CHAPTER 4

The Turn Away from French Universalism

In late January 1794 a remarkable delegation of three Saint-Domingue deputies arrived in Paris: Louis Dufay, a French-born white planter; Jean-Baptiste Belley, a formerly enslaved black army officer; and Jean-Baptiste Mills, a free coloured man. Despite considerable opposition from the white planter lobby, the ‘tricolor’ delegation secured seats in the National Convention as representatives of Saint-Domingue’s Northern Province. After a powerful speech by Dufay on February 3, the Montagnard-dominated National Convention declared the following day that ‘the slavery of negroes is abolished in all colonies; consequently, it decrees that all men living in the colonies, without distinction of colour, are French citizens and enjoy all the rights guaranteed by the constitution.’ The decree was undeniably a major feat: for the first time a national representative body of a major slave-holding Atlantic empire officially decreed the abolition of slavery. Celebrations in the Notre Dame (that had been turned into a ‘Temple of Reason’) and elsewhere in France were accompanied with speeches that were multiracial and universal, at least in spirit. In the following months and years, on more than one occasion, voices in France could be heard praising Saint-Domingue’s black citizens as capable and courageous, and being worthy of their French citizenship.¹

Yet the momentous expansion of citizenship within the French colonial empire was also short-lived, politically fragile, and ideologically muddled.² While the revolutionary momentum of the early 1790s had inspired many radical egalitarian revolutionaries to imagine models of equal imperial citizenship within a single constitutional order, the decree of 16 pluviôse an II (February 4, 1794) abolishing slavery and assigning French citizenship to black slaves within the French empire was neither a direct result nor a straightforward victory of a universalist ideology proclaiming liberté and égalité.³ At the time of the voting

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¹ Dubois, Avengers of the World, pp. 168–170.
² Cf. M.F. Spieler, Empire and Underworld: Captivity in French Guiana (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 38–52.
³ Popkin, You are all Free, esp. ch. 10. See however, Piquet, L’émancipation des Noirs dans la Révolution française: 1789–1795. See also Y. Bénot, ‘Comment la Convention a-t-elle voté l’abolition de l’esclavage en l’an II ?’, Annales historiques de la Révolution française 293–294 (1993), pp. 349–61.
in the National Convention, the Société des Amis des Noirs (which had always rejected immediate emancipation) had ceased to exist. Condorcet had gone into hiding; Julien Raimond was imprisoned; Brissot beheaded. The abbé Grégoire would later confess in his memoirs that at the time the ‘sudden emancipation’ had seemed ‘disastrous’ to him.\(^4\)

In addition, despite of the fact that the 1794 emancipation decree was reconfirmed in the Thermidorian constitution of 1795 as well as in the 1798 ‘Law on the Organization of the Colonies’, the actual implementation of the decree throughout the French empire was only carried through to a limited extent.\(^5\) The decree of 1794 never took effect in Martinique which was only returned to France by the Treaty of Amiens in 1802, while the white planters of Île de France (Mauritius) and Île Bourbon (La Réunion) successfully refused to implement it. In Saint-Domingue, slavery was in fact already abolished; the National Convention only confirmed it. Technically speaking, in February 1794 France was ruled by a ‘revolutionary government’, the implementation of the 1793 constitution postponed. Under these circumstances, as Miranda Spieler has argued, the status of new imperial law was highly uncertain.\(^6\)

Robespierre’s record on the issue of abolition, as well as that of other Montagnards, was, moreover, ambiguous.\(^7\) The purge of the Girondins in May-June 1793 was praised by the white planter class who for a time stood side by side with the Montagnards. Among Montagnards the burning of Cap Français in June 1793 was widely seen as a ‘Brissotin’ conspiracy. In July, the National Convention had even ordered the civil commissioners Sonthonax and Polverel to return to the metropole so as to put them on trial. In the conspiracy-ridden and deeply antagonistic political climate of 1793–1794, the dominating Montagnard faction, absorbed in strategic wrangling and internal strife, did not pursue a consistent abolitionist program.\(^8\)

If the February 1794 decree was at best a mix of idealism, (military) opportunism, and revolutionary symbolism, in the United States and the Dutch

\(^4\) H. Grégoire, Mémoires de Grégoire, ancien évêque de Blois (Paris: A. du Pont, 1837), p. 391.

\(^5\) On the law of 1798, see B. Gainot, ‘La naissance des départements d’Outre-Mer. La loi du 1er janvier 1798’, Revue d’histoire des Mascareignes et de l’Océan Indien 1 (1998), pp. 51–74; B. Gainot, ‘The Constitutionalization of General Freedom Under the Directory’, in: M. Dorigny (ed.) The Abolitions of Slavery. from Léger Félicité Sonthonax to Victor Schoelcher (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2003), pp. 180–196. Gainot assigns great significance to the law of 1798 as he judges it as less paternalistic and more egalitarian than Boissy d’Anglas’ vision of subordinate assimilation. Cf. Dubois, A Colony of Citizens, pp. 298–300.

\(^6\) M.F. Spieler, ‘The Legal Structure of Colonial Rule during the French Revolution’, William and Mary Quarterly 66 (2009), pp. 365–408.

\(^7\) Popkin, You are all Free, pp. 384, 389.

\(^8\) Popkin, You are all Free, p. 328.
Republic the decision by and large met with aversion, fear, and disenchant-
ment. The application of a radical document meant for a civilization at the
height of historical progress to what was widely regarded as a bunch of violent
and infantile savages, incited many Dutch and American thinkers, journalists,
and politicians to re-invoke and explicate boundaries of modern citizenship
that had hitherto largely remained implicit. This process was accompanied by
general feelings of disillusionment about the high and increasingly considered
naively abstract ideals of the French Revolution in light of the island’s disas-
trous course of events. The majority of Dutch Batavian revolutionaries too be-
came convinced that they should not follow the astonishing and wavering
French imperial policies of 1791–1794. Between 1798 and 1802, a broad and pow-
erful public opinion in France began to distance itself from what was portrayed
as the imperial chimeras of a reckless political faction.

1 Citizenship and Inequality in the Dutch Republican Empire

After the overthrow of the Orangist regime in January 1795 and the instalment
of the Batavian National Assembly in March 1796, the events in Saint-Domingue
became a crucial reference point. The last quarter of the eighteenth century
had been a time of both transformation and great uncertainty for the Dutch
colonial empire. The colonial system based on trading companies came to an
end. After decades of financial distress, the (second) West Indian Company
(WIC) was finally liquidated in 1791. The much more profitable East Indian
Company (VOC) followed suit in 1796.9 As a result, governance of the West and
East Indies came into the hands of the Dutch state, more specifically, into the
hands of several state councils and committees.

After the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780–84), the Dutch position in Asia,
especially that of the VOC, had been severely weakened, even though effecti-
vely not many of their colonial settlements were lost. The following decade
and a half was essentially a period of contraction, both economically and de-
mographically. The slave trade more or less collapsed. During the second half
of the 1790s, the Dutch were even on the verge of losing their entire, once il-
lustrious overseas trading empire. In 1795–96, a number of Indian and East
Indian trading posts, Cape the Good Hope, as well as a number of small West
Indian possessions on the Guiana coast were lost to the English.10 On the

9 The patent officially only terminated in 1799.
10 Namely Berbice, Demerara, Essequibo (‘Dutch Guyana’). In 1803 the Dutch regained Cape
the Good Hope but they lost it again to the English in 1806.
island of Curaçao, partly inspired by the events in Saint-Domingue, a slave insurrection under the leadership of Tula from the west-Curañaan plantation Kenepa broke out in 1795. But it was quickly suppressed and did not seem to have made any significant impact on debates in the Dutch Republic itself. In 1799–1800, Suriname and the (Benedenwindse) islands of the Leeward Antilles, Aruba, Bonaire, Curaça, fell into English hands, while the (Bovenwindse) islands of the Lesser Antilles, St. Maarten, Saba, and St. Eustatius, came under French rule. In short, although the situation was precarious due to continuous warfare, during the first few years of the Batavian Revolution the Republic still possessed Java and some smaller East Indian possessions, a number of trading posts in India, and in the West, Suriname and the Antilles.

The immediate causal importance of the debates in the Batavian National Assembly concerning the question whether a new Dutch constitution should apply to the Dutch colonies should therefore not be overstated. But it was also not merely a theoretical exercise. It is true, as economic historian Jan de Vries recently noted, that ‘[for] most merchants and investors the Atlantic world was understood as a zone of commercial activity first and of colonization and political power second’. Dutch Caribbean islands such as Curacao and St. Eustatius were nodal points in trade and commercial services, not plantation colonies. Yet, from the 1680s onward, a genuine plantation economy had been gradually established in Suriname and Dutch Guyana (Berbice, Essequibo, Demerary). Between the early 1700s and 1780, the number of enslaved Africans in Surinam increased from 9,000 to about 60,000. And although historians have traditionally considered the East Indies as being more important to the Dutch Republic’s empire, between 1730 and 1780 the total value of

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11 Oostindie and Klooster (eds.), Curaçao in the Age of Revolutions, 1795–1800.
12 Although the Dutch Atlantic has long been characterized as essentially a trading empire, the States General as well as other state institutions were on several levels entangled with the commercial companies, and at crucial moments made political and military interventions for strategical purposes. See, P. Brandon and K. Fatah-Black, ‘For the Reputation and Respectability of the State: Trade, the imperial State, unfree Labor, and Empire in the Dutch Atlantic’, in: J. Donoghue and E.P. Jennings (eds.) Building the Atlantic Empires: Unfree Labor and Imperial States in the Political Economy of Capitalism, ca. 1500–1914 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 84–108.
13 The growth of Dutch Guyana’s plantation economy was to an important extent due to British West Indian and American entrepreneurs. G. Oostindie, ‘British Capital, Industry and Perseverance’ versus Dutch ‘Old School’? The Dutch Atlantic and the Takeover of Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo, 1750–1815, BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review 127 (2012), pp. 28–55.
commodity imports from the Atlantic had grown rapidly, and in the 1770s even overtook the total value of imports coming from Asia.¹⁴

No anti-slavery movement emerged in the late eighteenth-century Dutch Republic. Yet the question of slavery and the slave trade were recurrent topics in literature, journals, and pamphlets.¹⁵ During the late 1770s and 1780s, critical discussions of slavery had appeared in such journals as De koopman (The Merchant), De vaderlander (The Patriot), Bijdragen tot het menschelijk geluk (Contributions to Human Happiness), De leerzame praat-al (The Educational Chatter Box), and others. In 1792, the prominent Maatschappij tot nut van ’t algemeen (Society for Public Welfare) organised an essay contest on the question: ‘Is slave trade necessary under the pretext of interest according to the maxims of sound politics, and admissible according to divine and human law?’ Prominent future revolutionaries such as Bernardus Bosch, Jan Konijnenburg, and Pieter Paulus, as well the jurist Hendrik Cras opposed slavery in both speech and writing, drawing extensively on British and French antislavery tracts. In literary texts, female authors such as Elisabeth Maria Post, Betje Wolff, and Petronella Moens raised the topic of slavery. The anti-slavery current was stronger than historians have sometimes made it out to be, but it lacked concrete action.

It did not take long for the Dutch planter class to start a counteroffensive against these abolitionist writings. A long pamphlet published in 1795 by an author who identified himself as a former planter from Demerary (Dutch Guinea), invoked the French ‘philanthropic’ emancipation decree in combination with an apocalyptic vision of Saint-Domingue’s destroyed plantations and murdered planters to dismiss any suggestion that the black slaves were to be liberated. ‘Negroes must be considered human beings’, the author admitted, but ‘without education, without religion, without morality’. He identified Grégoire and Condorcet as the principal authors behind French abolitionism. But allowing slaves on the Dutch colonies ‘unbridled liberty’ would be a ‘deadly

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¹⁴ The annual average revenue from the West-Indies increased from 5,600 (in thousands of guilders) for the period 1730–1739 to 22,400 for the period 1770–1779, whereas the annual average revenue from Asia for the period 1730–1739 was 16,705 and 19,951 for the period 1770–1779. J. de Vries, ‘The Dutch Atlantic Economies’, in: P.A. Coclanis (ed.), The Atlantic Economy during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: Organization, Operation, Practice and Personnel (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), pp. 1–29, at p. 19.

¹⁵ See Paasman, Reinhart: Nederlandse literatuur en slavernij ten tijde van de Verlichting; G.J. Schutte, ‘Zedelijke verplichting en gezonde staatkunde. Denken en doen rondom de slavernij in Nederland en koloniën eind 18e eeuw’, in: Documentatieblad werkgroep 18e eeuw 41–42 (1979), pp. 101–115; Sens, ‘Mensaap, heiden, slaaf’.
gift. Why should the consequences of the emancipation of black slaves be feared? The author replied that the ‘answer to that question can be found in the reports on St. Domingo of the last four years’. According to these planter class representatives the liberation of black slaves would be the death knell to the already weakened Dutch empire. Despite such rhetoric, however, many Batavian revolutionaries at the time were overall optimistic that much of the Dutch empire could and would be restored. During the Batavian Revolution their engagement with the Dutch empire was more about envisioning colonial reform than actual governance or implementing new policies.

After the regime change in January 1795 and the rather delayed formation of a National Assembly the following year, the Batavian National Assembly from March 1796 onward started to work on a new constitution that was to serve as the foundation for the new Batavian Republic. In early 1796, a ‘Committee for Affairs Relating to East Indian Trade and Possessions’ was established. It effectively replaced the former Board of Directors of the East India Company. By December, in a draft for the section on the East India colonies, the leading member of the Committee Samuel Wiselius together with Bogilaus von Liebeherr came up with a remarkable proposal for an egalitarian republican empire. It had much in common with the imperial visions of the Amis des Noirs. Weighing up the sweet benefits of empire and the revolutionary era's

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16 [Anonymous], *Vrymoedige gedachten, van een (geweest zynde) Demerariaansch planter, over twee brieven geschreven onder den naam van Zelidor aan Eliante; behelzende een beschryving van den slavernhandel, en onderzoek, of men recht heeft om vrye menschen tot slaven te maaken, en of de negers in slaverny moeten blyen* (Amsterdam: Gaspart Heintzen, 1795), pp. 11, 66–74. The pamphlet was a reaction to Jean-Henri des Villates, *Brieven over Wijsgeerige en andere onderwerpen* (The Hague: J.C. Leeuwestijn, 1795).

17 Cf. Gert Oostindie’s remark: ‘We should not assume that contemporaries were already anticipating this overall decline of the Dutch Atlantic. During the Age of Revolutions as well as at its conclusion, policy makers voiced optimism in spite of their painful awareness of Dutch decline, or at least the conviction that the Caribbean colonies could play a vital role in the Netherlands regaining the status of a serious world player’. G. Oostindie, ‘Dutch Atlantic Decline during the “Age of Revolutions”’, in: G. Oostindie and J.V. Roitman (eds.) *Dutch Atlantic Connection. Linking Empires, Bridging Borders* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 309–335; Schutte, *De Nederlandse patriotten en de koloniën*, pp. 214–215.

18 On the Dutch constitution, the colonies and the issue of slavery in the age of revolutions, see Lubbertus Les, *Van Indië onder de Compagnie tot Indië onder de staat: De koloniale titel in de Staatsregeling van 1798* (Rotterdam, 1947); Schutte, *De Nederlandse Patriotten; Schutte, ‘Zedelijke verplichting ene gezonde staatkunde’; A.H. Huussen Jr., ‘De Staatsregeling van 1798 en het slavernijvraagstuk’; in: O. Moorman van Kappen and C. Koppens (eds.) *De Staatsregeling voor het Bataafsche volk van 1798: Opstellen opgedragen aan de nagedachtenis van Dr. Mr. L. De Gou* (Nijmegen: Gerard Noodt Instituut, 2001), pp. 213–232. In the same edited volume: B. Sirks, ‘De Constitutie van 1798 en de koloniën’, pp. 197–212.
philosophical principles, Wiselius and Von Liebeherr stated in their draft that ‘in so far as they fall under the authority of the Dutch’, the colonies ‘must always be considered as inseparable parts of the united and indivisible Republic’. As the second basic principle they proposed that the colonies’ inhabitants ought to ‘share in, and enjoy all those political and civil rights and privileges to which the inhabitants of the Republic according to the new constitution are entitled’. But they immediately added that these rights could only be granted to the colonies’ inhabitants if the ‘special’ circumstances would allow such a bold move.

The Committee was subsequently asked to devise a general draft for the entire empire in both the East and West Indies. But no agreement on the status of the colonies could yet be reached. The debate was continued in the Spring of 1797. On February 3, the National Assembly established two new committees on colonial affairs. The first, chaired by Jacob Uytenhage de Mist, was assigned the task of giving advice on the relationship between the mother country and Surinam, Berbice, and the West-Indian and African oversea possessions. The other, chaired by Hendrik Jacob Floh, was assigned the task of giving a more general advice on how the relationship with the colonies ought to be written into the constitution. This ‘Floh report’ was presented to the National Assembly on April 11 and discussed that same month. Like Wiselius and Von Liebeherr, the Floh report defined the colonies as ‘unalienable possessions of the state’ in which the colonists were fully entitled to their ‘natural and civic rights’. In articulating the nature and constitutional foundations of the Batavian republican empire, the report was preoccupied with two ‘extremes’: the French and British empires. Britain, on the one hand, had lost sight of the ‘initial contract’ with its American colonists. Instead of establishing a relationship of equality, the American colonists were made ‘subservient’ to the British who had turned the colonists into a ‘pile of slaves’. The consequences were well known. The French, on the other hand, had ‘lapsed into the opposite extreme’ by proclaiming principles of universal equality in their colonies. Similar assessments of these ‘two pernicious extremes’ and ‘powerful and fatal experiments’ were made outside the confines of parliament. Members of the The Hague based Societeit voor eenheid en orde (Society of Unity and Order) reported in 1797:

19 ‘Bijlagen’ in: Les, Van Indië onder de Compagnie tot Indië onder de staat, p. 115. This draft chapter applied to the Asiatic possessions and Cape the Good Hope, but the following ‘title […] of the colonies’ made the same point.

20 Dagverhaal 5, no. 491, april 27, 1797 (session April 22), pp. 715–716.
The British domination of American colonies, in itself unjust and unlawful, has grabbed from Great Britain the sweet benefits that contributed to the domestic prosperity and commercial interests of that very empire. – The consequences of the, by itself, philosophical principles of the French, prematurely applied in their West-Indian possessions, have been both for the colonists and the French Republic most harmful and dreadful – and we are fortunate to take warning from these examples and their inescapable consequences, steer clear of these perilous rocks, and settle on a safe middle course.  

Given these examples and the precarious state of their colonial empire, the majority of Batavian revolutionaries were keen on proceeding carefully. The leading republican-democratic representative Pieter Vreede, on the other hand, was astonished that the section on the colonies as proposed by the Floh Committee made no mention of slavery and the slave trade whatsoever. Although he was aware of the ‘unfortunate example of our French brothers’, he urged his fellow representatives not to establish a constitution that ‘violates the rights of humanity’. Only a constitution that would explicitly speak out against the slave trade and slavery, Vreede argued, would be worthy of their revolution. During the subsequent debate over the Floh report and Vreede’s intervention, the prominent moderate representative Rutger-Jan Schimmelpenninck warned his colleagues that ‘the name of St. Domingo alone should make you think twice’. It represented nothing less than ‘[t]he very voice of humanity’, and this voice ‘calls out to you to be cautious’. The Floh report itself had not minced its words either. Saint-Domingue had fallen into ‘the most woeful chaos and miserable savagery’. As Batavian revolutionaries were envisioning the future of their own colonial empire, Saint-Domingue was on everyone’s mind.

As in the United States, in the Batavian Republic it would be repeated over and over again that the French – particularly the ‘philanthropists’ and politicians associated with the Société des Amis des Noirs – had made a disastrous

21 Rapport van de burgers Goldberg, Verbeek en Scheffer, uitgebragt in eene vergadering van de Sociëteit voor eenheid en orde in Den Haag, over het ontwerp van constitutie, zo als het zelve door de Nationale Vergadering, representeerende het volk van Nederland, aan het Bataafse volk ter goed of afkeuring is voorgedragen (Den Haag: I. van Cleef, 1797), p. 56. The report is discussed in: C. Rogge, Geschiedenis der Staatsregeling, voor het Bataafsche volk (Amsterdam: J. Allart, 1799), pp. 392–394.
22 Dagverhaal 5, no. 493, 28 april, 1797 (session April 22), p. 727.
23 Dagverhaal 5, no. 491, 27 april, 1797 (session April 22), p. 716; Dagverhaal 5, no. 493, 28 april, 1797 (session April 22), p. 729.
mistake. It seemed obvious that there was a direct causal relationship between the utopian extension of French ‘philosophical’ principles and the disastrous course of events in Saint-Domingue. The Floh report stated that

[t]he French nation at the dawn of her revolution, heated by the mesmerizing and conjuring notions of universal freedom and equality of rights, by their mistaken and premature application [...] and by proclaiming these general philosophical principles in her distant and extended colonies, quickly occasioned the destruction of all social order.24

The tragic case of Saint-Domingue was repeatedly evoked as a spectre, as proof of the danger of immediate emancipation. Although Jacob Hahn, a prominent speaker in the National Assembly, supported the liberation of black slaves, he also opposed ‘rash and reckless’ decisions. Schimmelpenninck agreed and called upon his colleagues to realize that in Europe only over a timespan of ‘many, many years’ the ‘system of freedom’ had gradually taken hold. He did not doubt that in the long run the ‘system of true popular liberty’ should be ‘propagated and spread’ around the world.25 But Schimmelpenninck and his moderate colleagues employed the language of the inequality of civilization and enlightenment in order to park the question of immediate emancipation. In the end, the Floh committee was instructed to produce a new report on the question if and to what extent the new constitution should mention the abolition of the slave trade. The question of the abolition of slavery as such, let alone the question of equal citizenship for freed slaves, were quietly left out.

The follow-up report by the Floh committee was debated exactly one month later, on May 22. Saint-Domingue was again the key reference. Floh at one point even confessed that the committee members gladly would have liked ‘to cast a veil over the horrors’ of Saint-Domingue, since the ‘disasters’ had been covered by the press in such a way that everyone should by then have been ‘sufficiently instructed and warned’;26 Saint-Domingue’s surrender to lawlessness and the supposed ungovernability of black slaves signified a ‘return to its former state of wilderness’, the report noted.27 Such characterizations of the civil war in Saint-Domingue were not a slip of the tongue. They helped to establish an intricate connection between the exceptional atrocities for which

24 Dagverhaal 5, no. 491, April 27, 1797 (session April 22), p. 716.
25 Dagverhaal 5, no. 493, April 28, 1797 (session April 22), p. 729.
26 Dagverhaal 5, no. 491, 27 april, 1797 (session April 22), p. 716; Dagverhaal 6, no. 547, June 1, 1797 (session May 22), pp. 3–8, at p. 7.
27 Dagverhaal 6, no. 547, June 1, 1797 (session May 22), p. 8.
Saint-Domingue was infamous and the alleged mentally and morally savage or ‘uncivilized’ condition of the slaves. The ‘dangerous and misleading’ French course of action to abolish slavery immediately was a key argument to omit both the slave trade or slavery in the constitution. Instead, in the debate that followed, the strategy and language of ‘civilizing’ slaves gradually through education (instead of liberating them immediately) was omnipresent. Two representatives emphasized the need to first educate the ‘Negroes’ so as to ‘impart civilization’ to them and make them ‘susceptible’ to liberty.28

The radical democratic-republican Pieter Vreede, in what was perhaps the most powerful and passionate antislavery speech in the brief history of the Batavian Republic, was less dismissive of French ‘experiments’ in universalism. He considered the French course of action merely an ‘ill-advised’ response to what he nonetheless considered a ‘noble desire of the soul’. The ‘piteous imprudence’ of the French, he suggested, should rather ‘serve as a manual’ for the question how to approach the issue of the liberation of black slaves.29 Still, Vreede was no supporter of immediate emancipation either. But in his view the constitution at the very least ought to mention the intention of abolishing slavery. If the National Assembly would not seize this opportunity, ‘What else is this than constitutionally legitimating these barbaric crimes?’ Some of Vreede’s fellow democratic-republican representatives supported him. But the great majority of the Batavian representatives in the end decided that the constitution should remain completely silent about the topic.

The first draft constitution offered to the Dutch people was rejected by referendum on September 13, 1797. In late December 1797 the National Assembly returned to Wiselius and Von Liebeherr for advice on the status of the colonies within the constitution. In the discourse préliminaire to a new draft, the authors reaffirmed as ‘foundational principle […] that equality, the foundation of civic freedom, allowing no distinction in rights between members of the same citizen state (‘Burgerstaat’); the rights as well as the duties of Batavian citizens in Asia, Africa, and America, must be like those that actually apply within Europe’.30 Having observed the experience of France, they added however that the implementation of equal citizenship throughout the empire was dependent on the ‘natural and moral circumstances’ of the parts of the empire in question. With an eye to the French colonial experiment, they stressed that

28 Dagverhaal 6, no. 548, June 2, 1797 (session May 22), p. 15; Dagverhaal 5, no. 493, April 28, 1797 (session April 22), pp. 731–733.
29 Dagverhaal 6, no. 548, June 2, 1797 (session May 22), p. 11.
30 S. Wiselius et al., Ontwerp van vertoog, om te worden geplaatst in het voorafgaande vertoog (discours préliminaire) voor het ontwerp van constitutie, December 18, 1797. As cited in: ‘Bijlagen’, in: Les, Van Indië onder de Compagnie tot Indië onder de staat, p. 126.
'attributing' the rights of man to black slaves did not automatically imply 'effectuating' them as citizenship rights.\(^{31}\)

Most Batavian revolutionaries simply assessed the state of the Dutch empire as too fragile to make any major decisions on the gradual or immediate abolition of slavery. Economic interests no doubt played a part too. But the relatively conservative outlook can also be explained by the frightening example posed by the French colony of Saint-Domingue. Almost without exception, it proved to Batavian revolutionaries that equal citizenship requires enlightenment and civilization. Tellingly, even the Batavian constitution of May 4, 1798, a product drawn up by democratic-republican radicals, merely declared the state owner of the 'foreign possessions and colonies'. Colonial profits were destined for the treasury. Any further explicit discussion of the relationship between the colonial empire and the motherland was 'postponed', including the question of equal citizenship rights within the empire. Not a word on the slave trade, slavery or abolition.\(^{32}\)

For most Batavian revolutionaries debating the future of their colonial empire and the civic status of its inhabitants the baseline was what may be called 'enlightened' citizenship. This begs the question what 'enlightened' citizenship entailed and in what broader social and historical outlook it appeared. An evocative perspective on late eighteenth-century enlightened citizenship that relates this picture of the 'modern' citizen directly to the 'Saint-Dominguan slave' is offered by the Dutch publicist and medical doctor G. Schutte in an 1797 article in *Nieuwe Bijdragen tot het menschelijk geluk* (New Contributions to Human Happiness). His essay titled *Verhandeling over den tegenwoordigen volks-geest, in zoo verr’ dezelve door de wijsbegeerte gewijzigd is* (Treatise on the Current State of the People’s Mind, in so far as it has been modified by Philosophy) bears a striking resemblance to Condorcet’s outline in his famous *Esquisse d’un tableau historique des progrès de l’esprit humain*. The foundation of Schutte’s Condorcetian account is man’s natural ‘inclination’ for ‘self-enquiry’.\(^{33}\)

Like Condorcet, Schutte attached great importance to the rise of ‘experimental

\(^{31}\) Wiselius et al., *Ontwerp van vertoog*, p. 126.

\(^{32}\) Les, *Van Indië onder de Compagnie tot Indië onder de staat*, pp. 40–61; Schutte, *De Neder-landse patriotten en de koloniën*, pp. 141–150. Les argues that the silence in the constitution of May 1798 on slavery can be explained by the influence of the more conservative Committee on East-Indian Trade and Possessions. Schutte adds that radical abolitionists like Vreede were a minority, even among the democratic republicans. Cf. Huussen jr., ‘De staatsregeling van 1798 en het slavernijvraagstuk’.

\(^{33}\) G. Schutte, ‘Verhandeling over den tegenwoordigen volks-geest, in zoo verr’ dezelve door de wijsbegeerte gewijzigd is’, *Nieuwe bijdragen tot het menschelijk geluk* 1 (1797), pp. 127–151, at p. 127.
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philosophy’, and the ways in which the insights generated by this new philosophy impacted the ‘direction of the human mind’.34 Certainties acquired in mathematics had penetrated ‘the moral world’; modern ‘ethics’ taught, among other things, that ‘we are at liberty to enjoy the delights made available by industry and industriousness’. Furthermore, this enlightened morality ‘imposes societal life as a duty’.35 Man thus ‘gradually casts aside the crudeness of morals as well as his savage nature, of which our forefathers – whatever one might say of the good old days – cannot be completely exempted’.36 In Schutte’s view citizens in advanced societies are characterized by continuous ‘exercise of intellectual power’; by the ‘love of reading’ that ‘penetrate into all classes’; by the increased visit to ‘theatre, that great place for people’s education’; by the growing number of ‘learned societies’ and ‘the exchange of views about all kinds of subjects’.37 Schutte, in short, provided a picture of the social and moral world of the enlightened, sociable citizen.38

The modern citizen was in his view assigned the important task to spread the advantages and delights of societal life: ‘The only thing the frail mortals can accomplish is cultivating the arts and sciences, furnishing them to the taste of the people, gradually undermining the walls of prejudice’ – all of this should be pursued to gradually reach man’s ‘perfection’. But, Schutte warned, in this endeavour one should also ‘follow nature’. Nature ‘makes no leaps, she develops gradually’.39

He, who suddenly lets brighter rays of truth shine into the eye of the weak man, makes his vision fuzzy by the glaring light. He who recklessly hands over the rights of man to the negroes of St. Domingo causes the destruction of the colony, which will become the victim of his carelessness.40

Schutte’s juxtaposition of, first, the moral and societal landscape of advanced citizenship and then, at the very end of his essay, the ‘negroes’ of Saint-Domingue was no coincidence. His articulation of enlightened citizenship – and its limits – was part and parcel of the Batavian citizenship discourse. The Batavian model of citizenship diverged from those of the ‘reckless’ French.

34 Schutte, ‘Verhandeling’, pp. 133–134.
35 Ibid., p. 140.
36 Ibid., p. 146.
37 Ibid., p. 149.
38 Cf. Kloek and Mijnhardt’s extensive historical exploration of what they call ‘moral citizenship’. Kloek and Mijnhardt, 1800: Blueprints for a Society.
39 Schutte, ‘Verhandeling’, pp. 150–151.
40 Ibid.
Such schemes of natural equality made compatible with civilizational inequality prevailed in the 1790s. The Dutch professor of natural law and law of nations at Groningen University, Frederick Adolph van der Marck, for example, insisted in his 1798 *Schets over de rechten van den mensch* (Sketch on the Rights of Man) that ‘after all, so-called slaves are like us rational beings, inhabitants of this universe, and God’s creatures’. In terms of ‘unalienable rights’, he maintained, they are ‘our equals’. The relevant distinction for Van der Marck was education: ‘[S]laves, due to lack of good education, are not yet susceptible to true freedom, and in that respect are to be considered children, unable to make use of their reason, and whom one should not hand over a knife to harm themselves or others’.41 Earlier, on the floor of the Batavian National Assembly, this metaphor had been employed by representative Van Hoorn who claimed that the rights of man had been given to the slaves of Saint-Domingue prematurely which in his eyes demonstrated that ‘everywhere freedom without enlightenment is sharpened steel in childhood’s hands’.42

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the Dutch reading public could read a fairly representative summary of the series of interpretations of the events on Saint-Domingue we have discussed so far in Konijnenburg’s multivolume *Tafereelen van de staatsomwenteling in Frankrijk* (Scenes of the Revolution in France). To Konijnenburg’s mind it was clear that declaring ‘people of colour free men’ and ‘citizens of the state’ had been a ‘righteous deed’ that corresponded to ‘the principles that were adopted in all candour’.43 He decried the white planters for whom the ‘last remaining drop of African blood’ was enough to deny coloured people any ‘political influence’. In his view the enthusiasm about granting citizenship to free people of colour could not remain separated from the question of slave trade and the institution of slavery in general. As Konijnenburg saw it, the colonial question on the most general level was indeed ‘whether the declared rights of man were to apply in the colonies too’. He was convinced that the slave trade and the suppression of black slaves were ‘direct violations of the rights of man’. The events on Saint-Domingue had expanded the revolutionary agenda, he fully recognized the logic of the rights of man.

But in describing the unfolding civil war in Saint-Domingue Konijnenburg made allusions to the island’s return to a ‘state of nature’; the island, he wrote,

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41 F.A. van der Marck, *Schets over de rechten van den mensch, het algemeen kerken- staats- en volkerenrecht, ten dienste der burgery ontworpen* (Sketch on the Rights of Man, General Canon Law, Constitutional Law, and Law of Nations, drafted for the Benefit of the Citizenry; Groningen: J. Bolt, 1798) (emphasis in original), pp. 186–191.

42 *Dagverhaal* 2, no. 164, August 27, 1796 (session August 23), p. 691.

43 Konijnenburg, *Tafereelen van de staatsomwenteling in Frankrijk*, vol. 6, p. 107.
was ‘recreated into wilderness’. The black insurgent was portrayed as a savage who ‘by the number of thousands desecrate everything in their path with their relentless rage’, and trespassing all moral boundaries, as ‘neither the youth, nor the elderly, neither child, nor pregnant women were spared’. The unfolding civil war’s exceptional ‘atrocities’, Konijnenburg asserted, had something to do with the distinct background of the black slave. He asked his readers to ‘imagine the African’s fiery character, his deep sense of insult, his multiplied number, his heated thirst for revenge and freedom’. This ‘image’ of an African barbarian, Konijnenburg supposed, ‘in itself is enough to shrink back of any further vision that would bring to mind horrors by which the human soul would grievously shrivel’.

Batavian revolutionaries in the National Assembly, opinion makers such as Schutte, the law professor Van der Marck, and Konijnenburg: they all recognized the pressure of the ‘logic’ of the equal rights of man. But by invoking the ‘atrocities’ of Saint-Domingue, the slaves’ stage of civilization, and the French mistaken application of universalist principles, they distanced themselves from such universalist models of imperial citizenship. It was an Atlantic Thermidorian moment in which the idea of a shared revolutionary project of citizen emancipation started to crumble.

2 ‘The vile machinations of men calling themselves philosophers’

Between 1794 and 1800 in the United States, too, the French citizenship model that now encompassed freed slaves was increasingly considered as alarmingly dangerous, a ‘Jacobin’ solution alien to the American state of affairs. Saint-Domingue became an important reference point in St. George Tucker’s *A Dissertation on Slavery: With a Proposal for the Gradual Abolition of It in the State of Virginia* published in 1796. Tucker was a prominent Virginia lawyer, law professor at the College of William and Mary, and judge of the Virginia General Court and later the Supreme Court of Appeals. His pamphlet is often invoked as one of the most elaborate and widely known pleas for gradual emancipation at the time, although the legislature of the state of Virginia did not approve it. Read in a transatlantic context, it can be interpreted as an American variant of a broader disenchantment with ‘French’ emancipation policies.

44 Konijnenburg, *Tafereelen van de staatsomwenteling in Frankrijk*, vol. 10 (1800), pp. 85–93.
45 Konijnenburg, *Tafereelen van de staatsomwenteling in Frankrijk*, vol. 15 (1802), p. 121.
46 Guyatt, *Bind us Apart*, 17–21; Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause*, 90–91.
Tucker wished to see slavery abolished, but he was not in favour of full-blown civic emancipation. In his proposal, he recalled ‘[t]he recent history of the French West Indies’ which ‘exhibits a melancholy picture of the probable consequences of a general, and momentary emancipation’.\textsuperscript{47} He went on to explain that ‘European migrants, from whatever country they arrive, have been accustomed to the restraint of laws, and to respect the government’. Black slaves however, ‘accustomed to be ruled with a rod of iron’, will not ‘easily submit to milder restraints’. Immediate emancipation would turn them into ‘hordes of vagabonds, robbers, and murderers’. This should come as no surprise Tucker said, for ‘[w]ithout the aids of an enlightened policy, morality, or religion, what else could be expected from their still savage state, and debased condition?’\textsuperscript{48} Consequently, although Tucker supported the abolition of slavery, he also argued that ‘emancipation does not confer the rights of citizenship’.\textsuperscript{49} He was fully aware of the more radical position of those who argued ‘[t]hat there must be no distinction of rights; that the descendants of Africans, as men have an equal claim to all the civil rights, as the descendants of Europeans; and upon being delivered from the yoke of bondage have a right to be admitted to all the privileges of a citizen’. Tucker, however, argued that it is up to the civic community to determine who is eligible to become a full member. He thus proposed a model that comprised a first and second-class type of citizenship, for ‘[w]e must […] endeavour to find some middle course’. One day, black men could perhaps be conferred full citizenship status. But ‘[n]ature, time, and sound policy must co-operate with each other to produce such a change.’\textsuperscript{50} In a letter to Jeremy Belknap, an influential Boston congregational minister, Tucker mentioned the time span of no less than a century for complete civic emancipation to arrive and ‘to see the Foundation of universal freedom in the United States’.\textsuperscript{51} The boundaries of the ‘universal’ could be stretched, indeed.

\textsuperscript{47} St. George Tucker, \textit{A Dissertation on Slavery: With a Proposal for the Gradual Abolition of It in the State of Virginia} (Philadelphia, PA: M. Carey, 1796), pp. 79–80. The gradualist line of reasoning that underpinned Tucker’s moderate antislavery position was widely praised, among others by such influential officials as justice and future Massachusetts governor of state James Sullivan. Letter from James Sullivan to Jeremy Belknap, July 30, 1795, with a letter from St. George Tucker to Jeremy Belknap, 10 February 1796. Tucker submitted copies of his pamphlet to the houses of the Virginia legislature, and to Thomas Jefferson.

\textsuperscript{48} Tucker, \textit{A Dissertation on Slavery}, p. 86.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., p. 75.

\textsuperscript{50} Tucker, \textit{A Dissertation on Slavery}, p. 90 (emphasis in original).

\textsuperscript{51} Letter from St. George Tucker to Jeremy Belknap, November 27, 1795. http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Letter_from_St_George_Tucker_to_Jeremy_Belknap_November_27_1795 (date of access: June 26, 2013).
Tucker’s dismissive evaluation of the French emancipation decree was part of a more widespread rejection of French universalism in which Saint-Domingue figured prominently. Such views the American reading public would come across in Bryan Edwards’ account of the Haitian Revolution. Edward’s ‘Narrative of the Calamities which have desolated the Country ever since the Year 1789’ appeared in his *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies*. This multivolume history would become immensely influential in the early American republic, as historian Edward Rugemer has recently demonstrated.

Edwards, a British colonial politician in Jamaica, plantation holder, and historian – ‘the pre-eminent statesman-intellectual’ of the British West Indies according to David Brion Davis – witnessed the slave insurrection when he came to the aid of French planters in September 1791. His account related of insurgents ‘spreading death and desolation’. To enhance the dramatic effect, he contrasted the once ‘magnificent and romantick landscapes’ with ‘the miseries of war, and the horrors of pestilence; to scenes of anarchy, desolation, and carnage’. Like so many of such characterizations, Edwards emphasized the unique nature of the civil war in Saint-Domingue. It was of a different kind than the anarchy that would come about as a consequence of any other ‘regular’ civil war. The savage

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52 Cotlar, *Tom Paine’s America*; Newman, ‘American Political Culture and the French and Haitian Revolutions’.
53 B. Edwards, *An Historical Survey of the French Colony in the Island of St. Domingo comprehending a Short Account of its Ancient Government, Political State, Population, Productions, and Exports; A Narrative of the Calamities which have desolated the Country ever since the Year 1789, with some Reflections on their Causes and Probable Consequences, and a Detail of the Military Transactions of the British Army in that Island to the End of 1794* (London: J. Stockdale, 1797). Edward’s account of Saint-Domingue was first published as a single volume. It appeared as the fourth volume of his *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (London: Crosby, 1798). This classic work first appeared in two volumes in 1793. It saw as many as five editions and was expanded to five volumes, and was translated into French and Dutch (early 1800s), as well as German, Portuguese and Italian. It came out in Philadelphia in 1806. Other American editions appeared in 1805 and 1810 (by three different printers). E. Rugemer, *The Problem of Emancipation: The Caribbean Roots of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), pp. 8, 52–53. On Edwards, see O.M. Blouet, ‘Bryan Edwards and the Haitian Revolution’, in: Geggus (ed.) *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, pp. 44–57; R.B. Sheridan, ‘Edwards, Bryan (1743–1800)’, in: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); online ed. Jan 2008 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8531, date of access: 17 April 2013].
54 Davis, *The Problem of Slavery*, p. 188.
55 Edwards, *An Historical Survey*, iii.
56 Edwards, *An Historical Survey*, iii, xviii–xix.
character of the insurgents accounted for this uniqueness, readers learned from Edward's widely read narrative:

Such a picture of human misery; – such a scene of woe, presents itself, as no other country, no former age has exhibited. Upwards of one hundred thousand savage people, habituated to the barbarities of Africa, avail themselves of the silence and obscurity of the night, and fall on the peaceful and unsuspicuous planters, like so many famished tiger thirsting from human blood.\(^{57}\)

The insurrection of Saint-Dominguan slaves was, thus, cast in the now familiar terms of anarchy, savagery, and African barbarism.

In his explanation of how this horrible situation had come about, Edwards charged that ‘[p]roceeding on abstract reasoning, rather than on the actual condition of human nature', the French ‘distinguished not between civilized and uncivilized life'.\(^{58}\) He specifically singled out Grégoire's letter to the Saint-Dominguan free people of colour. ‘What effect this distinguished piece of oratory may have had on the rugged and unenlightened minds of savage people', he venomously wrote, 'I pretend not to ascertain'.\(^{59}\) Like many French planters, Edwards primarily targeted the Société des Amis des Noirs for inciting the rebellion:

\[T\]he rebellion of the negroes in St. Domingo, and the insurrection of the mulattoes [...] had one and the same origin. It was not the strong and irresistible impulse of human nature, groaning under oppression, that excited either of those classes to plunge their daggers into the bosoms of unoffending women and helpless infants. They were driven into those excesses – reluctantly driven – by the vile machinations of men calling themselves philosophers.\(^{60}\)

Edwards’ assessment of the ‘excesses’ of French philosophers was unmistakably dismissive, but he was not overall unsympathetic to either the ideals of the French Revolution or the North American struggle for independence. ‘It is to be lamented', Edwards noted, ‘that a principle so plausible in appearance, should, in its application to this case, be visionary and impracticable'. He

\(^{57}\) Edwards, An Historical Survey, p. 63.
\(^{58}\) Ibid., pp. 16–17.
\(^{59}\) Ibid., pp. 87–88.
\(^{60}\) Ibid., xx–xxi.
deemed the acceptance of the proclamation of the ‘celebrated declaration of rights [...] a revolution unparalleled in history’, but hastened to add, that ‘[h]appy had it been for the general interest of the human race, if, when the French had gone thus far, they had proceeded no farther!’

Accordingly, the immediate emancipation of black slaves into citizens was rendered another foolish instance of Jacobin utopianism that could but end in bloodshed. As Edwards dramatically put it, the French experiment with universalism was ‘the homage of enlightened reason on the altar of humanity’. These sentiments towards French universalism as articulated by Edwards dealt another heavy blow to what had been a short-lived transnational moment of converging citizenship ideals.

This is not to say that Edward’s was the only discourse around at the time. A considerable number of American merchants from the northern and middle states, and those sympathetic to their interests, viewed Saint-Domingue differently. Many of them opposed slavery and were involved in the booming trade with the island of Saint-Domingue. In the second half of the 1790s, with growing Franco-American tensions, the northern Federalist political and merchant class was not opposed to the diminishing influence – or even removal – of France as one of the major European powers in the Caribbean. Around the turn of the century a considerable number of them welcomed doing business with the new black leader Toussaint Louverture. But the ideological aspect of this attitude toward business opportunities with the new Saint-Domingue authorities was weak at best. Instead, what both southern plantation owners and northern merchants in the end came to share was their disenchantment with revolutionary France.

In 1798, the political climate was such that an American Federalist candidate from New Jersey reckoned it a prudent political strategy to accuse his Democratic opponent of being ‘a Jacobin, Frenchman, and a leveler of all order and distinction’, who ‘intended to advocate the immediate emancipation of all

61 Edwards, An Historical Survey, p. 17.
62 Edwards, An Historical Survey, p. 82.
63 J.A. Dun, “What Avenues of Commerce, Will You, Americans, Not Explore!": Commercial Philadelphia’s Vantage onto the Early Haitian Revolution,’ The William and Mary Quarterly 62 (2005), pp. 473–504.
64 L.L. Montague, Haiti and the United States 1714–1938 (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1940), pp. 34–46; M. Zuckerman, ‘The Power of Blackness: Thomas Jefferson and the Revolution in St. Domingue’, in: idem, Almost chosen People. Oblique Biographies in the American Grain (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 175–219, esp. pp. 186–195.
the Negroes'.\textsuperscript{65} It was in this climate that a ‘lay preacher’ from Maryland in the \textit{Federal Gazette & Baltimore Daily Advertiser} particularly targeted Condorcet as the bogeyman of ‘this dangerous, deistical and Utopian school’. The French \textit{philosophe} was ‘eager that the blacks of the isles should be emancipated’ but ‘[p]hilosophy disdains the tardy step of time’, the author retorted, implying that black slaves were not ready for immediate emancipation: ‘Instead of viewing man as he is, they are perpetually devising plans for man as he should be’, the lay preacher continued. ‘They wish to fashion nature and society in their whimsical mould, instead of regulating that mould, according to the proportions of society and nature’. Instructed by philosophy that ‘all men are equal’, the Frenchman was ‘careless how many houses of the whites were consumed’. In sum, in the eyes of such commentators (echoing Edmund Burke’s rhetoric) the radical French emancipation project was a dangerous piece of ‘abstract, inapplicable, metaphysico politics’.\textsuperscript{66}

3 The French Colonial Thermidor

The French Thermidorian regime of 1794–1795 kept the emancipation decree passed by the Montagnard-dominated National Convention intact. But the French colonial empire remained governed by a civilizational hierarchy. The speech accompanying the presentation of the ‘Report and draft of constitutional articles related to the colonies’ delivered by François-Antoine Boissy d’Anglas, one of the principal architects of the Thermidorian Constitution in July 1795, can be seen as an ideological restatement of a qualified egalitarian French republican empire.\textsuperscript{67} Touching on a variety of issues, Boissy d’Anglas’ speech was beset with tensions, if not outright inconsistencies. Perhaps more

\textsuperscript{65} \textit{The Centinel of Freedom} (Newark, New Jersey), October 30, 1798. Also cited in Cotlar, \textit{Tom Paine’s America}, p. 65. Cotlar cites the \textit{Independent Chronicle} (Boston, Massachusetts), November 5, 1798, in which the article was reprinted.

\textsuperscript{66} \textit{Federal Gazette & Baltimore Daily Advertiser} (Baltimore, Maryland), July 25, 1798.

\textsuperscript{67} Jeremy Popkin has recently argued that the Thermidorian Convention’s decision not to repeal the Montagnard emancipation act of 1794 (unlike much other social legislation passed prior to the fall of Robespierre) was, although partly pragmatic, significant in that they embraced racial emancipation and an ‘egalitarian republican empire’. Popkin admits that even the most outspoken supporters of emancipation in the metropole, such as Defermon, qualified their proposals for equal citizenship by suggesting that blacks were not ready for freedom and that regimes of forced labour were therefore necessary, and colonial representative institutions should be prohibited. Miranda Spieler emphasizes the limited significance of the 1795 decrees on the colonies and the ambiguities surrounding the legal status of the imperial realm. J. Popkin, ‘Thermidor, Slavery, and the “Affaire des
than any other text, it represents the spirit of the modern republican mind committed to the principles as set out in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, while wholeheartedly defending a colonial empire based on a civilizational hierarchy. Since Boissy d’Anglas was addressing multiple interest groups and audiences, this might account for his contradictory statements. Without a doubt, the post-Terror political climate of moderation and reconciliation played its part too. Above all his speech was an expression of the complicated way French republicans tried to reconcile their commitment to revolutionary principles with a model of second class colonial citizenship within a republican empire.\textsuperscript{68} The complete abandonment of the ideal of equal citizenship throughout the empire for all inhabitants was only pushed through in the period 1798–1802.

First, Boissy d’Anglas accepted the revolutionary logic of universal principles: ‘The abolition of slavery was solemnly decreed […] and you would not wish to change it’, Boissy d’Anglas impressed upon his audience. ‘[I]t was a consequence of your principles, one of the results of your revolution, and you could not fail to proclaim them pompously’.\textsuperscript{69} He went on to evince his faith in the benign effects of a constitution, ‘the serpent of bronze that cures all injuries’. For the constitution to become ‘eternal’, it was necessary ‘that its benefits make themselves felt in two hemispheres’:

\begin{quote}
The revolution that you underwent was not solely reserved for Europe, but for the universe. Liberty, like sunrays, has to embrace the entire world and invigorate nature in its entirety. The principles that were advanced do not belong to some exclusively privileged peoples, they are the property of the human species. But justice and liberty is not one and the same thing, and those who do not know how to be just, will never be free.\textsuperscript{70}
\end{quote}

Despite Boissy d’Anglas’ professed commitment to universalism, spreading universal equality and liberty within the empire involved making clear distinctions. In America, he maintained, ‘complete independence’ is ‘only possible on the continent’. ‘Nature has promised liberty to the north of this hemisphere,

\textsuperscript{68} Boissy d’Anglas, ‘Rapport et projet d’articles constitutionnels relatifs aux colonies, 17 Thermidor, An 11 (August 4, 1795), au nom de la Commission des Onze’ (Speech to the National Convention), \textit{Gazette Nationale ou Le moniteur} 322, pp. 415–420.

\textsuperscript{69} Boissy d’Anglas, ‘Rapport et projet d’articles constitutionnels relatifs aux colonies’, pp. 415, 420.

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid, p. 415.
and kept its word’. In the case of the slave insurrection of Saint-Domingue, Boissy d’Anglas noted, ‘[p]olitical independence was not the goal of their agitation’ in the first place, but merely ‘physical liberty’. The insurrectionist slaves ‘have not longed for giving themselves leaders’.\(^{71}\) He characterized the island’s inhabitants as ‘softened by the influence of a constant and mild temperature’ while effortlessly harvesting ‘the richest gifts of the earth’. They did not aspire the kind of liberty ‘that would cost them too much effort to retain’, they were a people ‘unable to retain its independence’. He concluded that such a people ‘must therefore limit its wishes to being wisely and peacefully governed by humane and fair men’.\(^{72}\) Resonating the common trope that slaves were not prepared for unbridled liberty, Boissy d’Anglas held that ‘having broken their chains’, these ‘tribes’ were ‘tormented by the same burdens of liberty’. Nonetheless, the inhabitants of the republican empire should be regarded as citizens: ‘returning all the inhabitants of the colonies this liberty indistinctively, something which they were only able to delight in through violence and by force, is making them not only free men, but also citizens’. To remove any remaining doubts, he reaffirmed the same point: ‘The status of citizens is settled by the same constitution without exception’.\(^{73}\) Thus, he envisioned what historians have called the French colonial theory of assimilation:

Let us tie the colonies to us through a wise and firm government [...] So that the colonies today are French instead of being solely American; that they are free, without, however, being independent; that they constitute a part of our indivisible republic, and that they are overseen (‘surveillées’) and ruled by the same laws and the same government [...] In this way you will allow the government to take the necessary action to pacify the regions and utilize them all according to the law both for the republic and for themselves; [...] being essentially assimilated in all other parts of the republic.\(^{74}\)

Thus, the emancipation decree of 1794 was reaffirmed, while citizenship within the assimilated parts of the empire remained governed by a civic hierarchy based on civilizational inequality.

Boissy d’Anglas’ seminal late eighteenth-century expression of what post-revolutionary citizenship, or perhaps more aptly, hierarchically structured

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\(^{71}\) Boissy d’Anglas, ‘Rapport et projet d’articles constitutionnels relatifs aux colonies’, p. 418.

\(^{72}\) Ibid., p. 416.

\(^{73}\) Ibid., pp. 418, 420.

\(^{74}\) Ibid., p. 419.
post-revolutionary *citizenships*, in the French republican empire might look like exerted a powerful influence on the visions of empire in the nineteenth, and even the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{75} Whereas in the Charters of 1814 and 1830 it was ordained that the colonies should be ruled by royal ordinances and special laws, the 1848 Constitution fundamentally embraced the assimilationist ideal of one integrated indivisible empire.\textsuperscript{76} It is, however, fundamental to observe that during the 1790s the main questions had already been formulated and the ideological groundwork laid out.

A similar vision of the French imperial assimilation was also put forth by the committed universalist the Abbé Grégoire who in the late 1790s and early 1800s would continue to advocate new colonization projects in the African continent.\textsuperscript{77} ‘Certainly France [...] could and should have brought civilization to the shores of Senegal, where, without regrets and without dangers, she could have created prosperous colonies with rich soil and closer to the mother country than the Antilles’, he would write in his 1815 *De la traite et de l'esclavage des noirs et des blancs*.\textsuperscript{78} Earlier in 1796, Grégoire had reconvened the *Société des Amis des noirs* – under the telling new name *Société des Amis de Noirs et des Colonies*. Although this club would hardly exercise any influence at the time and was finally suppressed in 1799, its antislavery and neo-colonialist outlook buttressed the idea of a republican empire. The first article of the society’s mission statement read: ‘The Society continues to occupy itself with the abolition of slavery, the moral and physical improvement (*perfectionnement*) of the inhabitants of the colonies; the progress of agriculture, industry, and commerce.

\textsuperscript{75} R.F. Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890–1914*, new ed. (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2005, [1961]); C.R. Ageron, *France coloniale ou parti colonial?* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1978), esp. ch. 6.

\textsuperscript{76} 1946 saw the last expression of an assimilationist French ‘Union,’ ‘La République française une et indivisible’, in which the colonies were defined as ‘les territoires et fédérations d’outre-mer’. Ageron, *France coloniale ou parti coloniale*, pp. 190–195, 282–292; Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation*, pp. 67–124.

\textsuperscript{77} Sepinwall, *The Abbé Grégoire and the French Revolution*, pp. 149–155; Dorigny, ‘Intégration Républicaine des colonies et projets de colonisation de l’Afrique’.

\textsuperscript{78} H. Grégoire, *De la traite et de l’esclavage des noirs et des blancs* (Paris: A. Égron, 1815), pp. 35–36 [French original: ‘Certes la France, depuis long-temps, aurait pu et dû porter la civilisation sur les rives du Sénégal, où, sans remords, sans dangers, elle formeroit des Colonies prospères sur un sol luxuriant, et plus rapproché de la mère-patrie que ces Antilles’]. Cf. P. Røge, ‘L’économie politique en France et les origines intellectuelles de la “mission civilisatrice” en Afrique’, *Revue Dix-huitième siècle* 44 (2012), pp. 117–130; M. Dorigny, ‘La société des amis des noirs et les projets de colonisation en afrique’, *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 293–294 (1993), pp. 421–429.
in the colonies, and the formation of new colonies.\textsuperscript{79} While Grégoire as well as Condorcet in his \textit{Esquisse} only vaguely alluded to neo-colonization as a means to spreading French civilization, more detailed and elaborated plans also circulated. They proposed economic relationships with Africans based on free labour and trade, a ‘philanthropic system of colonization’, as one American newspaper called it.\textsuperscript{80} But whereas Grégoire and Condorcet were important exponents of a progressive and emancipatory pro-colonial mind set ultimately aimed at eradicating civic inequality within a greater French empire, the dominant pro-colonial – and until the abolition of slavery in 1848, pro-slavery – French visions of empire would be governed by much fiercer hierarchical notions of civilizational and racial subordination.\textsuperscript{81}

Meanwhile, much had changed on the island between 1794 and 1801, the year Napoleon decided to send the largest naval military expedition force of his entire military career. The black general Toussaint Louverture, who had played a major role in defeating British invasion troops between 1794 and 1798, had become the dominant figure in Saint-Domingue. Under his leadership, a system of government was starting to take shape largely outside French control. Toussaint Louverture’s decision to occupy Spanish Santo Domingo in January 1801 was a further indication that the leadership of Saint-Domingue was increasingly acting on its own without regard of the authorities in the

\textsuperscript{79} Règlement de la société des amis des noirs et des colonies, adopté dans sa Séance tenue à Paris le 30 Frimaire an VII (Paris: l’Imprimerie des sciences et arts, 1798), p. 5.

\textsuperscript{80} Most notably the writings of the Swedish publicist and member of the Société des Amis des Noirs et des Colonies Carl Bernhard Wadström: Especially his Essay on Colonization (London, 1794), translated as Précis sur les établissements des colonies de Sierra Leona et de Boulama à la côte occidentale d’Afrique (Paris: Pouyens, 1798); idem, Adresse au Corps législatif et au Directoire exécutif de la République française (Paris, Imprimerie des sciences et arts, 1795). Greenleaf’s New York Journal and Patriotic Register of November 28, 1798, wrote about the Council of Five Hundred examining the idea of ‘philantropic colonization’ and also identified ‘Mr. Wadstrom’ as the mind behind it. On Wadström, see J. Ahlskog, ‘The Political Economy of Colonisation: Carl Bernhard Wadström’s Case for Abolition and Civilisation’, \textit{Sjuttonhundratal: Nordic Yearbook of Eighteenth Century Studies}, \textbf{(2010)}, pp. 146–168.

\textsuperscript{81} Røge, ‘L’économie politique en France et les origines intellectuelles de la “mission civilisatrice” en Afrique’; Dorigny, ‘La société des amis des noirs et les projets de colonisation en Afrique’; B. Gainot, ‘La Décade et la “colonisation nouvelle”, \textit{Annales historiques de la Révolution française} 339 (2005), pp. 99–116; W.B. Cohen, \textit{The French Encounter with Africans: White Response to Blacks, 1530–1880} (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1980), pp. 155–180. For late nineteenth and early twentieth-century developments, see Conklin, \textit{A Mission to Civilize}; Cooper, \textit{Citizenship between Empire and Nation}; D.B. Marshall, \textit{The French Colonial Myth and Constitution-Making in the Fourth Republic} (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973); Wilder, \textit{The French Imperial Nation-State}. 
motherland. But it was in particular Toussaint Louverture’s commissioned drafting of a constitution without permission from Paris that angered Napoleon (he received a printed copy of it). There is no doubt that Napoleon by sending a 20,000-soldier strong naval force under the command of his brother-in-law General Charles Leclerc wanted to restore France’s supreme political authority in its empire. Recent scholarship, however, has suggested that it would be too simplistic to see Napoleon’s military expedition of 1801–1802 as a straightforward attempt to restore slavery driven by an influential colonial lobby which in turn was motivated by a uniform ideological pro-slavery agenda. Instead, it seems to have been a mission much more dictated by strategic and pragmatic considerations on the part of Napoleon and his military officials.

Yet, although the strict causal links between pro-slavery thought and Bonaparte’s imperial policies might indeed appear to be quite weak, it is undeniable that in this period the revolutionary conceptual triad relationship of empire-rights-citizenship dissolved. With Bonaparte’s seizure of power in 1799, France’s imperial policies took a decidedly anti-emancipatory turn. The vision that anyone within the constituted political space of a republican empire could ultimately obtain the status of citizen, as long as one had reached a certain benchmark of civilization and enlightenment, was brushed aside. The constitution of Year VIII (1799), brought into force after Napoleon’s ascendance, unambiguously abandoned the idea of a single imperial constitutional order, as it explicitly stipulated that ‘The regime of the French colonies is determined by special laws’. It soon became clear that Bonaparte was not intent on enforcing the 1794 decree assigning citizenship to black slaves in France’s Indian Ocean colonies where white planters had successfully resisted its implementation. Significant is the fact that the new constitution did not include a declaration of rights. France’s imperial policy became fundamentally detached from the discourse of the rights of man and citizen.

82 P.R. Girard, ‘Napoléon Bonaparte and the Emancipation Issue in Saint-Domingue, 1799–1803’, *French Historical Studies* 32 (2009), pp. 587–618; P.R. Girard, *The Slaves who defeated Napoleon: Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian War of Independence, 1801–1804* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2011); Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens*, pp. 351–352; Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*, pp. 116–120.

83 The principal publications on this episode include Y. Bénot, *La démence coloniale sous Napoléon* (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 1992); Y. Bénot and M. Dorigny (eds.), *Rétablissement de l’esclavage dans les colonies françaises. Aux origines de Haïti* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2003); P. Branda and T. Lentz, *Napoléon, l’esclavage et les colonies* (Paris: Fayard, 2006). Miranda Spieler sees much continuity between Napoleon’s imperial regime and the 1795 constitution. Spieler, *Empire and Underworld*, pp. 54–58.
Napoleon’s re-establishment of slavery on 20 floréal Year X (May 10, 1802) was accompanied by what Yves Bénot has called a ‘wave of proslavery propaganda’. The presumed civilizational degeneratedness of black Africans would be invoked time and again in these writings. This pro-slavery public opinion built on what conservative spokesmen of the planters and merchants class had kept repeating in the second half of the 1790s, namely that ‘the exercise of citizenship can only belong to a civilized population’, not to ‘savages’ and ‘primitive races’.\(^{84}\) Charpentier-Cossigny, a slave-owner from Île-de-France, stated that ‘Raising a barbaric people to civilization is not a one-day affair’.\(^{85}\) In debates in the Tribunat (one of the four assemblies set up by the constitution of year 1799), during the build up to the decree reinstituting slavery, the language of civilizational backwardness could be heard everywhere. Pierre-August Adet, diplomat, and former secretary of the Ministry of the Navy and the Colonies, who had been sent to Saint-Domingue in 1791 to put down the slave rebellion, commented on the abolition act of 1794: ‘Was this partial emancipation not the signal of a general insurrection and the devastation of the colonies?’ He went on to point out the parallel between the failure of revolution within European civilization and the one in the Caribbean: ‘[W]e had the suffering to see in our country, within European enlightenment and civilization, men who could not distinguish between the rights granted by liberty […] and the cruelty of savage tyranny with the noble prerogatives of liberty’. Adet could not imagine how ‘the obscurity of a child’ can abruptly transform from slavery to liberty. Such a step would require ‘sentiments’ that have benefited from ‘example and education’. Men ‘who have no idea’ of the ‘voluntary obedience which characterises the citizen’ will ‘break the yoke of laws imposed on them’, and this in the end leads to ‘scenes of blood and carnage’.\(^{86}\)

A similar dismissal of the universalist citizenship ideals was made by the French councillor of state Étienne Eustache Bruix, a former French navy admiral and minister of the navy and colonies, when introducing the slavery law of May 20, 1802, in the Corps legislative. Bruix’s speech was published in several

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84 The quote is taken from a mémoire drawn by Bordeaux merchants from June 19, 1797: ‘Mémoire des négociants de Bordeaux sur les colonies’, as cited in: Dubois, A Colony of Citizens, p. 290.
85 Charpentier-Cossigny, Moyens d’amélioration et de restauration proposés au gouvernement (1803) I, pp. 275–276, as cited in: Bénot, La démence coloniale sous Napoléon, p. 201.
86 Gazette nationale ou le moniteur universelle, no. 240, 30 Florial an X (May 20, 1802), pp. 981–988, at p. 988.
American newspapers, accompanied by the headline ‘Africans again doomed to slavery!’:87

It is known to you in what manner the illusions of liberty and equality have been propagated in those remote countries, where the striking difference between the civilized and the uncivilized man, the difference of climate, colors and habits, and principally, the security of European families, imperiously required a great inequality in the civil and political state of individuals […] It is also known what has been the fatal consequence of these innovations, so eagerly pursued by zealots, most of whom were doubtless actuated by the honorable intention of promoting the cause of humanity, and who, while endeavouring to render the inhabitants indiscriminately equal in rights have only rendered them equally unhappy.88

And finally, Napoleon himself echoed this kind of rhetoric, wondering ‘How anyone could have granted freedom to Africans, to men who did not have any civilization, who did not even know what a colony was, or what France was?’89 Napoleon’s remark shows that he not only related black people to ‘African’ civilizational backwardness, but also that he could not imagine them to be – or become – part of a French nation une et indivisible.

To be sure, the supposed degeneratedness of black Africans was not only expressed in terms of civilizational backwardness. As Andrew Curran recently has suggested, from the first decade of the nineteenth century onwards the discourse on the ‘nègre’ in France also underwent a renewed ‘widespread scientific racialization’ that posited deterministic schemas of black people’s cognitive and mental inferiority. This kind of thinking had its roots in racial classification schemas. Louis Narcisse Baudry Des Lozières, a ruined Saint-Dominguan planter, for instance, considered it as ‘natural evidence’ that the black species is ‘depraved’ (‘dépravé’) or ‘degraded’ (‘avilie’), contending that it is the most imperfect class of humanity, the darkest, the least capable of

87 According to the Albany Centinel (Albany, New York) of July 13, 1802, Bruix’s speech was translated from an article from a newspaper from Le Havre of May 20. It also appeared in: The Independent Chronicle (Boston, Massachusetts) July 12, 1802; Middlesex Gazette (Middletown, Connecticut), July 12, 1802; The Sun (Pittsfield, Massachusetts), July 19, 1802; Republican Gazette (Concord, New Hampshire) July 27, 1802. The quote is taken from the Republican Gazette.
88 Republican Gazette (Concord, New Hampshire) July 27, 1802.
89 J.J. Damas-Hinard (ed.) Napoleon, ses opinions et jugemens sur les hommes et sur les choses, 2 vols. (Paris: Duféy, 1838), vol. 1, p. 256.
enlightenment, the most vicious, the least correctable’.90 In a climate in which public sympathy for the blacks in Saint-Domingue waned, more racialized understandings of black people drawing on biology, natural history, and polygenetic theories of the origins of the human race(s) ‘intersected’, as Curran put it, with proslavery advocates’ denunciations of the radical egalitarianism of the Société des Amis des Noirs and the barbarity of black insurrectionists in Saint-Domingue.91 René Chateaubriand’s oft-cited quote in the midst of the military confrontation between France and Saint-Domingue speaks volumes: ‘[F]or the Negroes of our colonies [...] even pity has extinguished; for who would still plead the cause of the blacks after the crimes they have committed?92

In a letter of September 1802 to Minister of the Navy Denis Decrès (under the First Consulate), Jean-Baptiste Raymond de Lacrosse, governor of the French Caribbean colonies Martinique and Guadaloupe, captured the spirit in which the ideal of equal imperial citizenship was abandoned. Lacrosse wrote that the slave insurrection provides

the lessons that must illuminate the government more than theories whose unreflected application most often contradicts our hopes [...] The true liberty of civilized man was not made for the nègres of the French colonies. This gift was disastrous in its results not only to those whom it was given but also to the metropole, which wanted to take them out of a state of degradation rejected by the philanthropists. Those times of enthusiasm have ended.93

90 L.N. Baudry Deslozières, Les égarements du nigrophilisme (Paris: Migneret, 1802), p. 109. On Baudry Deslozières, see C. Wanquet, ‘Un Réquisitoire contre l’abolition de l’esclavage: Les Égarements du nigrophilisme de Louis Narcisse Baudry Deslozières (Mars 1802)’, in: Bénóit and Dorigny (eds.) Rétablissement de l’esclavage dans les colonies françaises, pp. 29–50.
91 Curran, The Anatomy of Blackness, p. 213.
92 M. le vicomte de Chateaubriand, Génie du Christianisme (1802) in: idem, Œuvres Complètes, 5 vols. (Paris: Didot, 1842), vol. 3, p. 235. Cf. Mercure de France 22 (April 1805), p. 441: ‘Those who wish the destruction of our colonies [now] understand that it is no longer possible to plead the cause of this barbarian race with success’. As cited in: Curran, The Anatomy of Blackness, p. 210.
93 Letter of Lacrosse to Minister Decrès (September 23, 26, 1802). As cited in: Dubois, A Colony of Citizens, p. 411.