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The Politics of Disaster in a Colony of Citizens:
Compatriotism, Citizenship, and Catastrophe in French Martinique (1870 – 1902)

By

Christopher Michael Church

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Tyler Stovall, Chair
Professor James P. Daughton
Professor Thomas Laqueur
Professor Percy Hintzen

Spring 2014

The Politics of Disaster in a Colony of Citizens:
Compatriotism, Citizenship, and Catastrophe in French Martinique (1870 – 1902)

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Christopher Michael Church

Abstract

The Politics of Disaster in a Colony of Citizens:

Compatriotism, Citizenship, and Catastrophe in French Martinique (1870 – 1902)

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Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Tyler Stovall, Chair

As politicians of France's Third Republic vied to build a democratic consensus and distance themselves from France's recent autocratic past, they projected a fantasy of assimilation onto Martinique—one of France's oldest colonies where the predominately non-white population had received full citizenship and universal manhood suffrage with the ratification of the Constitution of 1875. However, at the close of the nineteenth century, a series of disasters struck the French island of Martinique that threatened the republican fantasy of seamless assimilation: (1) the 1890 fire that destroyed the island's capital of Fort-de-France; (2) the 1891 Atlantic hurricane that devastated the island's economy and prompted a reevaluation of the place of the colony within the French nation; (3) the first general strike in 1900 wherein civil unrest in the colonies caused a political disaster in the metropole; and (4) the 1902 eruption of Mount Pelée that killed over 30,000 people nearly instantaneously and cemented a postcolonial relationship characterized by dependence. Throughout the Third Republic, the Martiniquais sugar economy was in rapid decline, and as capital was injected into the island in the form of disaster relief, the "old colony" that had once been a valuable asset was fast becoming a financial drain on the French economy. In their interactions with French economic and political imperatives, environmental disasters brought to the fore existing racial and social tensions and held to the fore France's ideological convictions of assimilation and citizenship.

The present work intervenes in the current historiography of France by bringing France's old colonies into the story of late-nineteenth-century nation-building and by underscoring the role played by the environment in race-making, identity formation, and class-based politics. Scholars of the French West Indies have extensively examined the importance of assimilation in Antillean politics and culture, clearly elucidating the significance of the short-lived emancipation of 1794; the transient citizenship gained in 1848 and suspended in 1851; and finally the full citizenship restored in 1871 and codified in the Third Republic's Constitution of 1875. This work does not seek to retrace their steps, but to explore how disastrous events in the French West Indies shaped the colonial relationship and interacted with broader developments in the metropole itself. During the age of new empire, the "old colony" of Martinique redefined what it meant to be a French citizen by precipitating a discussion over economic rights and social welfare.

Dedication

To my parents,
who always encouraged me to pursue the education they were never afforded.

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Introduction

"It is rather curious to observe that these possessions, so long under French control, do not enjoy more popularity among us, that is, the vogue which goes to the new colonies of Africa or Asia. We are speaking of Tonkin, the Congo, Madagascar, Soudan: Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Reunion have run out of stories. It is that these are no longer new lands. They are settlement colonies where a creole race remained very French and where the indigenous peoples acquired a certain degree of civilization. Their administration is moreover nearly the same as that of the metropole. They have deputies, senators, counselor generals, municipal counselors; they are familiar with all the misdeeds of electoral politics, and for some years they have presented strikes and social conflicts which have nothing to envy from those of France: here we are quite far from Soudan or the coast of Somalia!"

August Terrier, *Journal des voyages*, 1900¹

Characterized by a violent ecological climate and a volatile political landscape, the late nineteenth century was a rough yet transformative time for the French island of Martinique, as it was for the entire French nation. With the humiliating defeat suffered during the Franco-Prussian War in 1870 came the first democratic government in France in a generation—the Third Republic. While nationalist fervor was at its height and the French empire grew to its greatest extent, politicians of France's Third Republic vied to build a democratic consensus and distance themselves from France's recent autocratic past. Republicans projected a fantasy of assimilation onto the Caribbean island of Martinique—one of France's oldest colonies where the predominately non-white population received full citizenship and governmental representation with the Constitution of 1875. Environmental disasters threatened this republican fantasy by bringing to the fore existing racial and social tensions and holding to the fire France's ideological convictions of assimilation and citizenship. When disaster struck in the faraway French West Indies—whether the whirlwinds of a hurricane or the stirrings of an open rebellion—France faced a tempest at home as politicians, journalists, and economists, along with everyday people, debated the role of the French state not only in the Antilles, but in their own lives as well. During the age of new empire, therefore, the “old colony” of Martinique redefined what it meant to be a French citizen by precipitating a discussion over economic rights and social welfare, and by laying claim to a definition of tropical Frenchness that preserved French civilization against a hostile environment.

The present work intervenes in the current historiography of France by bringing France's old colonies into the story of late-nineteenth-century nation-building and by underscoring the role played by the environment in race-making, identity formation, and class-based politics. This dissertation explores not only how republicanism—vis-à-vis disasters—was refracted in the colonies, but also how the colonies shaped the Third Republic itself, the longest-lasting republic in France's history to date. Disasters exacerbated existing societal tensions and marked a rupture in the status quo, and are thus an excellent lens through which we can understand the socio-political and cultural struggles of a fin-de-siècle France riddled with social unrest and political divisions.

¹ August Terrier. "Le Journal des voyages à l'exposition universelle." *Journal des voyages et des aventures de terre et de mer*, Oct. 21. (1900): 332.

Disasters: Environmental Catastrophe and Civil Unrest in Martinique

During the Third Republic, a series of disasters struck the French island of Martinique: (1) the 1890 fire that destroyed the island's capital of Fort-de-France; (2) the 1891 Atlantic hurricane that devastated the island's economy, marked the transition of Martinique from a colony of capital extraction to one of capital injection, and prompted a reevaluation of the place of the colony within the French nation; (3) the first general strike in 1900 wherein civil unrest in the colonies vis-à-vis the declining sugar industry—itsself a result of both environmental factors and international economics—caused a political disaster in the metropole; and (4) the 1902 eruption of Mount Pelée that killed over 30,000 people nearly instantaneously and cemented a postcolonial relationship characterized by dependence. An island described by contemporaries as “one of France's oldest and most dear colonies” where former slaves and indentured servants had been successfully integrated politically and culturally into the French nation-state, Martinique was cast as evidence of the “civilizing mission made good.” Yet, over this same period, the Martiniquais sugar economy was in rapid decline, and as capital was injected into the island in the form of disaster relief, the “old colony” that had once been a valuable financial asset was fast becoming a financial drain on the French economy. In turn, these disastrous moments precipitated a discussion over economic welfare and colonial assimilation, challenging republican cohesion and putting forth an alternative image of Frenchness that was defined by its tropical surroundings.

It bears mentioning that disasters are never natural, and that moments of environmental catastrophe and civil disturbance are, in their effects, two sides of the same coin. Environmental historians delineate between nature-induced and human-induced disasters,² and irrespective of what induced the event, a disaster is always predicated on an event's interaction with human civilization. Natural events only become disasters when they encounter or interact with the trappings of human society—e.g. construction in flood plains or on tectonic plate boundaries, lax or non-existent building codes, high population densities, insufficient or crumbling public facilities and infrastructure, etc. That is, it is our own built environment—roads, housing, sewers, aqueducts—that come into conflict with what are natural cycles, and the natural ebb and flow of droughts, tempests, and seismic movements seem entirely unnatural when framed by the contours of human society: our notions of time, space, and location.³ As with nature-induced disasters, human-induced disasters—such as the 1900 strike in Martinique—disrupt what we see as normal time, space, and location by destroying the built environment, unseating or challenging cultural mores and political givens, and disturbing the pace of everyday life. All such emergency situations ultimately bring forth and make public systemic political prejudices and social tensions, ultimately leading to a crisis that precipitates a change in or reaffirmation of the status quo.

Therefore, at stake during the disasters that struck Martinique at the close of the nineteenth century were the population's citizenship rights and the French state's relationship to those citizens. Here, we define a citizen as someone who enjoys full legal rights and obligations within a state; possesses membership in a political community in which he or she has the right to participate; and is entitled to the protection of the sovereign state to which he or she owes

² Christof Mauch and Christian Pfister. *Natural Disasters, Cultural Responses: Case Studies Toward a Global Environmental History*. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009).

³ Mike Davis. *Ecology of fear: Los Angeles and the imagination of disaster*. (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998).

allegiance.⁴ A non-citizen, what one might call a subject, is excluded from some or all of these characteristics: he or she enjoys limited legal rights; cannot participate in the political community; or is not entitled to the protection of the sovereign state. Using this definition, we can examine the contours of Antillean citizenship in the Third Republic. At what moments and in what contexts were Antilleans fully embraced as compatriots and citizens, and when was that citizenship minimalized and curtailed? What influenced this ebb and flow of Antillean citizenship, and does this pattern have analogs within the metropole itself?

At the same time that the French began to make subjects of countless West Africans and Indochinese, the Third Republic invoked the Jacobin ideals of the French Revolution—liberty, equality, and fraternity—to grant citizenship rights to Martinique—in fact, to all the inhabitants of its "old colonies," including Guadeloupe, Guyane, and Reunion. As citizens and not subjects, the people of Martinique, with whom France had a sordid history marred by slavery and forced migration, demanded a quality of life equal to their metropolitan counterparts, who were simultaneously engaged in their own struggle for social welfare in light of rapid urbanization and rampant industrialization. That the Martiniquais were indeed citizens and not subjects, however, did not ensure equal treatment under the law. According to criminologist Allison M. Cotton, there are several types of citizenship at play in any nation-state—varying from the successful to the deviant, each with its own rights and entitlements.⁵ This typology is thrown into relief during catastrophes precisely because they disrupt the normalcy of everyday life. The general idea behind this typology—that of a continuum of citizenship—provides a useful framework with which we can unpack the ambiguous, often contradictory way that France treated Martinique during moments of disaster and civil unrest. At various points, the Martiniquais are permitted to voice their demands upon the state as citizens, and at other times their voices are muffled by accusations of criminality or colonial disorder. Yet, this slippage was in many ways mirrored by, and in fact influenced, developments within the metropole as the poor, destitute, and disenfranchised there demanded their equality in the face of industrial hazards and unfair labor practices. Incumbent upon citizenship is a certain degree of protection by the state, and the end of the nineteenth century was the height of French demands for a social republic that properly attended to the needs and demands of its citizenry.

Insufficient responses from the metropolitan government often fostered tension between creole elites in Martinique and mainland officials. As we will see in the following chapters, many prominent colonial administrators thought first and foremost of the sugar economy following disasters—after both environmental catastrophes and moments of civil unrest. Though they attempted to cast Martinique as a colony of settlement on the path to assimilation, where French values and mores had taken root in a tropical soil, administrators tacitly treated the island as a colony of extraction where sugar production was paramount. From small hurricanes, such as that of 9 September 1875⁶, to much larger events, such as the great hurricane of 1891 or the

⁴ Ariella Azoulay. "Citizens of Disaster." *Qui Parle*, Vol. 15, no. 2. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2005), 105-137.

⁵ Allison M. Cotton. "Stipulations: A Typology of Citizenship in the United States After Katrina." *Racing the Storm: Racial Implications and Lessons Learned from Hurricane Katrina*. Ed. Hillary Potter. (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2007), 157-170.

⁶ "L'ouragan du 9 Septembre: Robert." 9 September 1875. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

eruption of Mount Pelée in 1902, ministerial reports primarily recounted the disaster's immediate effect on the sugar economy, secondarily its impact on the alternative economies (fruit, cocoa, coffee, tafia), and only tertiarily on its consequences for the citizens living there. Even the ardent assimilationist official, Eugene Etienne, claimed in a report to Congress in 1904 that "Every colonial enterprise is a business which must be prudently and practically conducted."⁷ As historian Stuart Schwartz has posited, colonial governments saw catastrophic events, such as the coming of a hurricane, as an opportunity for restructuring society. And for many, this restructuring focused on a revitalization of, or in some cases a repudiation of, the colonial economy. At the same time, however, such a focus on the economy was challenged by a language of civic inclusion that heralded the Frenchness of the people of Martinique. As a result of this tension between an economic calculus of disaster and a republican language of citizenship, moments of catastrophe serve as a lens through which we can observe the contemporary values of French society and polity alike.⁸ And in the case of the French West Indies, which had been integrated in many ways into the metropolitan government, the demands and expectations for disaster relief had substantial repercussions in the mainland, and can thus be seen as a window into the political and social strife that characterized the parliamentary government of the Third Republic.

"Old Colonies" in an Age of New Empire

In addition to its engagement with disasters both political and environmental, Martinique brings to the fore the problem of what to make of the old colonies in the period of new imperialism. Despite its legacy of plantation slavery and forced migration, the colony of Martinique had become the "assimilated colony" par excellence in the eyes of French contemporaries. That is, while the republican myth of assimilation purported that all colonies could one day become part of a Greater France and that all colonial subjects, after receiving French education and culture, would become active French citizens, this myth was in many ways made real in Martinique. From 1848 onward, nonwhite inhabitants of the old colonies—including Martinique, Guadeloupe, Reunion, and Guyane—possessed full French citizenship, in theory if not in practice,⁹ thereafter rallying to the cause of the republican values of liberty, equality, and fraternity.¹⁰ After a period of "suspended" citizenship during the Second Empire, the French Antilles achieved universal manhood suffrage and became fully integrated into the French legislature under the Third Republic, receiving two deputies and a senator to represent their interests in Paris. The islands' General Councils, much like their departmental counterparts in the metropole, served as the local legislative bodies. The Law of 8 January 1877 replaced the colonial penal code with metropolitan law in the Antilles and Réunion, and later that year was

⁷ Cited in Raymond Betts. *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890-1914*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 137

⁸ Stuart B. Schwartz. "Hurricanes and the Shaping of Circum-Caribbean Societies." *Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol 83, No. (2005) : 401.

⁹ R. Renard. "Labour Relations in Martinique and Guadeloupe, 1848-1870," *Journal of Caribbean History*, 26/1, (1992): 37-57.

¹⁰ J.P. Sainton. *Les nègres en politique: couleur, identités et stratégies de pouvoir en Guadeloupe au tournant du siècle*. (Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2000).

fully extended to French Guyana and partly applied to French Indochina. No longer were the “old colonies” under the jurisdiction of a separate penal code; rather, these “colonial citizens” were brought under the same juridical framework as their metropolitan compatriots.¹¹ In many ways, the descendants of the forcibly-migrated Africans who populated the island were construed as tropical French citizens who had settled the colony in the name of France.

Despite Martinique’s colonial status, the representation granted to Martinique was on par with that granted to departments in the metropole, falling within the normal distribution of deputies per citizen. At roughly 83,560 constituents per representative, Martinique’s representation was on par with that of the departments of Loire (87,961); Indre-et-Loire (84,510); Nord (82,683); Haute-Marne (81,198); and Loire-Inferieure (80,472). By contrast, the average for France as a whole was 66,204 constituents per representative, with the most disproportionately represented department being Basses-Alpes (24,504). Guadeloupe fared worse than Martinique with respect to proportional representation, with roughly 90,000 constituents per representative. However, both Antillean colonies fared better than their colonial counterparts without any representation or citizenship rights, or even those with limited representation: for instance, Sénégal had a population of nearly 200,000 people represented by a single deputy, and only those *originaires* from the Four Communes had citizenship and thereby possessed the right to vote.

Yet, in light of Martinique’s history of slavery and its present conditions of agricultural monoculture, as well as officials’ Social Darwinist outlook toward the French empire, these tropical Frenchmen were often met with prejudice and inequity. For instance, the aforementioned law of 8 January 1877 that replaced the old colonies’ penal code with the metropolitan one had some important exceptions. Most notably, the application of the metropolitan penal code in the old colonies did not abrogate the restrictions and laws in force by the “labor police” that forbade public vagabondage and set up mandatory “work sentences” in public workshops.¹² The Antilles also remained under the thumb of a colonial administration. They were overseen first by the Ministry of the Marine and then by the Ministry of the Colonies after 1894, and administered by an appointed governor. Integrated legislatively but colonially administered, the French West Indies were indeed *colonies* of citizens. And with respect to legislative representation, if it were considered a department, it would be among the worst represented departments. Compared to the departments in France, the ratio of constituents to representatives was greater in Martinique than in 96.5% of the other represented departments.

¹¹ J. B. Duvergier. *Collection complète des lois, décrets, ordonnances, règlements, et avis du conseil d’état*, Tome 77. (Paris: Charles Noblet, 1877). 64-65. Retrieved 10 December 2012 from Google Books at <http://books.google.com/books?id=aVUUAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA1>.

¹² *Ibid.*, pg. 4.

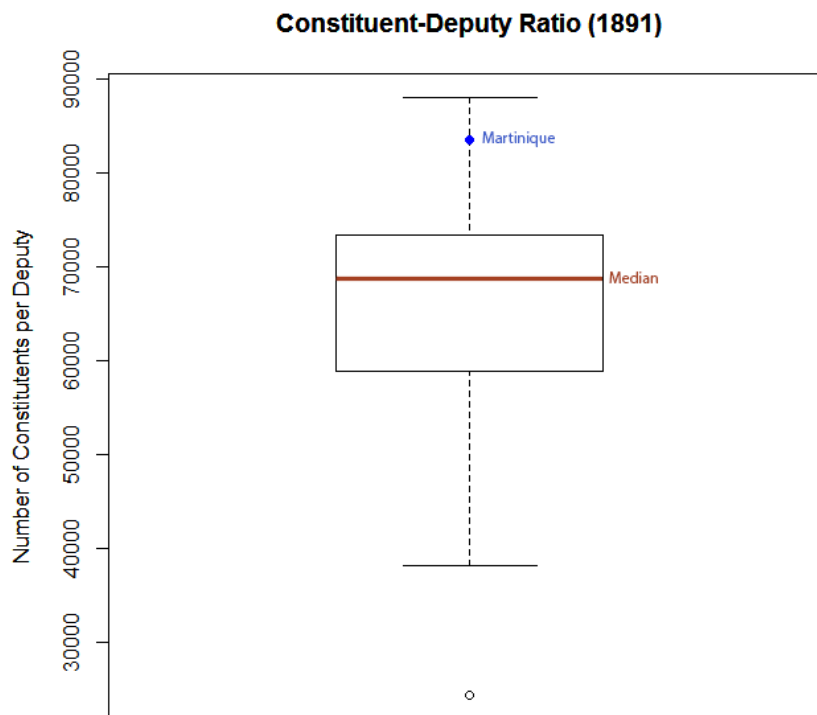
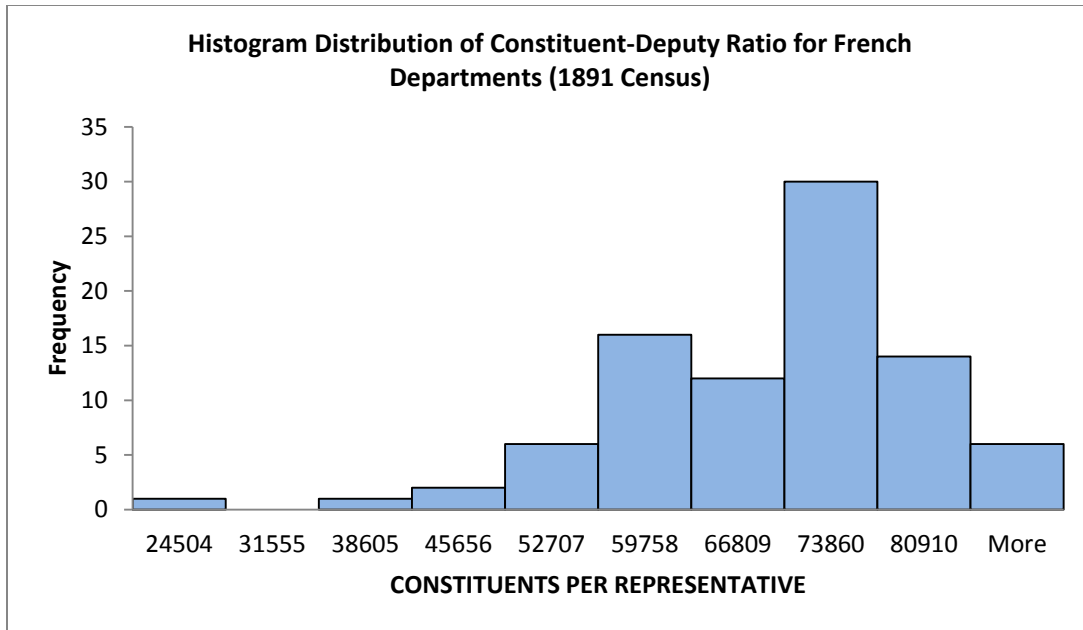


Figure 1. Martinique falls into the “More” category of this histogram, with roughly 84000 constituents per representative. Its ratio of representation is in the company of the departments of Loire (87961); Indre-et-Loire (84510); Nord (82683); Haute-Marne (81198).¹³

¹³ Statistics for the histogram compiled from « Tableaux des series du renouvellement par moitie » Annales de la Chambre des Députés: Documents parlementaires, Volume 38. (Paris : Imprimerie des Journaux officiels, 1893). Retrieved on 11 April 2013 from Google Books at <http://books.google.fr/books?id=E6VDAQAIAAJ&pg=PA723>; J.L. de Lanessan. *L'expansion coloniale de la France: Etude economique, politique, et geographique sur les*

Although it would have been among the departments with the smallest representation in the French legislature, Martinique nevertheless participated vociferously in the French Republic. Taking up arms during the French revolution of 1789¹⁴ and rejoicing during that of 1848—and even proclaiming a republic in southern Martinique in 1870¹⁵—the predominately non-white population of France's old empire defined itself as inherently French and undeniably republican. In fact, the legality of the Third Republic hinged on the political participation of the French Antilles. The Guadeloupean deputy, Germain Casse, permitted the ratification of the Constitution of 1875, because the Wallon amendment, which established the President of the Republic as the chief of the executive, only passed on 30 January 1875 by a single vote: that of Germain Casse. As *Le Figaro* put it after Germain Casse's death in 1900, "At the time of the Third Republic's founding, [. . .] the establishment of the government in France depended on the support of a colonial deputy."¹⁶ Those who represented Martinique's interests in Paris were by and large members of the island's mixed-race middle class. It has been well established that coupled with the flagging Caribbean sugar economy, which sapped the political power of the islands' *grands blancs* and pushed people of color into administrative, legislative, educational, and bureaucratic posts, the onset of the Third Republic jettisoned the French Antilles' colored population into social and political prominence, though the economic sphere remained largely dominated by the islands' endogamous white elite.¹⁷

Therefore, the island of Martinique was almost-but-not-quite a department of France. While it had been folded into the metropolitan legal code, was free from the harsh indigenous code applied elsewhere in the French empire, and had representation on par with other departments—if at the lower end of the spectrum—it still faced very real hurdles to integration, most notably the economic realities of sugar cultivation and the political realities of its still colonial status.

Colonialism, Catastrophe, and National Integration

Scholars of the French West Indies have extensively examined the importance of assimilation in Antillean politics and culture, clearly elucidating the significance of the short-lived emancipation of 1794; the transient citizenship gained in 1848 and suspended in 1851; and

établissements français d'outre mer. Ed. Félix Alcan. (Paris: Germer Baillièrre et Cie, 1886) Retrieved 12 April 2013 from Google Books at <http://books.google.com/books?id=UspCAAAAYAAJ>; *Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research. Social, Demographic, and Educational Data for France, 1801-1897*. ICPSR00048-v1. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2009-02-20. doi:10.3886/ICPSR00048.v1

¹⁴ L. Dubois. *A colony of citizens: revolution & slave emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804*. (Chapel Hill, UNC Press, 2004).

¹⁵ Armand Nicolas. *L'insurrection du Sud à la Martinique (septembre 1870)*. (Fort-de-France: Impr. populaire, 1971).

¹⁶ Henri Adolphe Lara and Leon Hennique, *Contribution de la Guadeloupe à la pensée française : 1635-1935*, (Paris : J. Crès, 1936), 192. Retrieved 6 December 2012 from Manioc at <http://www.manioc.org/patrimon/PAP11032>.

¹⁷ Franklin W. Knight and Colin A. Palmer. *The Modern Caribbean*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 91-92.

finally the full citizenship restored in 1871 and codified in the Third Republic's Constitution of 1875. From Richard Burton's *La famille coloniale : la Martinique et la mère patrie* (1994) and *French and West Indian* (1995), to Mackaella Perina's *Citoyenneté et sujétion aux Antilles francophones* (1997), to Jean-Pierre Sainton's *Les nègres en politique* (2000), and, more recently, to Serge Mam Lam Fouck's *L'Histoire de l'assimilation* (2006), scholars have probed the entry of Antilleans into the political sphere during the Third Republic and explored their demands for civic and economic rights. It must be reiterated that this work does not seek to retrace their steps, but to explore, as Laurent Dubois does for the First Republic in *A Colony of Citizens* (2004), how monumental events in the French West Indies—in this case, disasters both natural and manmade—shaped and interacted with broader developments in the metropole itself.

As Eugen Weber reminds us, the process of making Frenchmen out of a rural, disconnected peasantry at the close of the nineteenth century was a fraught and uneven process, which he deems a form of internal colonization in which urban values permeated the countryside through school systems, transportation and communication networks, and military service. Similarly, historian Benedict Anderson has demonstrated that nations are not natural or foundational givens, but are produced as "imagined communities" in the modern world through print-capitalism, the political action of provincial elites, and the ever-increasing bureaucratic apparatuses of the state. Martinique must be situated as part of this dual process of "internal colonization" and "national imagination," for its population participated as citizens in the national integration of France at the close of the century. Rather than forming an independence movement struggling to imagine a separatist community, the vast majority of the Martiniquais struggled as a colonial population to be recognized as a French one. Key to this process were not the creole elites, but the republican middle class and the socialist laboring class, because the legacy of slavery and the particularities of French republicanism complicate the role played by provincial—that is, Creole—elites in the Antilles. Rather than representing a form of nascent nationalism as it had a century before for American colonials in the United States, Antillean planters' demand for autonomy represented a form of secessionism that ran counter to the political ambitions of the island's predominately nonwhite middle and working classes. That is, colonial nationalism meant not independence, but integration.

It is against this backdrop that we must understand the political and tensions brought to light by disasters and civil unrest in the Caribbean as well as in the metropole, because cataclysmic events cast societal problems and dynamics in their starkest relief, and the debate over who belongs in the national community takes center stage. Public debates over Antillean belongingness in the national community were waged following catastrophic events: the great hurricanes that struck the Antilles during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the fires that swept through Martinique and Guadeloupe in 1890, and the eruption of Mount Pelée that destroyed the so-called "Paris of the Antilles," as well as the civil unrest, arson, and demands for social welfare during Martinique's first general strike in 1900. Not only do these events demonstrate moments of crisis; they were also moments of intense overlap and exchange between the Antilles and metropolitan France as French society questioned who belonged and who did not. Disasters and moments of civil unrest, therefore, unearthed and challenged the commonplace French understandings of citizenship, colonialism, and community. By tracing the peculiarities of the Caribbean environment—as well as the increasing role of the French nation-state in distant localities—against the backdrop of the rise of French nationalism and demands for political inclusion and social welfare, we can get a fuller picture of the development of late-nineteenth-century nationalism and its ramifications for the colonial world.

How and to what extent Martinique belongs as part of metropolitan France remains a prominent issue to this day. There exists a very real and clear tension between a sense of commonality with an African heritage—most clearly elucidated through the writers and artists of the *Negritude* school—and a drive by the Creolité movement for difference from, or rather a synthesis of, the cultural or geographic antecedents to Caribbean peoples. As such, the Caribbean during the late nineteenth century was a space of fragmentation and insularity, but also one of a shared connection to the physical tropical environment and a shared bank of local knowledge. Undoubtedly distinct from their metropolitan counterparts, Antilleans nevertheless saw themselves as both French and Caribbean, and they participated fully in the politics and social developments of the French Third Republic. While it is important not to reduce Antilleans to a singular cultural antecedent—either that of France or Africa—it is also necessary not to overlook Antilleans’ engagement with their French nationality and how, in times of both natural disaster and civil unrest, they were simultaneously included and excluded from French conceptualizations of nationality and citizenship. Accordingly, this dissertation addresses the peculiarity of a nonwhite citizenry demanding admission into, acceptance within, and assistance from an imagined community officially championing its inclusion and protection while simultaneously seeking to exclude it.

As a “colony of citizens,” Martinique was simultaneously a colonial territory and an integral part of France. Under French control longer than Nice, Savoy, or Alsace-Lorraine, the colony of “la France lointaine,” as it was called, was inextricably entangled in metropolitan concerns and arguments about the meaning and significance of “liberty, equality, and fraternity” as demands rose for a Social Republic in France. Rather than treating the colonies as a space to which national ideologies were either applied or one in which local circumstances pushed back on national discourses, the dissertation’s theoretical perspective is framed by historians like Alice Conklin and Gary Wilder, who have each argued that historians need to treat colonial and national history as a single unit. As Conklin states, it is “the multiple and uneven exchanges between metropole and colony that have decisively shaped France and its overseas territories in the modern era.”¹⁸ Therefore, as she argues, we should imagine French history as colonial history, and vice versa. Likewise, Wilder argues that colonial history is national history precisely because the administrative republic and the imperial bureaucracy were articulated within the same political formation, what he calls the “imperial nation-state.”¹⁹ It is imperative, therefore, to look beyond the dichotomy between metropole and colony. This allows us to explore not only how republicanism was refracted in the colonies, but also how the colonies shaped the Third Republic by challenging and redefining French ideology and serving as the battleground where a language of civic inclusion challenged, and was challenged by, economic imperatives.

Demands from the metropolitan government as well as conditions within the colonies shaped the French state's imperial policy. For the French, there was a strong desire to view Martinique as the embodiment of the civilizing mission “made good”—that is, as contemporaries explained it, as a place where French values and culture had taken root in the tropics. However, the old colonies present an interesting case study because they themselves had a voice in the

¹⁸ Alice Conklin. “Boundaries Unbound: Teaching French History as Colonial History and Colonial History as French History.” *French Historical Studies*, 23(2), (2000): 217.

¹⁹ Gary Wilder. *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude & Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

legislature and thereby a say in government's colonial policies. The political realities in Martinique were such that the island's mixed-race middle class and black laboring class championed assimilation, demanding disaster relief from the central government as if Martinique were a department and requesting economic parity with metropolitan citizens. Therefore, by looking Martinique's relationship to the metropole during times of unrest and catastrophe under the Third Republic, we can better understand the inextricability of colonialism, catastrophes, and democratic nation-building in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Overview of Chapters

The present chapter (Introduction) has introduced the main topic of analysis: how the late-nineteenth-century French understood disasters in the empire's oldest colonies through the bifocal lens of colonialism and citizenship; how they projected their prejudices and misconceptions, as well as their political hopes and aspirations, onto a tropical environment far removed from France; and how that faraway space—with its hurricanes, fires, and earthquakes—in turn influenced the conceptualization of the French nation itself. It has also introduced how this work intervenes in the historiography by situating the old colonies within French national developments at the turn of the century. It further establishes that natural disasters are an excellent lens through which we can understand socio-political and cultural struggles, because they bring forward existing racial and social tensions and they put under scrutiny France's ideological convictions of assimilation and equal citizenship.

Chapter 1 establishes that the “old colonies” are distinct from the “new colonies,” exploring the relationship of race to space to show that the colonial population of the French Antilles figured into the French imaginary as “tropical Frenchmen” who served as a bastion of French identity in a hostile environment that perpetually threatened to destroy all civilization there. Treated as a colony of settlement despite being in reality an extractive sugar colony, Martinique was seen as an extension of France in the tropics. As such, this “faraway France,” where a colonial citizenry had “attained a certain degree of civilization,” became the site of an intense struggle over French identity and nationality waged between liberal French republicans and a reactionary right comprised of monarchists and bonapartists. Race, politics, and socio-economics were intertwined in the Caribbean. Faced with an intransigent population of white planters who maintained the old aristocratic mores of pre-revolutionary France, liberal officials turned to the island's burgeoning mixed-race middle class as the bearers of the French Republic.

Chapter 2 explains how Frenchmen socially identified with and supported distant “compatriots” in the Caribbean who suffered during the 1890 fire that burned down the administrative capital of Martinique: Fort-de-France. The Fire of 1890, and the French government's relief campaign, illustrated the French state's need to safeguard its Antillean citizenry in times of natural disaster. Though the climate of the Caribbean was diametrically opposed to that of France, the people living there were depicted as inherently French—“more French than the French,” as many say today. Therefore, the dire situation following the Great Fire of Fort-de-France was met with an outpouring of public support from all across France, as Frenchmen heeded the call for Martinique's compatriots to open their wallets to their brothers in peril.

Chapter 3 examines the role played by economics in distinguishing “colonial” populations from “metropolitan” ones, looking at how the French business elite attempted to

distance itself from the French Caribbean in the aftermath of the 1891 hurricane. As “disaster fatigue” set in, officials began to re-evaluate the economic importance and vitality of Martinique, emphasizing its economic history as an extractive colony. To the chagrin of assimilationist politicians fighting for Martiniquais political rights, Martinique’s Frenchness seemed to hinge on its economic utility as officials subjected the island to financial “profit and loss” analyses and economic valuations.

Chapter 4 explores the consequences of the downturn in the Martiniquais sugar economy caused by international competition and local environmental catastrophes, turning toward politics to show that Martinique’s strike of 1900 foregrounded labor unrest in metropolitan France, as French socialists rallied to the cause of their “compatriots” in the Caribbean. The military had opened fire on strikers at Le Francois in Martinique, and that same year, the military used force in Chalon-sur-Saone to suppress an industrial strike in the metropole. Martinique was not exotic enough for it and its problems to be rationalized away as strictly colonial: the issues brought to light by the shooting at Francois, when cast with the unrest evident at places like Chalon, reinforced French cultural identification with their compatriots in Martinique.

Chapter 5 turns toward the deadliest natural event in the Western Hemisphere: the 1902 eruption of Mount Pélee and the destruction of Saint-Pierre, “the Paris of the Antilles.” If disaster had previously characterized how the French understood Martinique and the tropics more generally, the eruption of Mount Pelée solidified that association. As one of the world’s deadliest catastrophes, this eruption became the prevailing leitmotif for Martinique in the French imaginary, solidifying the ideological division between the Frenchness of the Martiniquais and the tropical space in which they lived.

The dissertation concludes by gesturing toward Martinique’s departmentalization in 1946, revisiting the dissertation’s themes and demonstrating that during the Third Republic, Martinique was seen as simultaneously French and colonial. As the people of Martinique were included in the French definition of the nation, and Martinique moved from being a colony of capital extraction to one of capital injection, it became increasingly clear that Martinique’s tropical environment was seen as antithetical to the republican project. As historians like Eric Jennings have shown, at play throughout the Third Republic was the juxtaposition of the French race with hostile, tropical spaces: in short, the distinction between white and non-white, between European and colonial. Faced with such a hostile, foreign space, Martinique’s colonial population was more firmly seen as part of the French citizenry and thereby the French nation, despite simultaneously being treated as inherently distinct and tropical.

Moments of catastrophe test the strength of liberal values and are particularly relevant to the world we live in today. In France, the state’s duty to its citizens in the Caribbean is still a hotly contested issue, and the old colonies, which became full French departments in 1946, continue to leverage demands on the French government. While the importance of environmental disasters—natural and manmade—remains understudied by historians²⁰, numerous *prise de conscience* articles and books have been published in the past two decades to raise awareness about the environmental hazards of the Caribbean, with the express purpose of garnering public support, improving infrastructure, and securing state aid.²¹ Moreover, the postcolonial

²⁰ Schwartz 390.

²¹ See Caraïbe Geode. *Les Antilles, terres à risques*. (Paris: Karthala, 1999) ; Alain Yacou. *Les catastrophes naturelles aux Antilles: d'une Soufrière à une autre*. (Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe: CERC, 1999) ; Pascal Saffache,

relationship of economic dependence and inequity, forged in the context of sugar cultivation and environmental catastrophe, has repeatedly come under fire in the French Caribbean. Most recently, in 2009, Antilleans took to the streets in the islands' largest general strike to demand higher wages and to protest their high cost of living, itself a byproduct of the eventualities of the insular environment and the costs of importing consumer goods and food stuffs. The citizens in the French Caribbean, whose race and geographic distance often cast them as outsiders in their own country of France, continue to demand parity with their metropolitan counterparts, and this dissertation explores the roots of this dynamic.

Jean-Valéry Marc, and Olivier Cospar. *Les cyclones en Martinique: quatre siècles cataclysmiques: Elements pour une prise de conscience de la vulnérabilité de l'île de la Martinique*. (Fort-de-France: Ibis Rough, 2002); Pascal Saffache, Jean-Valéry Marc, and Vincent Huyghes-Belrose. *Les cyclones en Guadeloupe: quatre siècles cataclysmiques*. (Fort-de-France: Ibis Rough, 2003).

“The Antilles are for us an entirely different thing than a colony to keep out of convenience: if they can only be considered a very weak part of the ancient colonies of settlement, because the French race there is today a very weak minority, they are no less true fragments of the French nation, with which everything is in common: language, education, and patriotism; the link which attaches them to us and us to them is stronger than that of convenience: it’s the familial link which dominates all the others.”

Paul Dislère, President of Administrative Council of the Ecole Coloniale²²

"It will be possible to establish that Martinique is a little France, a faraway France. The social manners do not differ principally from French social manners. Life, over there, is only an adaptation of European life to the necessities of a tropical climate."

Paulette Nardal, *Tourist's Guidebook to Martinique, 1931*²³

The West Indian was superior to the African, of a different species, assimilated to the metropolitan. [. . .] The West Indian was not a Negro; he was a West Indian, that is to say a quasi-metropolitan. By this attitude the white man justified the West Indian in his contempt for the Africa. The Negro, in short, was a man who inhabited Africa.

Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*²⁴

Chapter 1 – French Race, Tropical Space: Martinique during the Third Republic

In 1888, the soon-to-be president of the Ecole Coloniale’s administrative council, Paul Dislère, compiled his *Notes on the Organization of the Colonies*, in which he delineated between the assimilable and the non-assimilable colonies—that is, between those colonies that had enough in common with France proper that they could be assimilated into the French nation and those that could not. Though Dislère was an anti-imperialist earlier in his career, viewing overseas expansion an economic drain and a utter waste of resources, by the time of his tenure at the Ecole Coloniale—the college that trained all functionaries in the French colonial service in an effort to improve the quality of French colonial administrators from 1889 onward—he was an ardent assimilationist who dominated the school’s directors and set the agenda for school policy.²⁵

²² Paul Dislère. *Notes sur l’organisation des colonies*. (Paris: Société d’imprimerie et librairie administratives, 1888), 13.

²³ Paulette Nardal. *Guide des colonies françaises: Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyane, St. Pierre-Miquelon*. (Paris: Société d’éditions géographiques, maritimes et coloniales, 1931), 5.

²⁴ Frantz Fanon. “West Indians and Africans.” *Toward the African Revolution*. Trans. Haakon Chevalier. (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 20.

²⁵ William Cohen. *Rulers of Empire: the French Colonial Service in Africa*. (Palo Alto: Stanford, 1971), 44-45.

Leaving aside religious propagation for other bureaucrats to handle, this former director of the Ministry of the Marine and Colonies succinctly outlined five key motifs of French imperialism: (1) the expansion of the French race; (2) the extension of the powers of the state; (3) the satisfaction of commercial interests; (4) the creation of *points d'appui* from which military actions could be launched; and (5) the founding of places to which exiles from the metropole could be sent.²⁶ Placing an emphasis on the first three of these driving factors of French imperialism, Dislère drew the same divide highlighted by historians of empire today: the difference between colonies of settlement and those of exploitation, between colonies of citizens and colonies of subjects. He applied this division to the Antilles, which he described as “a very weak part of the ancient colonies of settlement, because the French race there is today a very weak minority, [though] they are no less true fragments of the French nation, with which everything is in common: language, education, and patriotism.”²⁷ Dislère’s statement glosses over the more unsavory parts of the colonial legacy in the Antilles, for the Antillean colonies were founded not as colonies of European settlement, but as exploitative sugar plantations where 3.2 million Africans were forcibly migrated to work as slave labor. Historically, the Antilles were colonies of resource extraction: the backbone of the slave labor economy that harvested sugar and amassed the capital necessary to catapult Europe into modernity.²⁸

However, in 1888, republicans had a selective memory, choosing to view these old colonies not as former colonies of extraction, but as poor examples of colonies of settlement. By the late nineteenth-century, those colonies that had begun as places of pure economic exploitation had come to represent “true fragments of the French nation, with which everything is in common: language, education, and patriotism.” When compared to the new colonies of exploitation in Africa and Indochina—the financially important colonies, according to Dislère and others—the French Antilles were “old hat” to the French government, populace, and financial sector. Their familiarity ensured that they lacked the exoticism that drew in the reading public drawn to popular colonial periodicals like *Les Journaux des Voyages*, while their obsolescence at the hands of European beet sugar left economists and financiers disinterested.

Arguing that the old colonies represented assimilable spaces which could one day become full French departments, while the new represented spaces of economic extraction that benefited the French economy, Dislère elucidated a distinction understood by many during the height of new imperialism: that the old colonies of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Reunion represented a categorically different colonial space than France’s newer colonies in Indochina and Africa. This distinction was reflected in the legal system, which held two judicial regimes: one for the old colonies and one for the new. As citizens, inhabitants of the old colonies were exempt from the harsh indigenous code, and by-and-large fell under the jurisdiction of metropolitan legal system.

Although the Antilles were distinct from the newer colonies founded for financial gain and international prestige,²⁹ Dislère nevertheless argued that the Antilles represented a very weak

²⁶ Dislère, 5.

²⁷ Dislère, 13.

²⁸ Eric Eustace Williams. *Capitalism and Slavery*. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1961).

²⁹ While Dislère and other contemporaries, particular members of the Parti Colonial, argued that the new colonies were financially beneficial to the French state, historians doubt that their contribution to the French economy was significant. In fact, it is likely that the colonies never absorbed more than 10-15% of French exports or that trade

example of colonial settlement. In his eyes, the French race was a minority there, because he identified only those descendants of the white planter class as the “true” Frenchmen in the region. It is different, however, with respect to French culture. Despite the minority of the French race, Dislère underscored the holistic similarity of Antillean and French culture, stating that despite their lack of economic utility, these old colonies of settlement must be treated as “true fragments of the French nation” that share a common French culture, republican patriotism, language, and educational system. In Dislère’s thinking, we can see the tension between civic and racial understandings of French nationalism that underpinned the Third Republic: from a racial point of view, the French Antilles were not France’s United States or Australia, where white expats formed autonomous colonies of settlement. From a civic standpoint, the Antilles represented, in spite of the dilution of the “French race” in the region, “true fragments of the French nation” on the grounds that these old colonies shared a culture with France.

The fact of the matter is that what Dislère saw as a selective process of colonial assimilation in 1888, and what Frantz Fanon sardonically highlighted as evidence of the dual-edged, liminal nature of being black but not yet a Negro in 1952,³⁰ was well-underway in the old colonies from the onset of the Third Republic, which had granted full citizenship and legislative representation to the old colonies with the Constitution of 1875. What do we do with the tension in French imperialism between a racial conceptualization of French civic identity—one which theoretically should seek to exclude Antilleans from the French nation on the basis of their skin color, as was done with Africans in France’s less ambiguous colonies of subjects—and the civic conceptualization of French race prevalent within both the metropole and the old colonies.

For many during the Third Republic, the distant Caribbean island of Martinique represented, in the words of the famous black Martiniquais intellectual, Paulette Nardal, a “a little France, a faraway France [where] [t]he social manners do not differ principally from French social manners. Life, over there, is only an adaptation of European life to the necessities of a tropical climate.”³¹ As a faraway France, Martinique reflected the socio-political struggle that characterized the unstable Third Republic from the brutal suppression of the Paris Commune onward. Treated as a colony of settlement despite being an extractive sugar colony in truth, Martinique was seen as an extension of France in the tropics. As such, this “faraway France,” where a colonial citizenry had “attained a certain degree of civilization,” became the site of an intense struggle over French identity and nationality waged between liberal French republicans and a reactionary right comprised of monarchists and bonapartists. Race, politics, and socio-economics were intertwined in the Caribbean. Faced with an intransigent population of white planters who maintained the old aristocratic mores of pre-revolutionary France, liberal officials turned to the island’s burgeoning mixed-race middle class. This in turn raised a challenge to the

with the colonies made up more than 10% of French commerce. See François Caron. *An economic history of modern France*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 109. Also see Hendrik Spruyt. *Ending Empire: Contested Sovereignty and Territorial Partition*. Ithaca, N.Y.: (Cornell University Press, 2005), 68.

³⁰ “The West Indian was superior to the African, of a different species, assimilated to the metropolitan. [. . .] The West Indian was not a Negro; he was a West Indian, that is to say a quasi-metropolitan. By this attitude the white man justified the West Indian in his contempt for the Africa. The Negro, in short, was a man who inhabited Africa.” Fanon, 20.

³¹ Paulette Nardal. *Guide des colonies françaises: Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyane, St. Pierre-Miquelon*. (Paris: Société d'éditions géographiques, maritimes et coloniales, 1931), 5.

prevailing French conception of race during the height of "new imperialism" which witnessed the ascendancy of "scientific" racist thought, and it heralds back to the oldest days of French colonialism in the New World when *métissage* was treated as expedient rather than threatening.

The Third Republic leaned heavily upon imperialism in order to maintain its legitimacy. Politicians like Jules Ferry and Paul Dislère intricately tied together racial typology and notions of French civilization, arguing that imperialism was necessary for the unification of the French nation after the bloody beginnings of the Third Republic in 1870-71.³² With regard to this racialist typology, historians like Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler have shown that French policymakers increasingly frowned upon racial mixing, viewing "miscegenation" as threatening to state power and European racial superiority. In *A Mission to Civilize*, Alice Conklin has aptly shown that for republican officials in French West Africa, who simultaneously championed French pro-natalism and imperialism, racial mixing would inevitably lead to the degeneration of the French (read: white) race and the undermining of colonial authority. In the view of the French officials, the person of mixed race—the *métis*—"should not and could not become French," and to preserve their Frenchness functionaries in the colonies were encouraged to practice endogamy.³³ At the turn of the century, however, French disdain for miscegenation, so prevalent after African and Caribbean involvement in the First World War, had not yet overcome the much longer tradition of *métissage* dating to the New World conquest and intermarriage between settlers and Native Americans. As a relic of this old empire, Martiniquais society was seen by French authorities as a product of this accepted, and oftentimes encouraged, interracial mixing that served to strengthen rather than diminish French culture and civilization abroad.

As historians like Eric Jennings have shown, at play throughout the Third Republic was the juxtaposition of French race with hostile, tropical spaces: in short, the distinction between white and non-white, between European and colonial.³⁴ While this may be true in the "new colonies" of Indochina and West Africa, the picture becomes much more complicated when we look at France's old colonies—Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyane, and Reunion—which had been under French control since the seventeenth century and thus had already been integrated in significant ways into the French nation religiously, economically, politically, and culturally.³⁵

³² As Jules Ferry, the influential statesman responsible for France's institution of mandatory education, proclaimed to boisterous applause before the Chamber of Deputies in 1883, France must expand not only because the "superior races have a right [. . .] [and a duty] to civilize the inferior races," but also because in an era of rising international competition the Republic of France must be "a great country, exercising all of her rightful influence over the destiny of Europe, that she ought to propagate this influence throughout the world and carry everywhere that she can her language, her customs, her arms, and her genius." In Ferry's view, to be a great nation was to be an expanding nation, lest France run the risk of losing its national sovereignty. See Jules Ferry. *Speech before the national assembly*. In *Sources of Making of the West*, Vol II. Ed. Katharine J. Lualdi. (Boston: Bedford, 2009).

³³ Alice Conklin. *A Mission to Civilize: the Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa*. (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1997), 164-172.

³⁴ Eric Jennings. *Curing the Colonizers: Hydrotherapy, Climatology, and French Colonial Spas*. (North Carolina: Duke Univ. Press, 2006). According to Jennings, the spa city of Vichy functioned as the archetype for the colonial spas, creating a dichotomy between the metropole as the cure and the colonies as the pathology. For Jennings, therefore, these spas functioned in a real as well as symbolic way to maintain imperial hierarchies and French identity, and thus the existence of colonial spas belied the French ideology of French egalitarian assimilation.

³⁵ Upon the creation of the Fourth Republic in 1946, the old colonies became French departments with the same legal status as *pays* within the metropole.

During a time in which national unity and the civilizing mission were of the utmost concern, racial typologies were mapped onto the old colonies in surprising ways. In the Caribbean, French identity was not, and still is not, simply a "black and white" issue. In fact, for many colonial functionaries, racial mixing became a necessary and laudable virtue, and old world whiteness was seen as antiquated and antithetical to the republican project. The old colonies in the Caribbean occupied a space separate from that of the new colonies, for unlike the new colonies they had come to represent French culture and ideals in a tropical world far removed from France; that is, though they were tropical and dangerous, they were seen as "civilized" spaces in the French imaginary. To be precise, the population living there was viewed as "civilized," whereas the environment perpetually threatened that civilization. Therefore, during a time of rampant imperialism that heightened the distinction between the French and the non-French worlds—in particular between the white and non-white worlds—the segregation of Frenchness and racial mixture collapsed under the weight of the republican myth of assimilation and unity, much as the division between metropole and colony began to give way from pressure from mulatto politicians who sought departmentalization.³⁶

In the French Caribbean, political motives, social stratification, environmental concerns, and racist attitudes intermingled to produce a sphere in which the gaining vogue of European "racial supremacy" was turned on its head. Racial purity—either white or black—was seen as antagonistic to republicanism in the Antillean tropics. For various reasons and to various ends, racial mixture was seen as a bulwark against the danger of a tropical environment to French culture. Therefore, with regard to the peculiarity of the Caribbean within the French Empire, historians should be attentive to the variegated ways in which French ideology was applied across the French Empire and remember that French racist thought followed as well as directed French politics.

Martinique: a Case Study in the French Caribbean

Drawing on sources from those charged with explaining the island to those in the metropole—not only the writers, educators, and scientists who traveled to the island over the course of the Third Republic, but also the popular guidebooks, textbooks, and encyclopedias that shaped the way in which republicans understood the old colonies—this chapter examines the complex way in which French racist attitudes were mapped onto the Caribbean island of Martinique. As home to Saint-Pierre—the so-called "Paris of the Antilles"—until its destruction by the eruption of Mount Pelée in 1902, Martinique represents a geographic space that was seen as simultaneously French and tropical, domestic yet foreign. On the one hand, Saint-Pierre's European-style gardens and architecture, as well as its social life, represented the transplantation of Parisian life in a tropical climate. On the other hand, the flora and fauna, as well as the perpetual danger of tropical diseases and hurricanes, drove home just how different this space was from the metropole. In this liminal space, the French looked to Martinique's mulatto population—an interstitial group who represented the convergence of two worlds—rather than the white planters as the embodiment of French civilization, that is, as the standard bearers of the French Republic in the tropics.

³⁶ When the Fourth Republic was inaugurated in 1946, Martinique officially became a department of France.

Travelers of one sort or another shaped French public opinion of and state policy toward the colonies: from a variety of employments, these authors traveled to the colonies and wrote about them both for a general audience and for policymakers in the metropole. Many of these writers, like many bureaucrats in the colonial administration, repeatedly moved between the metropole and Martinique, occupying an official function in the French colonial government. For instance, Louis Garaud, whose writings will be discussed later, was born in France in Pamiers and as part of his studies at the university, he was sent to Martinique where he stayed from 1885 to 1889. He left Martinique when he was named head teacher at a school in Algiers, but he returned to Martinique in 1893 as the vice-rector of a university. His work revolved around education, particularly public education in Martinique, as well as linguistic developments within the French language—both the creation of Martiniquais Creole and the phonetic development of Languedoc French. He published an ethnographic study of Martinique, called *Three Years in Martinique* (1892), that was meant for a general as well as an academic audience.³⁷ Writers like Garaud largely shaped French, and indeed international, conceptualizations of what Martinique was and how it related to France.³⁸ In fact, Garaud himself was well-known in both France and the United States,³⁹ and in 1888 he drafted an official report on the status of French education in Martinique.⁴⁰ Reports such as his encouraged French officials to distinguish French education in the Antilles from that in the newer colonies. Therefore, such travelers inform us of the way in which Martinique was imagined as a French space, and they shed light on the problems inherent not only to the creation of a French national "space" but also to the very nature of French colonialism in the era of the "civilizing mission."

To situate the cultural productions about Martinique within a broader historical context, this chapter will draw on contemporary political and economic developments as a backdrop. Since this paper is concerned with the way in which Martinique was conceived as French under the Third Republic, particular attention will be paid to descriptions of the island's population and environment, as well as the manner in which these descriptions are compared and contrasted with the mainland French populace and climate. In order to explain the mythos of the civilizing mission as well as foresee the eventual re-designation of the "old colonies" as French departments, this chapter seeks to answer: with regard to climate, culture, and population, what does France look like in the tropics?

An Overview of Martinique and the Metropole: Economic Reality and Political Aspiration

Before we examine the conceptualization of Martinique as French under the Third Republic, it is prudent to discuss briefly the manner in which Martinique became a French possession and the way in which it related to the Third Republic. The island of Martinique, which came under French control in 1635, was created as an extractive plantation colony.

³⁷ J. Domergue. "Garaud, Louis." *Dictionnaire de biographie française*, v.15. (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1933), 377.

³⁸ Many travelers to the island, most notably Lafcaido Hearn, had their writings republished or referenced in periodicals within the United States, most notably *National Geographic*.

³⁹ Vincent W. Byas. "Whither Martinique?" *Phylon*, Vol. 3, No. 3, (1942) : 277-283

⁴⁰ Louis Garaud. *Rapport sur la situation de l'instruction publique à la Martinique. (Année scolaire 1887-1888.)* (Fort-de-France: Imprimerie du gouvernement, 1888).

Slavery persisted on the island until the French Revolution, when, as a result of the Haitian Revolution as well as other Republican uprisings in the Lesser Antilles, slavery was abolished for the first time by Sonthanax during the First French Republic in 1794. However, the island passed into British control that same year, and the abolition of slavery was never enacted. When the island returned to France under the First Empire with the Treaty of Amiens in 1802, Napoleon reinstated slavery within the French empire. Although the island fell back under British control in 1807 and did not return to France until the Restoration, Napoleon's reinstatement of slavery remained, and the slave plantation economy persisted until the 1848 Revolution, when, upon the creation of the Second French Republic, slavery was abolished for a second and final time. In the spirit of "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity," the French Republic immediately granted full citizenship to all emancipated slaves in the French colonies. However, the rights concomitant with citizenship were suppressed upon the creation of the Second Empire, and under Napoleon III slavery remained on the island in all but name.⁴¹ Upon the creation of the Third Republic on 4 September 1870, universal male suffrage and citizenship rights were reinstated in the colony, though they were not codified until the Constitution of 1875, and with universal manhood suffrage came full representation in the French Republican government: two deputies in the National Chamber of Deputies and a senator in the National French Senate. During the first decade of the Third Republic, politics in Martinique were dominated by the wealthy white planter class; however, from the early 1880s onward, mulattos on the island came to the political fore.⁴²

As a result of the close relationship between the French Republic and the abolition of slavery, the French Antilles became markedly republican in political stature over the course of the nineteenth-century, often staking their claims in the French political arena, like their metropolitan counterparts, with reference to the republican values of the French Revolution. In fact, the sway of the republican ideology was so intense on the island that many Martiniquais politicians, much to the chagrin of the whites on the island who wanted to gain more autonomy, demanded assimilation into the metropole throughout the Third Republic.⁴³ In fact, the General Council of Martinique first expressed an interest in assimilation on 24 November 1874, when it proclaimed that Martinique was a French land with French values, language, culture, and dress. Shortly after the political gains of criminal juries and the freedom of the press in 1880 and 1881 respectively, the assimilationist sentiment was reiterated more forcefully in 1882 by mulatto republicans led by Osman Duquesnay in the General Council, who proclaimed, as representatives of a "patriotic population":

Considering that Martinique, which has been French for more than two centuries, which has enjoyed since 1870 the same political rights as the metropole, finds itself in the best

⁴¹ Emancipated slaves were highly restricted in terms of political rights and mobility in the French West Indies. For economic as well as ideological reasons, non-white citizens had to carry passports documenting both their employment and their movement on the island. If they could not prove employment, they were sent to involuntary workhouses. For more, see Rosamunde Renard. "Labour Relations in Martinique and Guadeloupe, 1848-1870," *Journal of Caribbean History* 26/1, (1992): 37-57.

⁴² R.S. Reisch. "French Experience with Representative Government in the West Indies." *American Historical Review*, 6(3), New Era Printing: Lancaster, PA, (1901): 480.

⁴³ Serge Mam Lam Fouck. *Histoire de l'assimilation des <<vieilles colonies>> française aux départements d'outre-mer: La culture politique de l'assimilation en Guyane et aux Antilles françaises (XIXe et XXe siècles)*. (Matoury, Guyane: Ibis Rouge, 2006).

possible conditions to be assimilated completely into the mother-country; [. . .] we renew the wish that was made on 24 November 1874 and ask that Martinique be constituted as a French department as soon as possible.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, although Martinique was integrated into the metropole in important ways and seen by many republican functionaries to be a colony of settlement—if only a “weak” one in the words of Dislère—the island of Martinique was first and foremost a colony of extraction. Martinique was as one of the major producers of sugar in the French Empire, and in the years leading up to the eruption of Mount Pelée in 1902, it exported an average of 35,000 tons of sugar per year, using nearly half of its cultivated land—roughly 25,000 hectares out of a total of 45,000 hectares—for sugar plantations. For economically-minded colonialists, however, the island was seen as woefully underexploited and underdeveloped, and many colonialists expressed disdain for the “black and mulatto” populations whom they viewed as averse to hard work.⁴⁵ As one observer put it, “In 1870, the budget of Martinique was 3, 214,191 francs; in 1901, it was 7,763,768 francs. [. . .] Public works cost 950,000 francs each year. In 7 years, we’ve spent 6.5 million. Where are the works that represent this infusion of capital? Where are the roads? Where are the canals? Where are the railways? There aren’t any.”⁴⁶ Both sugar production and infrastructure were lacking.

It is indeed true that Martinique's economic production struggled during the end of the nineteenth-century, and in fact the island was seen within the white community as a “lost land, or *pays perdu*.”⁴⁷ This was largely the result of the increasing beet sugar market, which cut into the demand for Antillean cane sugar; the hurricane of 1891 which devastated the island; and the unanticipated eruption in 1902 of a volcano thought to be extinct, Mount Pelée, which utterly destroyed the island's political and financial capital, Saint-Pierre. However, the inclusion of Martinique and Guadeloupe in the customs tariff of mainland France in 1892 helped to improve sugar production on the island, particularly after the devastating blow to sugar cultivation following the 1891 hurricane. However, it also brought Martinique into direct economic competition with mainland beet sugar and prevented trade with the United States. Although the island continued to produce roughly one third of all colonial sugar in France,⁴⁸ the French market shifted toward the cheaper, domestic alternative.

⁴⁴ A. Issac. *Question coloniales: Constitution et Sénatus-consultes*. (Paris: Librairie Guillaumin, 1887), 151.

⁴⁵ “In seeing all the unused fertile lands, for lack of hands to cultivate them; all the trees of the forests left to be devoured by termites, for want of roads to drive them to the coast, one inevitably thinks that, quite near—only a few hours walking on the coast—a too-dense population lives day-by-day, unhappy, without the energy to work in order to acquire the necessities and to earn dignity and the affluence that would be easily earned at the price of minimal effort.” L. Sonthonnax. *Deux mois aux Antilles françaises*. (Lyon: Impr. de A. Rey, 1898), 4-5.

⁴⁶ R. Pichevin. “Bulletin de l’Union coloniale française.” *Quinzaine coloniale*. 10 Mars 1906. (Paris: A. Challamel, 1906), 151-152.

⁴⁷ Reisch, 485.

⁴⁸ “Miscellaneous.” *The Beet Sugar Gazette, Vol IV, No. 4*. Ed. Frank Roderus. June 1902. (Chicago: Beet Sugar Gazette Co., 1902), 109

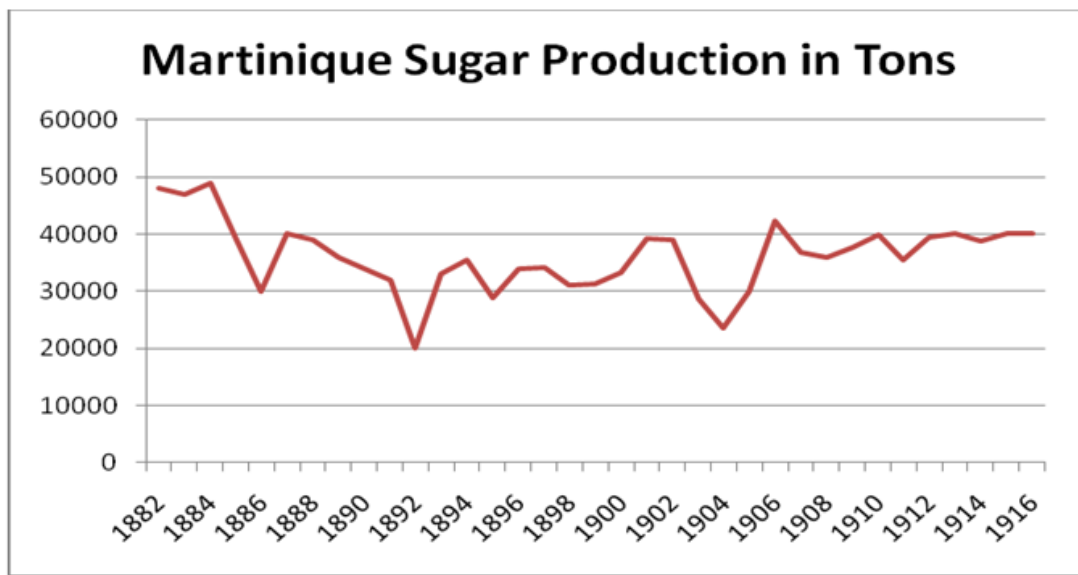


Figure 1. Martinique Sugar Production in Tons⁴⁹

Nevertheless, despite the declining importance of Martiniquais sugar in the world market, production remained fairly high, and aside from a few drops in production concomitant with natural disasters, sugar yields remained strong and stabilized in the first decade of the twentieth century. Sugar production remained a fundamental aspect of Martinique's economy and society, and to a large degree it remained not only an influential factor in the creation of colonial policy, but was also seen by Frenchmen to be the prime characteristic of Martinique.⁵⁰

Although Martinique remained an extractive colony, the cultural imperative to see it as a colony of settlement, as well as its incorporation into French culture and politics, demonstrated the ways in which the line between metropole and colony was blurry at best. Sugar production became a contested issue, and dissatisfaction on the plantation became tightly bound to metropolitan labor unrest. The Martiniquais strike of 1900 illustrates this point. In February 1900, workers across the island went on strike and demanded a wage increase, invoking the metropolitan Law of Labor Arbitration from 1892, which contained provisions extending its applicability to the old colonies. The Martiniquais workers were participating in a widely spread French phenomenon: labor unrest and arbitration, both successful and unsuccessful. In the ten years between 1893 and 1903, there were 5874 strikes and lockouts in France, and of those

⁴⁹ This graph was compiled with information from George Morrison Rolph. *Something about sugar: its history, growth, manufacture and distribution*. (San Francisco: John J. Newbegin, 1917), 242; P. Chemin-Dupontes. *Les Petites Antilles: étude sur leur évolution économique (1820-1908)*. (Paris: Désormeaux, 1979), 241-242; *Projet de budget (Département de la Martinique)*. (Fort-de-France. Impr. du gouvernement, 1913); *Projet de budget (Département de la Martinique)*. (Fort-de-France. Impr. du gouvernement, 1914).

⁵⁰ For instance, Louis Garaud dedicates an entire chapter to a sugar factory, including a detailed, step-by-step description of how sugar is refined; a narrative of the tasks of the black laborers; the specifications and layout of the factory itself; and an interview with a factory owner. Sugar production resulted in one of the fundamental dividing lines of Martiniquais society: most of the sugar plantations and factories were owned by rich white families and operated by poor black laborers, and as a result race was by-and-large mapped onto class divisions.

strikes and lockouts approximately 10 percent were successfully resolved via the arbitration outlined in the law of 1892.⁵¹ However, many of these strikes ended in bloodshed. When workers gathered at Le Francois on February 8 to voice their complaints and were told to disperse by a military detachment,⁵² they responded with Mirabeau's revolutionary phrase, "We are here by the will of the people and we shall yield only to bayonets."⁵³ The soldiers opened fire and killed eight agricultural workers and wounded fourteen others.⁵⁴

The labor unrest in Martinique coincided with mounting labor dissatisfaction in the metropole, and consequently the Martiniquais strike sparked a vicious parliamentary debate over the efficacy of the French government that lasted long after the strike ended in late February, nearly toppling the Waldeck-Rousseau government by late March. To the burgeoning socialist movement in the Hexagon, the shooting at Francois became known as the "Colonial Fourmies,"⁵⁵ calling to mind the massacre of workers in the department of Nord in May 1891. To the reactionary right, the event further elucidated the government's incompetent suppression of labor unrest.

Throughout 1900, Martinique resonated with those dissatisfied with the government's politics. On the 29th anniversary of the "Bloody Week" in May 1871 which brutally repressed the Paris Commune, demonstrations were held in Paris. According to newspaper reports, somewhere between 12,000 and 25,000 people took to the streets and marched through the Pere-Lachaise cemetery, shouting "Long live the Commune" and waving red banners which read "To the victims of Galliffet! To the victims in Martinique!"⁵⁶ In remembering the communards, the protesters drew a straight line from the bloody foundational moment of the Third Republic to the repression of the strikers at Le Francois. Contemporaries, as evidenced by August Terrier's comments cited in the paper's epigram, saw Martinique as occupying a space distinct from that of the new colonies—a space which in many ways coincided with metropolitan France.

The mulatto politicians readily draped themselves in the garb of the French Republic. In 1908 the Martiniquais section of the League of the Rights of Man and the Citizen drafted a letter entitled "Republican Martinique to Republican France," indicting the metropolitan government for permitting the *békés*, or colonial whites, to attempt to assert political dominance over the island. These *békés*—by and large the owners of the island's sugar plantations and

⁵¹ Carl H. Mote. *Industrial Arbitration: A World-Wide Survey of Natural and Political Agencies for Social Justice and Industrial Peace*. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1916), 102.

⁵² Jacques Adélaïde-Merlande. *Les origines du mouvement ouvrier en Martinique: 1870-1900*. (Paris :Editions Karthala, 2000), 143-171.

⁵³ Reisch, 490.

⁵⁴ Due to the seriousness of his injuries, one of the workers died in the hospital. Yet another had died but was reported by the mayor as wounded. The final casualty report was 10 dead and 12 wounded, though the true numbers remained contested. Throughout the following debates, estimations used in the Chamber varied from 8 to 12 dead with 14 wounded.

⁵⁵ "Un Fourmies Colonial." *L'Aurore*. 11 February 1900.

⁵⁶ Saint-Real. "L'Anniversaire de la commune." *Le Gaulois*. 28 May 1900.

Gaston de Galliffet was one of the generals who led the strike against the communards during the "Bloody Week" of May 21, 1871. He was Minister of War under the Waldeck-Rousseau ministry, and interestingly he resigned two days after this demonstration due to ideological conflicts with his colleagues.

manufactories—had been fighting against the movement to assimilate Martinique into mainland France, instead pushing for more autonomy. Claiming to represent the island's "fidelity to the spirit of the French Republic" and refusing "to consider as republican those who, contrary to the Declaration of the Right of Man and of the Citizen, make distinctions between humans based on their race, religion, or skin color," the League demanded the removal of the Governor of Martinique, Charles Louis Lepreux, whom the society held responsible for the assassination on 29 April 1908 of the Mayor of Fort-de-France, Antoine Siger—a man whose radical socialist leanings upset conservatives on the island.⁵⁷ In response to the scandal of the assassination, the anti-republican sentiment it uncovered, and the public outrage in Martinique, the Ministry promptly removed Governor Lepreux from office.

Despite the superficial noble aim—or rather, the hypocritical belief—to redefine the Antilles as colonies of settlement and to include Antilleans within the conceptualization of the French nation, the very reality is that the Antilles continued to be economically exploited at the close of the nineteenth century, earning far less than their metropolitan counterparts and meeting discrimination in the legal system, economic market, and popular press. Yet, increasingly Antilleans began to demand rights and privileges from the French state, in the form of assistance following natural disasters and wage increases and customs reform following collective action. In response to the driving impetus behind assimilation, Dislère himself recast the citizens living in the old colonies as a new form of leverageable resource. To answer his political opponents who fought against assimilating such old, financially unimportant colonies into the French market—let alone the French nation—Dislère justified assimilating the colonies via a new logic of “civic” extraction from the colonies, arguing that while the average taxpayer in the metropole gives 34 days’ worth of work to the French government annually, colonial citizens provide far less: 22 days’ worth in Martinique, 15 in Guadeloupe, and 19 in Réunion.⁵⁸ The citizenry was thus seen as an exploitable resource and a source of revenue for the French state. Under the Third Republic, the way in which the French state extracted resources from its colonial population—now recast as colonial citizens—had changed with the times.

It is against this backdrop of the strength of republican ideology and economic exploitation that the travel, ethnographic, and educational writings that follow can be understood. While the economic reality of Martinique was grounded in the extraction of sugar, the place of Martinique in the nineteenth-century bourgeois *imaginaire* was quite different and followed cultural and political imperatives. It was not just the Martiniquais themselves who viewed their land as incorruptibility republican and inherently French; the metropole itself underscored the Frenchness of Martinique's inhabitants—a population that was nearly 95% nonwhite⁵⁹—though this often played out in contradictory ways. On the one hand, it played into the racism inherent to the so-called the civilizing mission of "new imperialism." On the other hand, it complicated and challenged contemporary understandings of race in interesting and important ways.

⁵⁷ *La Martinique républicaine à la France républicaine*. (Fort-de-France: Imp. de la France Colonial, 1908).

⁵⁸ Dislère, 39.

⁵⁹ Garrad Harris. *The West Indies as an Export Field*. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1910), 310.

"Old" France with a new race of Frenchmen

Martinique had been under French control since 1635, and by the Third Republic it was seen as part and parcel of French heritage and often described as a piece of old France itself. For writers of tourist literature, who romantically glossed over the island's history of slavery, the people of Martinique exhibited the old manners and good hospitality of times past:

Martinique! This name in clear syllables evokes a brilliant past: supremacy of the small island in the 18th century, becoming the first of the Antilles. It was said then: lords of Haiti, *messieurs* of Martinique and the good people of Guadeloupe. At that time flourished in the island all the graces of a polished and brilliant century of which we can still find a faint echo in the current inhabitants of the Island of Flowers. Customs a bit outdated. Old French politeness. Light preciousness of music and dance. Clothes with affectation. Aged expressions. Gallant and kind memories. Slow and sweet speech.⁶⁰

This conceptualization of Martinique as a piece of old-world France was often coupled with the assertion that Martiniquais history was French history and that no-one could deny the loyalty of the island to France—a loyalty repeatedly tested by British occupations.⁶¹

The painting of Martinique as historically and traditionally French is surprising, given the racial composition of the islanders, the legacy of plantation slavery, and the forced migration of African slaves to the island. However, not everyone conceptualized Martinique as something old; others saw it as a fresh take on French tradition. For instance, in his ethnographic work on Martinique, Louis Garaud discusses numerous creole proverbs, explaining both their meaning and their relationship to their metropolitan counterparts. He provides analogs from traditional French proverbs for many of the creole sayings, illustrating that the same ideas permeate both cultures, though he insists that, despite the cultural parallels, these proverbs grew out of creole culture itself:

Do not believe that these proverbs are flat translations of French proverbs. All the more so when the inspiration for them is sensitive. For I do not believe that these borrowings were premeditated. The people were too naive and too young to own rags that smelled of centuries' dust.⁶²

By innovatively producing proverbs free from the 'smell of centuries' dust' that were simultaneously similar to those of French heritage, the creole population, for Garaud, invigorated French identity.

This combination of newness with Frenchness extended to the ways in which metropolitan officials understood the racial dynamics of Martinique. In the growing intellectual climate of scientism and social Darwinism, Europeans became preoccupied with a hierarchy of races and civilizations, presupposing whites as the most advanced race and colored races as inherently inferior—or, as Garaud's work shows, as younger and less developed than the races of Europe.

⁶⁰ Paulette Nardal. *Guide des colonies françaises: Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyane, St. Pierre-Miquelon*. (Paris: Société d'éditions géographiques, maritimes et coloniales, 1931), 1.

⁶¹ "The history of Martinique, a distinct reflection of that of France, will show him [the tourist], to the contrary, a definitive loyalty among the white French and the African blacks that has been strikingly proven time and time again." *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶² Louis Garaud. *Trois ans à la Martinique*. (Paris: Alcide Picard and Kaan, 1892), 86.

However, the application of this "hierarchical" ideology was far from straightforward in Martinique. Hybrid races, like the mulattos of Martinique that constituted roughly a third of the island's population during the Third Republic⁶³, challenged this racial hierarchy by introducing a "new race" that had to be fitted into the racial hierarchy. Historians have argued that what the mulatto class represented to nineteenth-century Frenchmen was a tainted whiteness, that is, a bastard race. As historian and political scientist Michaëlla Périna argues, "For the biologists of the 19th century, the hybrid constituted a veritable scandal [. . .] [, because] "hybridization" seemed inadmissible when applied to man, in other words, the mulatto was unacceptable."⁶⁴ Moreover, some historians have seen this racist ideology, the language of creole whites, as an impediment to assimilation, as something that characterized the relationship between the old colonies and the metropole.⁶⁵

For instance, in 1890, Armand Corre—a colonial doctor famous for his work on vaccines in West Africa—wrote *Nos Créoles*, a profoundly racist work with the "principal goal of clarifying the metropolitan opinion on the state of soul of certain colonial milieus, as well as cast in better relief racial elements imprudently sacrificed for those of lesser value."⁶⁶ The famed and well-traveled colonial doctor, observed with disdain in 1890:

No metropolitan governor, under the existing regime, will last long in our creole countries. These countries want men of their [crude] vintage, capable to accommodate the local rivalries in a sauce of common interest, for which the mother country will furnish all the ingredients. Blacks, mulattos, and whites associate together in the same impulses of complaints, reproaches, and sometimes invectives, addressed to this France who *does not do enough* [italics in original] for the most devoted of its children!"⁶⁷

The Martiniquais were participating in French politics and making demands of the French government: black workers lobbying for the social republic, mulattos for increased political and financial enfranchisement of the middle class, and whites for political autonomy. Corre labels these increasing social demands as ingratitude, and he goes on to cite a disgruntled and spiteful metropolitan school teacher assigned to Martinique, who, complaining that all is in the hands of the Martiniquais—Frenchmen by degree, as opposed to the "true" Frenchmen of France—laments in a letter to Cassagnac, bonapartist deputy of Gers and author of the rightwing, anti-Semitic journal *l'Autorité*:

Last year, in the full General Council, we were called foreigners, though the word was redacted by the president. [. . .] The majority of this council has for their motto: "Hate the European, down with whites." And France lets them. And we, the real Frenchmen, we are foreigners, while this band of blacks—more or less dark—are the masters [. . .] Tell it in your newspaper, on the grandstand, that in Martinique there's a crowd of Frenchmen of France vexed, tyrannized, pillaged by these blacks and mulattos of the country—Frenchmen by decree, because they are not it in their origin, their language, or their

⁶³ Ibid., 227.

⁶⁴ Périna, M. *Citoyenneté et sujétion aux Antilles francophones: Post-esclavage et aspiration démocratique*. (Paris: l'Harmattan, 1997), 98-99.

⁶⁵ Serge Mam Lam Fouck, 100-101.

⁶⁶ Armand Corre. *Nos Créoles*. (Paris : Tresse et Stock, 1902), 1.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 222

customs. [. . .] The European, insulted and challenged, is the foreigner, and they, these children of the Congo, call themselves *children of the country*!⁶⁸

What we have here are competing visions of what it meant to be French: on the one hand, the republican ideal, to which the school teacher should be adhering but has forsaken, that says that these “Frenchmen by decree” are political, culturally, and ideological French. On the other hand, we have a blood and soil tradition—invoked here by the school teacher—that pits “true Frenchmen” against these, of a sort, Martiniquais doppelgangers. The Martiniquais made claims to being French, and as such, forced metropolitan functionaries to take stock of what it meant to be French. However, Corre’s brand of racism was far from widely accepted under the Third Republic, and in most circles was politically untenable, at least with regard to the old colonies. Nevertheless, Corre’s work struck a nerve with many Frenchmen and was republished in 1902, though Corre asserts that his work had unleashed “great storms” and “brought on [his] person an incredible outburst of anger and manifestations of hatred.”⁶⁹

Though these “old colonies” were still plagued by vicious racism, there is something intriguing—and frankly, downright surprising—in the way that racial typologies were more generally applied to Martinique. To focus solely on the negative depictions of racial mixing misses something of key importance in the assimilationist ideology. While this interpretation may be true in certain scientific circles, in general, this was not strictly the case.⁷⁰ To the contrary, for many French writers, the mixing of European and African “stock” in the context of the Caribbean produced a new and exciting race that combined, to a certain degree, the best of both worlds. To these writers, “blackness” was not a taint on the population, but rather, in their “scientific” worldview, racial mixing actually served to strengthen the Martiniquais; in their estimation, to the civilized and intellectual white race was added a strength of physique and spirit. Though such an interpretation is undeniably racist, the prevalent focus on the inherent inferiority of colored populations relative to whites is significantly lacking. Although writers like Garaud depicted the Martiniquais as younger than their metropolitan compatriots⁷¹—and significantly, he does not map this along racial lines, but applies it to Martinique as a whole—such youth was often depicted as invigorating to a stale European spirit. It is in this context that racial mixing was heralded as inherently French and was held up as the civilizing process at work. In fact, the mulatto woman was often associated with Marianne, the symbol of the French Republic. In posters and popular images following the 1902 eruption of Mount Pelée, Martinique

⁶⁸ Ibid., 229

⁶⁹ Ibid., 1

⁷⁰ Claude Blanckaert argues that the discussion of racial mixing in France followed its own scientific progression separate from political aims. Though he does not deny that this discourse followed a colonial logic and that it was appropriated for imperialist aims, he argues that it should also be situated within a scientific problematic and not seen as strictly the transposition of colonial events. For more about the scientific discussion of racial mixing during the 18th and 19th centuries, see Claude Blanckaert, “Of Monstrous Métis? Hybridity, Fear of Miscegenation, and Patriotism from Buffon to Paul Broca.” in *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France*. Eds. Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall. (Durham: Duke University, 2003), 42-70.

⁷¹ The idea that the Antilles were the younger children of France characterized the relationship of the colonies to the metropole, and it also largely shaped the movement for assimilation. With respect to the old colonies, France’s role as the motherland was to raise these children to maturity. This familial rhetoric was commonplace and is the topic of Richard Burton’s analysis of colonial relations in Richard D. E. Burton. *La famille coloniale: la Martinique et la mère patrie, 1789-1992*. (Paris: L’Harmattan, (1994).

was depicted as a mulatto Marianne, complete with a "creolized" stand-in for the Phrygian cap. This attests to the profoundly republican nature of the island—here foregrounded by the tropical environment—as well as the prominence of its mulattos in the French imagination.

The *Grande encyclopedie*, published as a standard middle-class reference book under the Third Republic, echoes such a sentiment. It discusses in detail what were seen at the time to be the various classifications of the human races as well as the methodological and scientific debates over how to categorize those differences. The *Encyclopedie's* article on race goes on at length about the variations in height, weight, cranial capacity, skin color, hair color, and intellectual and emotional characteristics for each of the "human races." However, the *Encyclopedie* mentions mixed races only insofar as it points out the names used to refer to mixed-races and to state that racial mixing will not be covered in the article.⁷² Nonetheless, the article on Martinique was less ambiguous about the island's population. In reference to why the island's population of white had decreased dramatically in the last century and a half, the encyclopedia points to

the greater mortality rate [for whites] than for the African race during yellow fever epidemics, but especially the voluntary segregation of the white from the black who became his equal. However, [eventually] the races founded themselves, mixed with one another with the most diverse nuances, and this resulted in a new race, the creoles of color whose physical and intellectual qualities are remarkable, and to whom the future belongs. The Martiniquais are among the most beautiful of the Antilleans.⁷³

As this standard reference book illustrates, the "creoles of color" were seen to possess remarkable "physical and intellectual" qualities, which in turn qualified them to be in possession of the future. Far from degeneracy or decadence, there was the prospect of a positive future in the racially-mixed class of "creoles of color." Although the author's acclaim of racial mixing seems to only apply in the Caribbean context, where, in his imagination, European ancestry has elevated the Martiniquais above their "darker" neighbors, it is interesting to note that colonial circumstances have made "métissage" a virtue rather than the threat it was seen to be in West Africa and Indochina.

Highlighting the positive qualities of the Martiniquais, Louis Garaud introduces his ethnographic book about Martinique by addressing the stereotypes about the islanders, again treating the Martiniquais as naive and childlike—an idea which, while potentially demeaning, fits with the bourgeois understanding of the mulattos as the future and reflects the broader discourse of the *mission civilisatrice* that saw the need for colonial populations to mature into citizenship. This discourse is in many ways paradoxical, because the people of Martinique were legally full citizens of the French nation rather than subjects of the French empire. Yet again, Garaud does not specify how the stereotypes map onto the island's various races, even stating that the stereotypical "differences between the races which inhabit Martinique are more amusing than true"⁷⁴:

⁷² J. Deniker. "Race." *La grande encyclopédie*, Tome 28. (Paris: Société Anonyme de la Grande Encyclopédie, 1885-1902). 26.

⁷³ Charles Delavaud. "Martinique." *La grande encyclopédie*, Tome 23. (Paris: Société Anonyme de la Grande Encyclopédie, 1885-1902), 345.

⁷⁴ Garaud, 242.

I have wanted to pay to Martinique my debt of knowledge for the charm of its climate, the splendor of its vegetation and the hospitality of its inhabitants whose faults, facts of youth, still seduce more than their [good] qualities.

“What do you think about it?” people say to me sometimes. “The inhabitants of this colony, don’t they have intolerable defaults? Aren’t they prideful, prodigious, and audacious?”

I respond in this way: “Audacity is the courage that they carry; prodigality is the charity they exhibit; pride would be the most beautiful of characteristics if Christianity had not made it one of the most ugly of the Seven Deadly Sins. For the rest, the starkness of their good characteristics is accented by the shadow of their faults. In fact, can one be astonished that in the land of sun shadows seem more intense?”⁷⁵

Though he admits that there are prejudices toward the Martiniquais, some with which he agrees, Garaud argues that these stereotypes are not strictly negative. In fact, he turns the stereotypes on their head, arguing that the Martiniquais' "faults" are in fact their strengths: for Garaud, audacity becomes courage; wastefulness becomes charity; and pride is a good thing, particularly for a group of people who, in Garaud's eyes, celebrate French culture. This paternalistic description of the people of Martinique clearly reflects the primitivist stereotypes prevalent in colonial discourse, but it does so in a way that underscores the inherent, or rather nascent, Frenchness of the island's population, whose courage and pride rank among the most emblematic of French virtues.

Garaud also looks at the racial politics of the island. Disdainful of the island's whites and seeing the mulatto class as the impassioned political leaders of Martinique—caught between a laboring black class and an aristocratic, reactionary white class—Garaud finds it unfortunate that the whites and blacks on the island are mortal enemies and that this new race of mulattos cannot reconcile with either one:

People of mixed race or mulattos, which are still called by the euphemism, people of color, are today the leading class in Martinique. They walk at an equal distance between the blacks and whites. Whites sometimes refuse to extend their hand to them; [in turn,] they don't always extend theirs to the negroes. In sum, they are isolated, and they struggle between the blacks—the rising class, young, inflated with menace—and the whites—the old class which is crumbling and collapsing. It is regrettable that the old masters, the white Creoles, called *békés* in the local patois, have prematurely resolved to live in isolation. This class has closed itself off and left mulattoes to struggle. They love their mothers, but they disown their sons. They don't forgive them for having the blood of slaves in their veins.⁷⁶

Garaud's language is highly suggestive here: the blacks are young and on the rise, though menacing, whereas the whites are "crumbling" and "collapsing." In Garaud's estimation, the white planters have forsaken their role as the political elite in the island, leaving the mulattos to lead the island politically—and since they are caught between these two groups, he sees the mulatto class, from which the island's deputies to the French legislature were drawn, as "left to

⁷⁵ Ibid., vii-viii.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 216.

struggle." For Garaud, racial division, and not intermixing, undermined the republican project in Martinique.

Though not interchangeable, race and class were conflated and interrelated terms in Martinique during the late nineteenth century. Governmental officials used a language of racial difference to explain what were essentially class divisions on the island. The direct beneficiaries of the public education system instituted by Jules Ferry in 1881-82, Martinique's mulattos constituted a political class of well-to-do republicans distinct from both black plantation workers and the aristocratic *békés*. Mulattos controlled the island's government and constituted those who represented the islands in the metropolitan government. Therefore, mulattos largely comprised what might be called a "bourgeois" class of professionals, and as such they readily identified with the bureaucratic makeup of the Third Republic, finding employment as public officials, doctors, lawyers, and teachers, to name a few. On the other hand, the *békés* were the land-owning class whose plantations predated the First French Republic and recalled the Old Regime, while the laborers, vestiges of the island's cruel slave past, represented the underpaid proletariat which caused so much trouble in metropolitan France over this same period. While the aristocratic whites were seen as a reactionary threat to republicanism, the island's black laborers were associated with socialism and, as was discussed above in reference to the Strike of 1900, to the mounting labor discontent in the metropole. In this light, it is unsurprising that the Third Republic—pejoratively called by some a republic of lawyers—found its likeness in the island's mulattos. In fact, nearly all of Martinique's deputies, the majority of whom were mulattos from the 1880s onward, were lawyers or doctors, with the remainder made up by a schoolteacher, a notary, a newspaper editor, and a factory-owner whose father was a doctor.⁷⁷

Charles Mismier—a soldier who served in the French army for ten years, fought in the Crimean War, and then retired to Martinique to work as a horse groomer—echoes Garaud's frustration with the division of Martiniquais society along racial lines, stating that it does not sit well with his French upbringing. He is surprised by the racial antagonism exhibited by the white *békés*, because he feels that many of the people of color he has met would have fit in well within mainland French society, going so far as to say that they would not have been out of place in any French salon.⁷⁸ For him, therefore, the disdain that wealthy creole whites exhibit toward people of color as well as poor whites—for Mismier, illustrative of the "exclusionary spirit" of the "aristocratic minority"—is characteristically un-French because it threatens republican unity. Not only does it threaten the stability of the island's political and military future, it also violates the "egalitarian ideas with which [Mismier] was imbued from childhood." Himself a counterpoint to the white's "exclusionary spirit," Mismier, who shares the laborers' pain, stresses that he has "lost no opportunity to stand up for the poor blacks."⁷⁹

Though Mismier traveled to Martinique during the Second Empire, he wrote and published under the Third Republic while working as a sociologist. His understanding of the racial dynamics of Martinique and his condemnation of the exclusionary attitudes of the creole whites illustrate the way in which Martinique's social reality undermined the inclusionary ideals

⁷⁷ "Base de données des députés français depuis 1789." *Assemblée nationale*. Retrieved 17 September 2010 from <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/sycomore/index.asp>

⁷⁸ Charles Mismier. *Souvenirs de la Martinique et du Mexique pendant l'intervention française*. (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1890), 11.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

of French republicanism in the eyes of those who traveled there. Mismser is critical of the way in which Martiniquais society limits access to educational and financial resources to whites, seeing it as threatening to the overall well-being of the island. Nevertheless, Mismser asserts that his time on the island changed him, so that by the time he left, he was made "creole of language and cultural mores" to the point that "indigenous" inhabitants of the island would take him for a "compatriot."⁸⁰ Both he and Garaud remain optimistic about the possibility of the island's inhabitants to work together in the spirit of republican unity.

The mulattos were well aware of their mixed heritage and of their exclusion from white society, and at points this heritage was mobilized for political ends. For instance, on the meeting of the General Council of Martinique on 14 December 1887, one member was suggesting that scholarships to the colonial boarding schools be reserved for legitimate daughters of influential colonial personages.⁸¹ Upon hearing this, the counselor general leapt from his bench, exclaiming "Have you thus forgotten your origin? Gentlemen, we are all bastards here!"⁸² This episode calls to mind the political preeminence of the mulatto class and its profound connection to republican-style education, as well as the legacy of plantation slavery—everyone of mixed heritage in the Council chamber had as an ancestor an illegitimate child disowned by a slave owner. It also exhibits a political spirit that rejects out of hand exclusionary measures.

In any case, it would be incorrect to assume that since "creoles of color" were cast by French republicans in a positive light, they were not seen in racial—and indeed, racist—terms. Indeed, a host of stereotypes, largely founded in the late nineteenth-century racial "scientism" highlighted by Périna, were applied to what Garaud calls the "three colors" of Martinique, a phrase which unifies racial mixture and French republicanism by recalling the colors of the revolutionary flag. Though their "faults" were oftentimes spun as positive characteristics that embodied different aspects of Frenchness, blacks were nevertheless seen as inherently lazy and indolent, mulattos as fiery and fierce, and whites as reactionary and resistant to change. This racist discourse, so prevalent in the late nineteenth century, dominates historical accounts of "new imperialism," and indeed it saturates a fair amount of writing about the colonial—even the so-called "old colonial"—world. Although Martinique prominently figured into the foundational myth of the Third Republic and of republican imperialism—that is, the myth of the "liberty, equality, and fraternity" of all citizens of France—Martinique was also colonial in several important ways; it was, after all, founded and maintained as a colony of extraction. However, the island and its mulatto population played into the myth of the civilizing mission, and many saw the bridging of racial differences—a task which was seen as the responsibility of the mulatto class—as being central to Martinique's prospects of success. And if mulattos could overcome the racial differences plaguing Martinique, then perhaps there was hope for metropolitan officials to overcome the ever-widening rift between the Third Republic's government and its working class.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 104.

⁸¹ Both educational underachievement and birth out of wedlock was prevalent in Martinique during the Third Republic. In 1894, only 47,600 people of a population of 187,692 could read and write. In 1894, it was estimated that 3/4 of children were born out of wedlock. By 1910, the number who could read and write had grown to 69,170 out of a population of 180,428. See *Annuaire de la Martinique*. (Fort-de-France: Imprimerie du gouvernement, (1900), 630; R.S. Reisch, 310.

⁸² Garaud, 221.

Problems of Climate: It's not like France here

Although in many ways Martinique exhibited its French nature via its language, customs, and republican politics, its tropical environment was undeniably exotic when compared to the temperate climate of the mainland. Though the Martiniquais were remarkably familiar in the French imaginary—speaking the same language, often employing the same political precedents, and even pulling on a similar folkloric and literary tradition—the environment in which these people lived remained for many travelers remarkably unfamiliar. One writer said that when his companion visited the island for the first time, “the emanations of the negro, the cod and molasses odors, which are widespread in the city, made him sick. Two days afterwards, on the open sea, he claimed that his nostrils are still impregnated of this amalgam of perfumes, completely new for him.” Therefore, although the island “always left [the author] with the best memories,” the environment still represented something tropical and foreign for him, which was why he asserted that he “would not like to live there.”⁸³

As a further explanation of why they “would not like to live there,” writers about Martinique often made reference to the perilous nature of the island's environment and described at length its flora and fauna, its grueling sun and dangerous natural disasters. The yearly hurricane season posed a perpetual threat to the island's denizens, and after 1902 the threat of a second volcanic eruption loomed over the Martiniquais. As one traveler, Henri Monet, disbelievably explains in his introduction to a diary he wrote and sold for the benefit of victims of the devastating 1891 hurricane,

There were in total, from 1657 to 1858, in the space of 201 years, 67 disasters. That's one catastrophe every three years. [. . .]

Sixty-seven disasters! The simple pronouncement of this figure strikes like a hammer, stupefies by its incredibility, troubles like a legend of mythical times.

Sixty-seven disasters!...

One asks with an anxious terror if it's really true, if it's possible, that a population could live and prosper under a sun so dreadful, under a climate so terrible.

Sixty-seven disasters!

Nearly one per year. Perpetual suffering, continual panic.

The sword suspended by a thread over the head of Damocles was less terrifying.”⁸⁴

Monet's shock at the dangerousness of the island's climate is nearly palpable. One can almost hear his disbelief at the sheer number of hazards perpetually faced by the island's inhabitants: the figure, “sixty-seven disasters,” which he often repeats is meant to strike the reader—most likely someone from metropolitan France, from whom Monet was eliciting money to help rebuild the island—“like a hammer.” Overall, the French saw the tropical environment of the Antilles as shockingly dangerous. As a French geographer remarked in 1898, the ports of Saint-Pierre and Fort-de-France, “one of the most beautiful of the Antilles, were unfortunately ravaged by the hurricane of 17 August 1891, the most disastrous in Antillean memory. Already, on 22 June

⁸³ G. Verschuur. *Voyage aux trois Guyanes et aux Antilles*. (Paris: Hachette, 1894), 13.

⁸⁴ Henri Monet. *La Martinique*. (Paris: A. Savinne, 1892), 11-12.

1890, a fire had almost completely destroyed Fort-de-France. Add to these the bites—nearly always fatal—of the terrible Martinican pit viper, a sad particularity of Martinique and Saint-Lucie, and you will think these wonderful lands have more than their fair share of tribulations.”⁸⁵

From a purely environmental science point of view, the Caribbean Basin is indeed a dangerous place. Perpetually besieged by earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, hurricanes, and tropical depressions, the small islands of the Antilles are constantly under the threat of destruction by the natural environment. The entirety of the Lesser Antilles lies along a subduction fault, where the South American tectonic plate is slowly sliding underneath the Caribbean plate, and contains seventeen active volcanoes, of which Mount Pelée and Grand Soufrière are on Martinique and Guadeloupe respectively. A large earthquake decimated Fort-de-France in 1839 and killed over 1500 people in Point-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe. Another powerful earthquake struck the region in 1843, and thereafter Martinique’s capital, Fort-de-France, was built predominately of wood to prevent sheering.⁸⁶

In addition to the threat of earthquakes, the Caribbean basin has to contend with annual cyclones. Every year from June 1 to November 30, with a massive peak mid-August, a hurricane season of varying intensity harasses the populations of the Atlantic Basin—from southernmost Caribbean Sea through Mesoamerica to the northeastern seaboard of the United States.⁸⁷ As waters warm along the equator and atmospheric winds rise in intensity, the Earth’s own coriolis effect spawns rotating storms of severe intensity off the west coast of Africa. As these storms feed on the warmer waters of the Caribbean basin, they gain in intensity before making landfall. This perpetual threat was not lost on contemporaries, and in fact it became one of the defining characteristics of the Caribbean for metropolitan writers. As one contemporary remarked, “Martinique is one of our colonies that has hitherto been strongly distressed by disturbances of nature. The danger menacing it each year is the arrival of a hurricane.”⁸⁸

As historian Stuart Schwartz has illustrated, therefore, hurricanes mark one of unifying environmental factors that overcome the region’s insularity, taking its place among other *leit motifs* of Caribbean history: race, imperialism, plantation economies, and slavery.⁸⁹ Common to all the islands in the region, the language of meteorological devastation overcomes the linguistic and political boundaries common to the region. According to Schwartz, “Of all the hazards that humans confront in the region, none is more characteristic than the great Caribbean hurricanes that have defined the region and its risks.”⁹⁰

⁸⁵ G. Rossignol. “Séance du lundi 23 mai 1898 de la conference de M. Smaleul Verneuil sur les Antilles françaises.” *Revue de géographie commerciale de Bordeaux*. Ed. J. Gebelin. (Bordeaux : Feret et Fils, 1898), 306.

⁸⁶ P. Godefroy, E. Leroi, P. Mouroux, B. Sauret, Ch. Paulin, and Ph. Rancon. “Assessment of seismic hazard in the islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique (Antilles).” *Earthquake Engineering Tenth World Conference*. (Balkema, Rotterdam, 1992).

⁸⁷ “Tropical Cyclone Climatology.” *National Weather Service: National Hurricane Center*. 18 June 2012. Retrieved on 20 August 2012 from <http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/climo/>

⁸⁸ A. Romer. *Les Cyclones de la Martinique*. (Fort-de-France: Imprimerie du Gouvernement, 1932).

⁸⁹ Stuart B. Schwartz. “Hurricanes and the Shaping of Circum-Caribbean Societies.” *Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol 83, No. 4. (2005): 381-409.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 386.

This is particularly true in the French West Indies, where over the course of the nineteenth century, thirty storms—either hurricanes or tropical depressions—made landfall on either Martinique or Guadeloupe, representing only a subset of the tropical depressions and hurricanes that tore through the Caribbean. When these storms made contact with the built environment, the effects were disastrous. The capital city of Martinique, Fort-de-France, sits 4 meters below sea level, placing it under a high risk of flooding in any significant meteorological event. Moreover, it is directly in the path of the trade winds, regularly experiencing high velocity winds, and the dwellings in which most of its approximately 16,000 people lived were weathered and rickety.

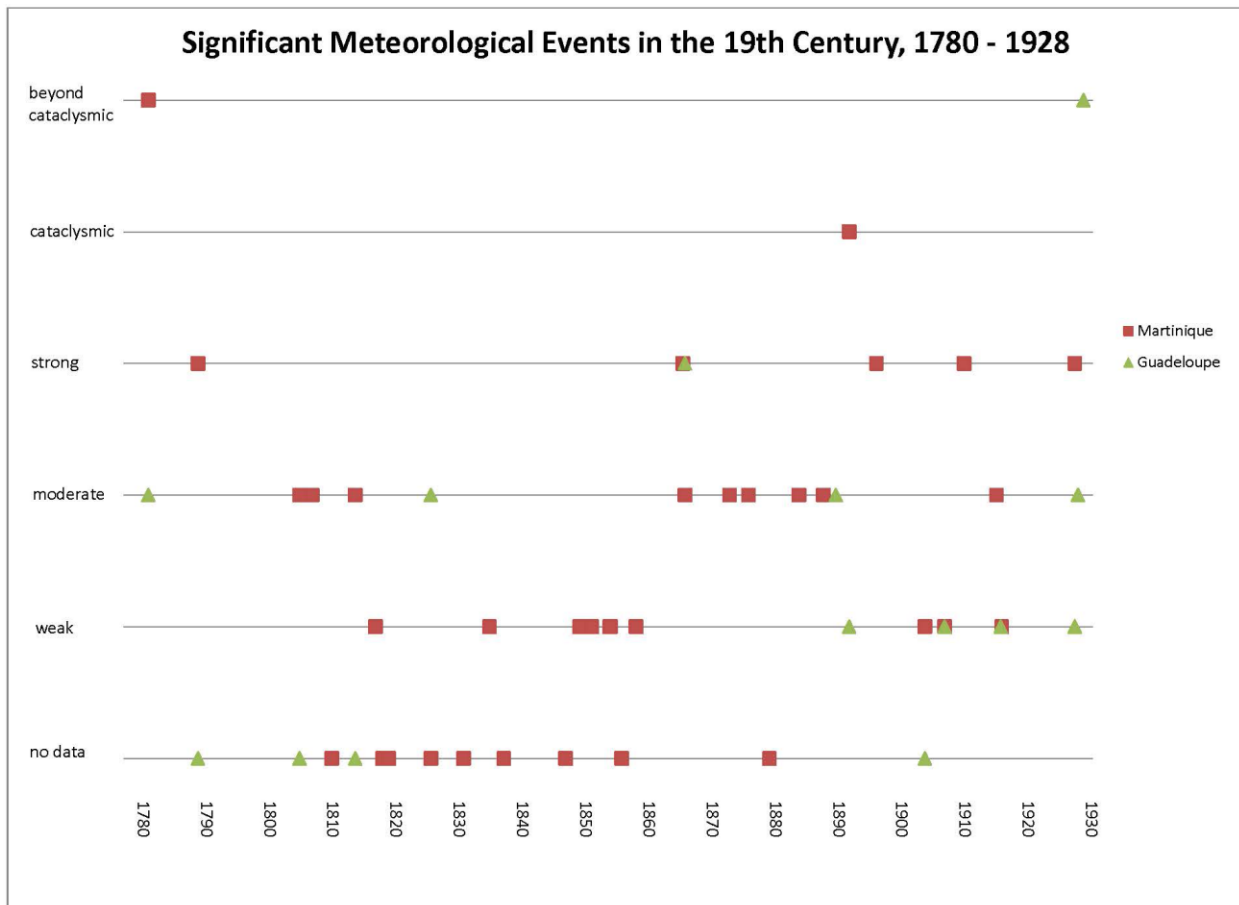


Figure 2. Significant Meteorological Events (Hurricanes/Depressions) in the French West Indies with Qualitative Descriptors⁹¹

⁹¹ Graph created in Microsoft Excel with information from Pascal Saffache, Jean-Valéry Marc, and Olivier Cospar. *Les cyclones en Martinique: quatre siècles cataclysmiques: Elements pour une prise de conscience de la vulnérabilité de l'île de la Martinique*. (Fort-de-France: Ibis Rough, 2002), 180-181; Pascal Saffache, Jean-Valéry Marc, and Vincent Huyghes-Belrose. *Les cyclones en Guadeloupe: quatre siècles cataclysmiques*. (Fort-de-France: Ibis Rough, 2003), 259-260.

DEADLIEST HURRICANES AFFECTING MARTINIQUE AND GUADELOUPE, 1492 - 1996			
<u>REGION MOST AFFECTED</u>	<u>APPROX. DEATHS</u>	<u>YEAR</u>	KEY
MAR, STE, BAR, offshore	22000	1780	BAH - BAHAMAS
GUADELOUPE	6000	1776	DOM - Dominica
FL, GUA, PR, TUR, MAR	3400	1928	FL - FLORIDA
Martinique	3000	1813	GUA - GUADELOUPE
Guadeloupe, Martinique	2000	1666	JAM - JAMAICA
Martinique	1600	1767	MAR - MARTINIQUE
Guadeloupe, Puerto Rico	1300	1825	MON - MONTSERRAT
Martinique, TUR, PR	700	1891	MX - MEXICO
MAR, DOM, New Eng, BAH	700	1788	NE - NEW ENGLAND
Offshore Martinique	600	1695	PR - PUERTO RICO
Martinique	440	1766	SC - SOUTH CAROLINA
Guadeloupe, NE US coast	200	1821	TUR - TURKISH ISLANDS
Cayman Islands, JAM, MAR	200	1903	TX - TEXAS
Martinique	100	1713	
TX, N MX, MAR	60	1967	
Martinique, SW Atlantic	60	1837	
GUA, MON, SC	60	1989	
Martinique, DOM	50	1970	
GUA, PR	30	1956	

Figure 3. Deadliest Atlantic Hurricanes Affecting Martinique and Guadeloupe⁹²

⁹² Edward N. Rappaport and Jose Fernandez-Partagas. "The Deadliest Atlantic Tropical Cyclones, 1492-1996." National Hurricane Service. (Miami, FL: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 1997). Retrieved 30 January 2013 from <http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/pastdeadly.shtml>

Antropogenic: the Built and Social Environment

From a societal point of view, the Caribbean Basin is tumultuous. In addition to climatic threats, the islands have a human history of disorder and chaos: brutal war and mass disease came with Europeans' first contact with the islands' original inhabitants, the Caribes and Arawaks; forced migrations and slavery followed as Europeans radically transformed the Caribbean's political, physical, and economic environment; and then came civil unrest as the disenfranchised and oppressed struggled for their freedom and equality.

As Schwartz has proposed hurricanes as the unifying factor of the Caribbean, Bonham Richardson has likewise analyzed late nineteenth-century West Indian history through the lens of fire. In many ways the converse of natural disasters, which are made unnatural by virtue of their contact with human society, fire is nearly always ignited by human sources and has disastrous effects on the built as well as natural environment. In the Caribbean's post-Colombian history, fire "cleared forests, burned sugarcane, sparked slave insurrections, attracted crowds, lighted streets and houses, and symbolized protest in the region [. . .] so much so that writers and poets often use 'fire' to signify their discontent with the Caribbean's steeply tiered social hierarchy."⁹³ Fire is more than just a metaphor for political discontent; with incendiarism as the primary means of protest in the Caribbean, fire was quite literally the embodiment of civil unrest. Moreover, due to past seismic destruction, most Caribbean structures had been constructed of wood by the end of the century, which, with the constant dry-rotting at the hands of the salty sea air and the brutal tropical sun, provided the perfect kindling for widespread firestorms.

The urban landscape provided little solace against the perpetual onslaught of natural disasters, and for some, the built landscape was seen as a liability rather than a protection. In fact, following a rather small earthquake in 1875, denizens of the island's communes—most notably Fort-de-France and Saint-Pierre—deserted the urban spaces for the countryside for a period of time,⁹⁴ feeling unsafe in the built landscape that had collapsed so violently and killed hundreds during the 7.3-magnitude earthquake of 1839.⁹⁵ Even today, Guadeloupe's capital of Point-à-Pitre is at an extremely high risk of liquefaction: the process by which the ground, due to soil saturation and its general composition, acts like a liquid during an earthquake.⁹⁶ Liquefaction is intensely dangerous, and as a result, Guadeloupe's capital is at risk of severe damage in the event of an earthquake.

For travelers to Martinique, the wild and dangerous environment of the tropics often stood in contrast to the built and manicured environment of its cultural capital, Saint-Pierre. For some, this contrast was striking and in fact clashed violently with their preconceptions about Martinique's tropical nature. Due to their expectations of what a tropical space should look like, some observers felt that Saint-Pierre's Botanical Garden—with its "symmetrical" and "tidy"

⁹³ Bonham C. Richardson. *Igniting the Caribbean's past: fire in British West Indian history*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), xi.

⁹⁴ "Renseignements complémentaires sur les effets du cyclone du 9 7bre – tremblement du terre à la Martinique." 29 September 1875. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

⁹⁵ P. Godefroy, E. Leroi, P. Mouroux, B. Sauret, Ch. Paulin, and Ph. Rancon. "Assessment of seismic hazard in the islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique (Antilles). *Earthquake Engineering Tenth World Conference*. (Balkema, Rotterdam, 1992).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

pathways—was "much more appropriate to the installation of a European park than to the disordered nature of a tropical country."⁹⁷ In other words, visitors to the island were struck by the "civilized" nature of the urban space within such a "wild" tropical environment. In addition to being the location of the botanical garden, Saint-Pierre's "upper town" was home to the well-to-do *békés* and wealthy mulattos: doctors, lawyers, clergymen, merchants, and proprietors. By contrast, as home to the town's laboring class, the "lower town" had a reputation for being far less orderly and sanitary—though more in line with an urban landscape than a tropical paradise.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 4. The great palms of Saint-Pierre's Botanical Garden (1899)
[photogr.] Salles [photogr. reprod. by Molténi]

This preoccupation with the environment—both built and natural—was common in writings about much of the French empire: the *Journal des voyages*⁹⁸ is replete with articles about botany, zoology, and climatology from throughout the European empires, and full of adventure stories about earthquakes, tsetse flies, and hurricanes. Scientific societies such as the *Société zoologique d'acclimation* employed the French empire as a laboratory to study ways to

⁹⁷ Vershuur, 14.

⁹⁸ A popular weekly periodical similar to *National Geographic* or *The Scholastic Reader*. The French Ministry of Education had a subscription to the journal for its use as a pedagogical tool.

habituate organisms to new environments.⁹⁹ The re-creation of European styles, as in the case of the botanical gardens of Saint-Pierre, was a characteristic feature of nineteenth-century European colonialism more broadly.¹⁰⁰ However, what is striking in Martinique is the way in which in many travelogues and guides the Martiniquais stand in for France in a tough, tropical climate. Elsewhere in the empire, the narrative typically revolved around the white civilizer-explorer's struggle with foreign atmospheres. In Martinique, however, the population, in particular the mulatto populace, represented a bastion of French civilization in a tropical setting. Accounts like Monet's often juxtaposed the terrifying environmental hazards against the French ingenuity and dedication of the isle's inhabitants. Therefore, it was not the transplanted or errant European but the local "creole of color" who was charged with safeguarding French civilization against the onslaught of hurricanes and volcanic eruptions—as the bourgeois *Encyclopedie* stated, it was to the Martiniquais mulatto that the future belonged.

In 1875, a young doctor named Laurent-Jean-Baptiste Bérenger-Féraud, member of the French Academy of Medicine and the Society of Surgery, traveled to Martinique as a chief medical officer of the marine and compiled a treatise on the sicknesses that could be attributed to life in the Martiniquais climate. His book—*Clinical Treatise on the Sickness of Europeans in the Antilles*—is a grand, encyclopedic collection in two volumes of possible medical afflictions in the Caribbean, and it is meant for white Europeans as a guide to explain the medical precautions necessary for them to survive in the harsh tropical climate. Having written on the diseases that commonly afflicted Europeans who travel to Senegal, he begins his work by expressing his astonishment over the number of acclimated Europeans—whom he calls "creolized Europeans" of "various categories"—who live with some degree of success in the tropical climate. Most French physicians from the time period—Bérenger-Féraud among the foremost—suggested that all "white creole" populations were particularly susceptible to tropical diseases like yellow fever,¹⁰¹ which played a pivotal role in the development of Caribbean history.¹⁰² In his astonishment, we see that Bérenger-Féraud sees the old colony of Martinique as fundamentally different from other tropical places like Senegal, for "diseases of Martinique cannot resemble those of Senegal both in respect to their distribution in various months of the year and to the various categories of Europeans who constitute the population of the colony."¹⁰³ However, he

⁹⁹ Michael A. Osborne. *Nature, the exotic, and the science of French colonialism*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

¹⁰⁰ For an account of how the French colonial policy of "association" informed the development of urban colonial architecture in the early 20th century, see Gwendolyn Wright. *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism*. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991). For the British context of how European imperial ideals were replicated in colonial architecture in India, see Thomas Metcalfe. *An Imperial Vision: Indian Architecture and Britain's Raj*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

¹⁰¹ "Acclimitization or Acquisition of Immunity from Yellow Fever." *Annual report of the National Board of Health. 1880*. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1881), 146. Retrieved 1 January 2013 from Google Books, at http://books.google.com/books?id=jZw7_eiFM3QC&pg=PA146.

¹⁰² John Robert McNeill. *Mosquito empires: ecology and war in the Greater Caribbean, 1620-1914*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹⁰³ L.J.B. Bérenger-Féraud. *Traité clinique des maladies des européens aux Antilles (Martinique)*. Vol 1. (Paris: Octave Doin, 1881), ix-x.

does argue that the perils of Martinique can be equally menacing to those of Senegal for those who do not follow his advice.¹⁰⁴

Bérenger-Féraud goes on to discuss the positive results of racial mixing in Martinique. Discussing the difficulty for transplanted Europeans as well as transplanted Africans to thrive in a tropical climate, Berenger-Feraud describes racial mixing in Martinique as fundamentally beneficial in terms of physical health:

In Martinique, whites lived next to blacks for a very long time, and the result was, as everywhere, a *mélange* that produced a variety of shades of those of mixed race. A curious thing is that this mixture seems to have produced children stronger, more vigorous than the parents, and it is undeniable that the traveler arriving in Martinique for the first time is struck by the sight of Europeans of a significantly lower health than they had in Europe, of Negroes who are clearly less beautiful than their counterparts from the African coast, and between them, the most beautiful mulatto came, seeming to have all the attributes of health and force needed to perpetuate their lineage.¹⁰⁵

In his racially-charged discussion of eugenics, Bérenger-Féraud goes on to argue that due to the minimal European emigration to Martinique as well as the current political and social divisions between whites, blacks, and mulattos, racial mixing has ceased, and as a result disease will increasingly wrack the populations on the island, thus forcing their decline. To avoid this, he claims, the native mulatto must continue to “bring together in turns white and black blood.” In a bizarre and unsavory way, Bérenger-Féraud lauds Martinique's slave-plantation past for causing the racial intermixing that secured a flourishing French population in a tropical environment. Though racist and only marginally based on the scientific principle of differential immunity, Bérenger-Féraud's claim complicates unilateral understandings of French colonialism, at least with respect to Martinique, and it explains why, as explored by historian Véronique Hélénon, French officials often looked to West Indians to fulfill the role of colonial administrators in other environments.¹⁰⁶ However, in light of his discussion of “creolization” and racial intermixing, it is important to underline here that Berenger-Feraud's praise of *metissage* only applies to Europeans living in non-European environments. His logic does not apply to France itself, but is restricted to the faraway France of the tropics.

To a certain extent, Louis Garaud echoes this sentiment, seeing cooperation, not necessarily intermarriage, as essential to the prosperity of Martinique. Garaud ends his ethnographic travelogue with a description of the effects of hurricanes—most recently, that of 1891—on the small Antillean island. He laments the hardships thrust upon the people, but given the lushness of “this green, fecund land where maternity doesn't sleep,” he is confident that all “vestiges of the disaster will have disappeared within a few months.” In short, in the tropical environment, he locates the perpetual promise of rebirth. Most interestingly, he identifies the need for the population to work together within this hostile—yet “fecund”—environment:

Ah! If in this sorry land the men of color wanted, in contact with this generous earth, to replant, to rebuild, and to recover, they would need above all to come together

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 475.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 473.

¹⁰⁶ Véronique Hélénon. *French Caribbeans in Africa: Diasporic Connections and Colonial Administration, 1880-1939*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

with the whites and blacks who are their brothers, uniting their hands and joining forces in the same efforts and the same progress, without antagonism, with resentment and without reservation.

Following the example of France, Martinique finally unites its three colors. In closing this book, I can make no better wish for the prosperity of the most beautiful and the most unfortunate of the Antilles.¹⁰⁷

It is noteworthy that he sees the "men of color" as those with the agency to rebuild and unite Martinique along the lines of the French Republican model. In adversity emerge the three colors of France—here, Garaud is referring both to the Tricolor Flag, the symbol of the French Republic, as well as the three races that make up the island's population. Thus, it is against the environment, which is inherently un-French, that the Frenchness of the island's inhabitants—or at least, the potential thereof—stands in stark relief. In Garaud's terms, the shadows in the tropics (i.e. the perilous climate) make the light (i.e. republican French civilization) seem that much brighter. For the French, mulattoes represent a branch of the French race that has been grown in the tropics and is thus suited to its environment in a way that Europeans and Africans are not.

Education

Travelers to Martinique, who were, like Garaud, sometimes employed as colonial educators, reflected ideas prevalent in Martiniquais pedagogy. We can see the ambiguous and rather contradictory conceptualization of Martinique under the Third Republic in the French educational system instituted in Martinique. In the jury reports for the Paris Exposition of 1900—the world's fair at which the French government showcased the modernity and strength of the French Republic vis-à-vis its technology, industry, and overseas empire—officials posited that Martiniquais public schools needed to focus more heavily on agricultural education than in the metropole in order to prepare children for manual labor, presumably in a fashion that would make them more amenable to menial tasks. The report made clear that this instructional regime was to remain differentiated from that instituted in the new colonies, stating that though the educational system would remain along the same lines as that of the metropole, manual labor would be added to the curriculum due to its ability to make men "more dignified and more moral."¹⁰⁸

Therefore, although this general idea of manual labor producing societal improvement—the notion of *mettre en valeur*—fit within the larger discourse of the "civilizing mission" meant to elevate populations within the French empire, officials felt the need to stress that Martiniquais pedagogy would remain distinct from that of the new colonies and similar to that of the metropole. This idea that the old colonies were markedly different than the new colonies was quite pervasive. For instance, M. Picard, the general commissioner for the Exposition, disagreed with the official jury report slightly, asserting that "the colonies of Martinique, Guadeloupe, Reunion, Saint-Pierre and Miquelon do not call for any special guidelines. They have no indigenous peoples to civilize, and the instructional regime must be the same there as that of the

¹⁰⁷ Garaud, 270.

¹⁰⁸ *Exposition universelle internationale de 1900 a Paris: Rapports du jury international*. Groupe 1. (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1902), 639.

metropole."¹⁰⁹ Both reports make clear that Martinique occupies a space apart from the new colonies, though it is clear that if perhaps French the colony was still seen as possessing an economic constitution.

In the preface to the schoolbook, *Histoire de la Martinique*, the book's author, Jules Lucrèce, exhibits the cultural conceptualization explained throughout this chapter: that Martinique represents its Frenchness by virtue of the racial creolization and acclimatization to a harsh environment. For the Martiniquais schoolchildren who are learning their history—a history framed by the Ministry of Education as inherent French—Martinique represents a space in which European and African heritage combined via French civilization. In the preface to Lucrèce's textbook, university Professor L. Achille states that the book presents a

Thrilling history of three centuries during which our ancestors, coming from France or imported from Africa, both confined on the same elemental and fertile soil of Martinique, combined across such obstacles, by the insidious effect of the climate, economic necessities, and social mimicry, to create a complex but well-characterized creole race which increasingly becomes aware of its vigor, of its possibilities, of its land-based solidarity, and which wants to make its small birthplace into a more and more comfortable and attractive place.¹¹⁰

Such an interpretation of Martiniquais history was well-received by the French government. In November 1930, the Head of the Department of Public Instruction, A. Fouret, wrote a letter to Lucrèce congratulating him on creating "a practical manual" that gives primary schoolchildren "useful knowledge on the evolution of their *pays*."¹¹¹ Unsurprisingly, he appreciated the focus on the democratic reforms of the Third Republic—that is, the reinstatement of universal manhood suffrage, full representation in the national French legislature, the creation of free and public education, and the reintroduction of freedom of the press in the island: in the words of Lucrèce, "the generous efforts of men like Schoelcher, Lamartine, Armand Barbès, Louis Blanc, Ledru-Rollin and others who fought and suffered to grant liberty and raise us to the dignity of citizenship."¹¹²

Therefore, though it presents and discusses plantation slavery, albeit cursorily, the textbook reads as a progression from slavery to liberty, from old regime to republic. Lucrèce characterized Martinique's history, as well as the history of France, from 1870 onward as the product of two forces: "the spirit of conservatism and reactionism loyal to the principles of personal government (monarchy and empire) and the spirit of progress and liberty loyal to republican traditions."¹¹³ Events such as the strike of 1900, which resulted in a shootout between

¹⁰⁹ Alfred Picard. *Exposition universelle internationale de 1900 à Paris. Le bilan d'un siècle (1801-1900)*, Vol. 6. (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1906), 108

¹¹⁰L. Achille. "Préface." *Histoire de la Martinique: A l'usage des cours supérieur et complémentaire des écoles primaires* by Jules Lucrèce. (Paris: Imprimerie des presses universitaires de France, 1933), vii.

¹¹¹ A. Fouret. "Le chef du service de l'instruction publique à M. Lucrèce Jules, Directeur d'Ecole, Marin." In *Histoire de la Martinique: A l'usage des cours supérieur et complémentaire des écoles primaires* by Jules Lucrèce. (Paris: Imprimerie des presses universitaires de France, 1933), v-vi.

¹¹² Ibid., ix.

¹¹³ Jules Lucrèce. *Histoire de la Martinique: A l'usage des cours supérieur et complémentaire des écoles primaires*. (Paris: Imprimerie des presses universitaires de France, 1933), 151.

French troops and Martiniquais workers, and the assassination of the Antoine Siger in 1908 by reactionary whites are presented not as racial or colonial problems, but as problems endemic to French society. In short, they are presented as the ever-present tension between the Old Regime and the Republic. With this in mind, the textbook asserts that the designation "French colony" is inappropriately applied to the "old colonies"—Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyane, and Reunion—because, in fact rather than name, they constitute French departments: the people who live in these parts of France are "a small people of skin colorations varying from ebony black to alabaster white, but they have the same language, the same interests, the same religious beliefs, the same customs and the same traditions as France."¹¹⁴

Conclusion

Though Martinique was grounded in a strictly colonial economic reality, the island served as a success story for the longevity of French civilization abroad in the cultural *imaginaire* of the Third Republic. Though sugar was no longer being extracted from Martinique in its earlier quantities, French republicans were now able to extract ideological fuel for their civilizing mission. What is interesting is that the defenders of republican French civilization were not the whites who were transplanted long ago under the Old Regime, but a new race of mulattos created out of the colonial experience who were capable of protecting French values against the onslaught of a hostile tropical environment. For Louis Garaud, the mulatto mediated between the outdated and aristocratic white planter class and the laboring black majority. For scientists like Laurent-Jean-Baptiste Bérenger-Féraud, the genetic combination of whites and blacks resulted in the best of both worlds: the fusion of French values with tropical adaptability. In fact, the irony is that the minority settler population is not the success story but the antagonist in these travel narratives. Observers like Charles Mismar were unable to reconcile their French values with the white exclusionism of the *békés* in Martinique, and in fact felt the need to defend the honor of the colored populations on the island. For many who saw them as vestiges of the Old Regime, the white planters—economically empowered but politically isolated—were anathema to the ideals of the French Republic.

It is apparent that the island of Martinique fit into a unique space in French colonialism. In an environment that was seen as characteristically un-French, the citizens of this "old colony"—in particular, the non-white population—were seen as representing the success of French universalism by embodying "tropical" Frenchness—a version of French identity that was simultaneously seen as new and adapted to the natural environment, particularly through racial mixing, as well as old and rooted in French traditions. With this in mind, it is apparent that racial politics on the island, as well as between Martinique and the mainland, cannot be boiled down to the "triumph of whiteness" typically associated with commonplace narratives of Social Darwinism and the civilizing mission. The bizarre way in which Social Darwinism was translated by French republicanism in the case of Martinique, as well as the colony's special designation as *ancien*, highlights the instability of the division between the metropole and Martinique during the Third Republic. This old colony's longstanding relationship with France both culturally and racially, coupled with the complex way in which Martinique fit into both the imagination of and the class tensions within the French Third Republic, sheds light on the

¹¹⁴ Lucrèce, 156.

paradoxical status of the island, of the oft repeated slippage of the distinction between metropole and colony.

“[It] was called Fort-de-France. This city prevailed over epidemics of leprosy and smallpox, September floodwaters, and earthquakes so sudden the rats had no time to warn anyone. It even endured a calamitous forest of furious flames in the great fire of June 22, 1890. Houses flared up like dry canes, with bursts of red and a spectral yellow that coppered the whole horizon. All Fort-de-France became one blaze that licked like a cloud before curling up on a bed of silent ashes. The city survived, but collapsed like a sorrowful negress into premature old age and stayed cringing in that bay facing the sea.”

Patrick Chamoiseau, *Chronicle of the Seven Sorrows*¹¹⁵

“It is truly with rage that Woe has befallen the poor city of Fort-de-France. It looks like a calculated plot against it, sophisticated in design. In its quiver, adversity has not left a single arrow, not one!”

Les Antilles, newspaper in Saint-Pierre, 25 June 1890

Chapter 2 - Fort-de-France Burning: The Great Fire of 1890

In the rising swelter of the tropical summer, a fire stormed through the streets of Martinique’s capital city, Fort-de-France. On its rampage through the heart of downtown, the trade-wind-fueled blaze incinerated 1600 homes, destroyed 1018 properties¹¹⁶, claimed 13 casualties,¹¹⁷ and left 6000 people—half of the city’s entire population—without food, water, shelter, or clothes. In addition to the human and physical costs, the economic costs were staggering. With the total damage estimated between 50 million¹¹⁸ and 67 million francs¹¹⁹, the destruction was more than tenfold Martinique’s yearly budget,¹²⁰ and the blaze consumed the capital base of *La société mutuelle*—the city’s only insurer. With the number of homes destroyed valued at over 15 million francs¹²¹, nearly three quarters of the city lay in ruins.¹²² As Guadeloupe’s governor, Antoine Le Boucher, exclaimed the day after the fire, “Fort-de-France no longer exists! A terrible fire has completely destroyed it.”¹²³ One week later, before the

¹¹⁵ P. Chamoiseau. *Chronicle of the Seven Sorrows*, Trans. Linda Coverdale, (Chapel Hill, UNC Press, 1986), 65.

¹¹⁶ Germain Casse. « Le Gouverneur de la Martinique a adressé au Sous-secrétaire d'Etat des Colonies les renseignements suivants sur sujet de l'incendie de Fort-de-France. » 2400COL, Carton 92. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

¹¹⁷ “La Martinique.” *Le Temps*. 30 June 1890. Retrieved from Gallica on 2 April 2012.

¹¹⁸ E. Peyron. « Comité de secours aux Incendiés de Fort-de-France (Martinique) et de Port-Louis (Guadeloupe). » 2400COL, Carton 92. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

¹¹⁹ “Choses de l’incendie.” *Les Antilles*. 28 June 1890.

¹²⁰ Paul Pelet. *Nouvel Atlas des colonies françaises, dressé par ordre de l'administration des colonies*. (Paris: A. Challamel, 1891), xxiv.

¹²¹ Janin. “Nos gravures: L’incendie de Fort-de-France.” *L’Illustration*. 26 July 1890.

¹²² “La Martinique. L’Incendie de Fort-de-France.” *Le Temps*. 25 June 1890. Retrieved from Gallica on 27 March 2012.

¹²³ “Souscription en faveur des victims de l’incendie de Fort-de-France.” *Le Journal officiel de la Guadeloupe*. 23 June 1890.

embers in Martinique had even cooled, the town of Port-Louis on Martinique's sister island of Guadeloupe went up in flames, destroying 68 homes¹²⁴, burning down three-quarters of the town,¹²⁵ and "plunging another 4000 inhabitants into misery."¹²⁶

These fires—along with a litany of hurricanes, earthquakes, and disease epidemics, as well as the catastrophic eruption of Mount Pelée in 1902—furthered the commonplace French view that the Caribbean was a volatile, exotic environment that perpetually threatened to annihilate those living there. In the words of one contemporary, "the sword suspended by a thread over the head of Damocles was less terrifying."¹²⁷ Nevertheless, this distant and dangerous locale held a special place in the French imagination. Not only had it been under French control since 1635—longer than many parts of the metropole (Nice, Savoy, and Alsace, to name a few)—its predominately nonwhite population possessed, unlike the rest of France's imperial subjects during the Third Republic, full French citizenship. The ideal of colonial assimilation was, to some extent, made good in France's old colonies, and as a result, French Antilleans demanded a quality of life equal to that of their metropolitan counterparts.

Yet, what did this citizenship bring, particularly given the sad social conditions of so many "bread and butter" Frenchmen within the metropole? In the republican universalist virtues of liberty, equality, and fraternity, we hear the battle-cry of a French Republic that sought to rectify inequality in all its forms, but we also hear the sarcastic lament of a citizenry that, in its endeavor to create a social republic where one did not yet exist, experienced what Eugen Weber described as the "internal colonization" of a nation being knitted together by railway lines and coal mines—the groan of a citizenry under the yoke of unfair labor practices, dangerous working conditions, and a destitute standard of living. As full French citizens, Antilleans should be situated as active participants in the social and cultural developments of a turn-of-the-century France riddled with social cleavages, labor unrest, and, to some extent, a delusional sense of optimism undercut by a pervasive fear of cataclysm on the horizon.

As this chapter shows, the great fires of 1890, and the French government's relief campaign, illustrate the French state's need to safeguard its Antillean citizenry in times of natural disaster. In exploring the duty incumbent upon the state to safeguard the French citizenry at large, including those living in the remarkably un-French environment of the tropics, this chapter examines the way in which the 1890 fires in the Antilles resonated throughout the metropole. Though the Caribbean was climactically un-French and tropical, the people living there were mostly, though not unproblematically, depicted as inherently French—"more French than the French," as many say today. Therefore, the dire situation following the Great Fire of Fort-de-France was met with an outpouring of public support from all across France and a call for everyday compatriots to open their wallets to their brothers in peril.

¹²⁴ "Gouvernement de la Guadeloupe." *Le Journal officiel de la Guadeloupe*. 30 June 1890.

¹²⁵ "Nouvelles générales." *Le Journal officiel de la Guadeloupe*. 1 July 1890.

¹²⁶ M. Carnot. « Projet de loi allouant, sur l'exercice 1890, une nouvelle subvention de 300.000 francs à la colonie de la Martinique et une subvention de 100.000 francs à la colonie de la Guadeloupe pour venir en aide aux incendiés de Fort-de-France et de Port-Louis. » 8 July 1890. 2400COL, Carton 92. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

¹²⁷ Henri Monet. *La Martinique*. (Paris: A. Savinne, 1892), 11-12.

First I will discuss the Fort-de-France fire itself, its causes, and the way in which contemporaries in the press and government interpreted the virtual annihilation of Martinique's capital city. I will then turn toward the subsequent relief campaign orchestrated by the French government, with an eye toward what that campaign tells us about the cultural place of the French Antilles in the French Republic. Finally, I will look at a disaster within the metropole itself—a mine collapse at Saint-Etienne—that was not only contemporaneous with the fire of Fort-de-France, but analogous in many ways, in order to show how victims on both sides of the Atlantic occupied similar places in the French imagination. While racism undeniably underlay the French understanding of this great disaster, it was equally complemented by classism and elitism. By looking at a mine collapse at Saint-Etienne in southeastern France, we can see that race was mapped onto class, and that class was understood as a racial concept.

Fort-de-France: “A Town of Silent Ashes”

The geography of the Caribbean presents a unique confluence of dangers. It is atop an active plate boundary, riddled with volcanoes, perpetually menaced by hurricanes and tempests, and characterized by a built environment that seeks to compromise between the aforementioned multitude of dangers—and, in the manner of compromise, is summarily compromised. As Marie-Sophie Laborieux remarks in Patrick Chamoiseau's *Texaco*, “Whoever feared earthquakes, would erect a house of wood. Whoever feared hurricanes or remembered fire, erected a house of stone.”¹²⁸

Since the earthquake of 1839, which wreaked devastation on Fort-de-France, the majority of the city's homes had been rebuilt as single-story units made entirely of wood.¹²⁹ Those that were not made entirely of wood had a cinder block base with wooden upper stories. Using wood rather than brick or stone allows load-bearing walls to flex during tremblors, thus preventing the home from collapsing during an earthquake. Repeated droughts had dried out all the capital's wooden structures, and in incendiary conditions, the homes' construction allowed fires to easily jump from house to house. Given the threat of earthquakes on the one hand and fire on the other, Fort-de-France's citizens were stuck between a rock and a hard place. Even so, many journalists faulted Fort-de-France's disaster preparedness and organization, arguing that given the prevalence of water and the availability of a sizeable fire-fighting force, the devastation should have been minimized.¹³⁰

Yet, with the post-1839 construction of inflammable yet earthquake-resistant housing, Martinique saw a dramatic rise in the use of coal and kerosene lamps to light and heat homes. As historian Bonham Richardson has pointed out, poor members of the black working class could not afford proper glass lanterns or globes, and thus home-made, jury-rigged lanterns became commonplace throughout the Caribbean. With the use of ad-hoc lighting came an increase in the number of urban fires throughout the region. Moreover, since the cost of proper kerosene was so

¹²⁸ Patrick Chamoiseau. *Texaco*. Trans. Rose-Myriam Réjouis, and Val Vinoku. (New York: Pantheon, 1997), 178.

¹²⁹ “La Martinique. L'Incendie de Fort-de-France.” *Le Temps*. 25 June 1890. Retrieved from Gallica on 27 March 2012.

¹³⁰ “Une catastrophe à Fort-de-France.” *Le Petit Journal*. 25 June 1890. Retrieved from Gallica on 3 April 2012.

high, many filled their improvised lanterns with unstable, highly flammable low-grade oil.¹³¹ The storage of this volatile fuel, combined with the ferocity of the region's trade winds and the aftermath of a prolonged drought, set the stage for a disastrous fire outbreak.

Early Sunday morning on 22 June 1890, a resident in a small cabin on rue Blenac left a tea kettle heating over an open flame, precariously perched over a vase of kerosene used for lighting and heating the home. At around 8am, the stove tipped, the kettle fell, and the floorboards ignited.¹³² The kerosene exploded and the small wooden house burst into flames. Fort-de-France had been amidst a massive drought lasting nearly eight months, and June was in the middle of the windiest time of the year. The fire could not have found more favorable conditions as it jumped from wooden structure to wooden structure, devouring the entire downtown area and chasing people from their homes.¹³³ As dazed firefighters and citizens converged on the scene, they were met with even more misfortunes. The fire originated in a part of town that had an insufficient water supply with weak pressure, so the pumps could not provide enough water at a fast enough speed to slow the pace of the fire. Moreover, since it was Sunday, many of the stores in the commercial district were closed and locked up tight, so access to fire-axes was limited.¹³⁴ Firefighters eventually resorted to demolishing homes in the path of the blaze to create a fire barrier, sundering the air with detonations that sounded to observers like "lugubrious cannon fire."¹³⁵ Observers remarked that it was as if the town were "under siege," which, according to the press, put the citizenry into a panic. As the denizens of Fort-de-France watched their homes and livelihoods go up in flames, they created refugee encampments on the sprawling nearby park known as La Savanne and sought sanctuary in the hills at Fort Tartenson.¹³⁶

Strong winds from the northwest and the inaccessibility of enough water held firefighters at bay until nightfall, when help arrived from Saint-Pierre and the fire was finally extinguished. In the words of an observer:

[The fire] lasted, it can be said, all day and all night, fostered by a combination of unfortunate circumstances, supported and driven by fate, finding everywhere boons for its destructive work, taking advantage of all: the lack of water, the lack of pumps, the wind which seemed to blow expressly to expand it in all directions, the late arrival of relief, the panic that never fails to occur in such cases and against which only an extraordinary firmness can respond, the absence of authorities, etc., etc. Rarely has one seen a disaster occur in rescue conditions so defective.¹³⁷

¹³¹ B. C. Richardson. *Igniting the Caribbean's Past: Fire in British West Indian History*. (Chapel Hill, UNC, 2004), 64.

¹³² Janin. "Nos gravures: L'incendie de Fort-de-France." *L'Illustration*. 26 July 1890.

¹³³ "La catastrophe du chef-lieu." *Les Antilles*. 25 June 1890.

¹³⁴ Germain Casse. "Le Gouverneur de la Martinique à M. le Sous-Secrétaire d'Etat." 27 June 1890. Printed in "Incendie de Fort-de-France." *La Journal officiel de la Guadeloupe*. 4 July 1890.

¹³⁵ "La catastrophe du chef-lieu." *Les Antilles*. 25 June 1890.

¹³⁶ «Choses de Fort-de-France.» *Les Antilles*. 8 July 1890.

¹³⁷ "La catastrophe du chef-lieu." *Les Antilles*. 25 June 1890.

Devastating both the city's rich commercial center and the poor workers' district,¹³⁸ the fire completely decimated the majority of the heart of Fort-de-France, burning through major boulevards and small side streets alike.¹³⁹ Only one house in the path of the fire was saved, and the fire destroyed much of the city's infrastructure. Though the Palais de Justice and the Direction of the Interior were spared, the fire destroyed the sugar factory at Point-Simon, the hospice, the postal and telegraph offices, the Saint-Louis Cathedral, the customs house, the contributions house, and the Schoelcher library.¹⁴⁰ In short, many of Fort-de-France's key cultural and administrative buildings had been lost in a matter of hours.

Although Fort-de-France was the administrative capital of the island and France's military headquarters in the West Indies, it was neither the island's chief economic port nor its cultural heart. This was not lost on the French press, who, just days after the catastrophe, were quick to point out that the economic hub of Saint-Pierre was doing quite fine.¹⁴¹ Official press releases assured the French population that the sugar plantations and refineries, located far from Fort-de-France or its environs, were safe and that Martinique's faith and credit with foreign and national banks remained sound.¹⁴² While the local Caribbean press underscored the scope of the devastation, Parisian papers trivialized the damage to some extent in order to assuage investors and prevent more capital from being withdrawn from the island. Therefore, while the sugar refinery at Point-Simon in Fort-de-France was indeed important for financial investors and its loss marked a significant blow to Martinique's already suffering sugar industry, papers hungrily proclaimed that sugar production remained on target at the island's other refineries, and that investors had little reason to pull their money from their Martiniquais investments. Contrarily, when the Parisian paper *Le Temps* reported the subsequent fire in Port-Louis, Guadeloupe, the paper highlighted the fact that vital sugar factories were in the town's vicinity and that the fire threatened the local economy.¹⁴³ The wealthy in Paris and Guadeloupe alike were alarmed that sugar output might dwindle as a result of the fires, and Port-Louis' victimized population of about 5,800 inhabitants¹⁴⁴ took second billing to economics.

¹³⁸ Germain Casse. "Le Gouverneur de la Martinique à M. le Sous-Secrétaire d'Etat." 27 June 1890. Printed in "Incendie de Fort-de-France." *La Journal officiel de la Guadeloupe*. 4 July 1890.

¹³⁹ The fire destroyed the boulevard Dourzelot, rue Blondel, rue Isambert, rue du Bord-de-la-Mer, rue Saint-Laurent, rue Victor-Hugo, rue Blenac, rue Saint-Louis, rue Sainte-Catherine, and rue des Fossés. The fire also consumed three-quarters of the rue du Gouvernement and rue Perrinon.

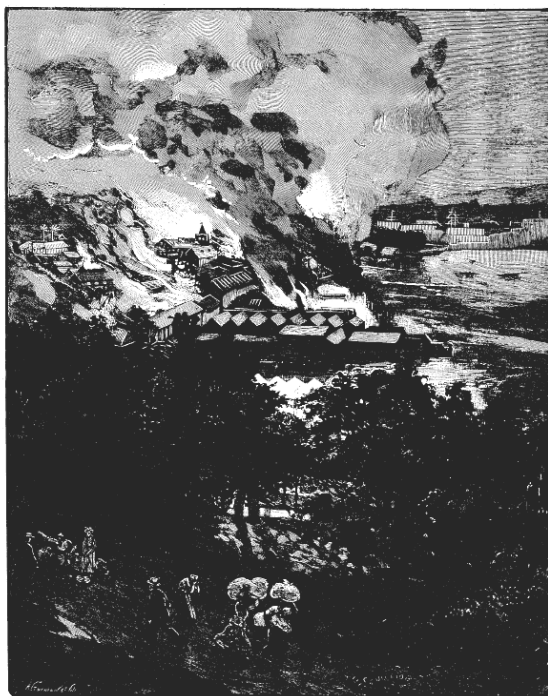
¹⁴⁰ "L'Incendie de Fort-de-France." *L'Univers illustré*. 5 July 1890. In *L'Univers illustré*, 2^e semestre. (Paris : Lévy, 1890), 422 ; Also, "L'Incendie de Fort-de-France." *Le Temps*. 27 June 1890. Retrieved from Gallica on 2 April 2012.

¹⁴¹ "La Martinique. L'Incendie de Fort-de-France." *Le Temps*. 25 June 1890. Retrieved from Gallica on 27 March 2012.

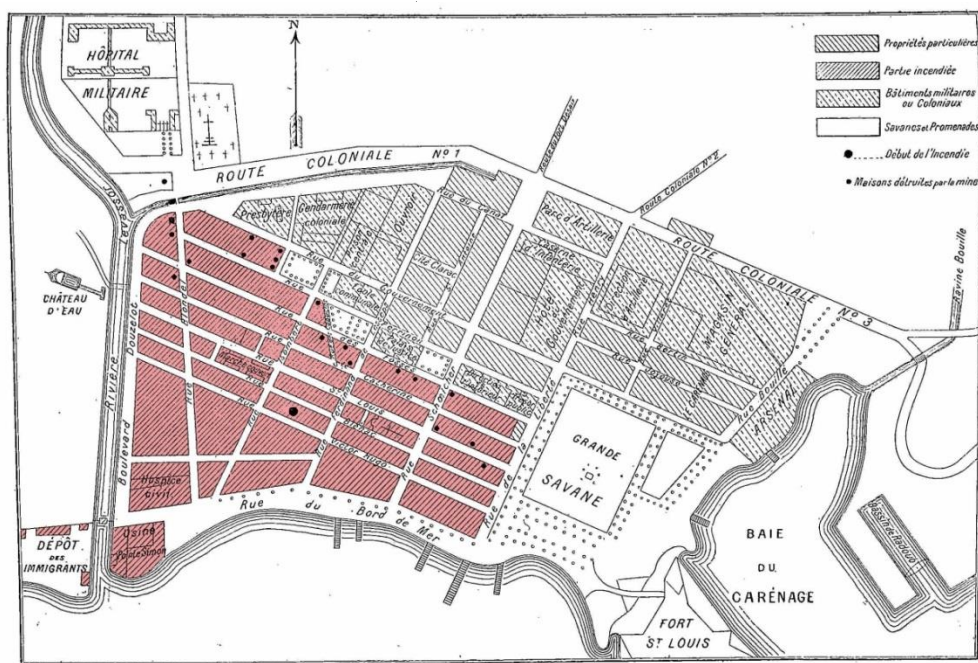
¹⁴² "Une catastrophe à Fort-de-France." *Le Petit Journal*. 25 June 1890. Retrieved from Gallica on 3 April 2012.

¹⁴³ "La Guadeloupe." *Le Temps*. 1 July 1890. Retrieved from Gallica on 2 April 2012.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*



L'INCENDIE DE FORT-DE-FRANCE. — (Dessin de M. Garaud, d'après des documents communiq. — Voir page 422.



PLAN DE FORT-DE-FRANCE APRÈS L'INCENDIE DU 22 JUIN 1890

Figure 1: (top) Downtown Fort-de-France engulfed in Flames¹⁴⁵ (bottom) Map of Fort-de-France after the Fire of 22 June 1890 [color added to the destroyed section of the city]¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ *L'Univers Illustré*. 5 July 1890, cover. Retrieved from Gallica on 27 March 2012.

¹⁴⁶ Louis Garaud. *Trois ans à la Martinique*. (Paris: Alcide Picard and Kaan, 1892), 231. Retrieved from Gallica on 3 March 2010. [color added]

The Commission de Secours in Martinique and the Comité de Secours in Paris

While deprivation, starvation, and confusion followed in the aftermath of the fire, insurance provided no relief. The capital of the *Société mutuelle*, a mutual insurance agency which had insured Fort-de-France and garnered capital from its population, was destroyed in the fire, and according to press reports, foreign insurance companies only agreed to pay an infinitesimal portion of the total damages, leaving charity “as the sole resource that remains to these unfortunate people [of Fort-de-France].”¹⁴⁷ To rebuild Fort-de-France, the French people—Antilleans first among them—really needed to pay for it themselves. Appealing to the hearts and minds of Martinique’s citizens, the press pleaded, “Creole hearts, open yourselves to your unfortunate brethren. Inhabitants of Saint-Pierre and the suburbs, direct to Fort-de-France your devoted, the tireless testimonies of your charity. Give to the unfortunate as much as you can. They are ruined but will not die if you feed them. Feed them, in God’s name, in the name of charity, on behalf of compatriotism. In short, bread, rescue, life for compatriots who demand and expect it from you.”¹⁴⁸ In honor of Martinique’s help following the 1871 fire in Pointe-à-Pitre, the first to bring aid to Martinique was its sister island of Guadeloupe, which was struck by its own fire within the week.¹⁴⁹ Within days of the Fort-de-France fire, Guadeloupe began a public subscription campaign, loaded two cargo ships with food destined for Martinique, and replaced its Bastille Day celebration, this year a costumed gala, with a benefit and raffle for the fire’s victims.¹⁵⁰

The day after the fire, Governor Germain Casse created three relief organizations for the establishment of shelter, the distribution of food, and the distribution of clothing. On 24 June, Casse created a ten-member Commission de Secours¹⁵¹ that was presided over by Martinique’s Bishop, Monseigneur Julien-Francois-Pierre Carméné. In addition to raising funds from the parishes and municipalities on the island, the Commission was charged with documenting, allocating, and distributing all donations received locally and from the metropole.¹⁵² Collections began in Martinique’s parishes and townships, raising over 100,000 francs (24,415 francs from Episcopal and 79,650 francs from municipal donations).¹⁵³ The governor himself provided a credit of 100,000 francs to be distributed among Fort-de-France’s victims, equating to 10 francs per victim. A second such credit was opened in August. Within days of the fire, the mayor of Fort-de-France, Osman Duquesnay, created squads of workers to clear the rubble from the city, offering a pay rate of 2 francs per day supplemented with food rations.¹⁵⁴ Support arrived from Saint-Thomas, Trinidad, and Demerara, and since Fort-de-France’s most immediate need was

¹⁴⁷ Janin. “Nos gravures: L’Incendie de Fort-de-France.” *L’Illustration*. 26 July 1890.

¹⁴⁸ “Catastrophe du chef-lieu.” *Les Antilles*. 25 June 1890.

¹⁴⁹ “Les Choses de l’incendie.” *Les Antilles*. 28 June 1890.

¹⁵⁰ “Gouvernement de la Guadeloupe.” *Le Journal officiel de la Guadeloupe*. 27 June 1890; “Tombola du 14 Juillet.” *Le Journal officiel de la Guadeloupe*. 1 July 1890.

¹⁵¹ L. Blanchard. « Extrait d’un rapport au sujet des secours et des vivres distribués à Fort-de-France après l’incendie du 22 juin 1890. » 4 February 1892. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

¹⁵² “Extraits du Moniteur du Mercredi.” *Les Antilles*. 28 June 1890.

¹⁵³ “Collectes paroissiales.” *Les Antilles*. 12 July 1890.

¹⁵⁴ “Derniers Renseignements.” *Les Antilles*. 25 June 1890.

food, Jamaica sent 300 barrels of flour and 300 bags of rice.¹⁵⁵ It was rumored that the United States' government had planned to donate 700,000 francs,¹⁵⁶ though there is no evidence that this ever came to fruition. In fact, foreign aid to Martinique only amounted to 37,000 francs.¹⁵⁷ However, due to the urgent conditions, which colonial investigators later identified as a sort of "willful ignorance" on the part of both the French military and the municipal government, the intake and distribution of foodstuffs was not subjected to any form of systematic accounting.¹⁵⁸

Ultimately, local support was not enough. In a letter from 8 July 1890, just two weeks after the fire swept through Fort-de-France, an alarmed Governor of Martinique, Germain Casse, warned the Colonial Undersecretary of State that once aid from Martinique's neighboring cities and islands is exhausted, "the most terrible misery will reign if Parlement and the Metropole do not come to our aide. [. . .] Without you, we would be lost. [. . .] We have confidence in France and await full of gratitude."¹⁵⁹ There was a real fear that public disorder and chaos would ensue if the central government did not intervene, so in Casse's view, it was essential that aid come from the metropole. He called upon Martinique's General Council to engender sympathy from the metropole in the name of the victims: "put aside your divisions, your grudges, your hatreds, if you don't want to paralyze the goal of solidarity which leads the Metropole toward you." In response, the General Council of Martinique sent photographs documenting Fort-de-France's devastation to Paris in an effort to further demonstrate Martinique's dire need in order to raise support.¹⁶⁰

However, information was slow in reaching Paris, where few realized the full extent of the devastation wrought in Fort-de-France. The entire city west of rue Schoelcher, as well as the section between rue Saint-Louis and rue Saint-Laurent, was completely destroyed, and the capital's postal and telegraph offices were lost to the fire. All correspondences had to be rerouted using English telegraph lines through New York via Saint-Pierre,¹⁶¹ thus drastically slowing communication between the administration in Martinique and the central bureaucracy. In fact, journalists lambasted Governor Casse for failing to supply sufficient and timely information regarding the post-incendiary conditions of Fort-de-France.¹⁶²

Nevertheless, a centralized relief effort began in Paris one month after the two fires, led by the "Comité de secours aux Incendiés de Fort-de-France (Martinique) et de Port-Louis

¹⁵⁵ "Nouvelles generals." *La Journal officiel de la Guadeloupe*. 4 July 1890.

¹⁵⁶ "Les choses de l'incendie." *Les Antilles*. 28 June 1890.

¹⁵⁷ L. Blanchard. « Extrait d'un rapport au sujet des secours et des vivres distribués à Fort-de-France après l'incendie du 22 juin 1890. » 4 February 1892. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

¹⁵⁸ L. Blanchard. « Extrait d'un rapport au sujet des secours et des vivres distribués à Fort-de-France après l'incendie du 22 juin 1890. » 4 February 1892. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

¹⁵⁹ Germain Casse. « Le Gouverneur de la Martinique a adressé au Sous-secrétaire d'Etat des Colonies les renseignements suivants sur sujet de l'incendie de Fort-de-France. » 2400COL, Carton 92. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

¹⁶⁰ "Dernier heure." *Les Antilles*. 19 July 1890.

¹⁶¹ "La Martinique." *Le Temps*. 26 June 1890. Retrieved from Gallica on 30 March 2012.

¹⁶² "Le Sinistre de Fort-de-France." *Le petit journal*. 26 June 1890. Retrieved from Gallica on 3 April 2012.

Also, "Le Sinistre de Fort-de-France." *Le petit journal*. 27 June 1890. Retrieved from Gallica on 3 April 2012.

(Guadeloupe)” directed by Alexandre Peyron and coordinated by Eugène Etienne. A vice admiral, recipient of the Legion of Honor, former commander of the Antilles naval commission, and former Minister of the Marine and Colonies, Peyron was then an irremovable senator—that is, a senator for life—from the center left in the French legislature,¹⁶³ while Etienne was an opportunist who had been supported earlier in his career by ardent republicans like Jules Ferry and Leon Gambetta.¹⁶⁴ These two political figures represented the heart of republican empire, and their fundraising campaign brought people together from across the political spectrum, successfully bridging the gap between assimilationist republicans and socialist deputies. In December 1890, when the *Comité* had decided to formally disband, Undersecretary Etienne thanked its members for the hard work of dedicated individuals like Admiral Peyron and those he represented. At the behest of Admiral Peyron, Etienne officially commended M. Bertin, the *Comité*’s account and second-in-command, and even formally recognized the work of M. Gerville-Réache, the socialist legislator from Guadeloupe.¹⁶⁵

The *Comité de secours* carried out a nine-month fundraising campaign to help the victimized populations of Martinique and Guadeloupe. The *Comité* sent out two-sided sheets to all the French communes: one side had a description of the disaster written by Admiral Peyron and signed by the committee, and the other side was a form for taking donations. Individuals, business owners, and municipal officials collected signatures and donations, each carrying out their own miniature fundraising campaign. Oftentimes this was held at a local event, such as a gala or banquet, or at the local school. The local fundraisers then turned over the subscriptions to the *Comité* directly by mailing them to the Colonial Undersecretary of State or indirectly via the military or local treasurer who then turned them over to the *Comité*. Everyone who donated money to the *Comité* and signed the subscription paperwork had his or her name published in the *Journal officiel de la République française*.

The campaign to raise money was initiated by the central government, but executed by departmental prefects, mayors, townships, and schools. Thus the fundraising took a variety of forms. At one point, the prefect of Seine-Inférieure and the president of the local charity committee in Le Havre joined forces to stage a *kermesse*—a traditional charity celebration in northern France and the Low Countries—designed to raise money for their *concitoyens* in Martinique and Guadeloupe. The centerpiece of this event was to be a “reconstituted” Martiniquais village built under the direction of a “worker familiar with the assemblage of the pieces [of such displays].” In the organizers’ estimation, this reconstituted village would give “more flair and local charm to this event” and thereby encourage attendees to donate to the cause. The organizers requested materials to build this mock village from the Minister of the Marine, though they were ultimately denied access to the necessary supplies. Nonetheless, several such local fundraising events took place all across France.

¹⁶³ «Peyron, Alexandre ». *Dictionnaire des parlementaires français depuis le 1er mai 1789 jusqu’au 1er mai 1889*, Tome IV. Eds. MM. Adolphe Robert, Edgar Bourloton et Gaston Cougny. (Paris : Bourloton, 1891), 612. Retrieved from <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb31224546x> on 13 March 2012.

¹⁶⁴ «Etienne, Eugène ». *Dictionnaire des parlementaires français depuis le 1er mai 1789 jusqu’au 1er mai 1889*, Tome II. Eds. MM. Adolphe Robert, Edgar Bourloton et Gaston Cougny. (Paris : Bourloton, 1891), 576. Retrieved from <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb31224546x> on 13 March 2012.

¹⁶⁵ E. Etienne. “Le S.S d’Etat à Monsieur le Vice Amiral Peyron.” 2400COL, Carton 92. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence

Soliciting donations from the press, prefectures, schools, organizations, and individuals within the Metropole—while receiving donations from foreign governments as well—the *Comité de secours* raised over 600,000 francs within the first few months of its operation (by November), and at that point planned to disband.¹⁶⁶ This is a substantial amount of money, given that the average yearly wage for a French worker in the metropole during the 1890s was 1,080 francs, paid at 35 centimes per hour.¹⁶⁷ In addition to the *Comité's* fund-raising, the central government allocated 200,000 francs to Martinique on 24 June,¹⁶⁸ and proposed a contribution of an additional 300,000 francs to Martinique and 100,000 francs to the newly-burned Guadeloupe on 8 July. Annotated “colonial service” under the financial law of 17 July 1889, this money was earmarked for reconstruction and individual aid in order to stave off what officials feared would be inevitable starvation and disorder.¹⁶⁹ The law contributing 400,000 francs to the Antilles passed unanimously, 511 votes for and zero against.¹⁷⁰ The *Comité* decided on 25 July 1890 that it would split the donations received between Martinique and Guadeloupe. Based on an approximation of the losses within each affected city, the *Comité* decided to apportion 90% of the funds to Fort-de-France, Martinique, leaving 10% for the town of Port-Louis, Guadeloupe.¹⁷¹ Though the *Comité de secours* had officially dissolved by December 1890, donations continued to trickle in from all over France and its empire until April 1891.

¹⁶⁶ Amiral Peyron. « Rapport fait au Comité sur les opérations de son Bureau et les résultats obtenues. » 2400COL, Carton 92. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

¹⁶⁷ *Salaires et durée du travail dans l’industrie française: Résultats généraux*, Tome IV. Ministère du commerce, de l’industrie, des postes et des télégraphes. (Imprimerie nationale, Paris, 1897), 16-17.

¹⁶⁸ “Loi qui accorde, sur l’exercice 1890, une subvention à la colonie de la Martinique pour secours aux victimes de l’incendie de Fort-de-France du 23 juin.” *Collection complète des lois, décrets, ordonnances, règlements et avis du Conseil d’Etat*, Tome 90. Ed. J.B. Duvergier. (Paris : L. Larose et Forcel, 1890), 446.

¹⁶⁹ M. Carnot. « Projet de loi allouant, sur l’exercice 1890, une nouvelle subvention de 300.000 francs. » 8 July 1890. 2400COL, Carton 92. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

¹⁷⁰ “Séance du Vendredi, 11 Juillet 1890.” *Chambre des députés. 5e legislature, session de 1900. C/I/448*. Archives nationales de la France, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine.

¹⁷¹ “L’Amiral, Sénateur Peyron, Président du Comité de Secours aux incendiés des Antilles à Monisuer le Sous-Sécretaire d’Etat et des Colonies.” 25 July 1890. 2400COL, Carton 92. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

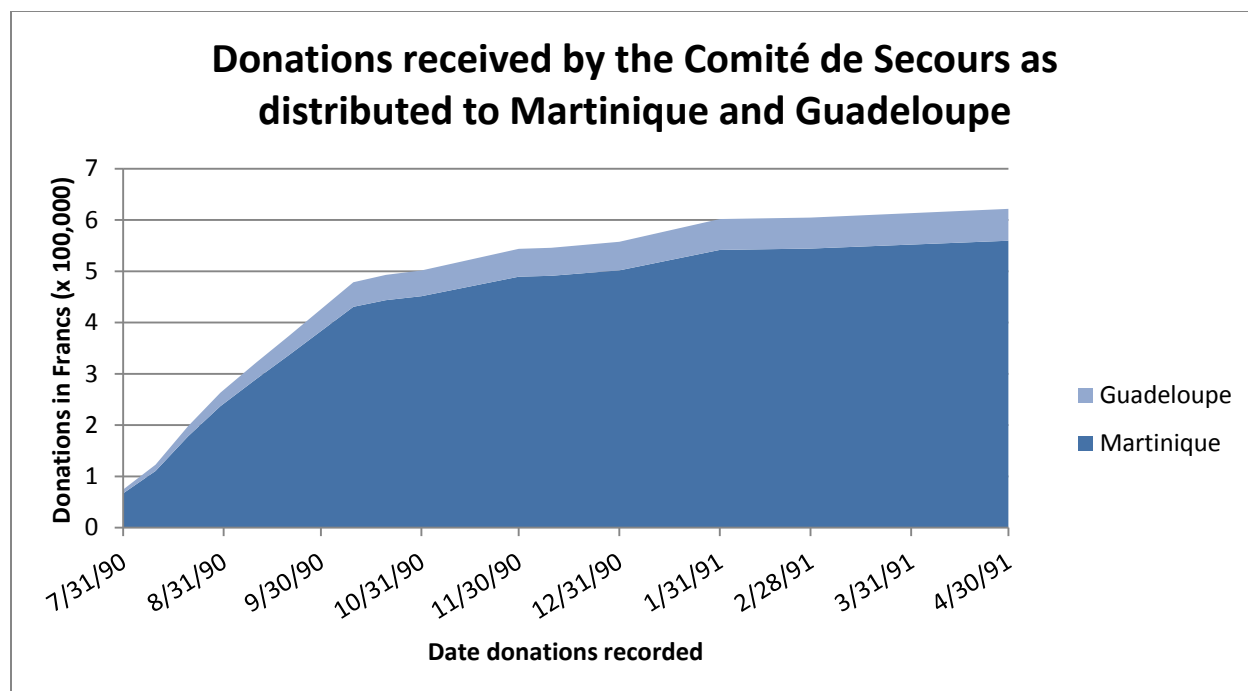


Figure 2. Donations received by the Comité de Secours as distributed to Martinique and Guadeloupe.¹⁷²

Between the metropolitan relief campaign and the local fundraising efforts, 1.7 million francs were deposited into the treasury of Martinique, with roughly half being received by the end of July 1890.¹⁷³ While some of the funds went to fill budgetary shortcomings, the bulk went toward direct dispensations to the afflicted populace. When the governor opened a credit of 100,000 francs on 27 June to be distributed to the population at the rate of 10 francs per victim, the administration divided the city up by roads and appointed a ten-person subcommittee to decide how to distribute the funds. Some of the money was used to create shelters for the neediest families, while the rest was distributed to the populace on 4 July. The fire's victims presented themselves to the treasury or the revenue office, signing off on the allocated amount of 10 francs. A second credit of 122,320 francs was opened in the same fashion on 21 August,¹⁷⁴ and a third credit of 30,000 francs provided assistance for previously undiscovered indigents at the rate of 36.80 francs per victim. However, the bulk of the *Comité's* funds went toward compensating victims for their structural, property, and commercial losses from the fire at a rate of 10%. Distributing 1.3 million francs by the end of 1891, the local Commission de Secours—the organization tasked with distributing the nationally raised funds—paid out a tenth of the

¹⁷² “Secours aux incendiés de la Martinique et de la Guadeloupe: Liste des souscriptions.” *Journal officiel de la République française*. 13 August 1890 – 30 April 1891. 2400COL, Carton 92. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

¹⁷³ L. Blanchard. « Extrait d’un rapport au sujet des secours et des vivres distribués à Fort-de-France après l’incendie du 22 juin 1890. » 4 February 1892. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

declared value of an individual's losses, which according to official reports by colonial investigators privileged small proprietors over the large.¹⁷⁵

Due to the overwhelming devastation caused by the 1890 fire, as well as the hurricane that followed on its heels in 1891, it took over a decade to rebuild Fort-de-France. Nevertheless, by 1903, nearly seven-eighths of the city had been rebuilt and was described by the US Bureau of Foreign Commerce as a "pretty and interesting town" that was "vastly improved" following the devastation of the 1890 fire. The government of Martinique awarded homeowners 50% of the market value of their burned-down homes in order to encourage reconstruction, paying out a total of 800,000 francs to help defray the costs of rebuilding the city's housing.¹⁷⁶ Moreover, Martinique's General Council provided a credit of 3 million francs through 300,000-franc annuities over a ten-year period to provide assistance to homeowners who lost their homes in the fire.¹⁷⁷ By 1 January 1892, the General Council had already used 260,000 francs of those funds to rebuild 49 homes, and though the 1891 hurricane had significantly slowed reconstruction and posed a host of new problems, colonial investigators acknowledged that the reconstruction of Fort-de-France was proceeding "at great steps."¹⁷⁸ Following the 1890 fire, officials acknowledged the riskiness of the Caribbean's built environment. In their reconstruction efforts, officials mitigated the dangers of earthquakes on the one hand and fires on the other by establishing new regulations that required new wooden homes to be built with a metal framework. Similarly, the town of Port Louis in Guadeloupe revised its construction standards to make homes more resistant to fire.¹⁷⁹

Laicization: Religious Fundraising in Martinique, Lay in the Metropole

Catholicism played an important part in the relief effort, as Martinique had been integrated into the French Catholic Church during the Second Republic, becoming part of a diocese that included Guadeloupe and Réunion. This diocese was attached to Bordeaux, largely due to the close commercial relationship with the city begun during plantation slavery. In a world often characterized by metropolitan Frenchmen as "Ancien Regime," Catholicism played a large role in the everyday life of the denizens of the French Antilles. According to one American priest, "Martinique forms a striking contrast with some parts of France. The Lord's day is well kept, the churches crowded at every religious function and the sacraments are observed frequently."¹⁸⁰ However, unlike the new colonies where French administrators felt strongly that "anticlericalism was not for export,"¹⁸¹ Martinique was not free from the French state's push for

¹⁷⁵ Ibid..

¹⁷⁶ *Commercial relations of the United States with Foreign Countries, Vol. 1.* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Foreign Commerce, US Department of State, 1903), 562.

¹⁷⁷ "Affaires coloniales: la Martinique" *Le Temps*. 17 August 1890.

¹⁷⁸ L. Blanchard.

¹⁷⁹ "Commune du Port-Louis." *Le Journal officiel de la Guadeloupe*. 29 July 1890.

¹⁸⁰ J. M. Desnier. "Martinique: Before and After the disaster of May 8, 1902 – Personal Impressions." *The Messenger: Monthly Magazine*, Vol. 39. (New York: The Messenger, 1903), 135. Retrieved 2 October from Google Books at <http://books.google.com/books?id=SrQOAAAIAAJ&pg=PA135>.

¹⁸¹ JP Daughton. *An empire divided: religion, republicanism, and the making of French colonialism, 1880-1914.* (New York : Oxford University Press, 2006), 6.

laicization and the culture wars that came to characterize the Third Republic. Its bishop was nominated by the government, and then approved by the Church. The 1880 laws that secularized instruction in the metropole were also extended to the old colonies, and the older religious, educational order of the Ploëmel were replaced by secular instructors.¹⁸²

We see this division between religious adherence and mounting republican secularism in the way in which donations were managed. The local Commission de Secours was headed by the Catholic Church, while the metropolitan Comité de Secours was purely a secular organization. We further see this division reflected in the donations themselves: religious organizations accounted for a very small percentage of total donations collected by the metropolitan Comité de Secours, whereas much of the Commission's fundraising took place in parish churches. That is, while virtually all local donations were filtered through the church in Martinique, religious donations raised by the Comité de Secours in the metropole only accounted for 0.26% of all money raised for Martinique and Port-Louis. By contrast, municipal and communal collections in the metropole accounted for nearly 20%; banquets for 11%; educational for 10%; and commercial institutions for roughly 6%. While it is fair to assume that donations originating from metropolitan religious institutions were in fact filtered through the municipal, communal, and public collections, it is nevertheless significant that they were not counted as distinct and were instead folded into the secular metropolitan bureaucracy.

The distinction between a Catholic Martinique and a secular metropole engendered disputes over what the state was obligated to repair. In 1892, when colonial investigators reopened an examination of the distribution of funds and supplies for the victims of the 1890 fire, they were insistent that the state not pay for the reconstruction of religious buildings on the island following the 1891 hurricane. It was the belief of the investigatory commission that the "the state is not fairly obligated to contribute with the communes to such costly expenses for the exercise of religion," but instead should only fund the reconstruction of buildings that serve a "necessary and incontestable public utility."¹⁸³

Although "secularism was not for export" to the colonies at the end of the nineteenth-century, the struggle between secularism and Catholicism came to characterize local understandings of the fire in Fort-de-France and its significance. The disagreement over whether Martinique was a secular or religious space was encoded in the way in which the local press covered the disaster, split between conservatives who saw the fire as an act of God that could be rectified by societal charity and individual faith, and republicans who viewed the entire catastrophe as the machinations of local politics and governmental malfeasance. As the administrative hub of the island, the ashes of Fort-de-France were a backdrop to the political philosophizing of conservatives who had strong allegiance to an old-fashioned understanding of Martinique as a relic of a Catholic Ancient Regime France and republicans framed the disaster in the context of an ongoing political war between leftists under Deproge and centrists under Hurard. Calls to aid from the population were framed in very nationalistic language: those who donated were true patriots, while those who did not contribute were seen as "anti-patriots" who did not hold true to their republican values.

¹⁸² *General Catalog*. 26J1, Archives départementales de la Martinique, Fort-de-France.

¹⁸³ E. Chaudié. « L'inspecteur des Colonies Chaudié, chef de mission à la Martinique, à Monsieur le Sous-Secrétaire d'Etat des Colonies. » 15 January 1892. In *MAR* 72, d.581. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

Nearly an Algeria: the Cultural Significance of Antillean Citizenship and Disaster Relief

Public relief was intricately tied to the legal and cultural incorporation of the French Antilles into the Republic, as well as the extent to which Antilleans were seen as equals to their metropolitan counterparts. At the head of the local relief effort was Germain Casse, the appointed governor of Martinique from 1889 to 1890 and a longtime advocate of equality for French Antilleans. A creole born of an emigrant Frenchman and a local woman in Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe, Casse was also an outspoken supporter of full assimilation of the French Antilles and seen as being “at the helm” of the mulatto politicians.¹⁸⁴ Under the Second Empire, Casse fought for the establishment of a Republic, and during the siege of Paris commanded the 135th battalion of *francs-tireurs*, or irregular troops who used guerilla tactics against the Prussian army. Having expressed his sympathy with the French Commune and later attending the First International, Casse sat on the extreme left of the French national assembly during the early years of the Third Republic, first as the deputy from Guadeloupe and then as the deputy of the Seine.¹⁸⁵ As a radical, he fought to abolish the presidency and secularize the republic, though he became tempered in his radicalism in his later years and sought a rapprochement with parliamentary moderates and opportunist republicans. As a mulatto from Guadeloupe at the center of Parisian politics, he embodied the republican ideals of colonial assimilation, as well as the Third Republic’s penchant for parliamentary dilettantes. And in 1886 he was even the target of an unsuccessful assassination plot carried out by Jean Baffier. A follower of the infamous anti-Semite, Edouard Drumont, Baffier was a deranged nationalist sculptor who saw Casse as an impediment to the reawakening of Gaul.¹⁸⁶ As the following caricature by André Gill’s from the irreverent *Les Hommes d’aujourd’hui* demonstrates, Casse’s contemporaries saw him as a champion for combining the Antilles’ African heritage with French culture during his time in office. *Les Hommes d’aujourd’hui* described him as follows: “His revolutionary temperament, his spirit of independence, his love of liberty, his conscience which clerical education could not diminish, his just sentiments led him to seek emancipation in the Republic and freedom of thought.”¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ Armand Corre. *Nos Créoles*, (Paris: Tresse et Stock, 1902), 222.

¹⁸⁵ Henri Adolphe Lara and Leon Hennique, *Contribution de la Guadeloupe à la pensée française : 1635-1935*, (Paris : J. Crès, 1936), 190-195. Retrieved 6 December 2012 from Manioc at <http://www.manioc.org/patrimoine/PAP11032>.

¹⁸⁶ Neil McWilliam. *Monumental intolerance: Jean Baffier, a nationalist sculptor in fin-de-siècle France*. (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000).

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 190.



Figure 3. Germain Casse with a white French baby on one arm and an African child on the other¹⁸⁸

The cultural importance of the relief campaign, and its connection to Antilleans' citizenship rights, was not lost on the *Comité's* membership, who were interested in bringing relief to the Antilles precisely because they were French and republican. In fact, the “honorary president” of the *Comité* was Victor Schoelcher,¹⁸⁹ the French statesman who championed slave emancipation and black citizenship in the Caribbean. Making his call to the French population's generosity in the *Comité's* official press announcement, Admiral Peyron expressed his certitude that everyone would give generously, “for, it is never in vain that one calls upon the sentiments of solidarity that unite all members of the French family.”¹⁹⁰

The *Comité* successfully appealed to Frenchmen's shared citizenship with their “compatriots” in Martinique. The Parisian newspaper, *Les Tablettes Coloniales*, exclaimed that “the call for help addressed to us by our Antillean compatriots [. . .] will be heard, this cry will not stay without echo. All that is possible to do to help the numerous unfortunate people, France

¹⁸⁸ André Gill. *Les Hommes d'Aujourd'hui*, 2e vol, no. 133. Paris (1881).

¹⁸⁹ “Antilles.” *Le Temps*. 6 July 1890. Retrieved from Gallica on 2 April 2012.

¹⁹⁰ E. Peyron. « Comité de secours aux Incendiés de Fort-de-France (Martinique) et de Port-Louis (Guadeloupe). » 2400COL, Carton 92. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

will do without hesitation, bringing to [the task] full alacrity and heart.”¹⁹¹ The newspaper went on to assert that “this is not only a humanitarian question, but a patriotic duty that everyone in France will be able to understand. [. . .] It is incumbent upon all of France, and by that we mean not only the metropole, but also all its colonies, to come to the aide of this dignified population.”¹⁹² Likewise, imploring fellow citizens to remember “the links which unite you with our colony of Martinique,” Bordeaux opened its own subscription campaign and called upon its citizens to help “your unfortunate compatriots without respite or food,” for the people of Martinique “wait for the *mère-patrie* to lift them from the ruins and assuage the miseries accumulated by this terrible catastrophe.”¹⁹³

There is no doubt that in such familial language we see the sort of paternalism highlighted by many historians of French colonialism. It must be underscored that at this time, Martinique was indeed still a colony, though one with a special place, and as such it was still subject to the eugenic and paternalistic mindset prevalent in turn-of-the-century France. Martinique was described as a tropical version of Ancient Regime France, and most descriptions of the fire were rife with discussions of coconut palms, brightly colored headdresses full of bananas and other tropical fruits, and traditional dances with untraditionally mixed-race peoples.¹⁹⁴ Few articles in Parisian papers, particularly those dealing directly with colonial issues like *Les Tablettes Coloniales*, neglected to append racial typologies to the end of their articles on the Fort-de-France fire: images of the prototypical “creole” woman, the mulatress, or the Negress stood side-by-side with images of the island’s devastated capital city.¹⁹⁵

Nevertheless, several metropolitan cities like Bordeaux underscored their linkages to the island—granted, these linkages had been forged through chattel slavery and the indignity of forced sugar cultivation—and the duties incumbent upon citizens to help one another. While ultimately Bordeaux was not among Martinique’s primary benefactors, the more general linkages between the metropole and Martinique are demonstrated by the scope and spread of the donations received by the *Comité* (Figure 4). The vast majority of the donations received over the course of the *Comité*’s nine-month campaign came from public and communal collections, banquets, and educational fundraising (Figure 8) – in short, the vast majority of money came from everyday Frenchmen and their children.

¹⁹¹ “L’incendie de Fort-de-France.” *Les Tablettes Coloniales*. 29 June 1890.

¹⁹² “L’incendie de Fort-de-France.” *Les Tablettes Coloniales*. 29 June 1890.

¹⁹³ “A la Cité bordelaise.” *Les Antilles*. 26 July 1890.

¹⁹⁴ F. M. “L’Incendie de Fort-de-France.” *L’Illustration*. 5 July 1890.

¹⁹⁵ “L’incendie de Fort-de-France.” *Les Tablettes Coloniales*. 29 June 1890.

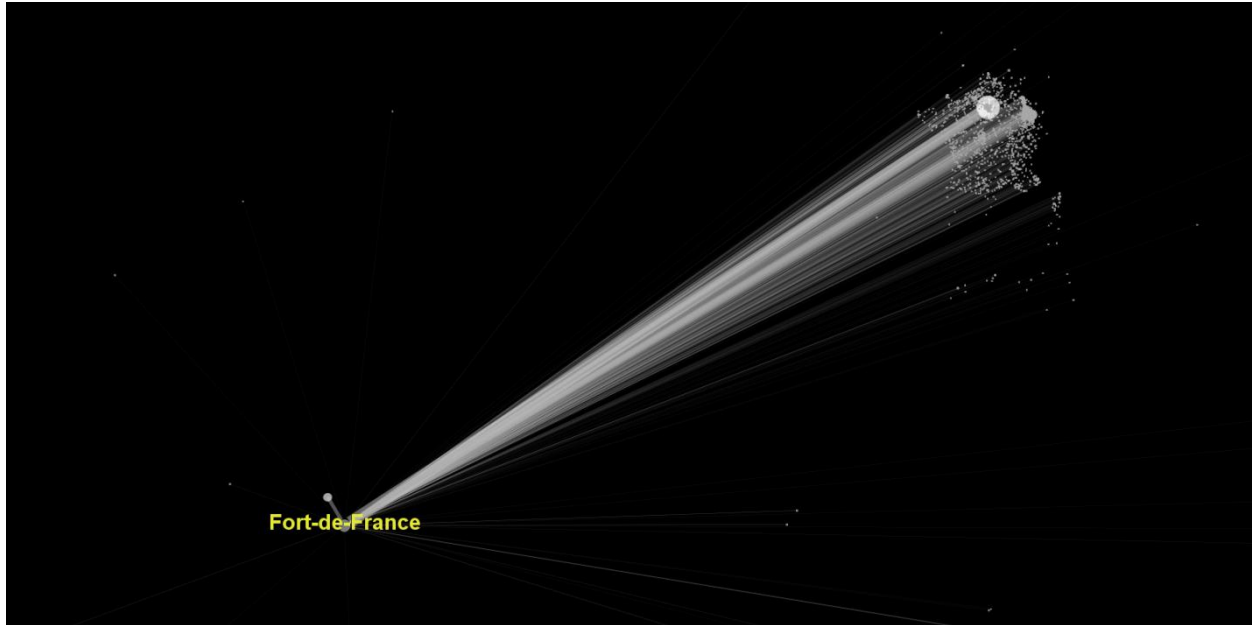


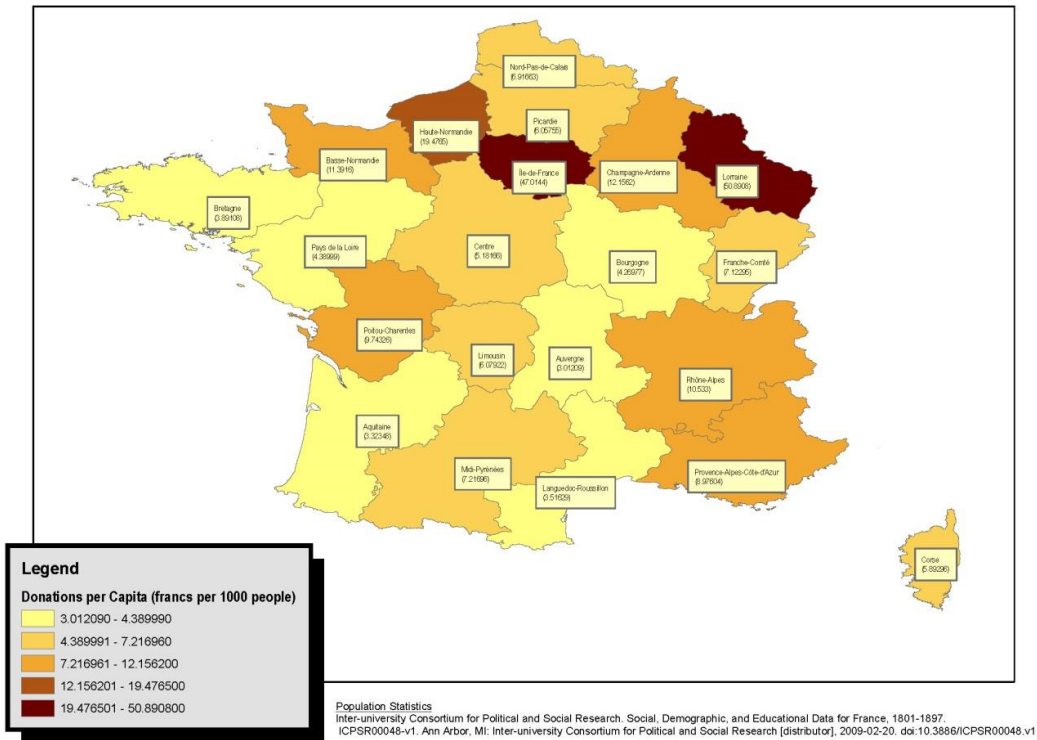
Figure 4. A Geolayout of Donations to Fort-de-France. When the donations are geocoded and plotted, a clearly defined image of France appears, showing that while donations came from all over France, the bulk originated in Paris and Lorraine. Visualization made in Gephi (Nodes and edges shaded and sized according to donation amount by city; 40% opacity on edges; cropped for visibility).

When looking at the spread of donations across France, the breadth of the fundraising campaign becomes apparent (Figure 4). In part, this is likely the byproduct of the Minister of the Interior proclaiming an official subscription in the school system, as well as a testament to the interconnectedness of France by the close of the nineteenth century. The bulk of donations came from public collections, which shows that knowledge of the disaster, as well as an interest in the well-being of the victims, extended across the metropole. According to *L'Illustration*, the news of the fire “caused a commotion in France, because, more than any of our other colonies, Martinique is in constant contact, familial relations most of all, with the mère-patrie. There are few Martiniquais, few families of settlers established there, who don't have very close relatives here. It's nearly an Algeria, if not by extent or proximity, at least by links of the heart.”¹⁹⁶ This sentiment was echoed by the *Journal des Voyages*, a periodical on the colonies geared toward the very school children who were so active in the fundraising campaign.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ F.M. “L’Incendie de Fort-de-France.” *L'Illustration*. 5 July 1890.

¹⁹⁷ F. M. “Les sinistres du monde. L’Incendie de Fort-de-France.” *Journal des Voyages et des aventures de terre et de mer*, no. 684. 17 August 1890. In *Journal des Voyages*, Tome 26, Paris, Librairie Illustree, 1890, p. 118.

Comite des Secours - 1890 Fort-de-France Fire
Donations per capita - francs per 1000 people



Comite des Secours - 1890 Fort-de-France Fire
Donations Per Capita by Department (francs per 1000 people)

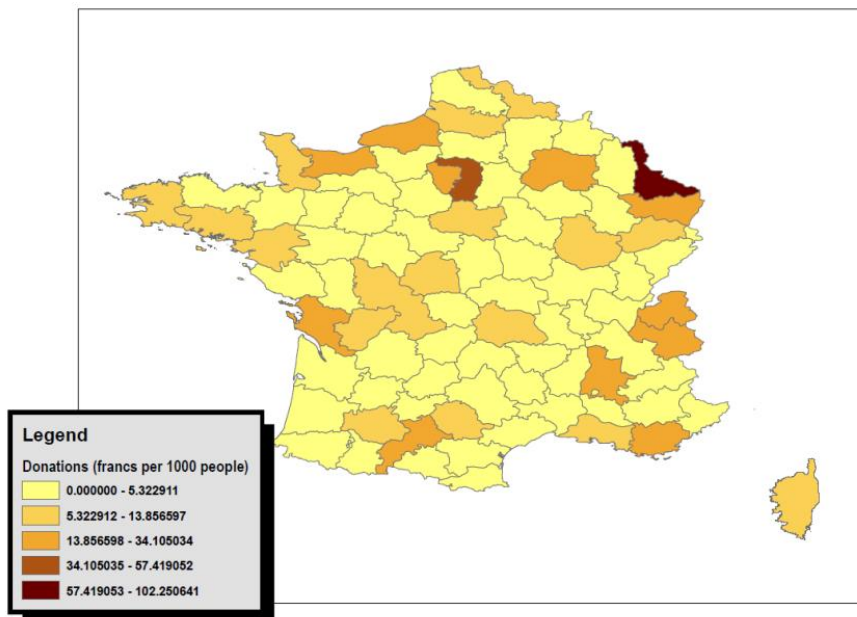


Figure 5. Donations per capita by region of France (*top*); by department (*bottom*) (ArcGIS, data from ICPSR00048-v1. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, 2009-02-20. doi:10.3886/ICPSR00048.v1 and 2400COL, Carton 92, *Archives nationales d'outre-mer*, Aix-en-Provence, France).

Comite des Secours - 1890 Fort-de-France Fire
Donations by Location

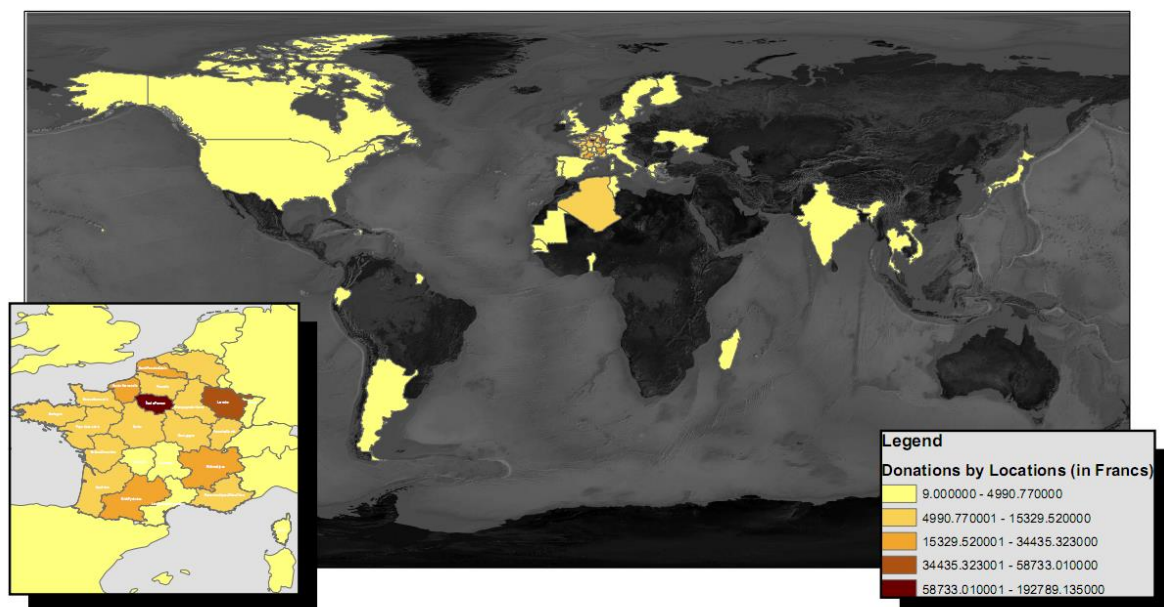


Figure 6. Raw donations worldwide with France insert (ArcGIS, data from ICPSR00048-v1. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2009-02-20. doi:10.3886/ICPSR00048.v1 and 2400COL, Carton 92, Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence, France).

However, what is striking is that the regions of France that were the most ideologically invested in the well-being of their *concitoyens* in the Caribbean were also the least invested financially—discounting Paris, through which all money in France ultimately flowed. The largest donations came not from the mercantile powerhouses of Marseille, Bordeaux, Le Havre, and Nantes that had close economic ties to the Antilles dating to the islands' slave past, but from the fringes of the French nation that had little to no financial connection to Martinique and Guadeloupe (Figures 5, 6, 7). Of the total tonnage of goods arriving in the metropole from Martinique in 1892, 26% arrived in Marseille, 34% arrived in Bordeaux, and the remaining 40% was split between Le Havre and Nantes. In fact, nearly a third of all sugar from Martinique, and a quarter of all commerce, arrived in Marseille alone.¹⁹⁸ While they accounted for roughly two-thirds of all trade with the French Antilles, Marseille and Bordeaux combined donated a total of 0.5% of all money raised for Martinique and Guadeloupe, with Marseille itself falling just behind the far distant Pondicherry. In fact, the Gironde department (Bordeaux) was ranked among the lowest donors per capita, while Loire-Atlantique (Nantes) and Bouches-du-Rhone (Marseille) were in the class of second-to-lowest donors. One exception to this rule was Le Havre, which held a special charity event for which they requested materials to “reconstitute” a model Martiniquais village. Seine-Maritime / Seine-Inférieure (Le Havre) actually ranked among the group second from the top.

¹⁹⁸Chambre de Commerce de Marseille. *Compte Rendu de la Situation Commerciale et Industrielle de la circonscription de Marseille pendant l'année 1892*. (Marseille: Barlatier et Barthelet, 1893), 208. Retrieved 28 Febraury from Google books at <http://books.google.com/books?id=Bg5QAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA208>

Top 12 Donating Departments

Raw Donations		Per Capita Donations (per 1000)	
DEPARTMENT	FRANCS	DEPARTMENT	FRANCS
Ville de Paris	167849.262	Meurthe-Et-Moselle	102.251
Meurthe-Et-Moselle	45507.978	Seine	57.4191
Seine-Maritime	21857.994	Drôme	34.105
Nord	13747.95	Savoie	31.7053
Marne	13398.075	Marne	30.6442
Yvelines	12840.642	Vosges	28.8411
Vosges	11803.797	Var	28.6655
Drôme	10391.292	Haute-Savoie	26.9695
Haute-Garonne	9966.825	Seine-Maritime	26.1825
Charente-Maritime	9527.562	Haute-Garonne	21.4616
Calvados	8395.38	Charente-Maritime	20.93
Savoie	8292.51	Yvelines	20.4214

Figure 7. Top 12 Donating departments, showing that Meurthe-et-Moselle was among second in terms of raw donations and first in terms of donations per capita. Also of interest are the per capita donations from Savoie and Haute Savoie, which due to their recent incorporation into the French nation in 1860 and their deep Italian republican heritage, exhibited a strong commitment to French republicanism and an equally strong distrust of monarchism and bonapartism.

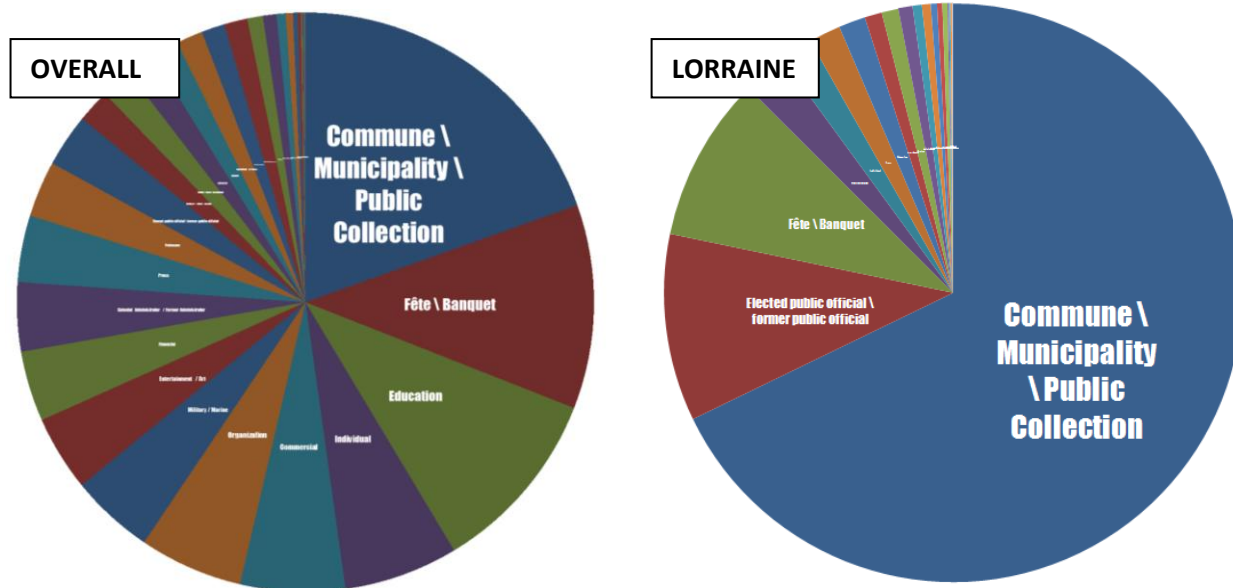


Figure 8. Overall Donations (left) vs Donations in Lorraine (right) received by the *Comité des Secours* broken down by sector¹⁹⁹

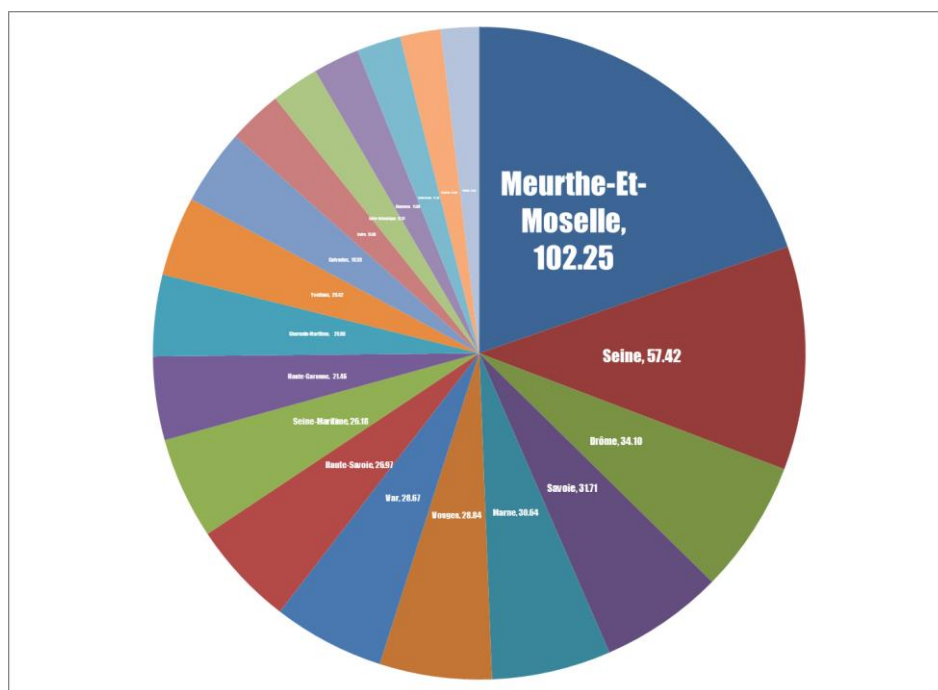


Figure 9. Donations per capita by department (francs per 1000 people) (Excel)

¹⁹⁹ All figures based on: “Souscription en faveur des incendiés de Fort-de-France et de Port-Louis.” 2400COL, Carton 92 Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

The region of Lorraine, specifically the department of Meurthe-et-Moselle, had by far the largest donations per capita at 10 centimes per inhabitant (Figure 7; Figure 9 - *101.25 francs per thousand; median: 22.5; average: 83.3*). The remnants of what was seized by Germany in the Franco-Prussian War, Meurthe-et-Moselle exceeded donations of the far-wealthier and business-oriented department of the Seine, which included the financial powerhouse of Paris. Perhaps a form of its own *revanchisme*, or the need to prove Lorraine's Frenchness after the disaster of the Franco-Prussian War, the disproportionately large donations from Lorraine suggest that the disaster clearly resonated in this rural yet industrializing region. Lorraine was France's primary iron-ore mining region.²⁰⁰ In 1896, Meurthe-et-Moselle was by far France's leading provider of cast iron, mining and smelting over 1.4 million tons (62% of France's total output)—1.2 million more tons than the next highest producing department in France, Le Nord.²⁰¹ Though fairly well-off with a well-balanced economy split between agriculture and industry, Meurthe-et-Moselle was far from fabulously wealthy, lagging behind the Seine with regard to the percentage of the population that lived solely off its own income, with 3.61% of its population able to sustain itself via its own income compared to 5.54% in the Seine or 6.71% in Seine-et-Oise. Meurthe-et-Moselle fell in the 75th percentile,²⁰² which suggests that, unlike more destitute departments like Nord (1.19%; 10th percentile), its population did have the disposable income to donate to causes with which it identified.

²⁰⁰ *Mines and Quarries: General Report and Statistics for 1902: Part IV—Colonial and Foreign Statistics*. Ed. Clement Le Neve Foster. (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1902), 395.
<http://books.google.com/books?id=egcAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA395>

²⁰¹ "Nouvelles Scientifiques." *La Nature: revue des sciences et de leurs applications aux arts et à l'industrie*, no. 1254. Ed. Henri de Parville. (Paris: Masson et Cie, 1897). Retrieved 4 December 2012 from
<http://books.google.com/books?id=eCQAAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA5>.

²⁰² Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research. *Social, Demographic, and Educational Data for France, 1801-1897*. ICPSR00048-v1. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2009-02-20. doi:10.3886/ICPSR00048.v1

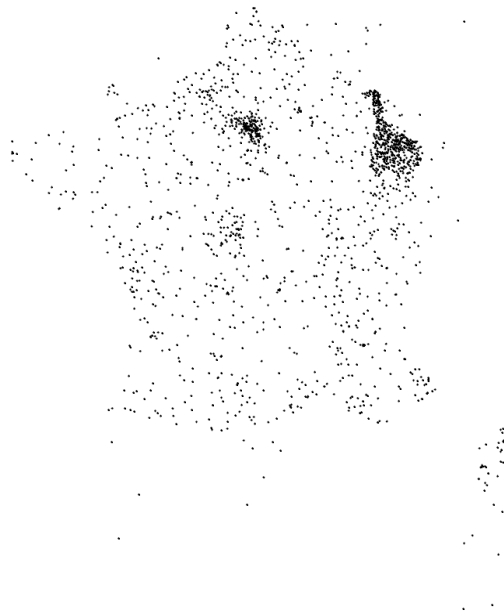


Figure 10. Geo-located donations plotted within France using Gephi

What is astonishing is the coverage of donations from Lorraine (Figure 10). While the bulk of the money raised came from public collections and relief banquets held in Nancy, nearly every commune in the region donated to some degree. It is also likely that this coverage is an indirect consequence of the nationalist campaign in Lorraine, where the “civilizing mission” had sent a legion of cultural ambassadors through the school system to heighten awareness of Lorrainers’ French nationality. The French government used the public school system in Lorraine to acculturate a backward and fairly autonomist peasantry to the cultural mores of the French urban centers, heightening this attempt following the loss of Alsace-Lorraine to Germany during the Franco-Prussian War. As historian Stephen Harp has shown, the French government felt that Lorrainers had to “learn to be loyal” to the French nation, and with the goal of nation-building from 1850 to 1871, the government sent a veritable army of French schoolteachers to the region to teach French history, culture, and language.²⁰³

The widespread support for the French Antilles is connected to the growth of the republican public education system. Schools made up one of the primary donors to Fort-de-France and Port-Louis, because the Minister of Public Instruction authorized collections in all public schools in France.²⁰⁴ Yet even more important was the school’s role in acculturating the populace and encouraging them to donate. The education system’s role as a vehicle for

²⁰³ Stephen L. Harp. *Learning to be Loyal: Primary Schooling as Nation Building in Alsace and Lorraine, 1850-1940*. (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1998).

²⁰⁴ “Dernier heure.” *Les Antilles*. 19 July 1890.

republican values was strongly felt in Lorraine as in Martinique, where middle-class mulattoes were both the island's leading republicans and the primary beneficiaries of a public education system modeled more closely on that of rural regions like Lorraine than on the colonial education system found elsewhere in the French empire.

The disaster spoke to Lorrainers, most strongly to people from the region's most marginal department of Meurthe-et-Moselle, because they had the strongest impetus to prove their republican convictions. As historian Mark Sawchuk has shown with respect to Nice and Savoy, it was precisely those regions within France that had to prove their Frenchness that were the most invested in French republicanism. After hearing the final sum donated by Meurthe-et-Moselle, Colonial Undersecretary Etienne wrote to the prefect at Nancy, "I would congratulate you especially for the remarkable results that you have achieved in this charitable work, and to heartily thank you for the momentum you've given to this movement of sympathetic commiseration that has manifested itself in Meurthe-et-Moselle in favor of our unfortunate compatriots of the Antilles."²⁰⁵ The resonance of this disaster in Lorraine demonstrates the extent to which Lorrainers internalized republican ideals, most notably those of cultural and political assimilation.

Aside from Paris, in which all economic, financial, and bureaucratic functions are centralized, the largest donations came from those regions with the weakest financial ties to the Antilles, as well as the weakest connection to the traditional conceptualization of France. Those departments that donated the most were precisely those that had to prove their French national identity.

Embers in the Ashes: Looters, Brigands, and Smoldering Political Differences

The day after the fire in Fort-de-France, a disgruntled man was arrested in Saint-Pierre near several barrels of oil outside a storefront, shouting, "Down with the 18th of July! Long live the fire!" Though the press labeled him a crackpot, monomaniac or hoaxer, it admitted that there was a palpable—and in their view, justified—fear that the Fort-de-France fire would not be an isolated incident, for "every misfortune that erupts soon finds its counterpart somewhere else."²⁰⁶ The press and authorities anticipated that someone might rekindle the fire in Fort-de-France—or perhaps even spread it to Saint-Pierre—or that panic would throw the entire population into violent pandemonium. In light of fears of disorder and widespread panic, therefore, gendarmes patrolled Fort-de-France in the name of preventing looting, particularly of the storehouses of food at the unburned military base at Fort Louis. In fact, a destitute group of fire victims—whom the press labeled an outside influence—attempted to procure supplies from that military storehouse, where gendarmes intervened with bayonets.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ E. Etienne. « S.S. d'Etat à M. Le Préfet de Meurthe-et-Moselle à Nancy. » 2400COL, Carton 92. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence

²⁰⁵ Le Feu." *Les Colonies*. 11 April 1891.

²⁰⁶ "Nouvelles du Mardi." *Les Antilles*. 25 June 1890.

²⁰⁷ "Derniers Renseignements." *Les Antilles*. 25 June 1890.

The city was placed under a “state of siege,”²⁰⁸ and as the press put it, “Military surveillance is ceaselessly very active and severe in Fort-de-France. It's necessary. Bands of looters, rogues, vagabonds -- those birds of prey that one meets after any tempest, feasting among the debris, those foxes and jackals who live on spoils -- are beginning to infect Fort-de-France, certainty looking to, it is said, revive the fire.”²⁰⁹ In the wake of any natural disaster, the concern of looters and brigands is always a prevailing fear—one thoroughly laced with racism and classism stemming from political tensions that predate the disaster. Looters are more a “social construction” manufactured by sensationalism in the press than a reality.²¹⁰ In fact, sociologists have found that, in contrast to authorities’ fears of widespread panic and disorder, humans tend to create cohesive, task-oriented groups that work together and experience a feeling of “expanded citizenship” in response to disasters.²¹¹ In a world turned upside down, however, one person’s “survivalist” is another’s “looter,” and the distinction is nearly always drawn based on race, class, or politics.²¹² In order to temper, or perhaps to mask, the grievousness—or rather, the baselessness—of “blaming the victim,” the French press tried to paint the “pillagers” as an outside influence disrupting the otherwise tranquil Fort-de-France population.²¹³ Martinique’s republican newspaper, *Les Colonies*, vociferously opposed this assertion, claiming it was an unfair attempt to off-load responsibility onto the rest of the island.²¹⁴

The leading republican paper pinned responsibility on the elected mayor of Fort-de-France, Osman Duquesnay, because he was the leading political opponent of the newspaper’s editor, Marius Hurard, summing it up as follows: “A city burned, 35 million lost, 5000 people without respite [. . .] is certainly a beautiful trophy in the arms of M. Duquesnay. [. . .] Can we at least hope that this will be the last, and that our population, so cruelly struck, will finally open its eyes to the acts of this scoundrel and understand his immorality.”²¹⁵ The great fire, as well as the public’s perceived incompetence of Duquesnay’s response, fed into the ever growing rift in Martinique’s Republican Party after 1885. At the time of the fire, *Les Colonies* was dominated

²⁰⁸ “Nouvelles du Mardi.” *Les Antilles*. 25 June 1890.

²⁰⁹ “Choses de l’incendie.” *Les Antilles*. 28 June 1890.

²¹⁰ Kathleen Tierney, Christine Bevc, and Erica Kuligowski. “Metaphors Matter: Disaster Myths, Media Frames, and Their Consequences in Hurricane Katrina.” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 604, no. 1. March (2006): 57-81.

²¹¹ Thomas E. Drabek. *Human system responses to disaster: An inventory of sociological findings*. (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1986); Russell R. Dynes, *Organized behavior in disaster*. (Lexington, MA: Heath Lexington, 1970); Allen H. Barton. *Communities in disaster: A sociological analysis of collective stress situations*. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969).

²¹² Michelle Miles. *Levees, looters and lawlessness: race, rumor & the framing of Hurricane Katrina*. Thesis (Ph.D.)--University of Colorado at Boulder, 2008; Hillary Potter. “Reframing Crime in a Disaster: Perception, Reality, and Criminalization of Survival Tactics among African Americans in the Aftermath of Katrina.” *Racing the Storm: Racial Implications and Lessons Learned from Hurricane Katrina*. Ed. Hillary Potter. (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2007), p. 51-67. William A. Anderson and Russel R. Dynes. “Civil Disturbances and Social Change: A Comparative Analysis of the United States and Curaçao.” *Urban Affairs Review*, 12 (No. 37), (1976): 37-56.

²¹³ “Extraits du Moniteur de Mercredi.” *Les Antilles*. 28 June 1890 ; Germain Casse. “Le Gouverneur de la Martinique à M. le Sous-Secrétaire d’Etat.” 27 June 1890. Printed in “Incendie de Fort-de-France.” *La Journal officiel de la Guadeloupe*. 4 July 1890.

²¹⁴ “Le Feu.” *Les Colonies*. 15 April 1891.

²¹⁵ “Echos du Jour.” *Les Colonies*. 2 July 1890.

by wealthy middleclass mulattos, whose largest political opponents at the time came from the far left: the socialist republicans led by Ernest Deproge who had split from the Republican Party five years earlier. Though *Les Colonies* framed the disaster in terms of its human costs, its calls for charity revolved around political patriotism and were predicated upon party allegiance.

Tensions flared between the mayor of Fort-de-France, Osman Duquesnay, and Governor Germain Casse, the two of whom shared no love for one another. Casse threatened to imprison Duquesnay at Fort Desaix if any misfortune, fire or otherwise, further befell Fort-de-France.²¹⁶ Undoubtedly a hollow threat, it nevertheless illustrates the level of discord between the municipal and colonial government—a discord that carried throughout the relief effort to follow. Duquesnay argued that Casse had overstepped his legal authority in creating the local Commission de Secours,²¹⁷ and he was disgruntled that his name came below the mayor of Saint-Pierre in the Commission’s roster. In a broadside posted throughout the city, Duquesnay’s political opponents accused him of incompetence and political maneuvering in the face of real disaster.²¹⁸ For center-right republicans, the true culprit was not Casse, but Duquesnay himself and the political infighting he incited in Fort-de-France by being a political opportunist.²¹⁹ In fact, the Hurardist journal, *Les Colonies*, ran for several months and in very large letters a quote by Victor Schoelcher from 1884 lambasting Duquesnay for his political opportunism. The quote from Schoelcher painted Duquesnay as an “unworthy” politician whose place in Martiniquais politics is not only a great shame, but also shameful.²²⁰

While the centrist republican paper, *Les Colonies*, treated the entire catastrophe as a result of the blunderings of the mayor of Fort-de-France, Osman Duquesnay, the conservative, Catholic newspaper, *Les Antilles*, treated the fire as an act of God that could be alleviated by the charity and faith of the good parishioners of Martinique (Figure 11). The conservative paper was geared toward the island’s white plantocracy, and as such it held a strong association with an Ancient Regime France characterized by centralized government. Therefore, in addition to framing the event as a form of divine retribution with a strong financial cost that could be healed through charitable donations, the conservative writers for *Les Antilles* focused much more heavily on the metropolitan government’s response, as well as the role played by the appointed governor. The conservative paper underscore the inequities prevalent among the people of Fort-de-France, even discussing the event as an opportunity for Fort-de-France to mend its ways and stop the persistent political infighting that had come to characterize the island’s locally elected assembly.

²¹⁶ “Dernier Renseignements.” *Les Antilles*. 25 June 1890.

²¹⁷ “Choses de l’incendie.” *Les Antilles*. 28 June 1890.

²¹⁸ “Aux électeurs de Fort-de-France.” 2400COL, Carton 92. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence

²¹⁹ Le Feu.” *Les Colonies*. 11 April 1891.

²²⁰ “Echos du Jour.” *Les Colonies*. 2 July 1890.

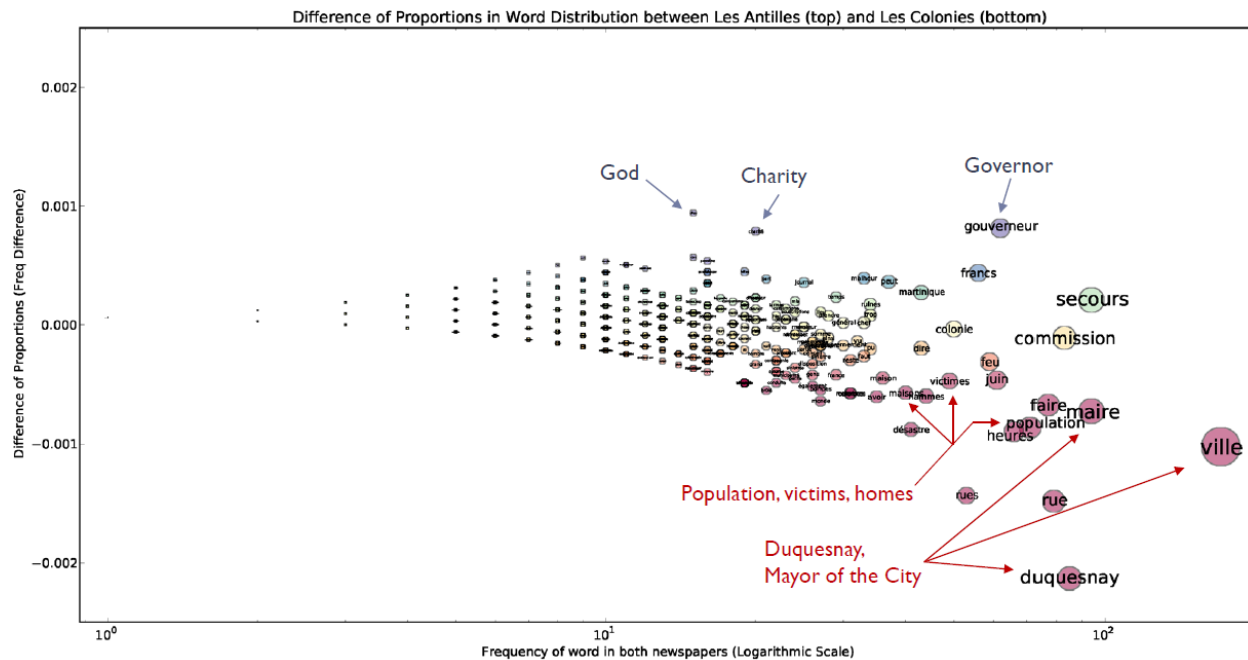


Figure 11. Difference of Proportions between *Les Antilles* and *Les Colonies*. In this graph, more frequent words appear larger and farther along the x-axis. Words associated with *Les Antilles*, the conservative religious journal, appear higher and colored blue, whereas words associated with *Les Colonies*, the centrist republican journal, appear lower and red. We can see that “governor,” “god,” and “charity” are more closely associated with *Les Antilles*, while “population,” “victims,” “homes,” “city,” and “duquesnay” are more closely associated with *Les Colonies*.

A telegram from Saint-Pierre was quick to put the fire in the context of the political battles and social tensions of the late 1880s, casting the fire as further proof that Martinique—“with its discord, hatreds, and excessive ardors”—is like “an overheated machine threatening to erupt.”²²¹ Some Catholics saw the fire as a form of divine retribution, for “God has his designs [. . .] and Fort-de-France had wrongs to right,”²²² and they considered the fire a means of setting the wayward Fort-de-France on the proper path. The biggest wrong in their eyes was impiety and the declining importance of Catholicism—something which by the 1890s was being felt all across France—but religious conservatives also saw Fort-de-France as filled with excessive emotions engendered by political discord—namely due to the 1885 split in Martinique’s Republican Party between Marius Hurard’s Progressives and Ernest Deproge’s Radical Socialists—and the economic downturn.²²³ By the 1890s, labor unrest in Martinique continued to rise due to the volatile world sugar market, eventually culminating in the Antilles’ first general strike in February 1900, covered in Chapter 4. As the press coverage betrays, of primary concern was the financial solvency of the city, and of the greatest losses were the businesses, docks, and sugar refinery at Point-Simon.

²²¹ “Dernier Renseignements.” *Les Antilles*. 25 June 1890.

²²² Ibid..

²²³ In 1885, the Republican Party split when Marius Hurard reached out to the wealthy *békés* who sought autonomy for Martinique, and Ernest Deproge continued to advocate for full assimilation into France. Cleaving the Republican Party in twain, Hurard created the Progressive Republican Party, and Deproge the Radical Socialist Party. See Armand Nicolas. *Histoire de la Martinique de 1848 à 1939*, Tome 2. (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1996), 141-146.

French officials took upon themselves the responsibility of protection and relief, reflecting their own societal and political visions in the relief or reconstruction effort. As journalist Naomi Klein has demonstrated in the *Shock Doctrine*, the growth of liberal, free-market economics fit hand-in-glove with what she terms “disaster capitalism”—or the use of cataclysmic moments to reshape the economic and political world of those affected.²²⁴ In the view of Martinique’s conservatives and their counterparts in Paris, the denizens of Fort-de-France needed to align themselves with “calm, order, and tranquility” in recovering from the disaster and rebuilding the city. The first wave of donations came from financial and commercial powerhouses in Paris, many of whom had financial investments in Fort-de-France.²²⁵ Perversely hoping that the fire had “consumed the discord, hatred, and excessive enthusiasm that boiled over there [in Fort-de-France] as if in a furnace,” conservatives in Saint-Pierre argued that while atrocious, the burning of Fort-de-France presented an opportunity for rebirth:

We’ll see if, with a change in material situation, it’ll bring about change in ideas and feelings. [. . .] City of Fort-de-France, sister city of ours, we take part in your grief; we share, as brothers, your affliction, and we wish to lift you up from your ruins. We will help you even. But lift yourselves up in wisdom. Lift yourselves up with sane ideas, lift yourselves up in right sentiments, lift yourselves up with noble resolutions, lift yourselves up with a greater faith, lift yourselves up with all the elements of a true and solid prosperity.²²⁶

By mid-August, conservatives in Paris began a racially-charged diatribe against the victims in Martinique, asserting that the fire in Fort-de-France was the machination of a corrupt elected official who wanted to win over a disgruntled black population. A sensationalist article in *La Paix* asserted that the fire was an act of political vengeance wherein “a man occupying an elected position set fire to the city with the certainty of being approved by the black population. Negroes repeatedly blocked the efforts of the fire fighters, and Negresses propagated the fire.” The article continues that “this explosion of animosity toward France manifested itself in the same conditions in Port-Louis [Guadeloupe] where the fire was equally set by a criminal hand.”²²⁷ The article was lambasted as inaccurate, ridiculous, and absurd in the Martiniquais journal *Les Antilles*, which underlined the sensationalism as evidence of Martinique’s strained relationship with France.

The *Journal des fonctionnaires* accused Governor Casse of malfeasance, arguing that he delayed in responding to the fire, showed insensitivity by strolling through the still burning streets with a cigar hanging from his mouth, and diverted relief funds from the victims to his political allies. Such negativity toward officials was commonplace at the close of the century, becoming a hallmark of parliamentary politics under the Third Republic. Alleging a track record of “the illegal suppression of the local government, the impoverishment of the colony, [...] [and] his heinous and passionate politics that have furthered divisions,” the *Journal* implored Colonial

²²⁴ Naomi Klein. *The Shock Doctrine: the Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007).

²²⁵ “Souscription en faveur des incendiés de Fort-de-France et de Port-Louis.” 2400COL, Carton 92 Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence. (Donation Database).

²²⁶ “Dernier Renseignements.” *Les Antilles*. 25 June 1890.

²²⁷ “L’Enquête.” *Les Antilles*. 20 August 1890.

Undersecretary of State to remove him lest he siphon off the remaining funds destined to rebuild the city.²²⁸ Casse was reassigned as the treasurer of Guadeloupe on 24 August 1890 and replaced by his own Minister of the Interior, Delphino Moracchini, who had been instrumental in distributing fire relief supplies.²²⁹ Prompted by Duquesnay and the newly appointed governor, the local government conducted an investigation into the appropriation of the relief funds to see if money had been embezzled. The investigatory commission found no malfeasance, identifying only a few negligible irregularities in the distribution of foodstuffs and supplies to the fire victims.²³⁰

Recent sociological studies have also shown that social identification, racial prejudice, historical memory, and media attention heavily influence how survivors, governments, first responders, and the public make sense of disasters.²³¹ Contrary to popular impression, however, the threat of looting and widespread panic following a natural disaster is rarely a viable cause for concern, and when looting does occur in a disaster—or perhaps, to be more accurate, is perceived by authorities—it is often intimately tied to political stresses.²³² Synthesizing sociological findings across numerous disasters in the United States and several abroad, Thomas Drabek has found that “[w]hen victimized by a disaster—be it a flood, tornado, or earthquake—most individuals evidence behavioral continuity and remarkable composure.”²³³ Rather than falling into pandemonium as contemporary news reports cautioned—as they still do today in the wake of Hurricane Katrina (2005), the Haitian earthquake (2008), and the Japanese tsunami and nuclear meltdown (2012)—disaster survivors typical evidence “constructive, goal-directed behavior” that are characterized by acts of selflessness and community.²³⁴ While panic is possible, it is not common enough to merit the attention given by the media, and it represents the extreme end of the spectrum of human responses to disaster situations.²³⁵²³⁶ However, even today, the mass media and official discourse continue to promulgate ideas proven to be false by

²²⁸ “L’Enquête.” *Les Antilles*. 20 August 1890.

²²⁹ “Affaires coloniales.” *Le Temps*. 25 August 1890. Retrieved from Gallica on 8 August 2012.

²³⁰ “Le rapport de la commission d’enquete.” *La Petite France*. 6 December 1890. . In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

²³¹ Angela P. Cole, Terri Adams-Fuller, O. Jackson Cole, Arie Kruglanski, and Angela Glymph. “Making Sense of a Hurricane: Social Identity and Attribution Explanations of Race-Related Differences in Katrina Disaster Response.” *Racing the Storm: Racial Implications and Lessons Learned from Hurricane Katrina*. Ed. Hillary Potter. (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2007), 3-32; Kathleen Tierney, Christine Bevc, and Erica Kuligowski. “Metaphors Matter: Disaster Myths, Media Frames, and Their Consequences in Hurricane Katrina.” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 604, no. 1. March (2006): 57-81.

²³² William A. Anderson and Russel R. Dynes. “Civil Disturbances and Social Change: A Comparative Analysis of the United States and Curaçao.” *Urban Affairs Review*, 12 (No. 37), (1976): 37-56.

²³³ Thomas E. Drabek. *Human system responses to disaster: an inventory of sociological findings*. (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1986), 133.

²³⁴ Timothy J. Singer. “An Introduction to Disaster: Some Considerations of a Psychological Nature.” *Aviation, Space, and Environmental Medicine*. (March, 1982) :245-250. Cited in Drabek. *Human system responses*, 137.

²³⁵ E. L. Quarantelli. “Panic Behavior: Some Empirical Observations.” *Human Response to Tall Buildings*. Ed. D.J. Conway. Stroudsburg, PA: Dowdwen, Hutchinson, and Ross, 1977), pp. 336-350. . Cited in Drabek. *Human system responses*, 137.

²³⁶ E.L. Quarantelli and Russel R. Dynes. “Response to Social Crisis and Disaster.” *Annual Review of Sociology*, 3, (1977): 23-49.

years of empirical research, and these “disaster myths”—most notably the panic myth—have real consequences for how disaster survivors behave and how official authorities respond.²³⁷

Throughout the Third Republic, the French press and authorities underscored the threat of looting in disaster situations, deploying the military for the dual purpose of providing relief and ensuring security and public safety. The *béké*-dominated, conservative press on the island was overwhelmingly fearful of mass panic and looting, and though they were quick to emphasize that the victims were not the perpetrators—that outside elements were exploited the poor and the indigent—they nevertheless underscored the perpetual threat of criminal activity. This desire to safeguard public tranquility against the threat of civil unrest—whether real or imagined following natural disasters—had very real consequences for the population of Martinique. It was this strong desire to keep the peace during the days before the eruption of Mount Pelée, for instance, that kept so many within harm’s way.

Although in many ways the French press “blamed the victim” following the fire of Fort-de-France, it did not do so consistently, oscillating between underscoring similitude with the metropolitan republicans and establishing deviation from true republican values. On the one hand, the citizens of Martinique were “concitoyens” in need, while on the other hand they represented the most radical elements of the French left—“petroleuses”, socialists, and malcontents—as well as the worst that parliamentary government had to offer—electoral fraud, administrative corruption, and embezzlement. The right’s unfounded concerns over looting and the general unruliness of the unwashed masses in Martinique echoed those leveled by the French right within the metropole against their political opponents within the French legislature.

In any case, the parallels drawn with Algeria, which held such an impactful and problematic place in France’s understanding of itself, as well as the depth and breadth of donations received from everyday Frenchmen, suggest we must take seriously the Comité’s appeal to the French citizenry on the grounds of compatriotism and the duty to help beleaguered “concitoyens” the Antilles. Looking at a disaster within the metropole itself, we see the same kind of paternalistic, racist dialogue that underlay public discussions of the Great Fire of Fort-de-France. Moving from “colonial citizens” to what I call “metropolitan colonials”, we will see that the dynamics and paradoxes found in colonial citizenship also apply to denizens of the mainland itself, and late nineteenth-century colonialism cannot be understood strictly in the straightforward geographic terms of “here” and “there.”

From Colonial Citizens to Metropolitan Colonials: The Saint Etienne Mine Collapse

Coal mining is a notoriously dangerous enterprise, and the dramatically increasing demand for coal in the late nineteenth century compounded the danger as coal miners felt the pressure to maximize production at the expense of safety. Like the constant threat of hurricanes, fires, and earthquakes on the faraway island of Martinique, the persistent risk of mine accidents—explosions, floods, and collapses—haunted the small town of Saint Etienne in the heart of France. A small town along the River Furens in the department of the Loire, Saint Etienne has a long history of mining disasters. Not only were the town’s workers constantly in

²³⁷ Kathleen Tierney, Christine Bevc and Erica Kuligowski. “Metaphors Matter: Disaster Myths, Media Frames, and Their Consequences in Hurricane Katrina.” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 604, (March, 2006): 57-81

peril, but the town itself was always at risk of being destroyed, much like cities in faraway Martinique, for the town was actually constructed upon coal deposits and the numerous nearby coal mines had undermined the town with passages.²³⁸ Moreover, officials were similarly concerned with economics; just substitute coal for sugar.

Near midday on 3 July 1889, over 200 miners were buried alive at a coal mine in Saint Etienne when a gas pocket known as a firedamp exploded. Within minutes, 4000 of the town's nearly 111,000 inhabitants had rushed to the nearby mine, along with the police and the mine company's personnel, but given the gruesomeness of the explosion, the main task in the aftermath was not to rescue survivors but to excavate bodies from under 400 meters of earth.²³⁹ For those not killed in the immediate blast, asphyxiation quickly set in, and only a very small portion of the victims were ultimately saved. At least 162 cadavers of the trapped miners were recovered, and of 213 miners who were trapped within the mine that day, only 6 survived.²⁴⁰ The disaster presented a mortal danger to the rescue crews as well. Of the 49 rescuers who were working in the nearby Saint-Louis pit, only two survived. In fact, four rescue workers passed out upon entering the mine—three were revived in open air, one fell to his death—and one rescuer suffocated in a pit that was 1800 meters from the explosion's point of origin.

The disaster on 3 July 1889 was the largest mining catastrophe in France until the Courrières disaster of 1906, and the danger persisted long after the initial explosion. Fires continued to rage in the damaged mines, and the gas pocket continued to menace the workers. For instance, two days after the disaster, at least 60 miners at the Rimbaud pit rapidly evacuated upon noticing an irregularly large flame in their safety lamp.²⁴¹ It took until August 1890 to drain the Saint Louis mine pit after the explosion in July 1889.²⁴² But before the wreckage of the previous catastrophe had been cleared, disaster struck again on the night of 29 July 1890, when over 150 miners working for the Villeboeuf company fell victim to poor ventilation in the Pélissier pits.²⁴³ An explosion ripped through the night air when volatile gases collected once again into a firedamp.²⁴⁴ Enveloping miners in what one reporter called “a hurricane of gas,” this tragedy represented the town's fifth major mining accident in 30 years: an explosion in the Jabin

²³⁸ “Another Mining Disaster, Loss of 200 Lives.” *The Press*. 6 July 1889, p. 5. Retrieved from *Papers Past* at the *National Library of New Zealand* on 5 April 2012 at <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&d=CHP18890706.2.36>.

²³⁹ “Explosion de grisou: 200 victimes.” *Le Figaro*. 4 July 1889. Retrieved from Gallica on 5 April 2012 at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k280811h>.

²⁴⁰ « Note sur l'explosion de grisou du puits Verpillieux. » *Annales des mines, ou Recueil de mémoires sur l'exploitation des mines et sur les sciences et les arts qui s'y rapportent*, 8^e série, Tome XX, Ed. Ch. Dunod, (Paris : Corps nationaux des ponts et chaussées, des mines, et des télégraphes, 1891), 397-408. Retrieved from Google Books on 20 March 2012.

²⁴¹ “Le explosion de grisou.” *Le Figaro*. 6 July 1889. Retrieved from Gallica on 6 April 2012 at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k2808138.image>.

²⁴² *Annales des mines*, 401-403.

²⁴³ “Dernière Heure.” *Le Patriote savoisien*. 31 juillet 1890. Retrieved from Mémoire et actualité en Rhône-Alpes on 16 April 2012 at http://www.memoireetactualite.org/dossiers/catastrophes-minieres/1890-le-puits-pelissier-de-la-compagnie-de-villeboeuf/1890_07_31_patriote_savoisien2/

²⁴⁴ “1890 : Le puits Pélissier de la Compagnie de Villeboeuf.” Retrieved from Mémoire et actualité en Rhône-Alpes on 16 April 2012 at <http://www.memoireetactualite.org/dossiers/catastrophes-minieres/1890-le-puits-pelissier-de-la-compagnie-de-villeboeuf/>.

pits killed 72 miners on 9 October 1871 and then another 200 one month later on 8 November 1871. Another explosion in the Jabin pit in 1875 killed approximately 226 people, with only 100 bodies of the deceased recovered for burial.²⁴⁵ A collapse at Chatelus killed 90 miners on 1 March 1887, and the disaster at the Verpilleux pits in 1889 had killed over 200.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵ “The Late Mining Disaster. The Explosion at Saint Etienne—Terrible Loss of Life.” *New York Times*. 22 February 1876. Retrieved from the New York Times Online Archives on 5 April 2012 at <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F20712FA355B127B93C0AB1789D85F428784F9>.

²⁴⁶ “Catastrophe à Saint-Etienne.” *Le Temps*. 31 July 1890. Retrieved from Gallica on 17 April 2012 at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k232627v.image.langFR>.



Figure 12: Rescuers discover the victims in the Verpilleux pits. (left: *L'Illustration*²⁴⁷; right: *Le Petit Parisien*)²⁴⁸



Figure 13. Miners at work. From this 1890 photograph, you can clearly see what was omitted from the artist's rendition found in *L'Illustration*—namely pants, shirts, boots, and helmets²⁴⁹

²⁴⁷ *L'Illustration: journal universel*. 6 July 1889. Médiathèque de Saint-Etienne. Retrieved from Mémoire et actualité en Rhône-Alpes on 16 April 2012 at <http://www.memoireetactualite.org/dossiers/catastrophes-minieres/2012/02/01/decouverte-des-victimes-de-verpilleux/>.

²⁴⁸ *Le Petit Parisien*, 14 juillet 1889. FPE 1755, Médiathèque de Saint-Etienne. Retrieved from Mémoire et actualité en Rhône-Alpes on 19 October 2012 at http://www.memoireetactualite.org/dossiers/catastrophes-minieres/1889-verpilleux/puits_verpilleux1-2/.

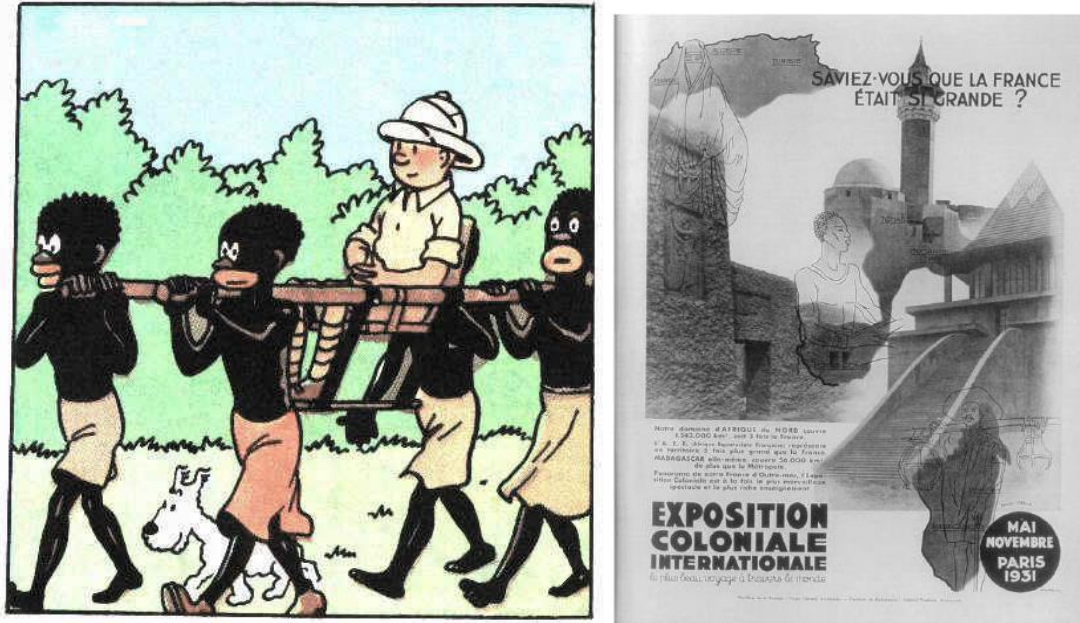


Figure 14. Image from Belgian cartoonist Hergé's popular *Tintin au Congo* (1931); notice the similarities between the cartoon, the “blackened” workers in *L'Illustration*, and the African man in the 1931 Colonial Exposition poster.²⁵⁰

The place of the miners at Saint-Etienne in French society was in many ways analogous to the place of the Martiniquais fire victims. Aside from being in a perpetual state of disaster, standing under Damocles sword, as it were, they were also at the bottom of the social ladder within France, and, as Eugen Weber has shown, had only been recently integrated into the Parisian-dominated French nation-state. As the image above from *L'Illustration* shows (Figure 12), race and class were inextricably intertwined in the French imaginary. Not only were the workers dispossessed of rights, property, and safe living and working conditions, as were their compatriots in the Antilles, they were racialized in a similar fashion. The authors of *L'Illustration* explained that the workers' lips were swollen and their bodies charred from the fire, and that their artist's engraving tried to replicate the, in the author's words, “blackened” nature of the corpses.²⁵¹ Though undoubtedly the miners would have been horrifically disfigured and burned, the artist's rendition of the cadavers replicates far more than mere disfigurement. Nineteenth-century viewers would have readily seen in the image the racial typologies prevalent in France at the time, for the miners had been “blackened” in more ways than one.

According to historian Dana Hale, the most common image of “blackness” during the Third Republic was that of a “black head in silhouette, full view, or profile on trademarks and

²⁴⁹ Carte postale, circa 1890. Médiathèque de Saint-Etienne. FPE 1801 (72). Retrieved from Mémoire et actualité en Rhône-Alpes on 19 October 2012 at <http://www.memoireetactualite.org/dossiers/catastrophes-minieres/2012/01/24/le-creusement-dune-galerie-au-charbon/>>

²⁵⁰ Hergé. *Tintin au Congo*. (Tournai: Casterman, 1974); *Le monde illustré*. July 1931. Cited in Dana Hale. *Races on Display: French Representations of Colonized Peoples, 1886-1940*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 177.

²⁵¹ “Nos gravures.” *L'Illustration*. 11 July 1889.

advertising.” The most prominent features were that of lips, teeth, and hair—features that Europeans saw as distinct from their own—and the most recognizable “African characteristic” was that of overly exaggerated lips (Figure 14). In many scientific circles, eugenicists used Africans’ pronounced lips as “evidence” that they were morally deficient and less evolved than Europeans.²⁵² In the image from *L’Illustration*, the “blackened” miners’ lips are pronounced, and their hair is short, receding, and curled. They bear a closer resemblance to African caricatures (Figure 14) than to either the French rescuer with the lantern entering from the right or the same miners as drawn by the artist from another French paper (Figure 12). Compared to another contemporary image of the same rescue found in *Le Petit Parisien*, it becomes readily apparent that a host of racial and class-based stereotypes are informing the image from *L’Illustration*. Unlike the miners in the image from *Le Petit Parisien*, which shows them as more characteristically “white”, those in *L’Illustration* are shirtless, barefoot, and bereft of any safety gear, suggesting the miners’ inability to take care of themselves as well as their savagery and stupidity. As Dana Hale reminds us, nudity and near-nudity represented African savagery in the press, scientific journals, travel books, and commercial advertisements. The racialized image from *L’Illustration*, therefore, would have reminded nineteenth-century viewers of the racist caricatures found in bourgeois encyclopedias or advertisements, as well as the common depictions of the mulatresses and negresses found in colonial periodicals like *Les Tablettes Coloniales*.

A month after the explosion, writers in *L’Illustration* were calling for a continued parliamentary inquiry into the causes of the explosion, with the hopes that better safety precautions could be taken to prevent another catastrophe. The victims could not recall what had sparked the explosion, so investigators resorted to interrogating workers on their daily routines to ensure that proper safety protocol had been followed. The subtext was that the workers had brought it upon themselves—as evidenced by the lack of any safety gear, let alone clothing, from the workers in the drawing from *L’Illustration*. A similar sentiment echoed throughout the metropole regarding the Fort-de-France fire, for many saw Fort-de-France as underprepared and full of civil and political unrest, and some went so far as to claim that the Martiniquais helped the fire along, acting, in a sense, as the *petroleuses* did during the Paris Commune.

Just like the French Antilles, Saint Etienne experienced a large disaster at a time when it was declining in relative economic importance. As the French Antilles were once the primary producer of French sugar, Saint Etienne was once France’s premier coal-producing region. Both gave way to newer, less expensive production (Figure 15). Sugar production shifted from cane plantations in the Caribbean to beet sugar refineries in Europe. And though coal production and consumption was on the rise at the close of the century, the locus of the coal industry had relocated from the Centre region to collieries in the Nord region, particularly at Pas-de-Calais.²⁵³ Prior to 1863, St. Etienne and the nearby Rive-de-Gier had been the primary coal fields in

²⁵² Dana Hale. *Races on Display: French Representations of Colonized Peoples, 1886-1940*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 24-28.

²⁵³ R. G. Neville. “The Courrières Colliery Disaster, 1906.” *Journal of Contemporary History*. Vol. 13. London, SAGE, (1978): 33-52.

France, but by 1903, 64.5% of all coal production in France was coming from the Valenciennes fields in Pas-de-Calais.²⁵⁴

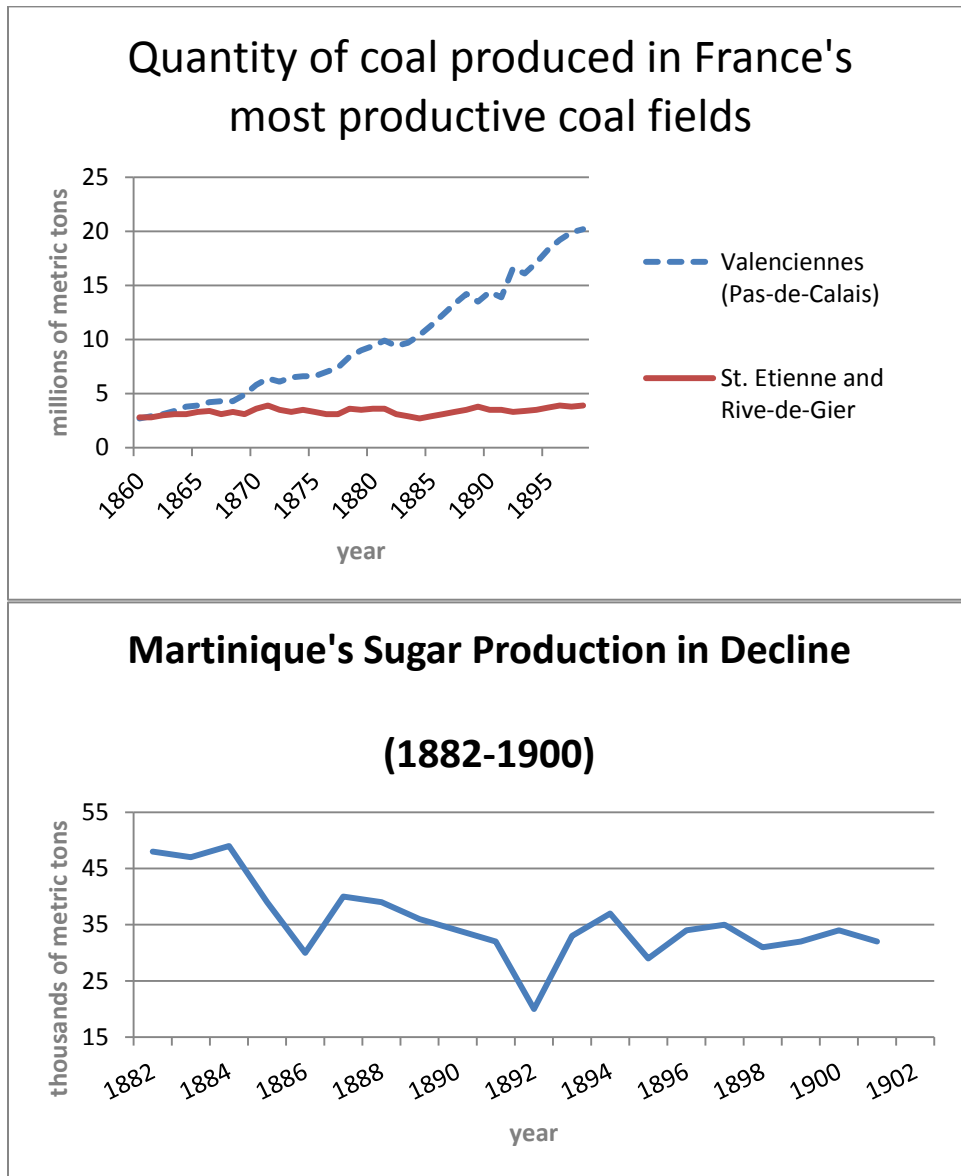


Figure 15: Declining importance of Saint Etienne's coal production as well as Martinique's sugar production²⁵⁵

²⁵⁴ C. Wright. *Twelfth Special Report of the Commissioner of Labor: Coal Mine Labor in Europe*, (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1905), 183

²⁵⁵ Graphs compiled with information from G. M. Rolph. *Something about sugar: its history, growth, manufacture and distribution*. (San Francisco: John J. Newbegin, 1917), 242; P. Chemin-Dupontes. *Les Petites Antilles: étude sur leur évolution économique (1820-1908)*; C. Wright. *Twelfth Special Report of the Commissioner of Labor: Coal Mine Labor in Europe*, (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1905), 186-187

With the memory the previous year's firedamp explosion still fresh, the 1890 disaster, which killed about 120 people and wounded roughly 35,²⁵⁶ became folded into relief efforts for the Antilles. Soon thereafter, donations for Fort-de-France and Port-Louis were supplemented by funds to help the poor miners of Saint-Etienne, and the colonial bureaucracy began fielding money for a metropolitan disaster. Unfortunately it is impossible to track the money through the archives. Since relief aid for Saint-Etienne was outside the mission statement of the *Comité*, the accountant, M. Bertin, forwarded along the money without recording it in his registers or publishing it in the *Journal officiel*. However, what remains in the historical record is a number of letters from donors who saw the two events as interconnected. Unprompted by the *Comité*, donors began sending in money with letters explicitly stating that their donations were destined to help their—in their own words—"compatriots" in the Caribbean as well as in Saint Etienne, and in effect a fundraising committee created out of various offices within the French colonial bureaucracy began handling money for the victims in Saint Etienne as well as those in the Antilles.

Conclusion

The dire situation following the Great Fire of Fort-de-France was met with an outpouring of public support from all across France, as Frenchmen heeded the call for Martinique's compatriots to open their wallets to their brothers in peril. Those regions that had the most tenuous connection to the "French tradition" were precisely the places that donated the most money to help their "compatriots in peril." Moreover, French citizens drew little distinction between a coal mining village, whose inhabitants were themselves struggling for social welfare and work safety, and one of France's economically exploited colonies. As everyday people began sending in money to help their beleaguered *concitoyens* in both Saint-Etienne and the Antilles, the colonial committee that had been created to raise funds for the fires in Caribbean inadvertently began raising money for a metropolitan disaster. Therefore, we must take the donors' choice of words—"compatriots"—seriously; re-examine the weight of republican universalism and how it played loose with geography, in both a positive and negative way; and view both the metropolitan coal miners and Antillean colonial citizens as part of a larger entity: what historian Gary Wilder calls the "imperial nation-state." For at the height of "new imperialism," France had "colonial metropolitans" within its borders and "colonial citizens" without.

²⁵⁶ "La Catastrophe de Saint-Etienne." *L'Univers*. 31 July 1890. Retrieved from Gallica on 17 April 2012 at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k707061s/f2.r=1%27univers.langEN>. Note: Depending on the source, estimates on the dead ran between 113 to 120, while estimates on the wounded ran from 35 to 40.

The hurricane of 18 August was the most violent, certainly the most gruesome, that ever unleashed on the sea of the Antilles; limiting its action to the sole island of Martinique, it seems to have concentrated and exhausted on our unfortunate colony all the rage and destruction that nature holds in reserve.

Report to the Chamber of Deputies
regarding a Proposed Relief Law following
the 1891 Hurricane²⁵⁷

The hurricane completed the work of the fire of 22 June 1890.

B. Guliet, *Journal des Voyages*, 1891²⁵⁸

The losses from the hurricane cannot include the value of structures don't have any. [. . .] [And if the infrastructure] doesn't exist, then what damage can the hurricane do to it?

E. Chaudié, Investigatory Report after the
1891 Hurricane, 1892.²⁵⁹

Chapter 3 – The Calculus of Disaster: The Hurricane of 18 August 1891

The Caribbean—and Martinique in particular—has been ravaged throughout its history by powerful hurricanes and tropical storms, the arrivals of which continue to define Caribbean culture and society to this day. From the poet Daniel Maximin to the author Patrick Chamoiseau, Antillean writers have described life in the Caribbean as shaped by the environment: the tropical sun, cyclonic winds, and torrential downpours have had very real consequences for Caribbean life and society. Not only did the yearly rhythm of hurricanes shape life on the island, it also influenced the island's political and economic development. French officials at the turn-of-the-century viewed the Antilles through the lens of natural disasters, seeing a foreign tropical environment that perpetually threatened French civilization there. However, despite the dangers, they perpetually underfunded the island's infrastructure and predominately focused on economic extraction, all the while trumpeting the extension of French citizenship to those living there.

French officials imagined Martinique as a colony of settlement, a place where settlers created a “faraway France” on the path toward full legal and cultural assimilation, rather than as the colony of extraction it really was. As the oldest and most devotedly republican holding in the French empire, Martinique was treated as more than a colony, but not quite a department. This created a tension between the realities of economic investment and the ideals of cultural and political incorporation. To the chagrin of assimilationist politicians fighting for Martiniquais political rights, Martinique's Frenchness seemed to hinge on its economic utility. Tabulating data

²⁵⁷ Report to the Chamber of Deputies on the Damages of the Hurricane of 18 August 1891. November 1891. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

²⁵⁸ B. Guliet. “Le Cyclone de la Martinique.” *Journal des Voyages et des aventures de terre et de mer*, no. 750. 22 November 1890. In *Journal des Voyages*, Tome 29, Paris, Librairie Illustree, 1891, p. 335.

²⁵⁹ E. Chaudié. « L'inspecteur des Colonies Chaudié, chef de mission à la Martinique, à Monsieur le Sous-Secrétaire d'Etat des Colonies. » 15 January 1892. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

with respect to the island's natural environment and mono-cultural economy, officials subjected the island to financial "profit and loss" analyses and economic valuations. Numbers mattered in the nineteenth century, when the advent of censuses and statistical measuring encouraged officials to comprehend their world through faceless numbers.²⁶⁰

The tension between economic measurement and political ideology came to a head in 1891, when Martinique was hit on 18 August by the largest hurricane to hit the island in several generations. The hurricane came one year after the 1890 fire that burned down Fort-de-France, while the capital city was still in the process of being rebuilt. Many contemporaries drew parallels to the "Great Hurricane" of 1780—the deadliest hurricane in recorded history²⁶¹ that killed around 22,000 people throughout the Atlantic coastal region, with 7000 to 9000 deaths on Martinique alone.²⁶² While it was nowhere near as deadly as the "Great Hurricane"—or even that of 1813 which killed 3000 people across the Caribbean—the 1891 hurricane was still deadly in its own right. Itself the 44th most deadly Atlantic hurricane in the period from 1492 to 1996, the hurricane of 1891 felt superlatively "violent" and "gruesome" because it concentrated its fury almost exclusively on the island of Martinique. Of the 700 people who died during the hurricane,²⁶³ nearly three quarters died in Martinique alone,²⁶⁴ and with over 2000 people wounded, the island's distress was overwhelming. One contemporary observed that "the shock was such [on the night of the hurricane] that most women who were pregnant gave birth to stillborns."²⁶⁵ While likely an exaggeration, this contemporary's assertion nevertheless elucidates the truly strong emotional and physical ordeal experienced by Martinique's population. Over the following months, the hurricane continued to claim victims: from 18 August to 31 December 1891, 1120 people died as a consequence of the hurricane, largely due to poor hygienic conditions.²⁶⁶

With the amount of damage to the economy taken into account, the 1891 hurricane caused more devastation spread more widely on the island than the 1890 fire covered in the previous chapter, which had been in truth a contained phenomenon in Martinique's administrative capital. Most important to French officials, the hurricane had much farther-reaching consequences for the island's plantation economy. At the opening of the extraordinary session of Martinique's General Council, the Minister of the Interior focused on the economic toll of the storm, exclaiming that "prosperous days before, [Martinique] is now more beaten

²⁶⁰ Joshua Cole. *The power of large numbers: population, politics, and gender in nineteenth-century France*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

²⁶¹ Edward N. Rappaport and Jose Fernandez-Partagas. "The Deadliest Atlantic Tropical Cyclones, 1492-1996." *National Hurricane Service*. (Miami, FL: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 1997). Retrieved 30 January 2013 from <http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/pastdeadly.shtml>

²⁶² A. Romer. *Les Cyclones de la Martinique*. (Fort-de-France: Imprimerie du Gouvernement, 1932), 7, 13-14.

²⁶³ Rappaport and Fernandez-Partagas. "The Deadliest Atlantic Tropical Cyclones"

²⁶⁴ Report to the Chamber of Deputies on the Damages of the Hurricane of 18 August 1891. November 1891. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ « Annexe No 2125. Séance du 31 Mai 1892 » *Annales de la Chambre des Députés: Documents parlementaires, Volume 38*. (Paris : Imprimerie des Journaux officiels, 1893), p. 76-77. Retrieved on 11 April 2013 from Google Books at <http://books.google.fr/books?id=E6VDAQAIAAJ&pg=PA76>

down, more ruined than at any other time in its history.”²⁶⁷ In the words of Martinique’s governor, “Since 1817, we haven’t had a disaster so lamentable.”²⁶⁸

The previous year’s fire amplified the relative damage and sense of danger caused by the hurricane. In the island’s capital, a tornado had torn through the city’s recently rebuilt urban landscape, causing over 4 million francs worth of damage to Fort-de-France alone.²⁶⁹ And in the days following the hurricane, the Undersecretary of the Colonies cabled Martinique’s governor, Delphino Moracchini—a Corsican-borne career functionary who had served as the organizer of the 1890 relief campaign under Governor Germain Casse—to inquire whether any funds and foodstuffs remained from the previous year’s relief campaign.²⁷⁰ In response, the governor requested that the central government send as much flour, salted cod, dried legumes, potatoes, and salted meats as possible²⁷¹, for of the 1.7 million francs raised for the 1890 fire, only 75,000 francs remained to put toward the 1891 hurricane.²⁷² In fact, by the end of 1891, the General Council of Martinique had voted to use some of the money received for hurricane relief to instead rebuild some of the buildings that had been destroyed in the 1890 fire, and to use the “relief measures” from the 1891 hurricane to assist the fire victims who were still struggling.²⁷³ Facing financial instability, the government requested a prorogation of all debts for three months, and the Undersecretary tried to arrange a one-million-franc loan to keep the colony solvent, though both measures were summarily denied by the financial minister.²⁷⁴ In short, the 1891 hurricane had put the island under water literally as well as figuratively.

Instead of a million-franc loan, the central government leaved 100,000 francs from their reserve funds to help alleviate the immediate consequences of the hurricane.²⁷⁵ Over the next few months, foreign workers’ organizations, Martinique’s local government, the central French government, concerned individuals, and particularly other Caribbean islands all donated to help

²⁶⁷ Report to the Chamber of Deputies on the Damages of the Hurricane of 18 August 1891. November 1891. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

²⁶⁸ « Gouverneur Martinique à Colonies, Paris. Télégramme no. 11 ». 20 August 1891. . In MAR 76, d.620. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

²⁶⁹ « Procès verbal constatant les pertes occasionnées par le cyclone du 18 août 1891 ». 20 September 1891. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

²⁷⁰ Eugene Etienne. “Du Moniteur du 21 Aout.” *Les Antilles*. 25 August 1891.

²⁷¹ « Gouverneur Martinique à Colonies, Paris. Télégramme no. 18 ». 28 August 1891. In MAR 76, d. 620. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

²⁷² L. Blanchard. « Extrait d’un rapport au sujet des secours et des vivres distribués à Fort-de-France après l’incendie du 22 juin 1890. » 4 February 1892. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

²⁷³ “Le Sous Secrétaire d’Etat des Colonies à Monsieur le Président de la Section des Colonies au Conseil d’Etat.” 1891. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

²⁷⁴ Telegram. Colonies à Gouverneur Martinique. 23 August 1891. . In MAR 72, d.583. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

²⁷⁵ « Délibération de la Commission coloniale en date du 26 Aout. » 26 August 1891. In MAR 72, d.582. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

the 1891 hurricane victims. By December 1891, over 791,000 francs worth of financial and in-kind assistance had been provided “in favor of the victims of the Cyclone of 18 August.”²⁷⁶

Yet, while the 1890 fire of Fort-de-France was met with an outpouring of public support and an overt—if at times, qualified—display of shared compatriotism between metropolitan France and its “colony of citizens” in the Antilles, officials now performed an “economic calculus” of disaster and recovery with regard to the French Antilles. With all the work rebuilding Fort-de-France literally washed away overnight, disaster fatigue had set in. Standing in contrast to the previous year’s fire-relief campaigns, official’s economic calculus ran up against French notions of civic duty toward the French citizens in Martinique who had vocal representation in the French legislature. Using racially-coded terminology and phrases, all the while disregarding the history of slavery that had shaped Martinique’s mono-cultural economy, French officials saw the far-reaching economic consequences of the hurricane and performed a cost-benefit analysis with regard to Martinique’s economic and political status within the French empire. As the French government took stock of the 1891 hurricane, it called Martinique’s “Frenchness” and its belongingness into question, criticizing the Martiniquais for the very socio-economic circumstances that French colonialism had helped to create.

For instance, just days after the hurricane, Martinique’s appointed governor irritated the island’s centrist republican reading public by invoking in a press release the ideals of French ancestry in a lame attempt at encouragement. Moracchini glossed over the island’s complicated history of plantation slavery, ending a public declaration with a call for the Martiniquais to “imitate our ancestors who never new discouragement.” While Moracchini clearly used a vague reference to “our ancestors” in the sense of “the Gauls” or the founders of the French republic, the island’s republican paper, *Les Colonies*, was quick to point out that the ancestors of the Martiniquais were themselves slaves, who had rebuilt the island with their own labor following major hurricanes in 1723, 1724, 1756, 1758, 1766, 1779, 1786, and 1788. Now that slavery had been abolished, the free market established in the colony, and a class of free and independent workers created, the center-right paper feared a form of class warfare that threatened to undo all the hard work and progress since the abolition of slavery in 1848. The republican mouthpiece on the island consequently contended that the French government needed to put its money where its mouth was and inject capital into the island, asserting that at this juncture it was all the more important that the metropole did not “leave its oldest colonies in the Antilles to perish—these old colonies, so devoted and patriotic, that form in reality French departments on the American continent.”²⁷⁷

With the history of plantation slavery embedded in the ministerial and investigatory reports, but actively ignored by French bureaucrats like Moracchini, officials quantified human suffering in charts, graphs, and tables. Therefore, in order to fully understand the weight of republican ideals in the face of outright classism and implicit racism, historians must attend to the cultural, political, and economic importance of natural disasters like the 1891 hurricane, which held to the fire French understandings of shared citizenship and patriotic duty, unearthed and challenged French prejudices, and underscored the ulterior economic and political motives of French officials at the height of French imperial expansion.

²⁷⁶ “Etat des ordres de recettes emis au compte sources en faveur des victims du Cyclone du 18 aout 1890.” In MAR 72, d.582. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

²⁷⁷ “Echoes du jour.” *Les Colonies*. 29 August 1891.

The Howling Wind: a Description of the Hurricane

Around 6pm on 18 August 1891, the most powerful hurricane to hit the French Antilles in over a century made landfall on the eastern side of the island of Martinique. The hurricane was compact, powerful, and fast, rapidly crossing the island in a matter of hours. The tempest had picked up speed as it strengthened over the warm waters of the Caribbean, and Martinique lay in its direct path, receiving the brunt of the storm's most powerful winds along what is known to meteorologists as the eye-wall. The destruction was overwhelming. Counting on the "generosity [of the] Parliament and *concitoyens* [of the] *mere-patrie*,"²⁷⁸ the Governor of Martinique telegraphed the Colonial Undersecretary:

Colony ravaged; towns completely destroyed; plantations* annihilated; sugar cane, colonial services ravaged, foodstuffs disappeared; factories half-demolished; village, rural buildings razed; 50 million in losses; population without respite, without food; famine menaces; aid urgently needed, in food and in money.²⁷⁹

While it is impossible to know the exact strength of the hurricane, eyewitness accounts and contemporary measurements suggest that the storm was small in diameter but intense. Modern meteorologists since 1969 have rated hurricanes and their damage potential according to the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Scale, which ranks hurricanes on a scale of one to five.²⁸⁰ Anything category three or above is considered by modern meteorologists to be a major hurricane due to its potential for substantial property damage and the risk of a significant loss of life. The damage potential of hurricanes category three and above is exponentially greater than those category two and below. In fact, more than three-quarters of all hurricane damage in the United States results from category three, four, or five hurricanes.²⁸¹

²⁷⁸ « Gouverneur à Colonies. » 23 August 1891. In MAR 72, d.582. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

* There are conflicting copies of the telegram: one that says "populations annihilated" and another "plantations annihilated." While it is likely that the real telegram said plantations, the slippage is interesting, because it shows the preoccupation with the economy in the face of human suffering.

²⁷⁹ « Parvenir au département par les soins de M. le Gouverneur. » August 1891. In MAR 72, d.582. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

²⁸⁰ "Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Scale." *Louisiana Geographic Information Center (LAGIC)*. Retrieved on 30 January 2013 from <http://lagic.lsu.edu/hurricanes/saffir-simpson.htm>

²⁸¹ James B. Elsner and A. Birol Kara. *Hurricanes of the North Atlantic: climate and society*. (New York: Oxford University Press. 1999), 23.

CAT.	SUSTAINED WINDS	EST. BARO. PRESSURE (inHg)	EST. STORM SURGE (m)	EXPECTED DAMAGE
1	74 - 95 mph	≥ 28.94	1	SOME
2	96 - 110 mph	28.5 - 28.91	2	EXTENSIVE
3	111 – 129 mph	27.91 - 28.47	3	DEVASTATING
4	130 - 156 mph	27.17 - 27.90	4 - 5	CATASTROPHIC
5	≥ 157 mph	< 27.17	> 5	CATASTROPHIC

Figure 1. The Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Scale with Estimated Barometric Pressures

The reported barometric pressure in Fort-de-France at the time of the storm’s landfall was 28.35 inches of mercury (720 millimeters of mercury), and the pressure at the eye of the storm had dropped to 27.95 inHg (710 mmHg).²⁸² According to the Saffir-Simpson scale as well as modern meteorological data, it can be estimated with a high degree of certainty that the storm was at least a category-three hurricane with sustained winds of 111 to 129 mph, and it is quite possible that the hurricane was a category-four storm with sustained winds of 130 to 156 mph—calamitous in either case. The Saffir-Simpson scale states that a category-three hurricane causes “devastating” damage, and that is with regard to well-built homes constructed according to twenty-first-century standards. The scale rates a category-four hurricane as causing “catastrophic” damage, with large numbers of buildings sustaining severe structural damage and/or being destroyed.²⁸³ Therefore, the damage potential of the 1891 hurricane lay somewhere between devastating and catastrophic.

A great deal of the damage caused by hurricanes comes from the storm surge, or the difference between the normal tide and the storm’s tide. In other words, the storm surge is the amount by which the sea level rises as the hurricane makes landfall, and it depends on the hurricane’s wind speed, among other factors like its forward speed and heading with respect to the shoreline. Although the threat of the storm surge was mitigated to some extent by the storm’s small diameter—storms with a larger surface area produce more significant storm surges—the 1891 hurricane nevertheless produced a great deal of flooding due to the island’s topography. Flooding is largely influenced by the shape and composition of the shoreline, because with the copious rainfall that accompanies hurricanes, flooding typically becomes concentrated in the low-lying areas. Though Martinique is mountainous, much of its farmland and urban space is located in low-lying coastal areas. Coupled with the run-off from the higher altitudes, the

²⁸² Report to the Chamber of Deputies on the Damages of the Hurricane of 18 August 1891. November 1891. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

²⁸³ “Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale.” National Hurricane Center: NOAA. 31 August 2012. Retrieved 29 January 2013 from <http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/aboutsshws.php>

hurricane's rainfall and storm surge utterly destroyed Martinique's urban and agricultural landscape. As an observer of the 1891 hurricane remarked to the Chamber of Deputies, during that "horrible night" of 18 August, "water penetrated everywhere, flooding everything."²⁸⁴

The built environment of the nineteenth-century Caribbean could not stand up against the force of hurricane winds. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the island's homes and structures were mostly built of wood rather than concrete due to the threat of earthquakes, and virtually all construction was weathered by the unforgiving Caribbean elements. Even when it is not further weakened by weathering, wood does not withstand gale-force winds nearly as well as stone or concrete. While the walls of most structures remained, the roofs were often lost and the interior completely destroyed.²⁸⁵ On the one hand, the islands' urban structures, which were often built with undulating roofs of corrugated steel or with overlapping tiles, were quite susceptible to uplift from the pressure differential caused in gale-force winds, easily blowing off and leaving the interior exposed. On the other hand, the homes of the island's rural peasantry had roofs made from cane stalks, which had no hope of withstanding sustained winds of up to 159 mph. For the island's many rural and isolated dwellings, the hurricane proved too much for them to withstand.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁴ Report to the Chamber of Deputies on the Damages of the Hurricane of 18 August 1891. November 1891. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

²⁸⁵ E. Chaudié. « L'inspecteur des Colonies Chaudié, chef de mission à la Martinique, à Monsieur le Sous-Secrétaire d'Etat des Colonies. » 15 January 1892. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

COMMUNE	FRANCS
Saint Pierre	12,191,800
Lamentin	6,569,658
Le Francois	5,665,200
Le Robert	5,407,100
Fort-de-France	4,392,320
La Trinite	4,166,756
Gros-Morne	2,903,266
Marin	2,658,720
Vauclin	2,386,000
Morne-Rouge	2,357,000

Figure 2. Damage by Commune (Top 10)²⁸⁷

Total Damage by Commune (1891 Hurricane)

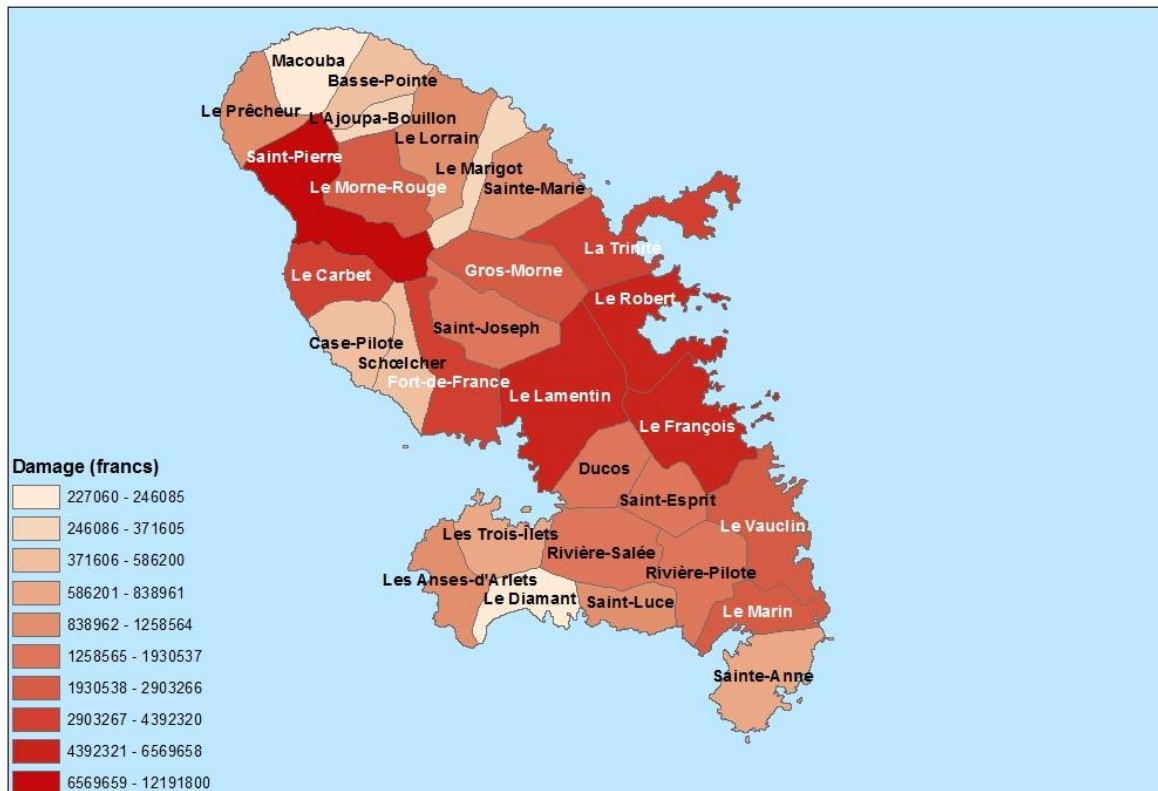


Figure 3. ArcGIS Map showing the Total Damage by Commune with 10 Natural Breaks²⁸⁸

²⁸⁷ Summaries of Deliberations of Communal Commissions. September 1891. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

In correspondence to the table, “Damage by Commune (Top 10),” the map in Figure 3 shows the distribution of damage across the island. Communes that sustained less damage are shaded a lighter color than those with heavier losses. By crosschecking eyewitness reports with a geospatial map of the damage sustained from the hurricane, we can estimate the storm’s path. The hurricane made landfall at the communes of La Trinité and Le Robert. Over the course of approximately three hours, with a brief twenty-minute calm during the storm’s eye, the hurricane successively destroyed the communes of Gros-Morne, Le Lamentin, Le François, Saint-Joseph, and Fort-de-France on its way westward. Reports state that Saint-Joseph, Duclos, le Vauclin, and Gros-Morne were completely destroyed.²⁸⁹ Halted by the heights of Mount Pelée, the hurricane paused as its powerful winds battered the communes in the valley below: Saint-Pierre took the heaviest damage on the island, while the communes of Le Marigot, Lorrain, Basse-Pointe, and Macouba were shielded by the mountain from the storm.

All told, the storm ruined countless cash and subsistence crops, and early reports warned of an oncoming famine.²⁹⁰ For example, the cacao plantations of Le Precheur, as well as the cacao and coffee plantations and subsistence farms of Le Vauclin that had existed for generations, were totally leveled. The sea level rose substantially, hammering ships docked at Saint-Pierre’s port and completely flooding the commune of Le Robert. Schools, churches, city halls, roads, bridges—that is, public infrastructure of all kinds—were all completely obliterated in under three hours. Lines of communications between Fort-de-France and the rest of the island, including Saint-Pierre, were interrupted, and the town of Le Lamentin was completely destroyed. In Morne Rouge, where picturesque and isolated homes dotted the landscape, the tempest destroyed every single “vacation villa” of Saint-Pierre’s wealthy elite. The wanton destruction gave contemporaries the impression that the hurricane was “the most violent, certainly the most gruesome, ever unleashed on the sea of the Antilles; limiting its action to the sole island of Martinique, it seems to have concentrated and exhausted on our unfortunate colony all the rage and destruction that nature holds in reserve.”²⁹¹

Figuring out how best to provide assistance to Martinique was a problem from the outset. Immediately following the hurricane, the government of Martinique realized that it was insolvent and requested a prorogation of all public debts by three months. This request was denied, because such a measure would require a special law passed by the National Assembly. A follow-up request for a loan of 1 million francs, made on behalf of Martinique by Undersecretary Etienne, was also denied on the grounds of illegality. The Minister of Finances argued that it is illegal to loan money by unilateral decree, and that such a measure would need to be deliberated by the National Assembly before being passed as a budgetary law. In his eyes, no matter how sad the situation might be in Martinique, and no matter how noble the aim, legality cannot be

²⁸⁸ Ibid. Shape file of Administrative Communes: *The GADM database of Global Administrative Areas, Version 2*, January 2012. Retrieved 12 December 2012 at <http://www.gadm.org/>

²⁸⁹ E. Chaudié. « L’inspecteur des Colonies Chaudié, chef de mission à la Martinique, à Monsieur le Sous-Secrétaire d’Etat des Colonies. » 15 January 1892. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

²⁹⁰ « Commission coloniale Martinique à Colonies, Paris. Télégramme no. 19 » . 28 August 1891. In MAR 76, d. 620. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

²⁹¹ Report to the Chamber of Deputies on the Damages of the Hurricane of 18 August 1891. November 1891. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

circumvented for any reason.²⁹² Ultimately, the Chamber did provide 100,000 francs in immediate assistance, supplemented by the remaining 75,000 francs from the 1890 fire, though this was a far-cry from the 1 million francs that Etienne had requested.

The Road to Economic Recovery: a Calculus of Human Suffering and Colonial Belonging

The efforts to take stock of the damage began immediately in the wake of the storm. Randomly selecting members from among its assembly, the General Council of Martinique formed a commission the day after the hurricane to estimate the losses caused by the hurricane. After its investigation, which Martinique's Senator Vincent Allègre described as "meticulous", the General Council had calculated that the storm caused 88 million francs worth of damage. Considering that the average yearly wage for a French worker in the metropole during the 1890s was 1,080 francs, paid at 35 centimes per hour,²⁹³ the storm's costs were equivalent to the yearly wages of approximately 81,481 workers, roughly the entire male population of Martinique. To put it simply, the storm had brought the island's economy to a grinding halt. However, the 88-million-franc estimate was seen as extreme. On 25 August, the governor's Direction of the Interior created a commission—called the "Central Aid Commission"—to handle all food and monetary assistance, national and foreign, to Martinique's population. This Commission was presided over by Governor Moracchini and headed by Carméné, Martinique's bishop, as well as Fawtier, the Director of the Interior. It was also tasked with enumerating in greater detail the damages caused by the hurricane. In order to arrive at a new figure, the gubernatorial commission solicited evaluations of losses from the various communes affected by the storm. Each local commune was expected to calculate communal damage, as well as field and substantiate reports of individual losses. On 5 September, the Director asked for a table from each commune detailing the following losses in francs:

²⁹² "Ministre finances à sous-secrétaire d'Etat des Colonies." 26 Aout 1891. In MAR 72, d.583. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

²⁹³ *Salaires et durée du travail dans l'industrie française: Résultats généraux*, Tome IV. Ministère du commerce, de l'industrie, des postes et des télégraphes. Imprimerie nationale, Paris, 1897, p. 16-17.

LOSSES TO THE COMMUNE OF
Colonial works, roads, bridges, and buildings
Communal works, roads, and buildings
Factories
Homes and traditional dwellings outside of towns
Individual homes in the towns
Home furnishings/property
Merchandise
Sugar harvests as a percentage loss based on annual yields
Food harvests, and all others
Total losses of all other sorts

Figure 4. Template proposed by the 5 September Circular from Martinique's Director of the Interior²⁹⁴

In order to answer the director of the interior's request for evaluations, each commune created a local commission, following already-established protocols that had been followed during earlier natural disasters, such as the 1875 hurricane.²⁹⁵ Each municipal commission was comprised of the mayor, the director of the civil engineering service, and the receiver-general (tax official).²⁹⁶ Supplementing property evaluations from the Banque Coloniale, the commission surveyed the towns and countryside; visited agricultural fields and subsistence plots; and consulted administrative and financial documents to arrive at their figures. Inhabitants of the various communes were also encouraged to come forward to report their own losses, which were then verified by delegates of the commission who surveyed the damage for themselves. The commission reserved editorial control and lowered or raised the figures as they saw fit.²⁹⁷ Most of the reported losses were ruined harvests of sugar, tafia, and foodstuffs, as well as damage to plantations and factory equipment. The loss of homes and public infrastructure (roads, bridges, and municipal buildings) were also reported by the communes, but these were largely overshadowed by the commercial casualties.

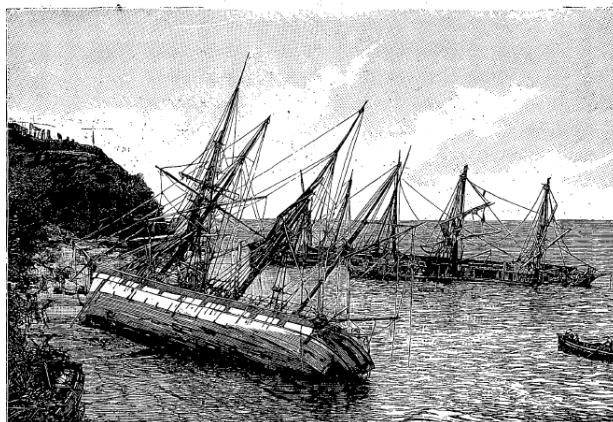
²⁹⁴ Circulaire à Messieurs les Maires de la Direction de l'Intérieure. 5 September 1891. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

²⁹⁵ "Extrait d'une letter du Contre-Amiral Gouverneur de la Martinique." 5 October 1875. In MAR 103, d.931. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

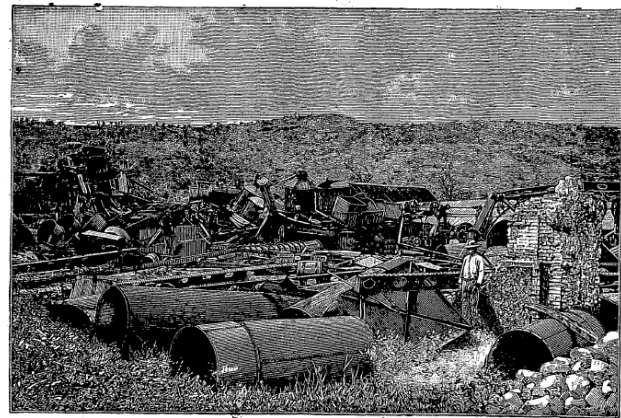
²⁹⁶ Letter from the Governor of Martinique, Moracchini, to the Undersecretary of the Colonies. 29 October 1891. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

²⁹⁷ E. Chaudié. « L'inspecteur des Colonies Chaudié, chef de mission à la Martinique, à Monsieur le Sous-Secrétaire d'Etat des Colonies. » 15 January 1892. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

Faced with the lack of wood, water, and shelter, the Central Aid Commission set about distributing foodstuffs and supplies to the populace, using the 100,000-franc advance provided by the central government as well as the remaining 75,000 francs in supplies and funds remaining from the 1891 fire-relief campaign. Due to the damage to the island's infrastructure, as well as the virtually complete destruction of the island's shipping capacity, the commissioners looked to neighboring islands, such as Saint Lucia, to provide supplies and lend their shipping capabilities. The Commission decided to cede shipping rights to foreign governments in order to get food to the most afflicted areas. Knowing full-well that the hungry population needed food and not money, the Commission resolved to secure foodstuffs, distribute money as well as a pre-determined amount of food aid free to the designated needy, and then sell the foodstuffs to the general population at a fair rate unadulterated by price gouging. In the case that local vendors were suspected of price gouging, municipal stores would be set up as an alternative.²⁹⁸ Local mayors were tasked with distributing both the food and the funds, though they found the task a burden on their local budgets.²⁹⁹ Once the reports came in from the local commissions by the end of September, the Governor ceased requests for food aid and turned instead toward repairing the damage.³⁰⁰



LE CYCLONE DE LA MARTINIQUE. — Des navires échoués au mouillage de l'Anse. (Page 335, col. 2.)



LE CYCLONE DE LA MARTINIQUE. — Ruines de l'usine Dillon, près de Fort-de-France. (Page 335, col. 4.)

Figure 5. Shipping was a real concern following the hurricane. Despite the need to provide humanitarian relief the populace, images accompanying newsreports typically focused on the commercial rather than human losses³⁰¹

²⁹⁸ « Extrait du procès-verbal de la Commission Centrale du secours aux victimes du cyclone du 18 Aout 1891. » 27 August 1891. . In MAR 72, d.582. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

²⁹⁹ « Délibération de la Commission coloniale en date du 26 Aout. » 26 August 1891. In MAR 72, d.582. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

³⁰⁰ "Gouverneur Martinique à Colonies, Paris." 28 September 1891. . In MAR 72, d.582. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

³⁰¹ B. Guliet. "Le Cyclone de la Martinique." *Journal des Voyages et des aventures de terre et de mer*, no. 750. 22 November 1890. In *Journal des Voyages*, Tome 29, Paris, Librairie Illustree, (1891) : 328-329.

Though food and shelter relief was the most immediate concern for some, the impact of the storm on the economy was of the utmost concern for the business elite as well as the laborers they employed. In the initial press reports, ministerial letters, administrative circulars, and communal reports, the inundation of sugar plantations and the destruction of fruit orchards, as well as the destruction of rum distilleries, sugar refineries, and shipping ports, by and large overshadowed the more human consequences of lost homes and ruined subsistence crops. We can see this preoccupation not only in the images that accompanied the news reports (Figure 5), but in the reports themselves. As the conservative, béké-dominated paper, *Les Antilles*, reported on its front page just days after the hurricane, when people were still without food, water, or shelter:

As for the large sugar mills and distilleries that are the powerful lever of our agricultural production—the instrument without which our agriculture would be sterilized—they are deeply affected, some completely destroyed. We know the huge capital allocated to these large industrial facilities—capital exceeding 24 million francs. A small part of that capital has been annihilated, and the rest has been immobilized until the power plants can be restarted after painful repairs.³⁰²

Though many viewed the hurricane through the lens of human suffering, many others saw it in terms of real-politik. As a writer for the colonial paper, *Le Journal des Voyages*, wrote, “with the local resources lacking, there is no doubt that the metropole will come to the aid of this old colony so cruelly afflicted, in order to permit it to [once again] fulfill its strategic function in the Atlantic.”³⁰³ This faith was shared by the local press, which repeatedly asserted its belief that the French government would come to the aid of “one of its most loyal children” if for no other reason than to safeguard the sugar industry.

While the business elite were concerned about lost capital and the damage done to the sugar harvest, the island’s workers were concerned about lost wages, property damage, and where their next meal might come from. In the aftermath of the hurricane, the island’s working class experienced a heightened concern about competition in the labor market due to the fewer number of jobs resulting from the stilted sugar harvest, expressing a growing animosity toward foreign workers from the neighboring British West Indies, regardless of whether or not their labor contracts had been signed before the hurricane struck.³⁰⁴

Tensions rose between those who saw the island’s suffering in terms of economic distress and those who demanded humanitarian relief, and they reached a high point as the local government began trying to take stock of the damage that the press had deemed “incalculable.” While the local General Council had reported 88 million francs in damage to the central French government, Governor Moracchini’s Central Aid Commission calculated only 72 million francs based on the reports received from the local communal administrations. Outraged, Senator Allègre complained to the Undersecretary of the Colonies and began petitioning the Chamber of Deputies. The sixteen-million-franc difference between the cabinet and the General Council

³⁰² “Le Cyclone du 18 Aout 1891 à la Martinique.” *Les Antilles*. 25 August 1891.

³⁰³ B. Guliet. “Le Cyclone de la Martinique.” *Journal des Voyages et des aventures de terre et de mer*, no. 750. 22 November 1890. In *Journal des Voyages*, Tome 29, (Paris : Librairie Illustree, 1891), 335.

³⁰⁴ « Correspondances. » *Les Colonies*. 29 August 1891.

resulted from the General Council factoring in the impact of the hurricane on successive harvest seasons. The gubernatorial commission had only accounted for the impact on the immediate growing season. The disputes over the damage estimations did not end there. The governor himself guessed that there was 35-40 million francs worth of damage, much lower than either the estimates by the General Council or the local communes. This tension strained relations between the island's and the national leadership, and local legislators feared that this number would continue to fall.

ENUMERATED DAMAGES	COST (in francs)
40% of a harvest of 40,000 tons of sugar and 10 million liters of alcohol	8,400,000
Loss of the harvest of 1893 affected by the destruction of the cane	5,000,000
Food-producing habitations (plantations) employing 70,000 people at 200fr. per person	15,000,000
Buildings of 540 sugar establishments	13,500,000
Buildings and machinery of 25 factories	2,500,000
Damage to the Ceramic Industry	400,000
Industrial, commercial, property, and national (direct and indirect costs)	44,000,000
TOTAL	88,000,000

Figure 6. Estimated costs from the 1891 hurricane according to Martinique's General Council³⁰⁵

LOSSES TO	COST (in francs)
The Colony	854,507
The communes	2,797,110
The factories	4,644,650
Rural homes	19,443,086
Urban homes	15,534,475.5
Property/furnishings	6,254,514.5
Merchandise	2,080,397
Cane harvests	10,315,833
Food harvests and orchards	10,100,858
TOTAL	72,025,431

Figure 7. Estimated costs from the 1891 hurricane according to the Gubernatorial Aid Commission³⁰⁶

³⁰⁵ Saint-Felix. *Rapport de la Commission spéciale du Conseil Général sur le cyclone du 18 août 1891*. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

³⁰⁶ Governor of Martinique Moracchini to Undersecretary of the Colonies. 30 September 1891. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

Ultimately it did. By late January 1892, the figure dropped further to 50 million francs, following an administrative report by colonial inspectors sent to Martinique to look into the impact of the hurricane on sugar harvests, the living conditions of the population, and the overall property and structural damage caused by the hurricane. Led by Emile Chaudié, a long-time colonial administrator who would eventually become the first governor general of West Africa (AOF) in 1895, the investigatory commission traveled the island, retraced the steps of the local commissions, and cross-checked figures from financial annuaries and property evaluations. According to investigators, the earlier reports by the local communes could not be trusted: not only did they see them as “exaggerated” and “fanciful,” but in the case of the communes of Le Francois, Le Vauclin, Sainte-Marie, and Saint-Esprit, they found that the appointed local commissions never carried out their in-person inspections or used concrete valuations, but instead submitted guestimates of the total damage.³⁰⁷ Though the investigators did see the situation as desperate, they nevertheless felt that the initial estimates were overblown in the emotion of the moment, and they scrutinized every expense and aspect of the island’s relief effort. They could not understand why each commune reported wildly different amounts of damage, because they argued that materially, each commune should be worth about roughly the same value. Therefore, they concluded that all communes should be subjected to a common measure.

One aspect of the relief campaign that was subjected to the colonial investigator’s scrutiny was the arrival of food aid. In the month following the hurricane, food assistance arrived from Barbados (15,135 francs), Saint Lucia (12,791 francs), Guadeloupe (52,178 francs), and from metropolitan France (158,162 francs). Since so much of Martinique’s food crop had been destroyed, local officials felt that sustained foreign assistance was necessary. Consequently, Saint-Pierre and Fort-de-France requested an additional 1.8 million francs worth of food from the central government. However, in light of the initial 238,000 francs of aid, colonial investigators felt that the island had an abundance rather than a dearth of food supplies, and they alleged that the communal administrators—whom the investigators accused of being concerned only with their own re-election and thus pandering to the masses—gave food to the capable as well as the needy, to those who were just looking for hand-outs as well as the real victims of the hurricane. Inspector Chaudié even criticized the island’s laborers for working the system, traveling great distances to the island’s urban centers to receive aid that they did not really need. He surmised that they were motivated by self-interest, slothfulness, and greed, because the state assistance was worth more than their salaries.

The Central Aid Commission itself had expressed concern about the misuse of materials—or the “mob of abuse in the Communes,” in the words of Bishop Carméné—as well as the waste that accompanied the relief effort’s lack of organization. In order to combat this “mob of abuse” characterized by assistance going to those who “do not really need it,” the Commission resolved that the names of the neediest were to be put on registers by the local commissions, and these registers would need to be approved by the Central Aid Commission prior to the distribution of aid. Though the Governor insisted that the distributions be carried out by the secular local commissions, it was decided that religious charity institutions would verify

³⁰⁷ E. Chaudié. « L’inspecteur des Colonies Chaudié, chef de mission à la Martinique, à Monsieur le Sous-Secrétaire d’Etat des Colonies. » 15 January 1892. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

and distribute the aid only to those named on the approved list.³⁰⁸ However, the Central Aid Commission experienced extreme difficulties coordinating the relief effort with the various mayors on the island, either due to lack of cooperation on the mayors' part or due to lack of organization on the part of the Commission. In a deposition to investigator Chaudié, the mayor of Gros-Morne admitted to having received but ignored the instructions from the Direction of the Interior,³⁰⁹ refusing to restrict access to foodstuffs to only those designated as the "most needy." Instead, the mayor gave food to anyone presented himself at the town hall, providing more or less depending on how "poor" the person seemed. As a result, he was accused, though later cleared, of favoring his own daughter in the provisioning of food aid. Meanwhile, several other mayors never even convened their local commissions,³¹⁰ and the commissions of other towns remained deadlocked in apportioning the aid to their constituents.³¹¹ Compounding the lack of adherence to the directives, communication between the Central and local commissions repeatedly broke down. For instance, food assistance continued to be sent to Le Francois after the mayor had requested that the aid cease.

Upon their review of the manner in which aid was distributed, the colonial investigators echoed the Commission's concerns about assistance going to those who do not "merit" it, and to some degree, they even saw the lack of coordination as a form of malfeasance. Claiming that such "abuse and waste" brought about an "economic and social peril" to the "great detriment of the interests of the treasury," inspector Chaudié felt that the central government "committed a grave error in thinking the hurricane brought famine" and thus needed to rethink how it would distribute public aid. Investigators insisted that public funds go only toward those whom the cyclone left with "neither bed, nor linens, nor rags," for "those who lost nothing but their jewels will get over it, like those who never had any."³¹² This is not to say that the investigators were entirely heartless, for at points Chaudié criticized the Central Aid Commission for dragging its feet in distributing the funds and supplies to the needy.³¹³ He also seemed truly concerned that the actual needy—the sick, old, and utterly destitute—were not receiving the assistance they needed, because the distributions were not being carried out with impartiality.

In general, however, the inspectors were eager to set aside their own sympathy in the interest of fiscal accountability. Though the investigators did underscore the suffering of the population in their report to the Colonial Undersecretary, they nonetheless insisted that human suffering did not warrant what they saw as elevated monetary values. Since poor populations have little to begin with, their losses do not represent high financial stakes. Moreover, the lure of

³⁰⁸ "Commission Centrale de secours aux victims du cyclone du 18 Aout 1891, Troisieme Séance du Samedi 26 Septembre 1891." 26 September 1891. . In MAR 72, d.582. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

³⁰⁹E. Chaudié. « Extrait d'un rapport d'enquete au sujet de la distribution des vivres dans la Commune du Gros-Morne. » 20 January 1892. In MAR 72, d.582. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

³¹⁰ "Commission Centrale de secours aux victims du cyclone du 18 Aout 1891, Troisieme Séance du Samedi 26 Septembre 1891." 26 September 1891. . In MAR 72, d.582. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

³¹¹ E. Chaudié. « Extrait d'un rapport d'enquete au sujet de la distribution des vivres dans la Commune de Sainte-Marie. » 20 January 1892. In MAR 72, d.582. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

³¹² E. Chaudié. « L'inspecteur des Colonies Chaudié, chef de mission à la Martinique, à Monsieur le Sous-Secrétaire d'Etat des Colonies. » 15 January 1892. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

³¹³ E. Chaudié. « L'inspecteur, chef de mission, Chaudié, à Monsieur le Sous-Secrétaire d'Etat des Colonies, à Paris. » 14 January 1892. In MAR 72, d.582. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

financial assistance promoted abuse, waste, and laziness. Therefore, essentially asking if the relief money had been and would continue to be well-spent, the investigators saw the suffering of their Martiniquais compatriots in financial terms—that is, as part of an “evaluative work that is not personal, but based on statistical givens”³¹⁴—and concluded that the assistance had heretofore been a poor investment. Pointing to the land around la Pagerie and les Palmistes, where the land was uncultivated and the dwellings abandoned, the investigators argued that “the losses caused by the hurricane cannot include the value of structures that have none.”³¹⁵ Moreover, inspectors claimed that given that public buildings had already sustained damage in Fort-de-France for reasons other than the hurricane (i.e. the previous year’s fire, as well as neglect), those damages should not be included in the official assessment of total losses. Investigators insisted that the damage estimates should not reflect the costs necessary to completely renovate the damaged structures and homes, restoring them to a like-new condition, but rather to return them to their—in their eyes, often dilapidated—state prior to the arrival of the hurricane. In all, they cut the damage estimates nearly in half, lowering the overall property damage of urban homes from nearly 15.5 million francs to 8.4 million francs.

Laden with implicit racism and classism that denigrated the island’s class of black laborers, the investigators’ skeptical and miserly report superseded both the damage estimates by the General Council and those proposed by the local communes,³¹⁶ and the calculations done by the investigators were not only precise, but manufactured to lower the damage estimates. For instance, Chaudié figured that since the costs of recently-imported zinc, tiles, and other roofing materials only amounted to 600,000 francs, the estimates of structural damage in Saint-Pierre of 2,400,000 francs was felonious. Slashing the original estimates by as much as 75% in some cases—such as the loss of merchandise in Gros Morne, a town which investigators had actually identified as one of the most afflicted by the hurricane—the investigators eventually lowered their estimate even further to 43 million francs, its final resting place.

³¹⁴ E. Chaudié. « L’inspecteur des Colonies Chaudié, chef de mission à la Martinique, à Monsieur le Sous-Secrétaire d’Etat des Colonies. » 15 January 1892. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ E. Chaudié. “L’inspecteur des colonies, en mission, Chaudié, à Monsieur le Sous-Secrétaire d’Etat des Colonies à Paris.” 22 December 1891. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

Gubernatorial Commission (proposed)

LOSSES TO	FRANCS
Colonial roads, bridges, and buildings	854,507
Communal roads, bridges, and buildings	2,797,110
Factories	4,644,650
Rural homes	19,443,086
Urban homes	15,534,475.5
Property/furnishings	6,254,514.5
Merchandise	2,080,397
Cane harvests	10,315,833
Other agriculture (food/orchard)	10,100,858
TOTAL	72,025,431

Colonial Investigators (accepted)

LOSSES TO	FRANCS
Colonial roads, bridges, and buildings	618,038
Communal roads, bridges, and buildings	2,123,500
Factories	3,146,700
Rural homes	12,931,000
Urban homes	8,467,550
Property/furnishings	3,619,000
Merchandise	1,904,500
Cane harvests	5,691,915
Other agriculture (food/orchard)	4,754,800
TOTAL	43,261,000

Figure 8. Estimated costs from the 1891 hurricane according to the Gubernatorial Aid Commission³¹⁷ (left) compared to the final accepted amount determined by the colonial investigators (right).³¹⁸

While the investigators claimed to touch the estimations of the losses felt by sugar cane growers and manufacturers “with the most extreme reserve” and insisted on the urgency of getting the sugar factories running as soon as possible, they nevertheless slashed the local estimates in half. Though Chaudié added a million-franc “coefficient” in the budget for the dashed expectations of an exceptionally bountiful harvest, the inspectors’ valuation paled in comparison to that of local sugar growers. In addition to lowering the losses felt by big industry, the investigators made extensive cuts across the board: homes, communal structures, colonial infrastructure, and personal and public property.

During their inquiry into the use of relief funds following the 1891 hurricane, the investigators even returned to the distribution of food and monetary relief after the 1890 fire, looking for a long history of wasted funds and foodstuffs. The mayor of Fort-de-France, Osman Duquesnay, vociferously denied such allegations, pointing to the investigatory commission that cleared his name in December 1890. However, Colonial Inspector Blanchard concluded in his

³¹⁷ Governor of Martinique Moracchini to Undersecretary of the Colonies. 30 September 1891. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

³¹⁸ « Annexe No 2125. Séance du 31 Mai 1892 » *Annales de la Chambre des Députés: Documents parlementaires, Volume 38*. (Paris : Imprimerie des Journaux officiels, 1893), 76-77. Retrieved on 11 April 2013 from Google Books at <http://books.google.fr/books?id=E6VDAQAIAAJ&pg=PA76>.

report from February 1892 that municipal officials wantonly distributed the public monetary and in-kind assistance with a “general tendency to be ignorant of the individual character of the charitable acts” and to dole out assistance to any “beggar” who presented himself. Frustrated with the general lack of accountability, Blanchard asserted that municipal and military authorities refused to take responsibility for the distribution of donated foodstuffs and supplies, and that these supplies were sold on the black market in some cases.³¹⁹

In the aftermath of the 1891 hurricane, investigators from the Colonial Undersecretary’s Office re-evaluated the efficacy and honesty of the aid distributed by the municipal government of Fort-de-France, and as a result, concluded that national aid from the central government should not come in the form of direct monetary or in-kind relief. Rather than thinking of the individual needy, authorities instead concerned themselves with economics in the abstract, deciding how they should intervene strategically in order to jumpstart the crashing Martiniquais economy in order to help the hurricane’s victims indirectly. For example, with regard to the sugar and tafia industry, the government tried to revitalize the economy and thereby recuperate industrial losses via tax breaks. Though the government did not completely abandon direct relief, its solution was to tie economic assistance to specific and quantifiable property damage. For instance, cocoa and coffee farmers would receive a prime of 1 franc for each destroyed tree that was either 6 or 18 months of age.³²⁰

Overall, the investigators found that the hurricane caused the most harm to the islands’ *cultivateurs* and small planters who worked subsistence and small cash crop plots, as well as the urban population of the sick, old, and young. However, inspector Chaudié had little sympathy for the male and healthy. In his eyes, while the urban factory workers sustained heavy losses, they were part of prosperous industry that paid them for their labor rather than the fruits of that labor, which in turn shielded them from the overall impact of the hurricane on their industry. In fact, he reasoned that their salary would double or even triple in the aftermath of the hurricane, because their labor would be essential to restore the beleaguered sugar market and would thus be in high demand. In Chaudié’s view, wage earners’ suffering paled in comparison to those small farmers—whom he romantically refers to as the “peasants of Martinique”—who had little to begin with, whose very survival depended on their daily toil, and whose crops of manioc, yams, taro, and fruits had been utterly decimated.³²¹

While the inspectors criticized doling out unneeded assistance to the urban or working poor, their rose-tinted view of the countryside encouraged them to provide direct assistance to the Martiniquais peasantry. Inspector Chaudié recommended that the Chamber attribute a fixed sum of 150 francs for the estimated 10,000 owners of rural homes, while the governor’s office estimated that 10,000 subsistence farmers should each receive 50 francs in direct aid (for a total of 500,000 francs) as well as a grant for 6% of their total losses of 10 million francs (which would amount to 600,000 francs). The Chamber of Deputies accepted Chaudié’s conclusion, resolving to distribute the bulk of its direct aid to the population (the *paysans* of Martinique) and

³¹⁹ L. Blanchard. “Extract of a report on the subject of foodstuffs distributed in Fort-de-France after the fire of 22 June 1890.” 4 February 1892. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

³²⁰ “Governor of Martinique Moracchini to Undersecretary of state of Colonies.” 30 January 1892. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

³²¹ E. Chaudié. « L’inspecteur des Colonies Chaudié, chef de mission à la Martinique, à Monsieur le Sous-Secrétaire d’Etat des Colonies. » 15 January 1892. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

give only to the neediest urban populations.³²² For the neediest urbanites, Chaudié recommended that the Chamber allocate an as-yet-undetermined indemnity for those “inhabitants of the villages and towns whom the hurricane left without shelter.”³²³

Chaudié’s glorification of the so-called “peasants” of Martinique reflects a French prejudice to recast Martinique as a colony of settlement as opposed to a colony of extraction, in part to assuage republican guilt about the history of plantation slavery while at the same time being able to figure Martinique into the republican myth of assimilation. This motif—that of the poor, hard-working “small planter” from the countryside suffering at the hands of mother nature—not only figured prominently in the ministerial reports following the 1875 hurricane sixteen years prior, but it also typifies a rural Martinique populated by willful migration and thereby overlooks the legacy of forced migration and unfree labor.³²⁴ During the Third Republic, colonial bureaucrats led by Paul Dislère at the Ecole Coloniale, as well as cultural commentators like August Terrier, referred to the Antilles as the exemplars of French assimilation, as “settlement colonies where a creole race remained very French and where the indigenous peoples acquired a certain degree of civilization. [and the] administration is moreover nearly the same as that of the metropole.”³²⁵ The fact remained, however, that these were not settlement colonies with indigenous populations. Colonization had completely eradicated the islands’ true indigenous populations, supplanting them with forcibly migrated slaves. Frenchmen did not migrate to the Antilles for settlement, but instead invested their money in slave economies of sugar and amassed fortunes from extracted resources and labor. This elision—the reconfiguring of Martinique as a settlement rather than exploitative colony—permitted officials, in part, to look past their own participation in creating the problems that investigators now used as evidence against Martinique’s local damage valuations. To some extent made obsolete by advances in beet sugar production, the now-abandoned plantations like La Pagerie, which Chaudié saw as valueless and thus excepted from the official damage valuations, bear testament to that exploitative past.

If Only We Were a Department: Martinique’s Demand for Aid

In addition to debating the merits of direct versus indirect assistance, officials also pondered whether Martinique should receive the same sort of aid that would go toward a department in a similar situation. Martinique’s General Council fore-grounded the quasi-metropolitan status of the island in its demand for national relief, arguing that while the distress of a department is mitigated by national support, a colony is completely on its own and must pay all its own expenses: “For a French department struck as cruelly as Martinique, rebuilding would be impossible without the powerful and effective help called for by the governor. But for a

³²² « Annexe No 2125. Séance du 31 Mai 1892 » *Annales de la Chambre des Députés: Documents parlementaires, Volume 38*. (Paris : Imprimerie des Journaux officiels, 1893), p. 76-77. Retrieved on 11 April 2013 from Google Books at <http://books.google.fr/books?id=E6VDAQAIAAJ&pg=PA76>

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ “Renseignements complémentaires sur les effets du cyclone du 9 7bre – tremblement du terre à la Martinique.” In MAR 103, d.931. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

³²⁵ August Terrier. “Le Journal des voyages à l’exposition universelle.” *Journal des voyages et des aventures de terre et de mer*, Oct. 21. (1900) : 332.

colony, the state's help is that much more indispensable, not only to rebuild, but also to survive."³²⁶ Faced with a budgetary deficit of 870,000 francs in 1891 and over 1 million francs in 1892, the colony demanded direct national aid and tax relief as if it were a department—and in their estimation, it should be a department—because the colony lacked the necessary money and credit to rebuild its devastated economy and to help the “175,000 Frenchmen [who] were suddenly struck by a catastrophe without precedent.”³²⁷

The discrepancy between the two relief commissions, as well as the fear of an ever-dropping damage estimate from the colonial investigators, was not lost on Martinique's Senator Allègre, who in a letter to the Undersecretary of the Colonies argued that the inspectors—that is, those born in France rather than “in the country itself”—could neither appreciate nor fully comprehend the losses experienced by Martinique's “energetic population who, in trying to lift itself up, will use up its last resources and count on the future as well as the goodwill of the mother country.”³²⁸ To underline the “desperate calls” of France's “unfortunate compatriots” and to express their dissatisfaction with the colonial investigation carried out by the Undersecretary's office as well as the disparity between their estimates and those of the governor's office, members of Martinique's General Council signed onto Senator Allègre's letter to the colonial office of the Ministry of the Marine.

Both the Council and Allègre fixated on the economic impact of the disaster, seeing financial recovery as the best path forward to restoring a sense of normalcy on the island. To this end, they demanded from the central government a tax exemption on Martiniquais sugar and an annual grant accorded to the colony to help balance its budget. With the backing of the Governor, the General Council of Martinique requested a total of 7.6 million francs from the central government, which included, not exclusively, 3 million francs to balance the budget; 800,000 francs in tax and customs relief; and 2 million francs in agricultural primes.³²⁹ Compared to the even reduced 43-million-franc estimation made by the colonial investigators, in the end the central government only offered 3 million francs to balance to colony's budget, which would be provided as an advance that would ultimately have to be reimbursed beginning on 1 July 1898 in ten annuities of 300,000 francs each.³³⁰ It was further recommended, though not legislated, that the money be distributed as follows:³³¹

³²⁶ Report to the Chamber of Deputies on the Damages of the Hurricane of 18 August 1891. November 1891. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

³²⁷ Letter from M. Allègre to Undersecretary Etienne. 9 November 1891. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Telegram. Fort-de-France to Colonies. 18 November 1891. In MAR 72, d.583. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

³³⁰ “Letter from Martinique's Direction of the Interior to the Undersecretary of State.” 19 November 1891. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

³³¹ « Annexe No 2125. Séance du 31 Mai 1892 » *Annales de la Chambre des Députés: Documents parlementaires, Volume 38*. (Paris : Imprimerie des Journaux officiels, 1893), p. 76-77. Retrieved on 11 April 2013 from Google Books at <http://books.google.fr/books?id=E6VDAQAIAAJ&pg=PA76>; also, M. Chautemps. “Rapport fait au nom de la commission du budget chargée d'examiner le projet de loi portant ouverture, au Ministre de la Marine et des Colonies (2^e section. – service colonial), sur l'exercice 1892 d'un crédit de 3,000,000 de francs à titre d'avances à la colonie de la Martinique. » *Chambre des députés, 5^e législature, session de 1892*. In MAR 72, d.582. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

AMOUNT (in francs)	DESTINATION
550,730	Tax relief on customs duties on sugar and tafia
449,250	Restoration work necessary to repair the damage caused by the hurricane
2,000,000	Allocations (<i>primes</i>) to small planters

Figure 9. Allocation of Funds on Budgetary Advance to Martinique, 31 May 1892

However, in a presentation to the Chamber of Deputies, representatives from Martinique insisted that while direct aid would help tremendously in rebuilding public infrastructure and homes in the island's cities and towns, it would not be enough to help the island's rural "peasant" population of subsistence growers nor the large industrial cane growers. Calling to mind the precedent of custom duties and tax relief following the 1817 hurricane in Martinique and various others afflicting Réunion, and pointing out that the state would not hesitate to provide such relief to metropolitan departments, such as those grape growing regions plagued by phylloxera, they asked for an exemption on property taxes and export duties on both sugar and tafia to help the large plantations, and in turn requested that a portion of the tax revenue left to the cane planters be used to assist the island's peasantry, for "[i]n this manner we will stop the culture of death, that is to say, we will save Martinique itself."³³² The planter lobby even used their relatively small impact on the metropolitan market as ideological leverage: since they only produce 30 to 40 thousand tons normally, they figured, relaxing the tax duties will negatively impact neither the domestic beet sugar nor the colonial cane sugar markets. Rather, the representatives felt that the state had a moral duty to help the Martiniquais sugar economy, which in turn would help the island's peasantry. Ultimately, however, these proposals were denied, because the colonial investigators had deemed that the hurricane's impact did not extend beyond the 1892 sugar harvests and thus there was no need to grant a five year exemption.³³³ In light of the inspectors' reports, the Chamber decided that a tax exemption would be unwarranted, because the crops, which Chaudié had said "suffered little," were expected to rebound quickly. Therefore, the only measure proposed to assist "the unfortunate *concitoyens* in Martinique" was a loaned budgetary advance of 3 million francs to be distributed as Martinique's General Council saw fit.³³⁴

Calling to mind the privilege of departments compared to colonies, Senator Allègre demanded a law identical to that which provided aid to Nice following a large earthquake in February 1887 that was centered in the nearby Italian Alps. The earthquake in the Alps had incurred costs in Menton of about 7 to 8 million francs, and damages in Nice of about 1.5 million francs. With the law of 22 July 1887, the central government borrowed 4.6 million francs from

³³² Report to the Chamber of Deputies on the Damages of the Hurricane of 18 August 1891. November 1891. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

³³³ « Annexe No 2125. Séance du 31 Mai 1892 » *Annales de la Chambre des Députés: Documents parlementaires, Volume 38*. (Paris : Imprimerie des Journaux officiels, 1893), p. 76-77. Retrieved on 11 April 2013 from Google Books at <http://books.google.fr/books?id=E6VDAQAIAAJ&pg=PA76>

³³⁴ Ibid.

the Credit Foncier de France to help the region rebuild. The central government took responsibility for 3/5 of the loan and left 2/5 to be repaid by the department. Much like investors' concerns about the economic impact of the hurricane in Martinique, both the Crédit Foncier and the central French government were well aware of the financial necessities and risks of rebuilding the towns of Menton and Nice in the metropole. In 1887, the government found such a deal to be feasible, citing that since the Credit Foncier had "considerable engagements" in the department of Alpes-Maritimes, loaning money for reconstruction would be to the bank's benefit.³³⁵

In response to pressure from Senator Allègre and Martinique's general council, both of whom deemed the central government's response underwhelming two-and-a-half months after the hurricane, Colonial Undersecretary Etienne argued that the government's response would be "analogous" to the aid it gave to the Alpes-Maritimes department, including a grant to help meet local budgetary shortfalls.³³⁶ Senator Allègre had emphasized that departments in France had access to support, supplies, and funds unavailable to colonies, which in his estimation were expected to stand alone with only a yearly budgetary allowance as assistance. Therefore, he put pressure on Undersecretary Etienne, who in turn conceded to find support equitable to that given to departments in emergency situations.

On 25 November, the Crédit Foncier responded to the central government's request for a loan on Martinique's behalf, agreeing to provide the funds at an interest rate of 4.10% if the state were to authorize the loan with a law and guarantee its repayment.³³⁷ The terms would require the state to repay the entirety of the loan, rather than splitting the loan between the colony and the state. The Undersecretary intervened, claiming that the rate was too high, and that he expected the Crédit Foncier to accept terms analogous to the agreement made with regard the 1887 earthquake in Alpes-Maritimes. In response, the Crédit Foncier insisted that such terms were impossible, because it was only authorized to loan to departments. In fact, the only colony it could loan money to was Algeria, and beyond that, the bank had no organized service or presence in Martinique. However, the bank did agree to lower the interest rate to 4%.³³⁸

The Undersecretary of State of the Colonies then turned to the Caisses d'Amortissement, the governmental body in charge of public debts, to see if it could intervene or loan the money to Martinique on behalf of the central government. After a meeting of the board, the General Director of the Caisses d'Amortissement informed the Undersecretary that loaning money to a foreign entity—in this case, a colony—would be a "difficult accomplishment" that would violate the organization's traditions, and thus it would be impossible.³³⁹ Under pressure from the

³³⁵ Notes from the Conseil Général regarding the earthquake in Alpes-Maritime. 22 July 1887. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

³³⁶ "Letter from the Undersecretary of State of the Colonies to Allègre, Senator from Martinique on 21 November 1891." Reprinted in *Mémoire présenté à M. le Sous-Secrétaire d'Etat des Colonies à l'occasion du Cyclone de la Martinique*. Paris, Imprimerie Chaix, 1891. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

³³⁷ "Crédit Foncier de France à Monsieur le Sous Secrétaire d'Etat." 25 November. 1891. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

³³⁸ "Crédit Foncier de France à Monsieur le Sous Secrétaire d'Etat." 22 December. 1891. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

³³⁹ "Director General of the Caisses d'Amortissement to the Undersecretary of State." 16 January 1892. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

Undersecretary to circumvent “the difficulty,” the Caisses responded by agreeing to loan the money directly to the colony, rather than to the affected proprietors, as was done by the *Crédit Foncier* in the Alpes-Maritimes.³⁴⁰ This would allow the state to guarantee 3/5 of the loan, as had been done in Alpes-Maritimes. However, the deal would be contingent on the proof of the loan’s importance, an agreement on the amortization schedule, and the strength of the guarantees provided by the state.³⁴¹ In short, getting the loan for Martinique on terms equitable to those provided to Alpes-Maritime was a tall order.

Both the hesitation on the part of the *Crédit Foncier* and the *Caisses d’Amortissement*, as well as Colonial Undersecretary Etienne’s insistence on an agreement analogous to that made for the Alpes-Maritimes, speak to the incomplete integration of Martinique into the domestic sphere in 1891. While the language used by the Colonial Undersecretary emphasized compatriotism and Martinique’s General Council underscored the island’s “near departmental” status, both financing institutions shied away from breaking with their “tradition” of lending only to full departments and resisted giving money to a colony on such lenient terms.

It would be a Mistake to Consider Martinique a Department

Like the *Crédit Foncier*, others questioned treating Martinique in the same manner as an afflicted department. Faced with the devastating effects of the hurricane that were multiplied by the previous year’s fire in Fort-de-France, the Chamber of Commerce of Bordeaux directly called into question the place of Martinique as a near “department” of France. Instead, the Chamber insisted that though Martinique is “one of the oldest and most loyal overseas possessions,” it is a colony nonetheless. In the Chamber’s eyes, Martinique was nothing more than a colony of extraction characterized by a monoculture of sugar cane, and investing in a colony with a bleak economic outlook was bad business:

It would be a mistake, ahead of the planned assimilation, if we considered Martinique to be a French department, ignoring the profound divergences created by its geographical, physical, and agricultural situation. French Departments form a whole--if not uniform, at least almost homogeneous. Their extent, the variety of their cultures, their many industries, their intimate union, the proximity of communal assistance, the flexibility and multiplicity of mechanisms of public credit--all of these allow for a speedy recovery in a community struck by an event of major force. Moreover, [in such an event] all the means of public wealth are not extinguished in one fell swoop.

Martinique, like all the West Indian colonies, is isolated at a large distance from the mother country: deprived of industry, Martinique has only agriculture and the trade closely depends on agriculture. [. . .] All the means of livelihood in the country, all

³⁴⁰ “Undersecretary of State to the *Caisses des Dépôts* “. 27 January 1892. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

³⁴¹ “General Director of the *Caisses d’Amortissements* to Undersecretary of State.” 29 February 1892. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

means of existence therefore, for both the poor as well as the rich, for the proletarian and proprietor, depend solely on sugar cane.³⁴²

Bordeaux's economic calculus applied to Martinique's wellbeing stands at odds with the general outpouring of "patriotic" support during the fires the previous year; though we must recall that Bordeaux was among the bottom tier of donors, and even during the height of public support for the fire victims, in the background we heard the concerns of agitated investors fearful that the Martiniquais sugar economy would falter. In the case of the 1891 hurricane, commerce and agriculture—in other words, sugar production—was at the forefront of the minds of many. As Bordeaux asserts, it's not personal; it's just business. Though shared culture and the myth of assimilation might compel France to treat Martinique as a department—or at least, a "near department"—Bordeaux's Chamber of Commerce provided a calculated reminder that economics trump culture, that giving Martinique aid as if it were a department would be a fiscal blunder.

Echoed by the Chambers of Commerce of Le Havre and Marseilles, supported by the local General Council of Martinique, and even advocated by Martinique's Senator Allègre, the solution put forth by the Chamber of Commerce of Bordeaux asserted that the best and most direct avenue toward recovery—that is, the best way to ameliorate the destitution of the island's denizens—would be to grant a tax exemption on sugar and tafia.³⁴³ In the words of Martinique's General Council, "What industry has created, it's up to industry to recreate. [. . .] It's through the import tax, the most powerful social agent there is, that we must ask the state to save us."³⁴⁴ Faithful that "the metropole will not leave her loyal Martinique to die," the General Council asked for a complete prorogation of all taxes (import, export, rent, property, etc.) for the year of 1892, and a successive reinstatement of taxes in 20% intervals for the five years after that (i.e. taxes attenuated to 80% of their pre-1891 amounts in 1893, 60% in 1894; 40% in 1895, 20% in 1896; and 0% in 1897).

In drafting their response to the hurricane, the Chambers of Commerce called to mind the government's response to "sugar crisis" of 1884: keeping cheap German beet sugar out of French markets by introducing foreign tariffs and a taxation scheme that encouraged better mechanization by taxing sugar yields in relation to the number of beets grown. With tax breaks and taxation schedules set in 1884, governmental intervention favored the producers of domestic beet sugar rather than the consumers.³⁴⁵ Following the hurricane, the metropolitan Chambers of

³⁴² "Letter from the Chef du 3e Bureau to the Chamber of Commerce of Bordeaux on 29 September 1891." reprinted in *Mémoire présenté à M. le Sous-Secrétaire d'Etat des Colonies à l'occasion du Cyclone de la Martinique*. Paris, Imprimerie Chaix, 1891. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

³⁴³ "Letter from the President of the Chamber of Commerce of Marseille to the Undersecretary of the Colonies on 7 November 1891." reprinted in *Mémoire présenté à M. le Sous-Secrétaire d'Etat des Colonies à l'occasion du Cyclone de la Martinique*. Paris, Imprimerie Chaix, 1891. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

³⁴⁴ Saint-Felix. *Rapport de la Commission spéciale du Conseil Général sur le cyclone du 18 aout 1891*. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

³⁴⁵ O. P. Austin. *The World's Sugar Production and Consumption showing the Statistical Position of Sugar at the Close of the Nineteenth Century*. (Washington, DC: United States Department of the Treasury, 1902). Retrieved from Google Books on 16 January 2013.

<http://books.google.com/books?id=TGouAAAYAAJ&pg=PA2607&lpg=PA2607>. Also, Frank Roy Rutter.

Commerce were pushing for a similar response for Martiniquais cane sugar, asking for a significant reduction in taxation for Antillean sugar that would effectively increase production.

In order to secure the assistance of the metropole, Martinique's sugar planters in Saint-Pierre sent a joint letter to the Undersecretary on 2 March 1892 outlining the dire situation of the island's economy, the key importance of sugar cultivation, and the breadth of the devastation following the 1891 hurricane.³⁴⁶ Asserting that the situation in Martinique was direr than that of the Alpes-Maritimes region 4 years prior—that the Alpes-Maritime agreement sought by Etienne was actually too little rather than too much assistance to the island's economy—the planters of Martinique, with the backing of Martinique's Chamber of Commerce, the agricultural syndicate, and the manufacturing syndicate, made the accusation that such “assistance has never been refused in the metropole to industries that have never experienced suffering as terrible as what we've just experienced.” Dissatisfied with the reports furnished by the colonial investigators, the planters and the syndicate claimed that official reports overlooked the indirect effects of the hurricane. For example, they alleged that electrical storms desiccated the sugar crop, which lowered crop yields by at least 25% and in turn affected molasses production. Since the sugar crop represented 97% of the colony's economic production, the agricultural and manufacturing syndicates purported that the livelihood and well-being of everyone in the colony—not just the wealthy landowners, but everyone from “city workers, to *cultivateurs*, to merchants, to proprietors, to manufacturers”—was at stake, because no secondary crops stood in line to replace the devastated sugar economy.³⁴⁷ In their estimation, the moral and “democratic” thing to do would be to support Martinique's decimated sugar production through tax relief and assistance in the amount of 13 to 14 million francs, far more substantial than proposed, and that an agreement analogous to that made in Nice would actually privilege the urban spaces over the rural and do little to jumpstart the sugar economy. The sugar planters on the island underscored the preeminence of the island's sugar monoculture, viewing tax and customs relief rather than direct public assistance as the true way to alleviate suffering on the island.

However, although inspectors Chaudié and Blanchard had thoroughly slashed the original damage estimates by submitting Martinique's suffering to an impersonal calculus, they nevertheless felt that some sort of direct loan to the colony was a viable, if qualified, solution to rebuild the island's colonial and communal buildings.³⁴⁸ Chaudié explained that the reconstruction must be warranted, however: “the metropole can only make financial sacrifices in favor of a department or a commune insofar as the expenditures for which it loans its aid are put toward buildings that serve a necessary and public utility.” Therefore, he argued that the state should not rebuild the island's many churches and rectories, which only serve a religious function, and should instead only fund the reconstruction of the vital communal buildings that serve a secular or administrative function. This ran counter to the interests of the Central Aid

International Sugar Situation: Origin of the Sugar Problem and its Present Aspects under the Brussels Convention. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1904). Retrieved from Google Books on 16 January 2013.
<http://books.google.com/books?id=1H7ecBBQbSAC&pg=PA58>

³⁴⁶ “Governor Moracchini to Undersecretary of State: Transmission of a letter from representatives of the sugar industry.” 4 March 1892. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ E. Chaudié. « L'inspecteur des Colonies Chaudié, chef de mission à la Martinique, à Monsieur le Sous-Secrétaire d'Etat des Colonies. » 15 January 1892. In MAR 72, d.581. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

Commission in Martinique, which not only had a the Bishop of Martinique on its governing board, but also did not distinguish between private, public, and religious institutions. For instance, in November 1891, the Commission allocated 3000 francs to assist nuns of the Déliverance from Morne-Rouge.³⁴⁹

By May 1892, Undersecretary Etienne had abandoned the plan to secure a loan on terms analogous to that received by the department of Alpes-Maritimes, even in its mitigated form which treated the colony itself as the borrower rather than those afflicted citizens who lived there. In light of the colonial investigation, the Chamber decided that the damages did not warrant that degree of assistance, and that the lure of 2 million francs worth of direct subsidies would engender far too much corruption.³⁵⁰ While the sugar industry was pushing for more aid than was originally proposed, the central government was only willing to grant less. It was ultimately decided that the colony would only receive the aforementioned loan of 3 million francs, which it would pay back in full in installments of 300,000 francs beginning in 1898.³⁵¹ This loan was made official on 20 July 1892, when the President of the Republic, Marie Francois Carnot, signed it into law.³⁵² All the valuations—whether done by the General Council, the municipal commissions, or the colonial investigators—were irrelevant to the final decision. That is, the entire investigatory work done by Chaudié, his willingness to slash valuations throughout his endeavor to lower the estimated damages from 88 million to 43 million francs, was an exercise in futility utterly unrelated to the real aid provided by the metropolitan government.

The Méline Tariff of 1892

With the rise of empires and the return of protectionist economies, the close of the nineteenth-century saw the sunset of what historian Eric Hobsbawm deemed “the age of capital”—that “enlightened, sure of itself, self-satisfied”³⁵³ age when governments had an unshakable faith in free market economics, state non-intervention, and aggregate statistics. Though the sun was slow to set, France had lost its faith in the international free market by the 1890s. Officials’ economic calculus of disaster and recovery ran side-by-side with debates throughout 1891 and 1892 about the passing of a new customs law that would break down tariffs between France’s colonies and the metropole, effectively bringing the Antilles and France into the same tax zone. The law of 11 January 1892—named the Méline tariff after its champion, Jules Méline—was protectionist in nature. Designed to protect national agricultural interests, stabilize domestic prices, and protect the French domestic market from perceived external threats, the Méline tariff ended France’s thirty-two-year flirtation with free trade following the

³⁴⁹ « Commission Central de Secours aux victimes du cyclone du 18 Aout 1891. 4^e Séance du Vendredi 13 Novembre 1891 » In MAR 72, d.582. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

³⁵⁰ « Annexe No 2125. Séance du 31 Mai 1892 » *Annales de la Chambre des Députés: Documents parlementaires, Volume 38*. (Paris : Imprimerie des Journaux officiels, 1893), p. 76-77. Retrieved on 11 April 2013 from Google Books at <http://books.google.fr/books?id=E6VDAQAIAAJ&pg=PA76>

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² “Loi portant ouverture au ministre de la marine et des colonies (2e section—Service colonial), sur l’exercice 1892, d’un crédit de 3 millions à titre d’avance à la colonie de la Martinique.” *Journal officiel de la République Française*, No. 196. (21 July 1892).

³⁵³ Eric Hobsbawm. *The Age of Capital : 1848-1875*. (London: Abacus, 1995), 16.

Cobden-Chevalier Treaty of 1860.³⁵⁴ At the same time that the metropolitan agricultural sector was floundering in the international market, the Martiniquais economy was struggling due to widespread agricultural devastation.

That the old colonies were folded into the domestic market by the 1892 customs tariff demonstrated that they were economically considered part of France, as were all of France’s colonies under this law.³⁵⁵ However, as historian Christian Schnakenbourg points out, the customs law of 1892, which proclaimed the principle of “customs assimilation into the metropole,” was nothing more than an inequitable half measure that created a new form of subordination: integration into the metropolitan economy.³⁵⁶ Although the Antilles were considered part of the metropole when it came to purchasing foreign goods, they still had to pay a customs tariff—though, at a preferential rate—when selling goods in the metropole. The Méline tariff was an important, if incredibly problematic, step toward the old colonies’ eventual integration into the French nation as a department in 1946. However, in their integration into the metropolitan economy, the Antilles were also met with discrimination in the domestic French market.

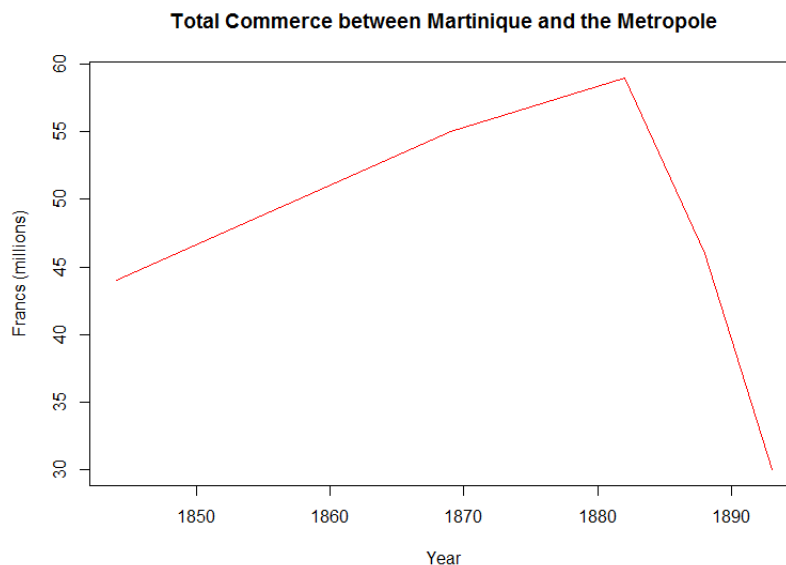


Figure 10. Total Commerce (in millions of francs) between Martinique and Metropolitan France³⁵⁷

In the customs law, as well as the governmental response after the 1891 hurricane, we can see the split—or rather liminal—nature of France’s oldest colonies: not really a colony, but not

³⁵⁴ Michael Smith. *Tariff Reform in France, 1860-1900: the Politics of Economic Interest*. (Ithaca: Cornell, 1980).

³⁵⁵ Peter J. Duigan and Lewis Henry Gann . “Introduction.” *Colonialism in Africa, 1870-1960: The Economics of Colonialism*, Vol 4. Eds. Peter J. Duigan and Lewis Henry Gann, (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1975), 9

³⁵⁶ Schnakenbourg, Christian. *Histoire de l'industrie sucrière en Guadeloupe aux XIXe et XXe siècles*. (Paris: Harmattan, 2008), 23.

³⁵⁷ Graph made in R using statistics from Emile Levasseur. *La France et ses colonies (géographie et statistique)*, Vol. 3. (Paris : Librairie Ch. Delagrave, 1893), 322. Retrieved from Hathitrust on 11 April 2013 from <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=npj.32101073592345>

yet a department. Schnakenbourg's assertion rings true, given the dual-edged nature of the metropolitan response. Oscillating between a near department and an extractive colony, Martinique was met with an underwhelming amount of support, as those financial heavyweights with the strongest economic ties to Martinique—Le Havre, Marseille, and Bordeaux—weighed in and demanded a way to get the most money out of Martinique while putting the least money in. Knowing full well that Martinique would receive more substantial aid if it were seen as a full department, Martiniquais politicians petitioned to receive aid analogous to that received by the Alpes-Maritime department following the earthquake in 1887. Moreover, Martinique's business elite, along with the agricultural and manufacturing syndicates, advocated for a five-year tax relief plan that would jumpstart the flagging sugar economy.

Ultimately, however, negotiations with respect to both these plans broke down, and while Martinique was in fact folded into the French customs zone following the Méline tariff, it remained on unequal footing with metropolitan beet growers and received little in the way of substantial aid. Beet sugar continued to outstrip the production of sugar cane, and by 1895, the land cultivated for sugar dropped to half of what it was in 1889 (from roughly 21,000 to 10,000 hectares).³⁵⁸ Over the course of the 1890s, real wages for Martinique's sugar workers continued to fall, precipitating the island's first general strike in 1900 which, as we will see in the following chapter, nearly toppled the metropolitan administration as parliamentarians and activists argued over the relationship between the state and its labor force.

As the sugar industry collapsed from natural disasters, market forces, and political neglect, Martinique was denied the same tax relief that was commonly extended to departments afflicted with phyloxera in the metropole, and colonial investigators were questioning the very efficacy of direct governmental aid to the island's suffering populace. Due to a willful blindness with respect to the island's slave plantation past, French officials, the Chambers of Commerce, and the financial system all refused to acknowledge their own role in Martinique's market instability. That is, at the same time that France's colonial empire was being folded into the metropolitan market, politicians were figuring out a way to keep Martinique from receiving the same sort of national assistance that regularly went toward departments.

Conclusion

Overall, the response to the 1891 hurricane put on display the ulterior economic motives of French officials who saw humanitarian aid as nothing more than, in the words of Emile Chaudié, "evaluative work that is not personal, but based on statistical givens."³⁵⁹ Though this evaluative work was completely divorced from the real economic aid proposed by the Chamber, it nevertheless reflects an ideological approach to disaster relief. As historian Joshua Cole has pointed out, the nineteenth century saw the rise of social science, censuses, and statistical measuring, and consequently officials retreated to the comfort of faceless numbers to describe French society, quantifying human experience in the name of scientific endeavor and justifying

³⁵⁸ Emile Légier, *La Martinique et la Guadeloupe : considérations économiques sur l'avenir et la culture de la canne*, (Paris : Bureaux de la Sucrierie indigène et coloniale, 1905), p. 178. Retrieved 1 May 2013 from Google Books at <http://books.google.fr/books?id=Dq4UAAAAYAAJ>

³⁵⁹ E. Chaudié. « L'inspecteur des Colonies Chaudié, chef de mission à la Martinique, à Monsieur le Sous-Secrétaire d'Etat des Colonies. » 15 January 1892. In *MAR* 72, d.581. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

policy decisions and cultural prejudices with tables, charts, and aggregate statistics.³⁶⁰ Faced with two back-to-back disasters, the colonial investigators, as well as the Chambers of Commerce of Le Havre, Bordeaux, and Marseille, crunched the numbers in order to find and thereby avoid the point of diminishing returns, all-the-while either ignoring or glossing over the societal inequities at play. For fear of providing too much and thereby engendering waste and abuse, “to the great detriment of the interests of the treasury,” officials sought a way to restore the economy, restart the sugar factories, and recuperate their losses, all while injecting the least amount of capital. A far cry from the outpouring of support the previous year, this calculus—which even re-evaluated the 1890 fire-relief campaign—dashed Martinique’s hopes to receive money on par with those afflicted departments that sought governmental aid. The cold calculus performed by colonial investigators reflected—implicitly, if not overtly—racist and classist stereotypes of indigent and lazy black laborers, and as they slashed the damage estimates and emphasized Martinique’s economic instability, they turned a blind eye to the legacy of slavery, the inequitable market forces at play, the history of inequality between the wealthy white elite and the black labor force, and the perennial underfunding of public infrastructure. However, Martinique’s insistence that they receive this sort of aid, and the brief moment for which the Alpes-Maritime plan was entertained and even advocated by Undersecretary Etienne, highlighted the way in which Martinique was always almost a department— or at the very least, “nearly an Algeria”—and that its colonial citizenry was constituted by, in the words of Fanon, quasi-metropolitans.

³⁶⁰ Joshua Cole. *The power of large numbers: population, politics, and gender in nineteenth-century France*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

We are here by the will of the people and we shall yield only to bayonets

A Man in the Striking Crowd at Le Francois³⁶¹

Chapter 4 – Strikingly French: Labor Unrest, Metropolitan Politics, and Martinique at the Turn of the Century

As we saw in the preceding chapter, colonial bureaucrats were preoccupied with the immediate effect on natural disasters on the Caribbean sugar economy, even thinking of the islands' alternative economies (fruit, cocoa, coffee, tafia) ahead of the human suffering. At the close of the nineteenth century, Martinique's black laboring class chafed under such a preoccupied administration, concerned as it was with the bottom line of sugar production at the expense of reasonable and fair wages. The disdain and disregard that colonial inspectors like Chaudié felt toward the island's black laboring class were shared by many in the French bureaucracy, and when this coupled with the international decline of the cane sugar market, workers on the island experienced worsening standards of living and declining wages.

With this context in mind, we now turn toward a man-made event—the strike of 1900—that intentionally disrupted the island's sugar economy, with the aim of raising standards of living for the island's black laboring class. Natural disasters and civil disorder share many parallels with regard to emergency organization, preparedness, and authority response. From the authorities' viewpoint, both are equally disruptive and oftentimes unforeseen, and both bring to the fore existing socio-economic and political tensions. However, the social context within which people are acting is quite different, because an event of civil disorder intentionally challenges the status quo, whereas the impetus following a natural disaster is either an attempt to return to the status quo or to refashion the afflicted society in the authorities' image.

Putting aside the dialectical dichotomy of colony versus metropole, therefore, this chapter focuses on how the general strike in February of 1900 was received within Paris in order to show how the strike unfolded within France's "imperial nation-state." As explained in the introduction, historian Gary Wilder sees a problem in how we view the French empire, because we base our conclusions on the assumption that the central nation-state is wholly distinct from the imperial periphery. Wilder suggests that one way to rectify this would be to "conceptualize France as an *imperial* nation-state in which the parliamentary republic and administrative empire are articulated within a single political formation."³⁶² With this in mind, therefore, this chapter explores how the strike and shooting at Le Francois reverberated throughout Paris, ultimately marking a political disaster for the Waldeck-Rousseau coalition government. This political disaster leads us to ask: in what ways did the strike in Martinique participate in the culture and politics of a fin-de-siècle France riddled with labor unrest and a rising demand for social justice?

As we will see, the strike of 1900 forced the central government and the island's administration to cease talking about disaster relief and Martiniquais rights in coded language

³⁶¹ R.S. Reisch. "French Experience with Representative Government in the West Indies." *American Historical Review*, 6(3), (1901) : 490.

³⁶² Gary Wilder. "Unthinking French History: Colonial Studies Beyond National Identity." *After the imperial turn: thinking with and through the nation*. Ed. Antoinette Burton. (Durham, Duke Univ. Press, 2003), 134-135.

and instead address racial and class dynamics outright, not just in the Caribbean but in mainland France as well. In the process, the strike became entangled in metropolitan debates, nearly toppling the coalition government and precipitating a short-lived identification of socialists in the metropole with black laborers in the Caribbean.

Fire to the Fields

On 5 February 1900, agricultural workers on the sugar plantations of Saint-Jacques, Pain-de-Sucre, and Charpentier in the northeastern communes of Marigot and Trinité on the French island of Martinique threw down their tools and refused to work, and a day later, workers on the other side of the island in Le Lamentin went on strike as well. Within a few days, workers were marching throughout the island asking that their compatriots cease their work in solidarity. What began as a highly localized demand for a wage increase extended to the sugar refineries along the coast, and as sugar production came to a grinding halt, the alarmed governor dispatched the colonial militia. Around 400 workers congregated at the refinery near Le Francois on 8 February to voice their complaints, and there they were met by a military detachment.³⁶³ When told to disperse, the strikers responded with Mirabeau's revolutionary phrase, "We are here by the will of the people and we shall yield only to bayonets."³⁶⁴ The soldiers opened fire and killed eight agricultural workers and wounded fourteen others. Over the next two weeks, the strike had spread across the island, and as homes and plantations were set ablaze, rumors of insurrection erupted in the sensationalist United States press and stoked the fears of French conservatives.

Although the escalation of the strike prompted the French government to reinforce the garrison at Fort-de-France and to send several French cruisers to the island,³⁶⁵ the mainstream French press did not initially reflect the level of sensationalism that characterized newspapers in the nearby United States, which, following the "Remember the Maine!" incident two years earlier, had a reputation for using "yellow journalism" to further its imperialist agenda in the Caribbean. What the US saw as open rebellion, or perhaps as an opportunity to obtain the strategically located Martinique, the French papers covered as labor troubles incited either by French socialists, American provocateurs, or gubernatorial incompetence. Though the shooting at Le Francois sparked outrage in the socialist paper *Aurore*, the general strike often emerged under the rather bland heading: "The Troubles in Martinique." However, with United States throwing fuel on the fire and downtrodden French workers staging their own strikes in the metropole, the events in Martinique sparked a heated parliamentary debate over labor unrest and the efficacy of the French government that lasted long after the strike ended in late February. Throughout the parliamentary sessions in 1900, "Martinique" became a buzzword mobilized by those on the left and right as they fought for control of the French Chamber of Deputies.

While natural disasters and civil disorders share much with regard to emergency organization, preparedness, and authority response, the willfulness of civil disobedience creates a different social context that frames the event as an expression of the public's volition, rather than

³⁶³ Jacques Adélaïde-Merlande. *Les origines du mouvement ouvrier en Martinique: 1870-1900*. (Paris, Karthala, 2000), 143-171.

³⁶⁴ Reisch, 490.

³⁶⁵ "Incendiarism in Martinique: Rioters Set Fire to Plantations—France Sends a Warship." *New York Times*. 15 February 1900.

the results of an unforeseen eventuality. Throughout the event, French officials readily mapped their pre-existing political tensions onto the events in Martinique as they debated whether the individuals involved were to be treated as citizens who needed protection or criminals to be prosecuted—or, in the case of Le Francois, executed. As we shall see, the delineation between illegal civil disorder and legitimate civil disobedience was grounded in the same political and social prejudices of the left, right, and center that were applied to labor movements within metropolitan France.

Employing a French Precedent

On 7 February, delegates chosen by the striking workers at Sainte-Marie sent a letter articulating demands for an increase in salary and pay rate to the justice of the peace of Trinité. Though technically wage rates were higher by 1900 than they had been in previous decades, workers were paid “by the piece.” Due to the growth of beet sugar and the resulting overabundance of sugar, Martinique’s plantation economy was subject to fluctuations that burdened workers with an unreliable pay rate based on production amounts. Though tariffs on beet and cane sugar set in 1892 and equalized in 1897 helped to mitigate the downturn in the Antillean economy, they also forced the Antilles into direct competition with mainland beet sugar and prevented trade with the United States. As agricultural workers suffered a world-wide crisis of overproduction, Martinique lost a quarter of its sugar factories by the close of the century, and real wages were a fraction of what they had been prior to 1884.³⁶⁶

Drawing upon metropolitan legal precedents, Martiniquais workers demanded their salary increase in accordance with the labor law of 1892 which provided legal means for workers to arbitrate demands with their employers. This law, developed for mainland France, contained a caveat in Article 16 which extended its application to the old colonies of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Reunion.³⁶⁷ Though it had to be explicitly stated, which underlines the colonial status of the “old colonies,” that this metropolitan law was extended to the old colonies is a testament to their special “assimilated” status within the French empire. Asking for a salary increase in light of what the workers identified as a recovering sugar economy between 1897 and 1900, their letter directly invoked the civic rights outlined in the law of 1892 to “demand equality of treatment for all workers.”³⁶⁸

This marks the first time that the 1892 law was used in Martinique, and it couches the workers' demands in markedly French terms. With the take-off of the industrial sector in the latter half of the nineteenth-century and beginning of the twentieth, strikes and labor unrest came to characterize France and French politics. In the ten years between 1893 and 1903, there were 5874 strikes and lockouts in France, and of those strikes and lockouts approximately 10 percent were successfully resolved via the arbitration outlined in the law of 1892.³⁶⁹ The Martiniquais

³⁶⁶ Christian Schnakenbourg . *Histoire de l'industrie sucrière en Guadeloupe aux XIXe et XXe siècles*, Tome 3. (Paris, L'Harmattan, 2008).

³⁶⁷ Ministère du Commerce. *Statistiques des grèves et des recours à la conciliation et à l'arbitrage survenus pendant l'année 1900*. (Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1901), 610.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 348.

³⁶⁹ C.H. Mote. *Industrial Arbitration: A World-Wide Survey of Natural and Political Agencies for Social Justice and Industrial Peace*. (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1916), 102.

workers were participating in a widely spread French phenomenon: labor unrest and arbitration, both successful and unsuccessful. As one observer put it months later, the French Antilles, where “the indigenous peoples acquired a certain degree of civilization [and] the administration is nearly the same as that of the metropole [. . .] have presented strikes and social conflicts which have nothing to envy from those of France: here we are quite far from Soudan or the coast of Somalia!”³⁷⁰

For most of the plantations, a deal was struck with the strikers on 13 February at Sainte-Marie: workers would receive a pay increase of 25 percent.³⁷¹ Some workers found this compromise satisfactory; others saw it as a cop out or even treason. On 14 February, a second arbitration at Rivière-Salée granted a wage increase of 50 percent, effectively bringing an end to the first general strike in Martinique. By 21 February, most of Martinique's agricultural laborers had returned to work, and though bands of 40 or 50 “agitators,” as they were called in the US press, continued to harass normal work on the island,³⁷² most of the sugar refineries and plantations had returned to full operation. Although there were several more fires and demonstrations at the end of February around Trinité and in the southern plantations, events had calmed by early March.³⁷³

Debating the Strike of 1900

Although the general strike had ended, the controversy had not. Given that the workers themselves were drawing on precedents that were rather controversial in French politics, it is unsurprising that the February strike in Martinique quickly became bound up in metropolitan politics in a contentious way. To the socialists, the shooting at Le Francois became known as the “Colonial Fourmies,”³⁷⁴ recalling the massacre of French workers in Nord in May 1891, seen as the foundational moment of French socialism. Both the political left and the colonial ministry argued that Martinique’s deputies had failed to make good on promises to raise their constituents’ wages.³⁷⁵ The center-right argued that the strike was emblematic of electoral fraud, an issue plaguing metropolitan politics throughout the Third Republic, and pointed their fingers directly at the socialists. Approaching the issue as an administrative problem, the right took the occasion to discredit Waldeck-Rousseau’s coalition government and tried to retake the Chamber. Regardless of who was blaming whom, the strike fed into the mounting tensions between left, right, and center in French politics, and the problems it represented—whether attributable to Waldeck-Rousseau's ministry, Martinique's governor, members of the Chamber, or the electoral process—were seen as an extension of those in metropolitan France.

As the issue entered into the realm of French politics, disagreements over the cause and impact of the strike were legion. According to Guadeloupe’s socialist deputies, the Martiniquais

³⁷⁰ Auguste Terrier. “Le Journal des voyages à l'exposition universelle.” *Journal des voyages et des aventures de terre et de mer*, Oct. 21. (1900) : 332

³⁷¹ “More Rioting in Martinique.” *New York Times*. 14 February 1900.

³⁷² “Incendiarism in Martinique.” *New York Times*. 23 February 1900.

³⁷³ “The Martinique Situation.” *New York Times*. 2 March 1900.

³⁷⁴ “Un Fourmies Colonial.” *L'Aurore*. 11 February 1900.

³⁷⁵ Reisch, 488.

workers were unsatisfied with their deputies, Osman Duquesnay and Denis Guibert, because they had, contrary to their electoral platform, sided with the more conservative elements of the French legislature. Likewise, Colonial Minister Albert Decrais and others in the Chamber accused Deputy Guibert of having unwarrantedly promised wage increases as part of his electoral platform. In response, Martiniquais deputies Duquesnay and Guibert blamed Governor Gabrié for inappropriately calling out the troops in order to achieve his own political motives.³⁷⁶ Guibert went so far as to accuse the governor of organizing an uprising designed to influence the local election, claiming that Gabrié delayed two days before responding to the situation in an attempt to strong-arm voters. He refused to name this a strike, instead claiming that the strike was invented as an excuse to cover up gubernatorial disorder and corruption.³⁷⁷

Similarly, having witnessed the peaceable negotiation of a wage increase in January by agricultural workers in the north,³⁷⁸ Duquesnay claimed that he saw the February strike coming and that he had tried to warn the colonial minister, M. Decrais, but no one heeded his warnings.³⁷⁹ Like Guibert, he argued that the workers were provoked into a riot, and as a result of the government's mishandling of the situation, "French blood was spilled on French soil."³⁸⁰ Duquesnay walked a fine line. On the one hand, he sought more autonomy for Martinique and vociferously opposed assimilation into the metropole. On the other hand, when discussing the events at Le Francois, he appealed to conservatives' "blood and soil" understanding of French identity. In an important sense, Duquesnay's simultaneous appeal to autonomy and French identity resembled—in language as well as content—those made by traditionalists who championed the distinctiveness of the local *pays* within the metropole.

The constant allegations shrouded the strike in controversy, leading Guibert to publicly assert that the US press was better informed than the French.³⁸¹ Though Guibert was mistaken about the United States being better informed, he was nevertheless correct in asserting that information was scarce and oftentimes conflicting. Operating on the official information wired to Paris by the governor, the French press initially reported that the troops at Le Francois had been attacked and thus implied that the use of force was warranted.³⁸² The commander of the military detachment, Lt. Kahn, had claimed that since the "rioters" had attacked his troops, he was left with no option but to fire. However, it soon became clear it was unlikely that the workers had been aggressive toward the soldiers. According to the police chief present at Le Francois, the soldiers fired on the strikers without warning or provocation: three men died from bullets to the back, and most of the wounded and killed were found at least thirty meters from the soldiers.³⁸³

³⁷⁶ P. Deschanel. "Chambre: Séance du 26 mars" *Journal des débats*. 28 March 1900.

³⁷⁷ "Séance du 11 décembre 1900." *Annales de la Chambre des Députés, 7me législature: Débats parlementaires: Session extraordinaire de 1900*. (Paris : Imprimerie des journaux officiels, 1901), 978.

³⁷⁸ Adélaïde-Merlande, 141.

³⁷⁹ "Les Colonies: La grève à la Martinique." *Le Figaro*. 12 February 1900.

³⁸⁰ "Séance du 12 février 1900." *Annales de la Chambre des Députés, 7me législature: Débats parlementaire*. (Paris : Imprimerie des journaux officiels, 1900), 497.

³⁸¹ "Bombs in Paris Markets." *Chicago Daily*. 14 February 1900.

³⁸² "Les Colonies: La grève à la Martinique." *Le Figaro*. 12 February 1900.

³⁸³ E. Terrée-Potino. "Le temps des grèves." *L'Historial Antillais*. Ed. Tony Djian. (Fort-de-France : Société Dajani, 1980), 381-382.

In order to address the conflicting reports from colonial officials, Waldeck-Rousseau announced that there should be a formal investigation into the events at Le Francois, and that Édouard Picanon, inspector-general of the colonies and lieutenant-governor of French Cochinchina, would conduct the investigation under the direction of the colonial ministry.

The heatedness of the debate precluded Decrais' Colonial Ministry from having full discretion in handling the problem as a purely colonial matter. On 21 February, "[i]n light of the emotion produced in the hearts of Parliament by the current events in Martinique [and] in light of the accusations leveled against the republican population of the island by its own representatives, and the maneuvers employed by a political party to deny the purely economic and social character of the agricultural strike," the General Council of Martinique resolved to conduct its own examination into the social and economic situation which gave rise to the strike.³⁸⁴ By this resolution, local officials in the Council named the unrest a legitimate strike, declared the island's inhabitants to be inherently republican, and expressed disapproval for the character attacks leveled against the workers. Martinique's General Council was not willing to cede full authority to Decrais' Colonial Ministry.

Likewise, the Chamber of Deputies followed Decrais' every move, holding standard sessions in February and March, as well as a special session in December, to discuss Martinique's general strike. During the March session when it was decided that the Colonial Ministry would investigate the strike, the socialists sent their own investigator, deputy Hégésippe Jean Legitimus, to Martinique to investigate the shooting at Le Francois.³⁸⁵ The special session in December was convened to evaluate the Ministry's handling of its investigation. Not only were many in the Chamber dissatisfied with the Ministry's handling of the report, but some of the more radical members even denounced Decrais for having falsified information.

From the outset, the Ministry's investigation was contentious and laden with political baggage from metropolitan struggles in the Chamber. When Waldeck-Rousseau announced the investigation, he declared the need—to the boisterous applause of the left and protestations from the right—to give "to the population of our colony the impression that, there like elsewhere, we mean to enforce, at the same time, order and liberty." In response, Deputy Lasies from the right exclaimed, "What a nice phrase! You treat us worse than the negroes!"³⁸⁶ As labor, politics, and race were superimposed on one another, people fell into distinct camps: those who viewed the workers' actions as part of a riotous uprising and those who saw them as part of an organized struggle for economic equality. Despite the blatant racism exhibited by deputies like Lasies, the problems brought to light were, in many ways, endemic to metropolitan France: as the push for social justice gained ground at the close of the 19th century, many on the left condemned the right for the plight of all workers, and many on the right considered all collective action to be unwarranted, riotous behavior. As a moderate coalition, Waldeck-Rousseau's ministry was stuck between a rock and a hard place.

³⁸⁴ *Délibérations du Conseil général: Session Ordinaire, Novembre 1900*. (Fort-de-France : Imprimerie du gouvernement, 1900), 79.

³⁸⁵ P. Bluyssen. "Un Debat Sterile." *Journal des débats*. 28 March 1900.

³⁸⁶ P. Waldeck-Rousseau. *Politique Française et étrangère*. Ed. Eugène Fasquelle. (Paris : Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1903), 276-277.

Remember Martinique, Remember Chalon!

On the meeting of 14 February, the Socialist party of France proclaimed that "The Committee general of the French socialist Party affirms the sympathy which links it with the workers of everywhere without distinction of sex, race and color. It declares itself to be in solidarity with the working victims of Martinique and denounces with public indignation the new crimes of the capitalist middle-class and militarism."³⁸⁷ In stark contrast to the claims from the right, socialists held that the strike was characterized by calm and moderation on the part of the agricultural workers. Despite the factory and plantation owners' attempts to incite the workers and thereby justify the type of repressive action witnessed at Le Francois, the workers by and large maintained a cool and collected demeanor.³⁸⁸ This sentiment was reflected in the Parliamentary debates: socialists opened their ears to M. Gaston Gerville-Réache, the mulatto deputy from Guadeloupe who did not believe that the fires were set by the strikers, but rather by those "criminals" interested in causing the military to intervene.³⁸⁹ Gerville-Réache's politics earned him no fans among the "order and liberty" crowd, and during his years as deputy, the Parisian police maintained an extensive dossier on him.

On the 29th anniversary of the "Bloody Week" in May 1871 that brutally repressed the Paris commune, demonstrations were held across Paris. According to newspaper reports, somewhere between 12,000 and 25,000 people took to the streets and marched through the Père-Lachaise cemetery. As the socialists marched shouting "Long live the Commune," they waved red banners which read "To the victims of Galliffet! To the victims in Martinique!"³⁹⁰ Gaston de Galliffet was one of the generals who led the attack against the communards, and he was the Minister of War under Waldeck-Rousseau until his resignation two days after this demonstration. In remembering the communards, therefore, protesters drew a straight line from the bloody foundational moment of the Third Republic to the repression of the strikers at Le Francois. This evidences how Martinique was integrated into the socialists' narrative of French history.

Socialists therefore conjoined metropolitan labor troubles with those in Martinique. Shortly after the general strike in Martinique, a strike broke out in early June at an ironworks in Chalon-sur-Saône. Over 1000 workers were confronted by police,³⁹¹ and after a heated exchange the police opened fire on the crowd, killing one striker and seriously wounding twenty others.³⁹² Throughout the socialist congress held from the 28th to the 29th of September, party members cursed the bourgeois class for exploiting the French proletariat in incidences of strike repression, repeatedly uttering Martinique and Chalon in the same breath. For instance, as one citizen was criticizing what he considered to be an overtly bourgeois cabinet in the government during the

³⁸⁷ *Deuxième congrès général des organisations socialistes françaises tenu a paris du 28 au 30 Septembre 1900.* (Paris : Georges Bellais, 1901), 77-78.

³⁸⁸ P. Nestor. "La grève générale des travailleurs agricoles." *Le mouvement socialiste: revue bi-mensuelle internationale*, 150. (Paris: Edouard Cornély and Co., 1905), 566.

³⁸⁹ P. Bluysen. " Un Débat Stérile." art cit.

³⁹⁰ Saint-Real. "L'Anniversaire de la commune." *Le Gaulois*. 28 May 1900.

³⁹¹ "French Labor Troubles." *New York Times*. 24 December 1900.

³⁹² "Strike Riots at Chalon-sur-Saone." *New York Times*. 4 June 1900.

second day of the meeting, a cry was taken up by those in attendance: " Les massacres de Chalon et de la Martinique! Massacreurs!"³⁹³

The socialist congress met in Lyon the following year. Faced with what they called the greatest crime against the working class since the Paris Commune, members present at the Third Socialist Congress in May 1901 issued a manifesto to the workers of Martinique in which they proclaimed, "Your enemies are our enemies. [. . .] Count on us as we count on you. Long live socialist Martinique! Long live the social Republic!"³⁹⁴ The socialist journal *Le mouvement socialiste* also highlighted the bond of common class struggle: "As we see by what happened here, the proletariat of the Antilles—with its strikes and organizational tendencies (unfortunately blocked by exterior causes thus far)—already entered into the conscious phase of class struggle. It disciplines itself more and more in this form of activity which makes the working class the great factor of transformations to come."³⁹⁵ For French socialists, the strike marked Martinique's rite of passage into full working class consciousness.

Fears of the Right

Although the more liberal republicans and socialists were willing to treat the strike in Martinique inherently as a labor issue, the conservative press treated the strike as a matter of "the black question" and foreign interference. Witnessing the political agitation of a predominately black population, the conservative press was quick to label the worker action as riotous at best and rebellious at worst. For instance, the bi-monthly review, *Questions diplomatiques et coloniales*, readily viewed the strike as a black insurrection: "In the course of a strike with as of yet undetermined causes and importance, a part of the indigenous population, those employed in agricultural work, entered into insurrection."³⁹⁶ The conservative interpretation of the event—evident in the Chamber of Deputies and particularly prevalent in the US press—asserted that the labor unrest was the result of granting black citizens the right to vote in 1848.³⁹⁷

A conservative article for the magazine *L'Illustration* focused on the "black question" in a similar fashion, insisting that the strikers were indeed rioters who forced honest men to stop their work on the threat of death. Providing evidence to validate the actions of Lt. Kahn, the author claimed that the riotous black workers menaced the white population the day after the incident at Le Francois, burning plantations and crying out "Down with the whites! Long live the negroes!

³⁹³ *Deuxième congrès général des organisations socialistes*, 96-98.

³⁹⁴ "Aux travailleurs de la Martinique." *Troisième congrès général des organisations socialistes françaises: tenu a Lyon du 26 au 28 Mai 1901: Compte rendu sténographique officiel*. (Paris, Georges Bellais, 1901), 497-498.

³⁹⁵ Nestor, 568.

³⁹⁶ "Renseignements Politiques." *Questions diplomatiques et coloniales: revue de politique extérieure*, Mar. 1. Paris, Rédaction et administration, 1900, p.312

³⁹⁷ "History of the Trouble." *Chicago Daily Tribune*. 16 February 1900.

Vengeance!"³⁹⁸ This fear of the black masses was echoed in *Le Figaro*.³⁹⁹ Overall, the conservative press treated the shooting at Le Francois as a hard lesson to brigands and rioters.⁴⁰⁰

Though much of the rhetoric surrounding the strike was overtly racist in nature—and intricately tied to a history of chattel slavery—it also represented the right's growing fears of internal contaminants in French society. In the political fallout generated by the shooting at Le Francois, the Martiniquais strike became implicated in the political struggle between the dreyfusards and anti-dreyfusards. When Lt. Kahn was pulled from active duty following the Picanon investigation, the monarchist newspaper *Le Gaulois* reported that "the disgrace of M. Kahn—a new victim of the dreyfusards, and a Jewish victim, this time—is a token paid to the socialists who had threatened to vote against the current cabinet in mass until the return of the investigation into the affair of Martinique."⁴⁰¹ The fear was not merely that colonial subjects were revolting against their colonial government, a situation that could be rectified by ramping up the military, but that there were members of French society who, like Dreyfus and his advocates, simply did not belong, or whom, like the socialists, the right saw as undermining French society. With regard to the "old colonies," where non-whites held the legal status of citizens and not subjects, the "black question" resonated with the right's fears over foreign "contagions" within France's civic society that threatened their mythic "blood and soil" image of France.

The right's fears also possessed an international dimension. The United States' press unambiguously sided with Lt. Kahn, consistently reporting that his troops had been attacked and were merely defending themselves.⁴⁰² The US press warned that Martinique was well on its way to following in the footsteps of Haiti, a country of ex-slaves "who won themselves the freedom which they have ever since been progressively engaged in showing that they do not know how to use."⁴⁰³ Frustrated by what the US saw as the French downplaying the situation, the *New York Times* asserted that while "nothing short of a rebellion is in progress there, due to maladministration, [. . .] the official reports attribute the trouble entirely to labor agitation, and take the most hopeful view of prospects for an early settlement of the trouble."⁴⁰⁴ The French press seized on this sensationalism and accused the United States of jealously eyeing Martinique,⁴⁰⁵ attempting to use racial unrest to foment a rebellion in order to seize it.⁴⁰⁶ Despite denials to the contrary, the US had in fact been actively asserting its own dominance in Caribbean affairs since the Monroe Doctrine eighty years earlier, most dramatically culminating in the very recent seizure of Cuba and Puerto Rico during the 1898 Spanish-American War.

³⁹⁸ P. "Les Troubles de la Martinique." *L'Illustration*. 17 February 1900 : 101.

³⁹⁹ M. Landry. "Les colonies." *Le Figaro*. 14 February 1900.

⁴⁰⁰ E. Terrée-Potino. "Le temps des greves." art. cit., 382.

⁴⁰¹ "Nouvelles militaires." *Le Gaulois*. 7 July 1900.

⁴⁰² "Labor Disorders in Martinique." *The Washington Post*. 10 February 1900.

⁴⁰³ "The Troubles in Martinique." *New York Times*. 15 February 1900.

⁴⁰⁴ "The Situation in France's Colonies: Many Believe a Rebellion is in Progress in Martinique." *New York Times*. 18 February 1900.

⁴⁰⁵ J. Corenely. "Les Troubles de la Martinique." *Le Figaro*. 23 February 1900.

⁴⁰⁶ "Renseignements Politiques.", 313

The political right therefore bound the events to growing concerns over international competition and interference in the French West Indies. According to a letter from the public prosecutor, the strike resulted from a rumor that the English queen had ordered the French government to pay its workers two francs each and that she had sent two million francs to the proprietors to be distributed among the workers. As the rumor went, the proprietors refused to distribute the francs, so the workers went on strike.⁴⁰⁷ Throughout the strike, plantation owners and managers claimed to have heard shouts about the “queen” and her guaranteed “price” from the strikers. In one such instance, the plantation manager of Le Lamentin claimed that one striker shouted, “The queen has granted this price, and it is necessary for you to give it to us.”⁴⁰⁸ It is likely that such rumors were exchanged, for as Laurent Dubois has shown for the French Revolution, rumors have historically been used in the French Caribbean to motivate revolutionaries and transmit vital information.⁴⁰⁹ The rumor of the “queen’s price” that purportedly induced the strike terrified conservatives and nationalists who were simultaneously opposed to collective worker action and international intervention. At the turn of the century, France's relationship with England was severely strained, and conservatives feared aggressive action against France's holdings in light of the Boer War. In early May 1900, the French government appropriated 9 million francs to strengthen Fort-de-France’s fortifications, and conservatives generally agreed that this would stave off English or American imperial aggression.⁴¹⁰

Coming to Blows in the Chamber

On 26 March, the ongoing investigation of the events at Le Francois was discussed in the Chamber of Deputies, and the event itself rapidly became the backdrop to a deep-seated disagreement between the political left and right in metropolitan France. Seeing how the general strike in Martinique was no longer the politicians' focus, the *Journal des débats* denounced the Chamber's "non-discussion" of Martinique as a sterile debate: "Most of the serious incidences which arise in the colonies as in the metropole—from without as well as within—belong to politics in general, participating in its incoherent, contradictory, anarchistic, and brutal nature. It is impossible for it to be otherwise."⁴¹¹ The context for this political battle was the rising labor unrest within France: the right debated the socialists whether or not the factory owners or Martiniquais deputies had promised salary increases to the workers, and the socialists accused the deputies from Martinique of standing by while the Martiniquais proletariat was being exploited.⁴¹² As emotions escalated over the course of the hearing, tensions between the left and right reached their boiling point. The disagreements over Martinique—truly disagreements over labor politics in mainland France—became physical as a socialist deputy punched a nationalist

⁴⁰⁷ Bluysen. "Un Débat Stérile."

⁴⁰⁸ Adélaïde-Merlande, 158.

⁴⁰⁹ Dubois. *A colony of citizens*.

⁴¹⁰ "Martinique is Jubilant." *Chicago Daily Tribune*. 6 May 1900.

⁴¹¹ "La Séance Hier." *Journal des débats*. 28 March 1900.

⁴¹² Ibid.

deputy while returning to his seat,⁴¹³ and the sensationalism of this event rapidly overshadowed the issue at hand. Paul Deschanel, a member of the French Academy and reporter on legislative events, criticized the Chamber for the episode:

As for the inhabitants in Martinique, they are a wise and tranquil people; the factory managers, if one believes MM. Duquesnay and Denis Guibert, are the model patrons; the workers, if one believes M. Gerville-Reache, are the sheep which one leads where one wants, and who let themselves be sheared nearly without protest. There is the good governor. But M. Decrais does not want to believe that it was he who made this docile flock enraged. There is lieutenant Kahn who commanded the firing on these innocent victims. But, says M. Decrais still, all the military witnesses of the affair affirm that he behaved with prudence and composure.

In Martinique, there are thus no elements of trouble; all goes well or nearly well. But at the Palais-Bourbon! It's there where the spirits are excited and overheated; it's there where one yells, where one throws punches; struggles and games flourish more than eloquence. The orators transform themselves suddenly into boxers, and the political battles take infinitely various and unexpected sides which delight amateurs.⁴¹⁴

Striking in Martinique had not only fueled tensions between left and right; they brought about a serious challenge to the current government. Claiming that the French people will not be satisfied for long with a weak government that cannot deal with the increasing number of strikes within France, lumping together the strike in Martinique and those in the mainland, conservative republican deputy Alexandre Ribot condemned the current ministry as being propped up by the socialists and proclaimed his severe lack of confidence in the Waldeck-Rousseau government.⁴¹⁵ Several other deputies on the right echoed similar sentiments. The issue culminated in a "vote of confidence" before the entire Chamber floor, which, if lost, would have overturned the Waldeck-Rousseau government. Siding with Waldeck-Rousseau despite having serious qualms with his ministry, socialist Maximilien Carnaud turned to the other socialist deputies and proclaimed, "My friends and I do not want to mingle our votes with those men who always fought with a rough energy the claims of workers, nor to provide to some ambitious men the occasion to collect a portfolio from the blood of the workmen of Martinique." With the uneasy support of the socialists, a vote of confidence in the current ministry was passed 285 to 239, inducing cries of "Long live the Republic!"⁴¹⁶ The Waldeck-Rousseau ministry maintained power but did not leave the incident unscathed. Confidence in the government had been shaken, and to contemporary observers the events in Martinique were representative of the mounting labor tensions that had polarized members the Chamber and resulted in numerous changes of government throughout the 1890s.

⁴¹³ "French Deputies in a Fight: Interpellation on Martinique Riots Leads to Fisticuffs in the Chamber." *The Washington Post*. 27 March 1900.

⁴¹⁴ Deschanel. "Chambre: Séance du 26 mars."

⁴¹⁵ "La Séance Hier."

⁴¹⁶ Waldeck-Rousseau. *Politique Française et étrangère*, 277.

The Bonapartist newspaper *La Presse*, which was highly critical of Waldeck-Rousseau's government, repeatedly used the events in Martinique to discredit the ministry. For instance, when the matchmakers went on a general strike in October, Louis Resse of *La Presse* sided with the right of workers to seek conciliatory measures from their employers and laid the blame for the strike at the feet of Waldeck-Rousseau. Pointing to Martinique and Chalon, he underscored a history of mishandling the mounting labor dissatisfaction within France, demanding to know why Waldeck-Rousseau did not respect the law he helped to draft in 1884 that had legalized the right to strike, sardonically asking "What can shock us after Martinique and Chalon?"⁴¹⁷ The rising labor frustration, as well as the violent repression of collective action, led many to lose faith in the current government.

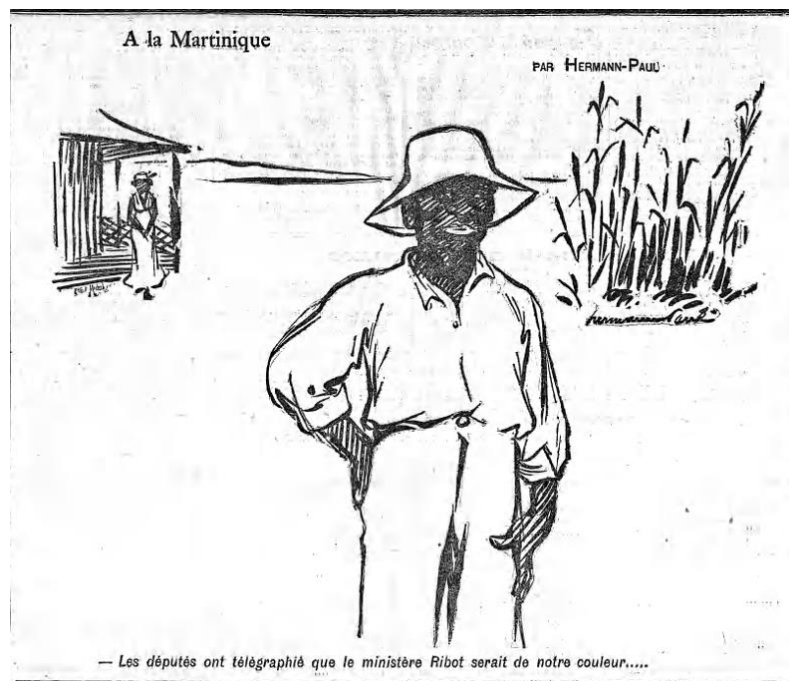


Figure 1. "A la Martinique." *Le Figaro*. 29 March 1900. "The deputies telegraphed that the Ribot ministry would be of our color [of our opinion]."

Immediately following the parliamentary session of March 26, a political cartoon appeared in the conservative newspaper *Le Figaro* satirizing the attempted overthrow of the ministry in the Chamber. In the rather desolate looking drawing, a black agricultural laborer stands before a cane field and looks calmly at the onlooker, stating that "the deputies have telegraphed that the Ribot ministry would be of our color [of our opinion.]" On the surface, this image conveys the workers' disappointment with the current ministry's handling of the strike. However, this cartoon possesses a rather multivalent meaning. Though the colloquial phrase "of our color" hints at the racial difference between mainland France and Martinique—that Ribot is of the worker's skin color is simply not true—it also opens the possibility that a white member of the Chamber could be identified with the workers in Martinique. Both shared a disdain for the

⁴¹⁷ L. Resse. "Les Allumettiers et l'Etat." *La Presse*. 24 October 1900.

way in which Waldeck-Rousseau's ministry handled the strike as well as the subsequent shooting at Le Francois, and the extent to which the event resonated in Paris suggests that the strike had indeed struck a nerve with regard to metropolitan labor unrest.

That said, since Ribot was not known as an advocate for workers' rights, but was in fact a staunch critic of the socialists, the cartoonist seems to be sarcastically emphasizing that the real issue for the Chamber of Deputies was not the well-being of the worker or even the nature of the strike, but disagreements between the Waldeck-Rousseau ministry and its opposition over metropolitan concerns. Ribot was a vocal opponent of secularization, an opponent of the socialists, and an ardent supporter of the Catholic Church. Upon coming to power, the Waldeck-Rousseau ministry further attempted to secularize the Republic, and as a result Ribot and Waldeck-Rousseau had a spectacular falling-out. In a bit of racially-charged humor, therefore, the cartoonist's phrase points to the irony of Ribot and the black workers being on the same side, as it were, against the Waldeck-Rousseau's ministry.

There is yet another layer to this cartoon: the deputies. That they have telegraphed what seems to be misleading information—Ribot was not a champion of racial equality or workers' rights—recalls the charges leveled against them by the socialists and other Martiniquais politicians, that is, that they have falsely promised wage increases as part of their campaign platforms. Though this image can be read in a variety of ways, it nevertheless suggests that colonial politics and metropolitan politics overlapped. Though the political use of the event in Paris may suggest that the strike served an instrumental purpose in metropolitan politics, the fact that it carried so much weight in the Chamber suggests a resonance that goes beyond colonial concerns. The problems brought to light by the strike in Martinique rhymed with those plaguing the metropole at the turn of the century.

The Cultural Backdrop: Opening of the Exposition of 1900

On April 15, the Universal Exposition opened in Paris. Nearly 51 million people visited the exposition,⁴¹⁸ which sprawled across 112 hectares and housed 83,000 exhibitors from over 25 countries.⁴¹⁹ Contemporaneous with the debates in the Chamber, the Paris Exposition of 1900 provided a rather different depiction of Martinique to the French population. There was a marked attempt to make the exhibit "exotic" and alluring. This image of Martinique stood at odds with the recent strike and the unfolding political drama in the Chamber of Deputies, and provides an illuminating contrast that heightens the significance of Martinique's involvement in metropolitan politics. Observers experienced cognitive dissonance as they tried to reconcile the colonial image prevalent at the Exposition with the political realities of the labor troubles covered in the press.

Although the Martinique pavilion was just one small piece of this sprawling World's Fair, it occupied a prime location in the section of the Exposition created to "call to the mind memories of exotic places": the Trocadero.⁴²⁰ Positioned directly off one of the park's major entrances, the colonial exhibits in the Trocadero were intended to be among the "most attractive

⁴¹⁸ Alfred Picard. *Exposition universelle internationale de 1900 a Paris: Rapport général administratif et technique*. Vol. 6. (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1903), 181.

⁴¹⁹ Maurice Normand. "Coup d'oeil sur l'exposition." *L'Illustration*, 2981. (14 April 1900) : 222.

⁴²⁰ A. da Cuhna. *Les Travaux de L'Exposition de 1900*. (Paris: Masson et Co., 1900), 22.

parts of the Exposition"⁴²¹ and designed to be a primary focal point of the fair. Indeed, approximately 3.3 million visitors entered by the Trocadero gate, making it the third most trafficked entrance of the Exposition.⁴²² The complex of pavilions dedicated to the old colonies was situated directly on this major thoroughfare. Guadeloupe and Reunion sat on the street, while the Martinique pavilion, replete with a bar staffed by attractive women and stocked with copious amounts of rum, occupied a "separate but more important location" immediately behind the other two.

According to an observer, the Martinique pavilion, full of vibrant colors and resonant with high-pitched creole music, gave visitors the impression that they had entered into a cage full of exotic birds. However, despite all the ostentation conferred upon the exhibit, the pavilion was largely overlooked, overshadowed by the new colonies. For example, there were fewer exhibits in the old colonies complex than in the pavilions dedicated to the newer colonies. The Martinique pavilion housed 114 exhibits, while the Guadeloupe pavilion contained 160. Although these pavilions were not among those with the fewest exhibits in the Trocadero, they were far surpassed—even combined—by those of the newer colonies. For instance, Madagascar's pavilion housed 480 exhibits; New Caledonia's 507; Tunisia's 590; and Algeria's 2019.⁴²³

With the recent strike still fresh in their minds, visitors to the exposition were not buying that Martinique was exotic. All three pavilions were designed to resemble colonial homes.⁴²⁴ Rather than recalling the exoticism of tropical fruit and strange music, the colonial home brings to mind the French colonial past: plantations and slaves. Though brightly dressed creole women chatted with visitors, serving Martiniquais rum while gracefully balancing ornate fruit headdresses on their heads,⁴²⁵ the pavilion seemed too banal. Within the construction of the pavilion lay encoded a French past rather than an exciting imperial present, and even the excitement of the current events on the island were lacking. According to an observer, politics in Martinique were "active and violent, recently bringing bloodshed to the colony as a result of the troubles of strikes. One would not believe it from seeing the placid figure, resigned and slightly grimacing, of those working in Trocadero."⁴²⁶

For all their tropical embellishments, the creole women were uncannily familiar. In his piece for *L'Illustration*, Arsène Alexander described one of the creole women, Eldja, as follows: "By her physical appearance she was undeniably creole, and by her voice strikingly Parisian—right bank even—and for all that a person of real distinction."⁴²⁷ In part, this familiarity was due

⁴²¹ Jean Charles-Roux. *Exposition universelle de 1900: L'organisation et le fonctionnement de l'exposition des colonies et pays de protectorat: Rapport général*. (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1902), 19.

⁴²² Alfred Picard. *Exposition universelle internationale de 1900 a Paris: Rapport général administratif et technique*. Vol. 6. (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1903), 188.

⁴²³ Jules Charles-Roux. *Exposition universelle de 1900: Les colonies francaises: L'organisation et le fonctionnement de l'exposition des colonies et pays de protectorat*. (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1902), 328.

⁴²⁴ 1900. *Exposition universelle de 1900: Les plaisirs et les curiosités de l'Exposition*. Paris: Guide Chaix, 260-261.

⁴²⁵ Arsène Alexandre. "Les femmes de l'exposition." *L'Illustration*. (13 October 1900): 232-233.

⁴²⁶ August Terrier. "Le Journal des voyages à l'exposition universelle." *Journal des voyages et des aventures de terre et de mer*, (Oct. 21., 1900) : 333.

⁴²⁷ Arsène Alexandre. "Les femmes de l'exposition." *L'Illustration*. (20 October 1900): 242-243.

to the fact that few of the creole women had left the islands past the age of six or seven and were more acquainted with Paris than Martinique.⁴²⁸ Serving as a cultural backdrop to the political debate in the Chamber of Deputies, the Exposition of 1900 further illustrates how Martinique—like the creole woman behind the bar—was uncannily French, that is, at one and the same time familiar and unnerving. Those who were going to the pavilion expected to see elements of the political and labor unrest that they had read about in the papers—or something exciting, exotic, and new—were instead confronted by women Parisian in manner and calm in demeanor.

We can also see the overshadowing of Martinique by newer imperial conquests in the president's official visit to the colonial exhibits. Having skipped the colonial exhibits during the inauguration's official promenade on April 15,⁴²⁹ President Emile Loubet strolled through the Trocadero section of the Paris Exposition on May 31, shortly after the explosive hearing on the Chamber floor, weaving in and out of the various colonial pavilions on his tour of Greater France. The report of the president's visit to the colonial exhibits had something to say about every pavilion but those of the old colonies. Though he wondered at exotic figurines in the Congo pavilion, marveled at richly painted porcelain at the Indo-China pavilion, and gingerly touched expensive silk tapestries at the Tunisia pavilion, he merely passed by the four pavilions of Martinique, Guadeloupe, Reunion, and Guyane on his way elsewhere.⁴³⁰ That the old colonies did not mark a significant part of his visits shows the disinterest toward Martinique *as a colony*. To a certain extent, these colonies were out of place; culturally they were not "exotic" and thus did not fit with the "more intriguing" colonies of new imperialism, and yet by virtue of their political status as colonies they were placed there all the same.

On July 25, a fire broke out in the basement of the Martinique pavilion among the casks of rum and straw crates. It took over an hour to extinguish, though it did not destroy the integrity of the exhibit. Police suspected malfeasance and began an investigation, because the firefighters found two distinct points where the fire started, each in adjoining straw crates.⁴³¹ They had even found evidence that a tightly bound bundle of rods had been used as a fire starter. Though the police suspected foul play, the press did not follow the story long enough to report on the perpetrators, in part because this particular fire was just one event in a series of unfortunate events plaguing the Exposition of 1900. Described as a natural disaster unfolding in Paris, the 1900 exposition was marred by electrical outages, fires, a deadly heat wave, and repeated sewage leaks. As historian Peter Soppelsa has shown, this "disaster discourse" called into question the republican ideals of urban modernity.⁴³² The fire in the Martiniquais pavilion, and the evident dissatisfaction with the 1900 strike, was part of this much larger discourse among conservatives about the failure of the Republic. Since the Exposition was staged by the French government to showcase the Third Republic's command of nature and the progress of French civilization, the repeated problems undermined the state's legitimacy and indicted French power. Criticisms of the Exposition were in reality thinly veiled criticisms of the republican government, and

⁴²⁸ Arsène Alexandre. "Les femmes de l'exposition." *L'Illustration*. (13 October 1900): 232-233

⁴²⁹ "L'Inauguration." *Le Temps*. 15 April 1900.

⁴³⁰ Gustave Babin. "L'Exposition universelle: le Président de la République au Trocadéro." *Journal des débats*. 1 June 1900.

⁴³¹ "Faits Divers." *Journal des débats*. 26 July 1900.

⁴³² Peter Soppelsa. "Paris's 1900 Universal Exposition and the Politics of Urban Disaster." *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Spring 2013): 271-298.

therefore the French government was getting hammered from two sides: the 1900 strike had undermined the legitimacy of Waldeck-Rousseau's coalition, while the repeated problems at the Exposition had called into question the very notion of French progress.

Surprisingly, the press did not immediately connect the fire to the strike, and while both were equally fuel for conservatives' attacks on Waldeck-Rousseau, the "colonial" aspect of Martinique as represented, albeit unconvincingly, in the pavilion was seen as distinct from the issue of labor unrest. In other words, through the Exposition it becomes clear that Martinique occupied a place apart from the newer colonies. According to the official jury reports on the Exposition, Martiniquais public schools needed to focus more on agricultural education which would prepare children for manual labor, presumably in a fashion that would make them more amenable to menial tasks and acquiescent in moments like that of February 1900. The report stated that though the educational system would remain along the same lines as that of the metropole, manual labor would be added to the curriculum due to its ability to make men "more dignified and more moral."⁴³³ M. Picard, the general commissioner for the Exposition, disagreed slightly. According to his official report, "the colonies of Martinique, Guadeloupe, Reunion, Saint-Pierre and Miquelon do not call for any special guidelines. They have no indigenous peoples to civilize, and the instructional regime must be the same there as that of the metropole."⁴³⁴ In stark contrast to his treatment of the old colonies, his report goes on to detail at length the types of subjects which should be taught in the other French colonies, chief among them agriculture and the French language. What is common across these two reports is the delineation of the old colonies, where education should match or nearly match that of the metropole, from the new, where education needs to civilize the indigenous populations. Nonetheless, with the memory of the strike, the official reports, which see public education in colonies as currently insufficient,⁴³⁵ posit that the population of Martinique needs to be, if not civilized, placated by public education.

The Special Session of the Chamber

By early June, Picanon had compiled his report on the causes of the general strike and on the actions taken by Lt. Kahn at Le Francois. In an attempt to defend the actions of the government and the current ministry against further "votes of no confidence," M. Decrais tried to coerce Picanon to alter his report to be in accordance with the testimony already provided in the Chamber in March: that Lt. Kahn had fired on the crowd due to their apparent aggression and that the events in Martinique were not a general strike, but rather a politically motivated revolt organized to influence local elections. Picanon refused to be swayed, and in return Decrais promptly sent him back to his position in Indo-China, denying him the previously offered position of governor-general of East Africa. Ultimately hoping to avoid the consequences of the

⁴³³ *Exposition universelle internationale de 1900 à Paris: Rapports du jury international*. Groupe 1. (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1902), 639.

⁴³⁴ Alfred Picard. *Exposition universelle internationale de 1900 à Paris. Le bilan d'un siècle (1801-1900)*, Vol. 6. (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1906), 108

⁴³⁵ "H. Froidevaux. L'Œuvre scolaire de la France aux Colonies." *Exposition universelle de 1900: Publications de la commission chargée de préparer la participation du ministère des colonies*. Ed. Augustin Challamel. (Paris: Librairie Maritime et Coloniale, 1900), 47-48.

findings, Decrais kept Picanon's official report from being published,⁴³⁶ presenting a censored summary of the results to the Chamber.⁴³⁷ On June 19, M. Decrais announced that Picanon's investigation, which was never made available to the public,⁴³⁸ showed that Lieutenant Kahn had acted hastily in firing on the crowd and would be withdrawn from service, though he would not be prosecuted. Though the investigation revealed that the strike's cause was economic,⁴³⁹ Decrais shifted the focus by declaring that the local police would be better recruited, the gendarmerie reinforced, and public functionaries forbidden from intervening in electoral campaigns.⁴⁴⁰

The report and Decrais' maneuvering left everyone feeling cheated. While conservatives felt the report's focus on economics showed that Picanon had caved to socialist pressure,⁴⁴¹ socialists saw the report as indicative of an exploitative, bourgeois bias in Waldeck-Rousseau's ministry. For instance, on 19 October, a grand banquet was held for all those who worked on the Exposition of 1900. The general idea was to honor those who had helped create and run such a successful international fair. However, with the government's handling of the Martinique strike still vivid, hard-line socialists did not want to invite M. Millerand, Minister of Commerce, to the gala. Since Millerand was a socialist whom hardliners saw as working in collusion with a corrupt "bourgeois" government, they blamed him—rather than the colonial ministry—for the mishandling of Le Francois and Decrais' subsequent attempt to alter the Picanon report.⁴⁴² The slippage here is quite interesting: the socialists held responsible the minister of commerce rather than the colonial minister, suggesting that for them the strike in Martinique was a French labor issue rather than a colonial concern.

Deputy Guibert continued to push for Picanon's results to be discussed in the Chamber in order to examine how the government handled the situation and to clear his own name with regard to the accusations of political misconduct. It was not until December, in a special session of the Chamber, that the issue was finally heard.⁴⁴³ In this special session of the Chamber, Decrais maintained that he did not want the report published, because in his estimation the unrest had died down and the elections went off without a hitch—that is, they mostly went to the republicans. He continued to argue that though the governor needed to have his powers strengthened, the underlying structure of Martinique's government did not need to be changed, because "[t]he politics of the government in Martinique are those politics which inspire the government in the metropole and which receive so often the blessing of the Parliament."⁴⁴⁴ Although disagreeing with Decrais politically, the socialists did not contradict Decrais'

⁴³⁶ "Une Vengeance ministérielle: renvoi et disgrâce de M. Picanon." *La Presse*. 11 October 1900.

⁴³⁷ "Séance du 11 décembre 1900.", 977.

⁴³⁸ "Le retour de M. Picanon." *Journal des débats*. 29 August 1901.

⁴³⁹ "Senat: Séance du 19 juin." *Journal des débats*. 21 June 1900.

⁴⁴⁰ "Lieutenant to Blame: Fired Too Hastily on Strikers in the Island of Martinique." *The San Francisco Call*. 20 June 1900.

⁴⁴¹ P.R. "Une affaire à éclaircir." *Le Gaulois*. 9 September 1900.

⁴⁴² "Le Grand Banquet pour les travailleurs de l'Exposition." *La Presse*. 15 October 1900.

⁴⁴³ "Les interpellations a la Chambre." *La Presse*. 15 December 1900.

⁴⁴⁴ "Séance du 21 décembre 1900." *Annales de la Chambre des Députés, 7me législature: Débats parlementaires: Session extraordinaire de 1900*. (Paris, Imprimerie des journaux officiels, 1901), 1190.

underlying assumption that Martinique occupied the same political sphere. Socialist deputy Gerville-Réache demanded that M. Decrais help bring justice to the colonies of Martinique and Guadeloupe, which have submitted fully and devotedly to the ideals of the Republic.⁴⁴⁵

Ultimately, the special session decided to treat Martiniquais labor issues in the same fashion as those of metropolitan France. On 21 December, the Chamber resolved to prevent troops from interfering in strikes and to maintain the enforcement of French labor laws in Martinique by a vote 273 to 202.⁴⁴⁶ The Picanon investigation and the debates in the Chamber settled, albeit uneasily, around the idea that this was indeed a strike begun for economic reasons, rather than a colonial uprising, and thus it was included and analyzed in the following year's publication of the *Statistiques des grèves* by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. In fact, out of a total of 902 strikes in France in 1900, the Martiniquais strike was listed as one of the 580 strikes in France that were sparked by a demand for wage increases.⁴⁴⁷ Moreover, in 1900 and 1901 the victims and families of the victims at François received indemnities from the General Council and the Ministry of the Interior. The General Council of Martinique had resolved to provide indemnities as early as 10 February, just days after the shooting at François and consequently long before the results of the Picanon investigation.⁴⁴⁸ After the special session in December, the Chamber of Deputies concurred with Martinique's General Council. Of the total 17,000 francs made available, 2574 francs was split among those whose wounds prevented them from working, paying twice the daily wage throughout the term of their disability. The remainder was split into 29 parts and went to the families of those killed by the gendarmes.⁴⁴⁹

Conclusion

Due to the strident chord struck with conservatives and socialists alike, the Chamber of Deputies was hit with a polarizing debate throughout 1900, and the issue was largely kept out of the hands of the newly created Ministry of the Colonies. Deputies were divided along ideological lines, with the socialists and more left-leaning republicans siding with the "strikers" of Martinique and the nationalists and more right-leaning republicans condemning the unwarranted actions of the "rioters." The disagreement hinged on whether the worker unrest and collective action in Martinique constituted a strike or a riot, a legitimate demand for a wage increase based on the Arbitration Law of 1892 or a black insurrection that calls to mind colonial resistance and a slave past—that is, whether it could be seen as an inherently French issue or strictly a colonial problem. The event became situated within metropolitan politics: socialists used the event as leverage in their struggle to oust "bourgeois" elements from the government; moderates and reformists used the event to highlight issues of electoral fraud and administrative misconduct within the metropole; and the right took the occasion to question the social ideals of the Republic, using the events in Martinique as an opportunity—an excuse, really—to discredit the Waldeck-Rousseau government. That each group within France used the events to their own

⁴⁴⁵ "Séance du 11 décembre 1900," 982.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 1194.

⁴⁴⁷ Ministère du Commerce. *Statistiques des grèves*, 298-300.

⁴⁴⁸ *Délibérations du Conseil général: Session Ordinaire, Novembre 1900*.

⁴⁴⁹ Adélaïde-Merlande, 171.

ends may seem to belie the notion that Martinique was really the issue here, and yet the question nevertheless arises: why was something that happened on a distant island in the Caribbean nearly sufficient to topple a government at home, and why did the debates so readily turn toward labor unrest within the metropole itself?

Though the event was not unequivocally treated as a metropolitan problem—a colonial investigator was indeed sent to the island and racism lurked in background—the event could not be neatly classified or reasoned away as a remote colonial concern. What was at stake was whether to view these Martiniquais agricultural workers, who were invoking the French Arbitration Law of 1892, as French workers, unruly colonials, or some third element, interior to France but also unsettling. French Antilleans had made clear demands as citizens to quality pay for quality work, as did many of their counterparts within France, thus calling to mind the "black question" of untraditional or unruly French citizens *within France's borders* that haunted not only the Dreyfus Affair, but metropolitan discussions of labor unrest and social justice. After the Picanon Report and the subsequent restitution paid to the workers at Le Francois, what was not in question was whether non-whites in Martinique were, at least by the letter of the law, French citizens and as such entitled to invoke the laws and rights granted to all citizens of France. What was increasingly questioned was what those rights were with regard to laborers, both within France as within Martinique, with the struggle intensifying as socialists and conservatives weighed in.

For many, Martinique was not exotic enough for it and its problems to be rationalized away as strictly colonial: the issues brought to light by the shooting at Francois, when cast with the unrest evident at places like Chalon, seemed uncannily familiar, and they stuck in the French imagination. Two years later, with the eruption of Mount Pelée in 1902, French socialists were still using the events in Martinique and at Chalon as evidence of the bourgeois excess of a "republican regime that is republican only in name."⁴⁵⁰ The extent to which the strike in Martinique impacted French politics and resonated with metropolitan concerns at the turn the century clearly illustrates the need for historians to attend to the colonies in discussing historical developments within metropolitan France. Metropolitan events—the struggle between socialists and conservatives, as well as labor unrest and the crisis of French identity—were not simply influenced by the colonies; rather the colonies were themselves part and parcel of them.

⁴⁵⁰ "Protestation." *Le Temps*. 12 May 1902. Retrieved from Gallica on 20 August 2013. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k7283650>

Poor Martinique! As a French colony, she will have been the object of an attention on behalf of the world that is sometimes justly jealous, and sometimes moved by the greatest pity for her great misfortunes.

Cardinal Lecot, Archbishop of Bordeaux, 29
October 1903⁴⁵¹

[T]he fallout came, swiftly and silently, to St. Pierre. The final agony of a town that some believed deserved to die had begun.

Gordon Thomas, Max Morgan Wits, *The Day the World Ended: Mont Pelee Earthquake 1902*⁴⁵²

With the inhabitants of Saint-Pierre, the elite of the colony disappeared, and at the same time nearly all the local fortune. [. . .] This is not an issue of credit momentarily troubled by a hurricane or a sugar field compromised or lost, which the bank recuperates the following year: this is the loss of the most useful souls, the creative forces themselves which were annihilated.

M. Sariat, former treasurer of Martinique, 15
May 1902⁴⁵³

Chapter 5 – Martinique Decapitated: The Eruption of Mount Pelée

As one of the world's deadliest natural disasters, the eruption of Mount Pelée has become Martinique's most salient characteristic. To this day, it has its place among the best known volcanic eruptions: Vesuvius, Mount St. Helens, Krakatoa, Pelée. To contemporaries at the turn-of-the-century, it seemed that the French colonial project on the island of Martinique had invoked the wrath of nature. In reality, an ill-prepared and ill-informed government inadvertently put a population of 30,000 in harm's way. In any case, the eruption of Mount Pelée was situated in the French imagination as part of a long history of natural hazards and unnatural dangers—from the Martinican pit viper to incendiary civil unrest, hurricanes to urban fires. The eruption solidified the association of risk with the island of Martinique and crystallized the ideological division between the Frenchness of the Martiniquais and the tropical space in which they lived.

In the press's coverage of the disaster, as well as in the governmental relief campaign, we see the mapping of political divisions within the metropole onto this colonial disaster, as officials in Paris and in Martinique understood the event through the bioptic of colonial liability and governmental responsibility. For a space that was simultaneously cast as an extractive sugar colony and a place of French settlement, the eruption of Mount Pelée was met with a mixed

⁴⁵¹ Edith Duchateau-Roger. *Une « histoire vécue » des cataclysmes de la Martinique, 1891-1902*. (Lille : Desclée, de Brouwer et Cie, 1904). H410779, Archives départementales de la Martinique, Fort-de-France, Martinique.

⁴⁵² Gordon Thomas, Max Morgan Wits. *The Day the World Ended: Mont Pelee Earthquake 1902*. (New York: Stein and Day, 1969), 2.

⁴⁵³ « La Catastrophe de la Martinique . » *Le Temps*. 15 May 1902. Retrieved 19 June 2013 from Gallica at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k237124j.zoom.langFR>

response, as French officials tried to understand the significance of the loss of 30,000 of their “compatriots in the Caribbean.”

The present chapter will first explain the events leading up to and including the eruption on 8 May. Desensitized to the perpetual dangers that presented themselves in the Caribbean—hurricanes, fires, earthquakes, and previous eruptions—governmental officials failed to take the threat of Mount Pelée seriously. Relying heavily on misinformed colonial scientists who concerned themselves with the wrong threat, they encouraged rather than discouraged people to stay in Saint-Pierre. The chapter will then examine how the eruption of Mount Pelée was cast as a national emergency as well as a colonial tragedy. Though this event evoked “solidarity” and a “great emotion” from metropolitan France, this national emergency was cast in the molds of imperial economics, political infighting, and racial prejudice. Finally, the chapter will explore the ramifications of this event for the place of Martinique within the French imagination. As a colony of citizens, Martinique had liminal status in the French legal framework, but the guiding ideological framework drew a distinction between the island as a tropical space and its people as members of the French race. On the one hand, the island itself was seen as a space that was by its very nature excluded from the republican definition of the French nation. On the other hand, the island’s population was included within the definition of French nationality and its three races mapped, albeit problematically, onto political divisions within the French metropole.

The Eruption

On 23 April 1902, the deadliest volcanic eruption of the twentieth-century began as Mount Pelée began to pollute the air with cinders and ash, wracked the ground with violent tremblors, and obscured the sky above Saint-Pierre, the cultural capital of Martinique known as “the Paris of the Antilles.” Over the next two weeks, the volcano’s rumbling and the stench of sulfur menaced the island. However, thinking of the loud yet unproductive rumblings of Pelée’s anticlimactic eruption in 1851, the populace of Saint-Pierre initially stood by and watched the volcano’s peak with more curiosity than alarm. The threat from the volcano seemed so remote that a picnic on its slopes had even been planned for 4 May, just four days before the violent eruption that destroyed the entire city of Saint-Pierre. Although the picnic was ultimately postponed following an increase in volcanic activity, the republican paper *Les Colonies* continued to remind its readership as late as 2 May that the picnic would be a “fine opportunity” to see “the yawning hole from which, in the last few days, thick clouds of smoke have escaped.”⁴⁵⁴ The paper lamented the picnic’s cancellation, arguing that time would prove the precaution to be unnecessary.

Convinced that the volcano posed little danger to those within the city limits and dedicated to maintaining public order, the governor of Martinique, Louis Mouttet, encouraged people to stay in Saint-Pierre. He was operating on intelligence from a team of colonial scientists, among them chemists, engineers, and professors of the natural sciences, who found Saint-Pierre to be in little to no danger. Mouttet even ordered the local garrison to turn back those who left for Fort-de-France, stationing the military along the route between the two towns.

⁴⁵⁴ “The Last Days of Saint-Pierre.” *The Century Magazine*. Ed. Aline Gorren. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1902): 610-633. Retrieved 10 September 2013 from Google Books at <http://books.google.com/books?id=XWMiAQAAIAAJ&pg=PA615>

He temporarily reassigned some of the gendarmerie in Fort-de-France to Saint-Pierre in order to help keep the peace, and personally refused any requests for leaves of absence from the increasingly anxious military and civil personnel in Saint-Pierre. Given the recent memory of the general strike in 1900 and the subsequent shooting at Le Francois that resulted from the mobilization of the militia, some saw Mouttet's use of the garrison as an attempt to forcefully mollify the increasingly panicked population. Conservative critics later used the police presence to foment rumors that Mouttet had forced the population to stay in order to win his party the election slated for 11 May.⁴⁵⁵ Such fears seem generally unfounded. To allay the populace's fears and set an example that he hoped would calm the population without the use of force—while at the same time, requesting direct command over the naval cruiser, *Le Suchet*, in port at Fort-de-France—Mouttet himself stayed in Saint-Pierre rather than returning to the governor's mansion 20 miles away in Fort-de-France.⁴⁵⁶

Despite the impending disaster, the mood in Saint-Pierre was actually one of relative calm, all things considered. Articles downplaying the impending danger from the volcano abounded in the republican newspaper, *Les Colonies*, and Saint-Pierre's mayor had even plastered posters all over town assuring the population that Mount Pelée posed no immediate danger and that damage “would be localized in those places that have already suffered.”⁴⁵⁷ Though a “dreadful fear” gained ground as the volcanic activity continued to increase in intensity after 2 May, with a column of mud killing roughly 150 people on 5 May at the Guérin sugar factory just two miles north near the coastal town of Le Prêcheur,⁴⁵⁸ few evacuated.

To quell the population's mounting fears, the mayor of Saint-Pierre, Roldolphe Fouché, addressed the population: “We are confident that we can assure you that, in view of the immense valleys that separate us from the craters, no immediate danger is to be feared, and that the lava will not reach the city.” With the scientific community asserting the safety of Saint-Pierre, the mayor called upon the island's successful recovery from disasters past to embolden the population: “Do not, therefore, yield to groundless panic. Do not be discouraged. Please let us urge you to redouble your efforts, as you did in 1890 and 1891. Resume your normal occupations in order to give the courage and strength necessary to the impressionable people in and around Saint-Pierre in this hour of public calamity.”⁴⁵⁹ With the mayor promising safety and the governor policing the exit routes, most in Saint-Pierre tried to go on with their lives as normal while Mount Pelée stirred on the horizon.⁴⁶⁰

In response to the accumulating damage in and around Saint-Pierre, the governor had brought in six metric tons of disaster relief provisions and had begun distributing them in Le

⁴⁵⁵ Alwyn Scarth. *La catastrophe: the eruption of Mount Pelee, the worst volcanic eruption of the twentieth century*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 190.

⁴⁵⁶ Ernest Zebrowski. *The Last Days of St. Pierre: The Volcanic Disaster That Claimed 30,000 Lives*. (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁴⁵⁸ “Télégrammes du cable français.” *Journal officiel de la Martinique*. 6 May 1902. Retrieved 30 August 2013 from Gallica at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k55555033>

⁴⁵⁹ Quoted in Alwyn Scarth. *La catastrophe: the eruption of Mount Pelee, the worst volcanic eruption of the twentieth century*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 87.

⁴⁶⁰ Zebrowski, 79-80.

Prêcheur, where volcanic activity was the highest and most deadly. As Mouttet approached Le Precheur on a chartered boat on 6 May—just two days before the fateful eruption—his ship was overwhelmed by a crowd of panicked citizens, predominately small landowners and agricultural workers who were fearful of the mud flows that had poured from Pelée’s crater, Étang Sec. These mudflows had destroyed their homes and their livelihood, and many feared for their lives. Mouttet took the refugees back to Saint-Pierre, where he believed they would be safe. Saint-Pierre’s population ballooned to nearly 30,000 as refugees from the mountainside sought shelter. For many in the rural countryside, the urban landscape of Saint-Pierre, with its stone structures and military presence, seemed a safe respite from the threats of the now awakened volcano. Nevertheless, an air of concern persisted in Saint-Pierre, and in response, Mouttet requested a detachment of thirty soldiers to patrol the streets of Saint-Pierre. The detachment was scheduled to arrive on the morning of 8 May.⁴⁶¹

After two weeks of waxing and waning disquietude, as moderate damage accumulated in the environs of Saint-Pierre and among the plantations at the base of Mount-Pelée, everything changed for Saint-Pierre. While the mayor’s assertions that Saint-Pierre was safe from Pelée’s lava flows were true, lava was never the real danger. As bystanders convened to watch a fireworks display for Ascension Day on 8 May—fireworks which were meant to commemorate the abolition of slavery and the unveiling of a new statue to Schoelcher—the volcano lurched fully awake, spewing hot gas and rock onto Martinique’s cultural capital of Saint-Pierre. With the final telegram from Saint-Pierre a chilling and ironic “Allez”—a signal to the telegraph operator in Fort-de-France to begin the day’s transmissions—the hands of the clock atop Saint-Pierre’s hospital became forever frozen in time at 7:50. Pyroclastic flows of searing rock and gas blasted from the mountain’s side, sweeping down the slopes at speeds exceeding 160 kilometers per hour to drape the city and its environs in hot volcanic dust. This *nuée ardente*—a mixture of water vapor and superheated rock—reached temperatures up to 250 degrees Celsius,⁴⁶² and as it blanketed the city, those who were not instantly killed by the high temperature died from suffocation. The event was so quick and the destruction so vast that only one person from within the primary city limits survived: a prisoner in subterranean cell in the city jail, who would later tour the United States as a sideshow in the Barnum and Bailey circus.⁴⁶³ Thirty thousand people, Governor Mouttet and his wife among them, perished in the span of a few minutes.

The eruption of Mount Pelée was the deadliest eruption of the twentieth century and the third deadliest eruption since 1500,⁴⁶⁴ and it wrought an unprecedented amount of havoc and destruction on the Northern portion of the island of Martinique. With the destruction of Saint-

⁴⁶¹ Alywn Scarth. *Volcan’s Fury: Man Against the Volcano*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 169.

⁴⁶² “Which eruptions were the deadliest?” *Cascades Volcano Observatory, United States Geological Survey*. Retrieved 30 August 2013 from http://vulcan.wr.usgs.gov/LivingWith/VolcanicFacts/deadly_eruptions.html.

⁴⁶³ Eye-witness accounts conflict about the number of survivors, and it was never entirely clear whether the story of the lone survivor, Louis-Auguste Cyparis, was actually true. It is true, however, that several eye-witnesses from the environs of Saint-Pierre, as well as from the harbor, survived. See Alwyn Scarth. *La catastrophe: the eruption of Mount Pelee, the worst volcanic eruption of the twentieth century*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). For more about Cyparis see Christian Flaugh. *Operation freak narrative, identity, and the spectrum of bodily abilities*. (Montréal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2012).

⁴⁶⁴ “Mont Pelée, West Indies.” *Cascades Volcano Observatory, United States Geological Survey*. Retrieved 30 August 2013 from http://vulcan.wr.usgs.gov/Volcanoes/WestIndies/Pelee/description_mont_pelee.html.

Pierre and its environs, approximately 20,000 people from 3500 families became refugees,⁴⁶⁵ displaced to the southern part of Martinique, to the administrative capital of Fort-de-France, and to the neighboring islands of Guadeloupe and Saint Lucie. Homes, plantations, and subsistence farms—even entire villages—were left completely abandoned. Animals and livestock had been left behind as people left in search of safety.

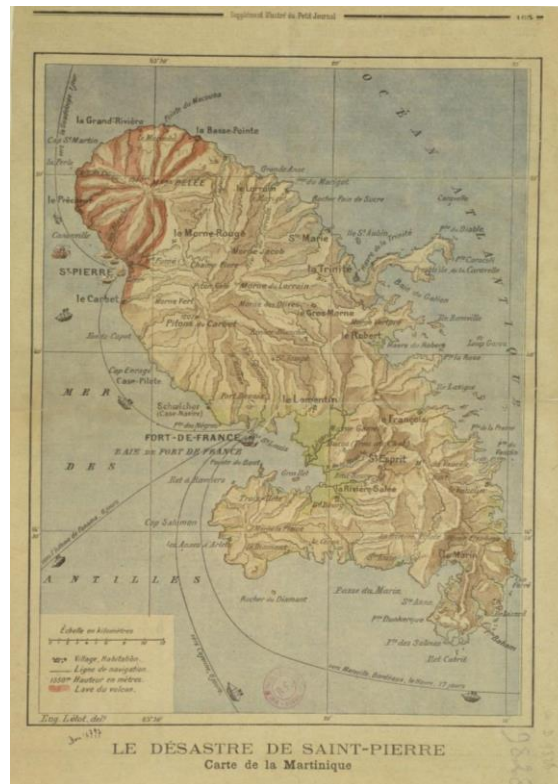


Figure 1. Historic Map of the Eruption of Mount Pelée in Northern Martinique with Lava Flows Marked in Red.⁴⁶⁶

Over the next year, the volcano continued its eruption, with a secondary eruption on 20 May and another on the 28 May. This kept the population mal-at-ease and in refuge in the south, while the north of the island remained a desolate, smoldering wasteland. Most sought refuge in Fort-de-France, where the Savane swelled with a populace looking for food and shelter. As the primary site for the allocation of food aid, Fort-de-France was bursting at the seams. It was even reported that an English reporter could not find a room to rent for upwards of 2000 pounds per night.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁵ “Projet de loi tendant à ouvrir au Ministre des Colonies un credit extraordinaire de sept millions de francs.” In MAR 58, d.486. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

⁴⁶⁶ Létot, Eugène. “Le désastre de Saint-Pierre. Carte de la Martinique. 12 km [= 0m060 ; 1 : 200.000].” *Supplement illustré du Petit Journal*. 1902. Retrieved 23 August 2013 from Gallica at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6700413c>

⁴⁶⁷ Remy Saint-Maurice. “Les désastres de la Martinique.” *L’Illustration: journal universel*, Tome CXIX, (1902): 466-459. Retrieved 14 September 2013 from Google Books at <http://books.google.fr/books?id=c7xRAAAAYAAJ>.

As people began to return home at the request of the new governor, Philema Lemaire, Mount Pelée erupted once more. In Le Morne-Rouge and other communes around Pelée's base, an additional 1000 people died in the tertiary eruption on 30 August.⁴⁶⁸ While the eruption in late August marked the last significant activity, the flows of lava, smoke, and volcanic lightning emanating from Mount Pelée forced yet another evacuation by the mayor of Fonds-Saint-Denis in September 1902.⁴⁶⁹ All told, the damage caused by Mount Pelée had continued long after the dreadful morning of 8 May 1902.

A National Emergency with or without a Colonial Citizenry

By both French officials and the international community, the eruption of Mount Pelée was seen as a national emergency, as a terrible event that struck the entire nation of France. In part, this was due to the unprecedented devastation that shocked France and the world, and in part to the number of *békés* and white functionaries—family members of people living in the metropole—who had perished in Saint-Pierre. However, the casting of this event as a national emergency was as the result of the longstanding relationship between Martinique and the metropole, one that often made people forget that the island was a colony and not an official part of France.

This ambiguity caused problems for disaster relief. Much as had been the case following the 1891 hurricane, the metropolitan government was at a loss for how to legally provide assistance to Martinique, since it was a colony but seemed so much like an integral part of France. On 4 May, just four days before the fatal eruption, Governor Mouttet had requested a nominal credit of 5000 francs from the central government's reserve fund, entitled "Aid for agriculturalists for agricultural calamities," in order to help those around the base of Mount Pelée, as well as the agricultural workers and proprietors at Le Precheur. The Minister of the Colonies forwarded this request along with his good graces to the Minister of Agriculture, who promptly denied the request on 10 May—two days after Mount Pelée had killed the entire population of Saint-Pierre—because those credits were reserved for agriculturalists in the metropole: "the credit to which you make allusion is rigorously reserved for agriculturalists in the metropole, and neither the inhabitants of our colonies nor those of our Algerian departments are able to be recipients of this aid."⁴⁷⁰ Moreover, the agricultural minister remarked that even if Martinique were a metropolitan department, it would only be able to receive assistance after a proper evaluation of damages, and even then the credit could only amount to a total of 5% of those damages.

What the denial of this modest credit shows is that while some, notably the Governor and the Minister of the Colonies, felt that Martinique should be entitled to the national governmental assistance, the legal structures in France precluded colonies like Martinique from receiving funds set aside for metropolitan interests. This was largely the same battle fought by Secretary Etienne and Senator Allègre following the 1891 hurricane, when Martinique draped itself in the trappings

⁴⁶⁸ Scarth. *La catastrophe: the eruption of Mount Pelee*, 212.

⁴⁶⁹ "Observations suite à l'éruption." In 4M11459, Archives départementales de la Martinique, Fort-de-France, Martinique.

⁴⁷⁰ « Diveres projets de la loi relatifs à l'ouverture de crédits extraordinaire. » In MAR 58, d.486. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

of a department and requested assistance analogous to that provided to Alpes-Maritime following the 1887 earthquake.

Given the vast devastation that came shortly after this initial and modest request, the French legislature opened an extraordinary credit in the amount of 7 million francs, which was used to settle public accounts, relocate refugees and displaced agricultural workers, and carry out public works. In addition to official budgetary line items and legislative allocations, the French government also organized two relief committees to raise funds from the French populace. The local committee was situated in Fort-de-France and staffed by members of Martinique's General Council, governors' office, and diocese, while the national committee was headquartered in Paris and run by the Ministry of the Colonies. The national relief committee was directly modeled on the fundraising campaign from the 1891 hurricane, and it was tasked with raising support—both money and in-kind goods—from prefectures, departments, communes, and individuals in the metropole. Made up of members from the colonial bureaucracy, the committee was presided over by Jules Godin, the center-right republican deputy who represented French India in the national legislature. Although the local committee in Martinique was charged with distributing the aid received by the national committee, the national committee set the general guidelines for the way in which the aid was to be distributed.

Throughout the disaster relief campaigns, it was clear that the eruption of Mount Pelée was simultaneously cast as a national disaster and as a colonial misfortune. The emotion in France was strong, characterized by mourning for lost family members abroad—both in the real sense of actual relatives, and in the figurative sense of “members of the French family.” As had been done for the Great Fire of Fort-de-France in 1890, the Ministry of the Colonies initiated a national donation campaign to benefit the victims of the disaster, asserting in newspapers and broadsides that all of “France is in mourning [. . .] [as] an immense cry of pain was raised in the entire world.”⁴⁷¹ The call for aid from the Ministry of the Colonies was laced with patriotic language, and it framed the disaster as a national catastrophe with victims in Martinique as well as in metropolitan France. Accordingly described as a “mission of patriotic solidarity” that is “addressed to the heart of France,” the national campaign called upon the rich and the poor in the metropole to “cooperate in this work of social assistance, reparation, and salvation.” Mayors, prefects, colonial governors, and foreign diplomats repeatedly wrote to offer their condolences as part of the morning that “struck one of the oldest French colonies and the entire nation.”⁴⁷² Throughout Greater France, fundraising galas, public collections, and newspaper campaigns raised money for the victims in Martinique. One such benefit gala by the Literary and Musical Association of Bouches-de-Rhône in Marseille raised 5000 francs in a single evening.⁴⁷³

Following an investigatory mission by the *U.S.S. Cincinnati*, the United States sent the *U.S.S. Dixie* to bring much needed supplies and assist with the relief effort. President Roosevelt asked Congress to give 500,000 dollars to the national French relief effort, and he created a

⁴⁷¹ “Souscription nationale au profit des sinistrés de la Martinique: Appel du Comité officiel d’assistance et de secours.” 1902. In FR CAOM 9Fi30, Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence. Retrieved 24 August 2013 from Base Ulyssee at <http://anom.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr/sdx/ulyse/notice?id=FR%20CAOM%209Fi30>

⁴⁷² Letters from diplomats and colonial governors. MAR 58, d.476. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence

⁴⁷³ G. d’Oussouville au Ministre des Colonies. 17 June 1902. In MAR 58, d.476. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence

National Committee to raise private donations.⁴⁷⁴ Ultimately Congress awarded 200,000 dollars of the requested 500,000, which went toward loading the *U.S.S Dixie* with food and medical necessities. France warily accepted the assistance. As was the case with the 1900 strike, the French readily saw the United States' involvement as characteristic of its "hegemonic spirit [. . .] with respect to all dependences in the New World"—the same spirit that would coalesce into the Roosevelt Corollary in 1904 that forbade European intervention in the Western hemisphere.⁴⁷⁵ French officials were disdainful of American involvement, because they saw it as a challenge to their own national pride, giving the United States justification in asserting the "powerlessness of Europe with respect to its American colonies."⁴⁷⁶ For the French, being able to provide meaningful aid was not just a matter of governmental responsibility, but of international competition. And to add insult to injury, American sailors and journalists were not averse to mocking the French.

In June, it was reported that two Americans were hospitalized in Fort-de-France: Clara King, a mulatto governess, and Rita Stokes, the orphaned child she was caring for. While these two were in actuality British citizens from the neighboring island of Barbados, the French press was quick to see this as emblematic of tensions between the United States and France. After they were discharged from the hospital, the governess and child were given refuge in a first-class cabin on the cruiser, *L'Eden*. The governess, Clara King, had been terribly upset that she had to pay 350 francs⁴⁷⁷ in hospital fees upon her departure from the hospital. When she recounted her story to a group shocked passengers, she decried, "And in Fort-de-France, this is the way you pay for the timely generosity of the United States? What better can we expect from these two new Haitis that you've let develop in Martinique and Guadeloupe. . . And there it is, the negro blunder!"⁴⁷⁸ The French were scandalized, and quite concerned that they had lost standing on the world stage. Moreover, it loomed in the back of their heads that perhaps they were at fault. To save face with the United States, the mayor of Fort-de-France, Victor Severe, wrote a letter to the American consulate apologizing to the two victims, whom he rightly identified as English and not American, and he refunded their hospital fees.⁴⁷⁹ Warning that the Anglophone press was already saturated with criticisms of the French government, a scandalized reporter for *L'Illustration* asked, "Did the mulatress speak the truth?" Had the French underinvested in Martinique? His faith in the French paternal stewardship of this colony of citizens in the Caribbean had been shaken, while the local aid commission was frustrated with what they saw as unwarranted criticism.

After several months of fundraising, the Comité renewed its call to the French populace in October, requesting more donations in the service of "human solidarity" to help alleviate

⁴⁷⁴ Jules Cambon, French Ambassador in Washington, to M. Delcassé, Minister of Foreign Affairs. 14 May 1902. In MAR 58, d.477. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ Reports vary as to whether she was asked to pay 280, 320, or 350 francs. There was also quite a bit of confusion as to the child and her governess's nationality. In any case, however, it sparked substantial criticism in the press.

⁴⁷⁸ Remy Saint-Maurice. "Les désastres de la Martinique." *L'Illustration: journal universel*, Tome CXIX, (1902): 466-459. Retrieved 14 September 2013 from Google Books at <http://books.google.fr/books?id=c7xRAAAAYAAJ>.

⁴⁷⁹ "Commission des secours aux sinistrés : Séance du 26 juin 1902. » *Journal officiel de la Martinique*. 12 August 1902. Retrieved 2 October 2013 from Gallica at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k55557988>

suffering both in Martinique and in Paris.⁴⁸⁰ This second call came after the deaths of nearly 1000 Martiniquais who fell victim to a renewed eruption of Mount Pelée on 30 August, and amidst mounting dissatisfaction with the distribution of aid. It was reported that over half of the 200,000 dollars apportioned by the United States government remained unspent in US coffers, while the private relief funds raised by a national committee in the United States were never completely spent. In September, a note delivered by left-wing senator Auguste Delpech took note of the delay in distribution: “It seems that the needs of the Martiniquais should be pressing enough, their miseries large enough, for them to count on efficacious and prompt aid from the *mère-patrie*, and for them not to learn without amazement that the millions raised sleep tranquilly in the coffers of the metropole.”⁴⁸¹ Nevertheless, the US press reported that the French government had the situation well under control.⁴⁸² Feeling that the situation in Martinique had stabilized, Roosevelt’s administration decided in late 1904 to divert the bulk of the remaining money to the Philippines, and to return the remainder to the individual donors.⁴⁸³

The relief campaign in France continued to raise money officially until June 1904 and unofficially well after that. In the official report, the Commission reported that their work to allay the “perturbation and incertitude” in this “unfortunate colony” had taken far longer than they had originally hoped. And even then, the relief effort was not yet finished. Governmental assistance for the displaced families from northern Martinique continued well into the 1930s. Spurred on by competition with the United States and repeated invocations of national pride and patriotic duty, the fundraising campaign was wildly successful. By the end of December 1904—nearly two and half years after the fateful eruption began—the Relief Committee had raised about 9.4 million francs for the benefit for victims in Martinique,⁴⁸⁴ far outstripping both fundraising campaigns for the 1890 fire and 1891 hurricane. The French state itself had contributed 1.5 million francs to Martinique.⁴⁸⁵

Overall the national Relief Committee had the best of intentions, but it was also bipolar—split between conservative financial interests focused on the island’s bleak economic outlook, and republicans dedicated to colonial assimilation. Made up of financiers, representatives from the colonial banks, and political conservatives, as well as dedicated assimilationists and social republicans, the Committee was split between helping Martinique as if it were an integral part of France and helping only those parts of Martinique that were seen as part of France—namely, the *békés* and white families left behind.

⁴⁸⁰ “Remerciements et nouvel appel du comité officiel d’assistance et de secours aux sinistrés de la Martinique.” October 1902. In FR CAOM 9Fi91, Centre des archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence. Retrieved from Base Ulysee on 15 August 2013 from <http://anom.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr/sdx/ulyse/notice?n=3&id=FR%20CAOM%209Fi91>

⁴⁸¹ “Note.” September 1902. In MAR 58, d.479. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

⁴⁸² “Martinique Fund in United States.” 1 November 1902. In MAR 58, d.477. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

⁴⁸³ French Ambassador to M. Declassé, Minister of Foreign Affairs. 2 November 1904. In MAR 58, d.477. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

⁴⁸⁴ “Listes de souscriptions pour les sinistrés de la Martinique (suite): 123e liste.” In MAR 58, d.476. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

⁴⁸⁵ “Comité d’assistance aux sinistrés, Paris, Rapport.” In MAR 58, d.479. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

From both camps—those concerned with the actual Martiniquais living in Martinique, as well as those concerned with solely those affected in the metropole—the eruption of Mount Pelée was truly an event seen as a national emergency, one that spanned the Atlantic and had repercussions not just in the Caribbean, but throughout metropolitan France as well. The shape and tenor of how this national emergency was understood had been strongly influenced by the intermingling of racial understandings with republican ideology. In response to the government’s “patriotic call of solidarity,” the metropolitan press abounded with imagery of a distressed Martinique calling to its motherland. As with previous disasters, press reports relied heavily on the familial metaphor that characterized Martinique—and the Antilles more generally—as among the dearest “children of the *mère-patrie*.” Underscoring that “the *mère-patrie* never forgets its children,” the metropolitan press seemed to highlight the outpouring of aid—both international and national—as an example to all the children of the motherland.⁴⁸⁶

Moreover, the Committee declared its intention to distribute the assistance equally among the 30,000 victims who “came from all categories of the population [. . .] Factory owners, laborers, proprietors or merchants, rich or poor, they were all reduced to the same level of deprivation. It is to this refugee population that it was necessary to distribute assistance.”⁴⁸⁷ The Committee made its explicit aim to return things to the status quo, helping people get back what they had lost financially on 8 May. The Committee sought to help what it saw as two types of refugees: those who had fled before the disaster, predominately to the south of the island or to Guadeloupe or Saint Lucie, and those for whom the disaster had completely destroyed their financial means, leaving them unable to survive by themselves. Using roughly half its funds (about 5.4 million francs), the Committee focused on finding the able-bodied employment, and used much of the remaining money (about 2.7 million francs) to provide direct relief to orphans, the elderly, and the infirmed. This direct aid amounted to 75 centimes per person per day,⁴⁸⁸ with those on the necessary registers eligible to receive a daily food ration that would supply roughly 2500 calories: 300 grams of bread, 300 grams of rice, 10 grams of salt, and either 150 grams of salted meat or 200 grams of cod with 6 centiliters of oil.⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁶ “Nos gravures: La France vient au secours de la Martinique.” *Le Petit journal. Supplément du dimanche*. 1 June 1902. Retrieved 20 August 2013 from Gallica at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k716489q>

⁴⁸⁷ “Comité d’assistance aux sinistrés, Paris, Rapport.” In MAR 58, d.479. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

⁴⁸⁸ “Commission des secours aux sinistrés : Séance du 10 juin 1902.” *Journal officiel de la Martinique*. 12 August 1902. Retrieved 2 October 2013 from Gallica at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k55557988>

⁴⁸⁹ “Décision fixant la ration à allouer à tous sinistrés.” *Journal officiel de la Martinique*. 29 August 1902. Retrieved 2 October 2013 from Gallica at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5555820n>

Use of Funds Raised by Public Subscription Campaign (1902-1904)

HOW THE FUNDS WERE SPENT	AMOUNT (in francs)	PERCENTAGE of Money Raised
Assistance for the able-bodied to find employment	5.5 million	57%
Educational grants for students living in metropolitan France	1.4 million	15%
Direct assistance for the old and infirmed (i.e. life annuities)	2.7 million	28%
TOTAL	9.6 million	100%

Figure 2. The Allocation of all funds received by the National Relief Committee, as reported in 1905

By August 1902, the French government had begun actively supporting students originating from Martinique whose families were affected by the eruption of Mount Pelée in order to “assure them a future and a career.”⁴⁹⁰ Of the 9.4 million francs raised by the relief commission for the families of the 30,000 people who had died in Saint-Pierre, as well as all refugees who had been displaced and left destitute in the island’s remaining population of about 155,000, over 1.4 million francs went to a mere 529 students who had begun their studies in Paris—fewer than 1% of those affected by the catastrophe. While their suffering is by no means trivial, the eruption of Mount Pelée had far-reaching consequences for many more than those students from the very small segment of Martiniquais society—predominately from the plantocracy or very wealthy mulatto middle class—who had enough money to continue their education in Paris.

Most of these students were the children of colonial functionaries or came from landed interests in Martinique. The majority had lost their familial wealth, if not their entire family. For instance, one medical student studying at the University of Paris had lost 12 sisters; another student at an *école polytechnique*, whose mother had financial interests in Saint-Pierre, was left completely destitute. Many of these students’ families had fallen from privilege on the morning of 8 May. To help offset the educational and living costs, and to keep these once wealthy children from falling into indigence, the French government provided each student with an educational grant of anywhere between 1000 and 10,000 francs. As a result, this group of students received a staggering proportion (nearly 15%) of all funds raised by the Relief Commission.

Among these students were the two daughters of Senator Amédée Knight, the left-leaning republican representative who lost not his life, but his familial fortune in the eruption of 1902. Others included the children of wealthy proprietors and governmental functionaries. One child in

⁴⁹⁰ Letters from the University of France, French Academy, and Committee of Assistance and Aid for Victims of the Catastrophe of Martinique. In MAR 58, d.478. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

law school received a stipend because his father, the director of instruction in Fort-de-France, lost his second home in Saint-Pierre. Another law student had his education covered because his mother, the widow of a brigadier in the French navy, had suffered a steep decline in her commercial enterprises in Fort-de-France.⁴⁹¹ Neither Allègre’s children nor the two law students had suffered the loss of their parents. Faced with the overwhelming number of those who had suffered in Martinique, it is shocking that nearly 15% of all relief funds went toward the educations of 529 children and young adults, which is equivalent to about 2700 francs per student living in the metropole. By contrast, the approximately 155,000 people left in Martinique each received on average less than 53 francs. Even if we only consider the 20,000 refugees the true victims of the disaster, that still only leaves 260 francs for each Caribbean refugee, ten times less than the funds received by students studying in the metropole.

Bigram Collocations – *Le Temps* – 9 May 1902 to 15 May 1902

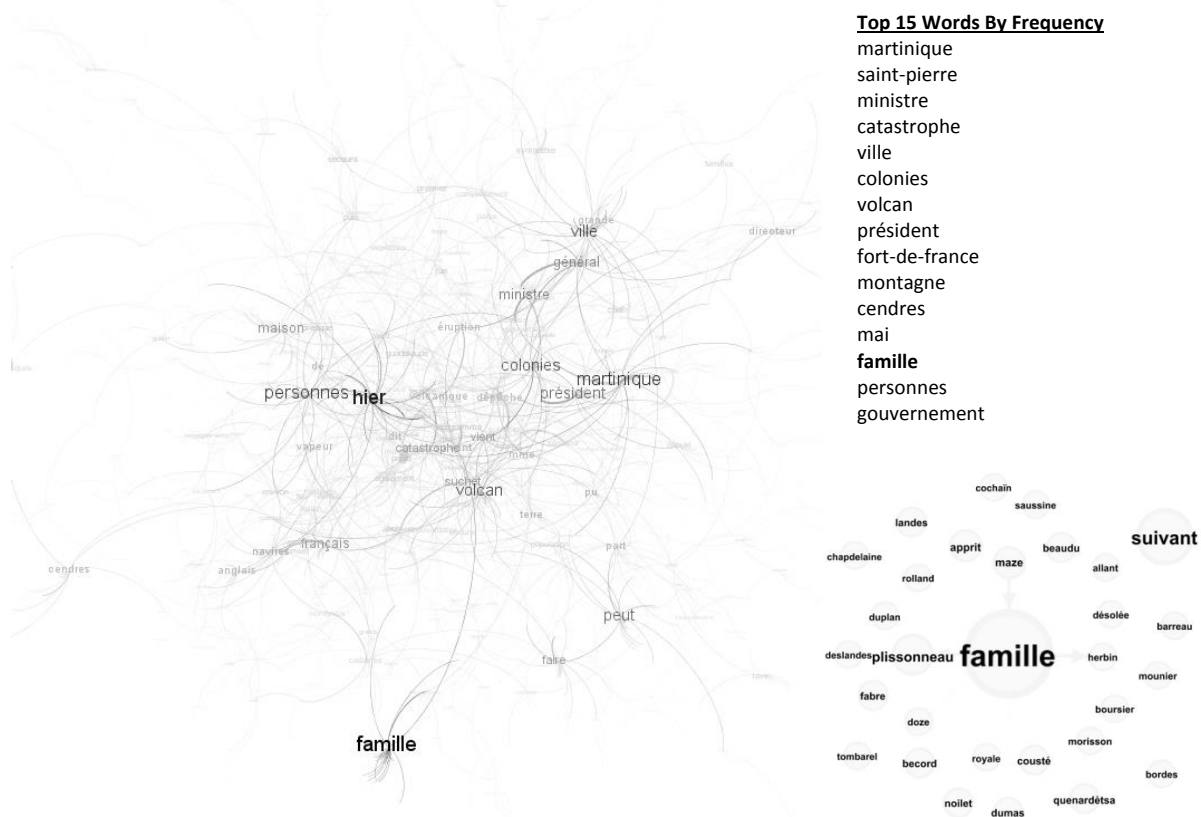


Figure 3. Bigram collocation network of the first week of press coverage in the Parisian newspaper, *Le Temps*, with the top 15 words ordered by frequency in the top right. The bigram collocation data was obtained using Python and the Natural Language Toolkit, while the visualization was created using Gephi.

In the first week after the eruption, the Parisian press was primarily concerned with news of metropolitans’ family members, many of whom were either members of the wealthy

⁴⁹¹ “Sinistrés de la Martinique don’t la famille habitait la Martinique, en dehors de St. Pierre, au moment de la catastrophe.” In MAR 58, d.478. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence

plantation class with strong ties to Bordeaux and the financial sector of Paris or were members of the burgeoning colonial bureaucracy. As we can see in the above bigram collocation network generated using transcribed news reports from the Parisian paper, *Le Temps*, there was a strong interest in reporting on and hearing about the well-being, or lack thereof, of family members living in colonial Martinique. As one member of the Relief Committee asserted just 5 days after the eruption, while the naval cruiser *Le Suchet* still looked for survivors and Pelée continued to threaten the remaining population, the government's primary aim should be to help the victims left in France, for "those of Martinique have perished, whereas in Paris and in France, they find themselves in a precarious position and it is necessary to help with any delay."⁴⁹² The victims in France were the families of metropolitan functionaries, wealthy mulatto politicians, or *békés*—the white plantation owners who dominated the island's economic sphere. There were also some *originaires* from Martinique who had moved to the metropole to find employment. In fact, many young Creole women moved to Paris in order to find work in the service sector.⁴⁹³ Other *originaires* from more well-to-do families had moved to the metropole to continue their education.

With the rising death toll among France's "miserable compatriots" and "unfortunate *concitoyens*" in Martinique, there was a clear delineation between the nameless masses who perished in the eruption and the select elite whose familial names were reported in the paper. Among those reported on was the Plissonneau family, who owned one of the largest mercantile firms on the island and who had been wealthy and lucky enough to charter a steamer to leave Saint-Pierre prior to the eruption.⁴⁹⁴ The Plissonneau family had lost its familial fortune and sought refuge in Castries, Saint Lucia. Ultimately, the family requested assistance from the local Martiniquais aid commission presided over by Victor Sevère and were awarded the same rate (75 centimes/day) of assistance as other refugee families.⁴⁹⁵ However, the Plissonneau family had recourse to making loss claims that helped the family recuperate its lost wealth, and Georges Plissonneau had access to a much wider base of capital investment. For instance, in July 1903, Georges Plissonneau posted his family's claim to three shares of a Martiniquais shipping company worth 375,000 francs,⁴⁹⁶ as well as three shares of a sugar factory at Le Lamentin that was worth 2 million francs.⁴⁹⁷ The difference between an average laborer and the privileged in their means of recuperating losses was substantial, and as historian Elizabeth Heath has shown,

⁴⁹² "Séance du 13 Mai: Comité officiel d'assistance et de secours aux victims de la catastrophe de la Martinique." In MAR 58, d.479. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

⁴⁹³ Passenger documents and ships' manifests. In F/5B/138 2/2 & 139 1/2, Archives nationales de la France, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine.

⁴⁹⁴ James Martin Miller. *The Martinique horror and St. Vincent calamity*. (Philadelphia: National Publishing, 1902), 348. Retrieved 30 July 2013 from <http://archive.org/details/martiniquehorror00mill>.

⁴⁹⁵ "Commission des secours aux sinistrés : Séance du 10 juin 1902." » *Journal officiel de la Martinique*. 12 August 1902. Retrieved 2 October 2013 from Gallica at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k55557988>

⁴⁹⁶ "Société anonyme par actions de bateaux à vapeur de la Martinique." *Journal officiel de la Martinique*. 21 July 1903. Retrieved 2 October 2013 from Gallica at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5792860t>

⁴⁹⁷ "Société anonyme par actions de de l'usine du Lamentin." *Journal officiel de la Martinique*. 14 July 1903. Retrieved 2 October 2013 from Gallica at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5792858r>

by the 1890s the French government had begun to actively subsidize both Antillean and metropolitan monocultures, giving financial preference to the island's white plantocracy.⁴⁹⁸

This division between the faceless masses and the wealthy elite was particularly strong among the local white plantocracy. For instance, the grandmother of famed Guadeloupéan poet, Saint-John Perse—whose family owned two plantations and belonged to the upper crust of Guadeloupe's white society—estimated that only 7000 perished in the catastrophe. When pressed on whether the death toll was in fact much larger, she admitted, “Oh yes, if you include the coloured people.”⁴⁹⁹ The French had a racialized understanding of the disaster and its consequences for Martinique and France more broadly, and in part the severity of the situation was underscored by the disaster's impact on the predominately white Saint-Pierre, which had been deemed the Antillean “Paris” in part for its culture and in part for its racial composition. This dynamic can even be seen in the fears of the right, which often saw persecution where there was none. In late June the bonapartist paper, *La Patrie*, published an article entitled “Scandal in the Antilles” that outlined a conspiracy in which the government knowingly gave more assistance to the island's black population based upon political imperatives:

Because the Negroes are radicalized and the whites are republicans, the former are favored over the latter. Before handing out aid, the functionaries of the French government busied themselves not with a victim's actual situation, but with his political leaning. [. . .] The districts containing a radical and revolutionary black majority received the most funds to the detriment of those districts where whites are the majority. The committee of Fort-de-France is responsible for these iniquities.⁵⁰⁰

Despite the paranoia of the reactionary right that the government was actively placating the unruly with food assistance, the mulatto population was in actuality far more republican than the intransigent white planter class, the vast majority of the island (95%) was non-white, and the entire system was set up to privilege those from the upper echelons of Martiniquais society. While direct assistance was equally distributed at a flat rate of 75 centimes per day, the overall distribution of aid favored the wealthy over the indigent by restoring the former's previous losses through insurance claims and capital reinvestment. Nevertheless, this conspiracy theory elucidates the mounting tension between the socialist left and the nationalist right, and it highlights the racialization of aid distribution.

Not only was there gap in press coverage between the death of white and non-white Martiniquais, but there was also a mounting mutual distrust between the administration and the populace. In light of the strike two years prior and the shooting at Le Francois, the populace was wary of the administration and its penchant for calling upon the armed forces. Moreover, the people were frustrated with the delay in distributing the aid in Martinique itself, which was at least partly due to the Relief Committee actually doling out funds to those marginally affected in

⁴⁹⁸ Heath, Elizabeth A. "Cultivating the Nation, Refining Empire: Wine, Sugar, and Citizenship in the Aude and Guadeloupe, 1880--1910." Order No. 3287047, The University of Chicago, 2007. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/304794437?accountid=14496>.

⁴⁹⁹ Quoted in Arwyn Scarth. *La catastrophe: the eruption of Mount Pelee.*, 209.

⁵⁰⁰ “Commission des secours aux sinistrés. » *Journal officiel de la Martinique*. 21 July 1902. Retrieved 2 October 2013 from Gallica at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k55557988>

the metropole. By September 1902, the people were alarmed. As the newspaper, *L'Opinion*, put it, “our valiant brothers [in the metropole] sigh in vain [. . .] when, finally, a new disaster has been added to the horror of our situation.”⁵⁰¹ This new disaster was the ongoing suffering of a refugee population of over 20,000 and the lack of distribution of aid. To many, it was criminal that months after the first eruption much of the relief fund remained unspent in French coffers.

On the other hand, the local administration looked down on the populace, convinced that the refugees sheltered in Fort-de-France were prone to criminal behavior and were apt to abuse the provided material relief. Provisional Governor Lhuerre telegraphed Paris to inform the Ministry of the Colonies that the ruins of Saint-Pierre have become the “theater of pillaging marauders,” and thus he has instructed the military garrison to maintain surveillance and ensure “the security of all other communes.”⁵⁰² A number of arrests had been made. A news correspondent further reported that the land around “Saint-Pierre is not policed, and bands of negro robbers are terrorizing the natives, burning and pillaging. All persons are going armed to protect themselves from the robbers, who have committed numerous assaults and have no fear of legal punishment. Men have been killed in several places.”⁵⁰³ The French Press repeated the assertion that pillaging “marauders” were menacing the remains of Saint-Pierre, and that the colonial infantry had been dispatched to put a stop to the criminal activity.⁵⁰⁴

This fear of looting is common to all emergency situations and was prevalent in previous disasters on the island, and it is politically motivated. Though such fears were prominent in the 1890 fire and repeated following the 1891 hurricane, in this case, it was further fueled by the collective action from 1900. As in 1900, when officials debated whether the demonstrating laborers were proper strikers or mere looters and brigands, the administration under Georges Lhuerre and later Philema Lemaire wrestled with how to view the suffering population: in many ways, to them refugees and potential troublemakers were synonymous. This is in part why Lemaire pushed so strongly for refugees to return to Le Prêcheur and the area around Morne Rouge. On 15 August, food distributions ceased in Fort-de-France and Governor Lemaire ordered the refugees back to their homes at the base of Mount Pelée.⁵⁰⁵ Ultimately, this decree put more in harm’s way, as a second eruption just fifteen days later killed over 1000 people and utterly destroyed what remained of Le Morne Rouge.

Lhuerre’s initial assessment of the situation stood in direct contrast with the appraisal of Senator Amédée Knight—the leftist Martiniquais republican who moderated the strike of 1900 and would later work on a republican entente with socialist leader Joseph Lagrosillière.

⁵⁰¹ “Note.” September 1902. In MAR 58, d.479. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

⁵⁰² “Telegram from Gouverneur Lhueure to the Ministry of the Colonies.” 16 May 1902. In MAR 58, d.483. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

⁵⁰³ Quoted in Frederick Royce. *The Burning of St. Pierre and the Eruption of Mont Pelee*. (Chicago: Continental Publishing, 1902), 97-98. Retrieved 23 September 2013 from Google Books at <http://books.google.com/books?id=ptQ0AQAAAJ&pg=PA98>

⁵⁰⁴ “Histoire de la Semaine : France.” *L’Illustration: journal universel*, Tome CXIX, (1902): 374. Retrieved 14 September 2013 from Google Books at <http://books.google.fr/books?id=c7xRAAAAYAAJ>. Italics added for emphasis.

⁵⁰⁵ J. M. Desnier. “Martinique: Before and After the disaster of May 8, 1902 – Personal Impressions.” *The Messenger: Monthly Magazine*, Vol. 39. (New York: The Messenger, 1903), 137. Retrieved 2 October from Google Books at <http://books.google.com/books?id=SrQOAAAIAAJ&pg=PA137>.

“Energetically protest[ing] the tendentious news against the attitude of the population” that was prevalent in the metropolitan press, which he said smacked of conservatives’ treatment of strikers in France, Knight reported to the Ministry that the population was “calm and dignified in the regions that suffered the most.”⁵⁰⁶ In his estimation, the laborers of Martinique, whom he typically characterized as “good republicans,” wanted to resume work and were waiting on the grand proprietors to get their acts together. This situation had not been resolved by the following year, and the tension persisted between republican representatives and the appointed executive. In June 1903, Martinique’s General Council even put forth a motion to protest the emergency military measures taken by Governor Lemaire “in preparation for agitation,”⁵⁰⁷ though their protestation amounted to little more than dissatisfied grumbling. The military continued to surveil and police the island.

In the months following the eruption, a special commission was tasked by the local government of Martinique with collecting official “declarations of losses” from the disaster victims and their relatives.⁵⁰⁸ Since there were at most two—and quite possibly one, depending on the accounts—survivors, the main task was sorting out inheritance and governmental assistance for the deceased’s relatives, as well as updating civil registers. The official questionnaire asked for the demographic information of the victim’s relatives: their name, age, familial relationship, and place of residence. It then asked for a detailed enumeration, with supporting documentation, of all property losses to the family: homes, possessions, outstanding debts, cash, land, mortgages, etc. It was a bureaucratic nightmare, requiring a level of accounting that strained the already taxed local resources and required a disheveled citizenry to take a detailed account of its familial worth. Initially, the official assistance campaign set a three-month timeframe to process families’ claims for assistance and share decisions with the local townships via the Comité situated in Fort-de-France.⁵⁰⁹ In reality, it took several years. In the two years from June 1902 to June 1904, the national Relief Committee had examined and processed over 8146 dossiers of loss claims.⁵¹⁰ The process took longer than was anticipated, because many people fled the island of Martinique following the eruption, only to file claims much later.⁵¹¹

Modern environmental scientists have found that natural disasters disproportionately affect the rural poor, with strong contrasts between urban and rural as well as between wealthy and indigent. While the wealthy shoulder the bulk of the financial costs, the physical and human costs primarily fall on the poor, who find it much more difficult to recuperate their losses than wealthy individuals who can find solace in insurance claims or the overall diversity of their

⁵⁰⁶ “Telegram from Senator Knight to the Ministry of the Colonies.” 18 May 1902. In MAR 58, d.483. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

⁵⁰⁷ Telegram from Governor Lemaire. 5 June 1903. In MAR 58, d.483. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

⁵⁰⁸ “Déclaration des pertes.” In MAR 58, d.475. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

⁵⁰⁹ “Comité officiel d’assistance et de secours aux sinistrés de la Martinique.” In FR CAOM 9Fi29, Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence. Retrieved 24 August 2013 from Base Ulysee at <http://anom.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr/sdx/ulysee/notice?n=1&id=FR%20CAOM%209Fi29>

⁵¹⁰ “Comité d’assistance aux sinistrés, Paris, Rapport.” In MAR 58, d.479. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*

investments.⁵¹² In the case of the eruption of Mount Pelée, the claims process privileged those grand proprietors whose families could use financial valuations from the colonial banks to petition for compensation of their financial losses. As with the Plissonneau family, who were able to reestablish their mercantile fortunes, and the well-to-do students in Paris, the wealthy were seen as vital to securing the economic future of the island. Consequently, they had access to subsidies, insurance claims, and grants, as well as to their own liquid assets.

The financial burden of natural disasters most visibly falls on the economically privileged and propertied, as opposed to laborers who have little in the way of financial capital or landed estates.⁵¹³ We know from the island's demographics that the most heavily affected segment of the population would have been the black laboring class: of the 30,000 who perished in the eruption, 53% (16,000) were black, 33% (10,000) mulatto, and 13% (4000) white.⁵¹⁴ Much of the direct assistance received by the working class in Martinique went toward paying transportation and educational expenses with the express goal of finding employment for the under- or unemployed. While some of the funds were used to set them up with available land, or to help find them housing, the ultimate aim was, in the words of the committee, to "allocate aid in order to permit them to create for themselves a new existence."⁵¹⁵

The Committee itself was not a monolithic organization, torn as it was between providing equitable assistance to the citizenry of Martinique and favoring those who were seen as the most valuable Frenchmen. Though the Committee strove to jumpstart the Martiniquais economy by equitably distributing aid, it did so in a way that would privilege the "job creators" and those with bright economic prospects—such as the students living Paris. The Committee created a special subcommittee to evaluate Martinique's losses and process the individual claims. Early on, its members' unanimously agreed that "the allocation of [funds] to victims should have for its goal the reparation of damage and not the realization of a gain," further resolving to toss out any requests coming from people for whom the loss of family members would not have affected them in "the normal order of circumstances."⁵¹⁶ The Committee felt that discerning between these claims was part of its mission to ensure the equitable distribution of aid, and to prevent abuse. In fact, the Committee prided itself in its final report with having indeed fulfilled its mission to bring equal aid to all who needed it, and for having done so with a discerning eye for those claims that it felt had overstepped their bounds. However, as a result of casting the relief as an effort in restoration, a disproportionate amount of the aid went to those who had rather than those who had not.

Much of the financial assistance went toward metropolitan bureaucrats and wealthy planters, truly the upper echelons of Martiniquais and French society who were most visible in the eyes of the relief committee. As we saw in the 1891 hurricane, colonial investigators had

⁵¹² David Alexander. 1997. "The Study of Natural Disasters, 1977–97: Some Reflections on a Changing Field of Knowledge." *Disasters*, 21: 284–304. doi: 10.1111/1467-7717.00064

⁵¹³ Ibid.

⁵¹⁴ "La Catastrophe de la Martinique." *Le Temps*. 5 May 1902. Retrieved 19 June 2013 from Gallica at <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb34431794k>

⁵¹⁵ "Note." 8 July 1902. In MAR 58, d.477. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence

⁵¹⁶ "Envoi du 3e proces-verbal de reunion de la Commission des pertes." 3 July 1902. In MAR 58, d.488. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

claimed that many the island's ramshackle homes and unkempt buildings were "valueless," and consequently the government needed only to repair those buildings that were valuable—and even then only to a quality of construction that reflected the island's overall lack of maintenance. A similar dynamic existed following the eruption of Mount Pelée, when the government doled out funds to those who had lost what was financially measurable. Unfortunately for the island's laboring and lower middle classes, the eruption did not simply alter figures on a balance sheet; it had killed whole families, ruined an entire way of life, and left many utterly destitute. Since the laborers had not lost anything but their own labor, the Relief Committee deemed it essential to actively help them "find the work that they had lost" rather than providing any a substantial amount of direct aid. Contrarily, the Committee found it essential that proprietors, merchants, and industry leaders be given the means to "reconstitute their lost position" and recreate the lost jobs so essential to the Martiniquais economy.

What we see is a clear divide between the republican ideology and its application to governmental relief. Pulling on patriotic language and mobilizing national support to raise over 9.6 million francs for the victims, the Committee asserted the equal impact of the catastrophe on all and the need to equitably assist those who were made equal in indigence. Claiming that this was an issue of national pride and "human solidarity," the Committee directly compared the 1902 eruption and the subsequent charity to the national response of the French public to the flooding in Toulouse in 1875 and the earthquake in Nice in 1887, and the international response to the flooding in Murcia, Spain, in 1879. The Relief Committee further asserted that it was the state's role to "do its part in effort and assistance" and "take as its charge works of general interest."⁵¹⁷ However, the state felt a stronger obligation to the movers and shakers of the Caribbean sugar economy, and ultimately the bulk of the financial assistance went toward returning each segment of Martiniquais society to its rightful social status.

Consequences of the Eruption

Aside from the nearly 30,000 dead and the 20,000 - 30,000 displaced, the approximately 155,000 people remaining on the island suffered as the eruption brought Martinique to an economic standstill. It caused between 200 to 300 million francs worth of damage—fourfold that of the damage from the 1891 hurricane—and it destroyed the commercial hub of Saint-Pierre. Much of that year's harvests were lost, and even those harvests that were not destroyed were still affected. Even though the sugar plantations on the rest of the island, as well as the industrial hubs of Le Francois and Le Lamentin, were not in the immediate path of the eruption, ash fall had killed a number of the crops all across Martinique. Since the laboring population was displaced throughout the island and the Caribbean more broadly, getting people back to work was an uphill battle. It took years to get the Martiniquais sugar economy back on track, and it was not until 1906 that sugar production levels met their pre-1902 levels.

⁵¹⁷ "Note." 8 July 1902. In MAR 58, d.477. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence

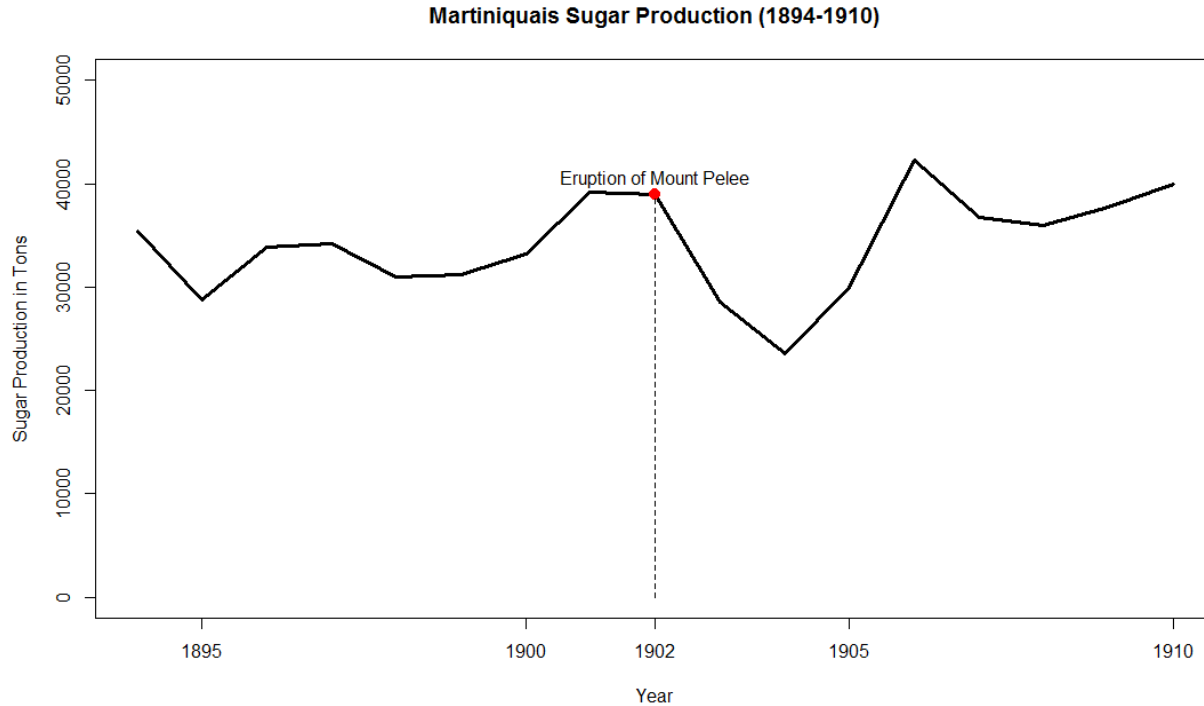


Figure 4. Sugar Production in Martinique in Long Tons from 1894 to 1910. Notice the drop in production between the years 1902 and 1906.⁵¹⁸

The eruption of Mount Pelée also had far-reaching consequences for politics on the island of Martinique, as well as its participation within the French national sphere. The eruption came in the midst of a hotly contested election. In fact, it was reported that a few days before the election socialists had marched through the streets singing the Internationale.⁵¹⁹ Although the elections slated for 11 May were never held in Martinique, Caribbean historian Franklin Wright has observed that the volcanic eruption actually accelerated the rise of Martinique’s colored population by killing many of the Antillean whites who had held graspingly onto strategic administrative and professional posts.⁵²⁰ Nearly 13% of all those who died in Saint-Pierre were white, which was disproportionate considering that the racial makeup of the island’s population. Of the estimated 185,000 people living on the island,⁵²¹ only roughly 5%—or roughly 9000 to 10,000—were white.

If disaster had previously characterized how the French understood Martinique, and the tropics more generally, the eruption of Mount Pelée solidified that association. Since Martinique

⁵¹⁸ Graph made in R using data from George Morrison Rolph. *Something about sugar: its history, growth, manufacture and distribution*. (San Francisco: John J. Newbegin, 1917), 242.

⁵¹⁹ J. M. Desnier. “Martinique: Before and After the disaster of May 8, 1902 – Personal Impressions.” *The Messenger: Monthly Magazine*, Vol. 39. (New York: The Messenger, 1903), 135. Retrieved 2 October from Google Books at <http://books.google.com/books?id=SrQOAAAIAAJ&pg=PA135>.

⁵²⁰ Franklin W. Knight and Colin A. Palmer. *The Modern Caribbean*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), p. 91.

⁵²¹ James Martin Miller. *The Martinique horror and St. Vincent calamity*. (Philadelphia: National Publishing, 1902), 30. Retrieved 30 July 2013 from <http://archive.org/details/martiniquehorror00mill>.

had been imagined as a colony of French settlement and nearly an integral part of France—almost a department in many ways, or at the very least an Algeria—the eruption of Mount Pelée had a significant impact on how the French viewed themselves. The dangers of the tropical environment, which ethnographers and journalists had feared for decades, had suddenly and violently become all too real. The sword of Damocles had finally fallen, and for some this shook their belief in French progress and very faith in republican civilization. Shortly after the disaster, a journalist for the Parisian periodical, *L'Illustration*, described the impact of the disaster on his republican faith in the following way:

This office boy is an old republican. Like many men of his generation, he has an absolute faith in the progress of the human race; as proof of his convictions, he climbed the barricades and received a bullet in his thigh. He does regret this wound that mars his walk. Instead, it reminds him of his collaboration in the work of liberty. He dreams with pride of the day when the meek will receive more justice, and he hopes that the time will come when fraternity and equality reign as absolute masters over the world. [. . .] He ardently loves humans; everyday he discovers new characteristics in them; he sees their strength grow and doesn't doubt that they'll become gods. [. . .] This catastrophe has profoundly touched him; he weeps for the thousands of beings who were snuffed out by the flaming materials launched by the volcano; but he also feels his faith stagger: *our race, is it as grand as we had imagined it?* Hasn't this disaster belied all these grand ideas? He moans, "In the 20th century! Is this even possible?" We all secretly have the same thought.⁵²²

For the French, who had begun to believe in man's triumph over nature and the Third Republic's ultimate victory over inequity, the catastrophe was truly earth-shattering. Whereas previous disasters had had a huge impact on the built environment, as did the 1891 hurricane or 1890 fire, this catastrophe had utterly destroyed an entire city and its population. For those who truly began to believe that Saint-Pierre was the Paris of the Antilles—a French settlement where the French race had been transplanted into tropical soil, producing what contemporary scientists saw as a *mélange* of European and French "bloodlines" particularly suited to the hazards of the Atlantic world—the eruption of Mount Pelée left them bitterly disillusioned, questioning whether the French race had truly triumphed over tropical space, or whether civilization had triumphed over nature more broadly.

The eruption had shaken people's faith in the safety of civilization. The press printed and reprinted numerous articles detailing historic eruptions like Vesuvius or more contemporary ones like Krakatoa, along with depositions on the world's so-called "dangerous zones" for seismic activity. With the nearly simultaneous eruption of Soufriere in Saint Vincent, the eruption of Mount Pelée had stoked French interest in the volcanic regions of the world, from California to the Mediterranean to South East Asia to the Pacific Islands. With the earthquake in 1887 in the Alps, as well as an increase in seismic activity that same year in Europe, it seemed that such an event could happen anywhere. On some level, the French were concerned that civilization was not yet prepared to handle such natural events. Yet, that faith was seemingly restored, as the

⁵²² André Fagel. "Courrier de Paris: La Catastrophe." *L'Illustration: journal universel*, Tome CXIX, (1902): 342. Retrieved 14 September 2013 from Google Books at <http://books.google.fr/books?id=c7xRAAAAYAAJ>. Italics added for emphasis.

French convinced themselves that with proper planning and science, they could avoid the real reason that so many had died in Saint-Pierre: “an incompetent local government assured [the population] on the very eve of the catastrophe that there wasn’t any danger.”⁵²³ This faith in civilization’s triumph over nature and the relative safety of Europe was painfully crushed by the flooding of Paris in 1910.⁵²⁴

As one of the most destructive and deadly natural events, as well as the only significant volcanic disaster in French history, the eruption of Mount Pelée became the prevailing leitmotif for Martinique in the French imaginary, dwarfing all other associations. As the figure below from Google’s nGram viewer demonstrates, by the end of 1902 and throughout 1903, one in every four books published that mentioned Martinique also mentioned Mount Pelée, up from one in twenty the year prior to the eruption. As the graph shows, the eruption became an international sensation, and mentions of Mount Pelée increased in English after 1902 as well.

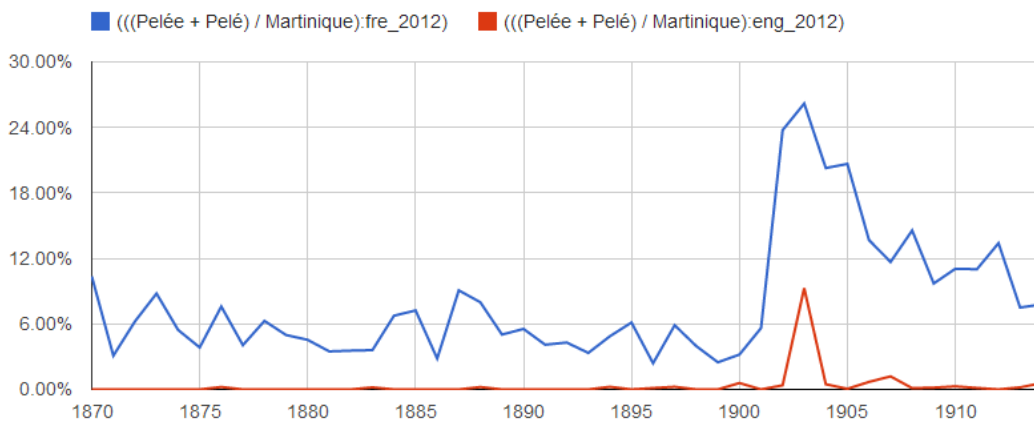


Figure 5. Frequency of French and English books mentioning Mount Pelée. The graph has a smoothing of 0 and is normalized against books that mention Martinique⁵²⁵

The association of Martinique with the eruption of Mount Pelée was in part merited, for the devastation was hitherto unfathomable. In fact, modern earth scientists have designated a class of volcanic eruptions named after the 1902 event: among the most violent and lethal kinds of eruptions, a “Peléan eruption” is characterized by pressurized gases blasting suddenly and

⁵²³ G. Cerbelaud. “L’Eruption de la Martnique: Volcans et tremblements de terre: les zones dangereuses.” *L’Illustration: journal universel*, Tome CXIX, (1902): 423-427.

⁵²⁴ Jeffrey H. Jackson. *Paris under water: how the city of light survived the great flood of 1910*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

⁵²⁵ Jean-Baptiste Michel, Yuan Kui Shen, Aviva Presser Aiden, Adrian Veres, Matthew K. Gray, William Brockman, The Google Books Team, Joseph P. Pickett, Dale Hoiberg, Dan Clancy, Peter Norvig, Jon Orwant, Steven Pinker, Martin A. Nowak, and Erez Lieberman Aiden*. *Quantitative Analysis of Culture Using Millions of Digitized Books*. *Science* (Published online ahead of print: 12/16/2010); “Pelée/Martinique”. *Google Ngram Viewer*. Retrieved 19 June 2013 from

http://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=%28Pel%C3%A9+Pel%C3%A9%29+Martinique%29%3Afre_2012%2C%28Pel%C3%A9+Pel%C3%A9%29+Martinique%29%3Aeng_2012&year_start=1870&year_end=1914&corpus=19&smoothing=0&share=

forcefully from the side of a volcano to travel at high speeds close to the ground.⁵²⁶ The damage was so extensive and long-lasting that the French government was still fielding requests for public assistance and building shelters for the victims in Northern Martinique well into the 1930s.⁵²⁷ Saint-Pierre and its environs never really recovered. Though some of the surrounding townships were rebuilt, the once bustling city of Saint-Pierre is today a fraction of what it was prior to the eruption. As the site of numerous historic ruins, the town welcomes many tourists interested in the city's ecological history.

Martinique Decapitated

Since Saint-Pierre was home to most of the island's wealthy, white plantocracy, the eruption of Mount Pelée served as a severe economic disruption. Moreover, the governor of Martinique—a career functionary named Louis Mouttet who had served in Senegal, Indochina, Guadeloupe, Guyane, and the Ivory Coast—perished in the eruption. With Pelée menacing the population, Mouttet had remained in Saint-Pierre to calm the populace. Though, while many lauded him as a martyr who steadfastly upheld the values of good government and republican benevolence, his political detractors, most of whom were from the far conservative right, argued that with the election of 11 May on the horizon, he stayed in Saint-Pierre to assuage voters at the behest of Minister of the Colonies, Albert Decrais.⁵²⁸ The political tensions between the republican center and both conservatives and socialists that came to the fore during the strike of 1900 had crystalized by the eruption of Mount Pelée. Whatever the cause of Mouttet's decision to remain in Saint-Pierre rather than return to the administrative capital of Fort-de-France, the catastrophe ultimately killed off not only island's economic elite, but its governmental leadership as well.

Viewing the eruption as the veritable decapitation of Martinique, particularly in terms of the financial elite, officials treated this devastating event as the last step toward the island's insolvency—a process carried out by hurricanes, fires, and a two-decades-long sugar crisis that “drained all the national money” and put a strain on the French currency.⁵²⁹ Much more so than when Fort-de-France—the administrative capital—burned down, many in France now felt that Martinique was headless. Martinique was without any “exchangeable value,” argued officials, and now unable to stand on its own. Some in the press expressed the concern that the entire Antilles might be “destined to disappear in the next disaster.”⁵³⁰ The French had truly begun to doubt not just the economic utility of the island, but the very possibility of its longevity.

⁵²⁶ Scarth. *La catastrophe: the eruption of Mount Pelee*, 19.

⁵²⁷ 1M11454. Archives départementales de la Martinique, Fort-de-France.

⁵²⁸ Jean Hess. *La catastrophe de la Martinique : notes d'un reporter*. (Paris, Charpentier et Fasquelle, 1902), i. Retrieved 25 August 2013 from Manioc at <http://www.manioc.org/patrimon/HASH01f397f0194a5e10bda154f9>.

⁵²⁹ « La Catastrophe de la Martinique . » *Le Temps*. 15 May 1902. Retrieved 19 June 2013 from Gallica at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k237124j.zoom.langFR>

⁵³⁰ “Nos gravures: La France vient au secours de la Martinique.” *Le Petit journal. Supplément du dimanche*. 1 June 1902. Retrieved 20 August 2013 from Gallica at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k716489q>

As was typical of coverage of these events, the press focused primarily on the loss of Saint-Pierre as a commercial hub rather than on the extensive suffering and loss of life,⁵³¹ and as was the case with the 1890 fire and 1891 hurricane, journalists were preoccupied with the disaster's effects on the port city's docks and shipping infrastructure. On behalf of the affected plantations and merchants of Martinique, the President of the Chamber of merchants, an organization representing Parisian financial interests, asked the Minister of the Colonies for an indemnity to cover the costs of the damages to property and commerce.⁵³² Collecting declarations from the "disaster victims living in the metropole" as well as those "in the colony," financial assistance to those affected was provided by the Minister of the Colonies in conjunction with the local government of Martinique.

However, at the same time, we can see resurgence in the language of compatriotism and citizenship with regard to Martinique, for it was seen—in France as well as among foreign representatives—that a "grand misfortune had struck France."⁵³³ As was the case with both the 1890 fire and the 1891 hurricane, the French underscored their shared citizenship with the afflicted in Martinique, and while this must be understood against the backdrop of financial concerns and colonial inequities, it is nevertheless significant that the aftermath of the eruption of Mount Pelée was treated by many as an issue of national emergency. In fact, the exact phrases "citizens of Martinique" and "citizens of the Antilles" spiked in all French texts contained within the Google Corpus following natural disasters in the years 1891, 1896, and 1902. The eruption of Mount Pelée caused the largest spike in the usage of the phrase. Despite the limitations of the Google Corpus, the three spikes show that there was an association between natural disasters in Martinique and the idea of citizenship, though this association was dramatically overshadowed by the idea of victimhood that accompanied the disasters.

⁵³¹ « La Catastrophe de la Martinique . » *Le Temps*. 10 May 1902. Retrieved 19 June 2013 from Gallica at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k237124j>

⁵³² Letter from the President of the *Chambre des négociants commissionnaires* to the Minister of the Colonies. 19 July 1902. In MAR 58, d.475. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence

⁵³³ Letter from the German Consul to the Governor. 12 May 1902. In MAR 58, d.476. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence

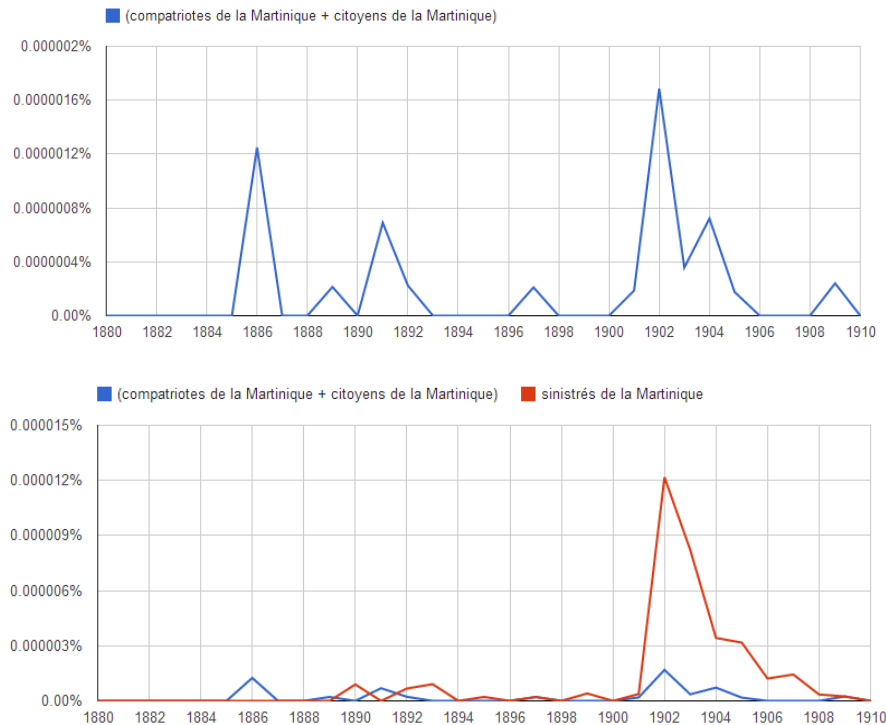


Figure 6. Prevalence of the Ngrams, “citoyens de la Martinique” and “citoyens des Antilles,” in French texts between 1880 and 1910.⁵³⁴ Notice the jump following the 1890 fire and 1891 hurricane, as well as the 1902 eruption of Mount Pelée. The spike in 1896 may have been connected to the very strong tropical depression in early December 1895, while the jump in 1886 is possibly related to the split between Hurard and Deproge in 1885. Although there is an increase in patriotic language following each disaster, this increase is dwarfed, particularly after 1902, by the notion of victimhood.⁵³⁵

Moreover, syndicates within the metropole took interest in providing relief to Northern Martinique, mobilizing benefits for the victims across the Hexagon and calling for demonstrations of solidarity.⁵³⁶ Although socialists generally seized the opportunity to poke their political opponents, taking strong umbrage with the *fêtes de charité* run by the bourgeoisie that they deemed as full of opulence, characterized by self-congratulation, and deficient in terms of real aid, they nevertheless underscored the very real need to help their compatriots in Martinique and couched their call to aid in strongly assimilationist and republican terms. As Ernest

⁵³⁴ “(compatriotes de la Martinique + citoyens de la Martinique)”. *Google Ngram Viewer*. Retrieved 19 June 2013 from http://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=%28compatriotes+de+la+Martinique+%2B+citoyens+de+la+Martinique%29&year_start=1880&year_end=1910&corpus=19&smoothing=0

⁵³⁵ “(compatriotes de la Martinique + citoyens de la Martinique),sinistrés de la Martinique.” *Google Ngram Viewer*. Retrieved 19 June 2013 from http://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=%28compatriotes+de+la+Martinique+%2B+citoyens+de+la+Martinique%29%2Csinistr%C3%A9s+de+la+Martinique&year_start=1880&year_end=1910&corpus=19&smoothing=0&share=

⁵³⁶ “Les Congrès.” *L’Aurore*. 12 May 1902. Retrieved 15 August 2013 from Gallica at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k71283650>.

Vaughan—the founder of the socialist newspaper, *L'Aurore*, and editor of Zola's famed article in support of Dreyfus, "J'accuse"—states, "the survivors of the catastrophe that has destroyed the most flourishing part of Martinique from top to bottom are our compatriots, in the same title as the inhabitants of any of our provinces. It's not alms, no matter how rich, that we owe them; it is full compensation for what they have lost. Republican France has an imperious debt to repay."⁵³⁷ The editor of the leading socialist paper thus reaffirmed the right of the Martiniquais to French citizenship, and thus the debt owed to them, not just because of their participation in a vision of the social republic, but also because of the colonial legacy for which the suffering had not yet begun to be repaid.

However, outside of the socialist press, assertions of Martiniquais citizenship and compatriotism often ran alongside reaffirmations of Martinique's colonial status. Frequently within official correspondences and within the centrist as well as conservative press, Martinique was referred to as "one of the oldest and most dear of the French colonies"—a phrase that often directly preceded or succeeded the affirmation of shared citizenship and compatriotism. At the same time that Antilleans' belongingness in the French nation was underscored in the national relief campaign, when all of France was draped in sorrow as journalists bemoaned the consequences of such a horrific disaster to befall the French nation, it was made abundantly clear that Martinique was indeed a colony—one of the most dear and oldest, to be sure, but a colony nonetheless. And as was the case with the rise in the use of patriotic language with regard to Martinique, the phrase "oldest and most dear colonies" was also a refrain of official correspondence regarding and press coverage of both the 1890 fire and the 1891 hurricane addressed in the previous chapters.

The perils of the tropical environment, and this disaster in particular, ensured that contemporaries repeatedly underscored how Martinique was a colony in the same breath that they stressed compassion and compatriotism. As people drew a connection between the mine collapses in Saint-Etienne in 1889-1890 and the fire in Fort-de-France, the French public drew comparisons with other colonial disasters. Most importantly, the amount of public support for the victims in Saint-Pierre had set a precedent for other colonies. Following the pacific hurricane in December 1902 known as the Foc Cyclone that affected French Polynesia, Charles Depince, a delegate from the Chamber of Commerce for Tahiti, asked for more governmental support for both the "French and indigenous populations" in the French South Pacific. Invoking the precedent of the "generosity that was so largely exercised for the benefit of our Antillean colony" in 1902, he argued that there was an "evident analogy of situations between these two colonies which, within several months of each other, were ravaged: one by fire, the other by water."⁵³⁸ In fact, he even asked that some of the money raised by the national campaign for Martinique be diverted to French Polynesia, though this request was denied on the grounds that people had donated those sums under the assumption that they were destined for Martinique.

Moreover, as was the case with the 1890 fire, descriptions in the press of the devastation wrought by the natural disaster were often accompanied by racist, archetypical renditions of the people, most frequently the women, living there: engravings of the *mulâtresse créole* and the

⁵³⁷ Ernest Vaughan. "Fêtes de charité." *L'Aurore*. 13 May 1902. Retrieved August 29 from Gallica at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k728366c.zoom.langFR>.

⁵³⁸ Letter from Charles Depince. 17 February 1903. In MAR 58, d.475. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

nègresse stood side-by-side with drawings and photographs of a destroyed Saint-Pierre. In June 1902, the *Journal des voyages*—a colonial periodical that purported to bring information about all of “overseas France” into bourgeois metropolitan homes—reported on this catastrophe to wrack one of the “*plus anciennes colonies francaises*” by juxtaposing idyllic and stereotypical depictions of the island’s non-white population with the flames, lava, and ash covering Saint-Pierre. Highlighting both the island’s long history with France and its racial mixture, the *Journal* explains,

And what a population! What charming grace is drawn on the face of this creole (in the accompanying image), the result of the crossing of white and black. [. . .] The *metis* are today the guiding class in Martinique. The *nègresses*, as our photograph shows, are not lacking in a certain appeal. Blacks or negros constitute what is called over there the third class of the population. As a result of contact with our civilization, they have lost little by little their apathy and inveterate indolence. The women seem completely transformed.⁵³⁹

The article continues by recounting a story by Louis Garaud in which a twelve-year-old black girl buys bread and a bouquet like a “real Parisian,” leading the paper to conclude that as “one of the colonies most devoted to the *mère-patrie*,” the island of Martinique “occupies an honorable place in our colonial domain.”⁵⁴⁰ As this article demonstrates, the French Antilles were simultaneously seen as French and colonial, tropical yet familiar. Although the population was seen as remarkably French in the case of mulattos or nearly—and quite condescendingly—French in the case of the island’s “third class” black population, Martinique was plagued by an environment that struck the French as dramatically and volatily foreign and un-French. Therefore, we again see the juxtaposition of a hostile environment and French civilization as it was embodied in the island’s population.

The French idealized the Martiniquais of the countryside, who embodied for them a form of old-world France where traditional values carried the day and the pace of life was calmer and more moderate. Such stereotypes persisted even though they were belied by the strike of 1900, which demonstrated a rising demand for social equality among the islands’ “third class” of black laborers who increasingly turned to the socialist party. In the words of the Vicar-General of Martinique, Monseigneur Gabriel Parel, the “true Martiniquians” lived in the countryside and “are kindly in spirit, the women more particularly, graceful and dignified in bearing. The French most readily projected their hopes and dreams onto the bodies of Afro-Caribbean women. Parel goes on to state that though the “men do not differ radically from other Negro types that are distributed through the Caribbean, except that they are softer in character and more gentle in ways[,] [i]t was different with the women, who appear immediately as a race apart.”⁵⁴¹

This preoccupation with Afro-Caribbean women—whom Parel describes as “imperiously attractive” with a voice “qualified to charm”—dates to the times of plantation slavery, for since the West Indies were a place where few European women migrated, the sexualized image of the slave woman came to prominence among the islands’ white male plantocracy. The image

⁵³⁹ “Aux Antilles: La Martinique.” *Journal des voyages et des aventures de terre et de mer*, no. 287, (1 June 1902) : 5-6.

⁵⁴⁰ “Ibid.

⁵⁴¹ Gordon Thomas, Max Morgan Wits. *The Day the World Ended: Mont Pelee Earthquake 1902*. (New York: Stein and Day, 1969), 98-99

persisted after emancipation, though now it had transformed into a projection of the French republic,⁵⁴² of the successes of the civilizing mission and the establishment of “French civilization” in the most inhospitable of places. As the image of Marianne came to embody the French Republic in the metropole, the image of the mulatresse—as typified on the following page—came to embody the “true Martinique” that had been acculturated to French values, styles, and beliefs. The stock image that covered the front page of *L’Illustration’s* edition on the eruption of Mount Pelée often accompanied news stories about Martinique, and was commonly reprinted on postcards and in travelogues about the islands.

This image of the Martiniquais woman—that of the light-skinned woman of color who was the byproduct of racial intermixing—was prominent in the press, and it had deep roots in the colonial relationship between Martinique and the metropole. In an extensive report on the eruption in *L’Illustration*, one journalist made sure to remind his readers of the Martinique Pavilion at the Exposition of 1900, the World’s Fair in Paris that had run contemporaneously with heated parliamentary debates over the 1900 strike in Martinique. Painting a sexualized picture of Martinique as home to the beautiful mixture of the races, he exclaims, “the visitors of the Exposition of 1900 certainly can’t forget the beautiful Martiniquaises who were, if it can be said, the lively jewels of our colonial section. They wonderfully represented, for the pleasure of the eyes, one of the most exquisite types created by the fusion of two races: the quadroon.” For him, it is this idyllic and fanciful world, where the legacy of slavery was mystically been sublimated into the peaceful and carefree blending of African and European heritages, that was cruelly disrupted on the morning of 8 May, arguing that “this female figure symbolized in a particularly characteristic way the collective humanity that had animated the life of the now vanished city.” He continues, “Charming Martiniquaises, carefree, a little frivolous, as it willfully is in the lands under the sun. How many of them perished in this dreadful massacre? How many passed instantly from smiling content to the torments of terror and death?”⁵⁴³

⁵⁴² For more on the image of women of color within France, see Robin Mitchell. *Les ombres noires de saint domingue: The impact of black women on gender and racial boundaries in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century france*. (Order No. 3444657, University of California, Berkeley, 2010). *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, , 246. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/859003747?accountid=14496>. (859003747).

⁵⁴³ “Une Martiniquaise.” *L’Illustration: journal universel*, Tome CXIX, (1902): 356. Retrieved 14 September 2013 from Google Books at <http://books.google.fr/books?id=c7xRAAAAYAAJ>.



Figure 7. (top left) A poster for a benefit held at the Hippodrome for the victims of Martinique (top right)⁵⁴⁴ An article in the Parisian periodical, *Le Petit Journal*, depicting France coming to Martinique's aid.⁵⁴⁵ (bottom): Stock image from the popular periodical, *L'Illustration*, as the cover piece for an article on the eruption of Pelée.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴⁴ “Représentation de bienfaisance au bénéfice des sinistrés de la Martinique”. In FR CAOM 9Fi474, Centre des archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence. Retrieved from Base Ulysee on 15 August 2013 from http://anom.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr/sdx/ulyse/notice?n=1&id=FR%20CAOM%209Fi474&qid=sdx_q0&p=1

⁵⁴⁵ “La France vient au secours de la Martinique.” *Le Petit Journal*. 1 June 1902. Retrieved 17 August 2010 from Gallica at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k716489q>.

As was stated earlier, the press coverage of the eruption of Mount Pelée was often accompanied by stereotypical depictions of the quintessentially Martiniquais woman. However, the preoccupation with Martiniquais women went further than ethnographic essentialism. For many French republicans, the Martiniquais woman—most notably, the mulatresse mother—represented the embodiment of Martiniquais culture as well as the very colonial relationship of the island to the metropole. As we can see in the two images above, Martinique was depicted as a type of mulatto Marianne. In the left image, taken from posters for a benefit in Paris to raise money for the disaster victims, we can see the typified image of the mulatto mother, distressed by the eruption and the prayers of those suffering men clambering to the safety of the beach and the children clinging to her breast. The mulatresse covers her mouth in disbelief as a blond embodiment of the French Republic reaches out from the hippodrome to bring her relief. On the right-hand image, we see a rather different version of the mulatto Marianne from *Le Petit Journal*. Now without children, the mulatto Marianne is dressed in a creolized garb reminiscent of the flowing garments donned by the republican icon, complete with a Caribbean stand-in for the Phrygian cap covering flowing black hair. The metropolitan Marianne clasps arms with her in solidarity as the mulatto Marianne points to the destruction of her “Paris of the Antilles.” While the mulatto Marianne looks to her metropolitan counterpart for help, the metropolitan Marianne looks in pain and disbelief at the destruction of Saint-Pierre.

Conclusion

Within less than a quarter of an hour, the “Paris of the Antilles” had become a modern-day Pompeii, and was referred to as such by contemporaries. However, there was a single yet stark difference: in Pompeii most had evacuated prior to the eruption, whereas in Saint-Pierre the majority had not.⁵⁴⁷ No one saw the catastrophe coming, or at least no one expected its magnitude. Martinique’s acting governor, Georges Lhuerre, later reported that “even early on the fatal morning, no fresh catastrophe seemed to be impending, as cablegrams received at Fort-de-France described the situation as stationary.”⁵⁴⁸ The population was truly hit by surprise. Whereas only about a thousand people remained in Pompeii when Vesuvius erupted, Mount Pelée had erupted and instantaneously killed approximately 30,000 people who had thought, only moments before, that they were relatively safe within the confines of Martinique’s cultural capital.

This tragic event wiped out a large portion of the white planter class, and was treated as a matter of national emergency—though colonial assumptions and racial prejudices strongly shaped what that meant. For some, the eruption of Mount Pelée was the epitome of the dangers of the tropical environment to French civilization—the capstone to a long history of fires, hurricanes, and earthquakes. For them the true victims were the approximately 5000 whites who

⁵⁴⁶ “La Cataclysmes de la Martinique.” *L’Illustration: journal universel*, Tome CXIX, (1902): 341. Retrieved 14 September 2013 from Google Books at <http://books.google.fr/books?id=c7xRAAAAYAAJ>.

⁵⁴⁷ Frederick Royce. *The Burning of St. Pierre and the Eruption of Mont Pelee: A Graphic Account of the Greatest Volcanic Disaster in the History of the World*. (Chicago: Continental Publishing, 1902), 78.

⁵⁴⁸ Quoted in H.N. Dickson. “The Eruptions in Martinique and St. Vincent.” *The Geographical Journal*, Volume 20. (London: Royal Geographical Society, 1902): 50-60. Retrieved 25 September 2013 from Google Books at <http://books.google.com/books?id=FR4DAAAAMAAJ>

died on the morning of 8 May, and despite a systemic privileging of the wealthy over the poor, they cried foul at the republican government's attempts to distribute national aid equally. For others, the eruption resonated so strongly due to Martinique's place in the French family, both literally and figuratively. Many had lost family members—or indeed, their entire families—in the eruption, while others saw the figurative suffering of the mulatto Marianne and the French response to it as emblematic of French solidarity. Ultimately, the eruption cemented the idea that the Martiniquais people were a bastion of French civilization in a hostile environment, while at the same time the loss of the most salient representation of Paris overseas furthered the idea that Martinique would forever be dependent upon the metropole for security.

A civilization that proves incapable of solving the problems it creates is a decadent civilization. A civilization that chooses to close its eyes to its most crucial problems is a sick civilization. A civilization that uses its principles for trickery and deceit is a dying civilization.

Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*⁵⁴⁹

Conclusion

In 1946, Martinique became a department of France, though to this day it has yet to escape its “quasi-metropolitan” status. Placed under the jurisdiction of the Overseas Ministry, the *département d’outre-mer* of Martinique is simultaneously an integrated part of the metropole, while at the same time cordoned off as different and distinct—a tropical France linked to the *mère-patrie* by a postcolonial relationship marked by income inequity and economic dependence. The island’s paradoxical status has deep roots, and the process by which Martinique became almost-but-not-quite metropolitan began at the close of the nineteenth century, when, amidst the twilight years of the Caribbean sugar economy, while France was being knitted together at home through industrialization and urban influx, a series of disasters cemented the view that despite the Hexagon’s cultural affiliation with the Antilles, the islands would always be seen as a distinctly different and dangerous locale.

Through the cycle of environmental catastrophe at the close of the nineteenth century, we see a shift from extracting capital from the island in the form of sugar to the injecting of capital in the form of disaster relief. As the sugar economy waned and the cost of rebuilding seemed to wax, many began to question why France held onto a colony as costly as Martinique. Such detractors and their critics came to the same answer: cultural affiliation and tradition. This left investors, and the many zealots of free-market economics in the governmental bureaucracy, dissatisfied with the place of the old colonies in the age of new imperialism. In response, they carried out a “calculus of disaster” that sought to strategically inject capital—to use financial investment as a form of societal and economic engineering—in such a way as to reinvigorate a sugar economy that by the 1890s was in its death throes.

Although disasters reinforced the colonial relationship by setting up a framework of dependence at the close of the nineteenth century that lasts to this day, environmental catastrophes also challenged the colonial status quo. Antilleans’ request for the sort and degree of aid that accompanied departmental status, as well as the French population’s outpouring of financial support through public subscription campaigns, affirmed compatriotism between center and periphery. That is, the language of citizenship that went with the civilizing mission had set the stage for the eventual integration of Martinique into metropolitan France—a fact thrown into stark contrast by the mounting tensions between a white settler plantocracy that favored autonomy and a Martiniquais left comprised of middleclass mulattoes and black laborers who favored the Republic above all else. *Vis-à-vis* the environment, the French defined political classes based upon racial categories, but given the long history of racial intermixture, they

⁵⁴⁹ Aimé Césaire. *Discourse on Colonialism*. Trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Press Review, 2000), 31.

understood race with respect to political affiliation. The wealthy whites of Martinique—the *békés* who dominated the island’s sugar economy—represented the landed aristocracy of the Old Regime, the utter antithesis to the republican project. Meanwhile, the island’s mixed-race population, by virtue of their politics and their economic status as a local middle class, came to represent the republican project in the New World, while the black laboring population draped itself in the values of socialists’ mounting challenge to the Republic’s dilettantish parliamentarianism. During the age of new empire, the “old colony” of Martinique redefined what it meant to be a French citizen by sparking a public debate vis-à-vis its social divisions over economic rights and social welfare that resonated with similar class tensions within the metropole.

Consequently, this cycle of environmental catastrophe also transformed the republican ideology of the civilizing mission by redefining French citizenship rights to include an entitlement to governmental assistance. And such disasters helped put forth an alternative image of the French citizen with a tropical rather than Salic or Gallic heritage. As the remnants of France’s old empire dating back to the seventeenth century, the colonial citizens of Martinique participated in the French Revolution of 1789, fought for emancipation in 1848, and earned French citizenship rights with the creation of the Third Republic. As France enlarged its empire to its greatest extent and made subjects of countless peoples in Africa and Indochina, the oldest of France’s colonial populations put forth a vision of a “tropical Frenchness” predicated upon racial intermixing and environmental adaptability, but nevertheless rooted in French political and cultural traditions. As colonial bureaucrats actively reframed Martinique as a settler colony where French civilization had taken root, they were met with a troubling paradox. The French could not look to a white “settler” population that had colonized the island, because the “settler population” of Martinique—if we can call it that—were in fact Africans who had been forcibly brought there as slaves and then acculturated over generations to the very French values that ultimately toppled slavery. As citizens of France, the population of Martinique participated in the process of national integration outlined by Weber in *Peasants into Frenchmen*, and in turn, this tropical France challenged a competing vision of France rooted in a blood-and-soil narrative that traced French heritage back to the Gauls, helping to redefine, oftentimes by directly contesting, the national values and mores of the Third Republic.

Environmental disasters brought to the fore the existing racial and social tensions that tested the Republic’s ideological convictions of assimilation and citizenship. As historian Ted Steinberg has explained, natural disasters are never natural. Normal environmental phenomena, such as the coming of a hurricane or the shifting of tectonic plates, can only become catastrophic events when they interact with human society and mark a rupture to existing societal structures. As the “architects of our own destruction,” we make the earth’s climate into a hostile and dangerous force, and it was only as the republican project of empire came in contact with the environment of the Caribbean that the rhythms of Antillean life became a “perpetual threat” to French civilization. The impact of hurricanes, earthquakes, fires, and volcanic eruptions, as well as the population’s collective action and civil unrest, on the colonial economy and sugar extraction foregrounded societal issues that challenged the French state to safeguard its colonial citizenry. By intervening in the island’s economy, the French state put Martinique’s relationship to the metropole on display for all to see, particularly as representatives from the island began demanding the economic and civic rights that belonged to French departments.

On the one hand, the tropical environment of Martinique made it “other” from the French nation, underscoring the creole distinctness of the island and marking it as a dangerous, colonial locale. Yet, while the environmental climate distinguished the Caribbean as a world apart, the political climate coincided with that of the metropole, and the government’s efforts at humanitarian aid reflected the Republic’s faith in shared citizenship and a civic conceptualization of the French state that saw the French race not in black in white terms, but with regard to cultural mores, political participation, and a unifying faith in liberty, equality, and brotherhood. Unlike the new empire in Africa and Indochina, where the people were colonial subjects without rights, the French Caribbean was part of France’s “old empire” dating all the way back to 1635 and the people living there were colonial citizens who had rights in the French nation and representation in the French government. The Republic’s relationship to Martinique, therefore, demonstrates most clearly what Wilder has described as the “imperial nation-state,” for through disaster relief within the metropole and within the colony, we see the articulation of imperialism in the framework of a parliamentary republic struggling to accommodate a citizenry’s demands for social equality and governmental protection. In other words, with respect to the appointed colonial bureaucracy, as well as with regard to Martinique’s representation in the French legislature, it is apparent that, as Wilder describes, the parliamentary republic and the imperial administration were articulated within the same political formation—that of a semi-representative French bureaucracy. In response to this political co-identification and in light of what Josh Cole has described as the development of the “statistical state,” the French government exhibited a form of “bureaucratic” humanitarianism that provided assistance to the suffering population in the form of economic engineering—an attempt to reconcile liberal, free-market economics and humanitarian intervention.

Therefore, at the same time that disasters were marked by a “language of citizenship” that underscored compatriotism with the colonial citizens of Martinique, environmental disasters threatened the republican fantasy that placed mulattoes at the heart of the civilizing mission and reinforced republicans’ fear of the black laboring class, who, as socialists as well as a colonial population, were cast as agitators threatening the very fabric of the French nation. This is most clearly seen during the hurricane of 1891, which devastated the island’s sugar economy and foregrounded the “economic calculus of disaster” that framed human suffering as a statistical and economic problem, during 1900 when a debate was waged over the legitimacy of colonial citizens’ right to strike, and again after Mount Pelée when the French privileged the white minority over the non-white majority in terms of governmental assistance and sympathy in the press. Yet, at the same time, such disasters forced the French state to publicly deal with issues of social welfare and social justice, at a time when liberal economic theory stood against governmental intervention, and in turn these disasters helped define the relationship of the French state to its citizenry, not just in the colonies, but more broadly in France as well. It is this very dynamic that we see in the first general strike of 1900, which cast light on labor unrest within the metropole as well as the mounting dissatisfaction with the colonial economy in Martinique.

Through environmental disasters and civil unrest in the late nineteenth-century French Caribbean, this dissertation has addressed two central questions: (1) how modern France reconciled its liberal convictions with its imperial ambitions; and (2) how the Republic and its concomitant definition of citizenship were transformed by the colonial citizens of Martinique. By looking at the legacy of “old imperialism” during the nineteenth century, it becomes clear that the colonial periphery helped guide France’s national integration at the close of the nineteenth

century. The environment played a key role in the race-making, identity formation, and class-based politics that defined this nation, and the Caribbean ecology—both as it relates to sugar production and its rhythm of catastrophe—affected countless lives and shaped both colonial and national politics. Citizenship rights came into the public eye in the face of cataclysmic events, as the French nation wrestled with issues of national as well as colonial identity, race, class, and the very nature of French civilization.

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