Chapter Two
From *Ménagère* to *Placée*

A[u]guste Tessier . . . se propose de donner Bal deux sois par semaine aux femmes de couleur libres, ou les hommes de couleur ne seront pas admis.

(Auguste Tessier proposes to give a ball two evenings each week for free women of color to which men of color will not be admitted.)

—*Moniteur* (New Orleans), November 23, 1805

Auguste Tessier was not among the Saint-Domingue refugees to settle in Philadelphia and complicate its politics. Like many others, he chose New Orleans instead.[1] As one fellow Dominguan emigrant observed, "one finds there the same habits, as well as frenchmen [*sic*] who know more or less who you are, either personally or by reputation, and who share more or less the same culture."[2] When he introduced a novelty into the popular dancing tradition of his adopted city during the social season of 1805, however, Tessier changed the culture of New Orleans. At the balls organized by Orleanians in the 1790s, white men who fancied a dance with a free woman of color had to compete for their favors with men of African ancestry who shared the crowded dance floor. Tessier's balls featured the Dominguan tradition of excluding men of African descent to give white men an unobstructed opportunity to court women of color.[3] His innovation, coupled with the plight of the Haitian refugees who settled in New Orleans, would cast a long shadow over the city's reputation and history. The arrival of Haitian refugees in Philadelphia shaped the politics of a city and a state for a decade or so. Their appearance in New Orleans was more far reaching and longer lasting, supplying the nation with a narrative that neutralized the threat of the black republic at the same time that it serviced white male fantasies of intimate mastery. In New Orleans, the avatar of Haiti was transformed from a bloodthirsty, rebellious

black army into a feminine seductress who submitted willingly to white male control. This chapter reconstructs the origins and mechanics of this transformation, a sleight of hand that preserved the peace of mind of the American slave republic.

The Largest Single Wave of Dominguan refugees comprised the 10,000 who fled the destruction of Cap Français in the summer of 1793. They and other migrants of the 1790s distributed themselves among several cities along the eastern seaboard of the United States. Philadelphia, as we have seen, became home to perhaps 2,000, but significant numbers also settled in New York, Boston, Baltimore, Norfolk, and Charleston.[4] The demographic impact of this first cohort was widely distributed, and they and the revolution they fled had a decisive yet diffuse influence on the politics of the young American republic, seeding a nimbus of fear about the contagion of black rebellion.[5] Only in Philadelphia, in the figure of the quadroon, did Haiti and its refugees function with specific symbolic power in the political discourse. Additional refugees arrived in the United States following the withdrawal of British troops from the western and southern provinces in 1798, and again with the defeat of Leclerc's expedition and the evacuation of French troops from Saint-Domingue in 1803. Only a second massive emigration in 1809 came close to duplicating the size of the 1793 exodus. Like the earlier migration, it was triggered by cataclysmic events, but this time 9,000 refugees converged on a single destination in the United States: New Orleans.[6]

The 9,000 who made for New Orleans in 1809 did not arrive directly from Haiti but from Cuba, where they had formed a large, concentrated refugee colony in the eastern part of the island. The evacuation of the British from Saint-Domingue in 1798 and the fear and chaos that followed the withdrawal of the French in 1803 propelled thousands of Dominguans to seek sanctuary in the vicinity of eastern Cuba's principal city, Santiago. There was already a refugee community

there, and the Spanish colonial government, interested in fostering staple crop agriculture in this underdeveloped part of Cuba, encouraged the tide of newcomers to settle in. The Dominguans literally put down roots, acquiring on favorable terms large plots of land that they quickly developed into coffee plantations, increasing Cuba's annual coffee harvest from 8,000 to 300,000 arrobas within three years. Their spectacular productivity was not enough to protect them, however, from the continuing vicissitudes of global politics. After Napoleon invaded Spain in 1808 their position became precarious, and on March 12, 1809, the colonial government in Cuba issued a proclamation that spawned vigilante committees throughout the island to investigate resident Frenchmen and expel those they thought dangerous. Few Dominguans escaped the dragnet, which operated with energetic efficiency.[7]

Nearly all of those ejected from Cuba made for New Orleans. To the degree that the migrants themselves participated in determining their destination, the city's French colonial origins would have made it a congenial choice. As the refugee Pierre Collet explained, "I thought I saw in Louisiana the place that would offer the most advantages to a poor colonist forced to flee, because, first of all, they [Louisianans] speak the same language." In New Orleans, the refugee would be at home in other ways as well. There would be no unpleasant adjustment from the torrid tropics to the icy winters of Philadelphia or New York. "Its climate," Collet noted, "is not unlike our own."[8] Such affinities and similarities, however, were not the deciding factor when an improvised flotilla of Cuban, French, and American sloops and schooners set sail from Santiago de Cuba in the spring of 1809. It was instead almost certainly the human property the migrants hoped to bring with them that made Louisiana their favored destination.

As one historian has pointed out, the refugee colony in Cuba was "solid ground for white resistance."[9] Many of the whites who would flee from Saint-Domingue to the Spanish colony in 1803, and some of the people of

color, ignored the general abolition of 1794 and continued to claim ownership of human chattel.[10] Their coffee plantations in the western and southern districts of Saint-Domingue were built on the labor of enslaved men and women. With workforces averaging from fifteen to thirty laborers, they did not approach the scale of exploitation of the great sugar plantations of prerevolutionary Saint-Domingue, but the inhuman architecture of the slave system remained central to their economic strategy. The refugees of 1809 might not be able to reestablish themselves as planters yet again in Louisiana, but they knew that if they could successfully assert ownership of any domestic and field laborers they managed to bring with them from Cuba they would find a ready market waiting for them. In Louisiana, the migrant Collet believed, "What's left of our Negroes is worth a lot more money, and they are more easily rented."[11]

He was right. Louisiana's appetite for bound labor was the highest of any place in the United States and its territories in 1809, a hunger paradoxically fed by the demise of Saint-Domingue's sugar monoculture. Sugarcane grew in southern Louisiana, but its semitropical climate brought occasional frosts that made the crop just unpredictable enough to stymie widespread commitment to growing cane. Those who did experiment with sugar found it difficult to sell their product. What Louisiana produced could not compete either in price or quality with the avalanche of white crystals that poured from the ports of Saint-Domingue. The Haitian Revolution's disruption of Dominguan sugar production was a deus ex machina for Louisiana planters. The opening in the market, together with the development of an improved refining process, transformed sugar planting from a foolhardy gamble to a guaranteed path to riches. By the mid-1790s Louisianans with capital began buying out the small planters around them, assembling the large parcels of land demanded by the greedy cane. The same planters, whose success with cane depended as much on labor as on land, waited impatiently for the ships carrying human cargo into the city's port, turning

New Orleans into a thriving slave market second only to Charleston's. When the United States began enforcing the abolition of the international slave trade in 1808, the labor-hungry planters had to rely on the domestic trade that brought workers sold away from plantations in Virginia and Maryland. The supply was never enough to satisfy the burgeoning market, and the Anglophone laborers habituated to wheat and tobacco cultivation in more temperate climes were not ideal candidates for the Louisiana cane fields. Nor did the rural upper South provide the skilled domestics sought by the port's booming hospitality industry. The refugees who sailed toward New Orleans in the spring of 1809 were right in thinking that their 3,000 French-speaking captive laborers, accustomed to work in the tropics or skilled in the domestic arts, were the most valuable currency they could carry into their new refuge.

There was a hitch. The act adopted by Congress in 1807 "to prohibit the importation of slaves into any port or place within the jurisdiction of the United States" applied unambiguously to Louisiana. The incoming passengers who were labeled *criados* (servants) by the Cuban port officials who recorded their departure could be admitted to American territory as free people. If they were recognized upon their arrival as chattel by the American authorities at the mouth of the Mississippi, however, they were slaves who ran afoul of the ban. The American officials in New Orleans apparently never entertained the possibility that the general abolition of slavery in Saint-Domingue in 1794 applied to the people claimed as property by the refugees. When William C. C. Claiborne, U.S. governor of the Territory of Orleans, was advised on May 15, 1809, by the commander of the fort at the mouth of the Mississippi that "a vessel from St. Yago, with a number of French passengers and thirty six slaves, is now near this City," he did not hesitate to assign the thirty-six *criados* who had sailed from Santiago a label that returned them to bondage. In the same letter, which was addressed to Secretary of State Robert Smith, he signaled a ready concession to the interests of the region's planters,

some of whom he was related to by marriage. "The difficulties which the Law of the U. States oppose to the introduction of these slaves into the Territory," he wrote, "have induced a number of very respectable and humaine Citizens, to address to me a Petition (to admit the slaves), which I have now the honor to enclose you." As he penned his missive, Claiborne was under the impression that permission was sought for the entry of a relatively small number of enslaved people. "It is stated to me," he advised Smith, "that the whole number of French families from Cuba, who propose to take refuge in this Territory, may probably be accompanied by from 250 to 300 slaves," purportedly representing "the few faithful domesticks who had accompanied them in their misfortunes."[12]

Before Claiborne could send his letter and the planters' petition on its way, the French consul in New Orleans, François Desforgues, rushed into the governor's office "to inform, that within 10 days, there would probably arrive here about two thousand French from St. Yago, & that at least six thousand more from Havanna, might be expected in three or four weeks." He confirmed reports that Claiborne had received the day before that thousands of refugees were at the mouth of the river. "I really fear that so great and sudden an Emigration to this Territory, will be a source of serious inconvenience and embarrassment to our own Citizens," the governor wrote.[13]

Claiborne could do little to control the flood of humanity making its way to New Orleans. The refugees were carried in vessels owned and captained by a diverse cadre of entrepreneurs who improvised an evacuation without guidance from any national government.[14] Captains Rodriguez, Ramires, Lopez, Le Floche, Meunier, and Petit joined Captains McDonald, Watts, and Hopkins sailing schooners and sloops named *Carmen*, *Le Sauveur*, and *Polly*, among others. With group passports from Cuban port officials in hand, they set out without invitation for the mouth of the Mississippi. Each ship paused at Fort Plaquemine downriver from New Orleans to register its cargo and passengers and then, beginning

on May 15, began to put in at New Orleans. Claiborne instructed the commander at Fort Plaquemine to detain some of the vessels to modulate the flow of refugees into the city's hostels and boardinghouses, but that measure did little to stem the tide. *Nuestra Señora Del Carmen* was followed by Captain McDonald's schooner, *Louisa*, on the 16th. On the 18th, the *Colline*, *Petite Marie*, *L'Esperance*, and *Tomassa* put into the city's port, followed on the 22nd by the *Clervo*, *Polly*, *Dispatch*, and *Clarissa*. This initial flotilla emptied some 1,026 men, women, and children onto the streets of New Orleans in the space of a week. The resources of the city of approximately 10,000 were immediately strained.[15] "These unfortunate People are for the most part without resources, and must depend upon the Benevolence of this society for the means of present support," Claiborne observed to Secretary of State Smith. "A supply of provisions has been forwarded to those now in the River," he continued and, with a note of dismay, admitted that "like relief will have to be afforded such as may hereafter arrive."[16]

Claiborne's worries were more than material. "I fear," he wrote privately to Thomas Jefferson on May 17, "that the misfortunes of Spain and her Colonies will give to this *Territory* an encrease of population, which may retard the growth of the true American Principles."[17] Several days later, Claiborne reported local opposition to offering sanctuary to the Dominguans. "The expediency of refusing them an Asylum has been suggested," he reported to the secretary of state. "I regret to see a space in our Society filled with a foreign Population, which I hoped would have been occupied by native Citizens of the U. States," Claiborne confided. But the governor acknowledged the conventions of "hospitality and indulgence which humanity and courtesy require" and overrode both his own and others' anxiety.[18]

Like others before him in the northern port cities, Claiborne harbored a vision of refugees passing swiftly through New Orleans en route to settlement in sparsely populated rural areas. He wanted to believe the heads of the white families who arrived at his doorstep on May

20, who told him "that having been obliged to make great sacrifices of their property in Cuba, their pecuniary means were limited; too much so, to continue in this City." Instead, they assured the anxious governor, "that as well from necessity as choice, they should retire to the interior of the Territory as soon as possible." In the meantime, Claiborne continued to slow the pace of arrivals by "a short detention of the several Vessels at the Fort at *Plaquemine*." He ordered the commander of the fort "to permit their departure from *thence* at such periods, as may prevent this City from receiving at the same moment, a too great influx of visitants, and to give time to those previously arrived to disperse and retire to the Country."[19]

Claiborne's creation of the Fort Plaquemine bottleneck slowed the disgorgement of refugees in the port, but the governor was powerless to address the obstacle that kept them tethered to the city. The human property the free Dominguans brought with them remained on the ships tied up at the dock, forbidden to disembark by the Congressional act ending the international slave trade. Without what was for many their only potential financial asset, the refugees considered themselves stuck. Public opinion on the advisability of allowing a large number of "French Negroes" into Louisiana was ambivalent. Many feared they would infect American soil with the contagion of Haitian rebellion, but other factors weighed in favor of their admission. The sooner the refugees were able to take possession of their human property, the sooner the city would be relieved of the burden of providing for them. And in the process, the city's hungry slave market would be able to take advantage of a labor windfall. On balance, Orleanians and their governor favored admission of the enslaved workers. Claiborne could hardly request the suspension of the law himself, but he helped those who could by implicitly endorsing their petition to Washington.[20]

The illegal human cargo remained aboard the vessels tied up at the harbor, where any insurrectionary contagion they might be carrying was more or less effectively quarantined for the time being. But they were

not the only source of potential trouble. "Among this mass of Emigration, there will doubtless be found some excellent Citizens; But I fear," the governor confessed, "there will also be many, who can alone be ranked among the worthless class of community. Of that class, New Orleans has already its full complement."[21] Claiborne may have been thinking of a criminal element, but there was another "class of community" aboard the vessels bound for the city that was already numerous and problematic in New Orleans: free people of color.

The first vessel to debark refugees in Louisiana, the schooner *Nuestra Señora Del Carmen*, captained by A. V. Rodriguez out of Santiago de Cuba, carried twenty-seven free people of color along with seventy-two whites and thirty-two enslaved people. Three days later, free people of color made up two-thirds of the schooner *La Colline*'s passenger list, with eighty-three free people of color easily outnumbering thirteen enslaved persons and thirty-four whites. By July 8, when Claiborne's deputy sent a summary report on the refugees to the Department of State, some 1,369 free people of color had debarked, making up roughly a third of the 4,282 arrivals.[22] Migrants continued to arrive during the rest of the summer, and eight ships made the round trip at least twice, almost always bearing large numbers of free people of color. The *Nuestra Señora Del Carmen* returned to Santiago and brought another seventy-one refugees to New Orleans in June, more than half of them free people of color. Most of the 300 passengers on the large ship *Arctic* on the first of its two rescue voyages were slaves, but more than seventy were free people of color. The more diminutive sloop *Polly* made three trips in quick succession, transporting well over a hundred free people of color on its single deck.[23]

The first cohort of free colored refugees numbered 1,369, of which 608 were adult women and 178 adult men. The demography of the schooner *Swiss*, which arrived in late May of 1809, implies an explanation for the imbalance. The vessel bore thirty-two white men, ten white women, and six white children. Sailing with the

forty-eight white people were fifty-eight free people of color, twenty-nine women, twenty-two children, and only seven fully grown men. Almost certainly the life partners of many, if not most, of the white men on the *Swiss* were among the free women of color on board.[24]

French-born Jean Moreu and men like him could well have been among those aboard the *Swiss*. Moreu, like many fellow refugees, settled in the Faubourg Ste. Marie in New Orleans, a part of the city best known early in the nineteenth century for the cheap lodging and nightlife it offered rowdy young flatboatmen at the end of their arduous voyages downriver. There, still living in a rented room about a year after his arrival, Moreu called in a notary to draw up a will that described the family he had brought with him to America. Marie Jeanne, a free woman of color with whom he had cohabited for twenty years, and the three mixed-race natural children he fathered on her were, he stipulated, his only heirs. He had nothing presently to bequeath them except the right to collect a debt owed him in Saint-Domingue. Entrusted with executing Moreu's last wishes was Joseph Saint Victor, his "old and good friend," who himself shared his life with a free woman of color and their six mixed-race children in another part of Faubourg Ste. Marie.[25]

Black men who might rise in bloody rebellion represented the most terrifying of the threats posed by the Dominguan influx of 1809, but the lopsided shipboard demography of the *Swiss* and the living arrangements of men like Moreu and Saint Victor stoked another fear.[26] A powerful discourse developed in prerevolutionary Saint-Domingue that portrayed free women of color as dangerous, sexually irresistible figures who seduced French men away from the attachment they should feel for French women and, by extension, France itself.[27] The formation of sexual partnerships across the color line that produced mixed-race children, known as *métissage*, was a widespread practice in many of France's colonies, especially those where French men greatly outnumbered French women. In Saint-Domingue, Michel-René Hilliard d'Auberteuil estimated in 1776 that for the

11,000 free men living in the colony's countryside, there were only 7,200 free women, 4,000 of them free women of color. The ratio was even more unbalanced in the cities, where there were 6,200 free women, 3,000 of them free women of color, for 13,900 free men. Even if there had been enough free white women to supply every free white man in Saint-Domingue with a wife, Hilliard d'Auberteuil observed that illicit sexual partnerships would prevail. "Marriages are rare in Saint-Domingue," he lamented. "The French workers who come here seeking their fortunes almost never marry; concubinage attaches them to white or black women by only the slightest of ties," a situation that left them free to pursue their money-making agendas uninhibited. The result, according to Hilliard d'Auberteuil's count, was that 7,400 white and free colored prostitutes and concubines outnumbered the 6,000 white and free colored married women in Saint-Domingue.[28]

During the first stage of its colonization of the Americas, metropolitan France was not anxious about *métissage*.[29] In fact, until the late seventeenth century, it supported an assimilationist policy that advocated the intermarriage of French men and Indian women to enlarge and implant a stable French presence in the Americas. The 1685 *Code Noir* regulating slavery in France's colonies even left a small space for legitimate marriages between French men and enslaved African women. Some French men did marry Indian and African women, but many more chose to conduct sexual relations with them outside of marriage. "In a colony where the number of white men is so much greater than that of white women, where most European men are condemned to bachelorhood by inevitable circumstances," explained Justin Girod de Chantrans in 1785, "they are agreeable to and satisfied with the favors of women of color."[30] Such behavior fed a chronic metropolitan grumble about "libertinage," but it was not until the middle of the eighteenth century that such complaints began to develop into a coherent ideology that linked theories of patriotism to sexual behavior in the colonies. At the

same time that European powers fought a succession of wars among themselves, culminating in the expensive Seven Years' War of 1757–63, they saw their American possessions begin to develop economies and identities that attenuated colonial loyalties to the homeland. Colonists' drift away from marriage to European women, accompanied by a growing population of children of mixed ancestry, heighted metropolitan France's anxiety about its relationship to its colonies. Not least, *métissage* posed an obvious threat to race-based slavery, the fuel of the economic dynamo of which Saint-Domingue was the foremost exemplar. Metropolitan opinion prodded colonials themselves to think more systematically about the nature of their own identities. For those who sought to be recognized as fully European despite birth and continued residence in the colonies, *métissage* and a growing body of people of mixed African and European descent constituted a circumstance that could be counted against them in their bid to demonstrate their suitability for full membership in the European polity.[31]

In Saint-Domingue, where African-descended people outnumbered those of unmixed European descent by a ratio of nine to one, the anxiety about *métissage* was especially acute. It coalesced in 1750 in a treatise by Emilien Petit, a Dominguan native of French ancestry, entitled *Le Patriotism américain*. In it, Petit urged the strong promotion of marriage among the colony's whites, a campaign against partnerships outside of marriage, and a ban on marriage between French men and African-descended women. In the decades following Petit's intervention, instead of withering away through the growth of white intermarriage, the population of free people of color grew ever larger. In 1771, 18,418 whites outnumbered the colony's 6,180 free people of color by a ratio of nearly three to one. By 1788, on the eve of the Haitian Revolution, 21,813 free people of color approached demographic parity with some 27,723 whites.[32]

Contemporaries believed that this dramatic increase was the result of rising numbers of white men

manumitting the children they fathered on enslaved African partners. "It is the concubinage of white men with black women that is the cause of there being so many free mulattos," Médéric Louis Élie Moreau de Saint-Méry explained succinctly. Historians have generally presumed the same.[33] A meticulous study of free people of color recently conducted by a Francophone historian, however, shows that the growth in the free colored population owed as much to the economic boom that characterized Saint-Domingue in the last third of the eighteenth century as it did to *métissage*. Forty-five percent of the manumissions in Port-au-Prince and 49 percent of those in Cap Français were of people classified as *nègre*, indicating unmixed African descent. Expanded opportunities to earn money in the colony's robust economy enabled enslaved people to buy their way out of bondage and made it easier for the newly freed to earn enough to liberate family members who remained enslaved.[34]

The practical reality that lay behind the growth of the free colored population proved no obstacle to the emergence of a stereotype that portrayed hypersexual mixed-race women as both the product and the cause of Saint-Domingue's compromised French identity. In the discourse that emerged in the 1780s and 1790s, the incontinence and libertinage of white men was replaced as the culprit of French degeneracy by the sexually powerful *mûlatresse*. Justin Girod de Chantrans produced a disquisition on free women of color in 1785 that served as a foundation for more elaborate treatments by the Baron de Wimpffen and Moreau de Saint-Méry published within months of each other in 1796. Girod de Chantrans explains phlegmatically in his work that women of African descent are "naturally more lascivious than Europeans," and that they consciously learned to amplify this advantage when they "collected and reserved to themselves all the pleasure (giving practices) of which they were capable."[35] By the mid-1790s, when Moreau de Saint-Méry and Wimpffen published their descriptions of the *mûlatresse*, the outbreak of the Haitian Revolution

had cast in a new light the characteristics and practices that Girod de Chantrans had dispassionately enumerated a decade earlier.

Echoing each other in a nearly pornographic evocation of the free woman of color's sexual charms, Moreau de Saint-Méry and Wimpffen delineated with sensationalized hindsight the latent danger of the black seductress. "The whole being of a Mulatress is a book given to pleasure, and the fire of this Goddess burns in her heart until she dies," Moreau de Saint-Méry informed his readers. "The imagination cannot conceive of anything more inflamed that she has not felt, guessed, accomplished. To charm all the senses, to raise them to the most delicious ecstasies, to suspend them by the most seductive raptures: this is her only object of study." In Wimpffen's less artful description, women of color "have reduced voluptuousness to a kind of mechanical art, which they have carried to the highest point of perfection. In their seminaries," he confides, Aretino, the author of a bawdy Renaissance satire set in a brothel, "would be a simple and modest scholar!" Both men compared the women's sensibility to fire, but Wimpffen added fireworks to his description. "They join to the inflammability of niter, a petulance of desire," a dangerous mixture that "in despite of every consideration, incessantly urges them to pursue, seize, and devour pleasure, as the flame devours its aliment." Moreau de Saint-Méry closed his damning paean with a well-placed Classical reference to lend a civilized gloss to his erotic litany. "Not even the code of Paphos," the birthplace of the Greek goddess of love, Aphrodite, "knows all the secrets of the amorous pleasures" at the command of Saint-Domingue's enchanting *mûlatresse*. White men were in thrall to these women's seductive virtuosity, despite the threat it posed to the integrity of their French identities and loyalties.[36]

As if their lethal charms were not enough to threaten the stability of France's hold on its most valuable colony, *mûlatresses* further imperiled the colony by their unfettered love of sartorial luxury. Instead of investing in the built environment of Saint-Domingue or in its

industry, they frittered away their money on "the most beautiful things that India produces, the most precious muslins, handkerchiefs, cloths and linens." These intrinsically beautiful fabrics they lavishly embellished with "rich lace, jewels, valuable in their multiplicity rather than their type." They were, Moreau de Saint-Méry observed, "so insatiable in their desire for these costly things that we see a fairly large number of mulattos in Saint-Domingue that could change their entire ensemble every day for a year."[37] In an essay on dance that he published at about the same time, Moreau de Saint-Méry produced an even more extreme example of the women's extravagant wardrobe. "At one of their balls, everyone wore taffeta, at another, everyone was in muslin, and at yet another all wore linen!" In 1785, Girod de Chantrans had suggested that instead of complaining about the prodigal expenditures on jewels and clothes, the French should view this behavior as a "voluntary tax which the metropole lays against the libertinage of the colonists."[38]

After the outbreak of the Haitian Revolution, the *mûlatresse* was portrayed in the discourse shaped by Moreau de Saint-Méry and Wimpffen as the shameless survivor of the tragedy she helped foment. "The French colored women live in the most obnoxious luxury in Philadelphia," Moreau de Saint-Méry observed during his temporary exile in the City of Brotherly Love between 1794 and 1798. This account was not published until the early twentieth century but almost certainly reflected the conversations among the white refugees who kept company with him at his Philadelphia bookshop. "Since this luxury can only be provided by the French and by former French colonials, the contrast of their condition with the misery of the mass of their compatriots is revolting."[39]

Moreau de Saint-Méry's observation that the exiled *mûlatresses* of Philadelphia were kept by white men gestures at another of the women's dangerous characteristics according to his rubric: their preference for white sexual partners. According to Hilliard d'Auberteuil, "they love white men, and disdain

the mulatto."[40] Moreau de Saint-Méry reiterated this prejudice, with emphasis, "Mulatresses affect a strong disdain for mulattos, and the same at their balls, which resemble those of the whites." At these soirées, attired in their finest muslins, taffetas, or linens, they "wanted no others but the white men."[41] These seductresses set their lures specifically to entrap white men, and, Moreau de Saint-Méry cautioned, it was all part of an elaborate scheme to extract as much as they could from their white paramours while they reserved their true affections for men of their own race. "This disdain is merely feigned," Moreau de Saint-Méry warned. "Many prefer a mulatto, and secretly bed him" in the privacy of their own homes.[42]

Early national American readers had access to these lurid condemnations of free women of color even if they could not read French. Baron de Wimpffen's book was first published in English, and in 1808 native Philadelphian Leonora Sansay made an American contribution to the portrait of the Saint-Domingue *mûlatresse*. A former love interest of Aaron Burr, Sansay married a Dominguan refugee and returned with him to Cap Français in 1802. In 1808 she published *Secret History; or, the Horrors of St. Domingo*, an account of the state of the colony just prior to the triumph of black revolutionary forces.[43] Before the revolution, she informed her readers, the *mûlatresses*' "splendor, their elegance, their influence over the men, the fortunes lavished on them by their infatuated lovers, so powerfully excited the jealousy of the white ladies, that they complained to the council of the ruin their extravagance occasioned to many families." When the council responded by imposing sumptuary laws on free women of color, they "shut themselves up in their houses, and appeared no more in public." The disappearance of their best customers dealt such an economic blow to the colony's merchants that they persuaded the authorities to rescind the regulations, "and the olive beauties triumphed."[44]

The *mûlatresse*'s bottomless appetite for luxury could have more dire consequences for white women than sartorial humiliation. It could rob them of the economic

security their husbands were supposed to provide. Sansay tells of a refugee woman from Jérémie whose husband stayed behind in Saint-Domingue at the outbreak of the revolution to guard his possessions. She returned to the colony a few years later to find her husband "attached to a woman of colour on whom he lavished all his property." When the situation in Jérémie became intolerable, he sent his wife and daughter to safety in Cuba in one boat and "embarked with his mistress in another." Once in Cuba, he took a house in the country with his "favorite, leaving his family in town, and in such distress that they were often in want of bread." The man, Sansay accused, "was rich!" But instead of fulfilling the responsibilities of a husband, he "lavished on his mistress all the comforts and elegancies of life, yet refused his family the scantiest pittance." He went so far as to deny his daughter a dowry. After the daughter's selfless fiancé overlooked her poverty and married her, the girl, presumably weakened by shame and hardship, promptly died.[45]

The sexually precocious free woman of color appeared briefly, as we have seen, as the object of a besotted Philadelphia Quaker's affection in John Murdock's 1795 *Triumphs of Love*, hinting that the stereotype was established in some form in the American imagination before its exposure to the powerfully moralizing characterizations produced by Moreau de Saint-Méry, Wimpffen, and Sansay. Another English publication from the early nineteenth century reveals yet one more way that the imagined qualities of the Saint-Domingue *mûlatresse* were transported to American shores. The memoir of Pierre-Louis Berquin-Duvallon, a Dominguan refugee who lived in New Orleans from 1800 to 1802 before relocating to France, was published in English in 1806. In it, he portrayed the free woman of color in New Orleans as the twin of the Dominguan *mûlatresse* who had contributed to the undoing of white colonists like him. He found the free colored women in New Orleans marginally less objectionable than the free black men he encountered there, "but they come close with their propensity for libertinage, (and) their vanity." These

women harbored a "hatred of whites in general and for white women in particular," but, as with the Dominguan *mûlatresse* described by Moreau de Saint-Méry, it was "a hate which is subordinated, however, to their personal interest, since a large number of them live in concubinage with the same white men, by virtue of greed more than by ties of sincere attachment." The English translation of Berquin-Duvallon played up the implicit warning to white men who might be tempted by the *mûlatresse*'s charms. In John Davis's freely edited 1806 version of Berquin-Duvallon, "Money will always buy their caresses," and, although they "live in open concubinage with the whites," they "are incited more by money than any attachment." Offering fatherly advice to his readers, the translator continued, "After all we love those best, and are most happy in the intercourse of those, with whom we can be the most familiar and unconstrained." The hearts of the *mûlatresses* of New Orleans, he insisted, "are with men of their own colour."[46]

Thomas Ashe, an Irishman who claims to have visited New Orleans in 1806, reprised and embellished the descriptions of Moreau de Saint-Méry and Wimpffen in his own portraits of the Crescent City's free women of color. Moreau de Saint-Méry's *mûlatresse* wore "rich lace, jewels . . . used in profusion," while on Ashe's, "the bosom is covered with solitaries, composed of every different kind of jewels." Wimpffen attested that "their favourite coiffure is an India handkerchief, which is bound round the head: the advantages they derive from this simple ornament are inconceivable." Ashe made it conceivable, and added gold and paste jewels for good measure: "Their most general head-dress is either a handkerchief of gold-gauze braided in with diamonds, or else chains of gold and pearls twisted in and out through a profusion of fine black hair, which produces a pleasing effect." Moreau de Saint-Méry's luxurious Indian fabrics, "the most precious muslins, kerchiefs, fabrics and linens," and his "rich laces" became in Ashe's account petticoats "ornamented at the bottom with gold lace or fringe richly tasselled" and "a cloak made of gauze, or some such light material, which

hangs as a loose train to the ground, or is occasionally fastened to the side by a clasp of jewels."[47]

Ashe may or may not have actually seen the opulently dressed free women of color he described as strolling along the New Orleans levee in search of white men to support their expensive tastes. His descriptions are often wildly inaccurate and borrow freely from others' works, as did many other contemporary travel accounts. But by the time he sat down to write his book a year or so after he completed his travels he had access not only to Moreau de Saint-Méry and Wimpffen but to Berquin-Duvallon, who had transported the trope of the *mûlatresse* to New Orleans. Moreau de Saint-Méry was the first to convey the extravagant seductress beyond the boundaries of Saint-Domingue, where her natural habitat had been destroyed by the revolution, to American shores. But his sighting of the temptress in Philadelphia lay unpublished until the twentieth century. It was Ashe's fantastic account of her sartorial splendor that sensationalized her and fixed her in the popular imagination at a new site on the American mainland. The *mûlatresses*, their beauty enhanced by jewels and gold trimming from the tops of their heads to their slippers "of gold embroidery," had a new home.[48]

The arrival of the *mûlatresse* in New Orleans created expectations of titillation — or outrage — among all who ventured to the city in the wake of Ashe's publication, but it also made a more critical contribution to the American psyche. The presence of the *mûlatresse* in continental America was a threat to the sexual order that was emerging as central to forging a stable American polity. If America was to be exposed to the reverberations of the Haitian Revolution, however, the *mûlatresse* was preferable to the alternative of unbridled black male violence. Directing the gaze of the American public toward the *mûlatresse* drew attention away from the more terrifying danger of the black rebellion that might escape the island's boundaries to far more devastating effect. Succumbing to the temptations of the *mûlatresse* was evil, but she was, in the end, a woman susceptible to the mastery of any white man who could satisfy her taste

for luxury. Admitting the *mûlatresse* to American soil and minds represented a devil's bargain.

Leonora Sansay's *Secret History* captures the covenant proposed by the *mûlatresse* in the story of Zuline, a young free woman of color in Cap Français. During the violence of May 1793 that ended in the burning of the city, Sansay writes, "a Frenchman was dragged from his place of concealment by a ruthless mulatto, who, drawing his sabre, bade him prepare to die." The mulatto promised to spare his life in return for money, and the Frenchman, having none, persuaded him he could get as much as he needed from an American merchant who was his friend. While the Yankee merchant dickered with the armed mulatto and the Frenchman trembled with fear, "a young girl of colour, who lived with the American, entered, and having learned the story, employed all her eloquence to make the mulatto relent." The girl "sunk at his feet, and pressed his hands which were reeking with blood," using the same charms that could be the downfall of vain white men for another purpose. "She was beautiful; she wept, and beauty in tears has seldom been resisted." She even "offered him, in addition to the sum proposed, all her trinkets," the things supposedly dearest to a *mûlatresse*'s heart. The mulatto relented, rejecting the baubles and the money, sparing the life of the Frenchman "for you alone, for to you I can refuse nothing. He shall be concealed, and guarded by myself till the moment of embarking" with the evacuating fleet. In return, the mulatto intended to take Zuline for his mistress. When the mulatto returned to collect his debt, the American merchant, revealed to be her lover, kept the rebel from claiming his ultimate prize. Zuline "was the means of saving many others, and the accounts I have heard of her kindness and generosity oblige me to think of her with unqualified admiration."[49]

Sansay's fable lays out perfectly the pivotal role the *mûlatresse* was to play as American consciousness came to grips with the Haitian Revolution. The free woman of color was an insatiable consumer who seduced white men, including American white men, tempting them away from their proper roles as faithful husbands and

fathers. The French discourse that cast the *mûlatresse* as a usurper of patriotic filiation applied equally to Americans. As Jan Lewis pointed out long ago, "marriage was the very pattern from which the cloth of republican society was to be cut." Only marriage properly fulfilled the prescription articulated in an American publication of the mid-1770s, enabling a man to experience the "endearing intercourse of friendship and communication of pleasure, the tender feelings and soft passions of the soul." No longer simply an ally of the state in establishing social order, marriage was the bedrock of a new variety of patriotism founded on affection. "In this happy state, man feels a growing attachment to human nature, and love to his country."[50] Lust for the *mûlatresse* perverted the course of patriotic married love, but it also offered a saving alternative to the rapacious and violent black rebel. Of the two invasive threats Haiti posed to the young American republic, the seductress was preferable, even welcome, despite her admitted evils (see Figures 5 and 6).

This literature prepared people to know what to expect and what to fear when thousands of Haitian refugees began pouring into New Orleans in 1809, whether native Orleanians or Anglo-Americans living far from the city's remote perch at the edge of the continent. The shipboard demographics of the free people of color were thus simultaneously comforting and disturbing. Among the initial swell of 4,282 refugees who arrived before July 18, 1809, free people of color comprised 608 women and only 178 men, accompanied by 583 children. Though vastly outnumbered by the 729 white men who arrived in the same cohort, the arrival of free men of color among the refugees was a particular worry, evoking fears of violent rebels like the treacherous mulatto in the tale of Zuline. Three years before the events of 1809 made such a threat plausible, the territorial legislature had already barred any free men of color from Haiti, from whom "serious inconveniences might arise." The same legislation took pains to make the gender aspects of the law clear, dictating that it would "not operate against women of color, nor against young people of that description, under

fifteen years of age, who shall be supposed to have left the island above named to fly from the horrors committed during its insurrection."[51]

Governor Claiborne reproved the American consul at Santiago for allowing adult men of color to make their way to New Orleans, notifying him in the late summer of 1809 that "the males above the age of fifteen, have in pursuance to a Territorial Law been ordered to depart. — I must request you Sir, to make known this circumstance." Adult male immigrants were illegal and feared, but Claiborne further implored the consul "also to discourage free people of Colour of every description from emigrating to the Territory of Orleans; We have already a much greater proportion of that population, than comports with the general Interest."[52]

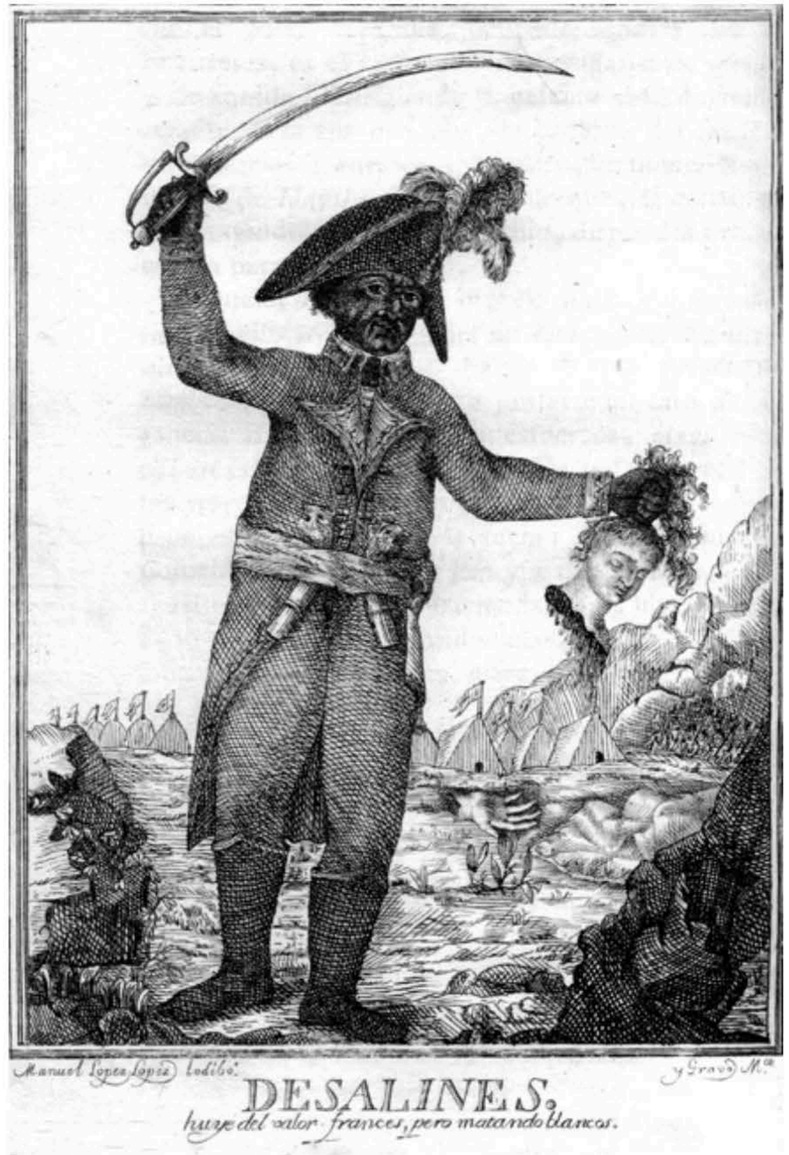

FIGURE 5. *Desalines* [*sic*]. This portrait of Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Toussaint Louverture's successor as commander of the Haitian revolutionary forces, is typical of popular images that portrayed the figure of the terrifying black Haitian male in the early nineteenth century. From Jean-Louis Dubroca, *Vida de J. J. Dessalines . . .* (Madrid: La Imprenta real, 1805). Courtesy of the Latin American Library, Tulane University.

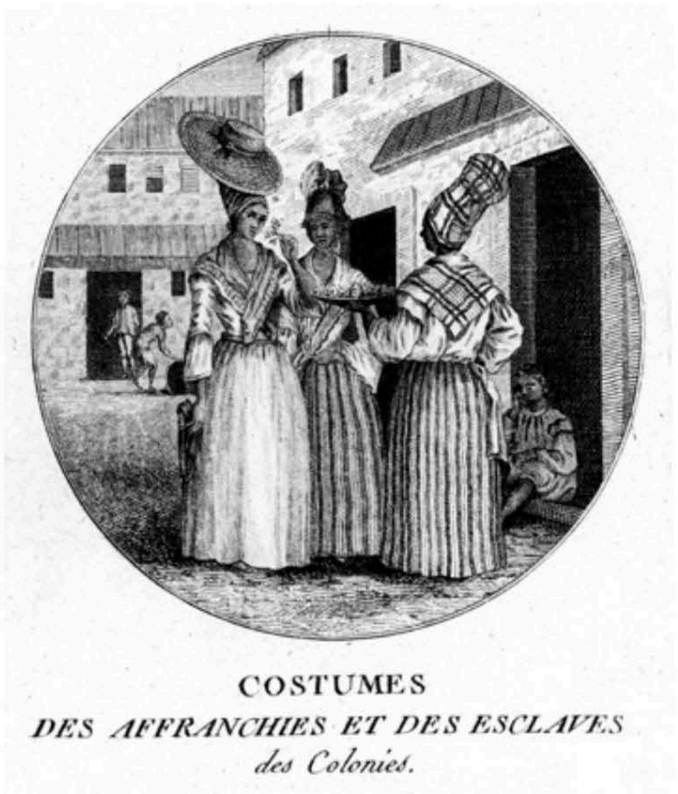

FIGURE 6. *Costumes des Affranchies et des Esclaves des Colonies*. Saint-Domingue's *mûlatresses*, portrayed as seductive, extravagantly dressed free women of color like the two facing forward in this engraving, posed a lesser threat than black male revolutionaries. From Nicolas Ponce, *Receuil des vues des lieux principaux de la colonie Francaise de Saint-Domingue* (Paris, 1791). Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University.

By making it difficult, if not impossible, for adult free men of color to come to New Orleans and remain there, territorial authorities unwittingly increased the likelihood that its white male inhabitants would be drawn into relationships with free women of color. Of 308 children born to Dominguan free women of color between 1810 and 1812 some 101, fully a third, were born to mothers who could identify no father for the sacramental register. The significance of these figures comes into focus when compared with 58 children baptized by Orleanian free women of color during the same period. Only 22 percent of the children they brought to the baptismal font lacked a named father. The difference

between the two groups underlines the obvious: refugee women through the ages have been and continue to be particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation.[53] Some of those who arrived in New Orleans may have had sexual partners in Cuba who, for a variety of reasons, did not accompany them to Louisiana. In the case of free men of color, they were clearly prohibited, but other scenarios can also explain the unattached mothers who baptized children shortly after their arrivals. It is likely that many resorted to transitory relationships or even prostitution as an economic survival strategy. Some, like the widow Catherine Couvreur, were doubly vulnerable. A native of St. Marc, Couvreur gave birth to a son in April of 1810, indicating that she was either in the early stages of pregnancy when she made the voyage to New Orleans or conceived the child shortly after her arrival. Identified as the widow Fonteneau in the baptismal record of her son, Couvreur seems to have fallen into even more difficult circumstances two years later, when she gave birth to another son. There is neither an indication of the father's identity nor mention of her status as a widow in the baptismal record on this occasion. Such details suggest a slide into prostitution or impoverished cohabitation, circumstances that would have robbed her of the dignity of being recognized as a widow by the priest who registered her son's baptism.[54]

Some women seem to have made fleeting liaisons with one of the many unattached Anglophone Americans who came and went from New Orleans during this period. Maria Louise Peche, a native of St. Marc, bore a daughter in October of 1810 to John Trigg, a native of Kentucky. Whether Trigg was one of the rowdy "Kaintucks" who floated flatboats down the river and quickly spent their earnings on strong drink and women before making the arduous trek back upriver is impossible to know. In any event, Peche bore no more children to him or any other man before she died in 1814, leaving the toddler an orphan.[55] Maria Pedra Hibard of Jérémie identified John Harvey, a native of Boston, as the father of the daughter she bore in the spring of 1810. Four years later, Harvey

stood in a different sanctuary in New Orleans with his wife, Prudence Oldner of Norfolk, to baptize a son, testimony to the transient nature of his relationship with Hibard. The father of Marie Catherine Oger's daughter was identified as "Joseph Haltt, American," in the child's 1812 baptismal record. Mother, child, and father all subsequently disappear from the record.[56] Charlotte Miranda seems to have found the difficulty of raising a child alone as a refugee too much to bear. When a trio of Haitian refugees brought her eleven-month-old son, Andre, to be baptized in 1812, no father was identified, and they testified to the priest that Miranda had returned to Haiti shortly after the child's birth.[57]

Theresa Sagory, a native of Môle St. Nicolas, was luckier than such women. Not long after her arrival in the city, she formed a stable relationship with Antonio Ignacio Silva, a native of the Azores who served as the chief pilot for New Orleans. He had come to the city as a twenty-year-old in the early 1780s and was a bachelor of fifty when the flotilla from Santiago de Cuba began arriving at the mouth of the Mississippi. It is hard to resist imagining that he somehow made the acquaintance of Sagory as he boarded the ship that had brought her from Cuba to guide it expertly upriver to the port. Their daughter, Maria, was born late in 1811, and the old bachelor acknowledged his paternity in her baptismal record. When their next child was born two years later, she was named after his mother, Rosa. Sagory bore Silva two more daughters in the next several years. When the pilot died in 1831 he was seventy and surrounded by the family he had led to safe harbor. Theresa Sagory's relationship with Silva may well have been "incited more by money than any attachment," but she hardly fits the profile of a cold-blooded seductress.[58]

Whether illustrated by a case such as Theresa Sagory's, with her stable relationship with a white man, or by accounts of women scrambling to support children born to temporary lovers, the immediate reproductive success of the refugees was striking and would have been cause for alarm among those in New Orleans who feared the growth of the city's free black population. There were

already 3,000 free people of color in the city when the refugees arrived, but between 1810 and 1812 these free people of color were not nearly as fertile as the same number of free black refugees. Dominguan free women of color baptized 308 infants to free black Orleanians' 266. Another phenomenon may have confirmed ideas about the predatory nature of the Dominguan *mûlatresse*'s sexuality. While nearly two-thirds of the fathers of children born to New Orleans free women of color were Louisiana born, many of them free men of color, white, foreign-born fathers featured much more prominently among Dominguan births. Frenchmen represented between one-fifth and one-fourth of fathers identified in the baptisms of refugee women's children between 1810 and 1819, while French fathers never made up more than 10 percent in the baptisms of children born to Orleanian women. Baby booms and boomlets often follow the kind of collective trauma experienced by the 1809 refugees, an affirmative expression of renewal.[59] Whether the children born to refugee women originated in hope, exigency, or exploitation was immaterial, however, to anxious white Orleanians who watched the free black birthrate rise.

Americans in 1809, whatever their ethnic, linguistic, or racial heritage, were conditioned by the existing discourse about the Dominguan *mûlatresse* to expect a limited range of behaviors as hundreds of free women of color debarked the ships in New Orleans in the spring and summer of 1809. They imagined them either as the pampered concubines of French men or as unattached women on the make in search of economically advantageous relationships with white men that ran the gamut from long-term cohabitation to prostitution. What the anxious observers in continental America were not prepared to anticipate was the more complex reality of Dominguan free people of color. Such observers were unaware, for example, that among many free black Dominguans marriage was increasingly the preferred family strategy and was a growing phenomenon. And few, if any, North Americans were familiar with the role of the *ménagère*, a free woman of color who managed a white bachelor's

household and frequently became his life partner. The refugee influx of 1809 included many, perhaps a majority, whose lives on Saint-Domingue had been defined by one of these two family formations, and the refugees brought these arrangements to New Orleans with them. The difficulties they encountered as refugees, however, often posed insurmountable obstacles to sustaining their families in these accustomed ways.

"I am the legitimate son and grandson of European property owners of Saint-Domingue," Julien Raimond proclaimed in his fiery 1791 contribution to the Parisian pamphlet war over the rights of free people of color. Raimond was born in 1744 in Saint-Domingue's rural southern peninsula to Frenchman Pierre Raimond and Marie Begasse, the legitimately born daughter of a French planter and free woman of color. Marie Begasse brought a dowry of 15,000 livres to her marriage, an impressive amount by any standard. And she was literate. In 1771 Julien Raimond married a cousin, Marie Marthe Vincent, who brought a stunning dowry of 60,000 livres. Raimond, a third-generation planter and slave owner, was born into a family that epitomized the bourgeois economic and family values of France. The women of his family bore no resemblance to Moreau de Saint-Méry's footloose seductresses.[60]

Julien Raimond is the most famous of the elite free colored planters of Saint-Domingue, but there were many others of his racial ancestry who shared his values. Hilliard d'Auberteuil counted 300 white men married to women of African descent in 1777. More recently, a French historical demographer found that 17 percent of the marriages in the southern district of Saint-Domingue were between white men and African-descended women.[61] In 1778, such marriages were outlawed, and though some continued to take place, intermarriage among free people of color became the norm and gained momentum in the last quarter of the eighteenth century.[62] One historian has found that half of the free people of color who were born free were born legitimately of married parents and comments that

"marrying put the seal on a claim to traditional bourgeois morality that was important for those free coloreds aspiring to community leadership." Wealthy free families of color who were planters and slave owners "valued marriage and legitimacy to such an extent that one rarely finds illegitimate children in their ranks beyond the first generation." In a study of the rural southern peninsula, Raimond's home ground, another scholar found the same phenomenon was especially pronounced.[63]

Some of these families were among those who arrived in New Orleans in 1809, and some of their children sustained the matrimonial tradition. For example, Benjamin Bosse and Marguarita Dió of Cap Français and Basille Mignon and Theresa Maurin of Port de Pas were among the free colored refugees who arrived in New Orleans as married couples with children. In 1813 the four of them saw their children, Francisco Bosse and Rose Mignon marry in St. Louis Cathedral in a festive celebration before a "great multitude."[64] The married couples Charles Durouleau and Maria Charitte and Pierre and Isabel Antoine similarly saw their own children, Pierre Durouleau and Marie Françoise Antoine, marry at the cathedral in 1816.[65] There may even have been a relative of Julien Raimond among the grooms at St. Louis Cathedral. Michel Raymond of the southern peninsular port of Les Cayes married Marie Magdaleine Savournée early in 1814.[66]

Some couples embraced the legal and economic pragmatism of marriage after their departure from Saint-Domingue. Adrian Jessé and Hortense Noleau, who had been wealthy planters from the Artibonite region east of St. Marc, were unmarried when they arrived in New Orleans with their four children. Adrian had himself been born of a legitimate marriage, and when he fell gravely ill in the spring of 1810, he and Hortense hastily exchanged vows and legitimated their offspring. The marriage contract they had drawn up on the day of their wedding reveals that they were representatives of the free colored planter elite that Julien Raimond claimed were the bulwark of bourgeois values in Saint-Domingue.

They stated that they brought to the marriage seven coffee plantations in the St. Marc district, together with 300 slaves, as well as a cotton and indigo plantation worked by 25 slaves in the mountains of Artibonite that had been given to the bride by her father. When they married in 1810, Jessé and Noleau had obviously not abandoned hopes of returning to Artibonite to reclaim their enormous wealth. But in 1822 they were still in New Orleans, where they presided over the marriage of their daughter Marie Joseph to Jean Louis Denis, legitimately born to married parents in Govaives, just to the north of the Jessés' native St. Marc. A year later, their daughter Antoinette married, this time to a native of St. Marc.[67]

Such marriages were, however, not as frequent as refugee parents might have hoped. Only 35 of the 141 weddings of free people of color that took place in New Orleans between 1810 and 1819 involved Dominguans. Half of these represented intermarriage between refugees.[68] Some marriages, such as that between Jean Bartholomy of St. Marc and Isabel François of Port-au-Prince in 1812, united people who lived in neighboring areas and may have known each other or had common acquaintances before they became refugees. Other marriages seem to have been born of economic considerations. Joaquin Vitry, a few years shy of thirty, wed the fifteen-year-old Marie Joseph Chais in 1811. Chais brought a dowry worth $1,600, comprising three slaves and personal goods, including silver tableware. Her assets certainly did not represent a fortune by any measure, but it was substantial when compared with what most refugees claimed in marriage contracts from the same period. Cecile Emmanuel, for example, brought only $200 in household effects and clothes when she married in 1816.[69]

If the tradition of marriage was to be sustained among the Dominguans in New Orleans, they would need eventually to venture beyond the refugee community for mates. This proved difficult, especially for women. Adult males had been prohibited entry in 1809, and though many slipped through the net, refugee and

refugee-descended women remained at a demographic disadvantage. Joseph Savary, a veteran of the Haitian Revolution who commanded over 200 Haitian-descended free black militiamen at the Battle of New Orleans in 1815, subsequently led two filibustering expeditions of free black men to the western Gulf Coast. Savary returned to New Orleans, but some of his men may have remained in Mexico and Texas, depleting the ranks of prospective Haitian-descended grooms left in Louisiana. At the end of the 1820s, there were 2.2 free women of color for every free man of color in New Orleans.[70]

Only six Dominguan women found marriage partners among New Orleans–born free men of color in the decade after 1809, while eight Dominguan men took Orleanian brides. Marriage contracts between Dominguan men and New Orleans women reveal the dynamic that may have enticed refugee men to favor local brides. Port-au-Prince native François Courreur declared assets of $350 in his marriage contract in 1817, while his seventeen-year-old bride, New Orleans–born Rose Aldoin claimed $1,500. When New Orleans native Zacharine Rouzan married refugee Louis Charles Ferant a year later, she brought $1,500 in earnings from her work as a couturier. Ferant brought nothing. Much the same transpired when New Orleans native Marie Laveau, who would later gain fame as the city's leading voodoo priestess, married refugee Jacques Paris. Marie's father, a married free man of color himself, gave his daughter a half-interest in a piece of property, which supplemented the two slaves and $500 worth of personal goods she brought to the marriage.[71]

All refugees were economically disadvantaged by their circumstances to one degree or another. The Jessé marriage contract speaks to the wealth that was lost, and the modest assets declared by the fifty-eight Dominguans who signed marriage contracts in the 1810s and 1820s confirm the difficulty refugees encountered as they sought an economic footing in New Orleans. It would have been difficult for a Dominguan woman to compete with the inheritances that many New Orleans women could bring to marriages, and the connections and social

capital their well-established local families could provide. The combination of economic and demographic factors made it extremely difficult for Dominguan women and their daughters to compete for marriage partners in New Orleans. Many women born to married free people of color would find themselves unable to replicate their parents' family formation in New Orleans. And many women born into families that were moving toward the respectability of marriage in prerevolutionary Saint-Domingue saw their opportunities foreclosed by the trauma and dislocation they experienced in flight.

Refugees made up half of the city's population of free people of color when they arrived in 1809. In the three years following their arrival, their numbers grew through natural increase at a rate that outstripped native Orleanians of color. Some 54 percent of the free infants of color baptized at St. Louis Cathedral between 1810 and 1813 were born to refugee parents, compared to 44 percent born to Orleanians.[72] Not a single one of the 155 daughters born to Dominguan parents married as the cohort came of age in the 1820s, while 10 of the 132 Orleanian girls baptized during the same years wed that decade.[73] Between 1810 and 1819, more than two-thirds (68 percent) of the brides at St. Louis Cathedral were New Orleans born. Brides born in Saint-Domingue or in one of the refugee colonies in Cuba represented only a fifth (21 percent) of the free colored young women who went to the altar during the first decade following the 1809 influx. Marriage prospects improved a bit for Dominguan women in the 1820s, when they made up slightly more than a quarter of brides (27 percent), but New Orleans–born women still vastly outnumbered the refugees, accounting for more than half (60 percent) of the city's brides of color during the decade. Three Dominguan-descended girls baptized before 1813 did marry in the first half of the 1830s, but they were outnumbered nearly three to one by girls from old New Orleans families.[74]

It is impossible to know whether the high rate of marriage that historians of colonial Saint-Domingue have found among free people of color would have survived

had the colony not been torn by revolution. What is clear is that the trajectory toward this bourgeois institution faltered and fell back dramatically among the refugees in New Orleans. The high proportion of "single" mothers among the refugees along with the low rate of marriage among them and their daughters reveal that any resumption of the trend toward marriage was stopped in its tracks in New Orleans. Most Dominguan women did not arrive in the city embodying the seductive *mûlatresse*, but exigency nudged many of them toward survival strategies that recapitulated the stereotype's features, reinforced its mythology, and transferred the primary site of the figure of the seductive *mûlatresse* from Saint-Domingue to New Orleans.

One of the mainstays of *mûlatresse* identity in Saint-Domingue was the role of *ménagère*, or housekeeper. Contemporaries invariably described the *ménagère* as a combination housekeeper and sexual partner, though Girod de Chantrans added bodyguard to her repertoire in his prerevolutionary descriptions. "Imagine an unmarried man, the only white in his house in the country," he invites his readers, "surrounded by a troop of black men and women who are his domestics, his slaves, and consequently his enemies." Amid this precarious situation, "a *mûlatresse* conducts his household; in her rests all of his trust." The *ménagère* was "no less useful to him for his safety than for his pleasure."[75]

Moreau de Saint-Méry insisted that serving as what might be termed a *ménagère* with benefits was a nearly universal occupation among Saint-Domingue's free women of color. "Most of them [*mûlatresses*] live with a white man, where, under the modest name of '*ménagère*' they have all the functions of a wife, without being much disposed to execute the responsibilities of that title." The reality of their situation was hardly masked by the title of housekeeper. "It is thus actually to the state of a courtesan that *mûlatresses* are generally condemned."[76] Baron de Wimpffen was slightly more charitable in his assessment. "It is from these women that the *ménagères* are usually taken; that is to say, the acknowledged mistresses of the

greatest part of the unmarried whites," he explained. "They have some skill in the management of a family, sufficient honesty to attach themselves invariably to one man, and great goodness of heart."[77]

Historians probing beyond the sensationalizing discourse of the late eighteenth century provide a more nuanced picture of the Dominguan *ménagère*.[78] The most detailed study of the role admits that many *ménagères* became the lovers of their white employers and often bore them children. However, it also draws attention to the more mundane, nonsexual nature of many of these arrangements. *Ménagères* executed formal contracts with their employers that detailed what services would be rendered by the *ménagère* and what salary and other emoluments would be provided by her employer. For example, in 1778, François Siriery, a shipping merchant, engaged Hélène Piquery to be his *ménagère* for two years. She was to "carry out the direction of the household with all the economy and vigilance of which she is capable." Hélène's duties included administering the budget necessary to keep the household running smoothly, managing the shopping, overseeing the preparation of meals, and supervising cleaning and laundry.[79] The 1779 *ménagère* contract of Marie-Louise à Traitté of Port-au-Prince stipulated, among other things, that in addition to a salary of 2,400 livres she would receive lodging, meals, laundry service, and medical care should she fall ill — hardly the baubles and other luxuries *mûlatresses* were said to have demanded of their lovers.[80]

Ménagères, like their counterparts in France, often received their compensation at the end of their terms of employment, and it was most often here that their employer's concern for their support beyond the terms of their formal contract was demonstrated. For example, Marie Dubreuil acquired a piece of property worth 20,000 livres in 1789 from her employer of seven years, the postmaster of Port-au-Prince. In the act of sale, she tendered only 3,000 livres, the remainder of 17,000 livres was declared to be equivalent to "seven years of service at 1,000 livres per year, the sum decided when she began

her service."[81] There is no hint in this transaction that Dubreuil was the sexual partner of her employer, but wills sometimes singled out *ménagères* and their children for bequests that suggest such attachments. "In return for her good and essential services these past thirty-five years, with so much zeal and devotion," Thomas Piganau of Croix-des-Bouquets gave his *ménagère* Marie-Françoise Julie Dahay 30,000 livres, as well as a buggy and three horses, twelve silver place settings, table linens, glassware, and furniture. He also left 30,000 livres to each of the six sons of the *ménagère*, and 50,000 livres to her daughter. Piganau did not recognize the *ménagère*'s children as his own, but the relationship is clear in his explanation for the bequests. "Having so far done nothing for them, although they constantly aided me in the various work that I undertook to build my fortune."[82]

Moreau de Saint-Méry's portrait of the *ménagère* stipulated a *mûlatresse* who served a white Frenchman or Creole, but not all *ménagères* served the households of white Frenchmen, nor were all *ménagères* of mixed race. Marie Louise à Traitté was the *ménagère* for the free colored planter Paul Bonneau. Jean-François Leveille, who would later become one of Toussaint Louverture's black generals, employed a free *négresse* as his *ménagère* on his plantation in the north district.[83] His decision to hire a *négresse* rather than a *mûlatresse* may have been influenced by his own racial ancestry, but the same cannot be said of the white Monsieur Delisle of Port-au-Prince and of Paul Bonneau, a free colored planter in Borgne, both of whom opted to hire women described as *négresse*. These women of unmixed African descent may well have been African-born.[84]

Ménagères may, according to their most authoritative historian, perhaps best be compared to young girls in France who took up the duties of housekeeper or governess "in large rural farms or bourgeois townhouses in order to save money for a dowry or simply to survive."[85] Women in such situations might find themselves sexually pursued by the master of the house, but that role was not universally part of their portfolio. *Ménagères* were

enterprising single women who entered into service on terms they could influence, if not dictate. They were a well-established part of the social landscape in Saint-Domingue, but their position and livelihood were obviously threatened by the disruptions of the Haitian Revolution. Although fragile, the institution seems to have survived long enough to resurface with the refugees of 1809 in New Orleans. But there it died, transformed into a concept more palatable to American tastes and politics.

Marie Louise Tonnelier, a Haitian refugee, brought suit in New Orleans in 1812 to recover property to which she believed she was entitled by virtue of her position as *ménagère* to a white man, Jean Baptiste Maurin. The court record states that Tonnelier had lived with Maurin "as his menagere. She had with her in his family, several grown daughters of hers. It was in evidence that he hired out some of the plaintiff's slaves, and received their wages. They had lived together in this manner for several years, in Hispaniola, St. Yago de Cuba, and New Orleans."[86] Superficially, the cohabitation of this Dominguan *ménagère* with her white employer resembles the standard description of *plaçage*, a term commentators began applying in the twentieth century to liaisons between white men and free women of color in antebellum New Orleans. As we shall see, the free black women in *plaçage* were imagined as romantically tragic kept women. A woman in *plaçage* — a *placée* — was dependent and defenseless against the exploitation of her affections by a fickle white lover. Marie Louise Tonnelier was a *ménagère* who believed herself entitled to the contractual rights that structured arrangements such as the one she had with Maurin in Saint-Domingue. She was not a dependent without resources when she arrived with Maurin in New Orleans, but part of a team, her slaves serving as a source of income for the household. But severed from the society that had recognized the place of the *ménagère* and without friends or protectors, her bid for agency failed and she lost her lawsuit. Marie Louise Tonnelier came to New Orleans a *ménagère*, but

like so many other unmarried refugee women and their descendants, she is remembered as a *placée*.

Among the things that marked a New Orleans *placée* in popular discourse was the origination of her situation in a particular setting, the quadroon ball. These were understood to be affairs from which free men of color were excluded in order to allow white men exclusive access to beautiful women of color and an entrée to more intimate encounters than the dance floor could accommodate. Visitors reporting on these entertainments as early as the 1820s presented them as one of the city's most notable traditions. But the dances were not a deeply rooted New Orleans practice at all. When Auguste Tessier, whom we met at the beginning of this chapter, advertised in 1805 that free women of color and white men would be welcome at his dance and free men of color barred from it, he was not upholding New Orleans custom but introducing a Haitian import.

During the pre-Lenten carnival season of 1776, a French promoter named Pamelart opened a dancehall known as the Vauxhall on the northern outskirts of Cap Français, near the battery and docks of the city. The festivities at Pamelart's facility were apparently wildly popular, especially the Sunday dances organized for free people of color but open to whites as well. Ash Wednesday came and went without closing down the merrymaking, but in 1777 officials stepped in and threw a wet blanket on Pamelart's parties when they issued a prohibition against whites attending the Sunday balls. The move "particularly disgusted the free women of color," according to Moreau de Saint-Méry, presumably because it robbed them of opportunities to meet the unattached white men that Moreau de Saint-Méry was convinced *mûlatresses* stalked at these events. In any case, this new rule served as a death knell for Pamelart's dancehall. He tried to bring people back with every trick he could think of, including fireworks, but to no avail. Within a year, Pamelart's ballroom had disappeared.[87]

Occasions where white men could enjoy the spectacle of free women of color dancing did not die, however,

with the demise of Pamelart's establishment. Indeed, they survived and remained a popular attraction for visitors. Baron de Wimpffen describes the scene at dances for free people of color in Jacmel, in the western part of the colony, in the late spring of 1789. Just after sunset the revelers gathered and took to the floor, where "the females more especially, discover such justness of ear, such precision of movement, and such volubility of reins [hips], that the quickest eye can with difficulty seize a few shades of the rapid and fugitive development of their lascivious graces." There was one dance that completely captivated the baron. When the women of color danced the Chica, he enthused, "never did voluptuousness in motion spread a more seducing snare for the eager and insupportable love of pleasure: — Hence, *to dance the chicca*, is considered as the supreme good." In a candid aside, Wimpffen confides to his readers, "I confess, with no little confusion, that the austerity of my principles never prevailed so far as to interdict me from the enjoyment of this singular spectacle, as often as it was in my power."[88]

Notwithstanding his general disapproval of the *mûlatresse*, Moreau de Saint-Méry was equally enthusiastic about the magic of the Chica, a dance to which he ascribed African origins. "It is a kind of lute where all the tricks of love and all its means of triumphing are put into action," he explains. "Fear, hope, disdain, tenderness, caprice, pleasure, rejection, delirium and finally drunkenness, annihilation," all are enacted in a language of movement familiar to "the inhabitants of Paphos," birthplace of Aphrodite. "The art for the female dancer," who either held the sides of her skirt or a handkerchief in each hand "consists mainly of shaking the lower part of her hips, while she keeps the rest of her body in a kind of immobility." When a man wanted to "enliven," the female dancer, "he approaches her and darts suddenly toward her, nearly touching her, then he withdraws and then darts towards her again," becoming the charmer instead of the charmed. "Finally, when the Chica appears in its most expressive form, there is in the gestures and the movements of the two dancers a

unity that is easier to conceive of than to condemn." This amorous dance, which showed "every aspect of lasciviousness and voluptuousness" imaginable, had once been danced in the Antilles by "young beauties whose naïve graces embellished it and made it perhaps more appealing. They danced it alone, it is true, or with one of their friends who took the role of the male dancer, without however thereby limiting the vivaciousness of the dance." But in the closing decades of the eighteenth century, Moreau de Saint-Méry lamented, "our morals are not pure enough that such a test can be attempted; the Chica is no longer allowed at the balls for white women, except at some fortuitous gatherings where the small number of people and the choice of spectators reassures the dancer."[89]

Auguste Tessier, one of the hundreds of refugees who arrived in New Orleans before 1809, created a space there where the Chica might have been danced again for white men who would never have a chance to duplicate Wimpffen's guilty indulgences in Saint-Domingue.[90] A native of Paris, Tessier and his life partner, Francisca Besinon, a free woman of color and native of Port-au-Prince, found their way to Louisiana from Saint-Domingue early in the nineteenth century. In 1805, Tessier took over from New Orleans native Bernard Coquet the management of a popular ballroom on St. Philip Street. Since the late 1790s, Coquet had hosted dances in the space where a rabble of slave and free, black, white, and "saffron color," made merry in what Berquin-Duvallon disapprovingly dubbed "tricolor balls."[91] Tessier, rechristening the dancehall the Salle Chinoise, introduced an innovation to the proceedings. He proposed "to give a ball two evenings each week for free women of color to which free men of color will not be admitted."[92] While such a restriction had never applied to dances in New Orleans before, it had been common in Saint-Domingue. "There are balls where the free women of color dance only with white men," Moreau de Saint-Méry testified in his 1796 essay on dance. "They want there not to admit men of the same color as themselves."[93] Prior to Tessier's

intervention, there had been no attempt to keep free men of color from vying for the attentions of mixed-race women on the dance floor, but white men now had unchallenged access to them two nights a week at the Salle Chinoise.[94] Coquet, who had moved on to a new space that he called the Tivoli, copied Tessier and added similarly restricted balls to his usual "tricolor" offerings within the year. A third dance hall, the Union on Ursulines Street, joined the fray just before Christmas in 1808.[95]

Tessier was himself the father of two mixed-race daughters born in New Orleans to a refugee woman, Rosa (1808) and Maria (1811).[96] As was typical for girls born to émigré parents during this critical moment, there is no record of either of the daughters marrying when they were in their early twenties. Rose Tessier would have been eighteen when Karl Bernhard, the Duke of Saxe-Weimar, visited New Orleans in 1826 and was "hastened away to the quadroon ball, so called." The duke began his evening in the company of several "gentleman" acquaintances at a masked ball for whites. It was staid, with many women sitting sedately in alcoves, rendered wallflowers by the scarcity of sufficient male dance partners. Most of the men had put in a quick appearance at the masked ball before moving on to the "quadroon ball . . . where they amused themselves more, and were more at their ease." Unimpressed by the white ball, the duke was quick to accept the offer of his local hosts to take him to a quadroon ball so that he could experience the difference for himself.[97]

Eyewitness the duke may have been, but his description of the quadroon ball and of the young women he encountered there present an amalgam of much of what had already been said by those who preceded him in chronicling the charms and living habits of mixed-race women in the Antilles and Circum-Caribbean.[98] Because his description was so widely circulated and has become such a common source for historians, however, the implicit link that he made between the ball and the arrangement of liaisons for the young women is important. So is the color terminology he chose to use.

The beauty who captivates white lovers is no longer a *mûlatresse* but a quadroon, and she lends her name to a kind of entertainment that became a byword for the illicit pleasures of white men in nineteenth-century America, the quadroon ball.

"The quadroons are almost entirely white," the duke observed. "Still, however, the strongest prejudice reigns against them on account of their black blood." Marriage between people of unmixed European descent and those of African ancestry was proscribed by United States law, and "as the quadroons on their part regard the negroes and mulattoes with contempt, and will not mix with them, so nothing remains for them but to be the friends, as it is termed, of the white men." Such an arrangement was viewed by the quadroon, according to the duke, as a matrimonial contract, "though it went no farther than a formal contract by which the 'friend' engaged to pay the father or mother of the quadroon a specified sum."[99] The duke transformed the black or *mûlatresse ménagère* who negotiated her own contract to act as housekeeper to a white man into a passive beauty whose parents undertook the dirty work of striking the bargain that consigned their daughter to concubinage.

The enterprising *ménagère* had become the compromised *placée*. The metamorphosis accomplished by the duke's description rendered the mixed-race temptress several degrees less dangerous. She was now fully mastered by the white men whose patriotism and security she had once threatened. Symbolically, the danger of Haiti was mastered. The trick by which the threat of the Haitian *mûlatresse* was neutralized, built on sensationalized descriptions of quadroon balls and concubinage such as Karl Bernhard's, masks the tragic reality of the young refugee women and the extraordinary nature of the strategies they deployed. Writers such as Bernhard and those who followed him with romanticized and sensationalized descriptions of New Orleans quadroons and quadroon balls have successfully obscured not just the tragic situation of Haitian-descended

refugees but the history of the city's other free women of color. Theirs is the story to which we next turn.