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“TO STRENGTHEN THE COLONIES”: FRENCH LABOR POLICY, INDENTURED
SERVANTS, AND AFRICAN SLAVES IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY
CARIBBEAN

by

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On September 18, 1676, in the port town of Dieppe on the north coast of France, Jean Maganes agreed to bond himself for thirty-six months of grueling labor in exchange for safe passage to his country's Caribbean colonies. His father, also named Jean, was a secondhand clothes dealer who had spent the last three years in Paris. Hoping for a better life on the other side of the Atlantic, Maganes agreed to the terms of indenture. In exchange for outfitting his son with clothing (one full suit, two extra shirts, a pair of shoes, a pair of woolen stockings, two woolly hats, and two handkerchiefs), his father received 300 pounds of tobacco or sugar.¹

As Maganes crossed the Atlantic with his second-hand clothes and began work in the West Indies with his woolly hat and woolen stockings, he came in the midst of a fifty-year effort by the French government to settle the islands with lower class white artisans, laborers, and peasants. Unlike the criminals who came from France beginning in the 1710s, either Maganes, or more likely his father, had agreed to sell three years of his life. Promises, often exaggerated descriptions of wild fruit and a healthful climate, as well as advance payments to relatives, had enticed thousands of French men like Maganes since the early 1630s to leave behind their familiar homeland in exchange for the excitement and possibilities of life in the Caribbean.² Close in situation and opportunity to those who had come in the previous fifteen years and those who would come in the next forty, Maganes arrived in a society that was prematurely transitioning to a dependence on African slavery. And whether Maganes realized it or not, his family's decision to send him to the Caribbean supported a policy focused on balancing this dependence on slavery

¹ Jacques Petitjean-Roget, *La Société d'habitation à la Martinique: Un demi siècle de formation, 1635-1685*, 2 vols., (Lille, France: Université de Lille III, 1980), 1422.

² W. J. Eccles, *France in America*, revised edition, (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1990), 157-158.

that had held a central position in French colonial rule since Minister Jean-Baptiste Colbert had introduced it in 1663.

Voluntary indentured servitude, as opposed to forceful deportation of criminals or religious heretics, acted as the primary vehicle for the transportation of poor French men, women, and children to the Caribbean during the seventeenth century. As a result, it has a prominent role in the historiography of French colonial expansion. Studies have explored Colbert's public policy regarding the West Indies, the social origins of servants, the unique quality of white migration to the French Caribbean, and the role of indentured servants in the formation of white creole society.³ All studies concur that Colbert and his successors wanted more servants to come to the islands so that they could serve in the colonial militias and maintain more balanced race ratios and that between 1663 and 1710 the enticement of indentured servants to settle in the islands formed an essential aspect of French colonial policy. They further agree that masters resisted, or at least ignored, the laws promulgated by the French royal officials. However, unlike the literature on British labor systems, there is zero discussion of how indentured servitude and the royal

³ For the origin of servants, see Gabriel Debien, *Les Engagés pour les Antilles (1634-1715)*, (Paris: Société de l'histoire des colonies françaises, 1951). For a discussion of France's peculiar emphasis on indentured servants and the most focused study of royal French labor policy, see Christian Huetz de Lempis, "Indentured Servants Bound for the French Antilles in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *"To Make America" European Emigration in the Early Modern Period*, Ida Altman and James Horn, eds., (Berkeley, California: University of California Press), 172-203. Even though on page 182 Huetz de Lempis describes the development of "a rift [in the 1670s] between planters, merchants, and ship's captains . . . who considered indentured servants as increasingly unnecessary . . . and the authority of the king . . . who mainly for military reasons wished to increase the numbers of white people" there is no discussion of how the government's enticement of servants impacted the attitudes of these planters, merchants, and captains. For examinations of indentured servants in the formation of creole society, see Léo Elisabeth, *La société martiniquaise aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles 1664-1789*, (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 2003) and Petitjean-Roget, *La Société d'habitation à la Martinique*. For an overview of French royal policy, see Stewart L. Mims, *Colbert's West India Policy*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1912). Mims contends that the supply of indentured servants was "not large enough to keep pace with the demand for labor after the introduction of the cultivation of sugar." He summarizes the transition to slavery as a matter of economy: "slave labor was more reliable and much cheaper. The slave became the planter's property and his labor was available throughout his lifetime, whereas the indentured servant offered only a temporary service and became his own master at the end of three years. This explains why the slave trade developed in the French West Indies." See Mims, *Colbert's West India Policy*, 283.

government's support of it influenced the transition to slavery.⁴ Scholars of the French Caribbean have yet to factor the place of indenture servants in the Caribbean economy into their studies of the development of the plantation complex in the French West Indies. Furthermore, the impact of the royal policies on the labor choices of French masters remains unexamined. As a result, no one has considered yet the effect of Colbert's unequivocal support of indentured servitude. Examining this transition from servitude to slavery in the French context provides a new perspective on how a metropolitan government can influence the labor preferences of Caribbean planters.

For whatever reason, the survey literature on France in the Americas remains disconnected from the specialized literature when it comes to the royal government's support of indentured servitude in the Caribbean. It not only misses the important role of indentured servitude in the development of slavery but also the French royal government's focus on promoting the migration of poor whites. Scholars working on the survey level either view indentured servitude as a temporary solution to the labor shortage that plagued the West Indies, one that the new culture of sugar and slaves swept away, or erroneously confound Colbert's stance on the Caribbean with his views on the settlement of Canada, making his labor and migration policies appear "confused, short-sighted, and frequently contradictory."⁵ A re-examination of the policies set forth by Colbert and his successors clearly demonstrates that they saw it as more than a short-term

⁴ For the development of slavery in Virginia, see Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: the Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*, (New York: Norton, 1975) and Anthony S. Parent, *Foul Means: the Formation of a Slave Society in Virginia, 1660-1740*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003). For the development of slavery in the Chesapeake as a whole see James P. P. Horn, *Adapting to a New World: English Society in the Seventeenth Century Chesapeake*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994). For its development in Maryland see Lois Green Carr, Russell R. Menard, and Lorena Seebach Walsh, *Robert Cole's World: Agriculture and Society in Early Maryland*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

⁵ James Pritchard, *In Search of Empire: The French in the Americas, 1670-1730*, (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 18.

fix and strongly supported indentured servitude as a chief source of labor for the West Indies.

Both the specialized studies of the French Caribbean and the larger survey works miss the fundamental connection between Colbert's legislative support of indentured servitude and the transition to slavery. During the second half of the seventeenth century, the economy of Martinique depended largely on mixed agriculture that should have encouraged the employment of indentured servants and facilitated their transition to employment as artisans, drivers, or small landholders, but instead the rate of migration plummeted. Concerned about the rapidly growing slave population and the danger of revolt implied by the racial imbalance, the government continually enticed French men to settle in the islands as indentured servants. Not only could these servants serve in the militia in event of an invasion or a revolt, but their subsequent rise to the level of farmer or artisan would also provide the colonies with an economic stimulus in a way that no other labor force could match. However, the French government's attempts to stimulate the use of indentured labor by making it a more attractive option for potential servants shaped masters' attitude toward the use of poor whites as laborers in an unintended way. Because of the protections that the French royal government promised to indentured servants to persuade them to come to the colonies and ensure a steady supply of willing migrants, these poor whites became a less desirable labor source for planters. This in turn fueled the planters' desire for African slaves, over whom they had greater legal and social control. It also almost completely eliminated the planters' demand for white laborers, which substantially diminished the migration of indentured servants to the French

Caribbean. Colbert's encouragement of indentured servitude ironically hastened the transition to slavery.

Since masters could choose whether to employ white servants or slaves, any law that bettered treatment of indentured servants (by stipulating a certain amount of food or clothing) that did not give the same protection to slaves made the slaves a more attractive labor force to masters. At the same time, laws protecting slaves also resulted in worsened conditions for servants. For example, in a decree dated 7 October 1652 the Sovereign Council of Martinique, a group of planters, prohibited the work of slaves on Sundays and feast days, but did not extend this same holiday to servants.⁶ Unusual for masters to willingly give their slaves time off of work, they did so to curry favor with the Jesuits, who had lobbied for this law.⁷ Forbidden from working their slaves on Sundays or Feast Days, but wanting the work to continue, because of this law masters worked their indentured servants while the slaves rested. It must have galled at least a few indentured servants to see that the law provided the slaves with the opportunity to relax and did not make a similar provision for them.

A rash of warfare between French settlers and the Caribs swept the Antilles in the mid-1650s. In their haste to provide a sufficient defense during the war over Guadeloupe in 1656 the French authorities armed their slaves, who then made common cause with the Indians. Only the timely arrival of a Dutch ship prevented a complete Carib/slave victory and the forced departure of the French from Guadeloupe. These wars and the

⁶ Conseil de la Martinique, "Arrêt du Conseil de la Martinique, touchant les Esclaves," 7 October 1652, in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des colonies françoises de l'Amérique sous le vent*, vol. 1., (Paris, 1786), 73. Moreau de Saint-Méry was born in Martinique in 1750, received legal training in Paris, and then returned to the French Caribbean to collect all of the laws pertaining to the founding and development of the French colonies. He then returned to Paris, where he published his collection in six volumes between 1784 and 1790.

⁷ George Breathett, "Catholicism and the Code Noir in Haiti," *The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 73 no. 1 (1988), 4.

consequence of arming slaves remained at the forefront of Colbert's mind as he took responsibility for the colonies. In order to prevent any possible repetition of the nearly successful slave revolt, he made the transportation of indentured servants to the Caribbean a top priority.

The planters also remembered the lessons of the war with the Caribs. Two years after the 1656 rebellion the Sovereign Council of Martinique, a group of planters, wanted to use their power to issue local ordinances to prevent any more slave revolts. The law of 13 June 1658 prohibited "the slaves from going out at night without a license of their Masters, who authorize them."⁸ The planters who made up the Sovereign Council intended to limit slaves' opportunities to meet friends at nearby plantations and plot rebellion or escape. Through the next several decades, the local authorities sought laws that gave them greater control over their laborers. Because the distant Crown's concern for their colonial possessions also included a deep and abiding fear of slave rebellion, the local authorities had royal support in gradually contracting the world of the Africans. Tight control of the slaves' actions and freedoms only made Africans a more desirable labor source for the planters.

Indentured servants had been coming to Martinique for at least thirty years by the time Colbert took control of royal policy. During the first twenty years of French colonization planters consistently demanded more laborers and the African slave trade had not yet developed fully; indentured servants played a pivotal role in an economy based on mixed crops and tobacco. Often sharing the same geographic background, sometimes a kinship connection, and suffering through the same hardships as their

⁸ "Cet Arrêt fait défenses aux Esclaves de sortir pendant la nuit sans avoir un billet de leurs Maitres, qui les y autorise." Conseil Souverain de Martinique, "Arrêt du Conseil Souverain de la Martinique touchant les Esclaves," 13 Juin 1658, in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et Constitutions*, vol. 1, 83.

masters, indentured servants and planters could have a close, collegial relationship.⁹ After a servant's term expired, his former master would set him up with land and a small amount of money so that he, too, could become a *habitant*, or free holding farmer who would in turn hire servants to come from France. This "frontier era" of settlement allowed former indentured servants a good degree of social mobility.¹⁰ This concept of indentured servants as citizens-in-training learning skills from benevolent older settlers became the ideal for which the French government sought and the system it believed could best develop the Caribbean colonies.

The degree and duration of this utopian, more egalitarian ideal is open to debate, but it had clearly ended by the late 1640's and 1650's, when chroniclers had sufficient evidence to demonstrate the cruelty of the masters. A shift toward anonymity in the recruiting process caused part of this change in the relationship between servants and planters. In the 1650's, as merchants and ship's captains replaced potential servants' kinsmen and business associates as recruiters, quantity and speed of recruitment replaced social connection as the impetus of the recruiting process. As a result, the servants became commodities rather than individuals, and their status worsened. Another change occurred as land became scarce in Martinique and elsewhere in the French Caribbean and competition among planters became keen. A former servant could become a rival planter competing for land and laborers. With only three years to get work out of indentured servants and without any personal desire to see their servants succeed or even survive beyond the three years, masters worked them as hard as they could. On the other

⁹ Huetz de Lempis, "Indentured Servants Bound for the French Antilles," 175.

¹⁰ Philip Boucher, "The 'Frontier Era' of the French Caribbean, 1620s-1690s," in *Negotiated Empires: Centers and Peripheries in the Americas, 1500-1820*, Christine Daniels and Michael V. Kennedy, eds. (New York: Rutledge, 2002), 209.

hand, planters purchased slaves for life and they had rights to the labor of the slave's progeny. The master had a vested interest in the maintaining a slave's health and strength.

Missionaries and other travelers in the Caribbean noted and decried indentured servants' poor quality of life. Writers such as Jacques Bouton and Pierre Pelleprat, both Jesuits, and Jean-Baptiste du Tertre, a Dominican, provided readers in France with vivid descriptions of life in the Caribbean, including the poor working conditions of servants. Father Du Tertre especially described "the harsh manner of treatment meted out by masters" and a planter "in Guadeloupe who had buried fifty [indentured servants] on his land, having worked them till they died."¹¹ Despite the gruesome tales the missionary writers told, the despondent continued to emigrate, with migration reaching its twenty-year high in 1661.¹²

Colbert spent his first few years as intendant of finance focused on the reorganization of the country's finances after the Fouquet embezzlement scandal. Even before he could fully pursue his colonial policy, in 1663 Colbert placed the recruitment of servants, and therefore the supply of white laborers to the West Indies, under official government auspices.¹³ That year the number of servants coming to the colonies reached its all-time high.¹⁴ Despite the fact that it never again reached this level of success, during years that the government could focus on colonial development it undoubtedly saw 1663 as a benchmark it needed to match or surpass. The annual rate of

¹¹ Jean-Baptiste de Tertre, *Histoire générale des Antilles habitées par les Français*, 4 vols., vol. 4 (Paris, 1667-1671), quoted and translated by Huetz de Lemps, "Indentured Servants Bound for the French Antilles," 175-176.

¹² G. Debien, *Les Engagés pour les Antilles*, 249.

¹³ Pritchard, *In Search of Empire*, 18.

¹⁴ G. Debien, *Les Engagés pour les Antilles*, 248-249.

migration steadily declined through 1715, despite the monarchy's attempts to boost the supply of servants.¹⁵

Then, in 1664, Colbert, newly minted *surintendant des bâtiments et manufactures*, embarked on a bold new strategy to reenergize France's overseas territories. He created the West and East India Companies, formed a council of commerce, and established a highly protective tariff.¹⁶ He also tightened his administrative hold on the colonies. Throughout the 1640s and 1650s colonial governors had tended to cultivate local interests rather than forcing the implementation of royal edicts and company policies, but Louis XIV and Colbert changed this trend with the commissioning of Alexandre Prouville de Tracy as the new lieutenant general of America.¹⁷

Colbert also believed that passing laws that improved the legal status of indentured servants vis-à-vis African slaves, would help overcome the negative publicity about the islands and better ensure that indentured servants survived their three years of service. Shortly after M. de Tracy's appointment, in late June of 1664, Lafosse Clermont, the governor of Martinique, as well as his lieutenant, one Sieur de Laubiere, and the captains and officers of the Sovereign Council received a long set of instructions from him. De Tracy personally commanded these local officials, who were representative of the major planters on the island, to abide by these new orders. He also specifically charged them with their execution and enforcement. If the local officials did not obey De Tracy's proclamation or if they failed to compel others to do so, then they

¹⁵ A brief, secondary peak in the migration rate occurred in the mid-1680s, but this reflected the rapid expansion settlement on Saint Domingue rather than Martinique.

¹⁶ Mims, *Colbert's West India Policy*, 7-8.

¹⁷ Boucher, "The 'Frontier Era' of the French Caribbean," 213-214.

would suffer “the wrath of the king,” a phrase that must have been foreboding during this time of increasing royal control.¹⁸

M. de Tracy issued this act to end blasphemy and other irregularities in the colonies. He included the privilege held by slaves over servants to attend mass on holy days and the mistreatment of servants by masters among these irregularities. Item three prohibited all masters, regardless of religion, from keeping indentured servants or slaves under their care from attending mass on Sundays or feast days.¹⁹ The colony would fine any non-compliant planter 120 pounds of tobacco. Because this law extended the same protection to both servants and slaves it corrected the legal inequality created by the 1652 law that kept only slaves from working on holy days. The chroniclers had harshly criticized the similitude between servitude and slavery; by granting the same protection to servants De Tracy, a royal emissary, took a necessary step in combating this negative publicity.

In this same decree, De Tracy also tried to ameliorate the relationship between indentured servants and their masters. One of the chief problems had been that greedy planters, anxious to get the maximum amount of labor from their servants, cruelly beat them until they complied with the master’s orders. In order to prevent these occurrences, De Tracy proclaimed:

Similar prohibitions are made of Masters who beat and injure (*excéder*) their Indentured Servant; and in the case where there is sufficient proof that he has by them infringed, the said Indentured Servant shall be declared free and paid by the Master of that which they had agreed until the day he left his service; the Master of the House

¹⁸ “l’indignation de roi,” Alexandre Prouville de Tracy, “Réglement de M. de Tracy, Lieutenant Général de l’Amérique, touchant les Blasphémateurs et la Police des Isles,” 19 June 1664, in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des colonies françoises de l’Amérique sous le vent*, vol. 1., (Paris, 1786), 122.

¹⁹ While Protestant or non-Christian planters may seem an odd condition for a French colony considering laws prohibiting Huguenot settlement in New France, during the 1650’s the French Caribbean experienced an influx of Dutch planters and their slaves from Brazil.

[Case] will have the responsibility of administering to his Indentured Servants, Negroes, and Negresses when they are sick.²⁰

The absence of slaves in the first half of this law is conspicuous. The royal government intended the protection of those whom they had enticed to come to the Caribbean. Even though this new ability of servants to sue for their freedom did not end all of the abuses, it did make some masters fear the royal government enough that they preferred slaves, whom they could legally punish in the way they desired, to servants, whom they could not.

This decree also regulated the degree of control masters held over African slaves. It gave the masters a few responsibilities. De Tracy required planters to ensure that they provided all slaves with baptism and the necessary marriages as soon as they become the master's property.²¹ The master also needed to see to the baptism of all children the slaves produced. If the master failed to comply, the state levied fines of 150 pounds of tobacco for the first offense, 300 pounds for the second offense, and if the master continued to neglect his slaves' spiritual welfare the state sold his slaves "to a more Christian master" and gave the offending master the proceeds.²² De Tracy also prohibited sexual relations between masters or overseers and female slaves. He considered corporal punishment suitable for such a transgression: twenty lashes for the

²⁰ "Pareilles défenses sont faites aux Maîtres de battre et excéder leur Engagé; et en cas qu'il y ait prevue suffisante qu'il y soit par eux contrevenu, ledit Engagé sera réputé libre et payé par le Maître de ce qu'ils sont convenus jusqu'au jour qu'il sortira de son service; le Maître de Case aura soin de faire panser ses Engagés, Negres, et Nègresses lorsqu'ils seront malades." Alexandre Prouville de Tracy, "Règlement de M. de Tracy, Lieutenant Général de l'Amérique, touchant les Blasphémateurs et la Police des Isles," 19 June 1664, in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et Constitutions*, vol. 1, 119-120.

²¹ Part of the reasoning behind this clause has to do with the legal foundation of the French slave trade; in 1648 Louis XIII authorized the French slave trade on the condition that their owners took the necessary steps to make them Christian. See Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: The Baroque to the Modern 1492-1800*, (London: Verso, 1997), 281.

²² M. de Tracy, "Règlement . . . touchant les Blasphémateurs," in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et Constitutions*, vol. 1, 117-118.

first offense, forty for the second, and fifty and the branding of a fleur-de-lis on the cheek for the third.²³

Taken as a whole, the lieutenant general's edict of 1664 did not better the world of the slave. It classified slaves with other forms of movable property (*meubles*), making them subject to confiscation by their owner's creditors and allowing their masters to take them with them when the master relocated to another island. This law also prohibited slaves from selling in the market without a license issued by the master. The state assumed that when an unlicensed slave sold goods he or she had stolen the items in question. De Tracy placed the burden of enforcement on all free members of the colony. Buying from an unlicensed slave brought a fine of 30 pounds of tobacco for the first offense, 60 for the second, and 100 for the third. The lieutenant general proscribed a specific punishment for slaves selling sugar or tobacco without a license: thirty lashes in a public square.²⁴

In a frontier colony on the other side of the Atlantic, the metropolitan government often had difficulty translating the decreed law into actual change, especially in a colony such as Martinique where for the last two decades the local governor had frequently flaunted his lack of regard for royal authority. However, 1664 marked a tightening of royal control and least a few members of the Sovereign Council would have wanted to please the new lieutenant general. Also, the parish priests and Jesuits, who had the power to legislate the religious education of slaves, would have helped servants secure their legal right to attend Mass on Sundays and feast days. This code of laws changed the nature of labor in the French Caribbean in two important ways. By virtually guaranteeing

²³ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 119.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 120-121.

indentured servants the privilege of attending mass and allowing them the opportunity to sue their way out of abusive situations, the French state made servitude a more attractive option for potential migrants but it also reduced masters' control over their servants. This made the hiring of servants less attractive to planters. Even though the royal government, working through De Tracy, granted some protections to slaves, it also gave masters greater control over them. These statutes institutionalized the infantilization of the slaves and controlled the slaves' access to two key commodities: tobacco and sugar, the chief sources of profit for the masters. Considering that slaves became the majority on Martinique during the 1660s planters favored any measure that gave them more control over this population.²⁵ The 1664 decree of De Tracy's, therefore, made buying slaves even more attractive to masters and diminished the demand for indentured servants in the Caribbean.

The legal documents that governed the life of the indentured servant demonstrate the efficacy of De Tracy's orders. Those stipulations guaranteeing the proper treatment of indentured servants found their way in various forms into the contracts the servants signed on the docks of France. When Jean Demetz and Charles Fournillet, both of Montivilliers, bound themselves to the French West India Company at Dieppe in December 1664 the company guaranteed them not only their rights but also the clothes and materials that a servant normally needed to use in the Caribbean.²⁶

A small change does appear in the masters' treatment of servants and their attitude toward using poor whites as laborers. In the mid-1660s masters considered white servants "insolent" and unwilling to work. Added with the short-term nature of

²⁵ Pritchard, *In Search of Empire*, 54.

²⁶ Petitjean-Roget, *La Société d'habitation à la Martinique*, 1424.

indentured labor because of either mortality or the three-year duration of the bond, indentured servitude became an extremely unattractive source of labor.²⁷ It follows logically that if the law had not expressly forbidden the injuring of indentured servants, masters could have used techniques perfected over the previous twenty years to convince them to work without fear of repercussion.

The migration of indentured servants dropped precipitously after 1664. Although several factors influenced the employment of poor whites, including the introduction of African diseases into the Caribbean, the growth of the slave trade, and a slackening of the supply of servants from France, the royal government's placement of increased restrictions on planters employing servants corresponds exactly with this decline. Once a servant could sue a cruel master and the royal government had made it clear that masters needed to provide their servants with better clothes and food, the rate of migration only approached half of the 1664 rate a few times. This transition to slavery depended on the comparative economy of indentured servants and African slaves.

The issue of economy, though often simplified in the literature, breaks down into two fundamental and discrete categories. The first is the cost of the laborer in question compared to the amount of work the laborer will do for the buyer. Rates of death, disease, and debilitating injury factor into this equation, but so does the ability to purchase a replacement if needed. Also, the price of the worker does not equal the asking price of the seller. It includes the cost of supplying any food, clothes, or salary required for the maintenance of the worker. The other category of the economy of a laborer is the degree of control a master can exert over one who works under him. The amount that the laws, social mores, or customs of Martinique softened the status of a servant and reduced

²⁷ Boucher, "The 'Frontier Era' of the French Caribbean," 223.

the control a master held over him became an extra inconvenience. The master wanted to harden the role of his servants, to make them more exploitable and him more profitable. If the laborer had the right to legal redress for mistreatment, the master could not discipline him beyond a certain point for fear of civil action. This becomes a mental disincentive, which, along with purchase price and upkeep, acted as a factor in determining the cost of labor and the transition to more economical slavery. De Tracy's proclamation of 1664, which he gave with Colbert's blessing, had significantly increased the disadvantages of employing indentured servants and decreased the masters' demand for white labor.

For his part, Colbert had no reason to believe that his policies, which addressed the supply of servants willing to leave France, would not succeed in augmenting the number migrating to Martinique. He had taken complete control of France's colonial efforts at a time when more indentured servants than ever were coming to the West Indies. He passed reforms bettering their status because he needed to preserve an atmosphere that would help entice servants to migrate to Martinique. Those poor French laborers with few prospects but hope of a better, or at least different, life had options other than migration to the Caribbean or Canada. Throughout the seventeenth century, French workers migrated across the Pyrenees, replacing the Spanish who had immigrated to America. One estimate suggests that in 1669 as many as 200,000 French lived and worked in Spain.²⁸ Despite opportunities within France, including internal migration and enlistment in the ever-growing army, it still had enough population pressure to export workers in large quantities. However, laborers preferred going to Spain to colonizing the

²⁸ Denys Delâge, *Bitter Feast: Amerindians and Europeans in Northeastern North America, 1600-64*, (Vancouver, British Columbia: UBC), 35.

Caribbean because its proximity more readily allowed them to return home with their wages. Also, they did not have to worry about the dangers of Caribbean life or the perils of the Atlantic crossing. Furthermore, the French seldom welcomed religious dissidents into its American colonies, with a few notable exceptions.²⁹ Instead they typically went to Holland, Great Britain, or their American colonies. Indentured servants, whether drunk and swindled or sober and hopeful, ultimately volunteered to come to Martinique. Colbert used the tools at his disposal, the laws that governed France's empire, to overcome these obstacles and make sure that potential migrants would have the greatest incentive to sign an indenture contract.

In the early 1660s the economy of Martinique had begun the transition to large-scale sugar production. Even though the switch to the "plantation complex" only happened gradually, in part because of the difficulty of acquiring slaves, Martinique exported twice as many tons of sugar as tobacco.³⁰ With the supply of slaves uncertain and the government encouraging the migration of indentured servants, the mass exploitation of servants should have seemed like a plausible solution. Certainly large numbers of whites came to work in the tobacco fields of contemporary Virginia. However, since Colbert had to entice the poor French to indenture themselves, he had to provide legal guarantees for their health and safety.³¹ For planters, this only increased the attractiveness of slaves as a labor option, and therefore Martinique never went through a

²⁹ The colony on Saint Christophe expelled its Huguenots and sent them to conquer and settle Tortuga. From there these buccaneers settled the northern coast of Hispaniola. See Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery*, 282.

³⁰ Boucher, "The 'Frontier Era' of the French Caribbean," 210-211, 221.

³¹ Indentured servants refused to perform many of the hard tasks associated with sugar cultivation. See Boucher, "The 'Frontier Era' of the French Caribbean," 223. Since the government sided with the indentured servants in case of severe discipline, planters had few legal recourses to make servants work, whereas Africans had fewer protections.

phase of industrial level exploitation of white servants. This gap between French public policy and the labor preferences of planters widened in the next decade.

In 1669 Colbert became Minister of Marine, further solidifying his control of the metropolitan government and his responsibility for France's American colonies. That same year, Governor-General Jean-Charles de Baas, who served in the West Indies from 1667 until his death at Martinique in 1677, had petitioned Colbert for more immigrants. De Baas suggested that the French government "send every year a number of young men of fourteen years with some young women of ten that are found in many hospitals in France."³² Colbert found the suggestion untenable politically, responding to De Baas, "Be persuaded that it is not in the power of the king, despite how powerful he is, to people by force these islands."³³ This comment has found its way into surveys as an indication of Colbert's reluctance regarding immigration, but Colbert only acknowledged the opportunity cost of forced deportations, a major concern for a statesman intent on making France and its king Louis the center of European power.³⁴ He did have a plan for the politically more viable voluntary settlement of the islands, as he indicated to de Baas in a letter dated 3 July 1670: "It must be remembered that it is only natural for men to want that which will give them pleasure and comfort."³⁵ Between 1669 and 1671 Colbert instituted another round of pro-migration legislation to see to the migrants' "pleasure and comfort."

³² "qu'on envoie tous les ans un nombre de garçons de quatorze ans avec des filles de dix qui se trouvent en plusieurs hôpitaux de France." De Baas to Colbert, 26 décembre 1669, Arch. Nat. Col. C8 A1. Quoted in G. Debien, *Les Engagés pour les Antilles*, 176.

³³ "Soyez persuadé qu'il n'est pas au pouvoir du roi, quelque puissant qu'il soit, de peupler par force lesdites îles." Colbert to De Baas, 9 avril 1670. Quoted in G. Debien, *Les Engagés pour les Antilles*, 177.

³⁴ Pritchard, *In Search of Empire*, 20.

³⁵ "Il faut s'en remettre à l'envie naturelle qu'ont les homes de gagner quelque chose et de se mettre à leur aises." Colbert to De Baas, 3 July 1670. Quoted in G. Debien, *Les Engagés pour les Antilles*, 177.

Even before he wrote his response to de Baas' request for more indentured servants, Colbert had already introduced a new law intended to entice more servants to the islands. On 28 February 1670, the French Council of State dropped the term of servitude from three years to eighteen months.

The king, having been informed that many of his subjects have decided not to go the Islands and Mainland of America, to strengthen the French colonies which have been established there, because of the understandable worry that they will, upon their arrival, be indentured for three years of service, and under the power of men whom they do not know, and whom they will fear will mistreat them . . .³⁶

Colbert and the royal French bureaucracy wanted to fulfill de Baas' request for more indentured servants because they thought that more white migrants would strengthen the colonies that had already been established in the Caribbean. They lacked the political capital necessary to promote the forced transportation of migrants, but they did use public policy to provide a great enticement to potential servants: they only had to endure eighteen months, not three years, of labor before they became free. Once the formerly indentured became free, they could:

Have the power and freedom of choosing for themselves the Masters such that seemed good to them, or to attend to the cultivation of the land, and take free-holdings, or attach themselves to such other vocation that appeared to them the most acceptable, without any of them being obligated to perform any service and stay in the house where they were indentured, the given time having expired.³⁷

³⁶ "Le Roi ayant été informé que plusieurs de ses Sujets auroient perdu les pensées qui'ils avoient eues de passer aux Isles et Terre ferme de l'Amérique, pour y augmenter les Colonies Françaises qui y sont établies, par la juste apprehension qu'ils ont eue d'être à leur arrivée engagés pour trois années au service, et sous le pouvoir de gens qui leur sont inconnus, et de qui ils pourroient craindre de ne pas recevoir un aussi bon traitement qu'il seroit à desirer" Le Conseil d'Etat, "Arrêt du Conseil d'Etat, qui ordonne que l'engagement ne sera plus que de dix-huit mois pour ceux passés aux Colonies aux dépens d'autrui," 28 February 1670, in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et Constitutions*, vol. 1, 190

³⁷ "Sa Majesté declare tous ceux de cette condition libres, et en pouvoir et faculté de se choisir des Maîtres tels que bon leur semblera, ou de vaquer à la culture des terres, et prendre des habitations, ou s'attacher à telle autre vacation qui leur paroitra la plus convenable, sans qu'aucun d'eux puisse être obligé à aucun service et séjour en la maison où il aura être engagé, ledit temps expiré." Ibid., 190-191.

The Council of State shortened the term to eighteen months, changing a forty-year-old tradition, because it believed that the lack of indentured servants harmed the growth of the colonies.³⁸ The French royal government expected indentured servants to become full-fledged members of the communities that they had served, which ought to have been possible during this “frontier era” of settlement in Martinique. Furthermore, as a reinforcement of the measures promulgated by De Tracy in 1664, the Council ended this proclamation by commissioning the royal bureaucracy in the West Indies with guaranteeing that servants were “well treated by their Masters, and furnished by them with a good and sufficient diet, and that they were well assisted during times of sickness that they may survive during the time of their servitude.”³⁹ To make sure the captains and masters actually obeyed these provisions regarding indentured servitude, royal officials saw that they were read aloud, publicized, and posted in every port town of France, as well as in every town in French colonies so that “no one could ignore them.”⁴⁰ Certainly now that poor French only had to serve for eighteen months, during which their masters would provide for their physical well-being, they would prefer migration to the Caribbean to working in Spain.

Unfortunately for the royal policy makers, the individual merchants who recruited indentured servants and the planters who bought their contracts did not want to shorten the length of indenture because this shortening rendered the use of servants less profitable. Jean Mahé, 22 years old, originally from St. Malo, indentured himself in Nantes on 13 April 1671, about a year after Colbert reduced the term of indenture. His

³⁸ Ibid., 190

³⁹ “soient bien traités par leurs Maîtres, qu’il leur soit fourni par eux une bonne et suffisante nourriture, et qu’ils soient bien assistés pendant les maladies qui leur pourroient survenir pendant le temps de leur engagement.” Ibid., 191.

⁴⁰ “à ce qu’aucun n’en ignore,” Ibid.

contract lasted for eighteen months, but the contract stipulated that he would not receive any of the typical gifts of food, clothing, or money from his master at the end of his term. Much more typically, recruiters rewrote the servants' contracts, replacing the new eighteen-month term with the traditional thirty-six months. Occasionally, some recruiters took the precaution of including in the contract the stipulation that the indentured servant would serve for thirty-six months "notwithstanding any proclamation of the Council or any other of which [the servant] now expressly renounces."⁴¹ The planters considered it an onerous burden to only have three years from which to profit from the servants' labor; to only receive eighteen months of labor guaranteed a loss of profit even if the servant lived until the end of his term. Of all of the policies intended to promote the use of indentured servants, the planters opposed the reduction to eighteen months most vehemently and refused outright to accept it.

Colbert became determined to overcome this reluctance on the part of the planters and in 1671 he developed another procedure for the shipment of servants to the colonies. He had previously stipulated that all merchant vessels trading with the colonies carry passports, or trading licenses, issued by the French government. Along with the licenses, Paris had required any ship sailing to the colonies to carry either two mares or two cows. But the royal government soon learned that:

One [could] not easily put the aforementioned Mares and Cows in the Ships of less than 100 tons, because the Decks are too low, and these Beasts and their food are a great encumbrance, occupying in these small Ships the place of Merchandise destined for the subsistence of the Inhabitants of these Islands.⁴²

⁴¹ "nonobstant tous arrests du Conseili et autre à quoy il a par exprès renoncé," quoted in Petitjean-Roget, *La Société d'habitation à la Martinique*, 1431-1432.

⁴² "Mais Sa Majesté étant informée qu'on ne peut mettre commodément lesdites Cavalles ou Vaches dans les Vaisseaux au-dessous de cent tonneaux, à cause que les Ponts sont trop bas, et que ces Bestiaux et leur nourriture étant d'un grand encombrement, occupent dans ces petits Vaisseaux la place des Marchandises destinée à la subsistance des Habitans desdites Isles." Le Conseil d'Etat, "Arrêt du Conseil d'Etat, portant qu'il ne sera expédié aucun Passeport pour les Isles de l'Amérique, qu'avec clause expresse que les

Colbert, seeing an opportunity to facilitate the transport of indentured servants, offered a compromise to the merchant captains. Through notices posted in admiralty offices throughout France and in the offices of justice in the Caribbean, as well as in the area around the offices, the Council of State informed the merchants of a change in policy. Although ships of over 100 tons still had to carry two cows or two mares, “those under the stated hundred tons” could carry “two Indentured Servants, in the stead and place of each Mare or Cow, at the pain of the nullification [of their] licenses.”⁴³ Even though merchants did not want to recruit servants and masters preferred slaves to servants, Colbert figured that once the indentured servants arrived in the colonies some master would buy their contract. The Council of State also provided enticement to the local authorities to better ensure enforcement. If a ship did not carry the required number of indentured servants, cows, or horses to the West Indies, the local government not only confiscated the ship and its cargo, it also charged a fine of 1,500 *livres*. A third of the confiscated goods went to the one who denounced the noncompliant captain; the Lieutenant-General and the local governor shared another third, and the final third went to the Company des Isles d’Amérique, for the establishment of hospitals in the Caribbean. No doubt a few local governors chose to look the other way, perhaps in exchange receiving a remittance from the captain. However, the harsh penalties, especially the threat of confiscation, would have convinced at least a few captains to comply.

Capitaines ou Maîtres de Vaisseaux de cent tonneaux, et au-dessus, porteront deux Vaches ou deux Cavaliers; et ceux au-dessous, deux Engagé pour chaque Vache ou Cavalle,” 22 January 1671, in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et Constitutions*, vol. 1, 207.

⁴³ “ceux au-dessous desdits cent tonneaux, deux Engagés, au lieu et place de chacune Cavalle ou Vache, à peine de nullité desdits Passeports.” Le Conseil d’Etat, “Arrêt du Conseil d’Etat . . . deux Engagé pour chaque Vache ou Cavalle,” 22 January 1671, in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et Constitutions*, vol. 1, 208

This law further exemplifies the effort the royal government put forth to get indentured servants to the Caribbean through any inexpensive, efficient method. Furthermore, even though Colbert made the requirement applicable to smaller ships because those vessels had the logistical problems and complained, the resulting law gave indentured servants a good chance of finding a suitable economic niche in the colonies. Large vessels came to large ports where they could guarantee a reasonable turn-around time, selling their cargo and buying sugar and other colonial commodities. The sugar plantations demanded their cargo of mares and cows so they could develop breeding populations of the draft animals they used to work the mills. Once the smaller ships stopped carrying livestock they had less success in attracting the business of large plantations and port towns and they traded with smaller communities, settlements that might have wanted the labor of an indentured servant. The metropole wanted indentured servants to go to the Caribbean and find work and insofar as ships' captains obeyed this law it gave servants the opportunity to do so.

The war between France and the Dutch from 1672-1678 brought new challenges to the colonization of the Caribbean. The war placed a tremendous strain on the limits of the army and France could not project enough force to the Caribbean to protect its territories there. Martinique again needed to rely on a local militia drawn from a large class of small planters, artisans, mechanics, and servants. Although the fight against the Dutch had a severe impact on the white population, it demonstrated to the French royal government a clear need for a local militia capable of self-defense and the importance of increasing the number of white settlers.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Huetz de Lemp, "Indentured Servants Bound for the French Antilles," 181-182.

The war with the Dutch highlighted the growing division between the metropolitan government and the local authorities over the preferred source of labor. The royal insistence upon the use of indentured servants puzzled planters. France, from their perspective, did not need well-fed, well-treated indentured servants to strengthen the colonies. They needed a steady supply of African slaves to plant, harvest, and process sugar cane, a supply that France's wars with the Dutch disrupted.⁴⁵ Though security remained an issue, they had won the war and the French government had been able to increase the number of professional soldiers stationed in Martinique.

From the perspective of Paris, however, the colonies needed upon whom the planters could rely in the event of a slave rebellion, attack from other colonial powers, or ambush by the Caribs. The royal government could trust indentured servants with arms and it could not trust slaves, therefore it pushed for an increased number of indentured servants. For the royal government the competition between colonial development and inter-European warfare for funding and institutional support made the settlement of indentured servants even more necessary.

Both planters and the royal government feared slave rebellion but they followed two different methods of prevention. The royal government desired a large class of middling whites, whereas the planters wanted laws that controlled the movements and activities of slaves so that they could prevent rebellions from ever happening. Even though the planters accepted indentured servants only reluctantly, the metropole

⁴⁵ Jacques Bouton, *Relation de l'établissement des français depuis l'an de 1635 en l'isle de la Martinique*, (Paris, 1640), 98-99. Bouton, a Jesuit missionary in the French Caribbean, concluded as early as the late 1630s that African slaves made for more economical laborers because they served for life, had fewer problems adapting to the local climate, and could work harder on less food and water. See Brett Rushforth, "Alliance, the Law of War, and the Creation of French Atlantic Slavery," paper presented at the William and Mary Quarterly/Early Modern Studies Institute Workshop, May 2006, especially page 11.

confirmed and codified local laws governing the activities of slaves in de Tracy's proclamation in 1664 and in various other declarations, culminating in the Code Noir of 1685.

Despite the broad categorizations of planter and master the residents of the French Caribbean who owned slaves and hired indentured servants were not a homogenous group. Mostly French, but also including some Dutch refugees from Brazil, they included such diverse backgrounds as former indentured servants, rich merchants, small farmers, government officials, clerics, and professionals. Most only had one or two laborers working for them, some had upwards of 75.⁴⁶ Some intended to get rich quickly and then retire to Paris while others planned to live in the Caribbean for the rest of their life. A few considered themselves too good for manual labor but for most they had to work in order to survive. Despite all of these differences, they shared one unifying characteristic: the desire to obtain the maximum amount of labor from those who toiled under them. The royal government stymied the planters' attempts to exploit servants by granting legal protections and guarantees of quality food and clothing, but because the metropole also feared rebellion, it ratified local efforts to place more and greater control on African slaves. Under official auspices, planters could only exploit their slaves, not their servants.

The tension felt in this bifurcation of policy toward servants and slaves finds another expression in the efforts of Bourbon bureaucrats to support the policies laid out by Colbert. In a 1681 communication Charles de Courbon, comte de Blénac and De Baas' successor as Governor-General of the West Indies, and Jean-Baptiste Patoulet, intendant for the windward islands, advised Louis XIV and his administration on a wide

⁴⁶ Pritchard, *In Search of Empire*, 107.

array of policies regarding the colonies. They discuss the need to keep the rapidly growing slave population in check and suggest a draconian new law: any slave that strikes a white is put to death. In their next breath, they recommend to Louis that royal officials tour the islands twice a year to make sure that no servant is suffering abuse at the hand of his master.⁴⁷ A transformation had taken place since 1652, when the local council on Martinique had insisted that slaves rest on Sundays without making a similar stipulation for the servants. In their efforts to support the migration of poor whites, Blénac and Patoulet wanted to supervise the planters and enforce the king's orders, thereby reducing the desirability of hiring servants. At the same time, they recommend the legal sanction of a local ordinance that provides planters with a great degree of power over their slaves. If a master has to fear a lawsuit from a servant whom he beats excessively, a lawsuit that he would probably lose, but he knows that if his slave strikes back at him he can kill the slave without retribution, with everything else equal he would have no reason to hire the servant. If no master would hire an indentured servant, then a rational captain would not hire any before leaving France. For this reason the French government eventually resorted to prescribing quotas for the large planters in order to increase demand for servants in the colonies.

The French royal government also watched the growing race ratio with increasing concern. In Martinique, blacks only slightly outnumbered whites in 1671 (6,582 to 4,326), but a scant eleven years later the colony had more than twice as many blacks as whites (9,364 to 4,505, with 251 mulattos). The ratio only continued to grow, with almost three times as many blacks as whites in 1702 (17,382 to 6,820, with 570

⁴⁷ Avis de Blénac et Patoulet, Archives d'Outre-Mer, C8A 3 F 97.

mulattos).⁴⁸ In order to prevent the slave revolt that seemed inevitable if the ratios became too skewed, Louis XIV attempted to offset this growing imbalance with white immigrants.⁴⁹ This policy drive encompassed the whole of the French Caribbean, with the most extreme example occurring in Saint Domingue in 1686. The colony had come under official auspices sixteen years prior even though the whole of Hispaniola still technically belonged to Spain. In his effort to secure the colony Louis XIV proclaimed a draconian new law: within six months all masters had to have at least as many indentured servants as African slaves. He exempted no one and threatened the non-compliant with the confiscation of all excess slaves.^{50,51}

Even though the metropolitan government lacked the ability to enforce this decree, and never attempted to do so, the fact that the administration had blustered such a threat clearly demonstrates the stance it had toward immigration. Louis had based his reasoning on an understanding that indentured servants had contributed the most to the growth of the colony thus far. From the perspective of the metropole a truly successful colony had to have a large class of indentured servants and other poor and middling whites.

Finally, Colbert's successors offered planters an economic incentive to use indentured labor. In 1687 the Council of State granted a tax break to military officers. It exempted the officers from paying a head tax for any indentured servant in their employ.

At the same time, officers, according to their position, received the same tax exemption

⁴⁸ Pritchard, *In Search of Empire*, 54.

⁴⁹ Huetz de Lempis, "Indentured Servants Bound for the French Antilles," 173.

⁵⁰ "tous les Habitans de ladite Côte, de quelque qualité et condition qu'ils soient" Louis XIV, "Ordonnance du Roi, portant que le nombre des Engagés sera, à Saint Domingue, égal à celui des Negres, à peine de confiscation de l'excédent de ces derniers," 30 September 1686, in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et Constitutions*, vol. 1, 434

⁵¹ Louis XIV, "Ordonnance du Roi . . . le nombre des Engagés," in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et Constitutions*, vol. 1, 434.

for a set number of African slaves. The French government ensured its ability to encourage a proper balance between indentured servants and slaves by dictating the number of tax-exempt slaves each officer could have.⁵² Instead of appealing to servants directly or using the power of the state to enforce its policy, the government began enticing prospective masters. Only this tactic directly addressed the planters' chief reason for preferring African slaves: the economics of the labor market.

The resistance of the planters fundamentally shaped long-term royal policy with regards to indentured servants. In 1698 the metropole officially reinstated the three-year term of servitude. Louis, however, also proscribed quotas, requiring ships with trading licenses and going to the Caribbean to carry certain numbers of indentured servants: "three Indentured Servants for those of sixty tons or below, four for those of sixty tons to one hundred tons, and six for those above [one hundred tons]."⁵³ Some captains continued to fake the hiring of the requisite number of servants, but other captains continued to bring them. At the same time, planters continued to purchase large quantities of African slaves.

The next year, the royal administration tried again to augment the number of whites via indentured servitude and correct certain abuses of the system that had arisen. In their efforts to fulfill the letter of law, certain captains had begun signing on twelve-year-old boys as indentured servants. These "servants" then arrived in the islands completely unfit for labor. Louis commanded:

⁵² Le Conseil d'Etat, "Arrêt du Conseil d'Etat, portant confirmation de l'exemption des Droits de Capitation établi par le Règlement de M. de Bass," 4 Septembre 1688, in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et Constitutions*, vol. 1, 471.

⁵³ "Trois Engagés pour ceux de soixante tonneaux et au-dessous, quatre pour ceux de soixante tonneaux, jusqu'à cent tonneaux, et six pour ceux au-dessus." Louis XIV, "Ordre du Roi pour porter des Engagés aux Isles," 19 Fevrier 1698, in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et Constitutions*, vol. 1, 581.

Having been informed that the Inhabitants of the Colonies of the French Islands of America, having not grasped of the intent that He has expected of His obligation that He imposed on the Captains of Merchant Ships who go there from the Ports of the Kingdom, of transporting Indentured Servants . . . because they take [as indentured servants] children of twelve years, incapable of enduring for a long time any work . . . the King has declared and does declare, wants and intends that the Indentured Servants who have to be transported to the Islands, in accordance with the proclamation of 19 February 1698, have achieved the age of eighteen years, and be in a state [of being capable] to work; that the term of their indenture shall be three years, and that each Planter of the Islands is to have one [servant] for every set of twenty Slaves, excluding the Overseer; wanting the Officers of Admiralty to reject the Indentured Servants who are not at the age and the quality above specified, and that Captains who bring [unfit servants] are subject to the same punishment as if they had not [brought any].⁵⁴

Though not nearly as draconian as its predecessor that required an equal balance between indentured servants and slaves in Saint Domingue, the King's Order of 8 April 1699 still insisted on a certain race ratio. Again, this attempt to bring a balance to the race ratio of the colonies failed. It would soon exceed three slaves for every white in Martinique, with 17,382 blacks and 570 mulattos to 6,820 whites in 1702 and 35,475 blacks and 993 mulattos to 9,106 whites in 1719.⁵⁵ The ballooning of the slave population only heightened the fear of revolt and the urgency felt by the government to increase the white population from which it could recruit a militia.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Louis XIV, "Sa Majesté étant informée que les Habitans des Colonies des Isles Françoises de l'Amérique, ne tirent point l'utilité qu'Elle a attendu de l'obligation qu'Elle a imposée aux Capitaines des Bâtimens Marchands qui y vont des Ports du Royaume, d'y porter des Engagés . . . parce qu'ils prennent pour les premiers des enfans de douze ans, incapable de supporter de long-temps aucun travail . . . Sa Majesté a ordonné et ordonne, veut et entend que les Engagés qui doivent être portés aux Isles, conformément à l'Ordonnance du 19 Février 1698, aient atteint l'âge de dix-huit ans, et soient en état de travailler; que le terme de leur engagement soit de trois ans, et que chaque Habitant des Isles soit tenu d'en avoir un par chaque vingtaine de Negres, outre le Commandeur; voulant que les Officiers de l'Amirauté rejettent les Engagés qui ne seront point de l'âge et de la qualité ci-dessus spécifiés, et que les Capitaines qui en apporteront d'autres subissent la même peine que s'ils n'en avont." Louis XIV, "Ordonnance du Roi, portant défenses aux Capitaines des Vaisseaux qui vont aux Isles de l'Amérique, de prendre des Engagés qu'ils n'aient atteint l'âge de dix-huit ans, et pour regler la proportion et la qualité des Fusils Boucaniers," 8 Avril 1699, in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et Constitutions*, vol. 1, 628.

⁵⁵ Pritchard, *In Search of Empire*, 54.

⁵⁶ Huetz de Lemps, "Indentured Servants Bound for the French Antilles," 183.

Even after Louis XIV's death in 1715, Philippe, Duke of Orleans, acting as regent for Louis' great-grandson, gave a long list of instructions to Louis-Balthazar de Ricouart, comte de Herouville and Intendant for the windward islands and M. de la Varenne, General in Martinique, who together administered Martinique while it went without a governor. Philippe informed them that:

One of the most important duties of Sirs de la Varenne and Ricouart ought to be the increase of the number of free planters; they ought to take great care that each merchant vessel coming to the colony brings the number of indentured servants that the previous Orders require . . . and they ought to ascertain that the captains of the merchant vessels charge a reasonable price for each servant . . .

It is not less important that each planter has the number of whites prescribed by the Orders, and this is so essential because of the large number of slaves which are in the Colony, to fortify it, His Majesty cannot recommend too much to not suffer any infringement under any pretext or cause whatever it may be.⁵⁷

The new administration continued the labor policies put forward by Colbert and his immediate successors, using the Bourbon bureaucratic structure to enforce the previous fifty years of labor regulations. The rationale remained the same: increase the number of indentured servants to increase the number of habitants. This would also augment the number of people that the colonial administration could organize into a militia. The rapidly growing slave population only added urgency to the situation and increased the determination of the royal government to rectify the situation.

⁵⁷ Louis XV, under the supervision and approval of Phillippe d'Orleans, "Memoire du Roi à MM. de la Varenne and de Ricouart, Général et Intendant, sur l'administration générale de la Colonie," 25 August 1716, Colonial Registry of Martinique, 116. "Une des principales attentions des sieurs de la Varenne et de Ricouart, doit être l'augmentation des habitans [sic]; ils y peuvent parvenir en tenant exactement la main à ce que chaque vaisseau marchand y apporte le nombre d'engagés auquel il est obligé par les Ordonnances . . . et ils tiendront la main à ce que les capitaines des navires marchands n'exigent qu'un prix raisonnable de chaque engagé qu'ils remettront aux habitans . . . Il n'est pas moins important que chaque habitant ait le nombre de blancs prescrit par les Ordonnances, et cela est si essentiel, tant par rapport au grand nombre de nègres qui sont dans la Colonie, que pour la fortifier, que S. M. ne peut que trop leur recommander de ne point souffrir qu'il y soit contrevenu sous quelque prétexte ou quelque cause que ce puisse être."

When Colbert took charge of colonial policy in the 1660s, he made the settlement of poor whites in the Caribbean through the system of indentured servitude a top priority. He needed to overcome the challenges of negative publicity about working conditions, the brutality of masters and the mortality of the servants, and the other options for the desperate poor, including intra-national migration to cities and crossing the Pyrenees to work in Spain. Therefore, he set forth a public policy intended to entice servants by promising them legal protection and shorter time of indenture. He also mandated quotas of shipment of servants for captains of small ships who wanted to trade in the French islands. His successors went further, demanding that all ships carry at least a few servants to the islands and that plantations maintain certain race ratios. Since the early initiatives reduced the degree of control masters had over servants and the economy of employing whites, and the later laws foisted poor whites on a society that did not want them, this public policy proved counterproductive. Ironically, it diminished the use of poor whites as a labor source. As a result, a few indentured servants, pushed to the Caribbean by royal policy and working in a society dominated by slavery, became a unique characteristic of France's eighteenth century empire.⁵⁸

In the early 1660s Colbert laid out a policy that he intended would encourage the recent increase in the use of indentured servitude. Because he sought to strengthen the system through the enticement of servants and the introduction of legal reforms, this dramatically reduced the masters' demand for indentured labor and ironically hastened the switch to slavery. More than merely ineffective, French labor policy for seventeenth

⁵⁸ G. Debien, *Les Engagés pour les Antilles*, 248-249. See also Huetz de Lemps, "Indentured Servants Bound for the French Antilles," 173.

century Martinique proved counter-productive, causing the demise of a system that Colbert had sought to preserve.

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