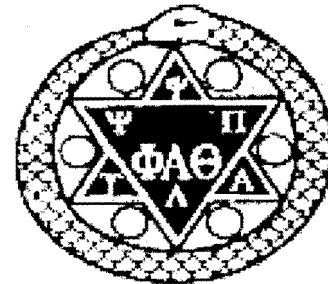


Loyola University New Orleans

# Student Historical Journal



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# The Student Historical Journal

Loyola University New Orleans  
Volume 37, 2005-2006

The Loyola University Student Historical Journal is published annually by the Pi Chapter of Phi Alpha Theta International History Honor Society. Each year the Journal serves as the culmination of the chapter's scholarly activities. Since 1966, first The Loyola University Student Historical Association, the Phi Alpha Theta have published the Journal to encourage scholarly activity by students and make public the best of their research efforts. The papers selected for publication were chosen from among those submitted to an editorial committee that included members of Loyola's history faculty and officers of Phi Alpha Theta. The papers were judged on scholarship and writing. Students who wish to submit a paper for the next publication should contact the Department of History at Loyola University, 6363 St. Charles Avenue, New Orleans, LA 70118.

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# The Student Historical Journal

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## **“Black and Blue”**

Black Soldiers and the British Press in the American Civil War Outstanding Honors Thesis

By: Meredith M. Griffin

At its inception, the American Civil War was a separate struggle to all those directly or indirectly involved. For Southerners, the war was a fight for states rights will whereas for Northerners, it was a statement that popular democracy could, and would, survive. For those who watched the war from across the Atlantic Ocean, such as the British, the Civil War was the ultimate spectator sport: bloody revolution on a massive scale, the likes of which were rarely seen in civilized society. Due to the intense economic interest Britain ad in the war, there were few media outlets in Britain that did not cover the war at least on occasion, with many newspapers having daily or weekly columns dedicated to reporting the latest news with a horrified, yet smug tone that belied their remaining resentment over the revolution of eighty years past.

Yet despite their supercilious attitudes toward the Union and Confederacy during the War, Britain, with its powerful economy and navy, was actively courted by both sides in the hope of an alliance that would turn the tide of war in their favor. Though Britain never formally enter the war on either side, its flirtation with the Confederacy as well as its war of words with American ambassador Charles Francis Adams continue to intrigue modern day scholars. In the last hundred years, scholarship on how the British viewed the United States and the consequences of such attitudes have been of great interest to many researchers. Indeed, the only thing more remarkable than the amount of information available on this subject is that there still remains much to be explored.

One such topic is how the British responded to a move by the Union army that caused no small amount of anxiety in the North and South. It is well known to those who study the Civil War that the enlistment of black soldiers was a contentious issue in America when it was introduced with the formal Emancipation Proclamation of January 1863. The South was predictably upset about the provision, and even many Northerners questioned whether the North should utilize the troops. But, the Northern opinion of black soldiers gradually changed as their regiments began to prove themselves as brave and capable as their white counterparts in battles such as Pt. Hudson, Milliken’s Bend, and Fort Wagner.

Although the subject of how the Northern public opinion of black soldiers changed during the war has been a popular topic for scholarship, how the British viewed the Union’s decision to utilize the black soldiers has not. Many Northerners, some scholars believe, went from being so against the measure to so supportive of it that they believed the success of the North would rest on the shoulders of the black soldiers.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, it has not been investigated whether the British opinion changed over the course of the war like Northern opinion did. Answering this question is important because it will help illuminate several topics relating to the civil war such as: the amount of influence that America had over Britain, how Britain viewed blacks, and how strong Britain’s antagonism to

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<sup>1</sup> James M. McPherson, *The Negro’s Civil War*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), p. 189.

to the North during this period was. To know what significance the civil war truly has, it's necessary to see what affect it had not only on Americans, but on the rest of the world as well.

It is logical to assume that the British opinion might change because of another often-discussed theory regarding the power of American prejudices and their influence in the early to mid part of the nineteenth century. It has been suggested that through the 1840s and 50s American prejudices about blacks made their way to England, reducing the once exceedingly popular British Emancipation movement to little more than a casual hobby in most circles.<sup>2</sup>

Knowing then that since American popular opinion could affect the British on one topic, it is only reasonable to wonder whether Americans could not only influence the British again, but whether they could influence the British positively this time, rather than negatively. Through an analysis of pro-Confederacy, pro-Union, and neutral newspapers, all of which reached to different strata of the social world, this paper seeks to analyze how the British media covered the war and how their coverage could be representative of the British opinion as a whole. This analysis concludes that the actions of the black troops may not have changed or destroyed the stereotypes held by the British, however, the actions did change how the press covered them and the battles they were involved in.

To understand why the British media reacted to the use black troops in the manner that they did, it is necessary to understand what sort of position blacks held in Britain during this time period and how they had arrived at that status. Though their position was far from enviable by modern standards, blacks living in Britain enjoyed a greater amount of freedom than those living in America. When the American abolitionist Frederick Douglass went to Britain in 1845, he was delighted to find that many levels of society favored eliminating American slavery.<sup>3</sup> The abolitionist tendencies that Douglass wrote about were not new; Britain had been working towards abolishing their system of slavery since the 1760s.<sup>4</sup> The abolition movement, led by activists like the Evangelical Granville Sharp and the influential Liberal MP John Bright, had gained a great amount of popularity in the early part of the nineteenth century as legal cases and other legislative measures were passed, all aimed at limiting the scope of slavery within the Empire and the powers of slave owners. *The Somerset Case*, which was one of the more noteworthy court decisions and stated that under English Common Law slaves brought into England were freed and could not be reclaimed and forced to return to servitude.<sup>5</sup> These lawsuits and other legislative acts continued until Parliament moved in 1807 to end the slave trade and in 1834 they officially outlawed slavery in England and throughout the Empire.<sup>6</sup>

Parliament, though ultimately the most important driving force of the abolition movement, was not the only one. British anti-slavery societies and abolitionist groups that wanted to eliminate American slavery were very popular

in all strata of society, with nearly every city having at least one abolitionist organization.<sup>7</sup> Apart from collecting money to help bring escaped slaves to Britain, these organizations also sponsored speeches from men such as Douglass and the Reverend J. Stella Martin, in order to bring more awareness to the plight of the slave. Generally, these organizations were religiously oriented and listed moral reasons among their reasons for defending abolitionism.

This time period of fervent British abolitionism was referred to by some as the “Man and Brother” stage.<sup>8</sup> It was considered to be a sort of golden age for abolitionists and blacks alike where equality between the two races was for the first time at least a remote possibility. But as all golden ages, the “Man and Brother” stage was not to last. When Frederick Douglass returned to Britain in 1859, he was dismayed to find that the movement that had had such fire was now burned out.<sup>9</sup> The abolition movement had indeed suffered since his first visit, due in large part to the influx of American prejudice that had swamped Britain in the subsequent. But what Douglass failed to notice then and what many scholars have ignored since was that while Americans had a heavy hand in creating stereotypes and in negative campaigning over in Britain, they did not do it alone. British citizens themselves played a large part in spreading American stereotypes and were so successful at it that when the war broke out, the position of the black man in England was similar to his position in America.

The prejudices brought over by the Americans were given extra credence due to two new sciences that were taking both Europe and America by storm. Europe in the 1840s was entering an era where scientific theories and organizations were all the rage, and to have scientific evidence, no matter how trumped up or faulty, gave weight to any popular opinion. Many sciences were developed and used to “prove” racist theories of the day.

The first major science that supported these prejudices, Phrenology,<sup>10</sup> started in Austria and arguably became one of the most popular Victorian sciences. Though it was debunked in the middle part of the century, it continued to influence popular thought all the way to the turn of the century. Phrenology claimed that by examining a person's cranium and jaw, a scientist could determine certain traits about that person such as their intelligence, linguistic capability, their level of benevolence, and their level of diligence. This pseudoscience asserted that blacks, as well as the Irish, were underdeveloped compared to their Anglo-Saxon counterparts, thus proving that the said groups were physically inferior and could never be equal to Anglo-Saxon men. This same reasoning was used to “prove” the inferiority of women of all races to their male counterparts.<sup>11</sup>

This pseudoscience also helped to push forth the theory of polygenetics, a scientific belief that theorized that because whites and blacks were so fundamentally different, they must have been created at different times in the past. The implicit religious overtones were used for a number of reasons during

<sup>2</sup> R.J.M. Blackett, *Divided Hearts* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2001), p. 36

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas Lorimer, “Black resistance to slavery and racism in eighteenth century England,” in *Essays on the History of Blacks in Britain*, ed. Jagdish Gundara, (Avebury: 1992), p. 58.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>6</sup> Lorimer, p. 58.

<sup>7</sup> Blackett, p. 35.

<sup>8</sup> *The London Times*, 14 September 1863.

<sup>9</sup> Blackett, p. 37.

<sup>10</sup> Madeline B. Stern, *Heads and Headlines: The Phrenological Fowlers*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), p. x-xi.

<sup>11</sup> Reginald Horsman, “Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism in Great Britain Before 1850,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37 (1976): 407.

the time period, one of which was to discourage the mixing of races and to the differences between blacks and whites.<sup>12</sup>

The other major science that helped to sustain the American racism in England was called Anthropology, yet it bore little resemblance to the modern day science that goes by the same name. The Anthropological Society of London was begun in 1863 by Dr. James Hunt as an offshoot of the Ethnological Society of London, which had been started by James Prichard several years earlier. Whereas the Ethnological Society adhered to a monogenetic approach, believed that environment was the primary factor in determining how a person evolved, and refused to allow their theories to influence or comment on religion, the Anthropological Society echoed Phrenology in taking a more polygenetic approach, consciously mixing science and religion.<sup>13</sup>

Hunt, unlike Prichard and the Ethnological Society, believed that physical characteristics were the most important factor in understanding humans and that their evolution would either be limited or enhanced by those characteristics.<sup>14</sup> In a paper he wrote, Hunt attempted to explain away intelligent and industrious blacks by stating that the only reason why this occurred was because of the presence of "European blood in their veins."<sup>15</sup> Hunt, a polygeneticist, believed that all people of different races — blacks, Asians, whites, and Indians — were all genetically disparate and emphasized this to remind his white counterparts that blacks and people of other races were not in fact their "brothers" and that they should not be seen as equals.<sup>16</sup>

The Anthropological Society sponsored controversial speakers such as John Eyre, whose violent and brutal handling of the Jamaican Rebellion caused no small amount of scandal in England. In a lecture given in support of Eyre and other anthropological ideals, one member summed up the philosophy of the organization by stating: "Let us take the Negro as we find him, as God designed him, not a white man nor the equal of the white man. That he can exist in a community of Anglo-Saxons on the terms of political and society equality is both physically and morally impossible." Thus the question of morality became unclear in the eyes of many and would continue to be so throughout the war.<sup>18</sup>

With this pseudo-scientific groundwork laid, England was ripe for prejudice to be imported from America. Americans began to directly influence British public opinion in two major ways, beginning heavily in the 1850s and continuing all the way through the war. These two methods appealed to all different levels of society, ensuring that their methods would be far reaching and all strata of the England social world would be affected. The first method was through the exportation of "Ethiopian Minstrels," sometimes referred to as "Nigger Pantomimes."<sup>19</sup> These black men and women were often former slaves who had been freed from their masters or freeborn Americans and moved to Britain in hopes of living a freer, more tolerant lifestyle. Little did they know

that their actions in Britain would seem to confirm the worst sort of stereotypes that the British had about blacks. These men and women traveled the countryside not unlike European Rom, dressed in clothing designed to resemble slaves' garb and carrying crude instruments made from washtubs and other household objects. They sang songs reminiscent of Southern hymns and tunes and spoke in improper English, mimicking the slaves that the English had heard of. Though these men and women sometimes became successful, they helped perpetuate the idea that blacks were, at the most basic level, childlike, moronic, completely incapable of taking care of themselves, and concerned with nothing more than dancing and singing. This idea that blacks were childlike would become so prominent in the minds of British citizens that later, it would become the primary argument against the freeing and enlisting of freed slaves in the army.<sup>20</sup>

The other way that Americans directly influenced British public opinion was by sending over "Pro-Slavery Ministers," who under the guise of Biblical Literalism, preached that slavery was sanctioned in the Bible.<sup>21</sup> These men preached both in cities and rural areas, and became very popular among many of classes in England. These ministers preached polygenetics, which had been made so popular by Phrenology and Anthropology, in an attempt to show that slavery was not the evil that so many made it out to be, but that it was in fact sanctioned by God in the Bible. These ministers harkened back to the fictionalized "Curse on Ham" in Genesis. Ham sees his father Noah naked and so Noah curses him to be a slave to his brother all his life.<sup>22</sup> Many interpreted this to mean that God transformed Ham from a white man into a black man because of his grievous sin and then cursed him to be a slave to the whites. These attitudes not only helped to emphasize the idea that blacks and whites were wholly different from one another, but also even more importantly, these ideas introduced the idea that to support abolition was to go against God, despite the Quakers' and others arguments to the contrary.

For those who did not quite believe or understand the racial reading of the Bible, the Pro-Slavery Ministers introduced another idea aimed at alleviating the guilt felt by many whites over the existence of slavery, this time by appealing to the heart rather than the head. European reports from the kingdom of Dahomey in Africa were popular during this time, as they and the French sought to colonize the area. Reports of Africans beheading each other in cold blood and the lawlessness that the Africans lived in served as a perfect example for the Pro-Slavery Ministers who wanted to prove that the white man had not kidnapped the black man from Africa, but in fact rescued him. This attitude is expressed perhaps most clearly in an editorial printed by The Times, which actively attempted to reinforce this idea.

Certain broad facts... about the negro race are clear. It is clear that the Negro in his native savage African state is the most brutal specimen of the human race. He has no sense of justice, no conscience, and a horrible and wild appetite for blood. Slavery is certainly an improvement upon

<sup>12</sup> Ronald Rainger, "Race, Politics, and Science: The Anthropological Society of the London in the 1860s," *Victorian Studies* (1978): 55

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55

<sup>15</sup> Rainger, p. 55.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55, 58.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>19</sup> Blackett, p. 43

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>22</sup> Genesis 9:25.

such a state of society as this...his general treatment from the planter has been far kinder than the treatment he received from his native chief and life upon a plantation has been much more comfortable than life in the African desert and jungle.<sup>21</sup>

By mid-century, American rhetoric had become British rhetoric thanks not only to Americans, but also to the British who reinforced these ideas back in Britain. In the twenty-five years before the Civil War, a remarkable number of British citizens traveled into America, both on business and pleasure trips. Though the exact number is not known, it can be assumed that it was a significant number, since there were two hundred and thirty journals of British visitors to America published in the years before the war.<sup>24</sup>

Many of these men and women traveled to the South, not only because they identified with the Southern “aristocracy” but also because many had a morbid desire to see America’s “peculiar institution” for themselves since slavery had been outlawed in England and many had never seen a slave before. The British who traveled to America brought back with them two main prejudices that would color the British point of view, both of which are easily seen in two of the more popular published travel accounts of the era.<sup>25</sup>

The idea that managed to perpetuate itself the longest and was by far the most influential was the idea that blacks were mentally inferior, childlike, and thus cowardly. Arthur Fremantle, who worked as a correspondent for the London Times and who would later be at Gettysburg with the Army of Virginia, wrote extensively on this prejudice in his work, *The Fremantle Diary*. While traveling with the Confederate army after the formal Emancipation Proclamation, Fremantle asked a soldier what he thought about the enlisting of blacks. The soldier replied, “If you were to collect a thousand [blacks] together, and fire one bomb in amongst them, they’d all run like hell,” after which, the slave assigned to him “grinned, and seemed quite flattered.”<sup>26</sup> As if attempting to prove this point, Fremantle later reports that he met with some slaves who, though not enlisted, were charged with digging trenches and doing other physical labor for the Confederate army. When fighting began, Fremantle reported that, “[the blacks] all with one accord bolted when the first shell was fired”<sup>27</sup> and reported that many had claimed they were “‘Dreadful skeered.’”<sup>28</sup>

Fremantle’s journeys in America were preceded by those of William Howard Russell, another correspondent for the London Times, who wrote *My Diary North and South*, which was published in the summer of 1863.<sup>29</sup> Though he claims to hate slavery, Russell’s racism is evident in his work, especially in his

consistent reference to blacks as “it” rather than by their proper pronouns.<sup>30</sup> He also wrote very unflattering reports on blacks in America, describing them as “big-stomached, curve-legged, rugged-headed...toothless...thick lipped.”<sup>31</sup> He also reiterated the idea of blacks as stupid on several occasions, referring to many slaves he saw as “untidy, slip-shod, and careless.”<sup>32</sup> In speaking with soldiers both in the Northern states and in the Southern states, Russell claimed, “On asking why negroes were not employed, I was informed: ‘The niggers would blows us all up, they’re so stupid.’”<sup>33</sup> Later on, when speaking with a southerner in Maryland on the use of blacks as contraband, he writes that the soldier told him blacks were “‘Nasty, idle, dirty beasts...I wish to heaven they were all at the bottom of the Chesapeake. [Captain Benjamin Butler] insists that they do work, but they are far more trouble than they are worth.’”<sup>34</sup>

The idea that blacks were stupid and useless gave rise to the second major prejudice: that because blacks needed to be taken care of, blacks were happy in their servitude and had no wish to be free. Fremantle claimed that while fleeing Natchez, Mississippi, he met a black man who claimed, “He didn’t want to see no Yanks, nor be freer than he is.” To emphasize that this was not an isolated case, he also records a meeting with another slave, who claimed, “he would rather be a slave to his master all his life, than a white man and a soldier.”<sup>36</sup>

While these travelers and others influenced how people viewed blacks, it was the noteworthy intellectuals of the day that had the greatest influence on what people thought about blacks and why. Not surprisingly, many differed on the subject and were not hesitant to express their opinions. One such man who never shied away from Phrenology and its racial diatribes was Robert Knox, an anatomist who published his most famous work, *Races of Men*, in 1850.<sup>37</sup> Lambasting Prichard and others who believed in nurture versus nature, Knox wrote that, “Race is in everything. Literature, science, art—in a word, civilization, depends on it.” Though Knox was willing to admit that perhaps some of the more degenerate “light races” such as Jews and the Irish could be taught civilization, he believed that the “dark races” were incapable of it. “Destined by the nature of their race to run, like all other animals, a certain limited course of existence, it matters little how their extinction is brought about.”<sup>38</sup>

Thomas Carlyle, Victorian England’s preeminent dilettante, was less rabid than Knox, but espoused many of the same ideas. In his 1849 article in *Fraser’s Magazine*, “Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question” which was later reissued in 1853 and retitled “Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question,” Carlyle formally entered the racial debate. In these two essays Carlyle attempted to find a way that white men may “abolish the abuses of slavery, and save the precious thing in it.”<sup>39</sup>

<sup>21</sup> The London Times, 5 September, 1863.

<sup>24</sup> Max Berger, “American Slavery as Seen by British Visitors 1836-1860,” *The Journal of Negro History* 30 (1945): 181.

<sup>25</sup> Berger, p. 183.

<sup>26</sup> Arthur Fremantle, *The Fremantle diary: being the journal of Lieutenant Colonel James Arthur Lyon Fremantle, Coldstream Guards, on his three months in the Southern States*, (New York: Little, Brown: 1952), p. 52.

<sup>27</sup> Fremantle, p. 73.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>29</sup> Howard Jones, *Union in Peril*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1992), p. 23.

<sup>30</sup> William Howard Russell, *My Diary North and South*, Volume 1 (New York: Harper, 1952) p. 211.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>34</sup> Russell, V.2 p. 172.

<sup>35</sup> Fremantle, p. 80.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>37</sup> Horsman, p. 405.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 407.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas Carlyle, “Fifteen Years of Emancipation in the West Indies,” *The Old Guard* 4 (1866): 311.

Carlyle used the British abolition experiment in the Island of Demara as his example of the Babylon that blacks would create when left to their own devices. Carlyle lambasted abolition and called for a system to be created that would force the blacks to be more productive. Famously, he claimed that the population of blacks on the island had the “intellect, faculty, docility, energy, and available human valor” of one of the streets of Seven Dials, which was at the time one of London’s most notorious slums.<sup>40</sup> Though he criticized slavery, Carlyle hypocritically made a veiled suggestion in much of his essay that blacks would be better off as slaves than as free men. Reiterating the popular opinion about the inherent laziness of blacks, Carlyle wrote,

If your nigger will not be induced [to work], it is full certain that he must be compelled...the tacit prayer he makes (unconsciously he, poor block head,) to you, and to me, and to all the world who are wiser than himself, is “compel me!”...If the black gentleman is born to be a servant... let him not be hired by the month...[but] hired for life... [lifelong servitude] seems to offer... a possibility of the most precious kind for the black man and for us.<sup>42</sup>

Carlyle’s view on blacks, though popular, was not without its critics. One such man was John Stuart Mill, who despite being a friend of Carlyle’s, was often at odds ideologically with him. Shortly after the first publication of Carlyle’s essay, Mill wrote an anonymous letter to Fraser’s, attacking many of his friend’s assumptions and defending abolitionism. Their debate was fueled by the Jamaican Rebellion and the growing disenchantment with abolition in the far reaches of the Empire.

Mill wrote about the earnestness of the abolition movement and attacked those who like Carlyle and pro-slavery ministers, claimed that the Bible sanctioned slavery. Citing a passage from Carlyle’s letter, Mill wrote, “If ‘the gods’ will [slavery], it is the first duty of human beings to resist such gods. Omnipotent these ‘gods’ are not, for powers which demand human tyranny and injustice cannot accomplish their purpose unless human beings cooperate.”<sup>43</sup> Mill defended the rights of the free blacks, asserting that they had as much of a right as the whites to enjoy themselves, to be as lazy or as productive as white men and lambasted Carlyle for supposing that the abolition movement was “an affair of sentiment.”<sup>44</sup> Mill took a purely moralistic approach to the subject of slavery, criticizing those who claimed that slavery had “saved” blacks. Passionately, he wrote, “I have yet to learn that anything more detestable than this has been done by human beings toward human beings in any part of the Earth.”<sup>45</sup> Mill and Carlyle’s debate lasted for years, with Mill eventually writing editorials for the *Daily News* and other pro-Union newspapers during the war.

The racist attitudes of men like Hunt and Carlyle, tempered by the more level headed opinions of the abolitionists such as Mill and Harriet Martineau and the growing liberal movement, continued to permeate Britain through the 1850s. Yet the “Negro Question” as many called it, was slowly forgotten as the Crimean War and other domestic issues flooded England. But when the Civil War broke out in April of 1861, the English were suddenly faced with the issues of slavery and racial equality once more. From the outset, the British believed that the heart of the war was slavery, and became alienated from the Union when Lincoln and others in his cabinet steadfastly maintained it was not.<sup>46</sup> The British government and common citizens watched the war slowly unfold with great interest, speculating constantly on the outcomes of various battles and implications for England if one side won over the other.

Though some were interested in the war for moral reasons, most of the British interests in the war were economic. With the Union blockade, the quantity of cotton coming into the country from the United States had dwindled dramatically, causing a crisis of massive unemployment in Manchester and other parts of the Midlands’ manufacturing districts. Though they were still able to import cotton from their colonies of India and Egypt, the price had risen dramatically because of the shortage, causing no small amount of problems for the country and generating a solid show of support for Southern secession.<sup>47</sup> In a similar vein, Prime Minister William Gladstone and other members of his cabinet were aware that though England was still the strongest manufacturing country in the world, the United States could surpass them in production in a few years, something that they were virulently opposed to.<sup>48</sup> Many hoped that the South would win, splitting the nation in two and thus crippling each country’s economy for such a time that England could continue its economic dominance.

Yet economic concerns and philanthropic desires aside, many English regarded the American Civil War as a morbid distraction and devoured the latest news on the war as fast as it arrived. Newspapers represented the most common, and sometimes only, way that most Britons received news of what was happening in other parts of their own country and abroad.

As the paper of the upper classes, *The Times* was the most influential and powerful newspaper in England, if not Europe.<sup>49</sup> Under the guidance of its bullish editor John Thaddeus Delane, *The Times* was generally regarded as either the most respected or the most hated newspaper in most of Europe. Its conservative and condescending tone earned it the dubious honor of being called “ever foremost in misrepresentation” by the British and Foreign Aborigines Aid Society’s *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*. Another publication, *The Morning Star*, castigated the paper for its “blind hero worship” of the Southern state and their commanders.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p. 243.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 311

<sup>42</sup> John Stuart Mill, “The Negro Question”, *Little’s Living Age* xxiv (1850): 465.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Jones, p. 15.

<sup>47</sup> Duncan Andrew Campbell, *English Public Opinion and the American Civil War* (Rochester: The Boydell Press, 2003) p. 54-55.

<sup>48</sup> Jones. 134.

<sup>49</sup> H.R.F. Bourne, *English Newspapers: Chapters in the History of Journalism*, v.2 (London: Russell and Russell, 1966), 165.

<sup>50</sup> *The Morning Star*, 6 January 1863, p.1



Though *The Times* was the most prestigious paper in Britain, it did not have as strong a following in Northern England as it did in Southern England. One of the more popular newspapers there was the *Leeds Mercury*, a relatively moderate newspaper with an editorial board under the leadership of Thomas Wemyss Reid,<sup>51</sup> that tended toward supporting the Union, rather than the Confederacy.<sup>52</sup> Begun in 1857, its primary purpose was to promote “Whig Liberalism” and quickly became one of the more popular “country papers.”<sup>53</sup>

Further north, the *Manchester Examiner* and *Times* also covered the war, as well as the cotton crisis that stemmed from the Union blockade. Though the *Manchester Guardian* had a wider circulation at this point than the *Examiner*, the *Guardian* was written akin to *The Times* for the newly moneyed merchant class hurt by the blockade, whereas the more radical *Examiner* was written for a wider, middle-class audience.<sup>54</sup> The *Examiner*, which had been founded in 1846, also tended to side with the Union, but did not become fully supportive until after the Emancipation Proclamation. Deemed too radical by its critics, *The Examiner* served as a mouthpiece for the abolition movement and gained so much popularity that the paper became a daily in 1855.<sup>54</sup>

In London and other parts of Southern England, the *Examiner* had a sister newspaper, the *Daily News*. Founded in 1845 by Charles Dickens, the *Daily News* and the *Examiner* had different editors and editorial boards, but printed reports from the same correspondent and often printed articles taken from each other.<sup>55</sup> The *Daily News* was slightly tamer in their approach to the war and was considered to be one of the more “liberal” newspapers, as opposed to “radical.”<sup>56</sup> Harriet Martineau wrote frequently for this paper throughout the 1850s as did John Stuart Mill, which gave the paper credence in the academic and social sphere.

On the other side of the political spectrum, as far away from *The Times* as was ideologically possible, was the *Morning Star* and its less popular mate, the *Evening Star*. This small paper, not unlike the *American Liberator*, had a circulation of fewer than 15,000 copies a day that belied the great amount of controversy it managed to create.<sup>57</sup> Formatted exactly like the *Times* in a mocking salute, the paper was published from London and edited by Samuel Lucas, a fervent abolitionist and supporter of the Union.<sup>58</sup> Lucas, who died the same week that the war ended in America, was a brother in law of John Bright and good friends with Richard Cobden. Cobden, a Midlands politician, abolitionist, and long time friend of J.S. Mill, frequently squabbled with Delane at *The Times* and their criticisms of each other are legendary.<sup>59</sup> Appearing for the first time on March 17th, 1856, the paper sold at one penny and began with the simple promise not to “pander to no popular passions.”<sup>60</sup> The editors of the paper kept their promise and throughout the war rallied on the side of the North and abolition, even when most other papers were beginning to doubt their victory.

Though the political views and agendas of these newspapers varied widely, they all received their war news the same way and shared four main avenues of dispensing it to the public. The first was through the use of Reuter’s telegraphs, which eventually became so popular that virtually all newspapers that covered the war printed the telegraphs in their respective “World News” sections. Though a trans-Atlantic telegraph cable had been installed in 1857, it had failed after only six weeks and another would not be installed until 1866. Thus, telegrams were wired to New York from the correspondents across the North and South, then shipped like regular mail and letters to newspapers across England and Europe.

In addition to telegraphs, almost every newspaper had a correspondent in the North or South who provided a first-hand view on the war and how it affected those living in America. *The London Times* had a total of five correspondents who went to America during the course of the war, including Fremantle and Russell. Generally, the paper employed a Northern correspondent, a Southern correspondent, and one who traveled in the West, all in order to get the widest range of coverage. Though many of them were not named in the newspaper, it is known that after Russell was recalled for “improper opinions” shortly after the war began, he was replaced by Charles Mackay, who was then replaced by Antonio Gallenga at regular intervals.<sup>61</sup> *The Morning Star* constantly criticized the *Times*’ “gentlemen correspondents... and we say ‘gentlemen’ despite all intrinsic evidence,”<sup>62</sup> while sending over their own correspondent, E.L. Godkin, an abolitionist whose essays had appeared in numerous journals in England. *The Daily News* and the *Manchester Examiner* shared a correspondent who wrote to both papers, though the name of the correspondent is not known. These correspondents sometimes traveled with army units as Fremantle did, but more often than not traveled around America of their own volition, reporting from whatever location was most pertinent at the time. Both letters from correspondents and telegraphs were typically printed fourteen days after they were written or dispatched, even though later in the war, it took nearly seven weeks for letters from Southern correspondents to reach their editors.

Taking their cues from their correspondents and from the telegraphs that they received, the editors and editorial board of each newspaper would then write their own opinion piece on whatever subject was most relevant at the time. These pieces, usually mixed in with editorials on other issues affecting England, were often succinct and short while making broad, sweeping generalizations on the status of the war, the outcome of the war, or the depravity of the conflict in general.

N also printed letters to the editor from readers, which often served as a barometer for how the public felt about the war, and the newspapers’ coverage of it. Although letters to the editor from everyday citizens regarding the war

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 362.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 24.

<sup>53</sup> Bourne, v.2, p. 257.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 362.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. 140.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p. 271.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p. 272.

<sup>58</sup> Bourne, v.2, p. 238.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. 144.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p. 238.

<sup>61</sup> Bourne, p. 263.

<sup>62</sup> *The Morning Star*, 6 January, 1863

Harriet Beecher Stowe, John Stuart Mill, and William Seward all wrote letters to the editor that became famous and were reprinted in other newspapers across England.

One event that created a great storm of controversy and in the newspapers was the announcement of the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation in October 1862. Many people claimed that to free the blacks would create a servile war, and that they would then kill the white population.<sup>63</sup> This idea of a servile war was a remarkable change of opinion among the British and Americans, since the popular sentiment had always been that blacks were childlike, harmless, and devoted to their masters. This sudden harkening back to the slave revolts of Nat Turner and St. Domingue clashed with what people wanted to believe of slaves, creating a panic that caused many to condemn the proclamation. Over the course of that fall and early winter, many wrote on the preliminary proclamation, some hoping Lincoln would repeal the proclamation, others criticizing him for only freeing slaves in rebelling states.

When January 1863 dawned, many were astonished to find that not only had Lincoln not revoked the proclamation, he had gone one step further and added a rather salient clause to it. In addition to freeing slaves in the rebelling states, Lincoln wrote, “I further declare and make known that such persons of suitable condition will be received into the armed service of the United States to garrison forts, positions, stations, and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service.”<sup>64</sup>

This clause, allowing blacks to enlist in the military, was new to the proclamation but was not in fact a new event in American warfare. Blacks had been utilized in the American Revolution by George Washington, and had been allowed to serve in militias until near the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, blacks had already been utilized as “contraband” by the Union army under the Confiscation Act of 1862 in non-combatant areas and had already been in combat at the battle of Island Mound. Nevertheless, reaction to the thought of enlisting blacks in a war where their own freedom was at stake was surprisingly hostile.

*The Times* was even more aghast at this new clause that it had been at the first proclamation. Feeding the growing fears of many people, they wrote, “The armies of the South have gained a clear superiority over the armies of the North, and it is to redress the balance that the negro, burning, ravishing, massacring, and destroying, is summoned to the conflict.” *The Times* also helped to support the popular American conception that the Civil War was a “White Man’s War,” by writing, “The enlistment of negroes [does not] recommend itself highly to the white men who have undertaken the fighting of this war” but admitted at the end of the article that “10,000 negroes, under a good white general... might be made a formidable weapon in the invasion of the south and might be the instrument by

which some great Northern ambition might snatch fame.” Yet most of their direct criticism was reserved not for the black soldiers, but for the Union itself. They criticized the Union for using blacks as “cannon fodder” and for all but murdering them by putting them in harm’s way.<sup>66</sup>

The *Leeds Mercury* also published a great deal on the new provision of the proclamation. Some articles positive while others scathingly negative. One claimed that “[Blacks] are of not much account to work... if the policy is carried out faithfully, it will demoralize the armies,”<sup>67</sup> and also that blacks, hearing of their freedom had risen up and killed their masters in cold blood.<sup>68</sup> Another article, reprinted from the *Morning Post*, declared, “On the first day of the year, President Lincoln signed the formal death warrant of the condemned United States. His proclamation of a servile war must extinguish the last hope that has lingered.”<sup>69</sup>

Although the newspaper printed negative press from other papers and from their own correspondents, the editorial board supported the measure and spoke out in defense of the proclamation. On January 15th they wrote, “The North and South are pretty fairly represented by the New Years proclamations of both presidents. The Northern Proclamation is a proclamation of freedom, the Southern proclamation is a proclamation of blood.” The editorial went on to claim that, “[Blacks] make indeed capital soldiers, as their life has filled with for adventure and rendered them careless of danger.” They attacked newspapers such as *The Times* that were unsupportive of the measure by saying that blacks were now forced to choose between “social contempt and vagrant idleness,” and hoped they would choose the former.

Both the *Daily News* and the *Examiner* regarded the proclamation as a sincere effort to free the slaves, and not an instrument of war. *The Examiner* gave statistics of the number of freed versus enslaved blacks in the United States and praised Lincoln for the measure, but chided him and the whole of the Union army for not protecting them or paying them as well as they did the white soldiers.

Dismissing *the Times* and other’s fears of a servile war, the *Daily News* wrote that “servile war is impossible” because the Union had enfranchised blacks into the military, thereby making them responsible for their conduct as the rest of the military.<sup>70</sup> They expressed nothing but disgust at the Southern proclamation, calling it “atrocious” while supporting the Emancipation Proclamation.

The *Morning Star*’s reaction to the enlistment of blacks was predictably jubilant and praised Lincoln for his decision. Triumphant, they recounted a story where a gathering of blacks, rescued off plantations in South Carolina, attempted to volunteer in the Northern army.<sup>71</sup> One hundred and forty five blacks volunteered, but only twenty-five were selected because of limited space on the Union ship. When the Union ship sailed on and reached their safe harbor, the soldiers aboard discovered that another thirty black men, so determined to

<sup>66</sup> The London Times, 15 January, 1863.

<sup>67</sup> Leeds Mercury, 9 January, 1863.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 10 January, 1863.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 16 January, 1863.

<sup>70</sup> The Daily News, 14 January, 1863.

<sup>71</sup> The Morning Star, 8 January, 1863.

<sup>63</sup> The Times, 15 January 1863.

<sup>64</sup> The London Times 14 January 1863.

<sup>65</sup> Noah Andre Trudeau, *Like Men of War*, (New York: Little, Brown, 1998), p.7

join the military and fight slavery, had snuck on board. Their reaction to the Confederate proclamation, which stated that all black troops and their commanding officers would be killed instead of taken prisoner, was appropriately scathing. On January 14th they wrote, “the proclamation of Jefferson Davis is one of the most revolting manifestations which even the fury of war has produced,” and promised that any massacre of black troops would be met with equal fury.

Apart from these few articles, there was surprisingly little written about this new provision in the formal Proclamation. It seems likely that more would have been written on the enlistment of blacks soldiers, had the British attention not been so consumed first by the battle of Petersburg and then by the battle of Murfreesboro, both of which soon dominated the headlines. In the months after the formal proclamation, papers published intermittent articles regarding the stationing and forming of black regiments, but they were soon forgotten as other battles and massive bloodshed ensued. Indeed, it was not until late May and early June of that year that black soldiers were once again in the British headlines, this time for facing their first test of endurance and bravery on the battlefield.

In May of 1863, news reached London that the black regiments formed by General Banks, known as the *Corps D’Afrique*, were to be sent into battle in the depths of Louisiana. At the time, most of the British press was concerned with the recent battle of Chancellorsville and did not deign to comment on the mobilization of blacks. It was only after the battle of Port Hudson on May 27th, 1863 that the newspapers paid any attention to the movements of the regiments.

Pt. Hudson, located on the Mississippi River north of Baton Rouge, was a fortified location that made a Union advance by land or water, nearly impossible.<sup>72</sup> Banks, who had been attempting to communicate with Grant and organize an attack on the fort, decided on May 20th to advance, despite the tactical disadvantages. Under Banks, the 1st and 3rd regiments of the Louisiana Native Guards marched to Pt. Hudson along with several newspaper reporters who asked, “Will they fight?”<sup>73</sup>

The route assigned to the black regiments was identified by Union army as the “easiest way into Port Hudson,” but the Mississippi river had risen up over the banks, creating a swamp that effectively gave the Confederates a natural blockade against any invading army.<sup>74</sup> Thus the easiest way into the fort suddenly became all but impossible to navigate. Despite the impassable route given to them, the thousand-strong regiments pushed through the Confederate’s artillery zones to within two hundred feet of the main wall. Due to the bad communications between the commanding officers, the 1st and 3rd regiments pulled back into the swampland and, under orders, continued to fire at the fort, despite the fact that it was out of range and their numbers were continually reduced due to snipers and other artillery fire. Generally, historians agree that despite their defeat, the blacks fought as well as they could have given their

<sup>72</sup> Trudeau, p. 34.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p. 38.

<sup>74</sup> Trudeau, p. 41.

disadvantaged position.

Casualty accounts from Port Hudson differ, depending not only on the abolitionist or anti-abolitionist stance of the source, but also whether the source was located at the battlefield or at another location. General Banks recorded that 293 of his soldiers were killed and over fifteen hundred were wounded. Officially, they recorded that only thirty-five soldiers were killed and one hundred fifteen were wounded. It was in the newspaper reports of the battle however, where the casualty reports varied the greatest. General Banks expressed delight in the conduct of the black regiments and wrote to his wife that, “[The Blacks] fought splendidly... Their charges upon the rebel works, of which they made three, exhibited the greatest bravery and caused them to suffer great losses” and in his official report, stated that the conduct of the black soldiers was, “in many respects... was heroic. They require only good officers... and careful discipline to make them excellent soldiers.”<sup>75</sup>

When word of the battle of Pt. Hudson reached London, the newspapers scurried to cover the story. *The Times* first reported on the battle on June 3rd, saying that there had been “violent engagements” and a few weeks later, chastised the Union for using blacks as “cannon fodder” which gave the blacks little else than “a new and mournful experience.”<sup>76</sup> It was not until most of the details of the battle had reached London that *The Times* devoted a large article to the battle. Immediately, they began to criticize the soldiers as “half savage negroes”:

In the valley of the Mississippi, where the negro soldiers are in actual service, it seems likely that a story as revolting as that of St. Dominge is being prepared for the world... It appears that the 2nd Louisiana Black regiment was almost entirely destroyed... “The Whites and blacks in a moment had hand to hand conflict unprecedented in its ferocity. The negroes in the conflict were soon disarmed and in defending themselves they rapidly used the weapons of savage humanity... they fought with their teeth, biting their combatants in every available part of their body, kicking and scratching them.” These unhappy Africans, whose clumsy frames are no match for the sinewy and agile white American, thus led on to be destroyed by a merciless enemy.<sup>77</sup>

They also launched into a long criticism of the Union, saying that the Union army, not the Confederate, was responsible for the deaths of the soldiers.

<sup>75</sup> James G. Hollandsworth Jr., *The Louisiana Native Guards* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1995), pp. 63.

<sup>76</sup> *The Times*, 15 June 1863.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 23 June 1863.

They criticized the Union for even sending the regiments into battle, since it was reasonable to assume that the Confederates could be so enraged by the sight of blacks in battle that they would fight with “the spirit of fury” and completely destroy them. To emphasize their point, they reported that six hundred troops had been killed instantly when the attack began and warned of dire consequences if black troops were allowed to stay in battle, predicting, “Reprisal will provoke reprisal, until all men’s natures are hardened and the land flows with blood.”

The other newspapers were not so dire in their news reporting. The *Mercury* reported frequently on the battle, but their coverage was far more objective. They did have one report of “negroes plundering and fighting” but it was from their correspondent, who claimed that he had simply heard of, but not witnessed, the actions. They reported that “General Banks often reports that the conduct of the negro troops has been heroic,” but offered no editorial on whether they viewed the conduct as heroic or not.

The coverage by the *Examiner* was spotty, but better than *The Daily News*, which barely reported on the battle. They published two reports on Pt. Hudson, but incredibly, made no mention of the black regiments being involved. It did mention that the Union had lost six hundred soldiers but neglected to mention what regiments they were from. They did, however, print a glowing report from their correspondent that reported on the movements of the troops. On June 18th, he wrote,

[The Black troops] acquitted themselves with greatest credit, fighting with the most desperate bravery. One of these regiments, which went into battle with full ranks, lost 600 men. Such a record as that certainly settles the much discussed question whether negroes can fight.

*The Morning Star* wrote pages on the battle, reprinting Banks’ official report and also printing favorable reports from American newspapers. One such reprint claimed, “Our men faced the storm of iron and lead that was hurled against them as if it had always been their business to do so.” Not to be outdone, the editorial board lauded the attempts at Port Hudson and wrote,

Those regiments fought not only with desperate valour but perfect discipline. They mounted to the deadly breach with steady feet – they engaged the enemy here in a hand to hand encounter. They thus conquered for themselves the warm approval of men who have long entertained prejudices against their race...

Clearly, the agendas of each paper dictated their coverage of P Hudson.

Most of the newspapers stayed quiet, waiting to pass judgment on the troops until they were tested again. It would not do to praise the troops for showing bravery and skill in battle, only to then have a new regiment of black troops act in a lawless manner somewhere else. Also, no newspaper wanted to admit that they had been wrong in their initial attitude about the troops; it’s only natural then to have the paper take the information they received and spin in to fit their primary assessments.

The next battle that managed to snare at least a sliver of attention from the British Press was Milliken’s Bend. The outpost, which had been an instrumental part of Grant’s stretched supply line, had been all but abandoned and was used primarily to recruit black troops under the guidance of Brigadier General Thomas. Most of the troops raised were former slaves and field hands, and though they were expected to defend the outpost, they had little formal training by seasoned army officers.

Confederate troops, under the order of Lieutenant General Edmund Kirby, made a movement on Milliken’s Bend, as well as other far western abandoned depots along the river. The Union forces were able to repulse the Confederates, but at heavy cost. The Confederates were able to break through some of the thorny defenses around the fort and many of the Union soldiers who were unused to their muskets had difficulty reloading. As Confederates reached the top of the levee, hand to hand battle ensued, with both sides using pistols and bayonets. The Union was eventually pushed back to the river, but when the gunboats *Choctaw* and *Lexington* began to fire on their regiments, they retreated back to Richmond, a town fifteen miles away.

The battle of Milliken’s Bend was not considered to be incredibly influential by much of the British Press. *The Times* briefly mentioned the battle on June 24th, but also mentioned the battle at Lake Providence, which was another one of Grant’s abandoned forts, on July 8th. Instead, they were more concerned with the rumors that Lincoln had spoken with John C. Fremont and offered him control of the Union’s black troops. *The Times* claimed, “Mr. Lincoln found some difficulty in offering [Fremont] a command so much less important than he had a right to accept,” and then made no other comments on either of the western battles.<sup>79</sup>

By contrast, the *Mercury* wrote a fair amount on the battle and surrounding circumstances swirling around Lincoln and Fremont. On the 24th of June, they reported, “A severe fight occurred at Milliken’s bend. Federal forces consisted most of negro regiments who were driven to the banks.” They continued to report on the events of the battle and the next day continued their coverage by writing, “The colored troops at first gave way, but upon hearing that those of their number who were captured or killed, they rallied with great fury and routed the enemy.” *The Mercury’s* coverage was fairly accurate, which only

<sup>78</sup> *The Morning Star*, 18 June 1863.

<sup>79</sup> *The Times*, 16 June 1863.

helped to emphasize the paper’s reputation as a fair and balanced publication.

Both the coverage of Milliken’s Bend by *The Examiner* and *The Daily News* was wanting. Nothing they printed had not been printed by *The Times*, and no editorials or correspondent letters were printed regarding the battle. Most surprisingly though, was the coverage by the *Morning Star*. The paper, which had been so emphatic on showing how the black troops could fight, neglected to cover this battle at all. Not one editorial or letter was printed regarding it.

The reasons for this shabby coverage by all the newspapers are not immediately clear. It could be that because the battle took place relatively far west, the papers did not deem it worthy of much coverage, or because *The Times* and other opposition newspapers had not been overly critical of the battle, there was no need to try and support the efforts of the black troops there. It is also possible that because the battle was small by the standards of many other engagements.

After the Western campaigns of the black troops stationed there, the Press’ attention turned to the black regiments stationed in the East. More black regiments were being formed in the East, most notably the 54th Massachusetts. Despite the victories of the black regiments out West, the conservative British Press was still hostile to their recruitment. The *Times’* Northern correspondent, most likely Antonio Gallenga, wrote a long letter to the paper that was dated July 21st, but not printed until August 10th.

But what shall we say of the arming of negroes? A negro regiment, the 55th Massachusetts, a very large and strong, and very well armed and equipped regiment, was marching past [my hotel]... carrying the American colors. I could hardly believe my own eyes. The American stars and stripes borne aloft by a nigger! Most of them, I am told, come from the Western States; but, oh! their countenances! The stolid negro features, lighted up by the brisk marching steps... looked savage and brutal enough to make me shudder. We hear that the first negro battalions in the South have displayed no less discipline than valour. But have their passions had time for development? The scent of servile war, of race extermination, floated in the air as those steaming black carcasses hurried past me. Surely; heaven can look down with no favor upon a cause, however just and holy it may be, which is to be advanced by such means.

But even as this article was written, another battle had just taken place a few hundred miles south in South Carolina. The 54th Massachusetts, under

the command of Robert Gould Shaw, had been involved in various skirmishes up and down the East coast, but had been ordered to South Carolina in early July, where they were to take part in the effort to bring down Charleston.<sup>80</sup> Fort Wagner, located on the Northern tip of Morris’ Island, had been under a constant barrage of artillery fire from Union ships in the hopes that the fort would be weakened enough to make a land invasion feasible. The surrounding islands had been taken in the weeks preceding the attempt on Wagner, all in order to help the Union further entrench their position. It was on one of these islands that the 54th Massachusetts landed on July 11th and learned how they were expected to take Wagner.

Like the Corps D’Afrique at Port Hudson before them, the 54th found themselves forced to traverse an impassable route to their target. The only way to approach the fort was by a narrow strip of beach, so narrow that the 54th was split in two and forced to march one behind the other across the sand. The 54th was chosen to lead the attack on Wagner, with two other regiments following behind them. Beginning in the evening, the assault on Wagner was a bloody affair. On the three quarter of a mile march toward the fort, the Confederate defenses fired shell after shell, reducing the number of soldiers but not stopping their momentum toward the fort. When they reached the fort, viscious hand to hand combat ensued between the Union and Confederate soldiers. Despite their best efforts, the black troops were repulsed and when they attempted to retreat, they were blocked by the approaching white regiments. The Confederate artillery hit them once more, reducing their numbers even further.

After the battle, word of their bravery spread across the United States. *The New York Times* reported that “[the black troops] moved up as gallantly as any troops could.”<sup>81</sup> Official reports from the commanding offers were no less brilliant and before long, the 54th was known all over the US for their bravery in battle. It would be Wagner, more than any other battle, that would serve as the point where Northern opinion changed for the better toward black troops.

*The Times* did covered the battle of Ft. Wagner, but only in a critical, disproving light. They reported on August 3rd that Charleston was under attack, but their excerpts were all from Southern newspapers, which were limited in their scope. It wasn’t until August 10th that they printed real accounts of the battle, and of the fighting that took place. They printed a report from Brigadier General Gillmore, who was in charge of the assault on Wagner, that lauded the attempts of the black troops. In fact, they printed many favorable reports from other media outlets on the conduct of the black troops, but never once printed an editorial that spoke favorably of their conduct. In fact, most of their print was reserved for further criticisms of the North and their policies. They once again claimed that Lincoln’s decision to enlist blacks was damning because “it compels the south to fight to the last,” and predicted a never ending flow of blood.<sup>82</sup> They also criticized the troops themselves, claiming that “some came back either

<sup>80</sup> Trudeau, p. 73.

<sup>81</sup> *The New York Times*, 31 July 1863

<sup>82</sup> *The London Times*, 17 August 1863

dressed in the US uniform, or waving the star spangled banner in their master’s faces, and are now idling about town and country, daring their former owners to claim them if they can.” In what might be the most blatant misuse of print that *The Times* exhibited during the course of the war, they printed long letters from their correspondent that claimed, “The enrolment [sic] of negro regiments has proved a greater failure...than most people anticipated. The negroes know their friends from their enemies. The tender mercies of the Northern Abolitionists are cruel, and know that the cheapest food for the gunpowder of this strife was the black food.”<sup>84</sup>

The *Leeds Mercury* covered Wagner more extensively than any other newspaper, first reporting a battle at “Ft. Wagoner” on July 24th. As the week continued, more information about the battle trickled into the newspaper until a large article was published on August 10th. They published a detailed account of the battle, as well of the casualties that the black regiments suffered. In this account, they wrote, “The troops displayed great bravery, many of them reached the parapet.”<sup>85</sup> A few days later, the paper printed a long report on the death and burial of Colonel Shaw, and speculated on whether any of the black troops had been taken prisoner. In a moment of clarity, the paper also pondered whether the brave showing by the black troops would cause the Confederacy to reconsider implementing them in battle as the Union had done.<sup>86</sup>

Again, neither the *Examiner* nor the Daily News printed news of Wagner, they were too consumed by the news revolving around Gettysburg and Lee’s movements. Ironically, so was *The Morning Star*. Though it seems that the paper would be joyous over the results coming in from Wagner, the paper was remarkably silent on the events.

The battle of Wager was the event that officially won over most of the North. It is also the point at which *The Times* began to shift their focus from primarily criticizing the troops to criticizing the Union. Notice that though they wrote derogatorily of the black troops behavior, the behavior they criticized was not the behavior that they had exhibited in battle. The Times, possibly realizing that it would be foolish to call this brave behavior savagery any longer shifted their attention to the Union, which always gave the paper some event or measure to criticize or rebuke. The *Leeds Mercury*, while still praising the efforts of the soldiers, stopped regarding the troops as an experiment. Rather, in wondering whether they would be taken prisoner or whether the Confederate Proclamation would be faithfully carried out, The *Leeds Mercury* began to view them as fully fledged soldiers. There is no end to the speculation of why the other newspapers did not cover the battle. One possibility is that they did not cover the battle because by this time, it was “old news.” Blacks had already proved themselves capable in battle, so what was the point of covering them again when Gettysburg, the most decisive battle fought so far, was still on everyone’s mind? The *Morning Star* would later recall Wagner as a turning point, signaling that they did not ignore the battle, or think it unimportant. It could simply be that they believed

there were more important things to cover.

The last major issue involving black troops that was covered in the British press was not a tale of their bravery; or, in the minds of some, savagery. It was a situation that would stick in the minds of Northerners and many of the British alike, all of whom were aghast at the horrific bloodshed that took place.

What became known as the massacre at Ft. Pillow had its beginnings in late March of 1864. Confederate general Nathan Bedford Forrest and his cavalry had been roaming the woods of Western Tennessee like wraiths, striking Union forts along the Mississippi river. Lionel Booth, the fort’s twenty-five year old commander, found himself in charge of regiments of black troops as well as whites, giving him an all told command of nearly six hundred soldiers. Most of the blacks were former slaves and illiterate, which created a racial division between the two that was so strong, the white and blacks lived and mostly worked apart.

But on the morning of April 12th, both the white and black soldiers were forced to fight together. Forrest, along with his troops, advanced on the North and East sides of Pillow while General McCulloch, who had been at Milliken’s Bend, came at the forth from the South. Booth was killed and Forrest managed to pen in the Union soldiers between the Southern troops and the Mississippi River. The Confederates spent the next few hours using sniper fire to reduce the number of artillerymen and breaking the spirit of the soldiers, who eventually raised a flag of surrender. Forrest’s men massacred the troops stationed at Pillow, both black and white. All reports though indicate that while the Confederates killed indiscriminately, they reserved their most brutal actions for the black soldiers. Those who were lucky enough to survive Pillow spread tales of the brutal actions that had taken place there and soon, all of America was ablaze with news of the brutal treatment of the black troops.

The events at Pillow did not go unnoticed by the British press, although *The Times* did its best to play down the massacre. On April 28th, *The Times* printed an official Union military dispatch regarding the battle, writing that “Both white and black were bayoneted, shot, or sobered. Even dead bodies were horribly mutilated and children and several negro children were murdered in cold blood. The dead and wounded negroes were piled in heaps and burnt.” But they were highly skeptical of these reports and later wrote, “The telegraph reports a massacre...but such stories have been so often repeated...that few people around to believe them” and later reiterated, “There is as yet no confirmation of the reports of the barbarity inflicted upon the negro soldiers—reports that bore the stamp of gross exaggeration, if not of positive falsehood...the federal government cannot and dares not retaliate.” It wasn’t until the 16th of May that *The Times* confirmed the horror stories, writing only one sentence on the subject. No editorial was written on the subject, nor was any letter from a correspondent regarding the event printed.

<sup>83</sup> The London Times 20 August 1863.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 13 August 1863.

<sup>85</sup> The Leeds Mercury 10 August 1863.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 14 August 1863.

<sup>87</sup> The London Times, 28 April 1864.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 2 May 1864.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 8 May 1864.

## “Black and Blue”

The other papers were not so jaded that they did not cover the event. *The Mercury* led a two front attack not only on the treatment of the black prisoners, but on *The Times* itself. The paper printed news of the battle in early May, only a few days after *The Times*. They covered the estimated death toll as well as the death of General Booth, but waited until the next day to comment on the hideous nature of the battle. In an editorial dated May 3rd, the paper asked sarcastically stated, “It is right and just of the English press... to pass over so slight an incident without notice, and not to raise a cry of indignation as if anything wrong had really been done.” The paper then launched into a criticism of *The Times* for doubting the reports and also criticized the paper’s continued devotion to the subjugation of black troops. Lastly, they began to criticize the Confederacy, writing, “it is not enough for the Confederacy that it has made slavery their cornerstone, it must make murder its buttress.”

The Examiner printed only the barest facts on the case right around the same time as both *The Times* and *The Mercury*, and taking a lead from *the Times*, very carefully pointed out that the reports were as of yet unconfirmed. *The Daily News* covered more, first printing a Reuters telegraph on the 27th of April, followed on May 3rd with a letter to the editor from Godwin Smith, a noted British abolitionist. This letter called for retaliation, which was a popular sentiment among many American and British abolitionists and Northerners; “If the murderers of negro prisoners can be identified and taken, let them be hanged as murderers.”<sup>90</sup>

Not surprisingly, it was the *Morning Star* that wrote the most on the massacre. On April 27th and 28th, they printed several telegraphs that appeared in most other newspapers, but on May 3rd, like other newspapers, printed a passionate editorial.

Forrest has evacuated Pillow, heaving its ruins so deeply stained with blood that cries for vengeance...if but a tithe of the atrocity reported be proved to have been perpetrated... the Confederacy will have revived against itself the fires of indignation and abhorrence that have lately slumbered. For three months past, England and France have thought more of the battles raging almost within sight of their own coasts than of the suspended campaigns in Virginia and Georgia. Let it be seen, as written in the blood red characters of the deed of horror said to have been done at Ft. Pillow, that the North and South are fighting it settle whether the negro is a man or brute- and Europe will think of little else until the issue is decided. No one can overlook or mistake the killing and burning of men because they are black... this is an event which speaks with the voice of a trumpet-- yea,

Meredith M. Griffin

as with of doom. The cause that can require or permit the perpetration of atrocities so devilish calls down upon itself the abhorrence of humanity and the judgment of God—and will not call in vain!

The coverage of Pillow by all the newspapers is the most interesting to analyze. The fact that *The Times* did not cover the battle in good detail is hardly surprising. Firstly, it was very embarrassing for them to admit that they had been wrong, and that the telegraphs they received were not exaggerated, as they had claimed. Secondly, and perhaps most strongly, the paper did not want to admit that the white Southerners, who they had such a camaraderie with, had acted in the savage way that *The Times* had anticipated that the black troops would conduct themselves. Rather than admit that they had been wrong and that the Southern troops had been so brutal, *The Times* chose to simply ignore the battle and everything that went with it. *The Leeds Mercury* changed their coverage as well in that they not only attacked the Confederacy, they attacked other British citizens who refused to acknowledge the horrors that had been committed, something they had not yet done. *The Morning Star*'s coverage is not surprising, considering how they had touted the effectiveness and quality of the black troops. However, the fact they printed so much on the battle, including the Congressional inquiry, shows that they believed this was a deliberate murder, and not an act of war.

While the actions of the black troops may not have changed the prejudices that the British had about the blacks, their actions did change the way that the British press covered them. The British press went from being suspicious and overly critical of the troops to finally admitting that they were able soldiers, and moreover, that they were human beings and not just fodder or mindless, childish, animals. What their personal views on blacks may have been, to save their credibility, they were forced to admit by the end of the war that blacks could fight, and could fight well. However, *The Times* and other newspapers never admitted that they had been mistaken, which indicates that they still held onto their views, despite the pressure they felt to capitulate and report favorably on the black troops.

What should be emphasized here is not the failure of black troops to change the British popular opinion, but the fact that they did manage to create a change within the media. Any change, at this point, was progress for the status of blacks in the Western world. Though it would take years for blacks to achieve anything that could be called equality with their white counterparts, the changes within the media signaled that the facts would eventually speak for themselves and that despite whatever spin may be present, the truth would eventually win out.

<sup>90</sup>The Daily News, 3 May 1863.

## Unintended Consequences: Haiti and the French Revolution

By: Tyler Douglas

The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the question of who those rights applied to meant that slavery was bound to become an issue during the French Revolution. Haiti was particularly affected, as it had a significant population of free blacks who owned slaves as well as other property. As such, the French Revolution was as much a revolution of human rights and civil liberties for the French colonies as it was for France. Interestingly, many of these free blacks wished to acquire the same rights as free white men, but still keep slavery. The complexity of Haiti, particularly its racially charged society, allowed the ideas of the French Revolution to have enormous, unintended implications on the colony which despite their best attempts, proved to be outside the control of Revolutionaries in France.

The Declaration of the Rights of Man was written with two explicit intentions: To end the institutions around hereditary monarchy, and to establish new ones using ideas from the Enlightenment.<sup>1</sup> Both the English and the Americans already formed documents stating human rights; in particular, the English Magna Carta and Bill of Rights, and The American Declaration of Independence and Constitution. These documents were written explicitly for the benefit of the English and the Americans, respectively; however, the French intended the Declaration of the Rights of Man to be applied to every human being, regardless of whether they were French. Attributing to the universality of the Declaration of the Rights of Man is that the words *France* and *French* only appear in the preamble introducing the document, not the document itself.<sup>2</sup>

Haiti was an interesting place to experience that nature of the French Revolution because its population was wildly different from France and the distinctions that were drawn in recognition of Haiti's status as a colony were vague and ill-defined. Haiti was a source of income and national pride for France that was greatly needed at the time. Its sugar industry was extremely profitable, but was made possible by an enormous slave population that was growing continuously from native births and constant importation. Masters were typically white, but there also was a significant population of free-blacks and other non-white slave owners that one did not find to the same extent elsewhere in the French colonies. In his book, *A Civilization the Perished*, Médéric-Louis-Elie Moreau de Saint-Méry describes how some of these free people of color acquired their status, as well as some of the customs that surrounded their existence. Saint-Méry stated that the population of free blacks increased most dramatically in the latter half of the eighteenth century, noting that in 1703 there were only 500 free blacks listed, but in the years 1770, 1780, and 1789 that population increased to 6,000, 12,000, and 28,000, respectively. Many of them gained their freedom after being the mistresses of white planters, or as the children from such relationships.<sup>3</sup>

On the eve of the Revolution in Haiti in 1789 there were 500,000 slaves,

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<sup>1</sup> The Declaration of the Rights of Man, The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History, translated, edited, and with an introduction by Lynn Hunt (Boston/New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1996), 77-79

<sup>2</sup> Hunt, Lynn, "Chapter 3 Page 2," <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/chap3b.html>, accessed April 14, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Médéric-Louis-Elie Moreau de Saint-Méry, *A Civilization That Perished: The Last Years of White Colonial Rule in Haiti*, (Philadelphia, published by the author, 1797-1798), translated, abridged, and edited by Ivor D. Spencer, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985, 73-75.



28,000 free blacks, and 32,000 whites.<sup>4</sup> Free blacks were still the minority population, but were nevertheless influential. In September of that year, a list of grievances sent as a decree to the National Assembly by Haiti's free blacks demonstrated the enlightened idea of individual rights, but with a particular emphasis on those that would benefit them. The list explicitly states that the Declaration of the Rights of Man should be applied to free people of color as it was to whites; that the Code Noir should be amended to reflect this; and that any privilege white people enjoyed, they should be able to enjoy as well, including the right for blacks and whites to enter into contracts and marriage.<sup>5</sup>

Technically, the Code Noir was responsible for the treatment of slaves throughout the French empire. It firmly held slaves in a status that gave them a greater similarity to property than to humans, and among other things, strictly prohibited them from becoming educated, marrying a non-slave, and engaging in commerce. It also outlined how masters should treat their slaves and allowed for some corporal punishment.<sup>6</sup> The Code Noir had been law since 1685, and despite the popularity of enlightened thinking in the late eighteenth century, its values were very much engrained in the French mindset. In his *Memoir of People of Mixed Race*, Henri Gregoire, a Parish Priest from Lorraine elected to the National Assembly, argued in 1789 that giving rights to free blacks would help uphold slavery. His argument was conflicted for some, but it did prove influential by resting on the fact that free blacks tended to be members of militias and were planters. As such, Gregoire believed they had just as much a stake in the slave society as white people and would work just as diligently to uphold it:

One rigorous consequence of what precedes is that the rejection of the people of color threatens the state with an unsettling shock; if on the contrary you fill in the gap that separates them from whites, if by bringing minds closer together you cement the mutual attachment of these two classes, their reunion will create a mass of forces that is more effective for containing the slaves...<sup>7</sup>

Gregoire's ideas influenced the National Assembly to take action. In March of 1790, a decree was proposed by the colonial committee of the National Assembly that threatened anyone who tried to instigate slave uprisings with prosecution, and exempted the colonies from the new French Constitution. Antoine-Pierre Barnave, a lawyer who represented the interest of France in its colonies, was instrumental in producing this decree. Barnave thought that Haiti's exemption from France's constitution was valid because it was a colony of France and not a province. He also thought that slavery should be maintained because it was vital to the function of Haiti as a sugar producing colony, and that anyone who instigated an uprising should indeed be punished.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, the decree only continued to make matters worse.

Free blacks continued to press for political rights in both Haiti and France, and in October of 1790, 350 mulattos rebelled. In a move foreboding of what would come in France, the rebellion's leaders were executed in February of 1791. Only three months later in May, the National Assembly took refuge in Gregoire's argument, and granted political rights to all free blacks who were born to free parents. In actuality, this only affected several hundred of the thousands of free blacks in Haiti, but it both thoroughly annoyed the pro-slavery white planter population and made the abolitionist increasingly vocal. One newspaper in France, the *Revolutions of Paris*, discussed the abolition of slavery in many of its articles. *Revolutions* published *No Color Bar* in September of 1790 as a justification of the increasingly radical behavior of the Revolutionaries, and to argue that it was the government which brought such actions upon itself:

“Let them learn that it is never in vain for people to be shown the truth, and that once the impetus is given, they must totally give way to the flood that will wash away the old abuses. The new order of things will rise up despite all the precautions that have been taken to prevent it. Yes! We dare to predict with confidence that the time will come, and that day is not far off, when you will see a frizzy-haired African, with no other recommendation than his good sense and his virtues, come and participate in the legislative process at the heart of our national assemblies.”<sup>9</sup>

It may have been premature to suggest that blacks would become part of government, but the author was correct in that once given an impetus, the people would have been more likely to push out the old system of government and to replace it with a new one. This was proven through the events in Haiti during the Revolution, but also in France where any impetus for further radicalization was utilized to do just that.

In August of 1791, the National Assembly revoked the rights they had given free blacks after slaves in Haiti rose in rebellion. This action only worsened Haiti's chaos, and throughout the fall of 1791 slaves burned their master's plantations, murdered their white masters, and attacked the surrounding towns. In March of 1792, the Legislative Assembly which replaced the National Assembly as France's body of government, voted to reinstate the rights of free blacks, but continued to do nothing about the rights of slaves.<sup>10</sup>

The emancipation of slaves became the most delicate issue surrounding the colonies during the French Revolution. Among France's educated, most agreed that free blacks should enjoy the civil liberties every Frenchman was entitled to. Slave's rights were less clear and defined. Many felt that a slow and gradual emancipation process was necessary to maintain the stability and profitability of the colonies as well as avoid uprisings that would cost France money that it ultimately did not have. In his essay, *On the Emancipation of the Negroes*, Jean-Louis Vieffville carefully plotted the rights and freedoms blacks should enjoy,

<sup>4</sup> Hunt, Lynn, “Chapter 8 Page 1,” <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/chap8a.html#>, accessed April 14, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> “List of Grievances to the National Assembly,” *Cahiers, contenant les plaintes, Doleances, et reclamations des citoyens-libre et proprietaires de couleur, des isles et colonies Françaises* (Paris, 1789).

<sup>6</sup> *The Black Code, Édit du Roi, Touchant la Police des Isles de l'Amérique Française* (Paris, 1687), 28–58.

<sup>7</sup> The materials listed below appeared originally in *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History*, translated, edited, and with an introduction by Lynn Hunt (Bedford/St. Martin's: Boston/New York), 1996, 105–6.

<sup>8</sup> *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History*, translated, edited, and with an introduction by Lynn Hunt (Bedford/St. Martin's: Boston/New York), 1996, 109–11.

<sup>9</sup> “No Color Bar,” *Les Révolutions de Paris*, no. 63 (5 September 1790), 523D24.

<sup>10</sup> Hunt, Lynn, “Chapter 8 Page 2,” <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/chap8b.html>, accessed April 14, 2006.

explicitly nullified the Code Noir, and established a hierarchy for emancipating slaves. His order for emancipation from first to last were slaves over the age of seventy, slaves who were married, orphaned slave children under fifteen once they became adults, all blacks who had worked for twenty or more years, and those over forty who could not work.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, Viefville's idea of building a charity home to accommodate the needs of slaves who were either not self-sufficient, or lacked family to help them was not only progressive, but ahead of its time. Viefville's decree kept Haiti as a colony, but would make all of the benefits of being French available to all of its residents regardless of race. None of his ideas were ever actually implemented.

Other arguments for maintaining stability in the colonies derived from economic interests. This should come as no surprise because much the French Revolution was shaped from economic influences, particularly France's enormous debts. Haiti generated income at a robust rate for France, due primarily from its slave-driven, sugar producing economy. Monseron de l'Aunay, a deputy of the chamber of commerce for the port city of Nantes, offered an excellent economic argument for keeping Haiti under French control, regardless of what the circumstances of the mother country were. Aunay used the example of Great Britain, which only a few years prior lost some of its highly profitable North American colonies. Aunay directed his argument at the National Assembly which he felt should arm the executive branch of government with the power to stop the revolution and the possible incursion of the British in Haiti if the French representatives who were there became too weak to exercise their power over the colony.<sup>12</sup>

Aunay's theory did have justification, Great Britain and Spain had strong colonial economic interests in the Western Hemisphere, and had begun to consider commercializing on France's problems in Haiti. France was not about to loose Haiti to the British or the Spanish, and in 1792, sent two agents to Haiti to suppress a slave revolt. The agents ended up abolishing slavery in Haiti after both the British and Spanish offered concessions to slaves who would join them in their fight against France. Initially the National Assembly condemned the agent's action, but eventually embraced it and abolished slavery in all of France's colonies.<sup>13</sup>

Many interpret this as a human rights action, and they are incorrect. The abolition of slavery was politically motivated, and ultimately necessary for the French to maintain control of Haiti. England and Spain had no intention of abolishing slavery in their own colonies when they offered concessions to Haitian slaves, but the slaves were too uneducated to realize any double standard. Unfortunately for France, abolishing slavery only proved to be a temporary fix. White people had been fleeing Haiti in droves and the few who were left saw slavery's abolishment as catastrophic to the society they had worked so diligently to uphold. Indeed, many people felt that the immediate emancipation of slaves in the colonies was a signal that France would loose their control over Haiti, not maintain it.

In hindsight, gradual emancipation would have been the most prudent action for France to take, but the nature of the French Revolution did not lend itself well to meticulously planned actions; it was a Revolution of quick, radical change. Even as a colony, Haiti was not exempt from this. Additionally, the political unrest that plagued France's economy had similar effects on Haiti's. Revolution does not make an environment conducive to trade, and Haiti's economy suffered considerably throughout the 1790s. By 1800, Haiti's plantations were producing only one fifth of what they were producing in 1789.<sup>14</sup>

Haiti ultimately exemplified the theory that no matter how progressive a governing document is, traditional, conflicting beliefs can nullify any potential benefits it may have. For example, Kersaint, a former Noble who was later executed in the reign of Terror, was a proponent of the gradual emancipation of slaves in the French colonies. However, he also realized that for white slave owners, the Declaration of the Rights of Man had the potential to overturn the society on which they had built their entire fortunes.<sup>15</sup> For thinkers like Kersaint, it would have only been natural for the white planter class to become exceptionally persistent in attempting to maintain the status-quo, and increasingly vocal about their feelings of racism. As one coffee planter stated, "He (the slave) is an animal rational in a middle degree; tolerably good, because he is docile and timid, and because he never thinks of a better condition than what he actually enjoys, unless the thought, as well as the means of attaining, is forced upon his observation."<sup>16</sup> In this planter's defense, he at least admits that using extreme brutality would be detrimental to the productivity of the slave, but qualifies this statement by saying that "We must extract from the negro all the work he can reasonably perform, and use every means to prolong his life. If interest directs the first, humanity enjoins the second, and here they both go hand in hand."<sup>17</sup>

Haiti eventually gained its independence after a slave rebellion in 1804 under the leadership of Toussaint L'Ouverture, a slave who became both literate and the leading Haitian general. The defeat of the French army under the leadership of Napoleon Bonaparte, despite L'Ouverture being captured and imprisoned in France until his death, had serious implications for slave societies around the world.<sup>18</sup> It embodied the worst-case scenario envisioned by slaveholders, and was made more intriguing because Haiti's original intent was not to become an independent nation. At the time, black Haitian planters only wished to receive the rights afforded to other people of their status in French society. The difference between intent and outcome were instrumental in shaping the ultimate outcome of the French Revolution, and the results of the decisions that lead to Haiti's independence were just as unpredictable as the decisions in France. After all, the execution of Louis XVI and the elimination of the French monarchy were certainly not original intentions of the Revolutionaries. Ultimately the effects of the French Revolution, of which Haiti's independence was a branch, really were a series of intended and unintended consequences that could not have been predicted then, and are still debated today.

<sup>11</sup> Jean-Louis Viefville des Essars, *Discours et projet de loi pour l'affranchissement des nègres ou l'adoucissement de leur régime, et réponse aux objections des colons* (Paris, n.d.).

<sup>12</sup> Letter from Monseron de l'Aunay to the Marquis de Condorcet, President of the Society of Friends of the Blacks (24 December 1789) *Journal of Paris*, vol. 362 (28 December 1789).

<sup>13</sup> Hunt, Lynn, "Chapter 8 Page 2," <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/chap8b.html>, accessed April 14, 2006.

<sup>14</sup> Hunt, Lynn, "Chapter 8 Page 2," <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/chap8b.html>, accessed April 14, 2006.

<sup>15</sup> *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History*, translated, edited, and with an introduction by Lynn Hunt (Bedford/St. Martin's: Boston/New York), 1996, 112-15

<sup>16</sup> P. J. Labourie, *The Coffee Planter of Saint-Domingo* (London, 1798), 157-70.

<sup>17</sup> P. J. Labourie, *The Coffee Planter of Saint-Domingo* (London, 1798), 157-70.

<sup>18</sup> Hunt, Lynn "Chapter 8 Page 2," <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/chap8b.html>, accessed April 14, 2006.

## Diaga Breitheamh: The Divine Judge

By: Dorian Joye

The Church in Ireland followed quite a different path than did the Church in England with regard to ecclesiastical legal practices and its court system.<sup>1</sup> In England the Church would not shed blood and rejected the Continental resort to torture after 1215. Instead, the English Church relied on a system of purgation and penance, and opted for the jury trial. In most cases, the English ecclesiastical courts were more lenient than secular authority. Consider the difference between the English secular and ecclesiastical courts in the prosecution of homicide: ecclesiastical courts allowed for gradation in forms of homicide, while secular authority provided for no difference between accidental homicide and murder. In Ireland, however, the Church was much harsher, especially in comparison with the native legal tradition. Crime was punished under native Irish law with compensatory fines, outlawry, and only rarely with physical retribution. Under the ecclesiastical law in Ireland, physical punishment in the form of severe public penance, trial by ordeal, and even capital punishment were much more common. This paper will attempt to explain the reasons for the discrepancies between the Irish and English Church courts by focusing on the differences in jurisdiction, penance and punishment, and the ecclesiastical relationship with secular authority.

Although there is clear evidence of differences between the English and Irish ecclesiastical courts, historians have offered little explanation for why the Irish Church took a more aggressive stance in its fight against criminal sins than its English neighbors. Peter Ellis is quick to point out that it was the influence of Christianity in the later middle ages that brought about the more severe methods of criminal justice. He refers to certain myths which attribute the harshest penalties to the famous (or perhaps infamous) St. Patrick.<sup>2</sup> These myths have led some scholars to conclude that it was St. Patrick who successfully integrated the death penalty in Ireland. Robin Stacey Chapman also offers stories of St. Patrick's rather unseemly zealous behavior, including the staging of a hunger strike against God, and admonishing a cleric for failing to perform a miracle on command.<sup>3</sup> However, the myths surrounding St. Patrick are highly questionable as to biographical or ideological authenticity, and do not provide the definitive historical evidence to bolster such assumptions. They may provide some insight into the Irish interpretations of the role of God in criminal procedure and life in general, but they do not contribute any significant explanation for differences in ecclesiastical criminal procedure in Ireland. Moreover, it would be mistaken to simplify the evidence of harsher punishments so much that Christianity remains the reason for such changes in Ireland. After all, the English Church courts were much more merciful treatment for even serious crimes. If Christianity itself were the primary cause for the dichotomy between ecclesiastical and secular courts, why did the Church in England remain so much more lenient?

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<sup>1</sup> Ellis, Peter Bradford (1995). *Celtic Women: women in Celtic society and literature*. London: Constable and Company Ltd.

<sup>2</sup> Ellis p. 133

<sup>3</sup> Stacey, Robin Chapman (1994). *The Road to Judgment: from custom to court on medieval Ireland Wales*. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press. p. 206

### Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction in England

One of the most important distinctions to be made between the ecclesiastical courts in Ireland and England is the jurisdictional relationship with secular authority. In England, the Church was not a replacement for secular authority. Rather, it acted in conjunction with a strong royal authority, one of the two swords of God's divine justice. Canon law's assumption was that, in order for a trial to be just, the accused should be tried by a group of his peers, those who would know him best. Except for a few crimes, laymen would be tried before lay courts unless local custom dictated otherwise.<sup>4</sup> Subsequently, clergy should be tried in the ecclesiastical courts. However, there were cases when the Church felt the need to hear cases which should have been reserved for lay authority, such as homicide, but these jurisdictional claims were based in the need to fill a gap in the secular system, not replace it entirely.

Technically, the English Church's jurisdiction was limited to crimes of the sexual, moral, and specifically religious nature. Nonetheless, the church courts presided over a wide array of crimes.<sup>5</sup> The most common indictments for crimes in the Church courts included defamation and slander, sexual crimes, and crimes among and against the clergy. In essence, the Church was interested in crimes that specifically threatened the family (as in adultery) and the souls of the faithful (as in heresy). Every crime was first a sin against God and the Church, and the Church placed a high priority on preserving the family. However, in cases when the royal courts provided an “inadequate forum” for prosecution, the Church stepped in to provide a more merciful alternative.<sup>6</sup> This is especially true in cases of infanticide, which were very rarely tried in royal courts.<sup>7</sup> Jurisdiction was not always so sharply defined, however. Rape and prostitution were crimes that were heard in both royal and ecclesiastical courts, even though sexual crimes were generally reserved for the Church courts.<sup>8</sup> Such ambiguity in jurisdictional boundaries suggests that the Church saw a genuine need for the power of the secular arm. The royal courts were helpful in the prosecution and sentencing in cases of serious offenses, such as heresy. Since the Church could not shed blood, ecclesiastic jurors could hand convicts over to secular authorities for execution. Clearly, the Church courts in England had a relationship with the royal courts that was both complimentary and at times contentious. Both the secular authority and the Church were strong enough to protect their own respective jurisdictions, and each willing (in most cases) to respect that of the other. While jurisdiction may have been ambiguous in some cases, it is important that the Church courts in England actually had to account for secular authority over criminal prosecution in some cases, and was willing to utilize that authority for aid in its own mission in shepherding the fold.

### Penance and Punishment under the English Ecclesiastical Courts

The English Church's understanding of penance and retribution for sins illustrates the central reasons for its interest in maintaining jurisdictional boundaries. The Church recognized that sinners required penitential atonement while they were alive if they would be saved from damnation. For felonies, the royal courts imposed one punishment: death. If the Church's first duty was to ensure the salvation of as many souls as possible, it was obliged to offer a punishment for a crime that would give the convicted the opportunity to repent. Mercy was the first policy in ecclesiastical criminal trials.<sup>9</sup> Atonement in the form of public penance was not meant so much to punish the sinner as it was to give him the opportunity to re-establish himself in God's favor. In other words, substitute earthly punishment for the eternal.<sup>10</sup> It follows, then, that for the laity to defy the right to atone for sins, or to deny a person's right to protection under the Church would also be a culpable act. A person could be excommunicated for violating a person's claim of sanctuary, and obliged to do public penance as surely as the man who was running from the law in the first place.<sup>12</sup>

Besides the desire to show mercy and help to ensure the salvation of souls, the English Church had other reasons for leniency in criminal trials. One was the understanding of the limitations of the human will and power of judgment. While God's judgment was sure, the Church's judgment was imperfect.<sup>13</sup> Because there was always room for error when human beings were making decisions about someone's life, mercy was of utmost importance. It is from these sentiments that the English version of solutions to the problem of serious sin and criminal activity: There was compurgation, which could either restore a person's good reputation or seal it as stained. This was often followed by public penance, which could be anything ranging from public flogging to a trial by ordeal.

### The English Ordeal

The ordeal was an elaborate, often painful ritual that was meant to invoke Divine Judgment on a person accused of a felony in an inconclusive case. What will be significant to the discussion later is the difference between the Irish and English interpretations of these same solutions, especially regarding the use of the ordeal. While often viewed as a barbaric, often contradictory approach to criminal justice in otherwise merciful Church courts, the English ordeals were reserved for only very serious criminal cases in which there was not enough evidence for the judges to pronounce a verdict.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, in most cases, the proband was found innocent, expunged of all charges, and given a stainless re-entry into the community. There were some cases in which a person absolved by the ordeal was then subjected to banishment, but this requirement was enforced by royal authority, not the Church.<sup>15</sup>

Probably the most important difference between the ecclesiastical

<sup>4</sup> Helmholz, R.H. (2004). *The Oxford History of the Laws of England: Volume I The Canon Law and Ecclesiastical jurisdiction from 597 to the 1640s*. New York: Oxford University Press. p. 602

<sup>5</sup> Helmholz *The Oxford History of the Laws of England* p. 229

<sup>6</sup> Helmholz, R.H. (1983) *Crime and Compurgation and the Court of the Medieval Church*. *Law and History Review* 1 (pp. 1-26) p.17

<sup>7</sup> Helmholz, pp. 16 “Crime and Compurgation”

<sup>8</sup> Kelly, Henry Ansgar (2000). *Bishop, Prioress, and the Bawd in the Stews of Southwark*. *Speculum*, 75, 2, 342-388.

<sup>9</sup> McCall, Andrew (1979). *The Medieval Underworld*. London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd. p. 27

<sup>10</sup> Helmholz, “Crime and Compurgation...” p. 13-26

<sup>11</sup> McCall p. 26

<sup>12</sup> McCall pp. 27-28

<sup>13</sup> Helmholz *The Oxford History of the Laws of England* p. 603

<sup>14</sup> Kerr, Margaret H. (1992). *Cold Water and Hot Iron: Trial By Ordeal in England*. *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XXII, 4: 573-595. p. 580

<sup>15</sup> Kerr p. 575

courts in England and those in Ireland to consider is the fact that in 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council prohibited the participation of the clergy in the ordeal, an act which spurred a major change in the legal system in England: the adoption of the jury trial. Thus, after 1215 in England, ordeals were deemed unacceptable means of proof, especially under the presumption of essentially forcing God to deal with such cases. In Ireland, however, the 1215 ban does not have the impact.

### Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction in Ireland

There are several theories regarding the nature of ecclesiastical jurisdiction in Ireland, two of which are particularly relevant to this discussion. The first theory suggests there existed two distinct legal authorities, each having their own separate jurisdictions, though occasionally overlapping as in England.<sup>16</sup> The second theory describes a fused jurisdiction in which the native law system was absorbed by the Church from very early on. In this theory it is supposed that the Church's influence was so great that native traditional legal practice became a kind of proxy for the more powerful, more learned ecclesiastics.<sup>17</sup> In Ireland there is almost no distinction between native secular jurisdiction and ecclesiastical jurisdiction. It is as if Church leaders in Ireland expanded upon the idea of all crimes being sins first against God and the Church. Having lost their credibility, native jurists were frightened into a corner so that even if they might have wanted to maintain their jurisdictional boundaries, the organization and overwhelming advantage of scriptural justification--"God's law made manifest in written form"<sup>18</sup>--of the Church would have been nearly impossible to overcome. Consequently, the ecclesiastical courts in Ireland were much more influential and necessary to keep the peace of the nation as they saw it. Unlike the complementary relationship between ecclesiastical and royal authorities in England, the Irish Church courts were not working in conjunction with an existing system, they were replacing it.

The fact that the Church was capable of asserting its legal authority almost without question can be connected with the common belief in the influence of the supernatural realm in the natural that was already imbedded in the pre-Christian Celtic world. Consequently, the ecclesiastical policies on prosecution of crime would have been understandable and attractive to the newly converted Irish. In Ireland, "The supernatural was a part of the law because it was a part of life itself."<sup>19</sup> The presence of relics in the life and legal tradition of the Irish Church is a concrete illustration of this claim. The devotion to relics was a Christian practice that was largely embraced by the native Irish. For many, they were gateways to the spirit world, talismans which conferred the power of God. Thus, throughout the British Isles, though to a greater extent in Ireland and Wales, relics were extremely important in many legal matters. In essence, they were reminders of the Divine watchfulness and judgment. For instance, a victim's family seeking a wergild might bring a relic with them upon confronting the

offender or his family.<sup>20</sup> The relic gave the bearers authority, Divine authority. Only the foolish would question the ones with whom God's favor rests.

### Jurisdiction, Punishment and the Monastic Tradition in Ireland

The extent of the Church's jurisdiction in Ireland is directly related to at least two factors: One, the disorganization and lenience of the secular courts, and two, the active presence and academic influence of a well-established monastic tradition. Under the native law system, those accused of crimes could pay a compensatory fee known as the eric-fine, a body fine elsewhere known as *wergild*, to the victim's family. Only in cases where this fee could not be obtained did the *family*, not the state (for there was no truly organized state) then gain the right to carry out vengeance. The courts stayed out of it.<sup>21</sup> There were virtually no instances of capital punishment, or severe public humiliation under the native court system, for even serious crimes were only vaguely under the jurisdiction of a state authority. Most crimes and misdemeanors were settled privately. With the growing power of the Church in Ireland, the ecclesiastics began to assume more and more control over both criminal and civil proceedings. The Church courts in Ireland maintained jurisdiction over the same criminal sins as in England, for instance adultery, sodomy, false witness, theft, and idolatry.<sup>22</sup> However, even in cases of more secular nature, including property disputes, assault, and homicide, it is clear that no aspect of the law was out of God's jurisdiction. Neither was anything outside that of the Church.<sup>23</sup> This much more invasive policy seems to have its roots in the ascetic monastic tradition in Ireland, from which the ecclesiastical courts also acquired their protocol for assigning penance, and especially the concept of "right intention" with regard to violent punishment.

Because of the active presence and academic influence of the monasteries, there is more evidence of accusations against monks and nuns, even those who were cloistered. One very famous case involves an Irish abbess named Elicia Butler. In 1531, she was accused of excessive violence--e.g. drawing blood--in anger towards her nuns, found guilty, removed from her post and finally excommunicated.<sup>24</sup> This case provides a significant look into the thought of Irish monastic communities: Discipline by superiors was common and widely accepted, even encouraged among the monastic clergy.<sup>25</sup> As in all measures, however, using physical force required the right motivation: that of purification and motherly discipline, never anger.<sup>26</sup> But even superiors were not above the justice of ecclesiastical law. The Church courts assumed the position of supreme arbiter and example of motherly love--and discipline. As God's representative, the Church is always justified under the "right intention," for God's intention is always perfect.

Punishment within this monastic tradition was based largely on the rule of St. Benedict.<sup>27</sup> Because the monasteries were so influential in Irish lay and

<sup>20</sup> Stacey p. 218

<sup>21</sup> Ellis p. 133

<sup>22</sup> McCall p. 28

<sup>23</sup> Stacey p. 217

<sup>24</sup> Hall, Dianne (2003) Women and violence in late medieval Ireland. In Catherin Lawless and Christine Meeks (Eds.), *Studies on Medieval Women and Early Modern Women: Pawns or Players?* (pp.131-141). Portland, OR: Four Courts Press. pp. 131-135

<sup>25</sup> Hall p. 134

<sup>26</sup> Hall p. 137

<sup>27</sup> Hall p. 135

<sup>16</sup> Ellis p. 135

<sup>17</sup> Stacey, Robin Chapman (1994). *The Road to Judgment: from custom to court in Medieval Ireland and Wales*. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press. p. 136

<sup>18</sup> Stacey p. 136

<sup>19</sup> Stacey p. 220

## “Diaga Breitheamh: The Divine Judge”

academic society, this Rule was certainly present in the Irish church courts. In Ireland, the ecclesiastics went much further in prescription of public punishments (*celebrad*) for a variety of what the English courts considered to be non-criminal sins, such as the violation of the sanctity of Sunday by missing mass.<sup>28</sup> In short, there existed a much more regulated and invasive policy in seeking the salvation of souls than in England, where the monastic tradition was not nearly as present or powerful.

### On the Irish Ordeal

The severity of ecclesiastical punishment in Ireland is most apparent in the use of the ordeal and the traditional use of the ordeal in Ireland is markedly different from its use in England. Not only was the practice continued long past the 1215 ban, it was used much more frequently, and not only in criminal cases. A person could opt for trial by dual, or poison, or hot iron in civil cases of disputed property claims. Ordeal was deemed necessary either when there was little proof to sway proper judgment either way, or else the case concerned a crime highly disruptive to social order.<sup>29</sup> Though the ordeal may have still been regarded as a form of penance, the absolving power of the ordeal seems to have come into question in some cases in Ireland. For instance, one ordeal specific to female felons is known as an “offense of the seal” or to be “set adrift.” In cases of a homicide were the *eric-fine* could not be paid, “the guilty woman was put in a boat without oars, sail or rudder and set adrift.”<sup>30</sup> Interestingly enough, the woman was punished either way fate would have it. If she did not return, she was obviously guilty, and by God’s providence would have died of dehydration and starvation, or drowning. However, even if she was washed back to shore, she was still outlawed, labeled *fuidhir*, or “non-free,” though her judgment was still truly left to God.<sup>31</sup> Evidently, it seems the Church was more interested in vengeful punishment than its more typical desire for the salvation of souls, for even this penitential ordeal did not fully absolve the woman. This post-ordeal outlawry by the ecclesiastical courts is notable, for in England, as was mentioned earlier, outlawry after a successful ordeal was compelled by the *royal* courts.

The significance of this ordeal lies as much in the reasoning behind such an event as in the protocol for interpreting the outcome. Rather than the ordeal being a kind of hands-off ritual overseen by the Church, in Ireland there seems to have been an idea among clergy that while God was ultimately just, his judgment was not always obvious enough. Many times, matters had to be taken into the human hands of the Church. Not only is there a very serious risk of dying --perhaps a backhanded form of capital punishment--in being “set adrift,” it is important to note that there is no presumption of innocence, as in the English ordeals.<sup>32</sup> Even absolution by the ordeal does not guarantee stainless re-entry into society. In effect, the Irish ordeal seems to have been more about punishment and retribution than a final stage of compurgation. On the other hand, requiring

exile or outlawry after an ordeal does suggest a different view of such a sentence, that of penance. Instead of interpreting a successful ordeal as God’s judgment of innocence, the Irish interpreted it as a new beginning in which God gives the proband an additional opportunity to cleanse his or her soul through penance. Outlawry, then, becomes a means to a holy end that one could not attain in any other way.

### Where did the Protocol for Public Penance Originate?

In response to the earlier claim that Christianity itself was the cause of harsher criminal procedure in the ecclesiastical courts of Ireland, there is one factor that cannot be ignored. Penitentials used all over Europe were the product of *Irish monasteries* in the early middle ages when Celtic monks were primarily concerned with converting the vastly pagan land.<sup>33</sup> These Penitentials were essentially reference guides to the proper prescription of penances for monks traveling the countryside of Northern Europe hearing confessions. Thus, wherever the monks went, so went the Penitentials to be used by priests everywhere. These books contained protocol for a great number of crimes and sins, and were especially careful in their distinctions between laity and clerics, serious sins and venial sins, habitual and occasional offenses, and, of course, intentional or unintentional crime. The *Penitential of Cummean* (c. 650) stipulates death as punishment for premeditated murder by a layman, perpetual pilgrimage for murder by a monk, and penance of varying in length for crimes of passion (three years) or accidental homicide (one year).<sup>34</sup> Of course, these penitentials had been written originally for the use of skilled and trained monks. Thus, when the books passed into more ignorant hands, the methodology and severity of punishments began to be criticized alongside abuses which began to surface. In 829, there was even an order to have penitentials destroyed to abolish any further misuse of them.<sup>35</sup> However, by this point, 200 years of use and influence had become too ingrained in the minds of the clergy for such practices to cease altogether.

The early penitentials were often very harsh. Most sins required a punishment of penance or prolonged fasting--up to twelve years for a bishop guilty of such sins as fornication, perjury, or drunkenness. A man who had difficulty staying awake for his duties, “The Sleepy Man” was prescribed to make a vigil, which required watchfulness over the course of at least one night, and unceasing prayer while kneeling on nettles or nutshells.<sup>36</sup> One penitential even prescribes death in the event of premeditated murder. *Penitential of Cummean* states that “He who commits murder through nursing hatred in his mind shall give up his arms in death, and dead unto the world, shall live unto God.”<sup>37</sup> Clearly, there is evidence early on that the Irish Church was actually advocating capital punishment, though only in particularly abominable cases. In the absence of a strong secular authority, the Church filled the gap even to the point of execution. Since these penitentials were written by Irish monks, it seems impossible that

<sup>28</sup> Stacey p. 219

<sup>29</sup> Stacey p. 118

<sup>30</sup> Ellis p. 134

<sup>31</sup> Ellis p. 134-35

<sup>32</sup> Ellis p. 134

<sup>33</sup> McCall p. 29

<sup>34</sup> McCall p. 29

<sup>35</sup> McCall p. 30

<sup>36</sup> McCall p. 30

<sup>37</sup> McCall p. 29

the severity and asceticism of the monastic lifestyle would not have influenced ecclesiastical procedure down the road.<sup>38</sup>

Penances were designed to purge the soul and to reconcile a person once more with God. At least early on, as in England, these penances were not so much about punishment as they were about restorative purification and reconciliation.<sup>39</sup> The dichotomy between English and Irish Ecclesiastical law must have its origins in a more culturally distinctive area. However, just where and when the two traditions drift apart is still rather unclear.

#### **Cultural Differences: Roman Law, Common Law, and Barbarian Law**

The plurality of criminal policies and procedures in the ecclesiastical courts in England and Ireland may be explained by the difference in cultural influences on the legal traditions in the respective countries. Christianity in and of itself cannot be the defining factor, for the Penitentials, written by Irish monks, provided the basis for penitential theology in both England and Ireland. Location and different intercultural interactions, however, could account for such variation in ecclesiastical policy. Britain, including both England and Ireland, was influenced by both Roman and Barbarian legal traditions.<sup>40</sup> Though England’s court system operated under the common law system, it was influenced much more heavily by Roman law than by the Barbarian law, which advocated a much more severe system of criminal justice. On the other hand, Ireland never adopted Roman legal practices. Rather, Ireland adopted policies closer to the Barbarian traditions, having had much more exposure to them than the Romans. Celtic monks took a leading role in the conversion process of the Northern Barbarians. It is a logical consequence of that interaction that ideas would have been shared and exchanged on matters of policy, dealings with criminals, and keeping the peace. It is even possible, then, that both Barbarian traditions and native Irish tribal traditions would have crept into canon law, or at least in its practice.

The Celts were a pagan, tribal people deeply rooted in their beliefs and rituals. Thus, when the first Christian missionaries arrived, they must have seen a greater challenge for conversion both because of the entrenched native spirituality, and a laxity of moral, specifically sexual, behavior. Perhaps Irish church leaders, especially in the latter part of the period, began to develop a sense of anxiety about the salvation of souls of those in the community. Perhaps this is a cause for the implementation of harsher punishments. Furthermore, that Irish ecclesiastics were natives themselves lends itself to the fact that they could have been reactionary against their own pagan heritage. Who is more zealous than the newly converted?

#### **Conclusion**

This divergence within the Church suggests a plurality of practices that

is likely to have existed elsewhere, breaking down the traditional view of the one, all-encompassing institution of the “Medieval Church.” Between countries even as closely situated as England and Ireland, cultural and social factors caused variation in theological understanding, especially with regards to sin and penance. In this instance, the Irish were clearly more ardent in their desire for purification on Earth through ascetic practices and harsh penances than the English. Still, the dichotomy between the criminal procedures in the ecclesiastical courts in England and Ireland is not easily explained, especially in considering the common source for penitential protocol. In both England and Ireland, the church courts’ more invasive policies seem to be a movement to fill holes in the secular court system. However, the extent to which the Church could stretch its jurisdictional boundaries was quite different in the two countries. Whereas in England the king was vying for power, the Irish secular authorities lacked the organization to be the iron hand of justice that the English king could be. In Ireland, the monasteries took it upon themselves to maintain public peace and order. Where there was much disorder and prevalence of lifestyles contrary to Church doctrine, it is logical that the Irish Church would have taken a more active, albeit harsher approach in punishing sin and crime than in England.

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<sup>38</sup> McCall p. 29

<sup>39</sup> McCall pp. 30-31

<sup>40</sup> McCall p. 41

## The Impact of the French Revolution on Slavery

By: Erin N. O'Neal

The French Revolution had dynamic implications that impacted individuals beyond its borders. Not only was the world forever changed by an unexpected revolution, but it allowed individuals to further examine a controversial topic that sparked debate throughout the world. Slavery was a blemish that many wanted to ignore, while others fought feverishly to expose it and reform it, some to the point of demanding the extinction of the institution all together. Regardless of a person's stance, the world, with the help of what is now deemed as the Revolutionary period, would be launched into consistent upheaval based on the topic of slavery. The principles, documents and ideals of the French Revolution fermented the debate as tensions rose to dangerous proportions. The end result would be a violent revolution in the French colony of Saint Domingue and increasing fears in the United States, followed by an abolitionist movement unlike any the world had seen before. One cannot examine the French Revolution without noticing the reasons it resonated in the minds of so many, or the dramatic outcomes of its ideals.

Understanding why the French Revolution had such an imperative impact on the rest of the world, relies on identifying some of the important ideals set forth by those who spurred the Revolution along. Throughout the Revolution, people began discussing their political and social oppressions, while attempting to address what they perceived to be the crucial attributes of a leader. Maximilien Robespierre is one such individual, who in his report "On the Principles of Political Morality," proclaimed that "[e]very precaution must be used to place the interests of freedom in the hands of truth, which is eternal, rather than in those of men who change; so that if the government forgets the interests of the people or falls into the hands of men corrupted... the light of acknowledged principles should unmask their treasons".<sup>1</sup> Upon reading this particular section of the report, one notices the mentioned ideals of freedom and the yearning of the citizens to have a leader with a strict obedience to the needs of his constituents. This notion, whether aimed at slaves, free blacks and creoles, or not, does help many different sects of people to begin pondering their own social status and their own ideals of freedom and anti- oppression.

When readers examine the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizen, as adopted by the National Assembly of France, one cannot help but to notice the inclusion of the phrases "men are born and remain free and equal in rights," which are "liberty, property, security and resistance to oppression".<sup>2</sup> Understandably, many would read this, or in some cases hear of these possibilities and begin applying them to their own situation. Free blacks and Creoles, in particular, who were more likely to know how to read, would wonder why they do not have the same rights and are not allowed to hold the same positions as whites. After this happens, the word of freedom had the potential to spread to slaves. It is also known, with a degree of certainty, that "slaves got their

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<sup>1</sup> Robespierre, Maximilien. "On the Principles of Political Morality, February 1794". Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution. CD-ROM. New York: American Social and History Productions, Inc. 2001.

<sup>2</sup> "Approved by the National Assembly of France, August 26, 1789". Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution. CD-ROM. New York: American Social and History Productions, Inc. 2001.



information about revolutionary events in France... from slaves that worked at the docks unloading and loading [ships]”.<sup>3</sup> All of these groups, like the average Frenchman, would be trying to figure a way out of their oppressive lives. While the declaration also says that “social distinctions may be founded upon the general good,” it later insists that “liberty consists in the freedom to do everything which injures no one else”.<sup>4</sup> The majority of people reading this statement would not assume that their oppression was for the ‘general good’ of society and they would also assume that their “owner’s” right to own them causes their injury and therefore cannot be considered acceptable. These principles would help build the argument for emancipation. The simple notion of fighting for freedom would increase fervor in any of the oppressed. Essentially, it meant that slaves and abolitionists would have the ammunition they needed to formulate an emancipation argument.

For the island of Saint Domingue, historians know that the free blacks and creoles who were on the island, many of whom were slave owners themselves, would begin to see the basic ideals of the French Revolution. This would spark discussions about their own status as men who are subjected to French rule and had many similarities with the more prominent men on the island, but were not granted the same rights.<sup>5</sup> The Grievance List, presented initially to the National Assembly, which appears in the *Cahiers* in September of 1789, shows the growing sentiments of the free, non- white, population of Saint Domingue, who argued for the “humiliating distinctions” that have been claimed between blacks and whites to be removed.<sup>6</sup> The general belief held by the black population was that both groups, with the removal of this distinction, could achieve actual equality, because the only notion that is separating the groups is the theory of black racial inadequacies. The problem with this is that white slave holders used theories of racial differences to promote slaves as helpless beings that were saved by slavery and they also used these theories to prevent their jobs from being given to black slave owners and property holders, both of which whites would protect at all costs.

The removal of such distinctions, however, was not the only demand the delegates were presenting to the National Assembly. The delegates stated that the black colonists wanted to be “admitted, concurrently with Whites, to all ranks, positions, responsibilities, dignities and honors,” or in other words have total and complete social and economic equality with their white counterparts and to be divided merely on class distinctions, not racial ones.<sup>7</sup> These non-white slave owners were not concerned with the liberation of all blacks, but instead wanted their own liberation, leaving the institution of slavery intact, while elevating their own status to that of whites.<sup>8</sup> Clearly, the whites of the colony would not want this to happen, because it would compromise their status.

<sup>3</sup> Censer, Jack and Lynn Hunt. *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press. 2001. 122.

<sup>4</sup> “Approved by the National Assembly of France, August 26, 1789”.

<sup>5</sup> Censer and Hunt, 118.

<sup>6</sup> “Grievance List (September 1789)”. *Cahiers, Contenant les Plaintes, Doleances et Reclamations des Citoyens-libre et Proprietaires de Couleur, des Isles et Colonies Francaises* (Paris, 1789). *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution*. CD-ROM. New York: American Social and History Productions, Inc. 2001.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> “Grievance List (September 1789)”. *Cahiers, Contenant les Plaintes, Doleances et Reclamations des Citoyens-libre et Proprietaires de Couleur, des Isles et Colonies Francaises* (Paris, 1789). *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution*. CD-ROM. New York: American Social and History Productions, Inc. 2001.

Ironically enough, the list of grievances does mention the fraternization of white slave holders and black female slaves, and the need for stricter punishments for such behavior, including the freedom of both mother and child, if one is conceived.<sup>9</sup> All of these grievances demonstrate the ability of the colonists to use the principles of the French Revolution to address their own problems.

While these individuals used the ideals to their advantage, other individuals began to use the notions as means to push for permanent abolition. The situation of the slaves in the colony was particularly gruesome. According to the Society of the Friends of Blacks, in their “Address to the National Assembly in Favor of the Abolition of the Slave Trade”, Saint Domingue slaves were “butchered by the thousands... in order to take hundreds of captives,” and bring them to the colonies on over-crowded, disease-ridden boats, so they could be destroyed day by day with “work, whippings and starvation”.<sup>10</sup> Speculation concludes that “two thirds of the prostitutes in Saint Domingue were women of color”.<sup>11</sup> The descriptions presented by this address would be enough to bring some men to the point of arguing for abolition and with the addition of the views of the French Revolution, views that these men specifically point to when formulating their argument, the reasons for abolition grew stronger. For example, the address explicitly proclaims to France that “[they] have engraved on an immortal monument that ‘all men are born and remain free and equal in rights’” and “[they] have broken the chains of feudalism,” and because these ideals were sufficient enough to provide white men liberation, then it should be enough to liberate the slaves (liberate them, not give them the same rights as white men).<sup>12</sup>

Other similar documents would surface in the same year, 1789, proposing that if the principles of the French Revolution were real, then the abolition of slavery was the next logical addition to French liberty. For many involved, the situation of the slaves had to be addressed, if for no other reason than the fact that people were beginning to look at laws governing slaves and they began noticing the cruelty of many of the laws like the *Code Noir* of 1685, the prominent slave governing document up to 1789, issued as an edict of Louis XIV, which explicitly stated that a master could murder a slave who raised his hand to his owner, among many other intolerably cruel acts.<sup>13</sup> Questions still remained, though, about the effects that complete emancipation would have on the economy of France, which relied heavily on cash crops from the colonies for support. Some gradual abolitionists began formulating their own ideas of how to deal with the slavery issue to ease the worries of some of their opponents.

One anonymous group suggested, in their pamphlet “The Abolition of Negro Slavery or Means for Ameliorating Their Lot,” that the slave experience should be similar to “the condition of the soldiers by providing an enlistment for a definite time at the end of which freedom would be restored to them,” or they

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> “Society of the Friends of Blacks, ‘Address to the National Assembly in Favor of the Abolition of the Slave Trade’ (5 February 1790)”. *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution*. CD-ROM. New York: American Social and History Productions, Inc. 2001.

<sup>11</sup> Censer and Hunt, 119.

<sup>12</sup> “Society of the Friends of Blacks, ‘Address to the National Assembly in Favor of the Abolition of the Slave Trade’ (5 February 1790)”.

<sup>13</sup> “The Code Noir”. *Edit du Roi, Touchant la Police des Isles de l’Amerique Francaise* (Paris, 1687). 28-58. *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution*. CD-ROM. New York: American Social and History Productions, Inc. 2001.

could “enlist for another term”.<sup>14</sup> Like a soldier, the slave would not be able to terminate this contract without “being punished by death”.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps the most interesting part of this idea is the presumption that slaves would actually want to continue to be slaves, which although certainly possible, since historians do know that some slaves were so loyal to their masters that they would not revolt against them, it is still seemingly unlikely that this would occur. Regardless, this article was particularly imperative because it showed that more individuals were coming up with ideas of alleviating the woes of slavery, without dramatically altering the lives of those in the colonies, or the lives of the French in Europe. If one were to judge the movement based on these documents alone, the assumption would be made that the French were moving towards the emancipation of slaves and there was no real need for a revolution.

Unfortunately enough for proponents of slavery, who spent a greater deal of time trying to prevent black, Creole and mulatto slave and property owners of the colony of Saint Domingue, from having the same rights and privileges, and not enough time attending to the abolitionist movement, the slaves of Saint Domingue had emancipation ideas of their own. As tensions rose between black and white planters throughout the colony, black planters threatened to invoke slaves to rebel as the slave was going to “raise the standard of the revolt”.<sup>16</sup> Essentially, everyone knew that since slaves and free blacks greatly outnumbered whites on the island, if they banded together, the whites would not be able to stop them. However, it is somewhat unlikely that free blacks, Creoles and mulattos were willing to jeopardize their own status over slaves for the slight possibility of further equality. In essence, they would be afraid to jeopardize the immense rights they do have, for a few rights they have yet to obtain. Chances are more likely that they were threatening to do so because they knew that it was the one outcome that whites feared the most. The Creoles and free blacks probably hoped to use the threat of abolition as a bargaining tool, hoping that whites would surrender to avoid the emancipation of slaves. Regardless, the situation escalated to drastic proportions and in response to whites lynching mulattos, in October of 1790, approximately 350 mulattos “prepared an insurrection”.<sup>17</sup> At the end of a seemingly unsuccessful rebellion, the insurrectionists were caught and hung, including a prominent abolitionist, who was well known in France, causing the National Assembly to take action.<sup>18</sup>

This turmoil would have grave repercussions for both white plantation owners and for their non- white counterparts. While free blacks were fighting for the rights previously reserved for white colonists, and the National Assembly was in the midst of trying to pass a resolution granting them full political rights (1792), because they agreed that the principles of the revolution applied in this case, “the slaves of Saint Domingue rose in revolt.”<sup>19</sup> The situation that had been feared— a violent rebellion— had been actualized. Slaves burned plantations to the ground and “wreaked their vengeance on their masters with pillage,

rape, torture, mutilation, and death”.<sup>20</sup> France was shocked when news of the insurrection reached them and in a bold attempt to try and alleviate grievances and end the rebellion, the National Convention voted to abolish slavery in the colonies on February 4, 1794 and proclaimed that they would share in “all the rights assured by the constitution”.<sup>21</sup> Saint Domingue would eventually achieve complete independence from France in 1804, after Napoleon failed to retake the island.<sup>22</sup> News then traveled to America, not only about the violent insurrection, but about the emancipation of the slaves and then the eventual liberation of the entire colony.

The culture of the United States was in a particularly fragile state and news of the new country of Haiti, a country being run by blacks, further agitated the situation. During this time, the debate over liberty and freedom was slowly beginning to turn to the question of slavery. The United States was founded on some of the same concepts that the French Revolution was fighting for, mainly, in the words of the Americans, “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”. One letter, written in 1774, a letter in support of the American Revolution, explicitly said that “when a nation led to greatness by the hand of liberty... instead of giving support to freedom, turns advocate for slavery and oppression, there is reason to suspect she has either ceased to be virtuous, or [has] been extremely negligent in the appointments of her rulers”.<sup>23</sup> This letter was clearly written in response to the “oppression” of the American colonists by England, but as was the case with many French Revolution documents, the discussion of freedom could not be continued without discussing slavery. With many parallels and ideals on liberty, some American individuals, like their French counterparts, began the debate over slavery.

The American south would have belligerent reactions to the movement, but more importantly, with events like the Haitian Revolution, Southerners would grow increasingly paranoid about a similar slave insurrection occurring on their own soil and destroying their own homes and livelihoods. Admittedly, their fears were not completely unjustified, because in 1800, a slave named Gabriel Prosser attempted to organize 1,000 slaves to march on Richmond, Virginia, a plot that was foiled before it could be actualized.<sup>24</sup> In response to the Haitian Revolution and Gabriel Prosser’s plot, Southerners began imagining the wrath of slaves as being a fate “worse than hell itself”.<sup>25</sup> Other rebellion possibilities soon surfaced with slaves like Denmark Vesey (1822) who planned to “torch Charleston and go to Haiti” and Nat Turner (1831), a slave preacher, who through his sermons persuaded a few slaves to attempt a similar rebellion in Virginia, with the hopes that other slaves would join the rebellion along the

<sup>14</sup> “Abolition of Negro Slavery or Means for Ameliorating Their Lot, 1789”. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution. CD-ROM. New York: American Social and History Productions, Inc. 2001.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Censer and Hunt, 122.

<sup>17</sup> Censer and Hunt, 123.

<sup>18</sup> Censer and Hunt, 123.

<sup>19</sup> Censer and Hunt, 123.

<sup>20</sup> Censer and Hunt, 123-124.

<sup>21</sup> “Decree of the National Convention of 4 February 1794, Abolishing Slavery in all the Colonies”. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution. CD-ROM. New York: American Social and History Productions, Inc. 2001.

<sup>22</sup> Censer and Hunt, 116.

<sup>23</sup> Minz, S. (2003). Anonymous Letter of 1774. Gilder Lehrman Number GLC 4774. Digital History. Retrieved 1 April 2006 from <http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/>

<sup>24</sup> Ross, Michael A. “The Gathering Storm: Slave Rebellions”. HIST A338. Spring 2006. Loyola University New Orleans.

<sup>25</sup> Oates, Stephen B. The Fires of Jubilee: Nat Turner’s Fierce Rebellion. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers. 1975. 18.

## "The Impact of the French Revolution on Slavery"

way.<sup>26</sup> The end result was white backlash against slaves, where they were no longer allowed to be able to read or write, or have their own preachers.<sup>27</sup> Essentially, the Southern response, which may not have happened if it had not been for the events in Haiti, worsened the situation for slaves and made the need for abolition greater.

As a result of the new situation of the slaves in the south, the abolitionist movement would move further. Americans would work feverishly to come up with a solution. For example, some suggest, Thomas Jefferson would make the Louisiana Purchase (1803) (only possible because Napoleon decided to release some French colonial possessions after the Haitian Revolution) so that he could realize his policy of diffusion, which relied on the premise that if slavery were to be spread out it would eventually die out.<sup>28</sup> In actuality, the purchase made the debate over slavery worsen since it thrust Americans into debate over whether the territories would be free soil or slave. As time progressed, other abolitionists, such as William Lloyd Garrison, would call for the "ignorance of the horrors of slavery," to be removed, since the only reason why other Americans are not calling for immediate emancipation is because they are in denial about the truths of the institution.<sup>29</sup> In many of his writings, Garrison would refer to slave atrocities, such as the lack of slave education, that became more prominent (except in the Deep South where it was commonplace before Haiti) practices only after the South's fear of insurrection became more widespread.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Harriet Beecher Stowe would make an "honest attempt to enlist the sympathies of both England and America in the sufferings of an oppressed race," as she wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.<sup>31</sup> The movement would not be limited to these individuals and although it is suggested that most Americans did not give a second thought to slavery, abolitionist would create enough fervor to make it seem like it was the only topic of discussion. In the end, America would be thrown into a grueling Civil War to settle the debate.

The complete repercussions of the French Revolution will probably never be understood. One can speculate that the French Revolution and the subsequent Haitian Revolution had an immense impact on the timing of the American abolitionist movement. The French Revolution undoubtedly had a direct impact on the Haitian Revolution and without it, many more years may have passed before the changes would have been made. Essentially, the French Revolution was responsible for adding momentum to the entire abolitionist movement. One cannot deny that these movements would have more than likely happened anyway, considering the fact that abolitionist movements were already underway. However, it is not possible to know to what extent the French Revolution altered the American abolitionist movement. One can speculate that if the French Revolution and the Haitian Revolution had not taken place, America may have proceeded in a gradual emancipation effort, instead of a revolutionary one. In the end, the French Revolution had an imperative impact on the shaping of Western history and the anti-slavery movement as a whole.

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<sup>26</sup> Ross, Michael A. "The Gathering Storm: Slave Rebellions". HIST A338. Spring 2006. Loyola University New Orleans.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Garrison, William Lloyd. "Abolition and Slavery". Minz, S. (2003) Digital History. Retrieved 11 April 2006 from <http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu>. Gilder Lehrman Number- GLC 4516.

<sup>30</sup> Garrison.

<sup>31</sup> Stowe, Harriet Beecher. Letter. Minz, S. 2003. Digital History. Retrieved 1 April 2006 from [Http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu) GLC 1585.