

■ Articles

Laurent Dubois*LA RÉPUBLIQUE MÉTISSÉE:*
CITIZENSHIP, COLONIALISM, AND
THE BORDERS OF FRENCH
HISTORY**Abstract**

During the past decades, debates about immigration and racism have raged in France, most recently through the *sans-papiers* movement through which undocumented immigrants have demanded documentation and the rights that flow from it. The important successes of the *sans-papiers* movement, I argue, are the result of the way they combined demands phrased through universalist discourse with expressions of cultural identity, bringing together approaches often considered incommensurable in French political culture. Taking as its contemporary point of departure the *sans-papiers* movement, this paper proposes that in order to better understand these debates we need to place them in the context of French colonial history. In particular, I focus on the ways the history of the French Caribbean have shaped the way race and citizenship are imagined in Republican political culture. I draw on my historical work to highlight the important ways French ‘universalism’ was in fact in many ways produced through the actions of slaves in the Caribbean. The struggles around slave emancipation and political equality in the Caribbean that developed during the French Revolution, I suggest, both produced a Republican tradition of anti-racist egalitarianism, and gave birth to a ‘Republican racism’ through which new practices of exclusion were articulated. To understand the contested meaning of citizenship in France at the end of the twentieth century, I suggest, requires such forays into the history of empire through which the possibilities of citizenship were formed.

Keywords

citizenship; *sans-papiers* movement; contemporary France; French Caribbean; Colonialism; Universalism

IN THE OPENING scenes of Wim Wenders' 1994 film, *Lisbonne Story*, Winter, the main character, travels from Germany to Portugal across a 'Europe without borders'. As he passes out of Germany the camera pans to the empty customs post as Winter begs 'Stop me! You can't imagine how much I'm smuggling!' He drives across the highways of Europe through night and day, sun and rain, to a soundtrack of radio chatter in different languages, of music from around the world – French rap, American pop – mixed with the eternal news of political scandal. Winter's car overheats just as he enters Portugal; but the border post is abandoned, so there is no one to help him. The phone doesn't even work. He is saved by a tour bus of Americans, who give him Coca-Cola to pour into his engine. In Lisbon, at the edge of an open Europe, he encounters the edge of representation; his filmmaker friend has abandoned all hope of producing unspoiled images, and spends his days making films that are to be preserved from the polluting and transforming gaze of the viewer. Winter ultimately coaxes his friend back from the edge, convincing him that it is still possible, at the end of the twentieth century, to make 'moving pictures'.

This evocation of 'Europe without borders' reverberates with the central political issues facing France and the rest of Europe today. The process of creating a European community – underfoot since the late 1980s, and intensified since 1992 – raises fundamental issues about the nature of the nations that will be part of this community. If the identity of European nations such as France was in many ways consolidated not only from the centre out but also from the periphery in (Sahlins, 1989), what happens when the border posts are abandoned, trade restrictions are lifted, and the border zones that were instrumental to the formation of nationality themselves vanish? Clearly the borders are far from gone, and national identity as an exclusionary concept is seemingly on the rise rather than the other way around. The opening of the territorial borders suggests not the elimination of borders and exclusions but their reconfiguration. Geographical border zones are less and less sites of the intensive policing of the territory that they once were; but the movement of people is nonetheless continually policed based on the 'probable cause' of the appearance of foreignness. As the more solid territorial border posts and checkpoints are abandoned, a thousand shifting borders are set up within the national territory of France.

One of the most heavily policed areas in Paris today is the RER train, which connects Paris' *banlieue* to the centre of the city. After a series of bombings, most notably an autumn 1997 attack on an RER train at the Port Royal Station, the French government instituted 'Operation Vigipirate', mobilizing troops to police the city, particularly the RER. The soldiers conduct extensive identity checks

against those who ‘look’ foreign, concentrated in sites of transit which those who live in the *banlieue* must pass through each day on their way to work. The policing of the RER is a structural reassertion of the economic exclusion of those who live in the *banlieue*. Unlike in US cities, the poorer areas of Paris are largely concentrated on the peripheries of the city. In these communities, often an hour’s train ride away from the centre of town, projects called HLMs (for *Habitations à Loyers Modérés*) were built starting in the late 1940s to provide housing for those left homeless after the Second World War. By the 1970s, these housing projects were increasingly populated by working-class immigrants. In recent years, the malaise of the *banlieue* has become a central subject of debate in French public life, as the youth of these neighbourhoods, many of whom are children of immigrants, have become an ‘issue’ through which problems of economic exclusion, cultural difference and national identity are discussed. The economic and social exclusion of these communities confronts French society with the limits of ideals of integration that have been traditionally the cement of Republican social policy. For many wealthier Parisians, the poorer *banlieue* is basically another world: the writer and editor François Maspéro wrote a travel narrative, *Roissy Express*, about a two-week trip into the northern Paris suburbs, and their history, and presented it as an anthropological journey into a foreign land (Maspéro, 1994).

The young director Mathieu Kassovitz turned an ethnographic eye towards the texture of life in the *banlieue* in his 1995 film *La Haine*, the best known of a series of films about the suburbs that have been released in France in recent years. The film skilfully captures the social distance between the *banlieue* and the centre of Paris by telling the story of a day in the lives of a ‘tricolour’ group of under-class youths from the *banlieue* – an Arab North African named Said, a black West African named Hubert, and a white Jew named Vinz. As the film opens, Bob Marley’s bass-heavy anthem *Burnin’ and Lootin’* mixes with footage of recent French riots, many of which have pitted police against youth in the *banlieue*. The film reverses the journey from Paris represented by Maspéro’s work, and places the viewer in the shoes of the youth of the *banlieue* as they make their way through a neighbourhood and a society policed against them. Its characters speak in the patois emerging from these communities – a French with its own accent, expanded with Arabic vocabulary and hip-hop terminology – and many French audiences had difficulty understanding the language, not to mention the sense of rage expressed in the film. The film sought to capture the culture of the *banlieue*, one in which US film and music – particularly rap – informs the *banlieue*’s encounter with police brutality and economic exclusion (see Canon, 1997). In one particularly skilful scene in the film, a young DJ sets up his speakers in the windows on top of one of the project’s towers, mixing Edith Piaf’s *Je ne Regrette Rien* with a rap of *Nique la Police*, a French take-off of N.W.A.’s song *Fuck the Police*.

The communities that live in the *banlieue* come from a variety of backgrounds – they are first and second generation immigrants from West Africa, the Maghreb, the Caribbean, they are whites of French ancestry returned from

Algeria, they are Italian or Portuguese, they are *Français de souche* (the 'real' French). Their presence in France is the result of a long process of inter-European migration as well as the more recent waves of movement from former French colonies during the latter half of the twentieth century (Noiriel, 1988). These populations do not live in communities according to their ethnicity: the group of friends in *La Haine* is aggressively multi-ethnic. Despite the multi-ethnic character of the *banlieue* communities, the process of their exclusion operates in ways that echo the racialization of policing and economic exclusion in the US. Yet the French engagement with issues of poverty, class and cultural identity differs in important ways from that of US society. This was made startlingly clear during the year before *La Haine* came out, when state officials passed a ban on the wearing of veils in public schools. Many in France, including those on the Left, supported the decision as a defence of the secularist tradition of Republicanism, in which education has been seen as a central institution in the production of the social equality central to citizenship (see Silverman, 1992). The decision, however, was also the expression of another, less acknowledged part of the Republican tradition – the colonial history through which universalism has been merged with the particularistic exclusion of 'others'. Though the administrative heritage of this colonial history is rarely recognized, understanding the conflicts over immigration and citizenship in France at the end of the twentieth century necessitates a journey into this often overlooked aspect of the genealogy of France's Republican political culture.

In this article, I draw on my research on the interwoven histories of France and the Caribbean to explore two moments of conflict over the meaning of national citizenship in the French Republic – the conflicts over the slavery that shook the French colonies at the end of the eighteenth century, and the contemporary struggles of undocumented immigrants in France calling themselves the *sans-papiers*. I do this not to correlate the two situations – clearly the experiences of eighteenth-century slaves and contemporary immigrants are vastly different – but rather to highlight continuities both in the forms of exclusion that have operated in French political culture and in the ways groups have struggled against these forms of exclusion. I also hope to suggest, through the specific stories I tell, some of the ways in which a better understanding of French colonial history is a vital foundation for an engagement with contemporary debates about race, immigration and national identity in France.

In *Vers un Multiculturalisme Français* (1996) the French anthropologist Jean-Loup Amselle argues that any project of imagining a 'multicultural' France must start with an understanding of the history of colonialism as one of the foundations for French national identity. The cover of his book is a scene from a public artistic event that sought to commemorate and create a vision of a united but culturally plural France – the 1989 *Opéra Marseillaise* that was the climax of the commemorations of the bicentennial of the French Revolution. This *Opéra* was the work of the advertising impresario, Jean-Paul Goude, who in response to his mission

of celebrating the heritage of the Revolution and of the universalist ideals of the 'rights of man', chose what he considered to be the modern-day, communication era equivalent to these ideals, the 'afro-occidental rhythm': 'I went to Bombay, to Brazil, to Moscow, to Hong-Kong. I realized that the youth had adopted the afro-occidental rhythm. English hip-hop, Chinese piliwu, American breakdance: all of it is the same thing. The 14th of July will be the consecration of this universal rhythm' (Leruth, 1995: 222). The celebration of this rhythm was, for Goude, the most appropriate tribute to the radical possibilities of the Revolution: 'To have groups of French traditional musicians play a symphony written by a composer of African origin who synthesizes Western and African rhythms, now that's revolutionary.' 'For me', he noted elsewhere, 'the true Revolution is the birth of a world sound' (Kaplan, 1995: 286–9).

Given the political debates surrounding the problem of immigration and the question of cultural identity in France, the parade was a controversial hymn to '*métissage*', figured both in the international mix of the dancers in the parade and in its percussive musical foundation arranged by the African musicians. One of the '*tableaux*' (as the sections of the parade were named) was called the 'Tribes of France'. It was meant to evoke the Festival of the Federation of 14 July 1790, during which representatives from the entire nation gathered in the first national celebration of the new Republic. The 1989 version grouped together traditional musicians from throughout France in a percussive mix arranged by the Franco-Beninois composer Wally Badarou. The '*tableau*' that followed was entitled 'the Arabs of Paris', and was composed of fifteen 'Maghrebian' waltzers in huge black gowns, each straddled by a small child representing the different peoples of the world. The African-American singer Jessie Norman, wrapped in the colours of the French flag, sang the Marseillaise; and the act that closed out the parade was the Texas A & M University marching band, which moonwalked backwards down the Champs-Élysée.

African culture was particularly show-cased in ways that accentuated the complex past of colonialism and the French relationship to the image of 'African-ness', whose exoticization was both critiqued and reinscribed in Goude's parade. In one *tableau* a giant staircase was topped by the Senegalese musician Doudou N'Diaye Rose, who was dressed in a white tuxedo and led an orchestra of percussionists. The float – presented in the official programme as 'an homage to Senegalese independence' – was surrounded by nearly three hundred torch-bearing men in 'colonial explorer uniforms', and topped by six Senegalese women in long blue, white and red gowns – the clearest and most striking representation of the French tricolour in the parade. The other African float, meant to represent all African countries (except South Africa), included a human pyramid of percussionists, including topless female drummers, accompanied by 360 men (recruited among African workers in Paris) dressed as *tirailleurs sénégalais* – the colonial troops who fought both in the European World Wars and in the repression of colonial rebellions (Leruth, 1995: 7–15; Kaplan, 1995: 305–7).

Goude's parade provides a window into the complexities of French Republican mythology. It was presented by some as a cosmopolitan and internationalist gesture – as proof of France's continuing tolerance and openness. After all, how many countries would celebrate their national holiday through a parade composed largely of foreigners? Yet what kind of relationship did the parade actually posit between France – and the French Revolution – and its African ex-colonies? What did it mean to have a homage to Senegalese independence carried by men figured as colonial explorers? What exactly did the Senegalese women in blue, white and red stand for? Goude's artistic fascination with 'Africanness' was part of his broader artistic trajectory, which in many ways echoed the primitivism of the surrealists in the ways it celebrated the liberating possibilities of African aesthetics through a disturbingly exoticizing and sexist gaze. Goude – who was capable of claiming that his conception of blackness was 'free of all social connotations because I am European' – presented his parade as an anti-racist celebration of 'world culture' (Kaplan, 1995: 288). Michael Leruth has written that it was a successful hymn to the possibilities of a plurivocal, postmodern 'pagan Republicanism' that is developing in French hip-hop and in the activism of the youth of the *banlieue*, for whom 'multiculturalism and tribalism are not always in contradiction with the French Republic' (Leruth, 1995: 354–5). It also, however, placed the 'multiculturalism' of France's own history on display in a way that did not confront the broader structural contradictions of a system that has long celebrated its universalism and tolerance while maintaining structures of racial and economic exclusion.

In constituting his battalions of *tirailleurs sénégalais*, the organizers of the parade encountered the contradictions of their own mythology. Recruiting in Senegal itself was too expensive, and so the organizers turned to the workers' dormitories of Paris to find men who could perform in the parade. But the potential performers were worried. Sylla Samba, a representative for a group of Malians from one of these dormitories, asked for an official letter that would allow them to absent themselves from their work without losing their jobs. Others worried that the recruitment was in fact a ploy to get them out of the dormitories and on to one of the Mali-bound charter planes which the French government had been sending during the previous years (Kaplan, 1995: 194). Africans were needed for the heart of France's bicentennial, and yet their very hesitation spoke profoundly of their exclusion from the universal rights which their presence was supposed to evoke. Any representation of Africa that takes place within France is fundamentally hemmed in by the broader structures of power that echo certain voices and silence others. Goude's parade in many ways courageously gestured towards a broader movement afoot within a variety of communities in France to redefine the meaning of citizenship and of rights. Yet it is not only in the birth of a 'world sound' that Africa and the Caribbean should be understood as present in France today, but in the very structures of the Republic itself.

The importance of *métissage* in the political history of the French Republic is highlighted by an examination of the French Revolution, which is commonly understood as the foundational moment not only of the modern French state but more broadly of modern-day practices of citizenship. In his now canonical work, Rogers Brubaker has argued that “[m]odern national citizenship was an invention of the French Revolution, which brought together a series of developments – including “the establishment of civil equality”, “the institutionalization of political rights”, and the creation of a “link between citizenship and nationhood” – “together for the first time” (Brubaker, 1992: 35). These ‘developments’ in the culture of citizenship were of course the product of a complex series of struggles within metropolitan France. Yet they were also, as has less often been noted, crucially affected by developments outside of Europe, notably in the Caribbean colonies, which were seen by both England and France as of vital importance to the future. In particular, the ultimate content granted to the abstract ideas of ‘universal rights’ depended on the actions of the slaves turned citizens of the French Caribbean, who during the 1790s transformed the order of colonial society.

In 1789, at the beginning of the French Revolution, the Caribbean islands of Guadeloupe, Martinique and St Domingue represented the world’s most valuable colonial possessions. There, an order based on the enslavement of 90 per cent of the population produced sugar and other commodities for metropolitan consumption, powering the economic transformations of eighteenth-century France and the emergence of a new merchant bourgeoisie. Between 1789 and 1794, the social order of the most prosperous colonial possessions of the Americas was completely reversed. The rapidity and scope of the changes witnessed in the French Antilles during this period bewildered, frightened and fascinated observers. As Michel Rolph Trouillot has argued, the Haitian Revolution was at that time, and in many ways has remained since, an ‘unthinkable history’. ‘The events that shook up Saint Domingue from 1791 to 1804 constituted a sequence for which not even the extreme political left in France or in England had a conceptual frame of reference. They were “unthinkable” facts in the framework of Western thought’ (Trouillot, 1996: 82). In the face of the 1791 insurrection, contemporaries constantly sought the roots of revolution outside the slave insurgents themselves, in the propaganda of abolitionists, the conspiracies of royalists, or the imperial designs of Spain or England. Even those who advocated slave emancipation were unprepared for the radical implications of the slave revolt of 1791, and tended to argue that political rights could only gradually be granted to ex-slaves. Indeed, by the time the massive revolt occurred in St Domingue, little progress had been made even on the issue of whether to grant *gens de couleur* – free people of African descent – political rights. Despite the activism of the famous *Société des Amis des Noirs*, no action had been taken at all in the direction of eliminating slavery.

Ultimately, emancipation was decreed locally in St Domingue in 1793, and this decision was ratified by the National Convention in Paris in 1794, so that

slavery was abolished through the French empire in the first national experiment in slave emancipation. If this occurred, however, it was both because of the military and economic pressure placed on the French colonies by slave insurrection, and on the basis of political alliance put forward by slave insurgents themselves. In the early 1790s, slave insurgents were often inspired by rumours that metropolitan officials had abolished slavery and that local officials were blocking the application of the new law. Such prophetic rumours put forward the idea that an alliance between slave insurgents and metropolitan officials could offset the power of white planters. By 1792 and 1793, many white planters increasingly turned away from the Republic, and even made overtures to the English, promising to hand over the colonies to them. Besieged Republican officials found allies in the *gens de couleur* and eventually in slave insurgents themselves. In 1793, when hundreds of slaves rose up in Trois-Rivières, Guadeloupe, and killed twenty-three whites, they presented their actions to the officials of the island as an attack against the royalist conspiracies of their masters. 'We have come to save you', they told the whites, 'we want to fight for the republic, the law, the nation order'. Instead of punishing them, many whites called for the formation of a slave army to defend the island from English attack. The intervention of insurgents like these into the conflict over the meaning of Republican citizenship ultimately became official policy first in St Domingue and then throughout the Antilles. The French Republic abolished slavery and mobilized armies of ex-slaves, and the call for slave liberation, as potent weapons in its global conflict with Britain.

In my work (Dubois, 1998a and 1998b) I have explored these events in order to argue that slave insurgents claiming Republican citizenship and racial equality during the early 1790s ultimately expanded – and 'universalized' – the idea of rights. The developments in the Antilles, I suggest, actually outran the political imagination of the metropole, transforming the possibilities embodied in the idea of citizenship. Though the intervention of European thinkers who had critiqued colonialism and slavery during the eighteenth century was of course an important part of this transformation, it was the slaves of the Caribbean who set in motion and defined the fundamental changes of the period. Out of alliances between slave insurgents and Republican officials in the Antilles, a new colonial order emerged, one in which the principles of universalism were put into effect through regimes that applied the same constitution in the metropole and the colony. The actions of slave insurgents, therefore, brought about the institutionalization of the idea that the rights of citizens were universally applicable to all people within the nation, regardless of race. This new colonial order, which marked a powerful blow to the system of slavery, was a crucial step in the broader march towards slave emancipation throughout the Americas and Europe. It was also the foundation for later attempts at colonial reform – most fully put into practice in 1946 – which were based on the idea of assimilating the colonies more fully into a metropolitan system of law.¹

This imperial expansion of France during the late nineteenth and early

twentieth century depended on the myth that France was the mother, and repository, of the universalist language of rights and the practices of citizenship that flowed from it. This myth rested on the convenient elision of the complex history through which events in the colonial Caribbean had actually shaped the political ideas and practices presented as the pure, exportable product of France. Scholarship in colonial studies has in recent decades shown the profound importance of colonial history in shaping the economic and cultural development of the 'West', but it has been less remarked on how profoundly important was the colonial experience – more specifically the actions of people in the colonies – in the development of the political ideas commonly understood as the product of that 'West'.² By returning to the history of the Caribbean during the 1790s, and so transcending the borders of French history as it has traditionally been written, we can undermine what Fernando Coronil calls the 'Occidentalism' of 'the West's self-fashioning as the self-made embodiment of modernity' (Coronil, 1997: 13–14).

The conflicts over the meaning of citizenship in the French colonies during the late eighteenth century were of course only the first volley in a longer history of colonialism which forged the contemporary structures and meanings of Republican political culture. In the 1870s, the emergence of the Third Republic in France was interlinked with the creation of the overseas institutions surrounding colonial citizenship. In the 1920s and 1930s, the emergence of what Gary Wilder (1999) has called 'colonial humanism' through the work of colonial administrators and activists from Africa and the Caribbean reshaped the meaning of Republican citizenship, culminating after the Second World War in the 1946 Departmentalization Law which installed a formal equality of rights between metropole and colony. And through the struggles over decolonization, ideologies of universal rights were used against the self-contradictory colonial regimes which had claimed to espouse and protect them.³

From the eighteenth century on, the profound challenges posed to the structures of French colonialism by insurgents forced administrators to respond in complex ways. During the 1790s, and again during the important French imperial expansion under the Third Republic, principles of universal inclusion became layered with practices of racial exclusion. Indeed, as has been noted again and again, universalism itself provided a powerful justification for colonial violence and oppression. In a recent article, Alice Conklin (1998) has explored how Republican principles animated the decisions of colonial administrators in West Africa at the turn of the twentieth century, and has argued that it is important for historians to take seriously the impact of universalist discourse on the process of colonialism. A better understanding of this history, she suggests, can help us meet 'the idea of universal human rights' as we disentangle the 'blind spots' of colonialists who saw themselves as Republicans. By studying the complex ways in which Republican thought was articulated within colonial regimes throughout French colonial history in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean,

we can better understand the contradictions which continue to haunt contemporary struggles surrounding immigration and citizenship in France.

How does the abstract universality of the discourse of citizenship become layered with practices of exclusion? Etienne Balibar (1991) and Uday Mehta (1990) have both interestingly explored how various foundational texts of political theory carry within them contradictions which allow for particularistic exclusions within universalist systems. Yet to fully understand the development of practices of exclusion we need to turn to the complex colonial history out of which these practices emerged. For in fact these contradictions were in many ways also the product of the process of contestation through which the colonized confronted and transformed the language of rights and forced colonial powers to reformulate their own discourses as they sought to maintain their colonial regimes. Here again, the history of the French Caribbean provides a window into the development of practices of exclusion within a project of liberation. The idea that certain people were simply not ready for citizenship is one that was at the heart of the contradictory regimes of emancipation established in the French Caribbean in both 1794 and 1848. In 1794, however, there were few earlier examples for administrators of emancipation to draw on, and so the development of their thinking provides a unique window into how universalist principles became layered with exclusionist policies.

After slavery was abolished in 1794, the new juridical order raised serious philosophical and political problems for the administrators who had to oversee the transformation: how were slaves, who had consistently been denied all legal and social rights, to become citizens ready to use and defend these rights? And how was the colonial plantation economy, deemed central to the economy of France, to be maintained despite this transformation? The question of how to create a society in which the degrading yet necessary state of the labourer co-existed with the successful functioning of a democracy was a central problem in Revolutionary political theory. It was an issue which animated the conflicts over 'active' and 'passive' citizenship during the Revolution and the continued struggles over suffrage in the next centuries.

One of the most important participants in this broader debate was the Marquis de Condorcet, whose ideas on the problem of transforming people into citizens were applied to the problem of slavery in his 1781 work *Réflexions sur l'esclavage des Nègres*. Condorcet argued that immediate emancipation of the slaves would be a danger to society as a whole as well as to the ex-slaves themselves. The slaves, he suggested, were 'degraded by the outrages of their masters, cut down by their severity' and 'corrupted by their example'. They were therefore in the case of 'those unfortunates who have, through barbarous treatment, been deprived of their reason'. Though the *natural* rights unjustly taken from the slaves had to be returned to them, this did not signify that they should be granted *political* rights. In certain cases the interests of the victims of oppression, and the need to maintain public tranquillity, could justify a cautious approach to the application

of such just principles: 'if because of their lack of education, and the stupidity contracted through slavery by the corruption of their morals', he wrote,

the slaves of the European colonies have become incapable of fulfilling the duties of free men, we can (at least until the experience of liberty has returned to them what slavery has taken away) treat them as men who have been deprived by misery or sickness of a portion of their faculties. We cannot, therefore, grant them the full exercise of their rights, without exposing them to the risk of hurting others, or harming themselves.

Condorcet proposed the gradual abolition of slavery, and the gradual integration of slaves into the state of political and economic freedom (Condorcet, 1788: 11–16).

Condorcet wrote a history of slavery as an institution that had left the slaves incapable of living responsibly within freedom. But, as was made amply clear in the revolts of the 1790s, the slaves did have a sense of the value and meaning of freedom – one which allowed them to transform the language of Republican rights. Yet the abolitionist vision of the history of slavery was powerful enough to survive the challenges posed by the events of the early 1790s, and the idea of gradual abolition was the foundation for the regimes of freedom established in the Antilles. The contradictions in such approaches to the citizenship of ex-slaves would haunt the period of emancipation and help encourage its reversal in the 1800s. A remarkable continuity was maintained between pre-Revolutionary proposals for gradual abolition, Revolutionary administrative arguments in favour of restrictive policies on plantation labour, and the arguments that were used by Bonaparte to re-establish slavery in the Antilles in the early 1800s. This is perhaps best symbolized by the trajectory of Daniel Lescallier, a colonial administrator who in the late 1780s managed an experimental plantation in Guyana and in 1789 published a pamphlet advocating gradual emancipation. In 1797, Lescallier reiterated the arguments of his 1789 work to argue that emancipation had taken place too quickly, and that it should be reversed so that freedom could be given to slaves by degrees. In 1802 he participated in the re-establishment of slavery in Guadeloupe (Lescallier, 1789, 1799).

Lescallier was not the only figure who straddled such different positions during the period. Victor Hugues, who abolished slavery in Guadeloupe in 1794, later oversaw the re-establishment of slavery in Guyana in 1802. When Hugues oversaw slave emancipation in Guadeloupe from 1794 to 1798, he drew on the ideas of gradualist abolitionists in administering a contradictory 'new citizenship' which combined a universalist discourse of racial equality with new forms of racial exclusion. In proclaiming emancipation in Guadeloupe, Hugues offered a peaceful vision of the collaboration he hoped would emerge in the new order:

CITIZENS of all colours, your happiness depends on this law . . . but the

white citizens must kindly offer, in fraternity, and with reasonable wages, work to their black and colored brothers; and the latter must also learn and never forget that those who have no property must provide, through their work, for their own subsistence and that of their family, as well as to the support of their nation.

In the next months, however, he reacted to the refusals of labourers to stay on the plantations with increasingly forceful regulations. Describing his actions, he wrote:

We proclaimed the decree on the liberty of the Negroes, but far from providing us with resources this decree steals them from us, because of the lack of education among our brothers in the colonies; nonetheless it is to be hoped that careful and severe measures will make them feel the price of Liberty.

Soon, Hugues ordered the 'Black citizens' who were not recruited into the army to return to the plantations where they had been slaves and to continue working there as they had before. Despite his stated intention to pay the *cultivateurs*, Hugues' regime never successfully did so; plantation labour was maintained through force, justified through the principle of national responsibility. Hugues also refused to apply the 1795 French Constitution in Guadeloupe, arguing that elections were impossible there and that any change in regimes would lead to chaos. Hugues argued that the subjugation of the new citizens could be justified by the fact that equality was not absolute, and that citizens had to be treated differently according to their moral and intellectual capacities. Granting political rights to the 'new citizens' beyond a paper 'freedom', Hugues argued, would destroy the colony by shattering the very foundations of its production. 'It is only by degrees, through education, through the needs and even the vices of Society that we can bring these unfortunates to the state that the Government calls them towards.' Without the threat of force, the new citizens would choose other means of survival, and the colonial economy would crumble. To learn how to be free, they had to be forced to work. Only then could the moral stain of generations of slavery be removed; only then could the ex-slaves become citizens.

Hugues used the language of nationalism to justify the limitations he placed on the freedom of the ex-slaves. For Hugues, the slaves did not – indeed, they could not – deserve freedom. Nevertheless, the nation, true to its Republican principles, had invested in them by subsidizing emancipation. The slaves therefore owed something to the nation that had freed them. Their particular debt brought with it particular responsibilities, which were *not* those common to all citizens of France; they were particular to those citizens who had until recently been property, and who had, as property, helped to produce vital commodities for the nation. This limitation was necessary to maintain the plantation economy,

whose disturbance would cause damage and inconvenience to the nation. The ex-slaves, like all good citizens, should be willing to sacrifice anything for the greater good of the nation; and their particular history dictated that their patriotic role would be to cultivate the soil as labourers. This is what it meant to be a 'new citizen', as Hugues called the ex-slaves: to be free, and to be a part of the nation like all other citizens, but to have a particular role tied to a past condition.⁴

The progression of Hugues' thinking, from the application of emancipation to what I call the 'Republicanism' of the restrictions he placed on the ex-slaves, was certainly not unique to emancipation as it took shape in Guadeloupe. Throughout the nineteenth century in the Americas, the process of slave emancipation created new forms of racial exclusions based on the idea that the ex-slaves were incapable of acting as free citizens (see e.g. Holt, 1992). The history of the United States from Reconstruction to the Civil Rights Movement is testament enough to the profound inequalities created after slavery, and to the importance of a long history of struggle in fulfilling the promises of Republican citizenship (Marable, 1991). In both the American and French cases, the granting of the rights of full citizenship was continually deferred through arguments about the inability of ex-slaves or colonial subjects to be citizens of the Republic.

French Republican colonial regimes, from the time of the Revolution through the twentieth century, operated on the principle that the colonized – whether ex-slaves in the Caribbean, or 'natives' in Africa and Indochina – had the potential to be assimilated as citizens of the Republic only potentially. This assimilation depended on a process of transformation that could only take place gradually through education and a transformation from tradition to modernity (see Conklin, 1997; Wilder, 1999). So citizenship, while possible for some among the elite, was for the most part deferred, a goal which justified the violence of colonialism through its promise. This complex of inclusion and exclusion, and of the deferral of the application of universal ideas, is the very 'Republican racism' which continues to haunt the contemporary discussions around immigration in France. The colonial history out of which French Republican political culture emerged highlights the continuing contradiction within the terms of citizenship, which carries both a promise of the expansion of rights and the constant possibility of a limitation on those rights. This history therefore posits a fundamental question: to what extent can the discourse of citizenship which has emerged out of colonial history serve to craft a better future for a France in the midst of economic and cultural reconfigurations at the end of the twentieth century?

In the past two years, the *sans-papiers* movement has actively crafted a response to this question. The *sans-papiers* movement began with the occupation of the St Bernard Church in Paris in 1996, when a group of residents of France who were the victims of increasingly restrictive immigration laws publicly announced their status as *sans-papiers* and their intention to challenge the laws that had excluded them from documentation and the rights that flowed from it.

The movement has challenged the categories through which immigrants are named and therefore are marginalized within the French Republic. By organizing themselves the *sans-papiers* helped transform the broader discourse surrounding illegal immigrants in France (Rosello, 1998).

The *sans-papiers* movement was in fact a loose collective of an extremely varied and diverse set of organizations which gathered together African, Caribbean, Chinese and Eastern European immigrants, organized in some cases according to their places of origin, and in others according to where they lived in France. These groups used a variety of strategies to make themselves heard within French society (see Simeant, 1998). In June 1997, for instance, a group within the broader movement called the *Artistes Sans Frontières* organized what they called a *parrainage Républicain* – a Republican godparenting ceremony. The Socialist mayor of the town of Pantin, outside Paris, had agreed to allow the ceremony to take place in the town hall, and his assistant was present for the ceremony. One by one, ten *sans-papiers* presented themselves, each time accompanied by two French citizens. The mayor asked these two citizens to confirm that they wished to become the godparents of the *sans-papiers*. All three then signed a document which looked like a French identity card, and which was given to the *sans-papiers* to be carried as an unofficial document to help them in their dealings with state officials. By creating these documents, the *sans-papiers* movement asserted the connections between citizens and those without papers, and made a claim for the rights of those immigrants who suffered daily exclusion from the society in which they lived. The ceremony combined Republican symbols with performances by the various artists in the group, who sang Haitian and African music as a way of thanking those who had come to support them.

The demands of the *sans-papiers* movement were phrased in a language of Republican rights which argued that those who had immigrated to France had the right to a humane, consistent and logical process for gaining temporary residency papers and ultimately the right to live permanently in France. They attacked the labyrinthine processes through which the French administration essentially kept many foreigners in a constant cycle of illegality, even after they had spent many years in France. And they demanded that under certain conditions – for instance, when a person had family born in France – the right to residency be granted. Yet the political strategy of the *collectif des sans-papiers* also included a stream of highly visible demonstrations in which the origins of the demonstrators – Chinese, Malian, or Haitian, and others – were put forward through music, dress and banners written in various foreign languages. In asserting cultural particularities in the pursuit of universalist principles of Republican equality, the *sans-papiers* were on some level challenging cemented assumptions about the meaning of the Republic and of assimilation in the French context. For many French intellectuals and administrators, the expression of ethnic particularisms is seen as fundamentally incompatible with the ‘Republican model of assimilation’ in which new arrivals are to integrate themselves into the

functioning of secular state institutions that grant them equal treatment as individuals. The goal of avoiding the creation of ‘ghettos’ that for many officials is the inevitable result of the ‘Anglo-Saxon model’ of immigration, in which the particularity of an ethnic group as such is respected, has motivated a range of government policies on schooling and housing on the national and local level. Local administrations, for instance, have constantly acted to avoid the consolidation of certain groups of immigrants within certain housing developments.

The political and rhetorical strategies of the *sans-papiers* movement therefore braided together approaches that were often assumed in French political life to be incommensurable. By creating both a recognizable cultural movement and articulating specific demands through claims towards universal rights, the *sans-papiers* productively used the space of possibility between a universalist language of rights and the evocation of cultural difference. The *sans-papiers* actively crafted a response to a question that had preoccupied many activists and scholars of the French anti-racist movements of the 1980s as they sought to confront the rise of racism in France, most powerfully symbolized by the electoral victories of Le Pen’s *Front National*: what was the most effective strategy against racism – was it the claim of a right to cultural difference within France, or the invocation of universalist values of tolerance?⁵ The *sans-papiers* spoke of universalism in foreign languages, presenting themselves as ‘foreign’ cultures at home in France, and so articulated the issue not as one about the ‘assimilation’ of outsiders but rather as the problem of a Republic which was violating the rights of men and women who lived within it, who had constructed it and were a part of its past, present and future. Their movement contributed to the broader political changes brought about by the new Socialist government elected in the Spring of 1997, which developed new, liberalized laws on immigration and regularized many *sans-papiers*. The group *Artistes Sans Frontières* successfully lobbied for the creation of an ‘artistic visa’ which made it possible for foreign performers to come into France, something which had become more and more difficult for many from Africa and Latin America.⁶

In the summer of 1998, in the midst of the euphoria surrounding France’s World Cup victory, won by a team that symbolized the multicultural mix of France – with players from Guadeloupe (Thuram) and Algeria (Zidane) scoring the winning goals in the final games – it seemed possible that the Republic might achieve tolerance and coexistence among the different groups that now make up its population. The ‘multicoloured’ nature of the French team, and the fact that the youth of the *banlieue* saw themselves reflected in the team, was noted by observers. Many repeated the idea that in winning the World Cup, the French team had issued a powerful blow against Le Pen’s *Front National* and its restricted vision of France. One commentator wrote: ‘Through the World Cup, the French are discovering, in the faces of their team, what they have become, a *République métissée*, and that it works, that we can love one another and we can win’ (Castro, 1998). The writer Leila Sebbar published a ‘letter to my father’, who was a North

African immigrant to France. He had experienced the victory, she wrote, 'As if you yourself had created today's favorite team, master artisan of the World Cup team, the work of your own life, so that *la France métissée* would win. Young, lively, against the ghosts that surround her. She won. You won' (Sebbar, 1998). The stunning about-turn of Charles Pasqua, the architect of the very immigration laws which during the 1980s had created many of the *sans-papiers* in the first place, symbolized to many how deeply the victory might promise new possibilities and solutions. A few days after watching Thuram and Zidane bring the nation to victory, Pasqua declared that those *sans-papiers* whose situation had still not been resolved should be given papers immediately.

The power of political symbols, in this case the French national team's success, should not be underestimated in determining the course of the Republic. It was, after all, through symbolic and ritual means that many of the leaders of the French Revolution hoped to transform the souls of the French people and create a virtuous Republic. The first 'Festival of the Federation', on which the 1989 commemorations of the Revolution were based, expressed a dream of unity that continues to hold a certain promise. In their 1994 song, 'Citoyen 120', the group Zap Mama call on the 'citizens of the entire world' to wake up to the realities of those who are excluded and isolated. They punctuate their song with a chorus, 'and you will wake up from this nightmare. . .', which expresses hope for a solution for the 'Citoyen 120' whose citizenship seems so precarious. As Zap Mama suggest, the terms of citizenship provide a vocabulary both for a struggle for liberation and a locus of division, both the space of community and the isolation of the anonymous, numbered and unrealized citizen. Their powerful song invites reflection on citizenship's dangers and its possibilities. In crafting a future for the idea of citizenship, today's France must engage with its complicated colonial history, which carries both the cause – and, I would argue, the solution – to the end-of-the-century crisis surrounding the meanings of citizenship and national identity. To confront the present crisis is to enter into a dialogue with a contradictory past out of which the possibilities of citizenship were born.

Notes

- 1 My work responds to Gilroy (1993), which calls for a more profound examination of how the culture of the 'Black Atlantic', and notably the Haitian Revolution, helped construct the forms of modern democracy. For the best histories of the Haitian Revolution, see James (1963) and Fick (1990); on the importance of news and rumours in the spread of insurrection, see Scott (1986); for an account of the movement against slavery in the Americas which argues for the centrality of the Haitian Revolution, see Blackburn (1988). On the concept of 'transculturation' see Ortiz (1995).
- 2 For a recent review of some of this literature see Pels (1997); the literature is,

- of course, vast, but see in particular the collections edited by Prakash (1995), Dirks (1992) and Cooper and Stoler (1997), and the work by Gikandi (1997).
- 3 For an account of the various exclusions from citizenship during the French Revolution, see Singham (1994). On French colonial policy during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Conklin (1997), Cooper (1996), Marshall (1972), and Rabinow (1989). An interesting work on colonial citizenship written from the midst of the colonial situation is the law thesis by Thiam (1953). For a collection of essays on 'Post/Colonial' Francophone literature, see Lionnet and Scharfman (1993).
 - 4 I draw here on my detailed exploration of the regime of Hugues, and its connection to abolitionist thought such as that of Condorcet, in Dubois (1999); for Hugues' quotes see 'Nous commissaires . . . aux Comité du Salut Public', 26 Prairial An 2 (14 June 1794), ANSOM C7A 47, 12–13, and 'Les Commissaire Délégués aux Ministre de la Marine et des Colonies,' 22 Thermidor An 4 (9 August 1796), ANSOM C7A 49, 43–5.
 - 5 For two examples of French work on the question of racism and anti-racism, see Taguieff (1988) and Balibar and Wallerstein (1988). For a treatment of the anti-racist movements of the 1980s and the broader history of 'immigrant collective action', see Blatt (1996, 1997).
 - 6 In the Summer of 1997, after the Socialist Party won a major political victory in France, Patrick Weil was placed in charge of a government commission that produced proposals for the reform of policies on nationality and immigration. The report of the commission he headed was published as *Pour une politique d'immigration juste et efficace* (1997), and most of its recommendations were put into effect in 1997 and 1998; see also Weil (1991) for a study of the history of immigration in France. For a critique of this 'institutional bricolage', and of the ways it avoids confronting the basic structural and economic causes which will continue to create *sans-papiers*, see Balibar *et al.* (1999).

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