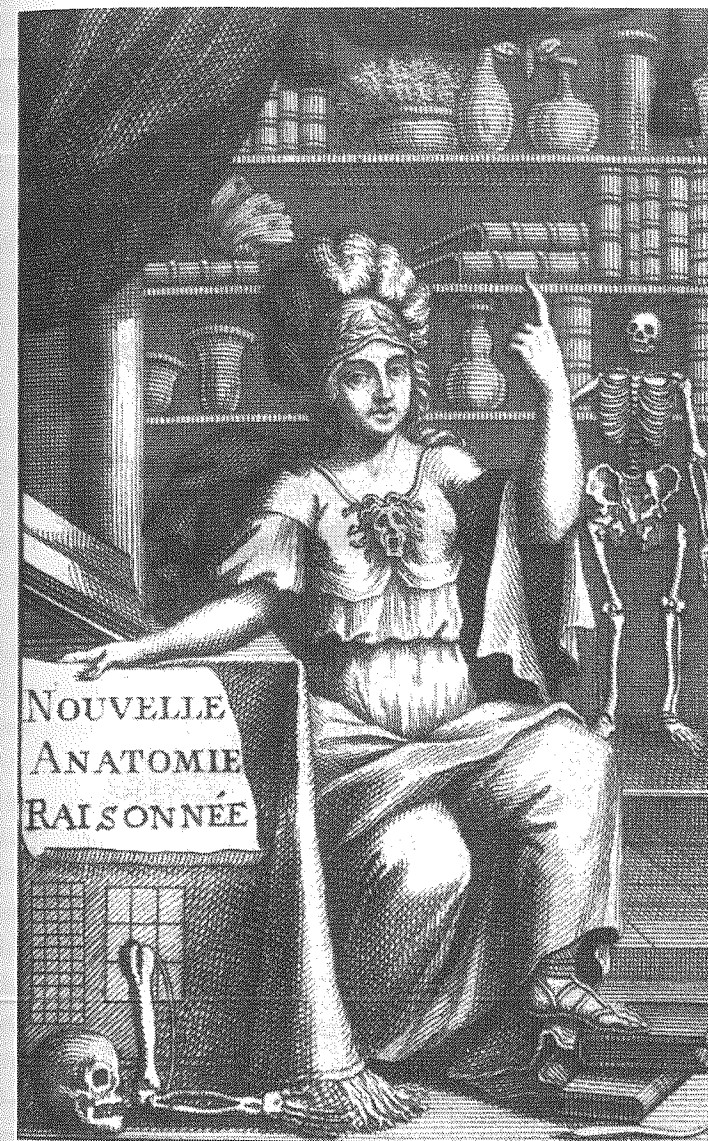
Human skin layers according to the Paris anatomist Jean Riolan the Younger. Riolan affirmed that black pigmentation was found in the *cuticula*, or thin outer layer of skin, marked A. Closely adhering to this is the *cutis*, or "real skin" (B), which contains the pores, through which disease supposedly entered. C is the *pinguedo*, or fat layer. Finally, D is the *panniculus carnosus*, or fleshy subcutaneous tissue. Riolan believed that the inner "whiteness" of black Africans, which was exactly like that of whites, pointed to an environmental explanation for the different human varieties. From Jean Riolan the Younger, *Encheiridium anatomicum et pathologicum* (1649). Courtesy New York Academy of Medicine.

notably Georges-Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon, readily acknowledged this fascinating discovery of dark bile and blood.

In addition to propagating spurious conceptions regarding the specificity of African bodies, Barrère's monograph also prompted a new generation of European anatomists to seek out, measure, and track human blackness. Much of this research turned to the brain after the 1750s. At the Berlin Royal Academy of Sciences, the hugely influential (but now forgotten) Johann Friedrich Meckel asserted that African brains had a comparatively darker or bluish hue. Meckel's findings were quickly accepted in both France and Germany, and in 1765, his work was further advanced by Claude-Nicolas Le Cat, a Rouen surgeon. In addition to confirming Meckel's "discovery" of dark brain tissues, Le Cat also posited the existence of an elemental fluid that he dubbed *oethiops* (ethiops), which supposedly originated in the African's darkened brain and flowed through the nerves and into the skin.⁷ Not unexpectedly, the implications of "black brains" and the *circulation* of a "brain-generated blackness" extended well beyond the realm of color. Many anatomists and naturalists simply assumed that these new anatomical discoveries justified the long-standing prejudice that the *nègre* had a comparatively limited cognitive potential. Most notoriously, the Göttingen savant Samuel Thomas Soemmering proclaimed triumphantly in 1784 that science had found a demonstrable link between the African's brutal stupidity and the supposedly coarse "strings" linking his brain to the rest of his body.⁸

Anatomy, especially as it was practiced by influential thinkers like Soemmering, produced the most authoritative statements regarding the particularities of the black African body during the eighteenth century. Although the discipline had previously been considered inferior to the core medical subjects of physiology, pathology, and therapeutics, by the mid-eighteenth century, anatomists could claim to have explained some of the most important corporeal structures of the human body, be it white or black.⁹ Looking back in 1795 on what the field's practitioners had accomplished, the anatomist Aubin-Louis Millin asserted proudly that anatomy had "advanced almost to the highest degree of perfection [in this century, because] the most renowned anatomists and physiologists felt that it was time to direct their research toward explaining the movements of animals and the hidden mechanisms behind their sensations."¹⁰

Rife with mechanistic metaphors and persuasive rhetorical arguments that claimed to explain the placement and form of and relationship among hu-



Frontispiece to Daniel Tavvry's *Nouvelle anatomie raisonnée* (New reasoned anatomy) (1690, 1720). The goddess of wisdom, perhaps Minerva Medica, presides over the rise of the new anatomy, pointing skyward to progress and new knowledge, while trampling underfoot old works of anatomy, perhaps Galen. Courtesy New York Academy of Medicine.

man body parts, eighteenth-century anatomy was indeed compelling, and not only for scientific readers. Anatomists were seen as able to pronounce on what was most appropriate to humankind's "way of life" and the fulfillment of its needs.¹¹ To paraphrase Thomas Laqueur, the springs and pulleys of anatomy were increasingly understood to reflect human destiny.¹² This development was unfortunate for the so-called *nègre*; anatomists had arrogated to themselves the right, not only to identify the black African's corporeal "liabilities," but to explain why this particular category of human was fundamentally inferior to the highest expression of humankind, the European.¹³

Defining le Nègre

As its title suggests, much of this book focuses on the anatomical concepts that played a key role in the categorization of black humans during the early-modern era. In addition to recovering a sphere of science within which the notion of a black human "variety" slowly crystallized into that of the black *race*, this approach also examines the way in which the anatomy of the black body became a site of heated debate in the era's thought; what is more, it also highlights the definition of human whiteness that emerged concurrently.

While the history of French and European anatomy underpins much of this study, its scope extends well past the era's life sciences. Indeed, one of the primary intentions of my work is to recapture the wider (and forgotten) interplay between the era's anatomy and the more theoretical conceptualizations of black Africans taking place in fields that we would now label sociology, ethnography, anthropology, psychology, and political science. This disciplinary intersection—between anatomical "discoveries" and the budding human sciences—contributed significantly to the era's discussion of the black African; in addition to intriguing naturalists and proto-anthropologists, the science of the black African was the catalyst for debates among slavers, missionaries, and colonists, as well as pro- and anti-slavery writers, philosophes, religious thinkers, and, ultimately, Africans themselves.

Not unexpectedly, the overall image of the black African during the Enlightenment era is more a shifting mosaic than a fixed portrait. Besides the fact that there were numerous inconsistencies and divergences within Africanist discourse, many of the era's foundational assumptions regarding the black African shifted from decade to decade. Even more vexing, many ideas associated

with the *nègre* during the eighteenth century had already moved across eras and, sometimes, genres.

Whether in the field of anatomy, natural history, or theology, tracking a specific genealogy within Africanist thought is a daunting task. Consider how African "ethnography" often morphed after its initial appearance. In Duarte Lopes's 1591 *Relação do reino do Congo e das terras circunvizinhas* (*A Report of the Kingdom of Congo and the Surrounding Countries*), for example, the overall image of the black African is relatively positive, and even quite laudatory at times. This "ethnography" took on a much more deterministic flavor 150 years later, however, in Abbé Prévost's *Histoire générale des voyages* (1746–70), when it was bundled with writings from other eras that described the same African peoples. Along similar lines, when the Dutch compiler Olfert Dapper adapted first-person travelogues by other writers for his *Naukeurige Beschrijvingen der Afrikaensche gewesten* (*Exact descriptions of the African lands*) (1668), he aimed at an open-minded breakdown of black African ethnicities that avoided sensationalism. Several decades later, his unattributed writings were often taken out of context and completely revised into prejudicial truisms for both pocket-sized "geographies" and giant compendiums such as Diderot's and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*.

There are even more curious instances of how "facts" regarding black Africans changed over time. Here again, Abbé Prévost provides a telling example. In 1744, this avid reader of African travelogues and future translator of John Green's *A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels* (1745–47), published a fictional account of the adventures of an English ship captain, Robert Lade, in which he not only recounted African anecdotes evoking the pleasures and pitfalls of cross-racial romance, but sketched ethnographic portraits of the inhabitants of West and South Africa. Several years later, while writing his *Histoire naturelle*, Buffon mistook Prévost's novel *Voyages du capitaine Robert Lade* for a "travelogue" and repeatedly cited it in his assessment of African mores. While perhaps a unique case, this transmission of knowledge from Prévost to Buffon (and from novel to natural history) demonstrates the ability of African proto-ethnography to move across permeable borders.¹⁴

Although modern scholars who discover such revealing examples of the *imagining* of black Africa and Africans tend to believe that they are the first to have done so, a significant number of Enlightenment-era skeptics also acknowledged the shortcomings of the representation of black Africa. In one of

the best-known examples, Jonathan Swift mocked cartographers who drew on their imaginations to fill in unexplored lands on their maps:

Geographers, in *Afric* maps,
With savage pictures fill their gaps,
And o'er unhabitable downs
Place elephants, for want of towns.¹⁵

In the introduction to his 1735 translation of Jerónimo Lobo's *Itinerário*, under the title *A Voyage to Abyssinia*, the young Samuel Johnson also scoffed at his era's exaggerated evocations of Africa's geography and peoples.¹⁶ Among eighteenth-century writers, however, the most vociferous condemnation of the reliability of African travelogues came from Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755). From the philosophe's perspective, the Africa described by travel writers—and popularizers who quoted them—was a hodgepodge of contradictions and half-truths produced by inferior minds.

Throughout the eighteenth century, the problem of veracity loomed large over the question of black Africa and Africans. And yet, it is imperative to recall that even the most skeptical eighteenth-century thinkers believed that there was a great deal of truth in the prevailing set of negative ideas about the *nègre*. This is quite understandable when one considers the extent to which withering views of Africans were diffused on all levels of society. Nicolas Lenglet du Fresnoy's popular *Géographie des enfans* (first ed., 1736) provides an unsettling example of how a censorious image of Africa and Africans was inculcated among the youngest members of (literate) French society. In this book of teacher-student dialogues, which were designed to be role-played, children were supposed to repeat the salient details about far-off lands, among them southern Africa:

[Child's Question]: What do you mean by *la Caferie*?

[Adult's Answer]: *La Caferie* or the country of the *Caffres* is a place on the sea, inhabited by the most barbarous and stupid people of Africa. The most significant places are the Dutch Cape of Good Hope and Sofala, [the latter of] which belongs to the Portuguese.¹⁷

One finds a similar, dogmatic tone in a 1787 issue of the *Bibliothèque universelle des dames*. Designed for the era's budding female readership, this par-

ticular volume of the *Bibliothèque* described significant advances in the era's anatomy and natural history, among them a new and astonishingly race-based definition of the *nègre* and what might be called body-based *négritude*:

One could say that a *nègre* is [a *nègre*] in all the parts of his body, except for the teeth. All the organs carry the mark of this color to a lesser or greater degree; the medullary substance of the brain is blackish and this color dominates more or less in diverse parts of this organ, the semen, the blood, etc.¹⁸

Other well-worn, well-diffused, and generally accepted notions about black Africans can be found in the era's recycled dictionary definitions, whether in Louis Moréri's *Grand dictionnaire historique* (1759), Diderot's and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*, or the successor to the latter, Charles-Joseph Panckoucke's *Encyclopédie méthodique*.¹⁹

This is also the case for the often-consulted Jesuit *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*. Initially published in 1704 and reedited and updated on numerous occasions throughout the eighteenth century, this dictionary made several predictable and recurring points regarding the *nègre*. In the first section found under this headword, this particular group of black humans is associated with "La Nigritie" or the *Pays des nègres*.²⁰ Suggesting that this *peuple d'Afrique* must have spread across the continent, the *Dictionnaire* then asserts, without transition or proof, that Africans are effectively responsible for their own enslaved condition and subsequent misery by recounting the "fact" that black men readily sell their own wives and children to European traders.²¹ Having reduced all *nègres* to these general truths, the author of this article then qualifies the notion of the *nègre*, at first enumerating the different ethnicities and colors found among the *nègres*, as well as specifying that different subgroups are either Muslim, pagan, or supposedly without any religion.²² The next entry (added in 1732) underscores the foundational tautology of the term *nègre*: it was understood as perfectly synonymous with *esclave*. A version of this concordance between "black African" and "slave" also shows up in Pierre-Charles Berthelin's 1762 abridged version of the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* as well, which notes that the word *nègre* is commonly used in a simile-based phrase to designate someone ill-treated or overworked, as in "on l'a traité comme un *nègre*" (he was treated like a *nègre*).²³ While this dictionary definition of *nègre* might seem to suggest that compassion should be extended to the suffering and subjugated black African slave, it should be emphasized that the person who

elicits sympathy in this particular locution is not the *nègre* himself, but the unfortunate non-black being treated *like a nègre*.

At first glance, the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux's* treatment of the term *nègre* is seemingly quite straightforward, but much is obscured in such dictionary definitions. Take, for example, the curious gendering of what was ostensibly a gender-neutral category. While the concept being defined in this dictionary—*le nègre*—theoretically conjured up all African men, women (*les négresses*), and children, Trévoux's definition also reflects an overdetermined gendering that deemphasizes both African women and children and prioritizes the *black male slave*.²⁴ The *nègre*, in short, was primarily imagined as a man. While it is certainly true that the era's West and Central African travelogues provided detailed portraits of West African women—indeed, they gave to understand that the *négresse's* indefatigable toil in the fields encouraged the *nègre's* sloth while her hypersexuality encouraged his lasciviousness—outside of the African context, the term *nègre* generally evoked a subjected male human whose very essence was associated with slavery and the mechanical functioning of the colonial enterprise.²⁵ This was, after all, the most fundamental (if unrecognized) ethnographic trait of the black African: enslavement.

If eighteenth-century dictionary definitions tended to reduce black Africans to an enslaved male, they also glossed over another important fact: the word *nègre* generally functioned both as a general and singular concept in the era's thought. When the term was accompanied by a definite article—as in "*le nègre* is a vicious species of man"—the word was used to conjure up all members of this group. This is *le nègre* that is generally discussed in natural history treatises, geographies, and books on anatomy. In contrast to this all-encompassing and necessarily reductive view, many writers of travel literature, novels, and even slavers produced portraits of individual black Africans that call into question the depictions of a "universal" black African. These images of intelligent, staid, or clever *négres* function in two ways. For abolitionists such as the American Quaker Anthony Benezet, this ethnography raised the possibility that the overall image of the black African was not only reductive but erroneous. For the vast majority of readers, however, such images were simply exceptions that proved the rule.

The New Africanist Discourse after 1740

As a topic of conversation, the *nègre* would ultimately fascinate a significant number of eighteenth-century writers, philosophes, and naturalists. Few issues generated as many curious anecdotes, proto-ethnographical assertions, and, at times, heated discussions regarding the undeniable horror of slavery. And yet, it would be misleading to begin a discussion of the overall discourse on the black African without first acknowledging that the subject of the *nègre* initially remained irrelevant to most people in France and Europe—including the figureheads of the so-called High Enlightenment—until the 1750s. Denis Diderot illustrates this development. To come up with material for the imposing headword "*Afrique*"—"one of the four principal parts of the Earth"—in the first volume of the *Encyclopédie* (1751), Diderot pilfered two hundred uninspired and unoriginal words from Jacques Savary des Brûlons's 1723 *Dictionnaire universel de commerce*. Although Diderot ultimately provided several intriguing articles on subjects including African cannibalism and religious practices in the early volumes of the *Encyclopédie*, he was unmistakably much more concerned with exploring theories of knowledge and refuting constructive metaphysics in 1750 than he was with engaging with issues such as Africanness or chattel slavery. Compared to his miniscule article "*Afrique*," for example, Diderot contributed three meticulously crafted folio-length pages to the *supplément* to the *Encyclopédie* article on the human soul ("*Ame*").

Diderot's treatment (or non-treatment) of black Africans in the article "*Afrique*" illustrates the dual position of the *nègre* around mid-century: simultaneously marginalized and yet critical to France's economic prosperity. This seeming lack of concern slowly gave way, however, as a series of new, more comprehensive or speculative assessments of blackness and black Africans began appearing, many of them in the years subsequent to the Académie royale des sciences de Bordeaux debate on blackness. In 1745, for example, Pierre-Louis de Maupertuis published his anonymous *Vénus physique*, in which he explained the black variety of man as something of a fluke of nature.²⁶ Two years later, in 1747, Abbé Prévost began publishing what would amount to four-and-a-half *in-quarto* volumes of annotated African travelogues organized by region, providing Enlightenment-era thinkers with a virtual encyclopedia of African ethnography. And, in 1749, volume 3 of Buffon's *Histoire naturelle*, containing his "*Variétés dans l'espèce humaine*," ushered in what would become a new era in the interpretation of the African.

Not only did Buffon's "Variétés" provide an authoritative explanation of the *nègre* that was totally free of metaphysics, it also supplied an influential natural history definition of the *nègre* that cleared up some of the ambiguity produced by the lexicographers and geographers who had been recycling definitions of the word for decades. Surveying the different types of dark-skinned peoples found on the African continent, Buffon affirmed that the blacker an African was, the more he corresponded to the category of the *nègre*: "true nègres" were "les plus noirs de tous les Noirs" (the blackest of all the Blacks).²⁷ This measurable blackness criterion—true *négritude*—functioned in multiple fashions in the *Histoire naturelle*. In addition to providing a counterpoint to new, latent definitions of whiteness, the amount of *blackness* became the decisive factor in the classification of humans living on the African continent. In fact, according to Buffon, the *nègre's* darkness was so distinct that he was to be distinguished conceptually from the other large group of black humans found in Africa, the Khoisan peoples. Explaining that these aboriginal hunters and pastoral peoples were lighter-skinned than the *nègre*, Buffon affirmed that these *Caffres* or *Hottentots* were another *variété* within the *race of blacks*.²⁸ They were not, as he put it, true *nègres*.²⁹

In a sense, Buffon's belief that there was a real and measurable *nègre* within the larger category of the "black race" simply confirmed more vague breakdowns that had existed in travel literature for centuries. And yet, in an increasingly anthropological era that was becoming less restricted by biblical accounts of humankind's disparate peoples, Buffon's authoritative "processing" of long-standing ethnographical beliefs into more concrete pigmentation-based categories invited further investigation into the essence and origins of blackness. Like other complex puzzles of the early-modern era, the pressing reality of this dark ethnicity had to be reconciled with the presumed regularities, not only of nature, but of whiteness. Whether armchair naturalist, Caribbean planter, or philosophe, those authors who took the time to write about black Africans in light of the *Histoire naturelle* implicitly or explicitly wondered to what extent the *nègre* represented a "limit case" within the overall understanding of humankind.³⁰ Contiguous to this natural history question was, of course, a related problem that would become increasingly important in subsequent decades: to what extent did the new material understanding of blackness overlap with the political construction of human bondage?

Diderot himself would come to ask many of these same questions. As the scope of his interests increased, he eventually had occasion to evoke the so-

called *nègre* in a number of works. In 1765, Diderot asserted in the *Encyclopédie* article "Humaine espèce" that the *nègre* was a sensitive yet not terribly intelligent "type" of man who suffered under slavery.³¹ Two years later, in the *Salon de 1767*, he brought up the African in a discussion regarding the relativity of taste, asserting: "I think that *les nègres* are less attractive to themselves, than whites are to *les nègres*, or *nègres* are to whites."³² In 1773, after meeting Petrus Camper in Holland, Diderot also let it be known that he was fascinated with the Dutchman's system of facial angles, which "demonstrated" an esthetic (but not biological) hierarchy that descended from the "visage of Gods" to any given national physiognomy, and finally to the "head of man, of the *nègre*, to that of the monkey."³³ Most famously, of course, Diderot provided a series of anti-colonial assessments of the African and African chattel slavery for the third edition of Abbé G.-T. Raynal's *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (1780). Some thirty years after penning the nondescript article "Afrique" for the *Encyclopédie*, the philosophe, who was now sixty-seven years of age, became not only one of the strongest anti-slavery voices of his generation but also an apologist for a group of people that many of his contemporaries asserted to be "born for abjection and dependence, for work and punishment."³⁴

Such a multiplicity of postures may lead us to wonder what the African represented for a thinker such as Diderot, or, more generally, what the African meant within Enlightenment thought itself. For the first scholars to think through this quandary during the 1960s, the answer was often assumed to be part of a larger chronology: to understand the conflicting images of Africa in the thought system of a philosophe like Diderot, one had only to situate his writings within a periodized historical trajectory, moving from an era of indifference regarding slavery (until around 1750) to an era of guilt (until about 1770), and, finally, to a time of activism.³⁵ In other words, Diderot's views of the African, whether degrading or positive, have often been seen as the product of larger shifts within a monolithic Enlightenment-era *mentalité*.

To a large degree, this misleading teleology is the extension of the classical narrative of "Enlightenment," a progress-driven narrative that follows the intellectual and political developments of the eighteenth century through to their seemingly inevitable conclusion: a time of revolution, republic, and, in the case of the African, the (temporary) emancipation of 1794. Diderot's interventions on the black African clearly belie this interpretative framework. Although his portrait of the *nègre* did evolve over time, his overall relationship

to the question of blackness remained more tied to context than to chronology. When Diderot treated the African from the point of view of natural history, he echoed the *diagnostic* understanding of blackness that was becoming increasingly rampant during his era. When constructing his defense of this oppressed people, he put forward his era's sentimentalized version of classical liberalism. In both of these cases, Diderot's so-called convictions regarding the black African were perhaps less real beliefs than they were the reflection of specific intent, conventions of genre, and competing Enlightenment-era epistemologies.

Diderot is far from the only Enlightenment-era thinker whose beliefs regarding the African can be characterized as syncretic. Voltaire's varied writings on the African are even more so. By far the most race-oriented thinker of his generation, Voltaire repeatedly asserted in his natural-history musings that Africans' morphology and supposedly limited powers of reason had conceptual significance. As he put it in the 1756 *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations*: "their round eyes, their flat noses, their invariably fat lips, the wool on their head, even the extent of their intelligence reflects prodigious divergences between them and other species of men."³⁶ Such a view seems at odds with Voltaire's much better known moral indictments of chattel slavery, the most prominent being that voiced by the *nègre de Surinam* in *Candide* (1759). Here, in contrast to the essentializing Voltaire, we find the more celebrated and universalist Voltaire: the voice of reason and critic of intolerance who ventriloquizes the suffering African slave: "When we work in the sugar refinery, and when the millstone catches our fingers, they cut off our hands; when we want to flee, they cut off our legs: I found myself in both situations. It is at this cost that you eat sugar in Europe."³⁷

This latter outburst, one of the most famous moments in *Candide*, functioned as a moral litmus test for Voltaire's era. To witness the pathetic scene that Voltaire conjures up was seemingly to be forced to choose between two sets of values: those of common sense, universalism, and empathy and those of the planter, namely, greed, cruelty, and a lack of feeling. And yet, this is perhaps a false binary. After all, this celebrated accusation of slavery camouflages the fact that, during his entire career, Voltaire never understood the link between his sneering representations of Africans and the justifications of human bondage espoused by pro-slavery thinkers. As Lynn Festa has perceptively written about the sentimentalized portraits of the African that appeared during the eighteenth century, be they in *Robinson Crusoe* or *Candide*, such

moments were often less about moral condemnation than they were about providing the era's readers with an opportunity to disengage themselves from the undeniable horrors of the colonial enterprise by sympathizing with the suffering *nègre*.³⁸

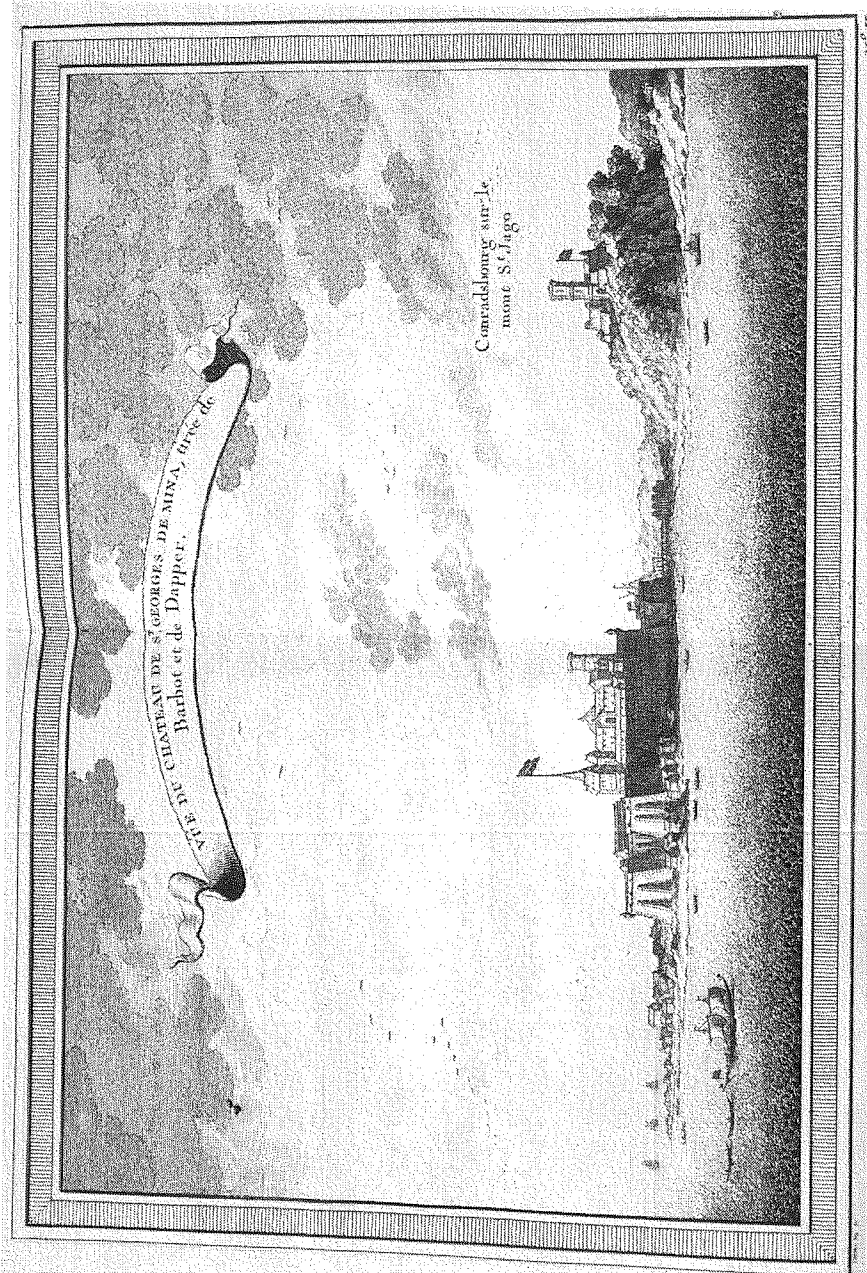
The Contexts of Representation

The textualized African produced by eighteenth-century writers is a protean construct engineered by both anonymous popularizers and intellectual Olympians like Buffon. While it cannot be emphasized enough that the brutal imperatives of slavery tended to homogenize any and all knowledge relative to the *nègre*, it should nonetheless be kept in mind that the overall representation of black Africans was the product of different contexts, psychologies, and geographies. The first two variables are dealt with in depth in the body of this book. As for the geographical context, it is perhaps useful to review (briefly) some of the spaces within which the African was evoked, as well as the telling white-black demographics that shaped how Europeans saw and described real Africans.

Actual contact between Europeans and Africans (and thus first-hand representation of the so-called *nègre*) took place in three major arenas: in Africa, in slave-based colonies, and in the homelands of colonizing powers such as France.³⁹ As I make clear in chapter 1, the vast majority of French-African interactions obviously took place in French colonies, particularly in the Caribbean.⁴⁰ While African slaves ultimately came to significantly outnumber whites on these islands, eventually by more than ten to one on Saint-Domingue (Haiti) by the late 1780s, the number of European colonists in the French Antilles was nonetheless quite substantial. By 1789, there were, by most estimates, more than 60,000 white colonists (and well over 600,000 slaves) living on the three major French islands, Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Saint-Domingue. Not unexpectedly, the portraits of the *nègre* coming from this context reflect, not only the constant fear of revolt, but also the highly regimented racial and behavioral codes that gave shape to plantation life.⁴¹

The French "encounter" with and representation of black Africans in West Africa also mirrored structural and demographic realities. While the numerous illustrations of European trading forts (*comptoirs*) found in works such as the mid-century *Histoire générale des voyages* may give the impression that tens of thousands of Europeans were making their lives in Africa by the first half

The castle of St. George de Mina (Elmina), founded by the Portuguese in the late fifteenth century on Africa's Gold Coast (now Ghana), taken from Barbot and Dapper, and nearby Fort Conradsbourg on Mont St. Jago, from which the Dutch captured Elmina in 1637, in Antoine François Prevost, *Histoire générale des voyages* (1746-70), vol. 3. Author's collection.



of the eighteenth century, the reality was actually markedly different. In general, the fortified trading structures where Africans and Europeans exchanged slaves, gum, sugar, liquor, ivory, wax, and sometimes gold had limited (white) populations, ranging from fifteen men in small outposts to perhaps two hundred in major forts.⁴² This was even true of French strongholds in Senegal. During his 1786 trip to Saint-Louis, Sylvain Meinrad Xavier de Golbéry reported 2,400 free blacks and people of mixed descent, 2,400 slaves, and 660 whites, only some 60 of whom were permanent residents.⁴³ Gorée's population distribution was similar, with 70 or 80 Europeans living among 600 free blacks and 1,000 slaves.⁴⁴ Not surprisingly, in both cases these white minorities mixed more freely with the local population than was the case in the Caribbean; they also had little interest in establishing segregated societies of the type often found in Caribbean colonies, and were even less able to do so than their counterparts in the latter. What these white populations did do, however, was participate in an ongoing market economy for slaves that fundamentally altered the internal politics of the lands in which they were living. This, too, as we shall see, was reflected in the characterizations of African life by slavers, traders, and missionaries.

As for French-African contact in France itself, estimates put the number of blacks residing in France in 1750 at approximately 4,000-5,000.⁴⁵ This was a varied population that included both servants and slaves who had returned (often temporarily) with their masters from the colonies, as well as the freed or abandoned Africans who lived permanently among the poor populations of cities like Nantes and Paris. While evidence of this population can perhaps be best seen in the era's painting—the mode of representing the *négrillon* servant comes to mind—this black population actually generated very little sustained interest among writers and philosophes. Where black Africans engendered more debate was among the colonists who had come back to France with their *nègres*. This particular constituency rightfully feared that the blacks that they were taking to France might be emancipated since, according to the *Code noir*, slaves were supposed to remain in the colonies and, more important, any enslaved African who set foot on French soil was supposed to benefit from the so-called Freedom principle.⁴⁶ As Sue Peabody's and Pierre Henri Boulle's important studies on this subject have demonstrated, planters and colonists worked hard to find a legal solution to this problem. In 1716, their lobbying led to an important edict that effectively legalized the presence of Africans on French territory. While this early *déclaration* established specific conditions for

importing black Africans into France (e.g., for religious or vocational training), later statutes regarding France's blacks were much more broad in scope. Responding to the notion that black Africans somehow constituted a threat to France, the 1738 *déclaration du roi* sought, for example, to encourage the departure of *nègres* through a series of controls including forbidding interracial marriage. The duc de Choiseul's directive of 1763 was even more forceful in this respect. Citing the possibility of miscegenation and an increasingly larger black population in France, Louis XV's minister of the marine sought to deport all black Africans to the colonies.⁴⁷ This fear of a "deluge" of blacks was, as Sue Peabody has demonstrated, more paranoia than anything else. Although there were far more blacks in France than there were Frenchmen living in West Africa during the same era, this imported population represented only a minuscule fraction (.0002) of the 25 million people living in France in 1750.⁴⁸

African-French demographics reflect one of the fundamental realities of the discourse on Africans during this era: excluding the geographically isolated white inhabitants of the Caribbean—who lived as a privileged minority within much larger black populations—the vast majority of the (primarily rural) French population probably never saw or met an African. Indeed, to the extent that people living in France were familiar with the so-called *nègre*, most inhabitants of the mother country surely derived their "information" from word of mouth and/or the era's written and visual representations of Africans. This group included many of the thinkers who would usher in a major transformation of the notion of the *nègre* at mid-century.

Representing Africanist Discourse

To help readers understand the textual representation of the *nègre* in eighteenth-century thought, this book replicates the reading practices of an imagined eighteenth-century reader. Thus, the first chapter of this study does not begin straightaway with a discussion of the era's debates on racial categories or slavery; rather, it starts where most Enlightenment-era people presumably did: with travelers' accounts and compilations.

The first real African travelogues to which eighteenth-century thinkers had general access date from the Renaissance, the era when Portuguese caravels first reported their spectacular *descobrimentos* along the Senegalese littoral.⁴⁹ As the Portuguese progressively explored the West and Central African coast in the fifteenth century, this small country undertook the first sustained Euro-

pean engagement with black African peoples.⁵⁰ The information derived from travels to this heretofore terra incognita changed Europeans' relationship to the rest of the world. In addition to disproving medieval ideas about the limits of the habitable Earth, the written and visual accounts of black Africans that were produced as a result of Portuguese exploration—particularly after the advent of the printing press—became epistemological and ethnographic benchmarks against which Europeans could increasingly measure their own identity.

Chapter 1, "Paper Trails: Writing the African, 1450–1750," chronicles the evolution of the textualized African that Europeans created in early-modern travel literature. In addition to familiarizing the reader with the wide range of authors (e.g., Leo Africanus, Lopes and Pigafetta, and Dapper) who were well known to Enlightenment-era naturalists and philosophers, chapter 1 explores the importance of generic and geographic conventions on the evolving pan-European construction of the black African. In many first-person accounts of Africans produced during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for example, authors provided episodic (and belittling) views of the continent's inhabitants. In contrast, by the early seventeenth century, a new group of European writers including the Englishman John Pory was able to synthesize a number of texts into compilations whose breadth allowed for more schematic ethnographic categorizations of African peoples. The inconsistent quality of this information notwithstanding, the publication of these more complete Africanist works allowed Europeans to rethink the continent in terms of an expansive and pessimistic human geography that stretched from Cape Bojador to Abyssinia.

The second half of chapter 1 examines the interplay between African travel writing and the increasingly authoritative Caribbean "ethnography" flowing back from the colonial world after the mid-seventeenth century. Through readings of authors including the Caribbeanist-turned-Africanist Jean-Baptiste Labat, chapter 1 demonstrates how the overall portrait of the African provided to Enlightenment-era readers was the product of differing contexts and evaluative criteria. If properly Africa-oriented texts dedicated most of their pages to African morphology, occupations, institutions, tools, pastimes, religions, sexual mores, and trading practices, Caribbean texts such as the Jesuit historian Pierre-François-Xavier de Charlevoix's 1730–31 *Histoire de l'isle Espagnole ou de Saint-Domingue* had their preoccupations as well, particularly the utility, ingenuity, docility, pliability, and brute strength of their African labor force.

To summarize, this first portion of the book demonstrates how seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writers repackaged elements from Africanist and Caribbeanist assessments of the African into a new view of the so-called *nègre*, one with a distinctly Atlantic orientation that combined information on African mores and culture with the suitability of different ethnicities to various tasks.

Chapters 2 and 3 engage in a more pointed examination of the progressively material and scientific view of the African. In particular, these two chapters explore the link between speculative micro-physiology and the era's more conceptual representations of the African. In a sense, these two chapters examine the way in which the era's naturalists and anatomists sought to reconcile blackness with existing paradigms; they also demonstrate how existing thought structures were adapted to reflect the perceived realities of blackness.

Not surprisingly, Buffon is a key figure in both of these chapters. As well-known Buffon scholars, including Thierry Hoquet, Claude Blanckaert, Robert Wokler, and Jacques Roger, have all asserted, Buffon's *Histoire naturelle* had a significant effect on the overall representation and understanding of the so-called *nègre*.⁵¹ Indeed, the naturalist reconciled what had seemingly been conflicting tendencies within the overall presentation of the African in 1749, namely: (1) a vague belief in the essential unity of the human species and (2) an increasingly long list of data regarding the specificity of the African variety. Buffon's major innovation, in short, was setting forth a theory of degeneration that posited a shared human lineage that readily acknowledged and explained the morphological and moral differences of the *nègre*.

Buffon's belief in degeneration—which posited an explicit *cousinage* between a prototype race of whites and the darker varieties of humans—contrasted with several other contemporary schools of thought, all of which tended to see human varieties as more fixed or separate entities. The first was the Scripture-based (polygenist) theory of separate human origins, which in France was initially articulated by the “pre-Adamist” Isaac de la Peyrère in 1655. The second was the more taxonomical breakdown of humankind into “races” or “species” by François Bernier in his 1684 “Nouvelle division de la terre.”⁵² Of these two seventeenth-century theories, it was the more trenchant classification of humankind put forward by Bernier that Buffon implicitly refuted. While Buffon did not mention Bernier by name when theorizing a human monogenesis, he was clearly contradicting the breakdown of the human species into “four or five” races, each of which supposedly had a biological integrity. Bernier's

categorization of humankind was only the first of Buffon's targets, however. In addition to refuting this schematic separation of the human race, Buffon (and his anti-essentialist and fluid portrait of humankind) implicitly countered a more recent development in the era's thought: Carl Linnaeus's division of the genus *Homo* into four distinct categories (including *Africanus niger*) in his 1735 *Systema naturae*.⁵³ While it should be noted that Linnaeus was not a polygenist, his *Systema naturae* explicitly claimed the right to project an implacable logic on human phenotypes.⁵⁴ This was something that Buffon could not accept. Although his understanding of the black African was as deterministic as Linnaeus's, Buffon nonetheless rejected the absolute categories that underpinned the Swede's understanding of humankind.

Situating Buffon's relationship to both polygenesis and the birth of race classification is a difficult task. To the extent that scholars have tackled this problem, they have generally and understandably sought to evaluate it against two major preoccupations. The most pressing question, as the scholarly divide between Louis Sala-Molins and Jean Ehrard has demonstrated, is: “Was Buffon himself racist?”⁵⁵ The second and overlapping query is more genealogical in nature: what was the precise link (or lack thereof) between Buffon's thought and later thinkers who more unambiguously perpetuated the “racializing” of other peoples?⁵⁶

While much of chapters 2 and 3 certainly engage with the relation that existed between Buffon's thought and increasingly clear-cut and zoological categories of the human, my treatment of Buffon initially eschews such debates in lieu of a more thorough contextualization of the genesis of Buffon's ideas on the black African circa 1749. It is with this in mind that chapter 2 (“Sameness and Science, 1730–1750”) begins with an examination of the essays on the subject of blackness submitted to the Bordeaux Académie royale des sciences in 1741. In addition to providing a survey of the competing theories on this question before mid-century, this segment of the book reveals the unstated, yet fundamental, problem that most naturalists, including Buffon, sought to address when they took up the topic of blackness. This was not the Kantian query “What is a race?” Rather, the question that perplexed natural historians including Buffon was “What happened to humankind's essential sameness?”

Buffon, of course, provided the most compelling answer to this question in the *Histoire naturelle*. But this chapter also demonstrates that, well before Buffon, Pierre de Maupertuis had seemingly solved the riddle of essential human sameness by examining what was the ultimate example of racial crossover: the

African albino. Strictly speaking, of course, the pathological condition that came to be known as albinism had not yet been defined in the eighteenth century; nor did French thinkers refer to "whites" born to "black" parents as albinos. Revealingly, the term that both Maupertuis and Buffon used to refer this human curiosity was *nègre blanc*, literally a "white negro." Although eighteenth-century thinkers had long been intrigued by reports of these category-defying humans, the full implications of *nègreblancisme* only became clear after Maupertuis published his 1745 *Vénus physique*, the first text that used albinism as a means of thinking through the question of race.

While it may be hard to imagine now, for Maupertuis and those who followed in his footsteps, the albino provided a type of "empirical" proof for the era's vague belief in an essential sameness or shared human origin. Maintaining that the birth of an albino was a fluke occurrence, Maupertuis explained that a *nègre blanc* was a rare case of a member of a black variety of human producing a member of a separate conceptual group, in this case, a white human. In addition to this important "fact"—which implied that the white and black varieties were biologically linked—the albino became the critical construct in a new and increasingly white-centered chronology of the human species. How this theory worked was actually quite curious. Maupertuis interpreted the fact that "blacks" sometimes produced "whites" to mean that whites were the original variety to which blacks sometimes reverted. A less European understanding of albinism might have asserted the contrary, of course. Indeed, the fact that blacks occasionally produced whites could have more logically indicated that blacks were the original race, a race that had, in the past, generated enough of these white "accidents" to form their own race.

Despite its shortcomings, Maupertuis's stunning example of quasi-logic echoed in the life sciences for decades. If, as d'Alembert wrote in the *Encyclopédie*, "[c]hronology . . . places men in time," and "[g]eography] distributes them across our Earth," the concept of the albino allowed Maupertuis to combine human biology, geography, and chronology into a dynamic narrative that explained both the origin and the source of humankind's differences.⁵⁷ Seamlessly accepted into Buffon's overall reconceptualization of the human species in his *Histoire naturelle* several years later, Maupertuis's use of the albino became the hidden foundation of a white-centered *science de l'homme* for the next three decades. What neither Maupertuis nor Buffon understood about the albino, however, was that this strange being functioned dialectically in their thought. On the one hand, the accidentalist explanation for the existence of

nègres blancs allowed both thinkers to manufacture a more "scientific" theory of a white prototype variety. On the other hand, the fundamentally degenerative genealogy of humankind that the albino suggested opened the door to increasingly pessimistic and diagnostic chronologies of the African. This is one of the most overlooked aspects of the history of the eighteenth-century life sciences: in putting forward this new scientific paradigm of an essential and original human sameness, Maupertuis and then Buffon implicitly invited a new generation of thinkers to identify the specific corporeal changes that now separated the African from the European. In other words, it was against the critical backdrop of an original sameness (and not essential difference) that a belief in the deeply divergent nature of the *nègre* would ultimately emerge.⁵⁸

Much of chapter 3, "The Problem of Difference: Philosophes and the Processing of African Ethnography, 1750–1775," examines the refinement of new theories of the African in light of degeneration theory. This too is a significant departure from the existing historiography. Instead of concentrating on the history of human classificatory schemes, as is often the case in contemporary scholarship, this chapter focuses on those anatomically and physiologically oriented thinkers who saw monogenesis as a call to speculate on just what had gone wrong in the African's body over deep time. Put simply, this chapter recovers anatomists' beguiling contribution to (1) the ongoing reconceptualization of blackness and (2) the attendant redefinition of the notions of variety, species, and ultimately race that anatomical "discoveries" engendered. Rather than trying to identify a precise date when race came into existence (or historicizing this concept in a linear fashion from figurehead to figurehead), this chapter examines the riddle of human difference as it related to biological processes and questions of human categories.⁵⁹

This treatment of the sameness-difference tension in the French life sciences also allows for a fruitful reinterpretation of many of the era's foundational "Enlightenment" thinkers. The goal of this section is not to recount or evaluate the relationship of Enlightenment to the concept of race as a whole, however; rather, it is to examine how the era's philosophes reacted to and often incorporated physiologically oriented understandings of the African into the new human sciences. This portion of the book resituates what have long been "problems" for eighteenth-century specialists, for example, Voltaire's unapologetic castigation of the African, the *Encyclopédie's* curious ambiguity regarding the *nègre*, and the new "definition" of blackness emerging in natural history dictionaries. Most significantly, perhaps, this section also provides an

analysis of Montesquieu's landmark *De l'esprit des lois* (1748) that interprets his famous "denunciation" of slavery in light of his natural history beliefs regarding the African. Much like Buffon's views on the African, Montesquieu's thought has divided Enlightenment specialists. If it is true that Montesquieu was theoretically, morally, and philosophically opposed to the enslavement of Africans, it is also quite clear that, like other thinkers of his era, he gave credence to the unsettling biopolitical implications of natural history. Indeed, while Montesquieu was the first to identify and to debunk the racial stereotypes that justified the overall justification of the slave trade, his understanding of the ethno-physiological reality of the African also seems to reserve a particular geographic space for African chattel slavery. In a century known for its relativism, this is perhaps one of the most disturbingly relativistic moments of the high Enlightenment.

Whereas the first three chapters of this book treat the question of slavery on numerous occasions, the final chapter, "The Natural History of Slavery, 1770–1802," provides an integrated reading of the question of natural history and human bondage. To the extent that scholars including Winthrop D. Jordan, Christopher L. Miller, and Adam Lively have examined the link between anatomy and the discourse on slavery, they have generally done so by documenting how colonial thinkers drew on proto-raciology in order to rationalize human bondage. While this chapter certainly draws on this important scholarship, it also examines the use of natural history by anti-slavery thinkers as well. This more comprehensive approach to the question of anatomy and slavery allows for a subtler understanding of the ambiguously politicized body of the African and the status of natural history itself.

Among the post-1750 texts that are taken up in this section, the multi-farious and multi-author *Encyclopédie* provides a telltale example of the peculiar relationship existing between natural history and slavery during this era. Some articles in this huge project contain racialized mercantile assessments of the African that came from the Caribbean; others reproduce demeaning portraits of black Africans from the era's travelogues; and yet, most famously, two articles—among the most cited in abolitionist historiography—call for an end to the slave trade. These divergent treatments of the *nègre* point both to the ad hoc construction of the *Encyclopédie* itself and to the importance of the overarching rubric under which the subject of the black African was being treated. When liberal thinkers examined the *nègre* from the perspective of natural history, for example, they tended to remain within this framework, suggesting

that the black African was a reprehensible and degenerate "variety" or "race." Elsewhere and unlinked by *renvoi* (cross-reference), these same philosophes interpreted the black African's plight from the point of view of natural law and often produced a plaintive and sentimental portrait.

If this initial analysis of the *Encyclopédie* serves to introduce many of the contradictions existing among Enlightenment-era thinkers, the remainder of the chapter examines how late-century anti-slavery thinkers began to reconcile or address these incongruities by practicing a new type of ideologically driven natural history. The most illustrative text to grapple with the question of anatomy and slavery is Abbé Raynal's so-called *Histoire des deux Indes* (in its multiple editions). Insofar as this subject has even been treated, the relationship between Raynal's understanding of African physiology and "his" views on slavery has puzzled critics. After all, in the first (1770) edition, the author, who would soon be known as the era's greatest *nérophile*, argued that the African—given his supposedly dark sperm and inferior intelligence—was a different species of human.

Not surprisingly, much of chapter 4's analysis of the *Histoire* hinges on an examination of the third and best-known edition of Raynal's text (1780). In this final iteration of the work, Diderot (as ghostwriter) completely rejected the cutting-edge proto-raciology of the earlier editions, which had seemingly contradicted Raynal's famous anti-slavery paragraphs. This was a significant moment in anti-slavery discourse. By following in the footsteps of the more positive reevaluation of the black African first undertaken by the Quaker Anthony Benezet in the 1760s and by Abbé Pierre-Joseph-André Roubaud ten years later, Diderot provided one of the first entirely coherent anti-slavery arguments in French thought. In addition to discrediting the era's racially essentialist anatomy and reasserting a belief in the shared unity of the human species, Diderot attributed the "shortcomings" of the African "type" to the institution of slavery and the white planters themselves.

Diderot's refutation of a century's worth of negative Caribbean-born stereotypes (and the purported scientific insights into the *nègre*'s physiology that served to justify them) changed the rules of the debate on slavery. Before the publication of the third edition of the *Histoire*, pro-slavery and anti-slavery thinkers had generally accepted a shared set of "facts" regarding the natural history of the African. While elements of these data varied significantly, the African was, for the most part, considered on both sides of the slavery debate as an inferior "variety" or "race" whose pathological physiology was the re-

sult of a climate-induced degeneration from an original white prototype. By disallowing the properly essentialist and racist elements of this explanation of the African, Diderot—arguably the most anatomically oriented materialist of the philosophes—not only turned his back on some of his era's most original anatomical "discoveries"; he recognized the nefarious biopolitics of his era's natural history. Like Benezet and Roubaud before him, Diderot understood that to argue against slavery effectively, one had to debunk the negative natural history of the African on which slavery increasingly relied.

The final section of chapter 4 takes up the fate of *négrophile* discourse as it was practiced during and after the era of the Société des amis des noirs (1788–1802). In particular, this segment of the book examines the evolution of *négrophile* politics during the revolutionary era, a time when slave uprisings in the French Caribbean led pro-slavery writers to castigate writers like Raynal as irresponsible ideologues who had incited rebellion on French islands. Ultimately, this section of the book underscores the fact that, as far as rhetorical strategies went, the efficacy of the new, more favorable natural history of the African depended heavily on historical context. If praising the African's potential to become a full-fledged member of the human community was a widespread and successful tactic in the mid-1780s, this particular argument was more difficult to put forward after 1791 when, among other things, Saint-Domingue had erupted into open revolt.

Anatomizing the History of Blackness

Coming to grips with the shifting construction of blackness during the eighteenth century involves a series of perils and methodological pitfalls. To produce a historical narrative on this subject—or any subject, as Hayden White famously suggested—is not only to select, but also to reflect a particular worldview. While I have attempted to produce a neutral historical account, it is nonetheless undeniable that my own work reflects an orientation with "distinct ideological and specifically political implications."⁶⁰

To a large degree, this book can be seen as part of a wider meditation on African representations that began after Christopher Miller published his seminal *Blank Darkness* in 1985. As I have maintained elsewhere, Miller drew from the theoretical foundations of both Michel Foucault and Edward Saïd in order to examine Africanist documents from a novel perspective.⁶¹ Rather than using these sources to establish a chronology of human events in Africa,

articulate a figurehead genealogy, or acquire specific knowledge of the African past, Miller studied Africanist texts with two goals in mind. First, he identified a period-crossing discursive structuring of Africa that functioned as a form of grammar, as a highly codified nexus of beliefs that gave shape to the overall representation of Africa. Second, and perhaps more important, he mapped the application of this "knowledge" onto a larger colonial project of representation and exploitation. Miller has built on and distilled this method to great effect in *The French Atlantic Triangle* (2008), a study in which he has demonstrated, for example, how Voltaire's varied opinions on slavery can be seen in terms of three overlapping discourses: a noble savage Peruvian one (*Alzire*), a "French Atlantic Triangle" view (*Candide*), and an orientalized form of human bondage (*Le blanc et le noir*).⁶²

Miller's influential contributions to the question of representation have implicitly invited scholars to examine the European discourse on the African with the same intensity that Europeans themselves examined other cultures during the early-modern era.⁶³ This has been the impetus for a number of studies including Y.V. Mudimbe's *The Invention of Africa*; Linda Merians's and François-Xavier Fauvelle-Aymar's respective books on the representation of the so-called Hottentot, *Envisioning the Worst* and *L'invention du Hottentot*; Roxann Wheeler's admirable analysis of skin color and its role in defining race in eighteenth-century England, *The Complexion of Race*; Adam Lively's charting of racial discourse in both eighteenth-century pseudo-science and modernist culture, *Masks*; and the collection of essays edited by Catherine Gallouët and others entitled *L'Afrique du siècle des Lumières* (2009). To the extent that I can contribute to the work of those scholars who have written on the black African after *Blank Darkness*, I am hoping not only to enhance our understanding of European mentalities, but also to challenge what is becoming an increasingly powerful and unquestioned belief in an anxious and monolithic Enlightenment-era consciousness that supposedly acted as both factory and repository for the representation of black Africans.⁶⁴

Readers of this book should be forewarned. This study does not posit the existence of a pan-national European "mind" engaged in a conscious attempt at removing colonized peoples from history. Rather, it offers an interdisciplinary examination of how Enlightenment-era thinkers living in France (and elsewhere) processed "ethnography" in the context of their own changing preoccupations. While identifying the French and European understanding or representation of Africans admittedly does not shed light on some of the

primary questions explored by historians of slavery—how many black Africans perished in *razzias*, or how they contended with conditions on Caribbean and American plantations—such a study does provide insight into an era that factored the torturous labor and murder of black Africans into the costs of production of various crops and commodities. Put bluntly, this book seeks to underscore the relationship between representation and the brutal lives to which Africans were consigned in European colonies.

This brings me back to the use of “anatomy” as it appears in this book’s title. In the most literal sense, this term obviously refers to the authoritative scientific discipline that played a key role in diffusing corporeal explanations for what had previously been vague, intuited preconceptions regarding the black African. But the title *The Anatomy of Blackness* is also intended to evoke a second meaning that the term *anatomie* had in eighteenth-century thought. As Jean-François Féraud pointed out in his 1787 *Dictionnaire critique de la langue française*, eighteenth-century thinkers employed the concept metaphorically to describe an incisive analysis of a given body of thought: “one can [also] say *undertake the anatomy of a discourse*.”⁶⁵ Implicit in this figurative use of the term is the telos of anatomy itself: to understand a complex *whole*, one is obliged to extract, dissect, and consider the viscera that compose it. Such a method was the point of departure for the study that follows.

Paper Trails

Writing the African, 1450–1750

I saw Africa, but I have never set foot there.

JEAN-BAPTISTE LABAT, *NOUVELLE RELATION DE L’AFRIQUE OCCIDENTALE* (1728)

Across from the Jerónimos Monastery on the north bank of the Tagus River at Lisbon stands the Padrão dos Descobrimentos, an imposing marble monument erected in 1960 to commemorate the five-hundredth anniversary of the death of the *infante* Henrique o Navegador, known to us as “Henry the Navigator.” This shiplike memorial gives pride of place to Prince Henry, who commands at the prow.¹ Standing or kneeling behind him are a number of historical and allegorical figures: King Manuel I, the epic poet Camões, the explorers Vasco da Gama, Magellan, Cabral, and Henry’s mother, Philippa of Lancaster. Less prominently, there are also the cartographers and missionaries who contributed to the Portuguese *descobrimentos* in their particular fashions. This celebratory rendering of history, which conflates discoveries in Africa and Brazil with the first circumnavigation of the globe, is aptly named a marker, or *padrão*. Like the inscribed stone crosses, or *padrões*, that Portuguese explorers sank into the ground along the African littoral, this testament to the fundamental realignment of the world stakes a distinctly Portuguese claim in Western historiography. In stark contrast to a view of the “Age of Exploration” that has traditionally concentrated on Columbus and the Americas, this giant

of slavery to an abolitionist, not only accusing planters of transforming the *nègre* into a "kind of livestock," but adding pathetic visions of African suffering and praising the creation of an anti-slavery movement in London.¹⁷⁷

While this final version of the article "Nègre" prompted pro-slavery thinkers to castigate Valmont de Bomare as a thoughtless and irrational *nérophile*, the naturalist had hardly modified his unambiguously negative portrait of the black African in 1791.¹⁷⁸ Despite the fact that he expressed his solidarity with the abolitionist movement, he nonetheless continued to portray the *nègre* as a highly degenerate being whose corporeal and moral liabilities were, alas, both considerable and undeniable. Indeed, regardless of his politics, these "truths" were part of the record that Valmont de Bomare felt compelled to communicate to his students and readers. This was often the case with many thinkers associated with the High Enlightenment: from their point of view, there simply was no contradiction between lecturing in compassion and informing one's readers about the brutal reality of race.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Natural History of Slavery, 1770–1802

Disgraceful race! Contemptible *nègres*! Those who pity you do not know you.

FRANÇOIS VALENTIN DE CULLION, *L'EXAMEN
DE L'ESCLAVAGE EN GÉNÉRAL* (1802)

[Negrophiles] have put the devil in the slaves' heads. Nothing is more diabolical than the strategy of the negrophiles. These brazen men give slaves liberty so that these *nègres* can become the executioners of their masters; negrophiles . . . change black into white, and white into black.

LOUIS-NARCISSE BAUDRY DES LOZIÈRES, *LES
ÉGAREMENTS DU NIGROPHILISME* (1802)

The black race has always seemed mentally rather inferior to other races and, regardless of the care that may be taken to educate young *nègres*, they have never produced a man of great genius. . . . they will always be in servitude by their weakness, and in barbarism by their inability to think.

JOSEPH-JULIEN VIREY, "VISAGE ET PHYSIONOMIE," IN *NOUVEAU
DICTIONNAIRE D'HISTOIRE NATURELLE APPLIQUÉE AUX ARTS* (1804)

Eighteenth-century natural history encompassed an extensive range of subjects: insects, plants, animals, minerals, and the "stars and meteors" that lit up the night sky.¹ Most memorably, however, natural history provided the forum for a new and wide-ranging exploration of the human species. While this particular area of inquiry was theoretically circumscribed by the primary function of the discipline—providing an accurate description of nature—natural history's practitioners invariably went beyond these strictures. Theologically

or providentially oriented "naturalists" such as Abbé Antoine Pluche examined humans as part of a divine plan;² politically minded thinkers including Montesquieu drew from natural history in order to speculate on the effects of climate on the inhabitants of a given region. But of all the questions that a new generation of naturalists raised about the human species, none was more momentous than the subject of African chattel slavery. That natural historians wrote about slavery (or that pro-slavery thinkers engaged with and contributed to the field of natural history) is far from surprising. After all, during the eighteenth century the *nègre's* enslavement was increasingly being understood from a zoological point of view.

Not unexpectedly, the natural history of the *nègre* has long drawn the attention of the most famous scholars working in the history of slavery. In discussing the intellectual underpinnings of human bondage in his *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, David Brion Davis cited the "complex history of biological theory" within the overall refashioning of the image of the black African during the era of slavery.³ Similarly, in his equally well known *The White Man's Burden*, Winthrop D. Jordan affirmed that natural history overlapped with and substantiated economic justifications of chattel slavery.⁴ While numerous scholars including James Walvin have questioned the actual importance of *blackness* in the initial construction of the Atlantic slave system, it is nonetheless now generally conceded that the black African's presumed natural alterity played many roles during the eighteenth century: it allowed Europeans to produce new definitions of whiteness; it provided a coherent concept around which the first "scientifically based" human classification schemes were organized; and, most infamously, it replaced theological and even economic justifications as the most compelling rationale for African chattel slavery.⁵

Scrutinizing the political implications of the "Africanist" branch of natural history is a necessary step in understanding the slave-based societies that became the norm in the Caribbean. In addition to the fact that such a study fleshes out our understanding of one of the great crimes of human history, this type of inquiry also provides a salutary reflection on the potentially pernicious effects of Western science. And yet, the way in which scholars have examined natural history in the past—by studying it as a subplot within the larger and all-powerful history of slavery—actually confuses the relationship that existed between this eighteenth-century academic discipline and the "larger" matter of human bondage.⁶ While natural historians who wrote on the black Afri-

can undoubtedly derived the majority of their information from the context of slavery, their texts rarely operated in lockstep with pro-slavery discourse. In fact, natural historians and anatomists' relationship to the institution of slavery ranged from denunciation to collaboration. Bearing this in mind, in this chapter I reverse the traditional historiographical relationship between the "history of natural history" and the question of African slavery. Instead of simply identifying negative scientific views of *le nègre* as they show up in the era's pro-slavery thought, I chart the wider dialogue that existed between natural history and the discourse on human bondage. Indeed, by examining the multifaceted connections between science and slavery, I demonstrate how the anatomy of the black African ultimately became a tool wielded by both sides of the slave trade debate.

The Hardening of Climate Theory and the Birth of New Racial Categories circa 1770–1785

Twenty years after Buffon published the first volumes of his *Histoire naturelle* (1749), a significant number of eighteenth-century thinkers began to distance themselves from the seemingly over-optimistic elements of his degeneration theory. In the English world, Edward Long famously "rewrote" Buffon's environmentalist survey of the African in his 1774 *History of Jamaica*. Pilfering freely from the French naturalist's overall description of the "Negro," Long nonetheless contradicted Buffon when he concluded that blacks constituted a separate category of human that one should distinguish from "the rest of men, not in *kind*, but in *species*."⁷ Several years later, the Italian economist and polygraph Abbé Ferdinando Galiani also refuted Buffon's theory of degeneration in the influential (but elite) *Correspondance littéraire* edited by Friedrich Melchoir Grimm and Denis Diderot. This was a three-step process. First, he flatly rejected the possibility of racial reversibility, stating unequivocally that "perfectibility is not a gift given to man in general, but only to the white and bearded race."⁸ Secondly, he scorned climate theory: "Everything that is said of climates is nonsense, a *no causâ*, the most common error in our logic."⁹ And thirdly, and well ahead of his time, he affirmed that the aptitude and destiny of humankind were not the products of environment: they were the results of a biology-based logic. In a declaration that is strangely prescient of Arthur de Gobineau's belief that race explained the destiny of the human species, Galiani asserted: "Everything is connected to race."¹⁰



Diogenes, who is said to have gone around ancient Athens with a lantern in broad daylight claiming to be seeking an honest man, illuminates Buffon, the discoverer of "humankind," while a putto places a laurel wreath on a bust of the late naturalist. From *Les Beautés de Buffon sous le rapport du style*, edited by Adélaïde-Gillette Billet Dufrénoy (Paris: Emery, 1823). Author's collection.

Along with Voltaire, Long and Galiani number among the most skeptical thinkers regarding monogenesis and climate theory during the eighteenth century. And yet, while one can point to increasing doubts regarding a single-origin theory of humankind by the 1770s, most French thinkers did not abandon Buffon's presumption; they simply retrofitted his understanding of the human species with a growing list of discernible and measurable anatomical differences separating blacks from whites. This more trenchant theory of degeneration, which was most clearly developed by Cornelius de Pauw in 1768, had a significant effect on the conceptual status of the black African. Such is the case in François Para Du Phanjas's 1772 *Théorie des êtres sensibles, ou, Cours complet de physique*. As a Jesuit philosopher and reader of both Buffon and de Pauw, Para Du Phanjas began his assessment of humankind's varieties by asserting that the *noir* and the *blanc* shared a "primitive origin."¹¹ The Jesuit also echoed standard degeneration theory when he explained that nonwhites had come into existence because of inhospitable climates and poor food. But Para Du Phanjas also painted a significantly more pathological view of blackness as well, asserting that the *nègre* had suffered from a tropical climate and diseases that not only denatured these "unfortunate victims" but also imprinted vices on the race "from father to son."¹² According to Para Du Phanjas, this pathological heredity expressed itself in both moral (e.g., penchants, taste, and judgment) and physical (e.g., color, traits) realms, and it could not be effaced in a different climate. Even if a group of Africans were to spend "an extended time of one or more centuries in the temperate zone," he wrote, their "original color" and thus their other shortcomings would not change "noticeably."¹³ And here we approach a more properly *racialized* understanding of black Africans; according to Para Du Phanjas, the *nègre* was a stable category defined by inherited features that were the natural extension of an established and inferior root stock.

This belief in the fixed and hereditary liabilities of the *nègre* overlapped with the birth of more delimited *racial* categories. As numerous critics have pointed out, these classification schemes were first produced among German naturalists, all of whom seemed to have been careful students of Meckel, Le Cat, and, especially, de Pauw.¹⁴ Among the German theorists of race, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach was perhaps the most attentive reader of the era's anatomical discoveries in general and Cornelius de Pauw's *Recherches philosophiques* in particular. In his *De generis humani varietate nativa* (*On the Natural Varieties of Mankind*) (1775), Blumenbach absorbed both the general foundation of

Buffon's monogenetic and environmentalist explanation of humankind and the increasingly fixed physiological understanding of the human that thinkers including de Pauw had championed.¹⁵ This dual perspective generated a somewhat contradictory presentation of the human. On the one hand, and even more explicitly than Buffon, Blumenbach sought to strike a blow against the idea that there were separate *species* of men. An overt critic of the polygenists La Peyrère, Voltaire, Griffith Hughes, Henry Home Kames, and Simon Tyssot de Patot, Blumenbach maintained that the belief in the "plurality" of the human species was a loathsome position that, far from based on fact, stemmed from "ill-feeling, negligence, and the love of novelty."¹⁶ In fact, the fundamental purpose of Blumenbach's race-based understanding of humankind was to demonstrate that there was a shared origin of the human species, one that "buttress[ed] the great monogenetic truth of the Old Testament."¹⁷

To a certain extent, this monogenetic belief was actually substantiated by Blumenbach's "use" of the era's anatomical and physiological discoveries. In order to give credence to his conviction that the human species had a common root, Blumenbach cited a series of shared cross-racial human traits that stood out in stark relief against those found in the rest of the animal world. All humans, he wrote, stood erect, were bipedal and bimanous, had a certain bone structure and "affections" of the mind, and were altogether "naked and defenseless" compared to other animals. Moreover, Blumenbach pointed out that, unlike the female members of other species, human women had a hymen, which was granted perhaps for "moral purposes."¹⁸ In sum, after sifting through his era's anatomical knowledge (including his own observations on skulls), Blumenbach could forcefully assert that the "constitution, the stature, and the color" of humankind's various races could be attributed to a climate-induced degeneration from an original root species.¹⁹

In contrast to this essential or original sameness, Blumenbach also cited important anatomical changes (in addition to blackness) that functioned as the defining characteristics of the African race. These bodily characteristics, which Blumenbach claimed were "beyond all doubt" and identified by an "industry of learned men,"²⁰ were essentially a combination of anatomical discoveries and notions that had been circulating since antiquity. According to Blumenbach, the Ethiopian had a "dry" and "heavy" body, sun-darkened bile, black blood, and, per Meckel, a "brain and spinal marrow" that was an "ashy color."²¹ To his credit, Blumenbach drew no specific conclusions about African intelligence from these data. Indeed, in his third edition of the *Generis*

humani (1795), he would cite the authors Gustavas Vassa (Equiano) and Ignatius Sancho (among other Africans) as living proof of the "perfectibility of the mental faculties and the talents of the Negro."²²

Blumenbach's overall intellectual legacy, however, has little to do with his effusive late-century defense of the African. Rather, scholars generally remember the German naturalist as one of the founders of physical anthropology and, more infamously, as the person responsible for a schematic classification of the human species into four (1775) and then five (1781) races, including the Caucasian (1795). Among the variables that contributed to this new schematization of the human species, nothing was more important than Blumenbach's belief that the African had undergone a series of significant anatomical changes (in addition to simply turning black as earlier environmentalists had claimed). Such was the ambivalence of the African's anatomy in the *Generis humani*. On the one hand, comparative study of human bodies served to refute the possibility of essential differences between human groups.²³ On the other hand, the notion that the physical features of the African and other races were measurable constituted the basis for real categories. While Blumenbach clearly saw no contradiction in these positions, many thinkers whom Blumenbach influenced simply dropped the optimistic aspects of his monogenetic presentation of the human species, putting forward their own racial classification schemes based on an increasingly physiological conception of human categories.²⁴

Between 1775 and 1777 alone, Immanuel Kant, Johann Christian Polykarp Erxleben, and Eberhardt August Wilhelm von Zimmermann all published schematic renderings of essential human categories based, in large part, on the new view of anatomy and a fixed degeneration.²⁵ French thinkers seized on this new way of constructing the human as well. In his influential "Essai sur la cause physique de la couleur des différents habitants de la Terre" (1781), Abbé Nauton presented an influential understanding of the measurement of race. This began with a remarkably corporeal vision of degeneration that conflated a hodgepodge of recent anatomical discoveries with classical humoral theory:

Constantly acting upon generation after generation, the varying degrees of heat in specific climates pass down to [the] oily element common to the blood, the bile, the gall, the sperm, and the mucus, a complexion commensurate with the local temperature. To better illustrate my point, imagine that a perfectly healthy

white man and white woman travel from our temperate zone to one of the hottest areas in the torrid zone; imagine further that this couple conforms to the customs and manners of the indigenous peoples, and do not fall ill with any sort of fever; their skin will harden and turn brown; it will flake and peel off. In effect, the excessive heat must, then, produce a greater agitation in the blood and the other humors, and the animalistic ether of the mucous bodies will become more saturated with phlogiston.²⁶

Like the majority of naturalists of his generation, Nauton believed both that "[t]he varieties and shades of the skin's complexion are noticeable in the principal fluids of the human body" and that the detrimental effect of heat had imprinted itself forevermore on the African.²⁷ Moreover, Nauton argued that after thirty generations, this originally "accidental tint" became something real and enduring, "a quality, an affect of nature, that is passed on from generation to generation, just as other deformities or diseases are passed from fathers and mothers to their children."²⁸ It was just such a pathological view of human varieties—which explained the very existence of the African in terms of *generations* of damage—that allowed for a trenchant new view of race. Clearly, much had shifted since Buffon had first introduced the notion of degeneration; his comparatively vague idea of a palette of human colors and, thus, *varieties*, no longer held sway. As Nauton himself put it, the European "naturalist-physician," like himself, was now making the logical leap from "the anatomical and physiological study of the individual" to a more complete study of "the species."²⁹ More important, he argued, European naturalists were now for the first time able to classify the human species in terms of three "striking" variables: "the difference between complexion and color, that between shape and size, [and] that of temperament, nature, and national genius."³⁰

Numerous essentializing typologies began to appear in French thought in the early 1780s. In 1782, following the Germans, the *Encyclopédie méthodique* proposed a racial breakdown that included categories like the "Gothic-Germanic," "the Western European (Celtic) race," and "the nègre race."³¹ In 1786, Para Du Phanjas maintained that there were perhaps three races: *Européenne*, *Nègre*, and possibly *Tartare*.³² Other naturalists went even further in their breakdowns of humankind. In an article published in the *Mémoires de la société des sciences physiques de Lausanne* in 1784, J. P. Berthout van Verchem argued that there were ten distinct races. What was important in all these classification schemes was not the number of races, however. The significance of

human taxonomy lay in the fact that an increasing number of the era's naturalists had claimed the right to classify the "measurable" effects of climatic degeneration, which, as van Verchem wrote, had produced the different races of men, or *general varieties*.³³

In addition to having a notable effect on the overall representation and understanding of the black African in the era's thought, the synthesis of heredity, anatomy, and taxonomy inspired new methods of ethnographic data-gathering and experimentation. Perhaps the most striking example of this tendency can be found in the guidelines that the Paris Société de médecine prescribed to the explorer Jean-François de Galaup, comte de La Pérouse, in May 1785. Two months before his expedition set off on its ill-fated scientific voyage to the Pacific (the ship sank near the Solomon Islands), the Société not only encouraged La Pérouse and his crew to gather information on foreign customs and comparative anthropology (e.g., the shape of the skull), it also invited these explorers to collect data on "the color of the skin" and the color of indigenous "humors" and organs.³⁴ In particular, the *savants* aboard La Pérouse's ships were asked to determine whether or not: "the spermatic fluid of men who are more or less swarthy, their brain matter, and their blood correspond . . . to the complexion of their skin."³⁵ What exactly the Société hoped to achieve with comparative data on the color of indigenous sperm, brains, and blood is not directly spelled out in this query; nor, I should hasten to add, did the Paris-based men of science provide guidelines as how to collect such information. It is probable, however, that the people who dictated this command to La Pérouse hoped, first and foremost, to confirm the now-general belief that darker bodies had darker organs and humors. But in addition to this objective, the Société also presumably sought to identify a spectrum of sperm colors (and heredity) ranging from the whitest white to that of black Africans. While the ostensible goal of such a venture was isolating the precise source of ethnic or racial difference, the real objective, of course, was managing such concepts.

Among all the other clues regarding the underlying motives of this erudite group of armchair naturalists, none is more important than the directive to obtain sperm from human albinos (*nègres blancs* and *blafards*).³⁶ As we saw in chapter 2, the albino or *blafard* had been a subject of interest long before the voyage of La Pérouse. A critical juncture in the forging of the concept of race earlier in the century, the *blafard* had allowed thinkers like Maupertuis and Buffon to posit a shared origin between black and white human varieties; it

had also permitted them to assert that the white variety was the prototype stock from which *nègres* had degenerated, and to which they occasionally reverted in the form of a *nègre blanc*.³⁷ By asking La Pérouse and his crew to determine if these albinos did in fact have darkened sperm, the naturalists were presumably trying to determine if the defining trait of Africanness (black sperm) was present in a white (albeit albino) human. The prospective finding of this outlandish experiment—that albinos might have the seed of blackness despite their pallid complexions—reveals the increasingly physiological view of race taking form in the last years of the ancien régime; it also underscores a new tendency among scientific institutions to gather physical data in order to establish both normal and degenerative categories of humans, categories that were based on interior physiology as well as on exterior color and morphology. This shift of the locus of race from the exterior to the interior, which had been taking place since the late 1760s, would not be lost on the more overtly racist thinkers of the nineteenth century. As the polygenist Julien-Joseph Virey put it succinctly in the 1803 *Nouveau dictionnaire d'histoire naturelle*: “the *nègre* is . . . not only *nègre* on the outside, but in all parts of his body as well, down to the innermost of his parts.”³⁸

Toward a Human Biopolitics circa 1750–1770

Throughout the eighteenth century (and beyond), natural history overlapped with the question of slavery in distinct and complicated ways. By the time that the theologically and ethnographically based *Code noir* came into being in 1685, European thinkers were already looking to “natural history” as a means of explaining the politics of servitude.³⁹ And yet, while early eighteenth-century French authors including Charlevoix and Labat commonly cited certain physical justifications of slavery—in particular, the suitability of Africans to labor in extreme conditions—such *corporeal* reasons were still less relied upon than four other rationales: (1) Europeans were simply participating in a longstanding African cultural practice; (2) Europeans were taking slaves who were *legally* enslaved; (3) Europeans were substituting one form of slavery for a much worse fate in Africa; and (4) slavery came with the possible benefit of eternal salvation, something that Africans could not hope to achieve as heathens.

By 1750, the one “positive” rationale in this list—that enslaving (and baptizing) Africans was a work of charity—not only began to lose its luster, it be-

came a target for violent ridicule by philosophes, who took particular pleasure in juxtaposing the tenets of Christianity and the horrors of the slave trade. While some writers including Buffon criticized the hypocrisy of pro-slavery Christians quite delicately, others, most notably Helvétius, derided religious justifications directly. In his 1758 *De l'esprit* (1758), Helvétius famously wrote that the power of “the church and the kings” to authorize and to justify the slave trade on the basis of metaphysical principles was an absurdity.⁴⁰ What was one to make of a religion, he wrote, that “curses in the name of God him who brings trouble and dissension into families, [but that] blesses the merchant who roams the Gold Coast or Senegal [in search of slaves]?”⁴¹ While it would be an error to assert that metaphysical justifications of the slave trade disappeared from pro-slavery discourse after mid-century, an increasing number of thinkers began to view them as cynical arguments. As the physiocrat-oriented *Journal oeconomique* summed up in 1768, “the conversion of *nègres* is very rarely a cause that brings Europeans to engage in commerce on the African coast.”⁴²

Pro-slavery writers who came of age after mid-century responded to such (anti-clerical) criticism of human bondage by seeking out more fruitful territory for advancing their case. If religious justifications of slavery were increasingly falling on deaf or dubious ears, it was entirely logical that pro-slavery writers would draw on more secular justifications. In addition to underscoring the critical role that African chattel slavery played within the French and French colonial economies, pro-slavery thinkers also began increasingly conjuring up the desacralized scientific portrait of the *nègre* being put forward by naturalists and anatomists. This represented a new and much more complete naturalization and normalization of the *nègre's* plight.

The vast majority of the scientifically oriented writers or naturalists who provided the grist for this pro-slavery portrait of the black African were seemingly oblivious to the political implications of their work. Once again, it was Buffon who established what would become something of a convention in this respect. Treating the colonial portraits of the black African with the same dispassionate language that he used to contemplate a specimen in the king's cabinet, Buffon concentrated on the “facts” before him and not the context within which these facts were derived. While it is true that he did in fact chide certain Caribbean planters for their biased portrayals of black African slaves in general, his tone effectively hid the full political implications of the new “science” of man. Other naturalists and anatomists were even less aware of

the politics of natural history. Indeed, when Meckel "discovered" black brains, he did so without any explicit reference to the implications for slave owners. In Le Cat's book-length treatment of the source of African *ethiops*, he wrote at great length about the color of Africans after death, their color at birth, the different shades of black on their body, the color of drowned Africans, and the origins and implications of albinos; and yet he never mentioned the state of the Africans in the colonies. De Pauw, too, separated his hugely influential explanation of the African's extreme degeneration from the overall question of slavery, although he did proclaim at one point in his *Recherches* that slavery itself "horried humanity."⁴³ In sum, although natural history in its various forms had overlapped with the politics of slavery for centuries, the thinkers who were most clearly responsible for supplying the physical data used to codify the notion of race often did so in a political vacuum.

Pro-slavery and anti-black thinkers, however, deployed these ostensibly apolitical assessments of the *nègre* with great verve. Among mid-century French writers to put forward a harsh new biopolitics of servitude, Jacques-Philibert Rousselot de Surgy stands out. De Surgy's 1765 *Mélanges intéressans*—published during the heyday of physiological speculation on the African—is a watershed in the French history of race. Some thirty-five years before the full potential of polygenist thought was harnessed by the generation of pro-slavery thinkers writing after the revolution on Saint-Domingue, de Surgy refuted any commonality between whites and blacks; indeed, he maintained that the African occupied a taxonomical space that was so close to that of *des bêtes*, that he was unable to decide whether these creatures were closer to the orangutan or to the white man. This posited taxonomical affinity with the animal kingdom was based not only on morphology and anatomical differences but also on performative criteria. As de Surgy wrote, the *nègre's* cognitive abilities were so severely limited that *nègres* had "no ideas, no knowledge, that belong to men."⁴⁴ Little wonder, then, that de Surgy believed that slavery corresponded perfectly to Africans' animal-like aptitudes; in his opinion it was clear that they were not "made for a condition better than that to which they have been reduced."⁴⁵ Unlike most French writers in the 1760s, de Surgy put forward an unequivocal politics of racial superiority and dominance.

In addition to serving as fodder for pro-slavery writers, the natural history of the black African also played an important role in the political assessment of slavery among philosophes. As I argued in chapter 3, the earliest and perhaps most telling example of how natural history infiltrated the classical lib-

eralism of the Enlightenment came in the 1748 *De l'Esprit des lois*. While Montesquieu famously censured the institution of slavery in this text as a violation of natural law, his capacious treatment of the question of human bondage in this text also led him to try to understand it as a practice whose origins, while illegitimate, could nonetheless be attributed to certain physical variables. Examining the enslavement of black Africans, Montesquieu ultimately admitted that the bondage of the African could perhaps be understood as a function, not only of the climate in which the *nègre* lived, but also of climate theory's corollaries: African mores and African physiology. It was these final variables that ultimately led Montesquieu to entertain the idea that the existence of slavery in certain climates and, by extension, among certain peoples, was a philosophically logical, albeit morally undesirable, phenomenon.

Similar epistemological dissonance would infuse much of the post-1750 examination of slavery by other "conceptual" thinkers. Eight years after Montesquieu published his reflections on slavery in *De l'esprit des lois*, François Victor Riquetti, marquis de Mirabeau, generated an equally ambiguous portrayal of human bondage in his 1757 runaway bestseller, *L'ami des hommes, ou Traité de la population*.⁴⁶ Drawing deeply, as had his friend Montesquieu, on the tropes of natural history for his so-called treatise on population, Mirabeau contended that the number of inhabitants in a given country (along with the success of its agricultural policy) was synonymous with either the wealth or poverty of this same nation. Within this thesis-driven text, Mirabeau dedicated a sizable chapter to the status of African slaves in European colonies. It was in this same section that he forcefully and famously vilified the institution of slavery as emblematic of the shortsighted and unhealthy state of the typical European colony.⁴⁷

Much of the historical significance attributed to the *L'ami des hommes* obviously derives from its status as a forerunner of the positions of later anti-slavery thinking among the physiocrats, including that of Pierre Samuel du Pont de Nemours and Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot.⁴⁸ To a large degree, this narrative is entirely accurate: like later thinkers, Mirabeau not only accused the colonial project of languishing in a "foolish infancy"; he criticized the colonization of the West Indian islands as a hopelessly backward endeavor based on greed, the overconsumption of a select few, and a financially illogical purchase and importation of slave labor.⁴⁹ And yet, Mirabeau was the first and perhaps the only French thinker to marshal economic arguments against slavery based, in part, on a profoundly negative assessment of the "natural

history" of the African. This begins with Mirabeau's "definition" of the black Africans found in French colonies: "Our slaves in America are a race of men separate and distinct from our own species by the most indelible of traits, that is, color."⁵⁰ More reminiscent of Voltaire's very schematic breakdown of humankind into different *species* than of the later (more benevolent) assessments of Africans found in the physiocrat writings of the 1770s, Mirabeau's seemingly polygenist evaluation of the African actually allowed him to explain the unhealthy form of slavery practiced in the Caribbean. Comparing Caribbean slavery unfavorably to the type of human bondage practiced during antiquity, Mirabeau argued that the slaves in the Americas were cultural others, whom he described as either "brutish or endowed with an instinct that is foreign to us."⁵¹ Little wonder, he suggested, that Europeans ended up treating them like animals.

For Mirabeau, much of what transpired in the scandalous colonial system could be seen in terms of an ethnological economy, or clash between cultures. This framework was carried over into his speculations on the future of sugar-producing islands in the Caribbean as well. In Mirabeau's estimation, these colonies had one of two possible futures. If Europeans continued to oppress their African slaves, populations would necessarily plummet. Not only would African women increase their practice of infanticide; the male slaves would become progressively deceitful and corrupt. On the contrary, if European masters were lax with their slaves, Africans would inevitably insert themselves into European households. In this latter scenario, masters would engage in debauchery, and an increasingly large mixed-race caste would be produced. Ultimately, this moral and biological decadence would lead to a decline in the number of whites and a growth in the number of *nègres*. The result of this shift in demographics would be inevitable: the *nègres* would one day take over European colonies, because, as Mirabeau explained it, "even the dullest of men have always been enlightened enough to understand the benefits of liberty."⁵²

Having evoked these two equally bleak futures, Mirabeau proposed a solution to the problem of slavery that, much like the other parts of his argument, incorporated elements of natural history. To address the problems of colonial slavery, he argued, one need not abolish the practice. Rather, colonial policy should encourage free trade and a more productive agricultural policy. This, in turn, would supposedly attract a new, industrious, and superior group of European settlers. These productive and intelligent "artisans" would, accord-

ing to Mirabeau, produce goods and services that would be far superior to anything that the African craftspeople could manufacture. Indeed, it would be inevitable that "the artisans of Europe . . . overtake the industry of the *nègres*, which is nothing but an exception among this race of men."⁵³ Like many early anti-slavery texts, the precise status of *L'ami des hommes* is far from unambiguous. While Mirabeau was clearly among the first thinkers to marshal economic arguments as part of an anti-slavery argument, much of his reasoning relied on a brutal race-based assessment of European racial superiority to do so.

The Politics of Slavery in the *Encyclopédie*

While something of an outlier in terms of its orientation, the publication of *L'ami des hommes* in 1757 coincided with a number of other significant developments in the then-nascent anti-slavery movement. Already, Rousseau had famously declared in the *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité* (1755) that human enslavement was an artificial and dishonest institution that only came into existence due to the desperate need of miserable people. In 1758, Helvétius also put forward a virulent denunciation of slavery in his *De l'esprit* in the section entitled "De l'ignorance." Condemning the "consumption of men" taking place in the Americas in a way that no philosophe had done before him—not Montesquieu, not Rousseau, not Mirabeau—Helvétius measured the colonial project in terms of the amount of suffering endured by Africans.⁵⁴ This included not only the wars fomented by Europeans in Africa, but also the horror of the Middle Passage and the meaningless deaths caused by "the cupidity and [the] arbitrary power of the masters."⁵⁵ It was just such a perspective that allowed him to proclaim that "no cask of sugar arrives in Europe that is not tainted by human blood."⁵⁶ By the 1760s, these relatively isolated outbursts gave way to a growing consensus among progressive thinkers that African chattel slavery was not only an anachronistic and brutal institution out of step with the liberal principles espoused by the philosophes; it was a cause that warranted attention, much like the "sin" of religious intolerance. How this "cause" was championed in light of the simultaneous rise of a whole new set of anatomical data, however, is a complicated story.

Among canonical Enlightenment texts, the multifarious and multi-author *Encyclopédie* best reflects the era's evolving and oftentimes incoherent treatment of human bondage. While it may appear inconceivable to us now, the "subject" of human slavery came up only briefly in the first volumes of this mas-

sive *dictionnaire*. Essentially absent from articles such as "Afrique" and "Colonie," the Atlantic trade did not really seem to draw the editors' attention until 1755. This was the year that d'Alembert paid tribute to the recently deceased Montesquieu in the *avertissement* that opened the project's fifth volume. In addition to providing Montesquieu's intellectual biography, d'Alembert's *éloge* also included a summary of *De l'esprit des lois*, featuring a disproportionately large section dedicated to Montesquieu's writings on slavery. This is just the first of several points at which volume 5 of the *Encyclopédie* implicitly questions the foundations of this long-standing institution. In the article "Egalité naturelle," for example, Jaucourt affirms that since "human nature is the same in all men; it is clear that according to natural law, everyone must value and treat his fellow men as beings who are naturally equal to himself."⁵⁷

Jaucourt followed up on this spirited praise of liberty in the article "Esclavage," condemning the unnatural introduction of political and civil slavery into the state of nature.⁵⁸ Much like Montesquieu's view of slavery, from which Jaucourt gleaned many of his ideas, "Esclavage" accurately reflects the tension existing between natural law and natural history during this era. On the one hand, Jaucourt affirmed that human freedom was an inviolable principle that had often been sullied (as in the case of slavery) through an illegitimate use of physical force. On the other hand, Jaucourt (like Montesquieu) also made clear that one of the root causes of human bondage could be attributed to a climate-induced suitability to "servitude."⁵⁹ While Jaucourt cited this environmentalist explanation of slavery alongside other "physical determinants," for example, "force" and "violence," this "natural" account of slavery was distinctive. Unlike the "human" influences that perpetuated human bondage, climate would presumably continue to engender pathological and social conditions conducive to slavery no matter what happened to the other variables.

This vexing force of climate disappeared in Jaucourt's later and more forcefully abolitionist article "Traite des nègres" (1766). Appearing in the sixteenth volume of the *Encyclopédie*, this entry reveals a significant shift in conventions and tone, both of which can be attributed to Jaucourt's discovery (and plundering) of the neglected but extremely important writings of the Scottish jurist George Wallace.⁶⁰ As David Brion Davis has demonstrated in a side-by-side comparison of these two works, the violent "Traite des nègres" flows almost directly from Wallace's text: indeed, it is no exaggeration to state that it was actually Wallace and not Jaucourt who was responsible for one of the first real denunciations of the colonial project in French thought.⁶¹

Following Wallace, Jaucourt asserted that the business of slavery "violates religion, morality, natural law, and all the rights of human nature."⁶² He also declared that those Africans who had been taken as slaves, regardless of the conditions of their enslavement, had the right to declare themselves free.⁶³ All the equivocation of the article "Esclavage" had disappeared in "Traite des nègres," and all justifications were now clearly overruled by humankind's defining principle: liberty. To emphasize this point, Jaucourt, per Wallace, courageously weighed the economic importance of France's colonies against the suffering of African slaves.

One might say [that these colonies] will be soon ruined . . . if they abolish the slavery of *nègres*. But were we to accept this premise, should we also conclude that humankind must be horribly wronged to enrich us or furnish our luxury? It is true that the purses of highwaymen will be empty if theft is completely abolished: but have men the right to enrich themselves through cruel and criminal channels? What right has a brigand to rob the passersby? Who is allowed to become opulent in bringing misfortune to his fellow man? Can it be legitimate to strip the human species of its most sacred of rights, only to satisfy one's own avarice, vanity, or individual passions? No . . . [I would prefer] that European colonies be destroyed, rather than do so much wrong!⁶⁴

Jaucourt clearly intended this anti-colonial stance to be the climactic moment of "Traite des nègres." And yet perhaps the most remarkable moment in this article comes later, when Jaucourt moves from his condemnation of slavery to a quixotic and utopian post-slavery vision of what the Americas could be if the colonial powers were to free their African slaves: "Liberate the *nègres*, and in but a few generations this vast and fertile country will have innumerable inhabitants. The arts and other talents will flourish; and in place of a country almost fully populated by savages and ferocious beasts, there will soon be only industrious men."⁶⁵ Reflecting the "liberty"-equals-prosperity thesis that was becoming increasingly popular in physiocrat circles during the 1760s (as much as in Wallace's text), Jaucourt's article sets forth a vision of a new colonial system that would differ markedly from the Caribbean factories of human misery.

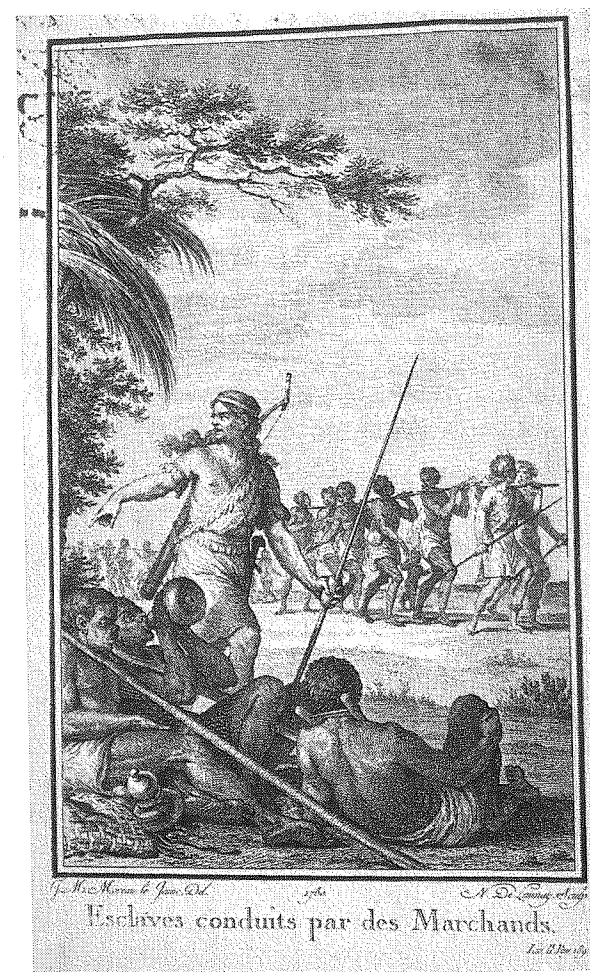
An amalgam of ideas advanced by Montesquieu, Mirabeau, and Wallace, Jaucourt's "Traite" has been identified as the kernel of later, even more incisive, condemnations of the slave trade. Jean Ehrard, for example, has maintained that Jaucourt is "the first to make the step from anti-slavery to abolitionism."⁶⁶

While this assessment of Jaucourt's text is not inaccurate, the full measure of his legacy can only be understood by recontextualizing his anti-slavery stance within the contradictions and paradoxes of his era and his own Africanist writings in the *Encyclopédie*.

One of the most startling aspects of Jaucourt's "Traite des nègres" is the fact that it was an anomaly within the *Encyclopédie*'s seventeen volumes of text; indeed, this memorable anti-slavery diatribe stands out in stark relief against a much more obvious collection of "neutral," non-moral disquisitions on various aspects of slavery. This can be readily seen when we consider Jaucourt's "Traite" alongside Jean-Baptiste Pierre Le Romain's article "Sucrierie," which appeared almost simultaneously. Much more indicative of the overall assessment of slavery during this era, Le Romain's dissertation on the sugar production in the Caribbean describes not only the manufacture of this colonial commodity but also the racialized servitude of the "extremely vicious and cunning species of man" who toiled on Caribbean plantations.⁶⁷

As we look back at the pro-slavery and anti-slavery articles penned by thinkers such as Le Romain and Jaucourt, it is easy to envision the discussion of slavery in the *Encyclopédie* as something of an ideological binary, in which a pro-slavery faction using natural history to dehumanize the African is pitted against an increasingly vocal anti-slavery contingent emphasizing a softer view of the *nègre*. More accurately, however, the *Encyclopédie*'s treatment of slavery remains fragmented into different disciplinary treatments, unlinked by cross-reference. This overall ambivalence regarding the question of slavery overlaps with a revealing ellipsis. In a work that was ostensibly designed to provide an inventory of the technologies of eighteenth-century commerce, there is no mention of the specific European know-how and equipment—such as leg irons, stowage plans, or ship conversion—that made the Middle Passage possible. While the *Encyclopédie* plates dedicated to colonial agriculture feature a series of vignettes of African slaves working in the cotton and indigo industries, corresponding articles such as Diderot's meticulous and lengthy treatment of the production of cotton gloss over the slave labor at the core of the manufacturing process.

In addition to this these lacunae, *Encyclopédie* contributors were also seemingly unable to reconcile their knowledge of the natural history of the African with their belief in natural law. And here again, it is Jaucourt himself who provides us with the best example of this curious phenomenon. On the one hand, as we have just seen, it was Jaucourt who took the most courageous



An African slave caravan, illustrative of Portuguese "crimes," in G.-T. Raynal's *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (1780). Author's collection.

stand against slavery in the aforementioned articles "Esclavage" and "Traite des nègres." And yet, throughout the *Encyclopédie*, Jaucourt vulgarized numerous unfavorable assessments of Africans in his many geographical and ethnographic entries on West Africa. In addition to describing West Africans as a credulous, dirty lot with an animalistic sexuality who "know neither modesty nor restraint in the pleasures of love," Jaucourt painted *nègres* as universally corrupt and more than partly responsible for the continued existence of the

slave trade.⁶⁸ While not nearly as palpable, a similar ambiguity can be found in Diderot's sole outburst against the slave trade in the natural history article, "Humaine espèce." In this short treatment of humankind's varieties, where he reduces Buffon's monogenetic narrative of different human varieties to several folio pages, Diderot restates what his friend the great naturalist had said about the African: the *nègre* may have little intelligence but is far from lacking in "emotions."⁶⁹ Having provided his "natural history" of the *nègre*, Diderot then goes on to criticize the horrific treatment of Africans, which makes a mockery not only of the spirit of Christianity but of humanity's pretense to reason: "We have reduced [the *nègres*] not only to the condition of slaves, but to that of beasts of burden; and we have reason! And we are Christians!"⁷⁰ This incongruous flare-up within what is ostensibly a naturalist account of blackness reflects the conflicted status of the *nègre* in this era. At times examined from the perspective of the naturalist, the African is forced into a speculative history of humankind that seeks to explain aberrant morphology, congenital vice, and innate obtuseness. At other times evoked in the context of universal human rights, the same black African (and his always latent status as a commodity within the colonial system) led Enlightenment thinkers to pity the *nègre* and to question the integrity of European humanism.

Examining the *Encyclopédie* from this perspective, it becomes clear that this massive *machine de guerre* did not lend itself to the type of comprehensive abolitionist discourse found in later anti-slavery works. What these abolitionists had realized—the Philadelphia Quaker Anthony Benezet as early as the 1760s—was that timeworn arguments in favor of the slave trade would have to be refuted with a comprehensive line of reasoning that combined the standard moral and philosophical objections to the trade with a repudiation of the economic and ethnological rationalizations that were increasingly popular among pro-slavery writers. The *Encyclopédie*, in which "ethnology" and human rights seemingly constitute independent disciplines with their own interpretative structures and their own sets of truths, could not produce such a consistent case.

Mercier and Saint-Lambert and the New Natural History

The first hints of French anti-slavery thought appeared among philosophes during the 1750s and 1760s. Some of these indictments of slavery, while they

rarely, if ever, questioned natural history beliefs regarding the African, overlapped with and/or inspired fictional representations of the evil of slavery in the era's literature. As both Léon-François Hoffmann and William B. Cohen have amply demonstrated, many of these literary representations of the *nègre* conferred a new autonomy and psychology on this maligned group of humans.⁷¹

To the extent that black Africans had been present in earlier eighteenth-century French fiction, they had generally functioned as "décor" or part of an exotic backdrop. After mid-century, however, the French began tapping into the sizable mythology of blackness that had long been a part of the English literary canon. French authors referenced Shakespeare's *Othello* and were fascinated by Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko: or, The Royal Slave* (1688), the compelling story of a defiant black African prince whose intelligence and comportment often put Europeans to shame. As the abundant scholarship on this subject has made clear, Behn's novella inspired numerous adaptations both in England and France. Whether restaged in England by Thomas Southerne or in France by Pierre-Antoine de La Place or Pierre-Joseph Fiquet du Bocage, the character of Oroonoko allowed audiences to envision the suffering of black Africans on an understandable, individual level.⁷² In contrast to the era's natural history or mercantile treatments of the *nègre*, dramaturges like La Place staged slavery in terms of a moral binary according to which the most sympathetic character, a rebellious but noble black African, struggled against a horrific and unfair system populated by cruel and unfeeling oppressors. In addition to the fact that this story had the undeniable advantage of projecting the guilt of slavery onto a specific class of Europeans—planters and colonists—it forced sensitive audiences to moralize about a subject that had long been seen as an unfortunate, but unavoidable reality.

To a large degree, the increasing number of literary works to treat the subject of African slavery reflected the beginning of a historical *prise de conscience*. As I stated in the Introduction, Voltaire provided the most notable example of individualized black suffering when he conjured up the dying *nègre de Surinam* in his 1759 *Candide*. While the anguished slave in this philosophical *conte* is, like the other characters, nothing more than a philosophical puppet, his celebrated accusation ("This is the cost of the sugar you eat in Europe") signaled the growing perception that the era was failing to take responsibility for the misery and agony of the black African.⁷³ Ten years later, a number of plays, poems, and novels would confer a more strident and accusatory voice to the

suffering African. Within the present study of the natural history of slavery, two narrative works merit special attention: Jean-François de Saint-Lambert's "Ziméo" (1769) and Louis-Sébastien Mercier's *L'an 2440: Rêve s'il en fut jamais* (The Year 2440: A Dream If Ever There Was One) (1770).

While Saint-Lambert's view of the African clearly inspired Mercier's, the respective contributions of these two authors to the genealogy of anti-slavery thought are best understood in reverse chronological order. Mercier's *L'an 2440* is a utopian novel that takes place in the twenty-fifth century. The protagonist, who wakes up after a seven-hundred-year nap, explores and describes, in a series of episodic chapters, an idyllically clean and rational Paris inhabited by Enlightenment sages, the seeming antithesis of the corrupt and unhealthy capital of 1770. Among the discoveries that this ancient time traveler makes is a "singular monument" that depicts a series of European nations on their knees begging forgiveness for any number of early-modern sins, including sectarianism and intolerance.⁷⁴ The most noteworthy failings of the prostrate European nations, however, involve their brutal colonial practices, chief among them the enslavement of Black Africans. Mercier's protagonist is forced to confront this sin directly when, after turning away from the first set of statues, he encounters a second historical "installation" piece, a huge figure of an Oroonoko-type rebellious slave posed on a dais. In sharp contrast to the passive figure of the African that we find in works such as *Candide*, Mercier's African statue stands tall among the wreckage of colonial empire: "I was leaving this place, when, to my right I saw upon a magnificent dais a *nègre*, with a bare head, outstretched arm, proud eye, and a noble, imposing attitude. Around him were the broken pieces of twenty scepters. At his feet read the words: *To the avenger of the new world!*"⁷⁵

Having sprung to life violently and organically from a nature with which he is seemingly synonymous, this black "genius" is, in the utopian world of 2400, universally praised for having undertaken the slaughter of the colonial whites who have oppressed his people. Strangely prescient of what would occur on Saint-Domingue some twenty years later, this allegorical victory of a vengeful African over a group of disgraced European nations is a significant moment in anti-slavery discourse. In addition to projecting the guilt of slavery onto entire nations (as opposed to only the planters), Mercier also suggested that this culpability would weigh upon future generations.⁷⁶

Mercier seems to have drawn many ideas from Jean-François de Saint-Lambert's "Ziméo," a short story that, in contrast to Mercier's tale, is set in the

contemporary reality of Jamaica. Here too, we meet an audacious slave (John-Ziméo) who, after burning plantations and killing unjust planters, meets a gentle, fair Quaker who, unlike those who die at Ziméo's hand, loves his slaves and only makes them work two days a week. But the most intriguing part of this short story is the epilogue that comes after Ziméo returns with his group of maroon slaves to the forests of Jamaica. It is in this paratextual digression that the narrator undertakes a re-evaluation of African stereotypes.

Argued from the perspective of the Quaker, who is familiar with both Africa and the Caribbean, Saint-Lambert's epilogue is a fascinating departure from other such works of fiction. Anticipating what we find in the *Histoire des deux Indes* some ten years later, Saint-Lambert's narrator asserts that slave traders and colonists involved in the slave trade cannot possibly accurately portray Africans: "My stay in the Antilles and my travels in Africa have confirmed for me an opinion that I have long had. . . . The merchants who trade the *nègres* and the colonists who bond them to slavery have too many wrongs against [these Africans] to be able to speak the truth."⁷⁷

This is only the beginning of Saint-Lambert's challenge of African stereotypes. Evoking the ethnographic diversity that his era came to know through African travelogues and compilations, the narrator asserts that Africa, like Europe, has both good and bad inhabitants. In his words, "the first of our injustices is to give the Africans a general character."⁷⁸ This blanket statement is followed by an enumeration of the different types of African moral systems, religions, and governments:

The various types of governments, goods, and religions in these immense regions have also determined the respective characters of their inhabitants. Here you will see Republicans who have sincerity, courage, and a spirit of justice encouraged by freedom. There, you will see independent *nègres* who live without leaders and without laws, as ferocious and as savage as the Iroquois. Enter the interior of certain countries, or limit yourself to the coastlines, and you will discover great Empires, the despotism of princes and that of priests, feudal governments, regulated monarchies, etc. One sees different laws, opinions, and notions of honor everywhere; and consequently, one finds humane *nègres* and barbaric *nègres*; warriors and cowards; pleasant customs and detestable customs; the man of the earth and the corrupted man, yet nowhere the perfect man.⁷⁹

While this schematic breakdown of the category of the *nègre* may recall aspects of both Buffon and, to a lesser degree, Montesquieu, what distinguishes

Saint-Lambert's "ethnography" is the fact that it overtly rejects the physico-environmental determinism that generally underlay most other theories during this era. If Saint-Lambert's Quaker readily admits the present superiority of the European over the African, he also asserts that this discrepancy stems neither from climate nor anatomy; it is simply the result of measurable "circumstances," such as the form of government or contact with more advanced peoples. According to the Quaker narrator, time and education, not anatomy and climate, are the only variables holding back the African. Saint-Lambert's message is clear: Do not enslave these people; rather, "let us bring them our discoveries and our knowledge; in centuries to come, they may add some of their own, and humankind will be better for it."⁸⁰

The Syncretism of the 1770s: Grappling with "Nature's Mistreatment" of the *Nègre*

The portrait of the African during the last quarter of the eighteenth century has left critics flummoxed. This is quite expected given the competing theories, epistemologies, and generic conventions that were brought to bear on the question of both Africans and their unfortunate fate in European colonies. One way that historians have attempted to understand this confusing set of "data" is by separating thinkers into two distinct categories: polygenist/pro-slavery and monogenist/anti-slavery (table 4.1). This breakdown of perspectives works rather well when the sample is limited to the most prominent thinkers who actively endorsed environmentalism (e.g., Montesquieu, Buffon, and Blumenbach) and their opponents. Indeed, according to this schema, those thinkers associated with either a latent or overt anti-slavery orientation are all monogenist, whereas the pro-slavery thinkers such as de Surgy are polygenist.

While there is an often undeniable relationship between a given thinker's stated position on the "origin" of Africans and this same person's stance on the legitimacy of slavery, this correlation dissolves in many eighteenth-century contexts.⁸¹ In addition to Voltaire—who is known for his outbursts against slavery, but who also believed that Africans constituted an entirely separate species of man—there are many other writers for whom this association is tenuous at best (table 4.2). Among Christian proponents of slavery, such as the Dominican missionary Jean-Baptiste Labat, a (Bible-based) monogenesis was a religious given. Cornelius de Pauw also provides an interesting case. While

Table 4.1. A Pro-slavery Polygenist and Three Anti-slavery Monogenists

	Montesquieu, 1748	Buffon, 1749	J.-P. Rousselot de Surgy, 1765	J. F. Blumenbach, 1775
Views on human origins	monogenesis	monogenesis	polygenesis	monogenesis
Position on slavery	anti-slavery	ambiguous but disapproving	pro-slavery	anti-slavery (esp. later editions)

the Dutch naturalist singlehandedly injected a new and brutal anatomical and hereditary component into Buffon's monogenetic framework—arguing that the inferiority of the African type or race was more fixed than previously thought—his work also shows a sensitivity to nascent anti-slavery sentiment. Even one of the most brutal polygenists of the early nineteenth century, Julien-Joseph Virey, was reluctant to embrace an unambiguous pro-slavery stance.

With the exception of those pro-slavery thinkers who fused the conceptual alterity of the African with a new and brutal biopolitics, many of the late-century writers discussed here simply did not produce what we might think of as a consistent treatment of this subject. This is also the case in the *Encyclopédie's* contradictory treatment of slavery, as we have seen. But the most telling example of the era's incongruous relationship between natural history and slavery is found in Abbé Guillaume-Thomas Raynal's *Histoire philosophique et politique du commerce et des établissements des Européens dans les deux Indes* (first ed., 1770).

Unlike the *Encyclopédie*, the *Histoire des deux Indes* was supposed to treat questions such as the African and the African slave trade from a comprehensive point of view, one that combined ethnography, ethics, and economics. Raynal's treatment of Africa, Africans, and the African slave trade comprises an entire section, book 11. Although technically not part of the *deux Indes*, Africa warranted its own section because it was considered something of an "extension" of the Antilles, or West Indies.⁸² As he did for subjects including China, India, and Peru, Raynal began his assessment of Africa (in 1770) with a meditation on the history and geography of this continent, including a digression on the possibility of a just war waged against Barbary despots. The text then abruptly moves from this hypothetical call to arms to a section on the natural history of the black inhabitants of this continent. Opening this section with an indictment of a religious-tainted "science" of the human, Raynal explained

Table 4.2. Views on Slavery in Relation to Position on Human Origins

	J.-B. Labat, 1722	Voltaire, c. 1733	Cornelius de Pauw, 1768	J.-J. Virey, c. 1800
Orientation	Dominican priest	philosophe	naturalist	naturalist
Views on African	uncivilized, redeemable; suited for slavery	animalistic, another species	degenerated; emphasis on anatomical differences based on heredity	separate race; characterized by essential corporeal differences; destined for slavery
Views on human origins	monogenesis, biblical Genesis	polygenesis	monogenesis, grave degeneration	polygenesis
Position on slavery	pro-slavery	anti-slavery	indifferent/ anti-slavery	reluctantly accepting of institution; expressed vague hopes for improvement ¹

1. Based on Virey's article "Nègre" in the *Nouveau dictionnaire d'histoire naturelle* (1803).

that to understand the black African "type" one should abandon Scripture and replace it with a more naturalistic point of view. Working backwards from the universally accepted "fact" of African inferiority, Raynal declared that "the *nègres* are beings who are *mistreated* by nature, and not damned by [the] justice [of God]."⁸³ Much was implied in this statement. In addition to the fact that Raynal was clearly rejecting any metaphysical (or biblical) views on humankind, he was also conjuring up an allegorical conception of nature, which, he maintained, had physically abused the *nègre*. A significant portion of book 11 attempts to explain or diagnose this so-called mistreatment.

Following established patterns in natural history discourse, Raynal began his discussion of the African's physical liabilities with an examination of the physiology of African skin color. Where he departed from thinkers like Buffon, however, was in the way he explained the origin and significance of this defining African feature. Although Raynal allowed that "famous naturalists" (meaning Buffon and his followers) had declared that the *nègre's* color sprang

up from the "climate in which they live," he downplayed this theory and emphasized the importance of anatomy in the overall constitution of the African.⁸⁴

Whatever the original, radical cause for the varieties in color in the human species, one must concede that the color of the complexion and skin comes from a gelatinous substance that is found between the epidermis and the dermis. This substance is blackish in the *nègres*, brown in olive-skinned and dark-skinned people, white in the Europeans, and spotted with freckles in pale blond or red-haired people.⁸⁵

Up until this point, Raynal's understanding of skin is unremarkable. Yet for Raynal, this gelatinous substance was much more than simply an effect of a particular environment. Borrowing from de Pauw's *Recherches philosophiques*, he affirmed that the *nègre's* skin was part of a larger set of corporeal liabilities that explained everything, including the ill-fated race's suitability to slavery.

Anatomical science has found *nègres* to have blackened brain matter, a nearly completely black pineal gland, and blood of a darker red than that of the whites. Their skin is always overheated, and their pulse brisk. As a result, fear and love are excessive in these people; and this renders them more effeminate, lazier, weaker, and unfortunately more suitable to become slaves. Furthermore, since their intellectual faculties have been nearly exhausted by their overindulgence in physical love, they have neither the memory nor the intelligence to compensate (by cleverness) for the force that they lack.⁸⁶

Like many of the era's post-1755 treatments of the *nègre*, Raynal's assessment of the African conflates a hundred years of negative Caribbean-born stereotypes with "ground-breaking" scientific discoveries regarding the *nègre's* anatomy. In particular, Raynal asserted, once again following de Pauw, that the ultimate cause of blackness (and all that it entailed) could be located on the most elemental level, in the African's dark sperm. This "factual" microphysiological understanding of the African as having a different *seed* ultimately led Raynal to depart from de Pauw, however. Whereas the Dutch naturalist had explained black sperm in terms of a deleterious degeneration from a prototype race, for Raynal this essential difference indicated a conceptual distinction between whites and blacks on the level of species and even origins: "Finally, anatomical science has found the origin of the *nègres's* blackness in their seeds of generation. It takes no more than this, it seems, to prove that the *nègres* are a

different species of men, for if anything differentiates species, or classes within a species, it is certainly the difference in sperm."⁸⁷

This stark understanding of the African's physiology represents an attention-grabbing departure from the general trend of natural history around 1770.⁸⁸ If the vast majority of the era's anatomists and philosophes were examining the African from an increasingly deterministic and physiological point of view, these same thinkers also remained wed to a climate-based, single-origin theory of humankind. Raynal, on the contrary, announced that the climate theory at the heart of the monogenetic enterprise was entirely misguided. While he readily acknowledged that there were certainly "climates suited only for certain species," he also refuted Buffon and de Pauw (although not by name), asserting that "climatic differences" did not "change the same species from white to black" and that "the sun does nothing to alter and modify the seeds of reproduction."⁸⁹ It was entirely wrongheaded, he asserted, to "attribute the color of the *nègres* to climate."⁹⁰

The relationship between Raynal's conceptualization of African physiology and his views on slavery has understandably puzzled critics for decades. The question raised by the 1770 edition of Raynal's opus is quite simple: how is it that he could put forward one of the most deterministic and pessimistic views of the African of his time, while also denouncing the institution of slavery? In *The French Encounter with Africans*, William B. Cohen attempted to resolve this problem by suggesting that Raynal's early polygenetic views on the African were an extreme position that he (actually Diderot) ultimately corrected in the third and final edition of the *Histoire* in 1780. Cohen suggests two specific reasons for this shift. The first, which attributes a great deal of power to Enlightenment ideology, is that the era's belief in "the unity of man [finally] asserted itself." The second is that Raynal/Diderot seem to have retracted "the polygenism because it better suited [the] antislavery argument."⁹¹ This latter explanation, which is perhaps much closer to the truth, merits further investigation.

Anti-slavery Rhetoric in Raynal's *Histoire des deux Indes*

Like much of the rest of the 1770 edition of the *Histoire des deux Indes*, the mosaic-like construction of the section on slavery allowed multiple truths and opinions to exist simultaneously. Beginning this section with a bit of historical context, Raynal explained that the present form of colonial slavery had

arisen when European merchants transformed a relatively benign African institution into an inhuman drain on Africa. Examining the phenomenon from a somewhat physiocratic point of view, Raynal asserted that the trade was taking a terrible toll on African populations. He emphasized this point a little later in this section apropos of the mortality rate of the *nègres* brought to the Americas: "Every year in America [i.e., including the West Indies] one-seventh of the *noirs* that are brought from Guinea die. The 1.4 million wretches that one sees today in the European colonies of the New World are the remainder of the nine million ill-fated slaves that they received."⁹²

Raynal's reactions to the reality and the shocking mathematics of the slave trade vary widely.⁹³ Perhaps most ambiguously, Raynal advocated a more "enlightened form of slavery" with the potential to improve the behavior of European masters by persuading them to treat their slaves with more "tenderness and humanity."⁹⁴ In one of his more curious suggestions along these lines, Raynal proposed that slave owners take advantage of the *nègre's* innate love of music, which would not only produce happier slaves, but a better harvest of slave babies.⁹⁵ And yet toward the end of this appeal Raynal actually broaches the idea of a progressive emancipation of the slaves, once again based on vague physiocratic principles reminiscent of Jaucourt's "Traite des nègres":

In according freedom to these miserable people, but progressively, as a reward for their economy, for their conduct, for their work, take care to make them adhere to your laws and your customs, and to offer them your superfluous things. . . . Give them a homeland, a small [business] concern, something to produce, and things to consume that correspond to their taste; and your colonies will not lack for [willing laborers] who, relieved of their chains, will then be more active and more robust.⁹⁶

This idealistic vision of a happy and productive workforce, which was often as much a planter fantasy as it was the dream of philosophes and physiocrats, is followed by the most commented-on portion of Raynal's *Histoire des deux Indes*: the unapologetic condemnation of the institution of slavery, much of which was presumably drawn from paragraphs provided by Jean de Pechméja.⁹⁷ This section opens by drawing a line in the sand separating those who believe in slavery and those who justify its continued existence through reasoned arguments: "Whoever justifies so odious a system merits a contemptuous silence from the philosophe, and a stab of a dagger from the *nègre*."⁹⁸ The ensuing anti-slavery paragraphs build on this violent image in various ways. Like Mon-

tesquieu before him, Raynal began this section by conjuring up a pro-slavery persona. And yet, unlike what we find in *De l'Esprit des lois*, the justifications of slavery in Raynal's text do not remain unanswered; they become the target of an imagined philosophe interlocutor speaking from the standpoint of a slave. In many cases, this prosecutorial argument takes the form of pointed rhetorical questions:

Will someone [really] claim that the person who wants to enslave me is not at all culpable, that he is exercising his rights? What are these, these rights? [and] who has given these rights a character that is sacred enough to silence mine?

Can't you see, unfortunate apologists of slavery, that you cover the earth with justified assassins?⁹⁹

In the ensuing paragraph, Raynal not only indicted the institution of slavery, but any institution that supported it:

if there were to exist a religion that authorized, that tolerated, if only by its silence, such horrors; if [this religion] were otherwise occupied by idle or seditious questions; if it did not thunder endlessly against the authors or instruments of this tyranny; if it were to make it a crime for the slave to break free of his own chains; if it were to welcome into its midst the sinful judge who condemns the fugitive to death; if this religion were to exist, it should smother its ministers under the debris of its own altars.¹⁰⁰

After this anti-clerical outburst, the first edition of the *Histoire des deux Indes* moves on to another target: pro-slavery arguments stemming from the discipline of natural history. This portion of the text, which contrasts markedly with the *Histoire's* earlier polygenist presentation of the *nègre*, clearly struck Diderot as an important part of a new anti-slavery discourse. In editing this section of the *Histoire* for both the 1774 and 1780 editions, Diderot inflected these paragraphs in interesting ways. This is best seen in a schematic form (see table 4.3).

Diderot's ultimate contribution to Raynal's text is best remembered for its violent images—the avenging African and the evocation of a *code blanc*—but his most significant intervention may actually have been in his subtle targeting of the scientific justification of slavery, a set of beliefs to which the earlier editions of the *Histoire* had seemingly given credence. Ann Thomson's important work on the evolution of this perspective from the 1770 to 1780

Table 4.3. Evolving Assessments of the Natural History of the *Nègre* in Raynal's *Histoire des deux Indes*

First edition, 1770	Later editions
"But the <i>nègres</i> are a species of men born for slavery. They are narrow-minded, deceitful, evil. They themselves agree on the superiority of our intelligence, and almost acknowledge the justice of our empire." ¹	Same paragraph in 1774 and 1780.
"The <i>nègres</i> are limited [in intelligence]; because slavery shatters the springs of the soul. They are wicked; not enough. They are deceitful; because one owes no truth to one's tyrants." ²	Slight modification (in boldface) in 1774 and 1780: "They are wicked; not enough with you [i.e., colonists or planters]." ³
"They recognize the superiority of our minds, because we have exploited their ignorance; [they recognize] the legitimacy of our power over them, because we have exploited their weakness." ⁴	Slight modification (in boldface) in 1780: "They recognize the superiority of our minds, because we have perpetuated their ignorance." ⁵
	Added sentences in 1780: "You almost managed to persuade them that they were a separate species, born for abjection and dependence, for work and punishment. You spared nothing to degrade these unfortunate people, and then you reproach them for being vile." ⁶

1. "Mais les nègres sont une espèce d'hommes née pour l'esclavage. Ils sont bornés, fourbes, méchants. Ils conviennent eux-mêmes de la supériorité de notre intelligence, et reconnaissent presque la justice de notre empire" (*HDI* [1770], 4: 172).

2. "Les nègres sont bornés; parce que l'esclavage brise tous les ressorts de l'âme. Ils sont méchants; pas assez. Ils sont fourbes; parce qu'on ne doit pas la vérité à ses tyrans" (*ibid.*, 172–73).

3. "Ils sont méchants, pas assez **avec vous**" (*HDI* [1780], 6: 207).

4. "Ils reconnaissent la supériorité de notre esprit, parce que nous avons abusé de leur ignorance; la justice de notre empire, parce que nous avons abusé de leur faiblesse" (*ibid.*).

5. "Ils reconnaissent la supériorité de notre esprit, parce que nous avons **perpétué** leur ignorance" (*ibid.*).

6. "Vous êtes presque parvenus à leur persuader qu'ils étaient une espèce singulière, née pour l'abjection et la dépendance, pour le travail et le châiment. Vous n'avez rien négligé, pour dégrader ces malheureux, et vous leur reprochez ensuite d'être vils" (*ibid.*).

editions of the *Histoire*—she too has charted this evolution schematically—has demonstrated convincingly that many of these changes were not original to Diderot but were adapted from the physiocrat Abbé Pierre Roubaud's *Histoire générale de l'Asie, de l'Afrique et de l'Amérique* (1770–75). As Thomson puts it, "The work of Abbé Roubaud was used in 1780 to carry out a reversal in the discourse about Africans, to fight against the prejudice which was making them out to be a separate race, and to reduce the gap between them and the Europeans."¹⁰¹

In contrast to the few critics who have written on this portion of the *Histoire*, Thomson underscores the fact that Diderot was carefully refashioning both the scope and focus of anti-slavery discourse: unlike the earlier iterations of the *Histoire*, the 1780 edition responded directly and unequivocally to the politics of natural history. In addition to adding the final paragraph cited above—where he effectively diagnosed the "liabilities" of the African as stemming from the colonial situation itself—Diderot completely retooled Raynal's understanding of natural history. Once again borrowing from Roubaud to do so, Diderot flatly rejected the increasingly humoral-anatomical understanding of blackness that had come into vogue after 1770:

By the eighth day after birth, the children [of black parents] begin to change color; the skin browns and finally becomes black. However, the flesh, the bones, the organs, all the internal parts, are the same color in the blacks as in the whites: the lymph is equally white and clear; the milk of their nurses is the same everywhere.¹⁰²

While Diderot allowed the belief in darkened blood to stand—this was, after all, a "fact" that his friend Buffon had accepted—he nonetheless forcefully refuted the conviction that the African's sperm was black. This was a critical decision, since darkened sperm was held to signify hereditary transfer of blackness and thus a more vigorous and deterministic view of race. In a sense, Diderot was consciously spurning the vision of human categories put forward by thinkers like de Pauw and was returning to the softer understanding of human *varieties* that Buffon had endorsed twenty years earlier. This act was much more than a simple recasting of environmentalism, however. Diderot, the author of the contemporaneous *Eléments de physiologie*, was actively challenging some of his era's most cutting-edge anatomical discoveries in order to advance a new biopolitics of essential sameness. This revised natural history of the black African made Diderot into one of the era's first *négrophiles*.

Not only had he expanded the era's critique of the colonial space to include heretofore-unimpeachable scientific "data" regarding the African, he violently refuted the political implications of the era's understanding of the black race. To a certain extent, this final 1780 treatment of the *nègre* in the *Histoire des deux Indes* rectifies the compartmentalization, contradictions, and ellipses that characterized many eighteenth-century philosophical works with anti-slavery leanings, including those present in the *Encyclopédie* and earlier editions of the *Histoire* itself.

The Era of Negrophilia

In the traditional historiography of anti-slavery discourse in France, scholars have generally identified two relatively distinct genealogies leading up to the birth of the main French anti-slavery organization of the eighteenth century, the Société des amis des noirs. On the one hand, there was the secular philosophe and physiocrat branch that grew out of Montesquieu's anti-slavery writings on through to Raynal; on the other, an evangelical branch that arrived in France in the late 1780s via Anglicans such as William Wilberforce, Thomas Clarkson, and Granville Sharp. While this is a useful schematic breakdown, it may be more fruitful, at times, to envision the evolution of French anti-slavery discourse as a hybridization of secular and religious thought (much like "scientific" monogenesis in a sense).¹⁰³ This is certainly the case for the important epilogue that Saint-Lambert appended to "Ziméo." Although the philosophe Saint-Lambert is certainly to be credited for publishing the landmark anti-slavery arguments discussed above, the entire architecture of his epilogue to "Ziméo"—the first inklings of what would be called *négrophilie* later in the century—surely came from the "other" side of abolitionist thought, perhaps even from the Quaker Anthony Benezet's *A Caution and Warning to Great Britain and her Colonies in a Short Representation of the Calamitous State of the Enslaved Negroes in the British Dominions* (Philadelphia, 1766).¹⁰⁴

Many of the arguments contained in Benezet's short (forty-page) Quaker indictment of the slave trade intersected with the then-nascent anti-slavery movement both in England and in France. Like Wallace and Jaucourt before him, Benezet attacked both the trade and the traders as barbaric, condemning the "temporal evils that attend this practice" on both moral and religious grounds. Where Benezet distinguished himself from his predecessors, however, was in the way that he made use of his extensive knowledge of Caribbean

and African travelogues. Citing numerous Caribbean sources, he recounted the horrors, tortures, and wasteful deaths of Africans on both Barbados and Jamaica. Quoting from a series of African traders, he also related the brutality of African royalty tempted by European riches. But Benezet's most significant contribution was the first true reevaluation of the extant ethnography associated with the African:

Some who have only seen Negroes in an abject state of slavery, broken-spirited and dejected, knowing nothing of their situation in their native country, may apprehend, that they are naturally insensible of the benefits of Liberty, being destitute and miserable in every respect. . . . Although it is highly probable that in a country which is more than three thousand miles in extent from north to south, and as much from east to west, there will be barren parts, and many inhabitants more uncivilized and barbarous than others; as is the case in all other countries: yet, from the most authentic accounts, the inhabitants of Guinea appear, generally speaking, to be an industrious, humane, sociable people, whose capacities are naturally as enlarged, and as open to improvement, as those of the European.¹⁰⁵

In order to advance this much more positive view of the "human geography" of Africa, Benezet drew from a variety of French and English travelogues, including the naturalist Michel Adanson's *Histoire naturelle du Sénégal*, William Bosman's *New and Accurate Account of the Coast of Guinea*, William Smith's *New Voyage to Guinea*, and André de Brûe's memoirs.¹⁰⁶ Anticipating the argument that he would make much more famously in his *Some Historical Account of Guinea* (1771), Benezet set out to prove that Africans were not only far from brutal or stupid; they were, in fact, generally peace-loving and kind, until they were either incited to violence by Europeans or ripped from a country of immeasurable fertility.¹⁰⁷

While it would be wholly inaccurate to assert that Benezet's counterdiscursive salvos had an immediate effect on the well-established and very negative conception of the *nègre*, his writings (as well as the more positive views of Africans beginning to circulate in French thought) provided a new model for the way that anti-slavery arguments might be constructed. In addition to simply making a case against the institution of human bondage, Benezet sought to paint its victims as sensitive and full members of humankind. It was precisely this humanization that was later featured in the image that appeared on the title page of the 1787 edition of Benezet's *Some Historical Account*. Steeped in a biblical monogenesis (the emblem is preceded by Acts 18), this small, often-



"Am I Not a Man and a Brother?" Wedgwood medallion reproduced in Anthony Benezet, *Some Historical Account of Guinea* (1788). Courtesy Watkinson Library, Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut.

reproduced Wedgwood figure of the kneeling African who asks, "Am I not a man and a brother?" underscores both the religious and ethnography-based *fraternity* of humankind.¹⁰⁸

The humanization and demystification of the African played an important role in the anti-slavery movement. In Bernardin de Saint Pierre's best-selling *Voyage à l'île de France* (1773), the future author of *Paul et Virginie* not only described first-hand the misery of the slave system on Mauritius; he took special care to depict the Africans (actually the Malagasy) as skillful, intelligent, loyal, interested in love, and good musicians. Similarly, in 1781, when Condorcet (writing under the pseudonym Joachim Schwartz) published his *Réflexions sur l'esclavage des nègres*, he commenced his "Épître dédicatoire aux nègres esclaves" by breaking down the categories that had long separated whites and blacks: "Although I am not the same color as you, I have always regarded you as my brothers. Nature has made you to have the same mind, the same reason, the same virtues as the whites. I speak only of the whites in Europe, for I will not insult you by comparing you to the whites in the colonies."¹⁰⁹

One of the things that Condorcet sought to do in this multifaceted de-

nunciation of the slave trade (with suggestions on how to destroy slavery by degrees) was to address the myriad natural history justifications and explanations of slavery that had, by the 1780s, become general knowledge. Particularly appalling to Condorcet was the planter-generated belief that Africans were a stupid and lazy breed. To combat this categorical assertion, Condorcet attributed these traits—which he did not deny—to the brutal oppression endured by Africans. This was done in one spectacularly clear sentence that refuted the various “explanations” of the African “type” either implicitly or explicitly crafted by writers including Montesquieu, Voltaire, and de Pauw: “It is not to the climate, nor the terrain, nor the physical constitution, nor the national character that one must attribute the laziness of certain peoples; it is to the bad laws that govern them.”¹¹⁰ Echoing the now familiar thesis that this “sweet, industrious, [and] sensitive people” had been disfigured by the institution of slavery, Condorcet explained that if African slaves were indeed “lazy, stupid, and corrupt,” such was “the fate of all slaves.”¹¹¹ In sum, while he admitted in the text that Africans seemed to suffer from “great stupidity”; he asserted that they were not to blame for this: “it is not toward [black slaves] that we should direct our reproach, it is toward their masters.”¹¹²

Abolitionists on both sides of the Channel were quick to incorporate this type of argument. In his 1784 *Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves*, James Ramsey emphasized the “shared rational capacity of Europeans and slaves,” contending that it was obscured in slaves by their enslaved condition.¹¹³ More pointedly, in the *Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* (1786), Thomas Clarkson attacked the supposed link between inferior intelligence, anomalous physical characteristics, and the justification of slavery.

Had the Africans been *made for slavery*, or to become the property of any society of men, it is clear . . . that they must have been created *devoid of reason*: but this is contrary to fact. It is clear also, that there must have been many and evident signs of the *inferiority of their nature*, and that this society of men must have had a *natural right* to their dominion: but this is equally false. No such signs of *inferiority* are to be found in the one, and the right to dominion in the other is *incidental*.¹¹⁴

In France, Benjamin-Sigismond Frossard echoed many of these views in his *La cause des esclaves nègres* (1789). Although less well known now than either of the previously mentioned English abolitionists, this Lyonnais graduate of Oxford and member of the Société des amis des noirs provided the most complete

published “interdisciplinary” arguments in French against human bondage of his era. Like Benezet, Frossard developed ethnographically based valorizations of the African, dedicating an entire section to favorable assessments of the “most advanced” peoples along the *côte des esclaves* in order to counter the belief that “life in [Africa] is so miserable, that [Africans] are very happy that [we] take them out of there.”¹¹⁵ On the contrary, the inhabitants of Guinea were not only content in their native land but potentially on their way to civilization, Frossard asserted.

The rhetoric of humanization—of painting African men and women as eminently redeemable—was not only altruistic; it was a *political* decision that implicitly argued for a new future. In particular, the image of a benevolent and potentially civilized African was designed to counter the planters’ belief that any transition from slavery to liberty would be characterized by groups of violent and vengeful slaves running riot on Caribbean islands. In 1787, for example, Jean [Jacques]-Pierre Brissot de Warville, one of the founders of the Société des amis des noirs, explicitly conjured up an optimistic physiocrat-type conversion of miserable African forced laborers into grateful and contented workers.¹¹⁶ In stark contrast to either anti-slavery writers’ fears (or the dire *Code blanc*, which Diderot evoked in his editing of Raynal’s *Histoire des deux Indes*, for that matter), Brissot envisioned a new day when sensitive and appreciative Africans would make the best of manumission.

I . . . am sure that tears of joy will pour from . . . the eyes of the *nègres* [after their liberation]. No, no, it is not revenge that they will dream of when they see their chains fall. Give them bread, finally allow them to rest, allow them the freedom finally to hold their children, to enjoy the sweet pleasures of domestic life with their wives, and they will be far from thinking of revenge. On the contrary, they will see us, love us as their liberators. The *nègre* is a loving husband, a good father; revenge does not inhabit a soul that embraces these sentiments, to whom one grants the right to enjoy them.¹¹⁷

In the same basic era, this optimistic portrayal of the African’s promise was being articulated with the most efficacy by people of African descent.¹¹⁸ When the Afro-British writer Olaudah Equiano related his childhood in Africa (supplementing his own memories by “incorporating whole sentences” from Benezet),¹¹⁹ literary self-representation reached its apex: Equiano’s text served as a de facto refutation of the era’s formulaic presentation of Africans. By proving himself to be a literate author, devout Christian, businessman—in addi-

tion to being a freed African slave—Equiano cast himself as a living confutation of the existence of a degenerate or inferior race that could not better itself. In a sense, Equiano dared to “write himself into the human community,” to imagine himself, on a certain level, not only as equal, but as morally superior to an oppressive white culture.¹²⁰

By the late 1780s, the anti-slavery writings of Benezet, Saint-Lambert, Diderot-Raynal, Ramsey, Clarkson, Condorcet, and Frossard (and freed slaves including Equiano) had established a new vision of the African whose foundation was based in a new and more optimistic natural history. While none of these thinkers denied the “liabilities” of African slaves (i.e., their limited intelligence and seemingly dissolute comportment), they did not explain such failings by looking strictly to the African body itself. In fact, without exception, these activists practiced a new politicized environmentalism where they attributed the slavish African *type* to the deleterious effects of human bondage and the influence of cruel planters.

Epilogue: The Natural History of the *Noir* in an Age of Revolution

Founded in 1788, the Paris-based Société des amis des noirs was the de facto champion of a more progressive and positive view of the black African. This group, which, at its peak, theoretically had two hundred men and women on its membership rolls, drew its general ideology from French philosophes and physiocrats as well as from its spiritual and organizational forebearer, the London Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade.¹²¹ Ultimately imitating much of what their counterparts had undertaken in England, the Société's core members—Brissot de Warville, Condorcet, Lafayette, Mirabeau, Etienne Clavière, and Henri Grégoire—sought to bring the French colonies into line with a new commitment to human rights.

As numerous historians have made clear, the complicated story of the Société takes place against the backdrop of a series of changing revolutionary events. From the very inception of the organization, the principal members of the group—who were also revolutionaries—found themselves engaged in battle against a powerful and organized pro-slavery opposition that effectively integrated itself into each of the many revolutionary governments. After encountering stiff resistance to their ideas from pro-colony representatives in the Etats généraux in 1788, the Amis des noirs then faced off against an even more

powerful group of pro-slavery politicians the following year in the Assemblée nationale. As Robin Blackburn has written, this constituency effectively controlled the colonial agenda by often shouting down anti-slavery speeches or enacting arbitrary procedural regulations; not only were “[c]olonial issues . . . referred to specialist committees, on the grounds of their delicacy, [but] [a]bolitionist advocates like the Abbé Grégoire had to content themselves with antislavery interjections in debates on other subjects.”¹²² Outside the legislative body, the Amis des noirs were also excoriated by the club Massiac, a cabal of planters, colonists, and lawyers working (and writing) together with more efficiency than did the Société. This comparatively large pro-slavery lobbying group, which coordinated with likeminded elements in the Assemblée nationale and its successor the Assemblée nationale constituante, put forward a collective, public, and national response to the activities of the Amis des noirs. The success of the pro-slavery lobby during the first years of the Revolution is easily measured: while the Amis des noirs were instrumental in passing legislation that gave citizenship to the *gens de couleur libres*, they were unable either to ban French participation in the slave trade or alter the way in which human bondage functioned in the French colonies.¹²³

The effective end of the first iteration of the Société des amis des noirs came about in 1792. Accused of facilitating the slave uprisings that began to take center stage in colonial affairs in 1791—a point to which we shall return—the Amis were also overwhelmed by a series of political developments that had little to do with anti-slavery politics. As the revolution lurched toward a more violent phase in September of 1792—the monarchy had been overthrown in August—the co-founder of the Société, Brissot, broke with Robespierre and his more radical understanding of the process of national transformation. From this point forward, members of the National Convention were effectively forced to choose between these two polarizing figures. When Robespierre and the Jacobins ultimately seized control of the Comité de salut public in June of 1793, the *Brissotins* or Girondins (among them, some of the most prominent members of the Société) would soon become victims of this revolutionary body. Brissot was guillotined in October; Clavière (1793) and Condorcet (1794) committed suicide in jail. While French hagiography has often conflated the Société des amis des noirs with the fateful vote to free French slaves (February 1794), the reasons behind this decision extended well beyond the Société's extensive efforts on behalf of black Africans earlier in the decade. Indeed, as Marcel Dorigny has amply demonstrated, the resolution to do away with slav-

ery on 16 Pluviôse had as much to do with geopolitical reasons—driving the English out of Saint-Domingue—as it did with the disinterested emancipatory politics of the disbanded Amis.¹²⁴

Despite this fact, it is nonetheless undeniable that the Société des amis des noirs forever altered the landscape within which slavery and the status of the black African would be understood in France. While it may be a bit too triumphalist to claim, as Jean Ehrard has, that “the eighteenth century did not liberate the slaves, but it did liberate the era’s thought [on their behalf],” the Société’s projet nonetheless represented a particular expression of Enlightenment humanism and universalism that replaced vague assertions with political action.¹²⁵ Indeed, the anti-slavery program of the Société, which generated a sizeable corpus of pro-*noir* and anti-planter pamphlets, was not guillotined with Brissot; much of its rhetoric was passed on to the revolutionary-era actors who played an important role in the Caribbean (e.g., Léger-Félicité Sonthonax) as well as to later abolitionists (e.g., Abbé Grégoire).¹²⁶

Among the most effective rhetorical strategies handed down by the Société des amis des noirs, two merit special attention. The first is the aforementioned politics of humanization. Coming into stark relief against the era’s nascent raciology, the posited fraternity of the *noir* allowed anti-slavery writers to ask their readers to imagine themselves in the slave’s unfortunate situation. The second and related tactic that the Société bequeathed to later activists was much more accusatory: blaming the planters for the perceived moral and intellectual deficiencies of African slaves, in essence, for creating the so-called *nègre* out of a *noir*.¹²⁷

Accusing Caribbean planters (while simultaneously lauding the *perfectibility* of the *noir*) had been an effective argument in the era’s anti-slavery writings since the 1770s. This dual strategy worked much less well for the Amis, however, after reports of huge uprisings on the northern portion of Saint-Domingue began arriving in France in late 1791.¹²⁸ Pro-slavery thinkers predictably seized upon this occasion to attack the Amis as never before. In addition to accusing the members of the Société of secretly conspiring with the slaves and the English in order to overthrow the French colonies, they also increasingly disparaged the Amis’ mind-set directly, labeling them foolish *nérophiles*. While this term now evokes someone who participated in the “current of literature . . . in which black characters were depicted as possessing heroic qualities,” this expression had an altogether different meaning in the mouth of a member of the club Massiac, for example. More than a literal synonym of *ami des noirs*, the

word *nérophile* referred to those people who had an “unrealistic” appreciation of the natural history of the African as well as a lack of understanding of the realities and advantages of France’s colonial empire.¹²⁹ Indeed, the term was commonly used to pathologize anti-slavery thinkers, associating them with the horror of blackness that they supposedly loved. As the anonymous author of *Le danger de la liberté des nègres* (1791) suggested, *nérophilie* was a disease of sorts stemming from a preposterous and quixotic excess of *humanité*. This warped worldview, he continued, generated the “fantasy” that, once liberated, grateful Africans would work more efficiently in a slavery-free society.¹³⁰

Literally denigrating the Amis was but the first way of interpreting the terrifying events on Saint-Domingue; vilifying the *nègre* race as an unworthy animal-like group was the second.¹³¹ While the pro-slavery lobby had often cited the black African’s “undeniable” inferiority when justifying slavery—in 1789, for example, Pierre Malouet famously responded to the Amis’ positive views of the *noir* by describing Caribbean slaves as “monkeys” who were “subject to all sorts of vices” that could only be controlled by absolute subjugation—this type of slander intensified as writers contemplated the loss of Saint-Domingue.¹³² Consider, for example, the *fragment politique* that the former apologist of the black African Louis-Sébastien Mercier published on the *nègre* during the dark days of 1792. While Mercier claimed that this text, as well as his other *fragments*, had been languishing in his portfolio for some time, this particular diatribe certainly seems to have been chosen in order to provide an accusatory explanation of the so-called *nègre*’s recent actions in the Caribbean:

The *nègres* are equally prone to all acts of treachery and villainy. . . . These peoples, who are too wicked to [create] a national government, suffer justly for its absence. They have lost the feeling of nature; they have retrogressed because they did not know how to advance toward civilization. Their lapses and corruptness have rendered them the playthings of foreign countries; and the false, evil, and perfidious mind of these people, shying away from any worthwhile edification, has reduced them to the basest and most credulous superstition, [a state] in which they cherish fetishes and soothsayers, and surround themselves with spells.¹³³

A number of thinkers seconded more “general” ethnographic condemnations with horrifying accounts of the specifics of the slave rebellion on Saint-Domingue. This was even true of one of the greatest advocates of the *gens de couleur*, Julien Raimond. A wealthy planter of mixed origins who was present during the revolts in Cap Français, Raimond published a pamphlet in

1793 that not only conjured up the massacres in the northern part of the island, it tapped into the collective fear of what he called "anthropophagic" and "bloodthirsty" *nègres* who were purportedly relishing the suffering of their victims, many of whom were either burned alive or had their arms, legs, and genitals amputated and were left to die in horrific pain.¹³⁴

After 1794, however, much of the (written) defamation of the black African provisionally faded. In addition to the fact that the Terror phase of the Revolution had curtailed virtually all publications, writers who had previously produced anti-black tracts as part of their pro-slavery argument were no longer engaged in a difficult battle with a vocal anti-slavery organization; as such, they clearly had less reason to lash out at *négrophiles* and, along with them, the *nègre* himself. Perhaps more important, however, by 1795, the Directoire (which instituted republican colonial policies) was increasingly putting its hope for salvaging Saint-Domingue in the hands of the brilliant military tactician, politician, and ex-slave Toussaint Louverture.¹³⁵ While it is difficult to know exactly what went on in the minds of anti-black thinkers and writers living in France at this time, the temporary drop in *published* anti-black sentiment, during an era when Toussaint had driven out both the Spanish and the British and had succeeded in rebuilding much of the island's export economy, seems more than a coincidence.¹³⁶

This short-lived dip in anti-black publications was reversed by the end of the decade. In addition to the fact that the pro-slavery lobby had reorganized during the last years of the century, the 1799 coup d'état of the decidedly pro-colony and pro-slavery Napoleon Bonaparte ushered in a new era for the black African. While the full interplay between Napoleonic politics and the era's "natural history of the *nègre*" extends well beyond the purview of this study, suffice it to say here that France's colonial policies during the Consulate had a decisive impact on the representation (and treatment) of the *nègre*. In the first place, Napoleon himself had long thought that the self-determination, independence, and liberty that had been accorded to the black Africans of Guadeloupe and Saint-Domingue by the revolutionary government in 1794 were not only horrible mistakes; they were undeserved. According to an account of the Conseil d'état in 1802, Napoleon reportedly proclaimed that the Convention would have never voted for the *nègre's* freedom in 1794 had it fully recognized the palpable inferiority of the *nègre*: "How could have anyone given liberty to Africans," he asked pointedly, "to men who lacked any idea of civilization, and who had no idea of what France was?"¹³⁷

Bringing the Caribbean's *nègres* back under the yoke of a new French colonial empire was the logical corollary to Napoleon's view of black Africans. A "thorough-going restorationist" who was advised by longtime partisans of human bondage, among them Médéric Moreau de Saint-Méry, Napoleon began planning the progressive reestablishment of France's West Indian empire as soon as he arrived in power.¹³⁸ This policy was implemented to varying degrees of success on the major (formerly French) islands of the Caribbean. On Guadeloupe, the French were able to slowly reenslave the island's previously liberated population after a besieged rebel army led by Louis Delgrès intentionally blew itself up on the slopes of the Souffrière volcano outside of Basse-Terre in 1802. The reincorporation of Martinique into the French sphere of influence was not so bloody. Captured by the British in 1794, Martinique once again became part of the French empire in 1802, one of the many territories that changed hands as part of the huge realignment brought about by the Treaty of Amiens.

Four years after he arrived in power, Napoleon had succeeded not only in reestablishing the plantation system and chattel slavery on Guadeloupe and Martinique, but in reinstating the race-based lines of separation that were an integral element of the colonial world during the ancien régime. Napoleon had clearly harbored similar fantasies for Saint-Domingue, although the political and military situation on this huge island obliged the First Consul to move more carefully. In his first dealings with Toussaint Louverture, for example, Napoleon tacitly recognized the fact that this assertive and effective "general-in-chief" of Saint-Domingue needed to be treated as an equal.

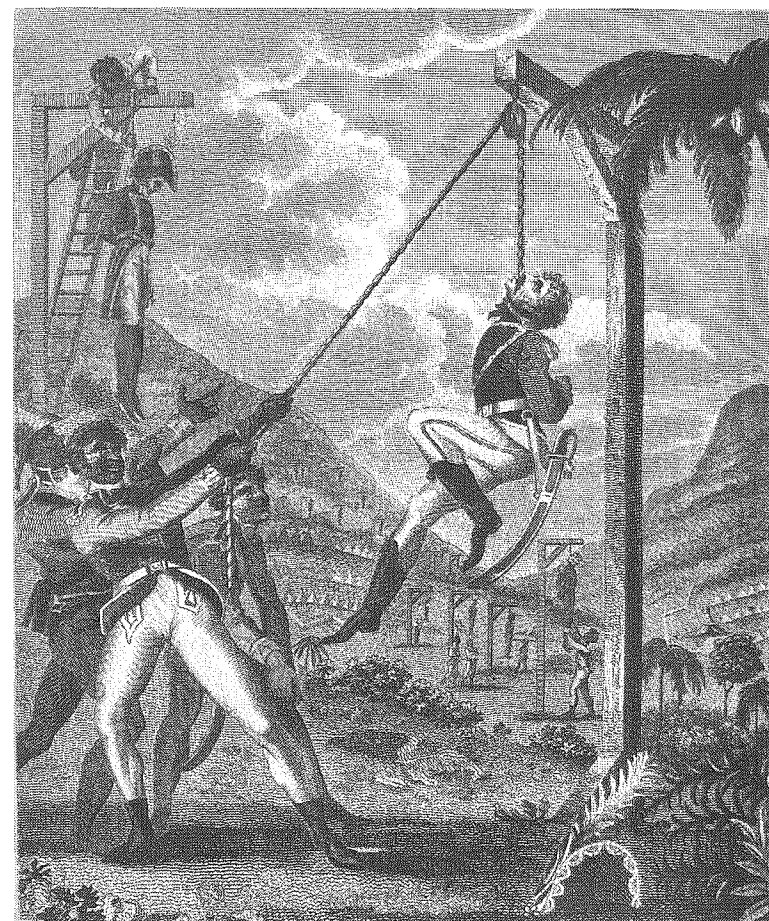
This arrangement changed radically by 1801, however. As Laurent Dubois's compelling account of the last phase of revolution on Saint-Domingue has demonstrated, Toussaint's takeover of Spanish Santo Domingo and, even more outrageous from Napoleon's perspective, the announcement of a new constitution for the island in 1801, prompted the First Consul to dispatch his brother-in-law, General Charles Victor Emmanuel Leclerc, and an initial force of 22,000 soldiers to the island, ostensibly "to disarm the blacks," and "make them free cultivators."¹³⁹ Recognizing immediately that this armada was there for more than disarmament, Louverture and his officers (among them, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Jacques Maurepas, Henri Christophe, and Jean-Baptiste Sans-Souci) initially waged a brutal and effective guerrilla war against French forces for several months. By April 1802, however, a number of French victories led to the surrender of Maurepas, Christophe, Dessalines, and, most im-

portant, Toussaint Louverture himself. On an island where racial and military alliances shifted quickly as a function of political strategies, Leclerc allowed Louverture to retain his rank and "retire" to his plantation; the insurgency's soldiers, however, were immediately incorporated into the French army and often fought quite effectively against their former comrades under Dessalines.¹⁴⁰

The success of this fragile strategy was short-lived. Although Leclerc ultimately arrested Louverture and deported him to France, a series of events beginning in July of 1802 brought disaster to the French mission. This began with a yellow fever epidemic that sprang up during the late summer and killed thousands of French soldiers, including Leclerc himself. As devastating as this plague was, the most problematic development for the French was perhaps the promotion of Donatien-Marie-Joseph Rochambeau to leader of the French expeditionary force on the island. His ruthless and bloodthirsty campaign on the island, which involved public tortures of both civilians and insurgents, "alienated even the most steadfast supporters of the French" and contributed mightily to the ultimate defeat of the French army.¹⁴¹ By December 1803, the revolutionary forces of Saint-Domingue, aided by a British blockade of the island, triumphed over the remnants of French forces during the battle of Vertières, ushering in the birth of Haiti.

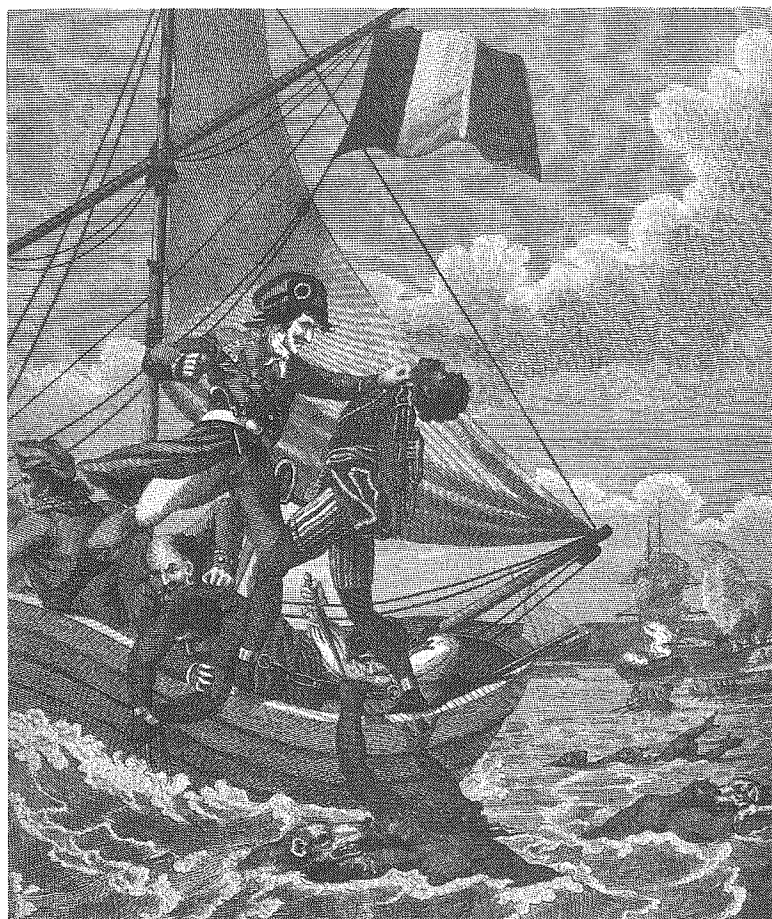
The Caribbean policies and historical events of the Consulate era utterly transformed Europe's understanding of the *nègre*. While the Haitian revolution has more recently been seen as one of the most successful resistance movements in the history of the world's oppressed peoples, in the early nineteenth century, the crushing *final* loss of Saint-Domingue, not to mention the death of more than 45,000 soldiers, was often explained in terms of a clash between cultures. "Those who wish the destruction of our colonies [now] understand that it is no longer possible to plead the cause of this barbarian race with success," *Mercure de France* declared in 1805.¹⁴²

Such images were increasingly read against the more widespread scientific racialization of the *nègre* that had been taking place since the end of the eighteenth century. This process took several forms. As T. Carlos Jacques has asserted, much of what was ultimately written about the black African at this time can be tied to a belief in a new cognitive determinism that was increasingly projected onto the *nègre*. In his 1797 *Etudes de l'homme physique et moral*, for example, J.-A. Perreau portrayed black minds of an entirely "degraded nature" and "doomed sometimes to stupidity, sometimes to the most extravagant



A British view of vengeful *nègres* executing Frenchmen during the Haitian revolution (1791–1804). From Marcus Rainsford, *An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti* (1805). Courtesy Wesleyan University Library, Special Collections and Archives.

delirium of the imagination."¹⁴³ Along similar lines, in 1800, the influential philosopher Joseph-Marie de Gérando (Degérando) developed many of these ideas in *Des signes et de l'art de penser*, stating that the *nègre's* intellectual faculties were characterized by a type of mental "void,"¹⁴⁴ an unfeeling nothingness that, implicitly, separated the black comprehension of the exterior world from that of whites. Generations of thinkers had alluded to the machinelike qualities of the African mind before de Gérando, but his reevaluation of this race positioned the *nègre* as a cognitive child who only saw "in nature what was



French massacre of black rebel troops on Saint-Domingue in 1803. The dogs in the surf are Cuban bloodhounds imported by Vicomte Donatien de Rochambeau, commander of French forces, to hunt down the insurgents. From Marcus Rainsford, *An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti* (1805). Courtesy Wesleyan University Library, Special Collections and Archives.

directly related to the needs of his senses."¹⁴⁵ Superimposed on a whole host of other negative stereotypes, including the late-to-catch-on physiognomical notions proposed decades before by Johann Casper Lavater, such a view implicitly recognized Europeans as the de facto masters of this intellectually and physically inferior brood.¹⁴⁶ Perhaps as important, this new theory of mind also created a new barrier between white and black that refuted the belief in a

shared sensibility among humans, one of the critical elements of anti-slavery discourse.¹⁴⁷

In addition to diffusing a belief in a cognitive blackness, late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century race theorists also increasingly emphasized the supposed differences between blacks and whites on a zoological level. Although some naturalists, including Georges Cuvier, carried on in the footsteps of Buffon by putting forward a (bleak) monogenist account of humankind, others, like Virey, asserted in works such as his *Histoire naturelle du genre humain* (1800) that the era's anatomical discoveries proved without a doubt that "the *nègre* differ[ed] very specifically from all other races of man."¹⁴⁸ As was often the case with polygenist thinking, Virey accompanied this assertion with a specific view of humankind's origins: "the gentle and fertile sky of Asia appears to have been the original cradle of humankind, as it was of religion; but the *nègre* species and the American races were undoubtedly born elsewhere."¹⁴⁹ Virey followed up on this belief in multiple human origins even more vehemently four years later in the article "Nègre" that he supplied for J.-F.-P. Deterville's *Nouveau dictionnaire d'histoire naturelle* (1804). In this substantial entry on the black African, presumably written after the loss of Saint-Domingue, Virey summarized the many areas in which the *nègre* was supposedly at variance with the European, emphasizing, in particular, the beastlike level of "cerebral function" that he attributed to a brain of inferior size.¹⁵⁰ Virey's conviction that the *nègre* was "radically different from the white species" was seconded by numerous thinkers during the same decade.¹⁵¹ The prolific naturalist and philosopher Jean-Claude de La Métherie asserted in his 1806 *De la perfectibilité et de la dégénérescence*, for example, that there were clearly two primary aboriginal races at the beginning of humankind's history, the race *hindouse* (Europeans and Tartars) and *la race nègre*, the former of which, over time, "spread out over the surface of the earth."¹⁵²

By the early nineteenth century, natural history was exiling the *nègre* from the family of man; race science had finally "slipped its biblical moorings and abandoned the scriptural genealogy of peoples set out in Genesis."¹⁵³ Not unexpectedly, these classificatory and conceptual understandings of the *nègre* intersected with a new wave of anti-black feeling among French pro-slavery thinkers, who, after years of frustration and perhaps restraint, could now fully express themselves with impunity. Among the numerous texts from this era that castigate the *nègre*, none is as telling as Valentin de Cullion's 1802 *Examen de l'esclavage en général*. As his predecessors had done, this lawyer and former

owner of property on Saint-Domingue began his diatribe by looking back at the "mistakes" of the past, lashing out in particular at the now-disbanded Société des amis des noirs and accusing them of ushering in the loss of the world's most valuable colony. Following up on this idea, de Cullion also complained that foolish *négrophile* texts such as Henri Bernardin de Saint Pierre's *Etudes de la nature* (first ed. 1784) continued to have a pernicious influence, despite their lies. Horrified, in light of recent events, that Bernardin's (recently republished) book could assert that certain African peoples "outshone [the Europeans] in moral qualities,"¹⁵⁴ de Cullion retorted: "[Bernardin de Saint Pierre] attributes to the *nègres* a superiority over us in qualities of the heart. . . . [I]t is absurd to assume that what one mistakenly calls goodness in a stupid being is genuine goodness when, in reality, it is no more than a negation of evil."¹⁵⁵

This was only the beginning of de Cullion's brutal ethnological and cognitive vilification of the *nègre*. Seeking to naturalize slavery, de Cullion posited that since "there is nothing to be expected from such an inferior a race of men," it was entirely expected that *les nègres* were "good for essentially nothing but slavery" and that "slavery is therefore [their] natural state."¹⁵⁶ Indeed, the *nègre's* destiny was an imperative according to de Cullion: "These people are the dregs, the scum of the human race; therefore let them occupy the lowest rank. Let them serve. Nature has decided their fate."¹⁵⁷

By the early nineteenth century, natural history had come to the fore of the slavery question. This was true not only in pro-slavery texts such as de Cullion's, but also in the way that an anti-slavery thinker such as Abbé Henri Grégoire was forced to recast his own arguments during this era. In his seminal 1808 *De la littérature des Nègres*—the first entirely positive assessment of Africans to appear in French since Frossard's *La cause des esclaves nègres* (1789)—Grégoire provided a comprehensive moral, spiritual, and intellectual apologia of the capacities of the black African; to a large extent, the publication of *De la littérature* was the culmination of decades of *négrophile* politics.¹⁵⁸ But what had changed between the era of the first iteration of the Amis des noirs and the reestablishment of slavery in the Caribbean was the way in which natural history functioned within the overall debate on slavery. While the discipline of natural history had always been linked to the overall justification of slavery, the *sciences de l'homme* were now totally imbricated with questions of the African's human bondage. As such, Grégoire was unable to begin his text by trotting out the now well-seasoned *négrophile* conviction

that the shortcomings of African "faculties" could be explained by the institution of slavery itself; rather, he was obliged to construct a careful refutation of what had become an authoritative nexus of biopolitical notions projected onto the *nègre*. In addition to contesting the increasingly influential polygenist understanding of humankind, Grégoire refuted a number of essentialist anatomical views of Africans advanced by Meckel, Christoph Meiners, Edward Long, and Franz Joseph Gall, the latter who had put forward the sinister new science of *cranioscopy*, later renamed phrenology. While much of the overall debate on slavery remained unchanged by 1808—economic (and national) interests continued to diverge from universal human values—the *nègre's* body had become an increasingly critical battlefield for pro-slavery and anti-slavery thinkers.¹⁵⁹ This had not always been the case. When the first generation of Enlightenment-era writers had argued about slavery, there had always been one thing about which there was little debate: the undeniable anatomical and cognitive inferiority of the *nègre*.¹⁶⁰

Coda

Black Africans and the Enlightenment Legacy

The history and the legacy of the Enlightenment [are] worth understanding and arguing about.

PAUL GILROY, *THE BLACK ATLANTIC*

In one of the more lyrical moments of the *Encyclopédie's* "Discours préliminaire," Jean le Rond d'Alembert reflected on the discipline of History. In his estimation, this branch of learning stemmed from an instinctive tendency to enter into dialogue with past and future inhabitants of the earth:

It is not enough to live with and understand our contemporaries. Excited by curiosity and pride, and seeking through a natural inclination to embrace the past, the present, and the future, we desire to exist both with those who will follow in our footsteps and those who have preceded us. From this [desire] stems the origin and the study of History. We are linked to past centuries through the spectacle of [humankind's] vices and virtues, as well as its knowledge and mistakes, just as our own are transmitted to future centuries.¹

D'Alembert's conviction that historians should engage with past and present events from an ethical or philosophical perspective remains one of many legacies associated with the Enlightenment era. The irony, of course, is that the Enlightenment itself has been judged quite severely against this same standard.²

Among the many regretful "vices" attributed to the eighteenth century—child labor, forced marriages, and a dehumanizing rationality come to mind—no failing stands out as jarringly as the European-orchestrated trade and exploitation of African slaves. The legacy of this deportation, which, on French ships alone, grew to thirty thousand Africans per year by the late 1780s, continues to exact a huge toll on Africa as well as on the diasporic populations that slavery created. Both the magnitude and the multidimensional character of this five-hundred-year history of forced migration have incited a wide variety of historical treatments. Statistically minded historians, beginning with Philip Curtin, have pieced together the numerical history of slavery in a way that colonial administrations themselves could not have imagined.³ Africanists such as Elikia M'Bokolo, Serge Daget, François Renault, Paul Lovejoy, P. E. H. Hair, John Thornton, and Robin Law have meticulously reconstructed the encounters between Africans and Europeans that took place in the slave-driven economies of cities like Ouidah in present-day Bénin.⁴ Maritime historians including Stephanie Smallwood, Robert Harms, and Marcus Rediker have recounted the devastating realities of the Middle Passage.⁵ Historians of the Caribbean, including Laurent Dubois, have meticulously reconstructed the complex history of African agency in the New World. Caribbeanists and Latin American specialists such as Gwendolyn Hall and Paul Gilroy have taken up the cultures and identities of Africa's diasporic peoples.⁶ Legal historians such as Sue Peabody and Keila Grinberg have looked at the network of laws regulating the circulation of bodies and sexual mores of African slaves both in the Caribbean and in European countries.⁷

Contiguous to these material, cultural, and economic assessments of human bondage is the thorny question of how slavery could not only continue to exist but even flourish during an era of supposed Enlightenment. The first real studies to grapple with the problem of slavery and Enlightenment appeared, not surprisingly, in the 1960s and 1970s, during and just after the era of decolonization and the appearance of pioneering works such as Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and Frantz Fanon's *Les damnés de la terre* (1961).⁸ Critical works from this era include many now-classic studies cited in this book: among them works by Yves Benot, Michèle Duchet, Roger Mercier, Leon-François Hoffmann, and William B. Cohen, the latter an American who was castigated by the French press when his *The French Encounter with Africans* appeared in 1980.⁹ While the respective methods of these scholars vary in significant ways, each conjured up a global eighteenth century involv-

ing the French Empire, French-organized slavery, and French Enlightenment ideas and structures. Duchet, in particular, famously demonstrated how Enlightenment thinkers including Raynal worked under the umbrella of a colonial administration that, particularly after the Seven Years' War, was keen on facilitating the ongoing slave trade. While it may be hard to imagine now, this was a shot across the bow of Enlightenment studies; in the era before scholarly works like Duchet's were published, eighteenth-century scholars had generally considered slavery and empire ancillary concerns at best. To the extent that such questions were even raised, this was done either to laud the anti-slavery movement among the philosophes or to quarantine these "problems" from the more important and progress-driven view of the high Enlightenment.

Four decades after Duchet's *Anthropologie et histoire au siècle des Lumières* first appeared, the intersection between the Enlightenment and the problem of slavery remains a beguiling area of inquiry. Akin to the way that eighteenth-century naturalists pored over descriptions of non-Europeans, scholars interested in resolving the problem of race and slavery have combed through the era's thought in search of some sort of answer to this nagging concern. Among the generation of scholars influenced by postcolonial approaches to such subjects—which seek, *grosso modo*, to question or to rewrite the Western narrative to varying degrees—the prevailing tendency has understandably been to critique the role of the Enlightenment in the overall representation and subjugation of the black African. In French circles, this effort has been led by Louis Sala-Molins.¹⁰ In his two very widely read indictments of what he deemed to be the failures and hypocrisy of the long Enlightenment, Sala-Molins has argued that this intellectual movement not only failed to live up to its own rhetoric and emancipatory values; it produced a horrific synthesis of race and law that grew out of the 1685 *Code noir*.¹¹ While among the most polemical, Sala-Molins is far from the only critic to make this point. Echoing aspects of Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*,¹² a number of scholars have actually identified Enlightenment-era philosophy itself as containing the very structures of oppression used to control Africans. In *Race, Writing, and Difference*, Henry Louis Gates Jr. highlights the paradox of the Enlightenment's use of *reason*, writing that "while the [era] is characterized by its foundation on man's ability to reason, it simultaneously used the absence and presence of [this faculty] to delimit and circumscribe the very humanity of the cultures and people of color which Europeans had been 'discovering' since the Renaissance."¹³ In a similar vein, David Theo Goldberg has argued

in his *Racist Culture* that "subjection perhaps properly defines the order of the Enlightenment: subjection by human intellect, colonial control through physical and cultural domination, and economic superiority through mastery of the laws of the market."¹⁴ Most provocatively, the philosopher Charles Mills maintained in *The Racial Contract* that the very basis of the Enlightenment—an era that corresponded to the golden age of contract theory—can be characterized by a racially based covenant of dominance between Europeans and non-Europeans, especially people of African descent.

While many of these claims are sweeping, and neglect to define just what "Enlightenment" was, it is nonetheless incontestable that one of the recurrent and constituent elements of high-Enlightenment thought, present not only in Montesquieu's *De l'esprit des Lois*, Voltaire's *Essai sur les mœurs*, and in Raynal's *Histoire des deux Indes*, is the fact that the imperatives of natural history often crisscrossed and negated the theoretically inviolable tenets of natural law.

An illuminating example of how the eighteenth century began teaching and institutionalizing belief in the inherited inferiority of the *nègre* can be found, appropriately enough, in Rousseau's *Emile, ou, de l'Éducation* (1762). More explicitly than any other thinker of his generation, Rousseau demonstrated the "application" of ethnographic knowledge. Drawing from Buffon's climate theory, Montesquieu's geo-ethnic relativism, and some vague notions about African physiognomy, Rousseau asserted quite straightforwardly that a student's intellectual potential was undoubtedly climate- and geography-dependent: "The country is not an inconsequential factor in the education of men; humans only achieve their full potential in temperate climates."¹⁵ This belief, that humankind's promise could only be realized in a moderate environment, is consonant with a Buffonian worldview; given the fact that humans supposedly degenerated in extreme climates, it followed that the moral and intellectual promise of a student would also be linked to the conditions in which he was raised. But Rousseau also went further than Buffon when he suggested in a much more deterministic fashion that humans living in taxing locations would make poor students because of their brains. Presumably conflating the era's belief (as best expressed by the German anatomist Johan Friedrich Meckel) that African brains were different in color with the notion that Africans and Laplanders were intellectually inferior, Rousseau declared: "It also appears that the organization of the brain is less perfect at the two poles. Neither the *nègres* nor the Laplanders have the intellect of Europeans."¹⁶ This was a significant departure from the type of environmentalism found in

Buffon's *Histoire naturelle*. Unlike the famous naturalist's understanding of the *nègre*, Rousseau's take on this human variety emphasized the importance of human anatomy in the *nègre's* educability. This was the result of the increasingly material study of the African's many "defects." While Buffon's environmentalist view of the *nègre* continued to hold sway with most thinkers (including Rousseau), the growing list of discernible, measurable, and potentially essential differences between blacks and whites was clearly undermining the more optimistic aspects of the "unity of the human species." This was also obvious eight years later, when Abbé Raynal published the initial (1770) edition of the *Histoire des deux Indes*. While the third (1780) version of this text would ultimately be castigated by pro-slavery thinkers as a despicable example of *nérophile* ideology, the first two editions present one of the most pessimistic, anatomically driven, and polygenist views of the *nègre* existing in eighteenth-century French thought.

The admittedly anachronistic question raised by such texts is one of consistency: how could the proponents of the Enlightenment's classical liberalism fall prey to a reprehensible, race-based view of the *nègre*, one that undoubtedly helped perpetuate a grave injustice against millions of black Africans from Guadeloupe to Mauritius? In this book, I have attempted to demonstrate that this distressing paradox is not necessarily the inevitable outcome of an intentional European hegemony per se, but often the result of the two givens in the era's thought: the convenient disciplinary compartmentalization of the "subject" of the *nègre* and the prevailing authority of natural history. Such is the case in Raynal's *Histoire des deux Indes*. A multi-authored work reflecting divergent perspectives (and disciplinary orientations), the *Histoire* reflects a general tendency to unbundle the moral status of enslavement from the physical status of those people being enslaved.

This curious disjunction between the *politics* and the *body* of blackness is to be found, not only in compendiums like the *Histoire des deux Indes* and the *Encyclopédie*, but in the worldviews of individual thinkers as well. Jaucourt's view of the African, as demonstrated in chapter 4, provides a telling example of this phenomenon. Best remembered for one of the earliest and most sustained refutations of African chattel slavery in Enlightenment thought ("Traite des nègres," pub. 1766), Jaucourt was simultaneously responsible for producing the veritable nexus of stereotypical assessments of African ethnicities that appear in the *Encyclopédie*. In these short (and generally pilfered) entries, Jaucourt provided concise sketches of supposedly backward African ethnicities

that functioned like ethnographic snapshots. Far from establishing real differences among the groups of Africans he wrote about, articles like Jaucourt's "Mindingues" contributed to an overall ethnography of the black African that evaluated different types of *nègres* as more or less ugly, more or less prone to ridiculous customs, and more or less useful in various situations of labor.¹⁷ While very much the anti-slavery thinker, Jaucourt nonetheless contributed to the uncritical and tautological association of the term *nègre* with *esclave*.

This general blindness to the biopolitics of representation touched all disciplines. Among more properly anatomical thinkers, a group of men for whom the influence of natural history was unimpeachable, "research" on the *nègre's reticulum mucosum*, "black" blood, or "black" sperm, was initially understood as having *nothing* to do with the reality of African chattel slavery; such inquiries were simply envisioned as part of an impartial quest to define the parameters of the human species. This seeming myopia is also found among more conceptually minded naturalists, including Buffon. Like all thinkers of his generation, Buffon inherited a nexus of anecdotal stereotypes and utility-based assessments of African ethnicities that functioned as facts: facts that, in his view, needed to be processed and interpreted. This was, after all, the project of the era's nascent human science. In the same way that botanists and entomologists were systematizing plants and insects, Buffon sought to integrate the *nègre* and all human varieties into a more comprehensive and explanatory theory. His premise, monogenetic degeneration, was the first to incorporate morphological and pigmentation "data" from travelogues, anatomical information from thinkers like Pierre Barrère, and basic stereotypes of the world's peoples into a speculative chronology suggesting that a primitive white prototype had given rise to the world's different *variétés* over deep time.¹⁸ While Buffon did acknowledge the unfairness of the ethnography flowing from the Caribbean, the overall treatment of the *nègre* in the *Histoire naturelle* nonetheless put forward an understanding of blackness that was both derived from and compatible with the context of slavery.

As noted in the Introduction, Buffon's 1749 "Variétés dans l'espèce humaine" has become a subject of great debate. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that this section of the *Histoire naturelle* is now something of a flash-point, a text where the reputation of the entire Enlightenment as either racist or non-racist seems to be at stake. While it may seem curious for specialists of this era to accord so much importance to one work, Buffon's ethnography-based theory of human degeneration lends itself to multiple and coherent

readings by both the apologists and censors of the Enlightenment. Among the apologists (both for Buffon and for the Enlightenment in general), it has been argued that this account of humankind's common origin stands in stark contrast to the vague nexus of polygenist thought circulating in France after the 1740s. After all, while anatomically minded writers were emphasizing fundamental and essential differences between whites and blacks, Buffon argued that such differences were nothing more than ancillary changes that had taken place over time as a result of the environment. Generally classing different ethnic groups with the botanical term "varieties" as opposed to the zoological term "races," it is argued, Buffon maintained that Africans, Danes, Eskimos, and Chinese were not members of essential categories; they were potentially shifting members of a dynamic species defined by an ability to interbreed and morph over time as it moved about the globe. To a large degree, this "enlightened" view of humankind is the one that is generally espoused today.

This is not the sole reading of Buffon. To his critics, the essential sameness that Buffon preached is seen as nothing more than a disingenuous sham that, as Sala-Molins famously argued, confused *unité* with *égalité*.¹⁹ Stating that Buffon's theory of human sameness is perhaps more insidious than theories of essential difference, Sala-Molins has emphasized the fact that Buffon's theory far from accords the *nègre* a real spot in the family of man; in fact, he has argued that the supposed conceptual affinities between Africans and Europeans in Buffon amount to nothing more than a mirage whose corollary—human *perfectibilité*—actually overlaps with the basic disciplinary structure of the 1685 *Code noir*.²⁰ Never, according to Sala-Molins, did the naturalist maintain that the African was a full-fledged member of the human species on the same level with whites.

The ambiguities of Buffon's view of humankind echo those of the entire Enlightenment, of course. Seen from a more hopeful vantage point, Buffon's unified view of humankind was unquestionably a *de rigueur* concept within the writings of anti-slavery thinkers, including the Quaker Anthony Benezet, the French abolitionist Abbé Grégoire, and the German naturalist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach. All three not only studied and cited Buffon; they combined monogenism with stories of "high-performing" Africans in order to assert that blacks had the same potential as whites. Less optimistically, as I have made clear in this book, Buffon's monogenism also generated a new type of toxic speculation on the African. While Buffon himself actively attempted to prevent this, his degeneration theory—an explanatory paradigm emphasizing

human change over time—prompted more anatomically oriented thinkers to retell the story of the *nègre*. Rejecting Buffon's fluid color map, *savants* including Le Cat and de Pauw overlaid environmentalism with a bleak anatomy- and heredity-based understanding of the black African. Their theories, which included scientifically derived data regarding darkened African blood, bile, brains, and sperm, poisoned the positive politics of Buffon's initial theory of monogenesis. If Buffon had explained the African as an accident of climate, the new anatomy positioned the African as radically pathological. By 1770 the consequences of this groundbreaking view of the African race were quite evident: a number of writers including Edward Long in England and J.-P. Roussetot de Surgy in France had enough anatomical data to reject monogenesis as part of their pro-slavery agendas. In a sense, Buffon's monogenesis had contributed to its own downfall; by inviting more speculation on how the process worked, it set the stage for a much more physiologically oriented understanding of the Black African.

Throughout this book I have shied away from assigning thinkers like Buffon to a particular space within a legacy-driven narrative. This is more a question of method than it is a lack of ideological orientation. In avoiding an account that seeks either to accuse or to exculpate, I have sought, above all, to come to grips with an overall representation of the black African that advanced the prospect of the African's *variétal perfectibilité* and *equality*, on the one hand, and the supposed hopelessness of an immutable, violent, animalistic, and hypersexual *race nègre*, on the other. I have also attempted to show how this natural history breakdown did not skew along political lines; as I have often pointed out in this book, anti-slavery thinkers initially held the same beliefs regarding the African as their pro-slavery interlocutors.

This leads me to a final word about my own objectives. While I have attempted to be as fair-minded as possible, this study is far from morally neutral.²¹ Even the most dispassionate or clinical passages of *The Anatomy of Blackness* reveal my own interests and preoccupations. Led to this subject via a fascination with the Enlightenment-era life sciences, I soon came to focus not only on the anatomy of the black African, but also on the nefarious shift in the ontological status of "black" and implicitly, "white" anatomy during the eighteenth century. If, during the era before "Enlightenment," blackness came into relief against a synthesis of biblical exegeses and vague physical explanations dating from antiquity, during the eighteenth century, the concept of blackness was increasingly dissected, handled, measured, weighed, and used as a de-

monstrable wedge between human categories. More than just a descriptor, blackness became a thing, defined less by its inverse relationship to light than by its supposed materiality. This eighteenth-century belief in the deep-rooted physicality of Africanness helps us to comprehend the power of "representation" and its connection to "reality" in the era's thought. The anatomization of blackness, in short, not only reflects the violence enacted on black bodies in the pursuit of knowledge; it mirrors the increasingly rationalized brutality to which real Africans were subjected during this time in the colonial world.

Notes

In the notes that follow below, the *Encyclopédie, ou, dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts, et des métiers*, edited by Diderot and d'Alembert (Paris, 1751–72), is cited as *ENC*. The three editions of Raynal's *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*, commonly abbreviated as *Histoire des deux Indes* (4 vols., Amsterdam, 1770; 8 vols., The Hague, 1774; 10 vols., Geneva, 1780) are cited as *HDI*. Buffon's *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière* (Paris, 1749–88) is cited as *HN*.

Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. I have also modernized French and English in both text and notes, although actual titles have been given in their original forms.

Preface

1. Kennedy, *Nigger*, 4.
2. Moreover, in a text such as Buffon's *Histoire naturelle*, the capitalization (or not) of the term *nègre* is seemingly arbitrary, shifting from section to section. Capitalization may have had more to do with the typesetter than with Buffon himself, although there are places where it seems more deliberate, for example, when Buffon is citing a list of human categories.
3. Eze, *Race and the Enlightenment*, 2.
4. Gordon, "Introduction," in *Postmodernism and the Enlightenment*, ed. id., 2.

Introduction

1. See Klaus, "A History of the Science of Pigmentation," in *Pigmentary System*, ed. Nordlund, 5. See also Riolan, *Manuel anatomique et pathologique*.
2. Leeuwenhoek, *Collected Letters*, 4: 245.
3. Alexis Littre is sometimes referred to as Littré. The experiment involved speculation on the relationship between the color of the foreskin and the skin on other parts of the penis. See *Histoire de l'Académie royale des sciences de Paris* ([1702] 1703), 31–32.
4. For a more complete contextualization of Malfert's text, see Ehrard, *Lumières et esclavage*, 105. As Ehrard's account makes clear, Malfert's article, "Mémoire sur l'origine des nègres et des Américains," was criticized for engaging somewhat positively with the idea that the two races came from different seeds.
5. Monsieur de J***, "Explication," in *Mémoires pour l'Histoire des sciences et des beaux arts* (1738). This is the so-called *Journal de Trévoux*.
6. "Quelle est la cause physique de la couleur des nègres, de la qualité de leurs cheveux, et de la dégénération de l'un et de l'autre?" The question was published in the *Jour-*

nal des sçavans and in a variety of other periodicals in 1739. For the essays in response, see Bibliothèque municipale de Bordeaux ms. 825/65.

7. See the more developed discussion of these findings in chap. 4 above.

8. See Augstein, *Race*, ed. id., xx.

9. See Porter, ed., *Cambridge History of Science*, vol. 4: *Eighteenth-Century Science*, 50–51.

10. "L'anatomie a été portée presque au dernier degré de perfection [puisqu'il] les anatomistes et les physiologistes les plus célèbres ont senti qu'il était temps de diriger leurs recherches vers les causes des mouvements des animaux et les ressorts cachés de leurs sensations" (Millin, *Magasin encyclopédique*, 4: 155).

11. See Morenas, *Dictionnaire portatif*, 387, on "la forme qui convient le mieux avec leur façon de vivre [et la satisfaction de] leurs besoins." According to Morenas, anatomical knowledge was among the most valuable contributions that science had to offer, inasmuch as it was essential in the "traitement des maladies qui sont l'objet de la médecine et de la chirurgie [treatment of diseases that are the object of medicine and surgery]" (ibid., 4:155).

12. Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 26–35.

13. The era's basic understanding of the *nègre* was also heavily influenced by symbolic concepts related to darkness. As critics including Gustav Jahoda have asserted, the blackness of the *nègre* went far beyond the strictly physical realm. Denoting both the presence of obscurity and the absence of color, blackness seemingly functioned as the antithesis of Christ the Light; it also recalled the curse that had been cast on the son of Ham. See Jahoda, *Images of Savages*, 26.

14. Buffon cites Lade quite frequently. See, e.g., his description of the Hottentot in *HN*, 3: 476.

15. Swift, "On Poetry: A Rhapsody," in id., *Poems*, ed. Williams, 2: 645–46.

16. Lobo, *Voyage to Abyssinia*, trans. Johnson from Joachim Le Grand's French translation of the Portuguese text, which appeared in 1728.

17. Lenglet du Fresnoy, *Géographie des enfans*, 92: "D. Qu'entendez-vous par la Cafre-rie? R. La Cafre-rie ou le Pays des Cafres est un pays sur la mer, habité par les peuples les plus barbares et les plus stupides de l'Afrique. Les endroits les plus considérables sont le Cap de Bonne-Espérance aux Hollandais, et Sofala qui appartient aux Portugais."

18. "on peut dire qu'un nègre est tel par toutes les parties de son corps, si on en excepte les dents. Tous les organes portent plus ou moins l'empreinte de cette couleur, la substance médullaire du cerveau est noirâtre, cette couleur domine plus ou moins dans les diverses parties de cet organe, la liqueur spermatique, le sang, etc." (*Bibliothèque universelle des dames* [1787], 1: 210).

19. All these dictionnaires had entries for *nègre*. For a discussion of *Encyclopédie* definitions of the *nègre*, see "Processing Africa and Africans in the *Encyclopédie*" in chap. 3 above.

20. See the 1732 *Dictionnaire universel françois et latin*, 4: 64. The same definition is used in later editions. *ENC*, 11: 140, defines "Nigritie," as a "large country of Africa, that stretches from the east to the west of the [river] Niger. It is bordered on the north by the Barbary deserts, on the east by Nubia and Abyssinia, on the south by Guinea, and on the west by the western ocean. This country comprises various small kingdoms, as many north of the Niger as those in the middle, and on both coasts of this great river [grand pays d'Afrique, qui s'étend de l'est à l'ouest des deux côtés du Niger. Il est borné N. par

les déserts de la Barbarie, E. par la Nubie et l'Abyssinie, S. par la Guinée, O. par l'Océan occidental. Ce pays comprend plusieurs petits royaumes, tant au nord du Niger qu'au midi, et des deux côtés de ce grand fleuve]."

21. What is less apparent, and perhaps more interesting, is the fact that the author of the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* article refers to the *nègre* as a *peuple d'Afrique*. A more natural history-oriented *dictionnaire* might have called the *nègre* a *variété*, an originally botanical term used to describe what was deemed a subset of the larger category of the human.

22. The term *nègre* was also used to refer to the "dark-skinned" peoples living in places such as Madagascar and even New Guinea, who were, of course, of mixed African, Malayo-Indonesian, and Arab ancestry, among others. Buffon considered them *Caffres*, however. Buffon (or his typesetter) spells the word both *Cafre* and *Caffre*. I have chosen to use *Caffre*.

23. Berthelin, *Abrégé du Dictionnaire universel françois et latin*, 2: 19.

24. This also overlapped with the French language's qualification of each noun by gender.

25. While this curious gendering of the term *nègre* is certainly linked to that fact that black male slaves generally outnumbered their female and adolescent counterparts in French plantation colonies, it is also likely that such an equation protected many Europeans' consciences from the more sobering reality of female and child slave labor. In the eighteenth century, French ships' registries recorded that the slaves they transported were 47.4% men, 26% women, and 26.6% children (Geggus, "Sex Ratio, Age and Ethnicity").

26. This was a revised version of Maupertuis's 1744 *Dissertation physique à l'occasion du nègre blanc*. Strangely, the *nègre blanc* did not become an important element in his cosmology until he rewrote the *Dissertation* the following year. See chap. 2 above for fuller discussion of this.

27. *HN*, 3: 519. The term *Noir* is equally fraught, but generally did not have the political connotations of *nègre* as "slave." In general, Buffon did not use the term *Noir* as a taxonomic marker; in his text it functions as a general adjective that occasionally is used as a noun.

28. Ibid., 453. Today, "kaffir" is regarded as one of the most derogatory ethnic slurs in South Africa, and its public use is actionable there. During the sixteenth century, the Portuguese used this Arabic word to refer very generally to the indigenous peoples of southern and eastern Africa. The Dutch later applied it to non-Khoisan, Bantu peoples, notably the Xhosa. Buffon uses *caffre* or *cafre* as a general marker to designate the Khoisan, however, very much in contrast with its denotation in southern Africa. The precise meaning of the word in its various spellings (*kaffir*, *cafre*, *caffre*) was very slippery during the early-modern era, particularly among armchair naturalists in Europe.

29. These maligned peoples were very often referred to as Hottentots. Labeled as stutterers by the Dutch, the Khoisan peoples suffered terribly in no small part due to the perception that their supposedly outlandish behavior and customs made them subhuman. Unlike the black ethnicities of the African littoral, the hunter-gatherers and pastoral peoples now known as the Khoi and San were rarely enslaved (although sometimes enserfed) and even less often deported; their fate and their legacy is not one of forced diaspora; they died from European diseases, were run off their land, and, in the case of the San, were exterminated in genocidal campaigns by both Boers and Xhosa. Since this book seeks, among other things, to explore the treatment of blackness in the plantation

economies of the Caribbean, the Khoisan peoples are not a major focus here. For more information regarding the Hottentot and European representations of them, see Armstrong and Tennenhouse, eds., *Violence of Representation*; Barnard, *Hunters and Herders*; Elphick, *Khoikhoi*; Holmes, *African Queen*; Hudson, "'Hottentots' and the Evolution of European Racism"; "'Hottentot Venus,'" Merians, *Envisioning the Worst*; Rawson, *God, Gulliver, and Genocide*; Sharpley-Whiting, *Black Venus*; and Fauvelle-Aymar, *L'invention du Hottentot*.

30. In the early 1750s, however, Buffon's ideas on the African were hardly seen as the most sensational or compelling aspect of the *Histoire naturelle*. Given the overall epistemological debates that were raging at the time, it was the potentially materialist implications of the *Histoire naturelle* that preoccupied most thinkers. See, e.g., Lelarge de Lignac's *Lettres à un Américain*, 5, where it is affirmed quite correctly that Buffon's universe has no need of a God.

31. *ENC*, 8: 347.

32. "Je crois que les nègres sont moins beaux pour les nègres mêmes, que les blancs pour les nègres ou pour les blancs" (Denis Diderot, *Salon de 1767*, in id., *Oeuvres complètes*, 16: 236).

33. "celle-ci jusqu'à la tête de l'homme, du nègre, à celle du singe" (Diderot, *Voyage de Hollande*, *ibid.*, 17: 447).

34. "née pour l'abjection et la dépendance, pour le travail et le châtement" (*HDI*, 6: 207).

35. See Hoffmann, *Nègre romantique*, 50.

36. "leurs yeux ronds, leur nez épaté, leurs lèvres toujours grosses, leurs oreilles différemment figurées, la laine de leur tête, la mesure même de leur intelligence, mettent entre eux et les autres espèces d'hommes des différences prodigieuses" (Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations*, in id., *Oeuvres complètes*, 11: 6). Earlier titles and versions of the *Essai* include an unauthorized version, the 1745 *Abrégé de l'Histoire universelle*, and a version revised by Voltaire, the *Essai sur l'Histoire générale et sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations* (1756). It received its final title used in 1769. See the introduction to Voltaire's *Oeuvres complètes*, i–vii, for the complete publication history.

37. "Quand nous travaillons aux sucreries, et que la meule nous attrape le doigt, on nous coupe la main ; quand nous voulons nous enfuir, on nous coupe la jambe: je me suis trouvé dans les deux cas. C'est à ce prix que vous mangez du sucre en Europe" (Voltaire, *Candide*, in id., *Romans et contes*, 189). For a brief assessment of blood-soaked sugar, see Hoffmann, *Nègre romantique*, 113–14.

38. Festa, *Sentimental Figures of Empire*, 2, writes: "In an era in which imperial reach increasingly outstripped imaginative grasp, sentimental fiction created the tropes that enabled readers to reel the world home in their minds. By designating certain kinds of figures as worthy of emotional expenditure and structuring the circulation of affect between subjects and objects of feeling, the sentimental mode allowed readers to identify with and feel for the plight of other people while upholding distinctive cultural and personal identities. . . . Sentimental depictions of colonial encounters refashioned conquest into commerce and converted scenes of violence and exploitation into occasions for benevolence and pity. In the process, sentimentality, not epic, became the literary mode of empire in the eighteenth century."

39. Substantive information regarding the fourth area of contact, the Middle Passage, was generally elided from the era's written sources until late in the century.

40. On slavery in the French Caribbean, see Kadish, ed., *Slavery in the Caribbean Francophone World*; Moitt, *Women and Slavery in the French Antilles*; Munford, *Black Ordeal of Slavery*; and Garraway, *Libertine Colony*.

41. See Butel, *Histoire des Antilles françaises*, 143–44, for basic demographic figures throughout the century. St. Domingue provides an illustrative case of the increase in the ratio of slaves to whites in the years leading to revolution in what is present-day Haiti. In 1779 there were 249,098 slaves and 32,650 whites. In 1789, there were 470,000 slaves and 40,000 whites. By comparison, on Martinique, there were 73,416 slaves and 10,634 whites in 1789. On Guadeloupe, there were 86,100 slaves and 11,100 whites in 1790. It should be noted that these demographic breakdowns occlude the complexity of the actual social ordering in French islands. As McClellan, *Colonialism and Science*, 47, writes, the racial axis of "black versus white" must be interpreted against the axes of rich versus poor as well as free versus slave.

42. The most populous colony in Africa during the eighteenth century was the Cape Colony, which had over seven thousand white inhabitants in 1765 (Mostert et al., *Demography*, 26).

43. Cohen, *French Encounter*, 121.

44. *Ibid.*, 121.

45. See Peabody, "There Are No Slaves in France," 4. See also Erick, *Etre noir en France au XVIII^e siècle*.

46. Boulle, *Race et esclavage*, 24.

47. *Ibid.*, 25. This was never enforced.

48. See Peabody, "There Are No Slaves in France," 86–87.

49. Jahoda, *Images of Savages*, 1–12, and others have demonstrated that some of the important elements of the early-modern understanding of black Africa can be attributed to vestigial beliefs dating from antiquity and the medieval era, but eighteenth-century readers were much more familiar with later texts. See also Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity and Before Color Prejudice*. Snowden writes that it "is important to emphasize that the overall, but especially more detailed Greco-Roman, view of Blacks was highly positive. . . . There was clear-cut respect among Mediterranean peoples for Ethiopians and their way of life. And, above all, the ancients did not stereotype all Blacks as primitives defective in religion and culture" (*Before Color Prejudice*, 59).

50. Hair, *Africa Encountered*, 11, 22, describes the Portuguese *descobrimentos* along the West African coast as an example of an "outthrust," a concerted and significant movement of one ethnic group in another world territory.

51. See chap. 2, pp. 107–13.

52. Based on arcane biblical exegesis, La Peyrère's *Praeadamitae* asserted that there had been two acts of divine creation: the first generated tribes of Gentiles, and the second produced Adam, father of the Jews. Before La Peyrère, in the late sixteenth century, Giordano Bruno had also postulated pre-Adamite races in order to explain the existence of Africans. Bernier's much more secular "Nouvelle division de la terre" is seen by many scholars as the first race-based text.

53. As chap. 2 above shows, the Linnaean system had seemingly contradictory effects on the French life sciences. On the one hand, Linnaeus's incorporation of humankind into an overall schema of the world's fauna implicitly invited naturalists (including French naturalists) to use the same methods to understand man as they did animals. On the other hand, his schematic view of both animals and especially humans was

seen as reductive and unrealistic and had the curious effect of inspiring more “empirical,” environmental, and inductive approaches to explaining the relationship among humankind’s different varieties. While the Linnaean system of binominal taxonomy would ultimately “win out” in France—Louis XV gave the order for the Linnaean system of nomenclature to be adopted at the Jardin du Roi in 1774—this was not the case at mid-century. Indeed, the rise of the life sciences in France—and the contiguous understanding of the human species—would take shape in contradistinction to such a priori categorization.

54. In the tenth edition of the *Systema* (1758), Linnaeus went further in this direction by adding humoral dispositions to his breakdown of the human species, e.g. the African was described as “Black, phlegmatic.” Although perhaps rear-guard in terms of its humoral theory, Linnaeus’s scheme uniquely accounted for Africans’ “liabilities.” Indeed, dark skin, lethargy, and a dominant humor were more than simply differentia: they were the basis for a real and evaluative taxonomical system. See Sloan, “Gaze of Natural History,” in *Inventing Human Science*, ed. Porter et al., 123.

55. This is discussed at length in the “Coda,” pp. 221–23.

56. Since “racist” implies a simple binary, whereas the issues involved are infinitely more complex, I use the term “racializing” here, which Hudson, “From ‘Nation’ to ‘Race,’” 259, defines as “the subjection of populations to scientifically invalid forms of classification based on arbitrary selection of phenotypical or genetic differences.”

57. “La Chronologie . . . place les hommes dans le temps” and “[la géographie] les distribue sur notre globe” (d’Alembert, “Discours préliminaire,” in *ENC*, 1: xi).

58. Indeed, this interpretive framework provided the point of departure for a potentially progressive conjectural history of *Africanness*, within which the African, much like any other human, could be expected as a group to “change, improve, and perfect its nature.” See Wokler, “Anthropology and Conjectural History in the Enlightenment,” in *Inventing Human Science*, ed. Porter et al., 34.

59. See Hannaford’s *Race*. This book provides a very teleological view of race history.

60. White, *Content of the Form*, ix.

61. See Curran, “Pourquoi étudier la représentation de l’Afrique dans la pensée du dix-huitième siècle?”

62. Miller, *French Atlantic Triangle*, 74.

63. See, among those who have reacted to Miller’s *Blank Darkness*, Aravamudan, *Tropicopolitans*, 4, who writes that the colonial subject can be simultaneously “fictive construct,” “actual resident,” and even potentially an “agent of resistance.”

64. This is particularly the case in Linda Merians’s otherwise excellent study, *Envisioning the Worst*. Merians attributes British views of the Hottentot to feelings of inadequacy suffered by a national (British) imagination: “[The views of the Khoikhoi] suggest no matter [how great] Britain’s imperial dominance around the world, the collective British imagination still had a need for demonizing ‘Hottentots’” (237). Contrary to what is asserted here, the overall discourse on Africa is anything but the product of a national mentality or a Lovejoy-type “unit-idea” that cuts across a variety of disciplines and genres. For a discussion of how the “unit-idea” functions within the intellectual history of Arthur Lovejoy, see Macksey, “History of Ideas.”

65. My emphasis. Féraud, *Dictionnaire critique*, 1: 108: “On dit [aussi] faire l’anatomie d’un discours, anatomiser un ouvrage.” Féraud put together this definition based on

ideas that had existed since the 1691 edition of the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française*. Furetière’s *Dictionnaire universel* (1690) also cites this use of the word.

CHAPTER ONE: Paper Trails

1. Dom Henrique’s father was King João I of Portugal.

2. Had this project been commissioned today, I suspect, this unapologetic rendering of Portuguese agency in the Renaissance era would certainly be tempered: rather than a thrusting ship, one might find—as one does now in Portugal—recognition of the contemporary cultural melting pot, not only in Brazil and the former Portuguese African colonies, but also in Portugal itself.

3. After Henry’s death, responsibility for the exploration of Africa was ultimately delegated to a rich Lisbon merchant, Fernão Gomes, in 1469.

4. See Russell-Wood, *Portuguese Empire*, xiii–xxv, on how anglophone historiography has neglected Portuguese exploration.

5. See Hair, *Africa Encountered*, 1.

6. However, Pliny the Elder’s cosmology, not to mention the fantastical medieval fables found in Reisch’s *Margarita Philosophica* (1503), provided the framework onto which new discoveries were initially mapped. See Broc, *Géographie de la Renaissance*, 18.

7. According to Hair, *Africa Encountered*, 112, many of these original sources were summarized and then destroyed because they were deemed “no longer useful” by archivists. Moreover, the main repositories of “Africanist knowledge” were also destroyed in the 1755 earthquake that leveled much of Lisbon.

8. *Chronique de Guinée*, ed. Paviot, 9. The English edition, based on a nineteenth-century edition, is *Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

9. Paviot points out (*ibid.*, 17) that the goal of Eanes de Zurara’s *Chronicle* was the glorification of Henry; it was not supposed to be an ethnographic report on African peoples.

10. Such was the market for African slaves during this era that by 1500, 7,000 to 8,000 “captives” purchased from African intermediaries were already “supplying Portuguese markets” each year. See Enders, *Histoire de l’Afrique lusophone*, 25.

11. See Quenum, *Eglises chrétiennes*, 72.

12. “d’assez bonnes gens [qui] se fient fort de nous.” La Fosse, *Voyage*, 25.

13. See Diop, “Mise à l’épreuve,” in *L’Afrique du siècle des Lumières*, ed. Gallouët, et al.

14. Ca’ da Mosto wrote that his expedition was only the second to reach this part of Senegal and that he was, in fact, seeking out Budomel because he had heard reports that the first expedition had been well received by him four years previously. Although Ca’ da Mosto called the chieftain Budomel, the proper title of the ruling king of the area known as Budomel was Damel. Budomel was actually the title of the ruler of the region.

15. Ca’ da Mosto, *Voyages*, trans. and ed. Crone, 40.

16. *Ibid.*, 38. He does, however, say that it reflects the lubricity of his hosts.

17. It should be pointed out that this may also have more to do with the syncretic orientation of popular medieval Christianity than Ca’ da Mosto himself. On the relationship between popular medieval European Christianity, official doctrines of the Church, and magic, see Kieckhefer, *Magic*. For a slightly different reading of Ca’ da

CHAPTER FOUR: The Natural History of Slavery, 1770–1802

1. "Histoire naturelle," *ENC*, 8: 226.
2. See Pluche's best-selling *Spectacle de la nature*.
3. David Brion Davis, *Problem of Slavery*, 455.
4. Jordan, *White Man's Burden*, 50, also maintains that economic justifications of slavery were bolstered by the comparative vulnerability of African society to "European aggressiveness and technology."
5. Some historians have attempted to temper such assertions by emphasizing the fact that perceived differences were perhaps less important than the relative "costs and availability of Black and White labor." See, e.g., Walvin *Questioning Slavery*, 16.
6. The number of books of natural history far exceeded the number of treatments of slavery during the first eighty years of the eighteenth century; while scholars have understandably given a great deal of attention to those works that focused on the question of human bondage—for example, John Wesley's *Thoughts on Slavery* (1774) or John Gabriel Stedman's *Narrative of a five years' expedition against the revolted Negroes of Surinam in Guiana on the wild coast of South America from the years 1772 to 1777* (1790)—such works are few and far between compared to the hundreds of natural history and proto-anthropology treatments of the black African that were published during the same era. Slavery was simply not a preoccupation in England and France until the 1770s and 1780s.
7. Long, *History of Jamaica*, 3: 375. In his "Of National Characters" (1748), David Hume had also affirmed that there was an original and *natural* distinction between whites and blacks (Hume, *Essays*, 208, n. 10).
8. "La perfectibilité n'est pas un don fait à l'homme en général, mais à la seule race blanche et barbue," Galiani wrote Madame d'Epinay in October 1776. Grimm and Diderot, *Correspondance littéraire*, 280.
9. "Tout ce qu'on dit des climats est une bêtise, un *no causâ*, l'erreur la plus commune de notre logique" (ibid.).
10. "Tout tient aux races" (ibid.). See also Gobineau, *Inequality of Human Races*, 50.
11. "une origine primitive" (Du Phanjas, *Théorie des êtres sensibles*, 1: 115).
12. "malheureuses victimes"; "de père en fils" (ibid.).
13. "couleur primitive"; "sensiblement" (ibid., 113).
14. See Eigen and Larrimore, eds., *German Invention of Race*, 51–52.
15. The various editions of Blumenbach's *De generis humani varietate nativa* can be found in his *Anthropological Treatises*.
16. Ibid., 98. Within the decontextualized race anthologies that generally "situate" Blumenbach, the naturalist often seems to grow organically out the polygenist thinkers he disdainfully rejected in his *De generis humani varietate nativa*. The implication is that the classificatory impulse associated with these "separate origins" thinkers overlaps with the classificatory impulse found in Blumenbach's monogenism. For the polygenists cited here, see La Peyrère, *Praedamitae*; Hughes, *Natural History of Barbados*; Kames, *Sketches of the History of Man*; Tyssot de Patot, *Voyages et aventures de Jacques Massé*; Voltaire, *Essai sur les moeurs*.
17. Kidd, *Forging of the Races*, 85.
18. Blumenbach said he did this to refute thinkers who associated humankind with the orangutan. See *Generis humani varietate nativa*, pp. 88–89.

19. Ibid., 101.
20. Ibid., 105.
21. Ibid., 106.
22. Ibid., 310.
23. See Blumenbach's own qualification regarding the fact that this scheme would later grow to five races; the final category including the people of the "new southern world," "the Sunda, the Molucca, and the Philippine Islands" (Blumenbach, *Anthropological Treatises*, 100, n. 4).
24. See Bernasconi, "Kant and Blumenbach's Polyyps," in *German Invention of Race*, ed. Eigen and Larrimore, 73–90.
25. None of these were polygenist schemes. All, very much like Kant, maintained that there was an original phylum, but also a significant hereditary transfer. In Kant's thought, this transfer involved "both 'germs' (*Keime*) and predispositions (*Anlagen*). On this, see the editor's preface to Kant's *Of the Different Races of Human Beings*, in id., *Anthropology, History, and Education*, 83.
26. "Les différents degrés de chaleur dans les climats respectifs agissant constamment de génération en génération, communiquent enfin à ce principe huileux commun au sang, à la bile, au fiel, au sperme, au corps muqueux, une teinte proportionnée à la température locale. Pour mieux me faire entendre, je suppose qu'une homme blanc et une femme blanche, bien constitués, passent de notre zone tempérée dans une des contrées les plus chaudes de la zone torride; je suppose encore que ce couple se plie aux moeurs, aux usages des habitants indigènes, et ne prenne d'autre espèce de fièvre; leur épiderme se hâlera et se durcira; il se détachera par feuilles et par lambeaux. En effet, la chaleur excessive doit d'abord produire une plus grande agitation dans le sang et dans les autres humeurs, et l'éther animal du corps muqueux s'imbibera de plus de phlogistique" (Nauton, "Essai," in *Observations*, ed. Rozier and Mongez, 17: 178). Nauton numbered among those early-modern thinkers who believed that "phlogiston" existed in all combustible substances and was released during combustion.
27. "Les variétés et les nuances de la couleur du teint se font remarquer dans les principales liqueurs du corps humain" (ibid., 17: 179).
28. "une propriété, une affection de nature, qui se perpétuera de génération en génération, comme l'on voit les difformités ou les maladies des pères et des mères passer aux enfants" (ibid.). "On ne peut . . . disconvenir . . . que la couleur noire de la peau des nègres ne prenne son origine dans le cerveau [One cannot dispute the fact that the black color of *nègres'* skin originates in the brain]," Sigaud de la Fond substantiated in his *Dictionnaire de physique*, 3: 337.
29. "physicien-naturaliste"; "l'étude anatomique et physiologique de l'individu"; "l'espèce" (Nauton, "Essai," in *Observations*, ed. Rozier and Mongez, 17: 166).
30. "la différence du teint et de la couleur, celle de la forme et de la grandeur, [et] celle du tempérament, du naturel et du génie national" (ibid., 165).
31. "race gothico germanique"; "la race de l'Europe occidentale (Celtique)"; "la race nègre" (*Encyclopédie méthodique*, 5: 259).
32. Para du Phanjas, *Théorie des êtres sensibles*, 122.
33. See J. P. Berthout van Verchem, in *Mémoires de la Société des sciences physiques de Lausanne*, 1: 11–12: "Le climat et la nourriture sont les grandes et principales causes de ces divers changements; elles doivent influencer sur plusieurs nations, et par conséquent former les différentes races d'hommes, ou *variétés générales*." (Climate and diet are the

primary causes of these diverse changes; they have an impact on various nations, and consequently, form the different races of man, or *general varieties*.)

34. "la couleur de la peau" (La Pérouse, *Voyage*, 1: 184).

35. "La liqueur spermatique des hommes plus ou moins basanés, la pulpe cérébrale et le sang, répondent . . . à la teinte de leur peau" (*ibid.*). See also Dunmore, *Where Fate Beckons*.

36. La Pérouse, *Voyage*, 1: 184.

37. It is hard to deduce exactly what the members of the *Société* may have thought of albinism. As had been the case since the 1730s, the albino was clearly a subject of fascination that many thinkers believed would provide clues about race, in this case, race's relationship to climate and heredity. By the time that the *Société* was providing guidelines for La Pérouse, many of these naturalists would have probably assumed that albinism was not specific to the newly designated *race nègre*, but a degenerative condition found in all races, albeit more frequently among indigenous peoples in tropical climates.

38. "le nègre n'est . . . pas seulement nègre à l'extérieur, mais encore dans toutes ses parties, et jusque dans celles qui sont les plus intérieures" (*Nouveau dictionnaire d'histoire naturelle*, 15: 433). The same sentence appears in the 1824 edition of Virey's *Histoire naturelle du genre humain*, 2: 38, but not in the first edition (1800).

39. The fundamental coherence of slavery and natural history is also plainly evident in how Labat chose to discuss the *nègre* in his *Nouveau voyage aux isles*. See chap. 1, p. 60.

40. "l'église et les rois" (Helvétius, *De l'esprit*, 252).

41. "maudit au nom de Dieu celui qui porte le trouble et la dissension dans les familles, [mais qui] bénit le négociant qui court la Côte d'Or ou le Sénégal?" (*ibid.*).

42. "La conversion des nègres entre pour très peu de choses dans les motifs qui portent les Européens de faire le commerce de la côte d'Afrique" (Boudet, *Journal oeconomique*, 135). This comment came in a review of an African travelogue that criticized the metaphysical justification of slavery.

43. "fait horreur à l'humanité" (De Pauw, *Recherches philosophiques*, 1: 43).

44. "nulles idées, nulles connaissances qui appartiennent à des hommes" (Rousselot de Surgy, *Mélanges intéressans*, 10: 165).

45. "fait[s] pour une condition supérieure à celle où ils sont réduits" (*ibid.*, 164).

46. Despite the fact that the publication date of Mirabeau's *Ami des hommes* was 1756, it did not appear until 1757.

47. Mirabeau believed that "American colonies were blighted by a disease that threatened the liberty of Europe. . . . True progress required freedom of trade and a wider distribution of goods; yet colonization had led to a form of commercial exploitation that allowed the avarice and overconsumption of a small group to choke the sources of healthy growth. The principle of slavery had infected colonial commerce as well as colonial labor" (David Brion Davis, *Problem of Slavery*, 428).

48. The physiocrats regarded the right to liberty as one granted by nature, and thus independent of man-made laws. Social and civic institutions were meant only to honor and enforce the preeminent laws of nature, protecting citizens' liberty and property. Within this natural order, the physiocrats believed in agriculture as the foundation for the economic viability and growth of a nation. Slavery was thus seen as untenable for

two reasons: it denied the natural (economic) freedom of man and relegated that which should be the most honored tradition in society—agriculture—to a level that most men deem unworthy of their own labor. Some physiocrats used François Quesnay's 1758 *Tableau économique* to determine the high cost of slave labor in the Antilles, ultimately advocating fair compensation to free workers both in the colonies and in African nations with whom France could set up legitimate commercial relationships. See Røge, "La clef de commerce," 431–43.

49. "imbécile enfance" (Mirabeau, *Ami des hommes*, 3: 153).

50. "Nos esclaves de l'Amérique sont une race d'hommes à part, distincte et séparée de notre espèce par le trait le plus ineffaçable, je veux dire, la couleur" (*ibid.*, 204).

51. "brutes ou doués d'un instinct qui nous est étranger" (*ibid.*, 205).

52. "même les hommes les plus épais ont toujours assez de lumières pour sentir l'avantage de la liberté" (*ibid.*).

53. "les artisans d'Europe . . . prendront l'avance sur l'industrie des nègres, qui n'est jamais que d'exception parmi cette race d'hommes" (*ibid.*, 206).

54. "consommation d'hommes" (Helvétius, *De l'esprit*, 3: 37).

55. "la cupidité et [le] pouvoir arbitraire [des] maîtres" (*ibid.*).

56. "il n'arrive point de barrique de sucre en Europe qui ne soit teint de sang humain" (*ibid.*).

57. "la nature humaine se trouve la même dans tous les hommes, il est clair que selon le droit naturel, chacun doit estimer et traiter les autres comme autant d'êtres qui lui sont naturellement égaux" (*ENC*, 5: 415).

58. Jaucourt asserts man's inborn freedom and equality, but quickly goes on to delineate the loss of that equality through man's desire for "les aisances de la vie . . . et des biens superflus [the luxuries of life . . . and superfluous goods]" (*ibid.*, 934).

59. "L'esclavage fondé par la force, par la violence, et dans certains climats par excès de la servitude, ne peut se perpétuer dans l'univers que par les mêmes moyens [Slavery, established by force, violence and, in certain climates, by an excess of servitude, can only perpetuate itself in the universe by these same means]," Jaucourt writes (*ibid.*, 398).

60. Wallace, *System*.

61. For an interesting side-by-side comparison of the two texts, including Wallace's landmark proclamation that "every one of those unfortunate men, who are pretended to be slaves, has a right to be declared to be free, for he never lost his liberty; he could not lose it; his prince had no power to dispose of him," see David Brion Davis, "New Sidelights," 586.

62. "viole la religion, la morale, les lois naturelles, et tous les droits de la nature humaine" (*ENC*, 16: 532).

63. *Ibid.*

64. "On dira peut-être [que ces colonies] seraient bientôt ruinées . . . si l'on y abolissait l'esclavage des nègres. Mais quand cela serait, faut-il conclure de-là que le genre humain doit être horriblement lésé, pour nous enrichir ou fournir à notre luxe? Il est vrai que les bourses des voleurs de grand chemin seraient vides, si le vol était absolument supprimé: mais les hommes ont-ils le droit de s'enrichir par des voies cruelles et criminelles? Quel droit a un brigand de dévaliser les passants? A qui est-il permis de devenir opulent, en rendant malheureux ses semblables? Peut-il être légitime de dépouiller

l'espèce humaine de ses droits les plus sacrés, uniquement pour satisfaire son avarice, sa vanité, ou ses passions particulières? Non. . . . Que les colonies européennes soient donc plutôt détruites, que de faire tant de malheureux!" (ibid., 533).

65. "Que l'on mette les nègres en liberté, et dans peu de générations ce pays vaste et fertile comptera des habitants sans nombre. Les arts, les talents y fleuriront; et au lieu qu'il n'est presque peuplé que de sauvages et de bêtes féroces, il ne le sera bientôt que par des hommes industrieux" (ibid.). For the slight modifications made by Jaucourt, see David Brion Davis, "New Sidelights," 594.

66. "le premier à franchir le pas de l'antiesclavagisme à l'abolitionnisme" (Ehrard, *Lumières et Esclavage*, 180). See also Røge "Question of Slavery," in *L'economia come linguaggio*, ed. Albertone, 149–69.

67. ENC, 15: 618. Having reduced the African to a vicious "species" early in his article, Le Romain ultimately felt the need to argue for a more humane treatment of Africans, albeit for "practical" reasons. Implicitly castigating sugar plantation owners who tortured their slothful slaves unjustly, Le Romain was careful to inform his readership how to determine, without recourse to the whip, if naturally indolent Africans were feigning illness. See ibid., 619.

68. "ne connaissent ni pudeur ni retenue dans les plaisirs de l'amour" (ENC, 7: 1009). The inhabitants of Senegal live under a miserable and fraudulent monarch, Jaucourt writes, and "se volent réciproquement, et tâchent de se vendre les uns les autres aux Européens qui font commerce d'esclaves sur leurs côtes [steal one another and attempt to sell one another to the Europeans who run the slave trade on their coasts]" (ibid., 15: 13).

69. "beaucoup de sentiment" (HN, 15: 457; ENC 8: 347).

70. "Nous avons réduits [les nègres], je ne dis pas à la condition d'esclaves, mais à celle des bêtes de somme; et nous sommes raisonnables! Et nous sommes chrétiens!" (ENC, 8: 347).

71. Eighteenth-century literature that attempts to negotiate the complexities and moral unease of colonial empire and slavery includes portrayals of patrician African princes, miserable, suffering slaves, and violent *nègres* presented as justified in their revolt. See Hoffmann, *Nègre romantique*, and Cohen, *French Encounter*.

72. For a useful summary of the adaptations, see Little, "Oroonoko and Tamango."

73. "C'est à ce prix que vous mangez du sucre en Europe" (Voltaire, *Candide*, 72).

74. "singulier monument" (Mercier, *An 2440*, 127).

75. "Je sortais de cette place, lorsque vers la droite j'aperçus sur un magnifique piédestal un nègre, la tête nue, le bras tendu, l'oeil fier, l'attitude noble, imposante. Autour de lui étaient les débris de vingt septres. A ses pieds, on lisait ces mots: *Au vengeur du nouveau monde!*" (ibid.).

76. It should also be pointed out, however, that on the level of the representation of the black African himself, *L'An 2440* simply recasts older stereotypes or tropes. In particular, the leader of this revolt, much like the well-established Oroonoko figure, is portrayed as an anomaly within his comparatively inferior cohort; he is a superior being, the *nègre exceptionnel*. Furthermore, much like the African "type" in general, he is portrayed as closer to nature—in this case, to a violent, avenging nature.

77. "Mon séjour dans les Antilles et mes voyages en Afrique, m'ont confirmé dans une opinion que j'avais depuis longtemps. . . . Les négociants qui font la traite des

nègres, les colons qui les tiennent dans l'esclavage, ont de trop grands torts avec eux pour nous en parler vrai" (Saint-Lambert, "Ziméo," in id., *Contes*, 69).

78. "la première de nos injustices est de donner aux Africains un caractère général" (ibid.).

79. "Les gouvernements, les productions, les religions qui varient dans ces contrées immenses, ont nécessairement varié les caractères. Ici vous rencontrerez des Républicains qui ont la franchise, le courage, l'esprit de justice que donne la liberté. Là, vous verrez des nègres indépendants, qui vivent sans chefs et sans lois, aussi féroces et aussi sauvages que les Iroquois. Entrez dans l'intérieur des terres, ou même bornez-vous à parcourir les côtes, vous trouverez de grands Empires, le despotisme des princes et celui des prêtres, le gouvernement féodal, des monarchies réglées, etc. Vous verrez partout des lois, des opinions, des points d'honneurs différents; et par conséquent, vous trouverez des nègres humains, des nègres barbares; des peuples guerriers, des peuples pusillanimes; de belles mœurs, des mœurs détestables; l'homme de la nature, l'homme perverti, et nulle part l'homme perfectionné" (ibid.).

80. "[p]ortons-leur nos découvertes et nos lumières; dans quelques siècles ils y ajouteront peut-être, et le genre humain y aura gagné" (ibid., 73).

81. This split nonetheless foreshadows the more delineated breakdown of monogenist/anti-slavery versus polygenist/pro-slavery thinkers during the nineteenth century.

82. As Michèle Duchet notes, it was not until 1763 that France began to consider Africa as a potential commercial interest in its own right. See Duchet, *Anthropologie*, 46–48; Røge "La clef du commerce."

83. "les nègres sont des êtres *maltraités* de la nature, et non maudits de [la] justice [de Dieu]" (HDI [1770], 4: 119; emphasis added).

84. "des philosophes"; "des naturalistes célèbres"; "climat qu'ils habitent" (ibid.).

85. "Quelle que soit la cause primitive et radicale des variétés du coloris dans l'espèce humaine, on convient que la couleur du teint et de la peau, vient d'une substance gélatineuse qui se trouve entre l'épiderme et la peau. Cette substance est noirâtre dans les nègres, brune dans les peuples olivâtres ou basanées, blanche dans les Européens, parsemée de taches rougeâtres chez les peuples extrêmement blonds ou roux" (ibid., 120).

86. "L'anatomie a découvert dans les nègres, la substance du cerveau noirâtre, la glande pinéale comme toute noire, et le sang d'un rouge plus foncé que dans les blancs. Leur peau est toujours plus échauffée, et leur poulx plus vif. Aussi la crainte et l'amour sont-ils excessifs chez ce peuple; et c'est ce qui le rend plus efféminé, plus paresseux, plus faible, et malheureusement plus propre à l'esclavage. D'ailleurs ses facultés intellectuelles étant presque épuisées par les prodigalités de l'amour physique, il n'a ni mémoire ni intelligence, pour suppléer par la ruse à la force qui lui manque" (ibid., 121).

87. "Enfin, l'anatomie a trouvé l'origine de la noirceur des nègres dans les germes de la génération. Il n'en faut pas davantage, ce semble, pour prouver que les nègres sont une espèce particulière d'hommes car si quelque chose différencie les espèces, ou les classes dans chaque espèce, c'est assurément la différence des spermés" (ibid.).

88. This assertion also appears in the 1774 edition of HDI.

89. "climats qui ne sont propres qu'à certaines espèces"; "différence des climats"; "change la même espèce du blanc au noir"; "le soleil ne va point jusqu'à altérer et modifier les germes de la reproduction" (HDI [1770], 4: 121).

90. "sans fondement qu'on attribue au climat la couleur des nègres" (ibid.). To the degree that climate even factored into his overall assessment of the African species of man, Raynal stated only that to live in the torrid zone was to be less influenced by moral considerations.

91. Cohen, *French Encounter*, 85.

92. "Il meurt tous les ans en Amérique la septième partie des noirs qu'on y porte de Guinée. Quatorze cents mille malheureux qu'on voit aujourd'hui dans les colonies Européennes du nouveau monde sont les restes infortunés de neuf millions d'esclaves qu'elles ont reçu" (HDI [1770], 4: 160).

93. Raynal produced three discourses: "Une condamnation absolue de l'esclavage; de prudentes propositions de réformes en faveur des Noirs; des propositions de réformes en faveur de colons" (An absolute condemnation of slavery; prudent propositions of reforms in the favor of the blacks; propositions of reforms in favor of the colonizers), which "overlap," according to Ehrard, *Lumières et esclavage*, 56.

94. "beaucoup de douceur et d'humanité" (HDI [1770], 4: 161).

95. Michèle Duchet's analysis of these passages demonstrates how the source of this reformist discourse did not simply involve well-meaning philosophes taking aim against evil planters (although this is how this was often portrayed by the philosophes themselves), but was also the result of a new pragmatic reformist position that came from planters like Pierre-Victor Malouet. See Duchet's discussion of Bessner and Malouet in *Anthropologie*, 131–34.

96. "En accordant à ces malheureux la liberté, mais successivement, comme une récompense de leur économie, de leur conduite, de leur travail, ayez soin de les asservir à vos lois et à vos mœurs, de leur offrir vos superfluités. . . . Donnez-leur une patrie, des intérêts à combiner, des productions à faire naître, une consommation analogue à leurs goûts; et vos colonies ne manqueront pas de bras, qui soulagés de leurs chaînes, en seront plus actifs et plus robustes" (HDI [1770], 4: 173).

97. Curiously enough, this segment in the 1770, 4: 167–68, and 1774 editions of Raynal's *Histoire des deux Indes*, begins with an indictment of Montesquieu's ironic treatment of the justifications for slavery in *De l'esprit des lois*. In the more than two decades that had elapsed since Montesquieu provided his satirical rationalizations for the slave trade in 1748, the topic had become a matter of great solemnity, so much so that Raynal believed that even if Montesquieu had been on the right side of the question of slavery, he had sinned *esthetically* in treating the topic so lightly.

98. "Quiconque justifie un si odieux système, mérite du philosophe un silence plein de mépris, et du nègre un coup de poignard" (HDI [1770], 4: 167–68).

99. "Dira-t-on que celui qui veut me rendre esclave n'est point coupable, qu'il use de ses droits? Où sont-ils ses droits? qui leur a donné un caractère assez sacré pour faire taire les miens?" (ibid., 217); "Ne sentez-vous pas, malheureux apologistes de l'esclavage, que vous couvrez la terre d'assassins légitimes?" (ibid., 218). This idea came from Abbé Baudeau's refutation of Rousselot de Surgy in the *Ephémérides du citoyen*, October 10, 1766, 171.

100. "s'il existait une religion qui autorisât, qui tolérât, ne fut ce que par son silence, de pareilles horreurs; si d'ailleurs occupée de questions oiseuses ou séditieuses, elle ne tonnait pas sans cesse contre les auteurs ou les instruments de cette tyrannie; si elle faisait un crime à l'esclave de briser ses chaînes; si elle souffrait dans son sein le juge

inique qui condamne le fugitif à la mort; si cette religion existait, il faudrait en étouffer les ministres sous les débris de leurs autels" (HDI [1770], 4: 221).

101. "L'ouvrage de l'abbé Roubaud fut utilisé en 1780 pour effectuer un renversement d'optique de la discussion concernant les Africains, pour lutter contre le préjugé qui en faisait une race à part et pour réduire l'écart entre eux et les Européens" (Ann Thomson, "Diderot, Roubaud, l'esclavage," 76).

102. "Vers le huitième jour après leur naissance, les enfants [des Noirs] commencent à changer de couleur; leur peau brunit; enfin elle devient noire. Cependant la chair, les os, les viscères, toutes les parties intérieures, ont la même couleur chez les noirs et chez les blancs: la lymph est également blanche et limpide; le lait des nourrices est partout le même" (HDI [1780], 6: 62).

103. This may also have to do with the historiography of the Enlightenment, which has sometimes tended to overreach when distinguishing between religious and anti-religious spheres of thought.

104. Benezet's text was published in French as *Avertissement à la Grande Bretagne et à ses colonies, ou Tableau abrégé de l'état misérable des nègres esclaves dans les dominations anglaises* (n.p., 1767).

105. Benezet, *Caution and Warning*, 11.

106. On J.-B. Labat's adaptation of André de Brûe, see chap. 1, p. 62.

107. In his *Some Historical Account of Guinea*, Benezet also used the same basic strategy (and much of the same prose), citing first-hand accounts of Africans by region much like the geographical dictionaries of the day. Bypassing the numerous censorious comments contained in the works he was consulting, Benezet selectively cited a number of Africanist writers: William Smith in order to emphasize the good government of the "Jalofs"; Francis Moore as a means of praising the abstemious and morally upright "Fuli Blacks" (9); William Bosman to portray the industrious rice farmers and fishermen of Accra (19); and Michel Adanson, who suggested that the black African, although primitive, had the ability to become an excellent astronomer (14). The collective force of such ethnographic snapshots allowed Benezet to affirm that Africans were "a humane sociable people, whose faculties are as capable of improvement as those of other men" (2). When coupled with legal refutation of slavery taken from Montesquieu, exposés on the cruelty of the slave plantations in Jamaica and Barbados, and the "shocking inhumanity" of the way the trade was conducted in Africa, Benezet's apologetics functioned as an essential element within his larger negation of pro-slavery arguments.

108. For a discussion of the iconography of abolition, see Peggy Davis, "La réification de l'esclave noir," in *L'Afrique du siècle des Lumières*, ed. Gallouët et al., 237–53.

109. "Quoique je ne sois pas de la même couleur que vous, je vous ai toujours regardé comme mes frères. La nature vous a formés pour avoir le même esprit, la même raison, les mêmes vertus que les blancs. Je ne parle ici que ceux d'Europe, car pour les blancs des Colonies, je ne vous fais pas l'injure de les comparer avec vous" (Condorcet, *Réflexions*, iii–iv).

110. "Ce n'est ni au climat, ni au terrain, ni à la constitution physique, ni à l'esprit national qu'il faut attribuer la paresse de certains peuples; c'est aux mauvaises lois qui les gouvernent" (ibid., 22).

111. "peuple doux, industrieux, [et] sensible"; "paresseux, stupides et corrompus"; "le sort de tous les esclaves" (ibid., 28).

112. “une grande stupidité”; “ce n’est pas à eux que nous en faisons le reproche, c’est à leurs maîtres” (ibid, 35).

113. Wheeler, *Complexion of Race*, 256.

114. Clarkson, *Essay*, 133. His emphasis.

115. “leur manière de vivre dans leur patrie est si misérable, qu’ils sont très heureux qu’on les en tire” (Frossard, *Cause des esclaves nègres*, 1: 141).

116. Dorigny and Gainot, *Société des amis des noirs*, 157, quoting minutes of the Société’s meeting on April 8, 1788.

117. “Je . . . suis sûr que, des larmes de joie couleront des . . . yeux des Nègres [après leur libération]. Non, non, ce ne sont pas des vengeance qu’ils méditeront quand ils verront tomber leurs fers. Donnons-leur du pain, qu’ils goûtent enfin le repos, qu’ils aient enfin la liberté d’embrasser leurs enfants, de jouir avec eux et leurs épouses des douceurs de la vie domestique et ils seront loin de s’occuper des vengeance. Au contraire ils nous regarderont, nous aimeront comme leurs libérateurs. Le Nègre est tendre mari, bon père, la vengeance n’habite pas dans une âme qu’animent ces sentiments, à qui on rend le droit d’en jouir” (ibid.).

118. In addition to Equiano, African writers who chronicled their experiences included Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, John Marrant, and Quobna Ottobah Cugoana. Substantial portions of these narratives are published with good introductions in Potkay and Burr, eds., *Black Atlantic Writers of the Eighteenth Century*.

119. Equiano, *Interesting Narrative*, xix, n.5.

120. Gates, *Figures in Black*, xxiv.

121. The number of members who came to meetings was far lower, however. See Dorigny and Gainot, *Société des amis des noirs*, 43–44.

122. Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 176.

123. This vote in favor of rights for *des hommes de couleur libres* took place in April 1792.

124. *Abolitions de l’esclavage*, ed. Dorigny, 7–8. Dorigny also cautions against the (postcolonial) ahistoricism that equates this decision solely with economic interests, noting that this vote abolished slavery in all the French colonies, not simply in Saint-Domingue. See also Benot, *Révolution française*, 1–10, for a more pessimistic reading of this decision, and, more recently, Dobie, *Trading Places*, 14–15.

125. “le XVIII^e siècle n’a pas libéré les esclaves, mais à leur sujet il a libéré la pensée” (Ehrard, *Lumières et esclavage*, 214).

126. Sonthonax, who was a member of the Amis des noirs, was sent to Saint-Domingue in 1791. Initially charged with bringing order to the island, including inducing the slaves to return to their plantations, Sonthonax is best known for freeing the slaves of northern Saint-Domingue as a strategic move within his larger fight against the English, who were threatening to enter into an alliance with white colonialists in the fall of 1793.

127. As has been noted, the Amis des noirs were not the first to indict the colonial system for impairing the moral character and intellect of the black African, but this charge was gaining traction among the French public in the early 1790s, when legislation on the colonial project was a real possibility. Benjamin-Sigismond Frossard, a member of the Amis des noirs, advocated such legislation in his *La cause des esclaves nègres* (1789); moreover, a series of anti-slavery novels appeared during the same era, including Joseph Lavallée’s *Le Nègre comme il y a peu de blancs* and Lecointe-Marsillac’s,

Le More-Lack. In addition to advocating for an end to slavery, many of these novels put forward a positive understanding of a perfectible African.

128. Moreover, as Marguerite-Elie Guadet reported to the Assemblée nationale in February, 1792, “The accounts received of the disturbances in Saint-Domingue undoubtedly leave us in much uncertainty; . . . but the insurrection no sooner broke out than it was attributed to the Amis des Noirs” (Garrañ de Coulon and Guadet, *Inquiry*, 23).

129. Finkelman and Miller, eds., *Macmillan Encyclopedia of World Slavery*, 2: 535.

130. Engaging with this flight of the imagination directly, in a clear rewriting of the *singulier monument* of Mercier’s *L’an 2440*, the author of *Le danger* proposed to erect a statue to any *nérophile* able to free the *nègres* without them seeking revenge on their white masters (7).

131. Looking back at the demise of French empire—Saint-Domingue in chaos, Martinique in the hands of the British (March 1794), Guadeloupe’s freed slaves revolting against their former masters (December 1794)—François Barbé-Marbois lamented that the *nérophile* mentality was unable to grasp the “leçons des événements” (Barbé-Marbois, *Réflexions*, 1: 243).

132. This comes from the baron de Wimpffen. See Noël, *Etre noir en France au XVIII^e siècle*, 174–75.

133. “Les nègres se portent indifféremment à tous les actes de perfidie et de scélératesse. . . . Ces peuples, trop méchants pour goûter un établissement national, portent bien justement la peine de l’avoir négligé: ils ont perdu les sentiments de la nature; ils ont rétrogradé, parce qu’ils n’ont pas su avancer dans la civilisation. Leurs écarts et leurs bassesses les ont rendus le jouet des nations étrangères; et l’âme fautive, méchante et perfide de ces peuples, fuyant toute instruction salutaire, s’est jetée dans la fange de la crédulité la plus superstitieuse, en caressant des fétiches, des devins, et en s’environnant de sortilèges” (Mercier, *Fragments*, 1: 204).

134. Raimond, *Extrait d’une lettre*, 19. Like many documents of this era, Raimond’s text is as much linked to self-presentation and contemporary politics as it was to absolute views of race. In this case, it was clear that Raimond was positioning himself as one of the free and powerful *hommes de couleur* of Saint-Domingue, the only group that had any hope of reestablishing order on the island. Raimond was later one of the collaborators in the drafting of a new constitution for Saint-Domingue in 1801.

135. See the assessment of this difficult period in Dorigny and Gainot, *Société des amis des noirs*, 301–27.

136. See Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 32.

137. “Comment a-t-on pu accorder la liberté à des Africains, à des hommes qui n’avaient aucune civilisation, qui ne savaient seulement pas ce que c’était que la France?” (Saint-Hilaire, *Napoléon*, 1: 112).

138. During the Terror, Moreau de Saint-Méry, a member of the club Massiac, was forced to flee to Philadelphia, where he wrote his *Description topographique . . . de l’Isle de Saint-Domingue*. This precious resource for scholars offers a casta painting-like typology of 128 racial mixtures, from the blackest black to the purist white, based on blood types. Couched in the neutral language of natural history, Saint-Méry’s breakdown reveals, not only a belief in measurable categories of *négritude*, but a hidden fantasy of racial whitening, improvement, and, ultimately, the eradication of black populations through the introduction of white sperm. On Saint-Méry, see Garraway, *Libertine Colony*, 262, 268, and Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 228.

139. See Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 254. In an exchange of correspondence between Toussaint and Napoleon in 1801, "Louverture had suggested to the consul that he [Napoleon] send emissaries back to the colony to discuss the terms of the constitution. Bonaparte, however, did not send a 'negotiator.' Instead, he 'sent an army'" (ibid.). Ultimately, some 77,000 soldiers had been sent to Saint-Domingue by 1803. See Régent, *La France et ses esclaves*, 265–66, for the military statistics related to this portion of the war.

140. Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 275.

141. Ibid., 293.

142. "Ceux qui veulent la destruction de nos colonies sentent bien qu'il n'est plus possible de plaider avec succès la cause de cette race barbare" (*Mercure de France*, no. 22 [April 1805]: 441).

143. See Jacques, "From Savages and Barbarians to Primitives"; "d'une nature dégradée" . . . "vouée tantôt à une stupidité, tantôt au délire de l'imagination la plus extravagante" (Perreau, *Etudes*, 1: 157).

144. "anéantissement" (Gérando, *Des signes*, 2: 466).

145. "ne voit dans les productions de la nature que ce qu'elles peuvent avoir de relatif aux besoins de ses sens" (ibid., 15).

146. Lavater, *Essai sur la physiognomie*. The French translation of the German is considered a primary text because Lavater had a hand in the translation and because it contains enlarged sections.

147. In 1817, Georges Cuvier, Buffon's intellectual heir, painted a damning view of the *race nègre* that combined geography, esthetics, anatomy, and comparative anatomy, as well as a pessimistic assessment of the *nègre's* future: "La race nègre est confinée au midi de l'Atlas; son teint est noir, ses cheveux crépus, son crane comprimé, et son nez écrasé; son museau saillant et ses grosses lèvres, la rapprochent manifestement des singes: les peuplades qui la composent sont toujours restées barbares [The *race nègre* borders on the southern Atlas [Mountains]; its complexion is black; its hair, nappy; its skull, compressed; its nose, flat; [and] its jutting mug and thick lips are manifestly like the apes': the peoples that constitute this race have always remained uncivilized]" (Cuvier, *Règne animal*, 1: 95). While the ideas contained in this ostensibly monogenist understanding of the *nègre* do not represent any real break with the past, the tone definitely does. Unlike earlier natural history texts, Cuvier did not separate his portrait of the *nègre* from the anti-black vitriol that had been confined in an earlier era to properly pro-slavery texts.

148. "le nègre diffère spécifiquement de toutes les autres races humaines." See Virey, *Histoire naturelle du genre humain*, 1: 202.

149. "le ciel doux et fertile de l'Asie paraît avoir été jadis le berceau du genre humain, comme celui des religions; mais l'espèce nègre et les races américaines ont sans doute pris naissance dans des contrées différentes" (ibid., 1: 228–29); see also "Nègre" in Deterville's *Nouveau dictionnaire d'histoire naturelle*, 15: 433.

150. "fonctions cérébrales" (Virey, "Nègre," in Deterville, *Nouveau dictionnaire d'histoire naturelle*, 15: 456).

151. "radicalement différent de l'espèce blanche" (ibid., 448).

152. "[se sont] répandues sur tout la surface de la terre" (La Métherie, *De la perfectibilité et de la dégénérescence*, 3: 359). This is an important text that synthesizes many of the seeds of polygenesis from the earlier century.

153. Kidd, *Forging of the Races*, 27.

154. "surpassent [les Européens] en qualités morales" (Cullion, *Examen*, 2: 177). See Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Etudes*, 1: 637.

155. "[Les négrophiles] nous accordent les avantages de l'esprit, pour s'autoriser à nous calomnier sur les qualités du coeur bien plus estimables. [Bernardin de Saint Pierre] fait plus, c'est aux nègres qu'il attribue la supériorité sur nous par les qualités du coeur. Par le raisonnement, il est absurde d'avancer que ce qu'on appelle abusivement bonté dans un être stupide soit véritablement de la bonté, ce n'est qu'une négation de méchanceté" (Cullion, *Examen*, 2: 177–78).

156. "il n'y a rien à attendre d'une race d'hommes aussi inférieure" (ibid., 295); "ne sont bons en effet que pour la servitude"; "l'esclavage est donc [leur] état naturel" (ibid., 296).

157. "Ce peuple est la lie, l'écume de la race humaine; qu'il soit donc au dernier rang; qu'il serve. La nature a donc prononcé sur son sort" (ibid., 290).

158. Grégoire, *De la littérature des Nègres*. Grégoire had thrown down the gauntlet by attacking the nexus of ideas being reused to justify the African's servitude in the Caribbean. In addition to refuting the increasingly dominant polygenist explanation of the different human races, Grégoire praised the African as having great potential and cited a number of prominent African writers to prove it. Although this book was allowed to be published, later abolitionist efforts by Grégoire were censured. See Sepinwall, *Abbé Grégoire and the French Revolution*.

159. To add to his argument, Grégoire also enumerated the "race's" high moral standards, heroism, and refinement in the arts.

160. In 1810, two years after Grégoire's *De la littérature des nègres* appeared, Richard Tussac published his *Cri des colons*, the most comprehensive anti-négrophile text produced during this era.

Coda

1. "Ce n'est pas assez pour nous de vivre avec nos contemporains, et de les dominer. Animés par la curiosité et par l'amour-propre, et cherchant par une avidité naturelle à embrasser à la fois le passé, le présent et l'avenir, nous désirons en même temps de vivre avec ceux qui nous suivront, et d'avoir vécu avec ceux qui nous ont précédé. De là l'origine et l'étude de l'Histoire, qui nous unissant aux siècles passés par le spectacle de leurs vices et de leurs vertus, de leurs connaissances et de leurs erreurs, transmet les nôtres aux siècles futurs" (*ENC*, 1: ij).

2. See the interesting discussion of the link between past and future in Brewer, *Enlightenment Past*, 72–82.

3. See Curtin, *Atlantic Slave Trade*. Among French historians, see Daget, *Répertoire*.

4. See Daget and Renault, *Traites négrières*; Lovejoy, *Transformations*; Hair, *Atlantic Slave Trade and Africa Encountered*; Thornton, *Africa and Africans*; Law, *Ouidah and Slave Coast*.

5. See Rediker, *Slave Ship*; Harms, *The Diligent*; Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery*.

6. See Hall, *Slavery and African Ethnicities*; Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*.

7. See Peabody and Grinberg, *Slavery, Freedom, and the Law*; Peabody, "There Are No Slaves in France."

8. In 1963, Fanon's *Les damnés de la terre* was published in an English translation by Constance Farrington under the title *The Wretched of the Earth*.

9. Benot, *Démence coloniale, Révolution française*, and *Lumières*; Duchet, *Anthropologie*; Roger Mercier, *Afrique noire*; Hoffmann, *Nègre romantique*. See also Cohen, *French Encounter*.

10. Kidd, *Forging of Race*, 79, summarizes this critique: "[T]here has been a generalized non-specific charge that the Enlightenment, the principal prop of modern Western intellectual life, was the achievement of several generations of periwigged white males who complacently assured the superiority of white European culture to the values of extra-European civilisations and gave at the very least implicit, sometimes very explicit, support to campaigns for overseas empire and colonialism." Kidd goes on to say that "[m]uch of this is, to a point, fair comment" (*ibid.*), but not all critics have been as open to an undermining of Enlightenment philosophy. Ehrard, *Lumières et esclavage*, 16, seeks to refute the accusation that the Enlightenment put up with slavery, an institution that was "si manifestement contraires à ses principes [so clearly contrary to its principles]."

11. This is the general thesis of Sala-Molins, *Misères des Lumières*.

12. "The individual is wholly devaluated in relation to the economic powers, which at the same time press the control of society over nature to hitherto unsuspected heights" (Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, xiv).

13. *Race, Writing, and Difference*, ed. Gates, 8.

14. Goldberg, *Racist Culture*, 29.

15. "Le pays n'est pas indifférent à la culture des hommes; ils ne sont tout ce qu'ils peuvent être que dans les climats tempérés" (Rousseau, *Emile*, in *id.*, *Oeuvres complètes*, 4: 266–67).

16. "Il paraît encore que l'organisation du cerveau est moins parfaite aux deux extrêmes. Les nègres ni les lapons n'ont pas le sens des européens" (*ibid.*).

17. This monolithic view surfaced often in the era's thought; such was the case in the very popular *Universal History* (which was translated almost simultaneously into French). "[W]ith respect [to black Africans], one might reasonably expect to find, in such a vast extensive tract of land, and so great a variety of climates, nations, and governments, a proportionable diversity of inhabitants, in regard to their qualifications both of body and mind. . . . Our readers, therefore, will doubtless be much surprised to find, on the contrary, a general uniformity run through all those various regions and people; so that, if any difference be found between any of them, it is only in the degrees of the same qualities, and what is more strange still, those of the worst kind; it being a common known proverb, that all people of the globe have some good as well as ill qualities, except the Africans" (*Modern Part of an Universal History*, 14: 17; emphasis in original).

18. This is quite different from the properly stadial-minded theorists who put forward what Lévi-Strauss called the century's "false evolutionism," a theory according to which the African and other "savage" peoples were designated as "pre-historic," "static," "children," and "uncivilized." See Lévi-Strauss, *Race et histoire*, 23–24.

19. Sala-Molins, *Code noir*, 49.

20. *Ibid.*, 54.

21. See Rapoport, *Origins of Violence*, which argues that "to be objective, one does not need to be morally neutral" (572).

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