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The Portrait of Citizen Jean-Baptiste Belley, Ex-Representative of the Colonies by Anne-Louis Girodet Trioson: Hybridity, History Painting, and the Grand Tour

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THE PORTRAIT OF *CITIZEN JEAN-BAPTISTE BELLEY, EX-REPRESENTATIVE OF THE COLONIES* BY ANNE-LOUIS GIRODET TRIOSON: HYBRIDITY, HISTORY PAINTING, AND THE GRAND TOUR

By

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ABSTRACT

THE PORTRAIT OF *CITIZEN JEAN-BAPTISTE BELLEY, EX-REPRESENTATIVE OF THE COLONIES* BY ANNE-LOUIS GIRODET TRIOSON: HYBRIDITY, HISTORY PAINTING, AND THE GRAND TOUR

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Anne-Louis Girodet Trioson's *Portrait of C. [itizen] Jean-Baptiste Belley, ex-representative of the Colonies*, is evidence of the changing ideological situation during the French Revolution. Girodet was one of the most learned and accomplished students of Jacques-Louis David who strove to surpass his teacher in two ways: 1) by painting David's Neoclassical style so well that his handling surpasses that of his master, and 2) by choosing subject matter never before explored by David. Girodet accomplishes both within this work. The Neoclassical handling of the image has been achieved with amazing clarity, and the central figure of an identified black man had never been displayed in the Salon previously.

The work was without precedent and without progeny. It successfully transcends the boundaries of portraiture into the highest tier of the Academic hierarchy: History Painting. Lacking in the existing scholarship of this portrait as history painting is that the work is successful in fulfilling a didactic and moralizing function, bearing significance to the general public. Scholars have hitherto ignored the striking visual similarities between this and Grand Tour portraits of Englishmen earlier in the century.

This portrait of Belley calls into question accepted post-colonial readings by not adhering to a strict Orientalist interpretation. His hybrid nature nullifies readings that he is merely a black man posed as a French one. Belley cannot be seen as simply African, nor Haitian, nor French, nor military man, nor politician; each of these aspects of his being add up to his individual identity. It was because of Belley's race that he was chosen for this portrait; his complex nature creates a dramatic painting relevant to varied members of the general public, his status as a black man allows for a politically relevant subject worthy of history painting, and the choice of Girodet's model of Grand Tour portraiture with its connotations of education, travel and social status—when applied to a black man—make this a revolutionary painting unparalleled in history.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1797, Anne-Louis Girodet Trioson painted the *Portrait de C.[itoyen] Jean-Baptiste Belley, ex-représentant des colonies* (Fig. 1), which changed the face of art history. For the first time in the Western world an artist created a near life sized history painting of a black man. Race plays an essential role in the importance of this work. It was because of Belley's race that he was chosen for this portrait; his complex nature creates a dramatic painting relevant to varied members of the general public, his status as a black man allows for a politically relevant subject worthy of history painting, and the choice of Girodet's model of Grand Tour portraiture with its connotations of education, travel and social status—when applied to a black man—make this a revolutionary painting unparalleled in history. This highly innovative work of art has been admired and scrutinized by scholars through the years because of the artistic prowess of Girodet as well as his ability to display varied levels of intellectual meaning. It has not however been analyzed in terms of the full scope of its racial connotations, especially those related to Belley's historical and individual significance and the painting's connections with Grand Tour portraiture.

In this large canvas (158 cm x 111 cm), the uniform-clad Jean-Baptiste Belley rests his right elbow atop a dark mottled marble pedestal. His body shifts slightly to adjust for this change in height. The body positioning is natural though exaggerated in an S-curve, reminiscent of late Greek sculptures by Praxiteles. Belley gazes outside the frame of the image, above and to his left, as though lost in thought or looking toward inspiration; more importantly, he is making a conscious decision not to return the viewer's gaze, endowing him with a sense of power over the viewer. Atop the pedestal

rests a white marble Roman-style portrait bust with "G.T. Raynal" engraved upon it, identifying the man as *philosophe* Guillaume Thomas Raynal. The bust of Raynal is tilted away from Belley, not facing him or the viewer, but looking out of the picture's frame in the opposite direction.

Belley is placed in an outdoor setting: a blue sky with scattered clouds as his backdrop. On the distant horizon is a verdant coastline, perhaps invoking his home of Saint Domingue.[1] Belley's suit is crisp and clean, though it does not give an air of rigidity as it moves with Belley's body. The bright white scarf about his neck contrasts highly with his dark black skin, so much so that you must look closely at the picture to discern his detailed facial features. He has a stern and noble expression added to the lofty gaze. His tight hair is graying, a result of his age and experience; Belley was most likely in his sixties when this portrait was painted.[2] In his right ear is a gold hoop earring, the only indication in his costume of his exotic nature.[3] The sash tied round his waist is parted to reveal red, white and blue: the colors of French freedom. These colors are again emphasized in the plumed hat Belley holds at his side in his left hand. Hanging from Belley's waist is a small object identified as a reading glass.[4] The addition of this device demonstrates the educated and elevated nature of Belley, especially among his fellow ex-

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[1] Helen Weston, "Representing the Right to Represent: The *Portrait of Citizen Belley, Ex-Representative of the Colonies*, by A.-L. Girodet," *Res* 26 (1994): 86-87. In this article Weston links the background with an engraving of the burning of the Cap of Galbaud in Saint Domingue. Though it is an interesting argument, I am inclined to see the background as an anonymous view of naure and not necessarily a specific location.
[2] As a former slave, there was no way to identify his birth date, and therefore no way to truly know Belley's age. Though Stephanie Brown states that he was born in 1747. Stephanie Nevison Brown, "Girodet: A Contradictory Career" (PhD Dissertation, London University, 1980), 146.
[3] It has also been suggested by Darcy Grimaldo-Grigsby that this earring was the fashion in Directoire France, though it was not the custom in military portraits of the time. Darcy Grimaldo-Grigsby, *Extremities: Painting Empire in Post-Revolutionary France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 54. Sylvia Musto marks the earring for its significance as being frequently included in depictions of blacks both slave and free. Sylvia Musto, "Portraiture, Revolutionary Identity and Subjugation. Anne-Louis Girodet's Citizen Belley," *RACAR* 20 (1993): 66.
[4] Grimaldo-Grigsby, 54.

slaves. The mere fact of his literacy caused him prominence among blacks in the eighteenth century. Belley's right hand falls at his waist and in an awkward gesture acts to measure his bulging genitalia, heightening his sense of virility and masculinity, again identifying him as a man of nature.

The Neoclassical handling of the image demonstrates the artist's connections with his teacher David, though this canvas has been painted with such clarity that Girodet perhaps surpasses his master in handling. The work is tightly painted and the colors are deep and smooth. Girodet has balanced the canvas to highlight the figure of Belley above any other aspect of the work. The predominant earth tones in the image intensify Belley's connection with the outdoor setting and his status as a man of nature. There is no sense that this is a stereotypical view of a black man, but an actual individual, complete with wrinkles and gray hairs. In fact, Belley's features are so exactly drawn, that based on his Senegalese origins, it can be speculated that he hails from the Toucouleur tribe.[5] The work has no sense of exaggeration, but of fact, no sense of Rococo frivolity, but of ancient heroism. Girodet's painting draws the viewer in with its beautiful surface, and then holds his attention with the intellectual nature of its subject.

The French Revolution was a time of constant change. The majority realized that they could assume the power held by the few. The Revolution was ideologically driven by the ideals of freedom from oppression, and slavery was at the heart of the debates. At the outset of revolution in 1789 there would be no way of predicting France's future over the next ten years; there was initially no intention of deposing, let alone beheading, the

[5] There are five main ethnic groups within Senegal: Wolof, Pular, Sereer, Mandinge, and Toucouleur. The identifying characteristics of each can be discerned upon extended time within Senegal. Through the dark skin, the nose shape and the eyes of Belley, I can most readily associate him with the members of the Toucouleur with which I am personally acquainted.

king. As time progressed, opinions and mandates shifted. The third estate, the majority of French people, desired to wield more power, as did the leaders of the radical Jacobin party. Jacques-Louis David, Girodet's master, was heavily involved with the Jacobin government, holding his own title of Pageant Master, in which he acted to raise the people's republican emotions. The *Convention Nationale* was the ruling body that attempted to be an equal opportunity assembly. It was however a daunting task to control not only Paris, but the surrounding provinces who felt quite detached from the revolution, as well as the colonies of imperialist France. This unstable situation allowed for the revolt of the slaves in France's most lucrative colony, Saint Domingue.

Saint Domingue was rich in sugar, cotton, indigo and tobacco, all of which produced great revenue for France, and all of which were dependent upon slave labor, providing, as James Smalls put it, "the *raison d'être* for the French slave trade."[6] Thus the colony's worth was tied directly to slavery. When the slaves began to revolt in the fall of 1791, France felt truly threatened. This threat was heightened by the eminent aid to the slaves by inhabitants of Spanish Saint Domingue and by the British in 1793.[7] This pressure proved to be too great for French Commissioner Léger Félicité Sonthonax, and in order to spare French troops on the island, he announced the abolition of slavery in the colony on August 29, 1793.[8] Though the French Commissioner had declared this emancipation, it could not be official until the act was ratified by the *Convention Nationale* in Paris. Sonthonax sent a delegation representing the colony to plead their case in France. Belley was chosen as one of these three delegates. The thought of losing

[6] James Smalls, "Esclave, Negre, Noir: The Representation of Blacks in Late 18th Century French Art" (The University of California, 1991), 32-33.
[7] Musto: 62.
[8] Ibid.

the resources of the colony was more financially damaging to the French than simply losing slave labor. The Convention therefore ratified Sonthonax's decree and slavery in the colonies was officially abolished on February 4, 1794.

As popular support intensified the resolve of the Jacobin leaders—Robespierre in particular—the Terror commenced. This caused difficult times to fall upon France, and the will of the people no longer rested with the Jacobin militants. Once again, the government was adjusted and the *Directoire* began. Many of the original members of the *Convention Nationale* continued their governmental positions as members of the *Conseils des Anciens* or the *Conseils des Cinq Cents*. Belley was one such member elected to the latter group. The Terror had caused a very insecure situation for the French in general and the Directoire was trying to stabilize the nation. The insecure financial situation of this time led these new officials to rethink slavery and the position of Saint Domingue in particular. France had lost almost all power on the island and was in need of the revenue that would accompany greater control of the colony. Members of the government with specific ties to colonial planters insisted on a change in the ruling of Saint Domingue.[9] It is therefore within this setting the Girodet painted the *Portrait of Jean-Baptiste Belley*.

Scholars, such as Darcy Grimaldo-Grigsby and Sylvia Musto, have focused on the painting in terms of its position within a social and historical framework. This is necessary in understanding the relationship between men of color and Europeans, as well as the rhetoric and ideology of the French Revolution so closely tied to issues of slavery and freedom. Darcy Grimaldo-Grigsby, in the most thorough reading of the work, explains that the portrait was an answer to a challenge issued by Robespierre.[10] The

[9] Musto.
[10] Grimaldo-Grigsby, 12.

Jacobin leader asked artists to create history painting based on the most recent events of the Revolution, including the emancipation of colonial slaves. Grimaldo-Grigsby states that the interplay between figures, the full-length Belley and the portrait bust of Raynal, acts to remind the viewer of the importance of the abolition of slavery in the French colonies, and the role each figured played within this momentous occurrence. Sylvia Musto explains that the function of portraiture changed during the revolution to "mark and define the configurations of the newly developing power structures."[11] Belley's portrait plays a part in this through the presentation of Belley as a powerful military and political leader, positions never afforded to a black man before the equalizing events of the French Revolution.

George Levitine, in his dissertation "Girodet: An Iconographical Study," groups the *Portrait of Belley* with two other portraits by the artist: *Chateaubriand,* and *Baron Auguste de Stael*. This grouping provides a new type of portraiture according to Levitine, which he terms "a poeticized masculine portraiture."[12] All men lean against some form of architecture in the same relaxed pose reminiscent of Praxiteles, all are depicted out of doors with the figure above the horizon line so as to silhouette their torsos against the sky. Levitine, however, neglects to comment on the importance of the fact that Belley stands alone as the only black man of this trio. Levitine understands this poeticized masculine portraiture as generating from eighteenth-century English aristocratic portraiture, such as that painted by Gainsborough.[13] Girodet's style is differentiated by the internal emotion of the figure, its classical simplicity, melancholic mood and the

[11] Musto: 60.
[12] George Levitine, "Girodet-Trioson: An Iconographical Study" (PhD Dissertation, Harvard University, 1952), 316.
[13] Ibid., 317.

lyrical isolation of the figures. Levitine states that these are all aspects of nascent romanticism as expressed through Girodet and are therefore important markers of future artistic trends. This is especially emphasized through the connections of these figures with Romantic writings by Rousseau and of course Chateaubriand himself. Levitine does not, however, look to the implications of these ideas in connection with Belley's person—how the black man fits into this categorization of poetic masculine—nor does he look to other possible sources for the pose and setting. Levitine has ignored the possibility of the painting's connections with Grand Tour portraits produced in Italy during the decades preceding this portrait, which will be discussed in Chapter Three.

Post-colonial theory also informs the discussion of the figure of Belley as demonstrating the Western construct of a black man. Richard Brilliant views the work as an image of an identity based on "other people's thought".[14] As this scholar sees it, Girodet has fabricated a comparison between two individuals, two ideologies, and two racial types in what Brilliant calls a (mis)representation of the individuals' true identities. Belley is only known through a constructed identity produced by an individual entirely opposite of himself. Based on Said's seminal text, *Orientalism*, we learn that throughout history, Westerners chose to understand the "Other" through a false placement of values and attributes of the Self on that "Other".[15] Belley, then, can only be understood as a dignified individual worthy of painting through his portrayal as a fully assimilated Frenchman. Though I do not disagree that the figure of Belley does indeed illustrate this tendency, I feel that this issue bears further scrutiny. Though Belley is figured as a Frenchman, I feel that it is not a racist depiction demeaning the figure; Belley was in fact

[14] Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 32.
[15] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

a Frenchman, not simply an ex-slave and therefore reality is being demonstrated. In fact, I believe that Girodet's depiction of Belley as a noble Frenchman allows this black French official to be immortalized as the noble human being that he indeed was.

Helen Weston acknowledges the post-colonial reading of this work in terms of the figure of Belley being defined almost wholly through his juxtaposition with the figure of Raynal, therefore evaluating Belley using a Western construct.[16] Thus, she states that this work can be read as an "intentional negative characterization by Girodet of Belley, as he is set in invidious contrast with a wholly positive characterization of the Abbé Raynal. By extension, this becomes an artist-intended statement of denigration of blacks as a race."[17] Weston, however, questions the absolute validity of this negative and subjugated view of Belley's identity. She tries to answer this question by discovering what Belley stood for (in terms of the Salon audience) in the last decade of the eighteenth century. Though she is touching on a very important point to this thesis's interpretation of the painting, she does not however fully analyze the Salon audience, nor the placement of this painting within the broader context of the eighteenth century. This is what I hope to achieve through this thesis. Most important to this is the analysis of each individual being made bare through the canvas—Belley, Raynal and Girodet—which will be achieved in Chapter One.

In terms of this thesis's relation to post-colonial theory, Homi Bhaba's discussion of hybridity is most appropriate.[18] No one categorical identity is sufficient in explaining selfhood, particularly within this case. Belley cannot be seen as simply African, nor

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[16]Weston: 84.
[17]Ibid.
[18] Becky McLaughlin and Bob Coleman, ed., *Everyday Theory: A Contemporary Reader* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2005), 315-332.

Haitian, nor French, nor military man, nor politician; each of these aspects of his being add up to his individual identity. The figure of Belley then cannot merely be understood as a black man posed as a French one. Though he was a black African, he was also a Haitian military leader, and a distinguished French official. I pose that one must take into account these various facets of Belley's being in order to fully appreciate the identity displayed on the canvas. There is an important emphasis on each of these characteristics within his presentation, leading to the conclusion that Girodet was aware of each of these attributes, and clearly chose to make them visible; therefore his identity is not formed wholly through his juxtaposition with Raynal, though this juxtaposition does play an important role in understanding one aspect of Belley's nature.

Little discussion of the portrait has focused on the artistic precedents for the work. Though this is such a unique painting, it does have important ties to previous styles. It is precisely the fact that this work compares more closely with works painted decades earlier that it stood out among the other works at the Salon of 1798. As has been noted, George Levitine links the portrait of Belley with the English Grand Manner.[19] Though this is indeed an important acknowledgement, Levitine does not give this proper attention, nor does he look to other English prototypes. By comparing this work with Grand Tour portraits by Pompeo Batoni and Jean-Etienne Liotard principally, it is apparent that Girodet was following this established style. Though neither of these artists was English in nationality, they worked primarily for Englishmen on the Grand Tour, and the style was therefore seen as English. It is significant that Girodet chose a model so connected with education, wealth, travel and social status: none of which would readily be compared with a black man of the eighteenth century. This connection further

[19] Levitine, 317.

enhances the importance of Belley as an individual and might go as far as to show the black man's equality with white Englishmen.

The general consensus among scholars is that this work was conceived of entirely by Girodet; it was not a commissioned portrait. This identification leads scholars to interpret the work solely in terms of Girodet and what the artist brought to the work in an intellectual and philosophical sense. Post-modern theory allows for portraits to be seen as a form of dialogue between artist and sitter allowing both a voice within the work.[20] Through various etymological models, philosophers such as Sartres and Lacan teach that identities are not formed independent of the outside world, but through interaction with other people and objects.[21] Therefore, an experience involving more than one individual cannot be completely controlled by only one of the people participating in that event. Though Belley's influence on the work may not have been overtly vocal, his person would exude certain ideas he had about himself that Girodet would have intuited and recorded on the canvas.

The fundamental dilemma faced by Colonials deals with the seeming impossibility synthesizing tradition and civilization as offered through the imperial culture. This was particularly poignant in French colonies because of their policy of absolute assimilation. How does one reconcile the old, traditional ways of life with the imposed rule of the "civilized" French? Franco-African literature after the Independence of Senegal, allows these individuals a voice, providing insights into this fundamental

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[20] Courtney R. Davis, "Beneath the Gendered Gaze: Rosalba Carriera and British Grand Tourist Portraiture" (MA Thesis, Brigham Young University, 2001). I am indebted to Courtney for the ability to articulate this idea. I was very interested in Belley as an individual and how his personality has been overlooked to a great extent in discussions of this work, but was unclear as to how I should develop this idea further until reading Courtney's thesis.

[21] See Lacan, *Lectures* and Sartres *Being and Nothingness*.

conflict of maintaining individual identity while assimilating into the dominant culture.[22] These works are autobiographical to the extent that they reflect the authors' own inner conflict. Belley's nature as French representative from the colony of Saint Domingue placed him in an awkward position vis à vis his white counterparts, as well as his black compatriots. He can either be seen as being completely assimilated, or as successfully making a synthesis, again coming back to his hybridity. Even if he was assimilated (he always maintained that he was first and foremost French), his visage necessarily made him exotic, and therefore his identity cannot be simply French or "other".[23] This thesis will discuss these topics and try to reconcile the painting not only as a physical portrait of Jean-Baptiste Belley, but as a psychological image of the conflicts faced by colonials and colonists alike in how to perceive these individuals.

Chapter One will interpret the painting in terms of Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity as well as within its cultural/historical context. By so doing, it will show that the painting is highly reflective of the debate surrounding race, slavery and freedom at the time. Not only is this, as Darcy Grimaldo-Grigsby has suggested, a record of the events of the day, but also a record of the varied sentiments of the day.[24] Helen Weston underscores the importance of the pairing of Belley with the bust of Guillaume Thomas Raynal.[25] Without Raynal, the issues of slavery, enfranchisement and freedom would not

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[22] I spent Spring 2000 in Senegal studying French African literature with Chantal Thompson and Aminata Sow Fall, one of Africa's leading authors. I also studied the people and culture and learned of the struggles of the people. My interest in this painting was piqued through this experience and the fact that Jean-Baptiste Belley was originally born in Senegal. Some of the major novels I am referring to are Cheikh Hamidou Kane, *L'aventure Ambigue* (Paris: Editions 10/18, 1961). Camara Laye, *L'enfant Noir* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1994). Aminata Sow Fall, *L'appel Des Arenes* (Dakar: Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines du Senegal, 1993).

[23] Weston: 94. Weston recalls a speech in 1794 where Belley defined himself through his allegiance to France first, and as an allegorical man of nature second.

[24] Grimaldo-Grigsby, 12.

[25] Weston: 84.

necessarily be invoked. According to Sylvia Musto, Belley's "revolutionary identity" depends on his connection with Raynal for the same reason. Without invoking the role Belley played in the emancipation of black colonials, he does not become an important historical figure worthy of such a prominent work. It also then endows the portrait with the power to increasingly "mark and define the configurations of the newly developing power structures", as Sylvia Musto puts it.[26] The relationship between these figures was not simple. The thesis will discuss the three main figures connected with this work—Belley, Raynal and Girodet—in relation to their position within French society and politics at this time. In also discussing important beliefs and philosophies of the time, the thesis will discuss the greater significance of the painting relating to the general French public. This relation allows the work to become a broader symbol of the unstable time period, and perhaps to be revolutionary, though also politically correct based on the rhetoric of the day.

Chapter Two will address Girodet's portrait as history painting. Since Academic inception, there existed a hierarchy of painting genres. Portraiture was decidedly inferior to history painting, though it was merely second on the list. Within an eighteenth-century construct, the previous definition of a history painting (large canvas showing multiple figures acting out some sort of religious or mythological scene[27]) was extended to include contemporary subjects. The key element in a history painting to many critics during the French Revolution was its public appeal; it had to edify the general public.[28] Portraiture was seen as a private art, but if the artist included a deep philosophical message that

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[26] Musto: 60.
[27] *History Painting*, (Oxford University Press, 2006, accessed 2-12 2006); available from www.groveart.com.
[28] Tony Halliday, *Facing the Public: Portraiture in the Aftermath of the French Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 6.

would educate the people, even a portrait could be viewed as a history painting. Girodet uses a black man paired with the marble bust of a white man in order to heighten the intellectual meaning, specifically tying the work to the abolition of slavery, and therefore elevates the status of his work from portraiture to history painting. This in itself was a significant feat.

Tony Halliday, in *Facing the Subject: Portraiture in the Aftermath of the French Revolution,* explains the complications of Academic hierarchy in relation to portraiture and states that the *Portrait of Belley* is successful in its capacity as history painting because it does not simply portray the physical likeness of one man, but portrays "le miracle de l'authorité".[29] James Smalls, in his dissertation "Ésclave, Nègre, Noir", extends the success of this work as history painting to include the fact that this canvas marks a transition in the representation of blacks from chattel to noble savage. What is not included in the existing scholarship of this portrait as history painting is that the work is successful in fulfilling a didactic and moralizing function, creating a relevance to the general public.

Revolutionary art and ideology revolved around classical philosophy. Through the use of Roman and Greek precedents within this work, Girodet is offering two models of virtue—stoicism and primitive nobility—for contemporaries to pattern their lives after. The choice of portrait bust of G. T. Raynal by Espercieux as Girodet's model for this work links the man with Roman portrait busts from the Republican period (Fig. 2). These busts extolled the virtues of the stoic. Stoicism was the philosophical belief in governing one's thoughts and actions through ordered reason. Marcus Aurelius was a major component of this philosophical thought. This distinction between classical

[29] Ibid., 110.

precedents for the figures has not yet been elucidated, although this element of public edification, in providing classical models of thought to imitate, allowed an important distinction between history painting and portrait at the end of the eighteenth century. Therefore, Girodet was able to translate this portrait into history painting through this dialectic of authority, the painting's marking of transition between black's portrayal as chattel to that of noble savage, and the ability of the work to instruct and edify the public through its offering of moral models.

Chapter Three will discuss the possible precedents of Girodet's work. The artistic styles that an artist chooses to emulate have great intellectual bearing upon the final work of art. George Levitine has suggested that many of Girodet's portraits follow the Grand Manner practiced by English portraitists.[30] Stronger than this connection is that of the portrait with those commissioned by wealthy English travelers on the Grand Tour. One can most readily compare the portrait of Belley with the *Portrait of Richard Pococke* by Swiss artist Jean-Etienne Liotard (Fig. 3). Though the two are almost identical formally, the figures can be seen as complete opposites. Belley is a black man dressed in French political fashion while Pococke is a white Englishman dressed in full Turkish garb.[31] Grand Tour portraits were used to commemorate experiences of wealthy young men culminating their education on the continent. These portraits would often include art or architecture viewed on the tour as well as costumes associated with the masquerades young men would attend while in Italy in particular. In choosing the Grand Tour portrait

[30] Levitine, 317.

[31] Pococke was a traveler and writer who extended the regular Grand Tour to include a visit to Turkey, seen as quintessentially exotic by his contemporaries. To read about his travels see Michael McCarthy, "The Dullest Man That Ever Travelled'? A Re-Assessment of Richard Pococke and of His Portrait by J.-E. Liotard," *Apollo* 143 (1996). John McVeigh, ed., *Richard Pococke's Irish Tours* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1995).

as model for the portrait of Belley, Girodet imbued the work, and the black man, with significant connotations of wealth, social status, travel and masquerade.

The conclusion will reevaluate the significance of this painting as a history of race and equality in Revolutionary France according to the new information discussed within this thesis. Though the work has indeed been recognized as being revolutionary, its full implications have not been adequately discussed. It will also look to the ramifications of this revolutionary depiction of a black man on later works of art. Girodet's depiction of a noble black man allowed future artists the inspiration and opportunity of doing the same. It also allowed, however, for a sub-category of prints to mock the status of a "civilized" black man. The fact that this work has inspired such disparate interpretations of blacks attests to its pivotal role in the history of art. Girodet's conception of a black man, in a heated racial climate, which includes connotations of wealth, education, social status, masquerade, and history in the making was highly individual and highly influential on future works of art.

CHAPTER ONE
PLURALITY AND HYBRIDITY: FRAMING THE *PORTRAIT DE C.[ITOYEN] JEAN-BAPTISTE BELLEY, EX-REPRESENTANT DES COLONIES*

Girodet's *Portrait de C.[itoyen] Jean-Baptiste Belley* (1797) is a radical portrayal of a black man in late eighteenth-century France. Girodet was able to create a work that elicited various responses from his particular public and suggested a myriad of interpretations. The work is essentially a record of three equally varied and complex men: Jean-Baptiste Belley, Guillaume-Thomas Raynal, and Anne-Louis Girodet-Trioson. Each man was a multi-layered and controversial figure within eighteenth-century French society. Though the work is often interpreted as an acknowledgment by Girodet of the roles both Belley and Raynal played in the abolition of slavery, each figure had a problematic relationship with this event which allowed for more than one possible reading by the contemporary audience.[32]

The issue of interpretation revolves around one's intellectual framework. Who was Belley and what did he signify to France? Who was Raynal? What did slavery and race mean to the average Revolutionary Frenchman? In exploring the various ways of framing these issues, a plurality of views becomes apparent. Also important to take into account within this discussion is the hybrid nature of identity. None of these men was a monolithic individual; none of them stood for a single idea or mindset within France at the time. Belley was not simply a black man, nor were the other two simply white. These varied layers of each identity further enhance the plurality of the painting. Girodet

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[32] For scholarly readings of this portrait see: Brilliant. Brown. Thomas Crow, *Emulation: Making Artists for Revolutionary France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). Grimaldo-Grigsby. Halliday. Hugh Honour, *From the American Revolution to World War I: Slaves and Liberators*, ed. Ladislas Bugner, The Image of the Black in Western Art, vol. IV (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989). Musto. Smalls. Weston. Helen Weston, "Girodet's *Portrait of Citizen Belley, Ex-Representative of the Colonies*: In Rembrance of 'Things Sublime'," in *The Art of Forgetting*, ed. Adrian Forty and Suzanne Kuchler (Oxford: Berg, 1999).

would have been aware of the importance of each of these figures and their corresponding views to his own society, and he used that to his advantage to create a truly complex work of art in his *Portrait de C.[itoyen] Jean-Baptiste Belley, ex-représentant des colonies*.

Each of these three individuals' identities and signification within French society must be explored to understand the multiplicity of views of this painting. In order to do so, it is not only important to investigate their biographies, but also to set a cultural context in which to place these individuals, as well as examine the theory which has been set forth on these topics. First, a discussion of Jean-Baptiste Belley's life and position within French government will be set forth, after which Guillaume-Thomas Raynal and his contribution to racial theory will be elucidated. The chapter will then discuss Girodet's own place within the artistic and political society at the time in order to understand why he was perhaps the artist best suited to create such a work of art. It is also necessary to establish the cultural context, including the philosophical place of race and slavery, in which these men lived and in which this portrait was created. Finally, this painting will be explained in relation to contemporary critical discussions of post-colonialism. Context and theory will create a background for the painting and an understanding of various interpretations of this revolutionary portrait of a black ex-slave.

Belley was sold into slavery as a young boy. His date of birth has been traced to 1747, though this date is more likely the time he was sold into slavery, as such records were not kept by slaves.[33] Though it is not known the exact age he was taken into

[33] Brown, 146. Brown gives the date of 1747 as if it were verifiable fact. These records simply were not kept by slaves; there was no need to keep track of your age as a slave. The only records that were kept were those logs within the slave houses recording the years the slaves were brought to them. Brown also asserts that Belley was born in Gorée. Gorée was one of the four communes of Senegal, the other three

slavery, he was a boy, and therefore his connections to his native Africa may not have been made fast. Though this area of his identity was not fully established, it cannot be nullified as being important in shaping his individual nature. A contemporary, Olaudah Equiano, wrote an account of his own experiences of slavery and subsequent freedom in 1789.[34] His account is the closest we have to understanding what this portion of Belley's life would have been like. Equiano was kidnapped and taken into slavery when he was merely eleven years old. He devotes the first few chapters of his history to his homeland and customs. He describes these memories as such:

> They had been implanted in me with great care, and made an impression on my mind, which time could not erase, and which all the adversity and variety of fortune I have since experienced, served only to rivet and record; . . . I still look back with pleasure on the first scenes of my life, though that pleasure has been for the most part mingled with sorrow.[35]

Therefore, it can be assumed, through this little first-hand knowledge available, that Belley would have still felt an affinity for his native land and customs, and felt that his African nature was a large part of his identity. It was always his black skin which divided him most from others, and which certainly set him apart for this significant portrait.

Jean-Baptiste Mars Belley was shipped from the island of Gorée to France's most lucrative colony at the time: Saint Domingue. Though the specifics of Belley's personal history cannot be verified, due to his position as a slave, the nature of race relations in Saint Domingue can, and therefore, a measure of his experience in Saint Domingue can

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being Dakar, Saint Louis, and Rufisque. All individuals born within the precincts of these communes were automatically considered French citizens. The French government could safely grant this citizenship due to the fact that these areas were populated by government officials—meaning the whites colonizing the country and their mulatto families. Most likely, Belley would have been born in the interior of the country and brought to the island to be shipped as a slave.

[34] Olaudah Equiano, *The Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African,* ed. Paul Negri, Dover ed., Dover Thrift Editions (Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 1999).

[35] Ibid., 23.

be intuited based on the colony's convoluted racial hierarchy. A common practice among French colonies was to enlist slaves as military men to bolster troops. As they worked their way up the ranks, they would gain their freedom. It is known that Belley gained his freedom as such, earning himself the title of Captain of Infantry.[36] This earned freedom gave Belley the status of *ancien libre*.[37] He now belonged to a social caste of former slaves now free, who, in the complicated racial hierarchy of Saint Domingue—which will be discussed next—held more rights than slaves, but not more than the lowest tier of whites.

The *raison d'être* for Saint Domingue was to produce goods by slave labor that would then produce profits for France. As such, the colony was driven by division and social hierarchy. By the mid-eighteenth century, the colonials had already developed a complicated social hierarchy based solely on race.[38] By 1787, society had been divided into three separate, and distinctly unequal, castes: the whites, of which there were roughly 24,000; the *gens de couleur*, which was comprised of both mixed races and freed black men, of which there were 20,000; and the black slaves, of which there were roughly 408,000, with numbers growing every day.[39] John Garrigus has explained that: "By this time, the colony had such a large and wealthy free population of mixed ancestry that the simple idea of 'white over black' was not enough to ensure social hierarchy."[40] Thus

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[36] Brown, 146. Again, Brown states that Belley "managed to save enough to buy his freedom", though every other source, as well as general custom, attests to the fact that his freedom was granted through his military service. She, however, is the only source I have found which announces his military rank.
[37] Sylvain Bellenger, *Girodet 1767-1824: L'album De L'exposition* (Paris: Editions Gallimard/Musee du Louvre Editions, 2005). This new source announces that Belley gained his freedom through his involvement in the American Revolution.
[38] John Garrigus, "La Mulatre Comme Il Y a Peu Des Blanches," in *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France*, ed. Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 74.
[39] Most of the following information comes from Thomas Ott, *The Haitian Revolution 1789-1804* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1973), 8-27.
[40] Garrigus, 74.

their racial hierarchy was much more convoluted than what Belley would have encountered later in France.

Even relations among the whites were strained with three subdivisions: the aristocrats; the *grands blancs*, or the plantation owners and merchants; and the *petits blancs*, or those whites who did not hold property.[41] The *petits blancs* had strained relations with both the *grands blancs* and the *gens de couleur*. Though many of the *gens de couleur* had greater wealth than the *petits blancs*, they maintained a lower social status because of their color, and the *petits blancs* always reminded them of that; they coveted the property and station of the *grands blancs*. In many ways the *grands blancs* were closer in ideology to the *gens de couleur*; it was assumed that each wished to mimic the life and fashions of the French, and each had a dislike for both the aristocracy and the *petits blancs*, but the color barrier continued to separate them.[42] Racial tensions and the highly disproportionate division of castes were bound to erupt sooner or later.

Belley described his own life as such: "Brought as a child onto tyranny's soil, through hard labor and sweat I conquered liberty."[43] It was his status as a French military officer that put him in an interesting position vis à vis the slave revolt in Saint Domingue. In 1791, the slave population revolted, demanding rights as the predominant group in the colony, starting a long and bitter struggle. The revolt was lead by Toussaint Louverture and was essentially ended when he elicited the support of the British end of Saint Domingue. Belley, though black and an ex-slave, would have been obligated to fight against the insurgents, though one would naturally assume he would hope for the universal acknowledgement of equal rights and freedoms gained through the abolition of

[41] Ott, 9.
[42] Ibid., 12-13.
[43] Belley as quoted in Honour, 104.

slavery. Because of this awkward position held by Belley and other *gens de couleur*, these men were accused of begrudging the freedoms they held to the revolting slaves. Governor Laveaux articulated this in a statement to the Minister of the marine:

> The mulattoes are in despair at seeing Toussaint Louverture, a Negro, become brigadier-general. Yes, Citizens, I must admit the fact: all the mulattoes and old free Negroes are the enemies of emancipation and equality. They cannot conceive that a former Negro slave can be the equal of a white man, a mulatto or an old free Negro.[44]

Though this statement is not linked to Belley personally, it suggests a sentiment felt by the whites toward the *ancien libres*. The French colonials assumed that the *gens de couleur* were not as idealistic as one would hope (or as idealistic as the whites saw themselves), and that they were unwilling to lose their position of power by allowing others to gain the same freedoms they possessed. There is of course no proof to this statement that Belley, or truly any other member of this social class, felt this way. It is telling that this is a white interpretation of black sentiment, further complicating the matter, and exhibiting the false conceptions this audience might have. It is, however, this white audience that Girodet was painting to, further complicating the interpretation of Belley and the portrait, especially in relation to the abolition of slavery set up through his juxtaposition with Raynal.

Belley was elected to the *Convention Nationale* as one of three deputies from Saint Domingue on 24 September 1793, and was sent to France to formally abolish slavery in the colonies.[45] Though he was an official Deputy of the *Convention Nationale*, he was not recognized as such by the individuals taking him from Saint Domingue to Paris, and consequently was subjected to humiliating torture and even imprisonment

[44] Brown, 405.
[45] Ibid., 146.

along the journey, thus demonstrating the lack of respect for the freedom Belley supposedly already possessed.[46] He first stood before the Parisian body of the Convention on 4 February 1794. During his post he defended himself and his race in the few existing speeches made to the Convention, as well as one published account. In one of these speeches, Belley was compelled to justify himself and stated that he had proven his allegiance to France in his many years of military service. He stated that he felt more at home on the battlefield defending his country than in a convention making speeches, and he defined himself as a man of nature.[47] Belley would not have felt it necessary to state such without some sort of pressure from his fellow delegates, who perhaps felt him a danger to themselves because of his differences. This governmental position, though it would have been an honor and a privilege for Belley, would have also been quite difficult and very challenging, and certainly not always pleasant.

Belley was known to argue publicly with his political rival, Marie-Benoît-Louis Gouly, deputy from the eastern colony Ile de France, who was actively and vocally pro-slavery. Like Belley, Gouly also became a deputy to the Directoire after the Convention National, though Gouly was elected to the *Conseil des Anciens* while Belley was a member of the *Couseil des Cinq Cents*.[48] While fulfilling these posts, the two individuals often wrote about slavery and the black man in particular. In a lengthy footnote within his pamphlet *Vues générales sur l'importance des Colonies*, Gouly spoke of the soul of the black man:

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[46] For a more full account of these humiliations including Belley's own words see Grimaldo-Grigsby, 24-27.
[47] Weston, "Representing the Right to Represent: The *Portrait of Citizen Belley, Ex-Representative of the Colonies*, by A.-L. Girodet," 94.
[48] Ibid.: 86.

> The soul of the Negro, of Africa especially, seems to be accessible only through the organ of hearing; he hardly is animated except by the loud sounds of a drum or a voice expressed with force. He does not have physiognomy; his traits are without expression, his eyes without vivacity and his figure presents the image of stupidity; he acts and does not reflect; he seldom speaks and often sings; never does a profound sentiment of pain or pleasure cause tears to stream from his eyes; never does laughter paint on his cheeks the sweet state of a sensitive soul which invites [others] to share the happiness it enjoys. The Negro expresses his joy by songs; cries are the evidence of his pain; he suffers and never complains; he is without shame and not without modesty; he has no desires, loves repose and absolutely hates work; his pleasure is to do nothing, and he finds all his happiness in sleeping.[49]

As can be extrapolated from his text, Gouly believed that the black man had no soul, and therefore was exempt from the discussion of physiognomy (which will be discussed later in this chapter), for if he has no soul, how can that soul be expressed through his physical characteristics? To Gouly, the black man's features are opaque. His description adheres to the many stereotypes of the slave.

Belley responded to this in his publication of roughly December 1794, *Le bout d'Oreille des Colons, ou le Systeme de l'Hotel de Massiac, mis au jour par Gouli*,[50] in which Belley criticizes this strange description Gouly has given of the black man, and explains what is really happening behind the face of the slave, therefore giving us an insight into his own life and feelings:

> Who would not rise up in indignation and pity when reading the bizarre portrait that Gouli makes of blacks; is it really a man that this colonist wanted to paint[?] . . .But this man brutalized by slavery, the whip ceaselessly suspended over his head, returned to infancy by this shameful and cruel punishment which degrades humanity and modesty, this man is not insensible; his blighted soul, dead to hope, has long experienced the discouragement inspired by happy and cruel tyrants. Very often I shed bitter tears of unhappiness in secret [because] the flight of

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[49] Grimaldo-Grigsby, 52.

[50] Helen Weston gives the date and full title of the work, she also explains that Page and Brully, the white representatives from Saint Domingue were attempting to resurrect the Club Massiac, a defunct aristocratic organization formed expressly for the purpose of maintaining racial superiority, prejudice, and financial interests tied to the slave trade. Weston, "Representing the Right to Represent: The *Portrait of Citizen Belley, Ex-Representative of the Colonies*, by A.-L. Girodet," 86.

> energetic thought would surely lead to the death of the slave who dared to exhale it! . . .and [yet] their oppressors liken them here to brutes and reproach them for having souls without physiognomies . . .Ah! Gouli you who dare thus to profane nature, you well prove that it is your physiognomy which is without a soul.[51]

Belley's choice to describe physiognomy in terms of visual portraits is more than coincidental for this discussion. Physiognomy was indeed a tool often associated with painting. This illustrates that Belley was highly sensitive, as a black man, to the manner in which a white man might portray him.

After the fall of Robespierre in August of 1794, Belley maintained a position within the Directoire government as a member of the *Conseil des Cinq Cents*. He maintained this post for three years, being replaced by Etienne Mentor in May of 1797.[52] Here, Belley's history becomes unclear and untraceable. There are varied and conflicting accounts as to Belley's actions after the painting of this portrait. It is fairly certain that Belley left Paris in order to return to Saint Domingue shortly after Girodet completed the portrait. Scholars seem certain that Belley died in 1804, though they are not certain of the location or circumstances surrounding this death.[53] It has been suggested that Belley was arrested after his return to Saint Domingue during an insurrection at Haut Cap, and then that he died in a prison in Isle-en-Mer in Brittany.[54] Others state that he was captured by black revolutionaries in Saint Domingue and was shot after the French abandoned the colony. Thus, there is little record of the man himself and the greatest tribute to him is Girodet's portrait. He was a complex individual about whom little

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[51] Belley as quoted in Grimaldo-Grigsby, 53.
[52] Weston, "Representing the Right to Represent: The *Portrait of Citizen Belley, Ex-Representative of the Colonies*, by A.-L. Girodet," 94.
[53] Brown, 149.
[54] Ibid.

verifiable information is available, though what remains, including this remarkable portrait by Girodet, it is apparent that he was extraordinary.

Belley's multivalent identity is created through his time spent in different lands. During the eighteenth century, men of consequence prided themselves in their travels. These travels were evidence of their status as knowledgeable and cultured individuals. The more traveled one was, generally speaking, the better educated he was. This was due to the fact that travel was expensive and therefore only the most serious of students would embark on journeys, mostly to study foreign people, customs, politics and art. The Grand Tour, which will be discussed in depth later in this thesis, is strong evidence of this attitude. As travels required significant funds, it was not as likely for a free black man to travel. Though Belley's first travels were related particularly to slavery, it was his freedom and his consequence that sent him as a deputy from Saint Domingue to France. Because of this prominent position as an outsider among Parisians, especially considering his race, Girodet would have necessarily noticed Belley as an individual worthy of great portraiture.

Belley was not the only figure included in Girodet's *Portrait de C.[ityoen] Jean-Baptiste Belley, ex-répresentant des colonies*, but the portrait bust of another equally controversial man is also included. Guillaume-Thomas Raynal was very much a public figure, though he was not unwavering in his opinions, nor the public in their opinions of him. Abbé Raynal was one of the original members of the Société des Amis des Noirs. In 1770 he wrote the treatise that gained him acclaim throughout France and Europe: *L'Histoire philosophique et politique du commerce et des établissements des Européens*

dans les Deux Indes.[55] The work denounced slavery as an un-Christian practice and predicted the inevitability of revolt. [56] Many people were offended by the work and it was re-edited for more than a decade after its initial publication. After the publication of the 1781 edition, Raynal was arrested and forced to find sanctuary in Switzerland. However, he returned to France in 1787. His tone changed quite a bit when in 1791 he and his closest allies accused other individuals, including members of the Société des Amis des Noirs, of extremism. When criticized for his violent language within the first edition of *L'Histoire Philosophique*, he explained this as being due to his collaboration with Diderot. Most likely Raynal believed in the amelioration of the situation of slaves, though not in their categorical equality, nor even necessarily in their emancipation.

On June 2, 1791, *Le Moniteur* published the account of an accusation made by Raynal within the National Assembly on May 31. He informed members of the assembly of their error in skewing the notions of liberty fought for in the Revolution. The outburst produced a string of publications responding to his accusations of "ignorance, vulgarity and the violation of conservative principles of property."[57] It is ironic that Raynal was working on yet another revision to his greatest work—which provides the very reason for his inclusion within this painting—in the year of his death, 1796. His recent death brought him into the public eye again and produced a Roman portrait bust of him

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[55] My timeline of Raynal's public opinion comes primarily from Weston, "Representing the Right to Represent: The *Portrait of Citizen Belley, Ex-Representative of the Colonies*, by A.-L. Girodet."

[56] Smalls explains the importance of this prediction on the actual insurrection of Toussaint Louverture. Raynal's exact call for a "Black Spartacus" to liberate the people was seen by many not only as a foretelling of the future, but as an impetus for the black leader, who was known to have read Raynal's work, though no direct correlation between his reading of this text and the beginning of the revolt can be made. Smalls, 36-38.

[57] Weston, "Representing the Right to Represent: The *Portrait of Citizen Belley, Ex-Representative of the Colonies*, by A.-L. Girodet," 96.

executed by Raynal's friend Espercieux, included within the Salon of 1796.[58] It is assumed that this is the sculpture used by Girodet as a model for the representation of Raynal. Clearly, the *philosophe*'s reputation and writings were not consistent, and just one year after his passing, the public would not have completely agreed on the exact role he played within the abolition of slavery.

Anne-Louis Girodet, like Raynal, was a highly complex character with a varied reputation among artists and politicians in Revolutionary France. Girodet was a highborn pupil of Jacques-Louis David.[59] His upbringing had afforded him an extensive education in the classics and he spoke Latin and some Greek, qualities greatly prized among Frenchmen, and especially David. This set him apart among David's students. Girodet soon showed his talent and penchant for originality. He was entrusted with copying the *Oath of the Horatii*, the final result being so close to the master's hand that the museum in which it is now housed will not attribute it to Girodet.[60] He also quickly showed his great desire to remove his style from that of his teacher. Girodet wanted his acclaim to rest firmly on his own shoulders, and attempted to do so through his innovative handling of both traditional and radical subjects.

The artist's competitive nature was apparent in his early years under David's instruction. This is most prominently displayed in the events surrounding his first attempt at the *Prix de Rome*. Competitors were not allowed to complete any preparations outside of their assigned workspace, and no aids could be utilized in the creation of the final work. Girodet used David's studio to complete preparatory

[58] This bust is now lost. Brown, 405.
[59] Crow, 86-88.
[60] Ibid., 90.

drawings, which he apparently sneaked into the competition inside a hollow cane.[61] He was discovered and disqualified from the match, making Girodet a bitter loser. This defeat especially spurred the artist on to proving his greatness. He was vindicated to an extent when he won the prize in 1787. Girodet studied in Rome for five years and widely announced his radical Republican views, which got him into trouble with Italian officials. Also while in Rome, Girodet completed one of his greatest masterpieces, the *Sleep of Endymion* (1791) (Fig. 4).

In the Salon of 1791 Girodet exhibited his greatest painting to date, which can be seen in many ways as both a precursor and a foil to his later *Portrait of Jean-Baptiste Belley*. The work stood apart in his rendering of the story, his radical exclusion of the figure of Diana—her only presence being light—and the innovative handling of the male figure. The nude figure of Endymion has been adjusted from its typical prototypes, not only is his body consumed by the female gaze of the light (Diana), but the male gaze of the viewer. One Salon critic heralded the work as such: "This painting is a true original both for its auspicious and poetic conception and for its strong and spirited effect."[62] Girodet returned to Paris the next year, and critics were expecting much more of the artist. He, however, did not deliver until 1797. It is interesting that in that year at the Exposition de l'Elysée Girodet would show both the *Sleep of Endymion* and this portrait exhibited under the title *Portrait de Nègre*, thus acknowledging this new work as equivalent to the object of his previous critical success.[63]

Girodet was an astute artist and scholar who would have understood the problematic natures of Jean-Baptiste Belley and Guillaume Thomas Raynal when he

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[61] Ibid., 92.
[62] As quoted in Ibid., 171.
[63] Grimaldo-Grigsby, 9-12. Here the two are compared at length.

painted the portrait in 1797. It can be agreed that the general public had not reached a consensus on the importance or the nature of either man through the varied and disparate critiques of each of their works. Girodet was aware of his audience and the potential for varying opinions of the piece, and it seems plausible that he was counting on just that. This work was surely singular among the other portraits being created at the time. He drew on many of the important trends and philosophies of the day, but created something so unique that it would never be copied. The issues dealt with in this painting were so charged that it evoked a multiplicity of responses and a myriad of interpretations. Girodet was very adept at creating the possibility for these multiple views, all of which were important to the racial and political climate of the French Revolution. Girodet also understood that the public was not monolithic, and he therefore created a truly successful work of art through his allowance of multiple interpretations.

An example of Girodet's ability to elicit more than one reaction out of a single viewer is illustrated in Salon criticism from 1798. This particular criticism was set to music in the Vaudeville fashion, reporting a conversation, real or imagined, between a poet and a female spectator. Her first reaction deals simply with the surface of Belley, exhibiting an aversion to the figure she dubs diabolic. Then, upon further examination she exclaims:

> Yes, black, but not so much a devil.
> Seeing him closer
> I find him admirable . . .
> How mistaken I was.
> Yes, learned Giraudet [sic]
> This tableau pleases me!
> A respite from caustic humor,
> Not a satirical feature.
> Never will criticism strike down your talent.
> Really,

> Really,
> This portrait speaks.[64]

This is an amazing effect for an artist to have on an individual. The initial reaction is what the critic fabricating this encounter assumes to be the natural reaction of a woman (stereotypically more sensitive and fragile than a male) to a black figure. Once compelled to look again, however, she is able to see past her prejudices toward color, to recognize the figure of Jean-Baptiste Belley as a noble man. As she states, she was mistaken; she is now able to see Belley's light and nobility through the fact that the painting contains no caustic humor, nor any satire. One can read into this statement that the stereotypical representation of blacks, then, is always caustic or satirical. Girodet has done neither, but has used this portrait of an important black figure to perhaps open the eyes of the general public. This work offers an alternate opinion of blacks than what the Salon audience was accustomed to (as will be discussed in following chapters). Girodet understood that some viewers would at first see the dark nature of an exotic black devil, but, in drawing them in for a closer look through his beautiful surface handling, the viewer sees, not a devil, but an equal.

Race was a highly debated topic in the eighteenth century. Enlightenment scientists attempted to comprehend the basic nature of man. Natural scientists and philosophers strove to understand men's differences based on empirical evidence, such as geographical location and climate differences, as well as facial and body types.[65] One of the most popular sciences studied at the time was physiognomy. This was a pseudo-Aristotelian science that explained that physical characteristics and the soul of the

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[64] As quoted in Ibid., 56.
[65] See Johann Gottfried Herder, *On World History: An Anthology*, ed. Hans Adler and Earnest A. Menze, trans. Ernest A. Menze with Michael Palma (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1997).

individual were indelibly linked. The science therefore has a tautological nature, especially in its connections with portraiture. One can either explain another's character through his physical attributes, or one can illustrate another's soul through painted features understood to correspond to that personality. [66] Johann Caspar Lavater was the most celebrated of physiognomists in the late eighteenth century. He concluded that "beauty of the soul could only be found within a classically beautiful body."[67] In the fourth volume of *Essays in Physiognomy Designed to Promote the Knowledge and Love of Mankind* this conclusion was taken further to mean that the physical anomalies seen in black men were characteristic of their lower intelligence, he described "the full lips and flatness of the nose as removed from any possibility of expressing refinement and grace."[68] It can be understood then, that an artist attempting to create a work of great beauty would stay away from blacks, or at least adjust the features to represent their views of beauty.

Such 'sciences' provided the justification for hundreds of years of slavery, based on the belief of biological inferiority of blacks to whites. Albert Boime brings to light that, "A French memoir of 1777 on the security of the West Indian colonies declared that the distinction between black and white was 'the principal foundation of the subordination of the slave, namely, that his color has made him into a slave and that nothing can make him the equal of his master.'"[69] The issue of slavery had multivalent meanings when revolution broke out in America. The American Revolution was often

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[66] Brilliant.
[67] Weston, "Representing the Right to Represent: The *Portrait of Citizen Belley, Ex-Representative of the Colonies*, by A.-L. Girodet," 85.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Albert Boime, *The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), 4.

seen as a template of sorts for the French Revolution, which occurred a decade later. In America, many abolitionists pondered the question of whether or not freedom for an entire nation could be achieved on the backs of slaves. French abolitionists and *philosophes* had also been actively involved in this debate. Though there were few slaves on French soil, the French colonies were rife with slavery, bringing in necessary revenue for the revolution-torn country. The motivation and justification for the French Revolution hinged on the question of slavery and the rights of man. This fact made Belley a prime candidate for such a political portrait. Though the French Revolution was not based on freedom from a colonial power as in America, it was based on freedom from the tyranny of an oppressive monarchy, and in turn each member of the Third Estate in particular was seen a slave to the regime. As a result of the fact that many of the same points had already been argued a decade earlier, some individuals were more progressive and able to articulate the finer points of freedom's arguments when France revolted. This rehearsed rhetoric might also account for the fact that some Frenchmen, as can be assumed by Belley's reception by society, readily accepted black men as free French citizens. Therefore, this progressive depiction of Jean-Baptiste Belley can be more understandable in relation to this discourse.

Additionally, the actions of Englishmen were informing the ideas of French *philosophes*, like Raynal, on the issue of slavery. It was the Quakers and other dissidents who first started vocalizing their views on abolition. As early as 1758 Anthony Benezet started writing texts on Negro competence, these theories were widely read by abolitionists in England as well as France.[70] He even began a school in his own home in order to educate black children. A free Quaker school for blacks was opened in 1770,

[70] Ibid., 79.

and that decade brought about more widespread Quaker denunciations of slavery. David Hartley moved for the first parliamentary legislation on slavery, stating that: "the Slave-trade was contrary to the laws of God, and the rights of men."[71] Albert Boime explains that though the motion failed, it is of note that the Declaration of Independence makes numerous indirect allusions to England's colonial policies vis a vis slavery.[72] As evidenced by the failure of Hartley's motion, there were still many who did not believe in black rights. In 1774 Edward Long wrote, according to one scholar, "the most violently Negrophobic publication of the century which sought to prove biologically that blacks constituted a distinct species, naturally inferior to *homo sapiens*."[73] Therefore, though some were progressive, there remained a large contingent of those comfortable with the position of slavery that is apparent by the way these "free" black men were treated, and the quick reinstatement of slavery.

On May 1,1772, the London *Gazette* published a poignant poem, written by a black slave which eloquently stated the inconsistencies within these cries for freedom:

> Is not all oppression vile?
> When you attempt your freedom to defend,
> Is reason yours, and partially your friend?
> Be not deceiv'd—for reason pleads for all
> Who by invasion and oppression fall.
> I live a slave, and am inslav'd by those
> Who yet pretend with reason to oppose
> All schemes oppressive; and the gods invoke
> To Curse with thunders the invaders yoke.
> O mighty God! Let conscience seize the mind
> Of inconsistent men, who wish to find
> A partial god to vindicate their cause,
> And plead their freedom, while they break its laws.[74]

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[71] Ibid., 22.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid., 32.
[74] Ibid., 29-30.

Again, this poem gives us a unique insight into the actual feelings of men like Belley. He was being forced to work with the very people who used freedom to justify their actions. His position in the world was very insecure, and though he had much power as a black man, he was able to do little about even his own situation, as evidenced by his ignominious death.

Just as abolitionist rhetoric was most vocal in England and America before France, one of the first portraits of a black intellectual was painted in England. Thomas Gainsborough painted the *Portrait of Ignatius Sancho* in 1768 (Fig. 5). Gainsborough made Sancho's acquaintance while he worked as butler for the Duke and Duchess of Montagu. Sancho was able to attract the notice of more friends of the family and even began corresponding with various members of the literary elite. A collection of Sancho's letters was published in 1782, for which an engraving of the portrait was produced to act as frontispiece.[75] Though the portrait is an oil sketch and not the impressive canvas that Girodet chose to employ for his portrait of Belley, it is still significant to see that Gainsborough painted the man as an individual, and saw fit to give credit to the man by painting his portrait. It is also significant that as early as 1782 it was acceptable to publish the correspondence of a black servant. Ignatius Sancho was not the only black to be recognized as worthy of portrait painting in England, but was joined by Olaudah Equiano, whose portrait was also used as a later frontispiece (Fig. 6). Hugh Honour states: "The portraits which revealed the blackness of their complexions were diffused in books which justified their claim to be regarded as the intellectual equals of whites—a claim that was at the time recognized in the West only for those who had assimilated

[75] Honour.

themselves to European culture."[76] These men, though in some ways accepted into this society, remained forever outsiders, and servants. These men were allowed entrance into white society because they took on attributes of white men, though they still attempted to maintain their identities and retain remembrances of their experiences as slaves, as can be read in their memoirs.

This question of slavery was highly charged during the French Revolution. One of the visual icons employed widely during the revolution was the Phrygian bonnet, symbol of the freed Roman slave. The common people recognized that they had been freed from slavery and oppression of the monarchy, but they did not wish to extend this freedom past themselves. The revolutionary values of liberty, equality and fraternity only applied to white Frenchmen of the Third Estate. There were various groups formed which opposed this one-sided view of equality, but each had their own limitations. The Société des Amis des Noirs was one of the most prominent of these French groups and was founded by the Marquis de Condorcet in 1789, but they only wished to extend rights to the *gens de couleur*, and wanted to maintain the status quo in regard to slavery. Raynal's treatise was interesting in this regard because of its prediction of slave uprising in the colonies. This could have been read in two ways: one, that France should be aware of this threat and avoid such a catastrophe by abolishing slavery, or two, that the only way to maintain global French power and to fund the weakened government was slave labor, and that the risk of revolt was worth the benefits reaped.

An important scientist within France, François Bernier (1620-88), was one of the earliest men to separate and define the races. In 1684 an anonymous article, cited as the first presentation of the modern view of race, was published in the journal of the French

[76] Ibid.

Academy of Sciences entitled, “A New Division of the Earth, according to the Different Species or Races of Men Who Inhabit It.”[77] This article has since been attributed to Bernier based on his view of racial divisions. Surprisingly, Bernier has not been studied as often as other Frenchmen, such as Count Henri de Boulainvilliers (1658-1722), who has been deemed one of the “true ancestors of racism”, or Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon (1707-88).[78] In the fifteenth century the term race started to be used more widely, but simply as a means of establishing lineage. What is significant is that the label was also understood in terms of natural or biological difference.

The descriptor of “race” was being refined in the eighteenth century. Enlightenment ideals pushed scientists to create divisions among peoples in a sort of Linnean taxonomy. Race was discussed in terms of physical attributes. Scientists strove to discover levels of biological hierarchy among men. The great question lay in whether those attributes that demarcated difference among men were inherent, or whether they were imposed on people through some exterior influence. Various physical characteristics, and therefore races, were deemed inferior to others. As would be expected, those races that differed most physically from the Europeans were seen as incapable of the same intellectual strains as their European counterparts. The question of whether these characteristics were genetic or the result of location deals directly with the ideas of the Abbé Gregoire and other of the *Amis des Noirs*. Scientists attempted to discover, in essence, whether race was something that could be “fixed” in individuals, or if these aberrant peoples were doomed to their genetic inferiority.

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[77] Pierre H. Boulle, "Francois Bernier and the Origins of the Modern Concept of Race," in *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France*, ed. Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 11-27.
[78] Ibid., 11.

Abbé Gregoire proposed that race was something imposed upon individuals and could be changed. He suggested that intermarriage should be the means by which blacks could repair the damage of their dark skin, stating: "All the physiologists attest that the crossed races are together more robust."[79] This idea is based on the genetic theory of hybrid vigor. The "hybrid", or mixed race child, will inherit the positive attributes of each parent and be himself stronger than his progenitors. Perhaps this idea of crossed races can be seen, not only physically, but ideologically as well. Girodet's painting shows a strong ex-slave, now freed, educated and articulated in the French social and political system. He is also shown in a suit associated with a white man of power, both having political and martial importance. The presence of attributes associated with both races could prove that Belley is just such a robust hybrid, bringing together the best of both progenitors.

The fact that Belley is depicted in a white man's uniform in Girodet's *Portrait de C.[itoyen] Jean-Baptiste Belley, ex-représentant des colonies* is deeply significant to the meanings within this painting. Military uniforms connote freedom, struggle, and primarily power. When these uniforms are placed on an individual of color, do they still hold these connotations? Helen Weston has read this clothing when placed on a black figure as literally denigrating the individual.[80] The word *denigrate* comes from the deconstruction de-nigerate. At various times in history, the 'de' can either be read as a negation, or an intensifier.[81] Most commonly it is seen as an intensifier, making

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[79] Abbé Gregoire as quoted in Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall, "Eliminating Race, Eliminating Difference: Blacks, Jews, and the Abbe Gregoire," in *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France,* ed. Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 36.
[80] Weston, "Representing the Right to Represent: The *Portrait of Citizen Belley, Ex-Representative of the Colonies*, by A.-L. Girodet," 84.
[81] Though Helen Weston uses this word to illustrate the fact that Belley's blackness is emphasized and made more apparent through his position next to the ultra-white bust of Raynal, she also admits that the

something blacker, holding negative connotations. In such a case, the costume, which seems out of place on Belley, does emphasize his blackness. The white collar especially acts to make his skin even darker and a deeper shade of black, as well as the fact that this costume seems just that, a costume worn by someone who belongs in some other clothing. The 'de' prefix can also be used as a negation: to take the blackness out of something. Within the context of this portrait, not only must the black man be viewed as white, i.e. in white man's fashion, to be more acceptable, but he must also have the blackness taken out of him. This makes Abbé Gregoire's statement even more poignant, for what was he suggesting in his proposed intermarriage but the removal of the blackness from future individuals? From the time of European interference in Africa, at the least, lighter skin was always privileged. Paradoxically, it is Belley's uniform that endows him with power and authority, as well as removing a part of his expected identity.

Belley stands in a leaning posture wearing the uniform of an officer of the *Convention Nationale*, holding a hat plumed with red, white and blue, signifying liberty, equality and fraternity, at his side. Edward Said believes that for white men to accept black men, they must somehow be portrayed as white, i.e. through dress or mannerism.[82] The Abbé Gregoire held just this type of thinking in terms of Christianity. Only when the black savage was initiated into civilized Christianity would he be worthy of the white man's further efforts at civilization. In essence, both beliefs are based on the idea that in order for blacks or other minority figures to be acceptable human beings, they must be

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word denigrate can be seen in more than one way. I choose to read the term differently, with the de-, not used as an intensifier, but as a negator. I believe that it is more interesting to see the figure in terms of a stripping of his blackness in terms of his very seemingly white portrayal. Ibid.

[82]Said.

like us, European Christians, before they can be let free. As an example of this, "before the 1794 abolition, Gregoire appealed to the *gens de couleur* to spread Christianity among their own slaves; becoming Christian, he suggested, constituted a necessary component of the preparation that would allow slaves to learn how they could conduct themselves as free men and women."[83] It was only once the savages turned Christian, as the Europeans, that they could hope to walk among whites in civilized society. This imperialistic attitude of assimilation was not exactly in keeping with the ideals of equality, fraternity and liberty that the revolution espoused.

Belley's uniform creates his identity in that it was only through his military service that Belley was able to gain his freedom, and it was through this hard-earned freedom that Belley was allowed to represent the people of Saint Domingue in front of the *Convention Nationale* in Paris. Belley is an interesting enough individual to be figured in such a remarkable portrait because of his ability to gain power despite limitations associated with his background and color. It is precisely his uniform that signifies this masculine, active aspect of his identity. Not only does the uniform signify male masculinity through its connotations of force and power, but this uniform acts to highlight his physical masculinity as well. The tight pants bulge at Belley's groin, and his awkward hand position emphasizes the size of his genitalia, illustrating the measure of his manhood. In emphasizing his penis in such a way, he is in fact made to be ultra-masculine in every way.[84] This heightened masculinity shows not only his individual

[83] Sepinwall, 34.
[84] Weston, "Representing the Right to Represent: The *Portrait of Citizen Belley, Ex-Representative of the Colonies*, by A.-L. Girodet," 99. Here Weston ascribes the exaggerated genitalia to an implication of his status as man of nature. In the same article Weston discusses the importance of the representation of Belley's masculinity (through military rank) because masculinity was stereotyped as a white characteristic (pp. 87).

power, but also emphasizes his bestial nature which links him to theories of the noble savage as promoted by figures such as Rousseau.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) was one of the most influential theoreticians of his time. Though he was born in Geneva, he moved to Paris in 1741. He was especially interested in the foundation of man, and in the issue of inequality. The fundamental question of inequality for Rousseau rests on his observation that: "Man was born free, and everywhere he is in chains."[85] Rousseau believed that all men are born in a noble, uncorrupted state, free to choose as he wished. Slowly, through convention, he relinquished that freedom and found himself bonded to forms of government, ruled by this convention created by the collective. It is therefore society that corrupts us. Rousseau states that it is through these bonds that inequality exists among men. He cites two types of this inequality: natural, or physical inequality, and moral or political inequality.[86] The first is linked to natural advantage or disadvantage, the other formed by the strictures of human convention. In viewing Belley in relation to these two types of inequality it is apparent that as a strong individual, physically he is greater than the majority of his fellowmen. His moral or political inequality is debatable. His position in government would suggest that here he is also greater than others, though his social positioning as a black man was necessarily inferior. Rousseau states that "no man has any natural authority over his fellow men" and therefore slavery is "absurd and meaningless."[87] Though he is not necessarily referring to actual black slaves, they do figure into Rousseau's reasoning. Not everyone saw the relationship between whites and

[85] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1967), 7.
[86] Ibid., 175.
[87] Ibid., 11, 15.

blacks as naturally equal. Some men chose to see blacks as mere beasts, as evidenced by their differing facial features and their propensity to hard labor, multiple diagrams drawn by such scientists compare the black man to apes (Fig. 9). Certain men even ventured to say that the African had a physiognomy without a soul.[88] As mentioned previously, it was such a view of blacks as biologically inferior to whites that provided the justification for the slave trade.

This discussion allowed for many interpretations of where blacks fit into society, and especially how they related to their white counterparts. The most recent study of this deals with how Post-Colonial scholars understand these men only in terms of white points of view. As was discussed in the introduction, Homi Bhabha has a more intriguing analysis, as applied to the *Portrait of Belley*, due to his recognition that these men were in no way monolithic; that their natures were in every sense hybrid. Even as Belley's uniform can be seen as simultaneously a recognition of his individuality and a means of placing him in a white perspective, the attributes which some men admired in him were the same which caused others, such as Gouly, to abhor him. It is important to also use the means of his hybridity to more fully understand his individual nature. As there is not a wide availability of the thoughts and feelings of Belley's contemporaries, we must look to later colonial individuals to understand the plight of individuals in situations closest to Belley's.

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[88] Belley's rival Gouli made the statement about this and was quoted earlier in this thesis: "The soul of the Negro, of Africa especially, seems to be accessible only through the organ of hearing; he hardly is animated except by the loud sounds of a drum or a voice expressed with force. He does not have physiognomy; his traits are without expression, his eyes without vivacity and his figure presents the image of stupidity; he acts and does not reflect; he seldom speaks and often sings; never does a profound sentiment of pain or pleasure cause tears to stream from his eyes; never does laughter paint on his cheeks the sweet state of a sensitive soul which invites [others] to share the happiness it enjoys. The Negro expresses his joy by songs; cries are the evidence of his pain; he suffers and never complains; he is without shame and not without modesty; he has no desires, loves repose and absolutely hates work; his pleasure is to do nothing, and he find all his happiness in sleeping." Gouli as quoted in Grimaldo-Grigsby, 52.

Homi Bhabha, as an Indian and therefore British colonial, brings the colonial's struggle with his own selfhood into the post-colonial equation within *The Location of Culture*. Bhabha uses Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* as an exploration in colonial identity.[89] Fanon is an Algerian doctor who studies psychiatry and philosophy to answer the question: "What does the black man want?" Fanon describes the reactions he received from white colleagues, "You're a doctor, a writer, a student, you're different, you're one of us."[90] Bhabha comments that, "to be different from those that are different makes you the same—that the Unconscious speaks of the form of otherness, the tethered shadow of deferral and displacement. It is not the colonialist Self or the colonized Other, but the disturbing distance in-between that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness—the white man's artifice inscribed on the black man's body."[91] Therefore, what makes Belley such an intriguing figure ultimately is perhaps not his difference from the Frenchmen in the Convention Nationale, but his difference from the savage slaves revolting in Saint Domingue which makes him the same, and worthy of painting. It is the white man's artifice, so pointedly inscribed on the body of Belley through his uniform, which makes him approachable, and also makes his identity so clearly hybrid in nature.

This theory can be applied specifically to Belley and his psychological state—his beliefs of his own identity—which can be implied through Girodet's view of the black colonial, as evidenced by the portrait. As has been previously stated, there are few extant writings by Belley himself. Writings by modern French colonials are perhaps the closest link to truly understanding the state of mind of Belley. In 1956, Léopold Sédar Senghor,

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[89] Homi Bhabha, "Interrogating Identity: Franz Fanon and the Postcolonial Prerogative," in *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge Classics, 1994), 57-93.
[90] Ibid., 64.
[91] Ibid.

the first President of Sénégal and leader of the literary négritude movement stated, “Nous sommes des métis culturels. Si nous sentons en nègres, nous nous exprimons en français.”[92] Senegal did not gain its independence from France until 1960, and therefore this sentiment expressed by Senghor of being of cultural mixed race was one felt by colonials for centuries. If this opinion was true in 1956, it was perhaps even more pronounced in 1797 for Jean-Baptiste Belley. Though Belley’s Senegalese identity was not allowed time to develop, one can use the writings of other Senegalese expressions as a template for the feelings Belley, as a French black colonial, would have felt more than two centuries ago.

Some of the most poignant portraits of colonial being are found in Franco-African literature of the twentieth century. These semi-autobiographical works allow the reader insights into the mind of the colonial.[93] Perhaps Cheikh Hamidou Kane articulates this best in his 1961 novel, *L’Aventure Ambiguë*, a study of reconciliation between the old African ways of faith and the progressive reason of French education. This celebrated African novel revolves around the figure of Samba Diallo, a promising young African who is chosen as the cultural sacrifice sent to the French school. Cheikh Hamidou Kane, similarly, was a traditional African educated in Paris, who later became an important and controversial political official. Within the novel he explores the differences between orient and occident and the struggles of the main character to discover a means of synthesis between their disparate natures.

Kane uses the beautiful metaphor of dusk as the moment in which the two natures are able to coincide in harmony. A common symbol for knowledge and reason is light.

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[92] Senghor as quoted in Vincent Monteil, “Preface”, *L’Aventure Ambigue*, 1961, 7. The quote essentially states: “We are cultural mulattos. If we feel in black, we express ourselves in French.”
[93] Some of the most popular of these are Fall, Kane, Laye.

Within the symbol of dusk, the lingering rays of the sun represent French technology and education, whereas faith, in terms of African tradition, animism and Islam, is symbolized by the on-setting shadow of darkness. Dusk is not only the moment when light and shadow coexist in harmony, but the fleeting moment when the two enhance and clarify one another. Samba becomes lost in the customs of the French, and is barely able to hold on to his faith. Though he has gained great knowledge and social status, he has lost an important part of his identity, and wonders what is more important. Kane is ultimately suggesting not only that it is possible for the two cultures to coincide, but necessary, as well as acknowledging the very difficulty in achieving such synthesis.

Jean-Baptiste Belley was similar in many ways to the fictional character of Samba Dialo, and to Cheikh Hamidou Kane. Belley was a free intellectual who was paving the way for future individuals of his race. Belley was able to gain his freedom, like so many of his kind, through his military service. In donning the French military uniform, his identity was taken up with the French white man's cause. He was afforded a French education, which was highly subjective in terms of colonialism. He could never completely assimilate because there were those who could not see past the color of his skin for the man he truly was; again showing the significance of Girodet's depiction for its ability to do just this. He shows the man in a manner that highlights both his identity as the Other and as a French gentleman. All of the attributes connected with Belley's figure point to his importance as an individual with power and strength within the French government.

Therefore, Belley perhaps was not even entirely sure of his own situation within France and as a free black man. The society was ever changing in its opinion of men of

color, especially during the volatile era of the Revolution. The fact that the other men highlighted in the construction of this painting were also subject to wavering public opinion allowed a looser interpretation of the work on a whole. There was by no means one single interpretation of this painting. It is not an absolute depiction of a man as he was, but an image demonstrating the possibility of the various aspects of his being. One mark of a great painting is that it crosses over boundaries and that it appeals to a broader public, as demonstrated by the success of this portrait. Girodet was able to create a work whose multiplicity of interpretations added to its appeal.

This chapter is not a suggestion that discovering absolute meaning in this painting is a futile exercise. It simply acknowledges that this problematic dialectic allowed for a multiplicity of readings among Girodet's contemporaries, therefore heightening its importance to the public at large. The fact that it did not simply hold one meaning allowed for broader public appeal, and possibly also allowed the painting to instruct a broader audience. It is important to understand that there is more than one way to frame this painting and that these divergent frames allowed for a plurality of interpretations which invested the work with more meaning. So much of this meaning hinges upon race and the understanding of it at this precise moment in history. Girodet was indeed making history of his day. This painting therefore does not exhibit a monolithic history, but one encompassing the varied views of Frenchmen.

CHAPTER TWO
THE PORTRAIT AS HISTORY PAINTING

As race is the foremost issue in reading this painting, it is integral to the understanding of this work not simply as portraiture, but as history painting. The previous chapter has established Jean-Baptiste Belley's unique position, as a black man, within the French government. This portrait illustrates him as a figure of equality and liberty. His inclusion within the Convention Nationale itself shows that race relations were changing at this period; Belley's color would have necessarily excluded him from membership previous to 1794, as evidenced by the simple fact that he was indeed the first man of color to be admitted to the convention. The enlightened *philosophes* coming out of England and France, and their discourse surrounding slavery and freedom, as well as the events of the slave revolt in Saint Domingue, allowed Belley to become the first black official within France. This alone would have made him worthy of history painting. Proving his genius, Girodet goes beyond race and focuses on other reasons for Belley's inclusion in a history painting by pairing him with Raynal, a white individual credited with the incitement of the slave revolt, which further enhances Belley's political and historical significance. Blacks had previously been figured merely as objects possessed by Europeans, but this canvas marks a shift in their representation to that of noble savages. It is, therefore, essentially his race and his ability to achieve greatness, despite racial limitations, that make Jean-Baptiste Belley a candidate for history painting.

Directly after the French Revolution, society and portraiture were indelibly changed in a way that forced artists to reevaluate their position among their peers. Artists who had specialized in portraiture before the Revolution had been primarily aligned with members of the very aristocracy being deposed in France. Their

connections with these individuals forced some of the most prominent figures, Elizabeth Vigée-Lebrun most notably, to flee France.[94] In many minds, these artists were just as suspect as the individuals they painted. Also, with the reduction of exceedingly wealthy patrons in France, there was little work available for grand history paintings, or indeed high paying portraits. As such, prominent artists, including the famed history painter Jacques-Louis David and his students, were turning to the bourgeoisie for portrait commissions, no longer relying on state funding for grand history paintings.[95] Portraiture, however, was barely recognized as a genre within the established hierarchy of painting, and more importantly did not exhibit the intellectual and moral ideology so important within the neoclassical and revolutionary time period. Artists were striving to prove to critics and to the Academy that if the subject of the portrait involved enough intellectual mastery and political ideology, it could indeed be dubbed history painting, and therefore was worthy of grand praise as it applied not only to the private sphere, but to the public interest.

Girodet was the type of artist and individual to be defensive of his position as an artist, causing him to work tirelessly to achieve acclaim for his highly individual work. Girodet's oeuvre was far from ordinary. His most critically acclaimed success to this point was his *Sleep of Endymion* (1791) (see Fig. 4), which the artist had painted while studying in Rome. This was a dramatically different representation of the mythological narrative from how it had been painted previously. Endymion lies in an ecstatic sleep

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[94] Vigée-Lebrun was the favorite artist and friend of Marie Antoinette and was closely connected with the queen. She left France and pursued connections with other members of the aristocracy throughout Europe. See Mary Sherriff, "Portrait of the Artist," in *The Exceptional Woman: Elizabeth Vigee-Lebrun and the Cultural Politics of Art* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996). Halliday also discusses this phenomenon, 27.

[95] Tony Halliday explains that not all artists are turning to portraiture for funding, and that the fact of receiving funding from portraiture in France was even a bit of a paradox. Halliday., 28-29.

while the light of Diana, who has caused this sleep, enjoys him eternally. The inclusion of cupid in the scene is undermined because of the intense light hitting the torso of Endymion. The form of this male mortal is treated in a very sensuous fashion, making his figure—and the painting—very erotic. Diana's inclusion within the painting as light was extremely innovative and was critiqued as exhibiting the artist's true genius.[96] The work was acclaimed for its unique handling of the male form, as well as the new interpretation of the subject, thus proving the artist's originality.

Girodet had not been able to attain the same level of praise as the *Sleep of Endymion* for nearly half a decade, and the fact that he was unable to match this acclaim upon returning to Paris was diminishing the artist's reputation. He was determined to prove his genius. He confidently believed that he had simply not received the accolades he deserved. Moreover, Girodet strove to distinguish himself from the other artists in Jacques-Louis David's atelier and especially from David himself. In a letter to Dr. Trioson, Girodet stated that "Je tâche de m'éloigner du genre de M. David le plus qu'il m'est possible, et je n'épargne, ni peines, ni études, ni modèles, ni plâtres."[97] In combination with this desire of all academics to prove themselves to the public at large, Girodet was doubly invested in producing works of great import, and very stubbornly so, as illustrated by this comment. Though David had created some very popular and venerated portraits, he had yet to produce a portrait of such overt political and racial consequence as the *Portrait of Belley*. The task was both technically and ideologically challenging, which appealed to Girodet's competitive sensibilities. The *Portrait of*

[96] Crow.
[97] A.-L. Girodet-Trioson, *Oeuvres Posthumes*, edited by P.A. Coupin, Renouard, Paris, 1829, vij.

C.[itoyen] Jean-Baptiste Belley, ex-représentant des colonies (1797), is an example of such a portrait that also merits the descriptor of history painting.

The eighteenth-century relationship between portraiture and the aristocracy is complicated, at the very least, which further problematized the issue for the post-Revolutionary audience that would receive Girodet's painting. To artists and critics, and for the most part, the general public, portraits were seen as private works, and were to be kept as such. Eighteenth-century cultural ideology, especially in association with the French Revolution, esteemed works that were for public consumption, displaying high-minded ideals to edify the audience at large.[98] One of the major critiques of portraits, especially those of the aristocracy, was that they only benefited the individual's family in a prideful fashion. In 1789, Abbé Sieyès wrote his *Essai sur les privilèges* which presented "the cult of family portraits" as "feeding the privileged man's sense of belonging to a race apart, a concrete manifestation of his preference of individual private interest over the general interest."[99] This was tantamount to heresy.

If portraits were indeed some means of the upper class's reinforcement of their elevated situation, they certainly had no place within the public setting of the official Salon, or in the newly formed revolutionary state. If this ideology was indeed widespread, what would account for the increasing numbers of portraits being shown in the Salon? In practice, it would appear, these rules did not always apply. Girodet would be aware of this paradox and the continued production of portraits, though the clientele had shifted slightly. The subjects of many portraits changed to revered political and military heroes as well as bourgeois individuals. It is possible that he would also view

[98] Halliday, 6.
[99] Ibid.

this paradox of private piece and public interest as a challenge, which one can see him take up in the portrait of Belley, a public figure of far from aristocratic birth.

Artists chose to maintain portrait painting for various reasons. There were those, women mostly, who continued to paint portraits because they were thought incapable, or at least lacking in the necessary training, of producing history painting.[100] Many French artists who chose to pursue portraiture as a means of revenue started scaling down their works. Rising artists, both academic and not, were reverting to miniature.[101] Large-scale portraits were just too expensive to produce, and too expensive for middle-class patrons to afford. This drive toward the miniature causes the large canvas (158 x 111 cm) of the *Portrait of Belley* to be especially significant. The cost to the artist of such a large work could be construed as a great risk to his financial success. Especially in light of the fact that Girodet was not being paid by the sitter, as scholars agree that this was not a commissioned piece. This, however, would not presumably come into play if the artist viewed the work as history painting, as well as a means of truly distinguishing his portrait from the others on exhibit, which Girodet certainly had the desire to do.

Girodet had a stable financial situation—due in part to his adoptive father Dr. Trioson—that did not require him to completely relinquish his goals as a history painter.[102] Also, an important source of income for Girodet in the second half of the 1790s came from two illustration projects: Didot's edition of Virgil, and a project devoted to Racine.[103] Girodet therefore did not need to practice portraiture for financial reasons, but still had enough freedom to pursue more lofty ambitions. This security

[100] Sherriff, 195. Here the discussion is in terms of Vigee-Lebrun.
[101] Halliday, 123.
[102] Crow, 88.
[103] An extensive account of these Didot illustrations can be found in Brown, 143-144.

allowed Girodet the luxury of creating this work without commission, and enabled him to showcase his grand abilities as an artist to produce a viable history painting within the accepted portrait style.

The face of the Academy and Salon system were equally changing, broadening the scope of works on exhibit and allowing artists more freedom. The Salon of 1791 was the first open Salon to be held in France. Since any artist could exhibit, regardless of their status vis à vis the Académie des Beaux-Arts, critics were especially harsh on members of the Academy. Now that the system established by the crown was being undermined, critics would not accept an artist's talent based on their position in the Academy. It was no longer advantageous to be a member of the Academy, in fact, some artists felt that membership had become a hindrance. The aversion to the aristocracy and organizations associated with them produced a distrust of academic artists; they now had to prove their genius to a public who no longer wanted to listen to the king's academy.[104]

At the founding of the Académie des Beaux Arts a hierarchy of painting genres was established. The highest of these was set as history painting. History painting was defined as painting with a lofty subject matter that included multiple figures, usually taken from a written source, or history. The term "history" painting was taken from the sense of *historia* as used by Leon Battista Alberti in 1435 to describe multi-figured *narrative* painting.[105] The second tier of the hierarchy was occupied by portraiture. Though portraiture features second in the hierarchy, it was seen as obviously inferior from the point of the Academy's inception in 1648, and was not even recognized as a

[104] I gleaned this from various discussions on portraiture in Halliday.
[105] H. Wine: 'The End of History? Painting in France *c.* 1700–1800', *Tradition and Revolution in French Art, 1700–1880: Paintings and Drawings from Lille* (exh. cat. by H. Wine and others, London, N.G., 1993), 13–30.

valid genre by certain individuals. Portraiture has always been difficult to define based on the subtleties of figure painting. Art that is produced from a live model is privileged in Western art, and therefore, paintings not meant to be portraits will exhibit the likeness of an individual. Portraiture then cannot be defined simply in terms of likeness. Portraiture involves the translation of something more than physical likeness onto the canvas; there must be something of the person's character or personality to qualify the work as good portraiture, according to academic standards. This, however, is still not as exalted as the aims of history painting, and therefore portraiture occupied a lower tier in the hierarchy.

During the eighteenth century, various artists fought against the demarcation of portrait versus history painting, noting that the two could often intersect. In England, Jonathan Richardson wrote a treatise entitled, *Ut Pittura Poesis*, in which he extolled the virtues of history painting, but also the possibility of creating history painting of portraits.[106] The blurring of lines between the two genres especially came into play with the new practice of using contemporary subjects of great importance for history painting, such as the *Death of General Wolfe* by American artist Benjamin West (Fig. 8). These paintings could arguably be considered portraits because they were indeed likenesses of the individual as well as exhibiting their personality. The fact that the works indeed included multiple figures who were engaged in some lofty subject, no matter whether they were contemporary to the artist, automatically made them history painting, and the artist would surely prefer their work to be included within this top tier of the academic hierarchy. In France this comparison was analyzed in relation to the old ways of the

[106] Arline Meyer, "Re-Dressing Classical Statuary: The Eighteenth-Century "Hand-in-Waistcoat" Portrait," *The Art Bulletin* 77 (1995).

monarchy and the new importance of the Republic. Chaussard, Salon critic for the *Décade* stated that: "It is in a Republic that the images of the hero, the useful man, the estimable woman are greeted with respect: from a moral and political pint of view, the genre of the portrait should be elevated."[107] Individuals now mattered for the merit they held and could give to society as models for behavior, not because of their particular wealth or parentage.

Another popular sub-category of portraiture was the *portrait historié,* though it was seen to be in no way equal to history painting. Though this type of portrait, to a degree, contained the element of narrative so important to history painting, it was a contrived story that was based on the sitter's wishes, not one displaying relevance to the public at large.[108] The removal of full artistic freedom from the artist himself seriously degraded the possibility of these *portraits historiés* being seen as history painting. Sir Joshua Reynolds was probably the master of this genre, though he was indeed viewed as a portraitist. His style revolved around placing the sitter within a historical text of sorts. For example, in his work *Sarah Siddons as the Tragic Muse* (1794), the famous British actress is cast as the tragic muse herself, pondering the nature of theatre (Fig. 9). Though these works might be said to display more taxing mental powers than a straightforward portrait, they were still not intellectual and complex enough to be viewed as a history painting.

The confusion between portrait and history painting is complicated in terms of the *Portrait de Jean-Baptiste Belley,* precisely because it is those attributes which individualize the sitter—so closely associated with the creation of portraiture—that allow

[107] Halliday, 86.
[108] Ibid., 10.

this work to be seen as a history painting. The fact that Girodet chose to represent a specific man, with whom there was no equal in his society, and to place him next to another figure, albeit a carved representation of one, within an outdoor setting, creates a dialogue pertinent to the greater question of slavery and the political climate of 1797. This dialectic extends the work into the realm of history painting. The *Portrait of Belley* itself also acts as a history in a sense because it marks a point in which the stereotype of painted blacks transforms from being merely chattel to becoming the noble savage. As a large-scale painting dealing with politically relevant issues, as well as marking a new trend in the portrayal of blacks, this work extends beyond mere portraiture and satisfies the demands of history painting.

As per the definition of history painting previously offered, the work must include multiple figures. Belley's figure is not alone in that he is accompanied by a representation of Raynal. One of the most prominent examples of history painting including a live and a sculpted individual is Rembrandt's *Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer* (1653) (Fig. 10). Here, the portrait bust of Homer acts as a second figure, as does the bust of Raynal. Within this image, the figures interact with one another in a way absent within Girodet's image, due to the relationship between Belley and Raynal. Within Girodet's image, the two are juxtaposed to provide further intellectual processes on the part of the viewer. Aristotle connects with the figure of Homer on a different level. Aristotle was a great philosopher and is here shown in the act of deep contemplation. This active contemplation can also be applied to the figure of Belley further ennobling him through his thought process. There is no doubt as to this image's

place in the canon of history painting, for the same reasons Girodet's *Portrait of Belley* is also included.

In France, the most prominent of individuals dealing with this debate of whether or not portraits could be considered history paintings was Elizabeth Vigée-Lebrun. She was arguably France's most prominent portraitist at the time, and a skilled and intellectual painter. One of her greatest hindrances to Academic acceptance was the fact that she was a woman.[109] It was difficult for a woman of talent to gain acceptance in a male dominated genre such as history painting. In fact, it was so problematic for some artists that rumors were spread accusing Vigée-Lebrun of having a male lover painting her works. There were even more scandalous rumors of Vigée-Lebrun being a hermaphrodite.[110] Her bid to be accepted as a history painter did however spur on much discussion of the differences between history painting and portraiture that are so relevant to the discussion here. The key ingredient to history painting, as was discovered by Vigée-Lebrun critics, was intellect, an intellect that contemporaries felt could not be found in a woman.[111] It was therefore highly important for Girodet to tax his intellect by creating a painting with multiple layers of meaning and significance to the public in order to assert its status as history painting. Indeed these layers have been previously discussed in this thesis.

Jean-Baptiste Belley was the perfect subject for Girodet for multiple reasons, including his exoticism and political and intellectual position within French society. Girodet's biographer, P. A. Coupin, stated that the artist was fascinated by non-

[109] Critics had more than just this concern with Vigée-Lebrun. The fact that her husband was a prominent art dealer made her suspect, as well as her close position with the aristocracy, which has already been discussed.
[110] Sherriff, 180-185.
[111] Ibid., 193-195.

Europeans and tried to be in their company as often as possible.[112] Belley was certainly extraordinary in this sense, and a person to whom Girodet would have been drawn. Moreover, Belley's dark black skin and prominent features were uncommon among the French and therefore difficult to paint. Translating unfamiliar subjects, such as black skin, into paint required different skills than those already refined by the artist, and to do so with great skill was a true sign of virtuoso.[113] The fact that this black man also held a prominent position in the government and was an eloquent speaker would have made him an even more intriguing individual. Belley personified many facets of his contemporary history, and as such allowed for the deeper intellectual meaning expected of history painting. As a black man from Saint Domingue he represented both the expansion of the French empire, as well as the negative and positive aspects of the colonial enterprise. He also embodied the heated racial climate of France at the time, and more specifically, the abolition of slavery and the threat of its reinstatement. These aspects of Belley's position in French society and government allowed Girodet to move from the lower sphere of portraiture to that of history painting.

As has been previously discussed, no records exist to affirm the terms of the commissioning of this portrait; however it can be inferred that Girodet was the instigator behind this work and that he did not receive funding from Belley.[114] After the work was exhibited in the Salon of 1798, it remained in Girodet's possession, though based on traditional systems of patronage, had Belley commissioned the work, he would have taken the work with him. Even if Belley was not responsible for the commissioning of

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[112] Weston, "Representing the Right to Represent: The *Portrait of Citizen Belley, Ex-Representative of the Colonies*, by A.-L. Girodet," 83.
[113] Grimaldo-Grigsby, 42.
[114] Honour.

the painting, there would be definite advantages for him to pose for Girodet, and it is assumed that these reasons led him to agree to the sittings once approached by the artist.

In the most obvious sense this painting does not fit into the genre of portraiture due to its lack of an established patron. One of the critiques of portraiture at the end of the eighteenth century was that the artist was held to strict—sometimes impossible—demands of the patron. Carmontelle wrote a play entitled *Le Portrait* in 1768, which explored this critique. Two artist friends, Durbain, a history painter, and Bernard, a portraitist, discuss pleasing the sitter:

> *M. Durbain*. All I have to do is to give my heads the expression I want them to have.
> *M. Bernard*. You are right. As for us, we could put in all the expression, simpers and grimaces of which a woman is capable, and I guarantee that she would still not be satisfied.[115]

In this case, the artists show the ease of painting on the side of history painting and not portraiture, for it is far too difficult to please the fickle nature of patrons. The fact that such a scene would be included in a play of the period indicates that the general public understood this as a concern dealt with by multiple artists. It is, however, assumed that a true genius should not be second-guessed by a patron, and should instead have total artistic control over his work.

Girodet's ambitions to history painting may also be inferred through the titling and exhibiting of the work. The painting is dated "An V" indicating that the work was finished in 1797, even though it was shown in the Salon of 1798. Girodet had finished the portrait earlier in the year and had arranged for the portrait to be included in the Exhibition de l'Elysée. What is of note is that Girodet displayed the portrait under the title *Portrait de Nègre*. Helen Weston has suggested that under this generic title the

[115] Halliday., 8.

painting was refused by the Salon of 1798, but when the identification of the man as Belley was added, it was indeed not only exhibited by the salon, but it enjoyed great popularity.[116] It is curious to note the varied titles along with the varied venues of exhibition. The Exposition de l'Elysée, though a prominent exhibition for the year, did not possess the same prestige, nor the same public, as the official Salon. It is possible that Girodet would have seen this venue as a means for artistic exposure to the bourgeoisie. This would explain Girodet's choice of a generic title that would focus the attention of the work on his skill as a portraitist, thus gaining him further patronage. The official Salon, however, was a true public venue where people of all walks of life were invited, and where the pressure to exhibit genius and the ability to create a work which truly edified the masses was especially high. It was also in the Salon that Girodet wished to validate his previous status among the critics, the government and his peers.

This desire for Salon recognition led him to produce and exhibit only great history paintings in the Salon. In one of the artist's many extant letters he complains of the positioning of the two works exhibited in 1798 within the Salon stating: "These two portraits are almost full-length, and the manner of their treatment necessarily classifies them as history paintings."[117] In a review of Elizabeth Vigée-Lebrun's portraiture at the time, and the critiques of her work, Mary Sherriff states, "In theory, portraiture did not tax the mental powers of imagination and judgment, central components of reason; it required only manual skill and the ability to copy or mimic nature. . . . [H]istory paintings displayed and required imagination and judgment—two central components of

[116] Weston, "Representing the Right to Represent: The *Portrait of Citizen Belley, Ex-Representative of the Colonies*, by A.-L. Girodet," 83.
[117] Girodet as quoted in Halliday, 99.

reason."[118] If this was the general conception of history painting and portraiture at the time, one can assume that the informal title *Portrait de Nègre* would not accompany a history painting, but that the addition of Belley's identity and position within the government of Republican France added a new dimension to the work—one that exhibited the artist's intellectual as well as manual skill.

Girodet's choice to include Belley's governmental title, "ex-representative of the colonies", brings to light Belley's historical significance, which has been discussed in the previous chapter. It therefore provides a link to the historical and political significance of the painting. Although slavery had been abolished three years prior to the painting of this work, the issue of reinstating slavery was very much at hand in 1797, making this commemoration of its abolition highly influential to the future of slavery. The actual treatment of blacks in general was far from satisfactory. Many were still viewed as slaves. They were seen as empirically and biologically inferior to the white man, the entire slave trade had been based upon this fact.[119] The unstable financial situation of the Directoire led these new men in office to rethink slavery and the position of Saint Domingue in particular. France had lost almost all power on the island and was in need of the revenue that would accompany greater control of the colony and its resources. Members of the government with specific ties to colonial planters insisted on a change in the ruling of Saint Domingue.[120] Toussaint L'Ouverture, now Lieutenant-Gouverneur of the colony, and former leader of the slave revolt, wrote the Directoire in 1797, threatening to revolt again if matters should escalate:

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[118] Sherriff, 193.
[119] Boime, 85.
[120] Musto: 63.

> But no, the same hands who have broken our irons will not enchain us anew. France will not revoke her principles, she will not reclaim the greatest of her blessings, she will not permit one to pervert her sublime morale, that one would destroy this principle that she honors most, that the Decree of 16 Pluvoise that honors humanity so well be repealed. But if, to reestablish slavery in St. Domingue, it would be, I declare to you that this would tempt the impossible: we have been known to affront danger to obtain our liberty, we would brave death to conserve it.[121]

These contentious words, coming from a man who had already led a revolt against France—and emerged victorious—would not have been taken lightly by some members of the Directoire government. Thus, the issue caused an amount of uncertainty surrounding the colony's ownership, which reinstated the matter of Saint Domingue as important to the French people in general and made the matter politically relevant to 1797 in particular. This further provided Girodet with a complex subject worthy of history painting in 1797.

Belley's figure alone was insufficient in acting as a symbol of the issues of slavery and Saint Domingue and therefore Girodet chose to include more than just Belley in the portrait. Belley leans against a pedestal atop which sits a marble portrait bust. The bust prominently features the carving "G.-T. Raynal", identifying the man as French *philosophe* Guillaume-Thomas Raynal, whose recent death in 1796 had brought him to the philosophical and political forefront once more. The inclusion of this figure allows for the discussion of Belley and his role within the emancipation of slaves in the French colonies. Abbé Raynal was often credited with providing the intellectual impetus behind

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[121] Ibid. "Mais non, la même main qui a brisé nos fers ne nous enchaînera pas de nouveau. La France ne révoquera pas ses principes, elle ne nous retirera pas le plus grand de ses bienfaits. . . elle ne permettra pas qu'on pervertisse sa sublime morale, qu'on détruise ceux de ses principes qui l'honorent le plus. . . que le Décret du 16 Pluvoise qui honore si bien l'humanité, soit rapporté. Mais si, pour rétablir la servitude à St.-Domingue, il l'était, je vous déclare que ce serait tenter l'impossible: nous avons su affronter les dangers pour obtenir notre liberté, nous saurons braver la mort pour la conserver."

the slave revolt in Saint Domingue. His work, *Histoire philosophique et politique du commerce et des établissements des Européens dans des Deux Indes* (1770) called for a "Black Spartacus" to come forth and lead the colonial slaves to freedom.[122] If this passage was not directly responsible for Toussaint L'Ouverture's decision to lead the revolt, it is at least significant that Raynal predicted the event.

Scholars have suggested that the background of Belley's portrait is a representation of Saint Domingue and that to the left of Belley there is even a representation of the slave revolt, as seen in the smoke billowing in the background (Fig. 11).[123] The two figures together invoke the events of the slave revolt of Saint Domingue in the minds of those Frenchmen viewing the work. This pairing highlights the historical significance of the two men as well as the intellectual and political prowess necessary for Girodet to display in pairing the two figures together. The inclusion of both figures also allows for the more formal definition of a history painting to include multiple figures. Raynal's recent reemergence into the public forefront, and therefore his role in connection with Saint Domingue and therefore Belley, surely would have been understood by the learned Frenchmen attending the Salon.

The juxtaposition of Belley with the bust of Raynal is also significant in comparing and contrasting the two physically. It is significant to note that Belley leans against the pedestal, thus making his head level with the bust of Raynal and suggesting equality between the two. Neither figure confronts the viewer directly, but each is turned at a three-quarter view and looks out beyond the picture's frame. Thus the artist

[122] Smalls, 37. James Smalls also sets up the possibility of Girodet's portrait rendering Belley as such a "Black Spartacus".
[123] Weston, "Representing the Right to Represent: The *Portrait of Citizen Belley, Ex-Representative of the Colonies*, by A.-L. Girodet," 87.

does not show preference to either figure; the viewer does not readily associate with the bust of the white man, nor fully relate to the individualized portrait of the black man. It is also of note that neither figure acknowledges the other. There is no sense that one figure pays reverence to the other, also allowing for a sense of equality. Girodet has used the portrait bust of Raynal by sculptor Espercieux, a friend of Raynal, as model for this painting (see Fig. 2). This particular Roman-style bust is an interesting combination of verism and generality. Though the work appears to be very realistic, it lacks the particularities associated with Raynal in other eighteenth-century representations of the *philosophe* (Fig. 12).[124] The corresponding particularization of Belley allows him to be seen for who he was: an individual and not a type. This difference between their representations is also important in terms of the respective artistic sources for each of these figures, and the connotations accompanying these models.

Raynal's bust can readily be compared with *The Head of a Roman Patrician* from the Republican period of ancient Rome, thus furthering the connection to history (Fig. 13). This ancestor portrait is not only meant to honor those that have passed but the style is also meant to invoke the virtues of the Stoic.[125] Through this connection, Raynal is shown as old, wizened by experience, serious; one who rules through his intellect rather than his emotion. He is associated with a certain degree of freedom to which the French Revolution aspired, especially during this period of the Directoire, when the people wanted a more moderate governing body led by the people as opposed to the militancy

[124] Darcy Grimaldo-Grigsby includes another typical portrait of the *philosophe* where he appears as an eighteenth-century gentleman, quite apart from the classical bust as he appears within Girodet's work. Grimaldo-Grigsby, 38.
[125] Marcus Aurelius was seen as the great Stoic, these attributes can be studied more fully through his Meditations and other writings on the subject.

experienced during the Terror.[126] One can assume that Girodet, well versed in the classics, would have understood the implications of this style and would have specifically chosen Espercieux's bust for his representation of the white *philosophe* based on this reading.[127] The implications of comparing the contemporary *philosophe* with one of the ancients would have been well understood during the late eighteenth century when the greatest minds and artists were mirroring the conduct of the ancients.

Just as Raynal's depiction can be linked with Republican Rome, Belley's pose is reflective of ancient Greece through his leaning stance, very similar in form with the S-curve of Praxiteles, again relating to a specific period in history, and adding an element of didacticism required of history painting. Belley's form has been linked with the sculpture *Leaning Satyr* (Fig. 14).[128] In addition to Belley being characterized with the more primitive Grecian culture, he is equally paired with the half-man, half-beast satyr. This direct link with bestial nature emphasizes Belley's savage side. Though this savage nature is emphasized, he is also depicted as quite noble, an equal to Raynal. Renaissance artists often used depictions of the satyr as illustrations of the noble savage.[129]

Another great work by Praxiteles carrying more noble connotations is the *Apollo Sauroktonos*, whose stance can also be linked with Belley (Fig. 15). While a connection with the *Leaning Satyr* does further the noble savage view, it is also half-man, and it is apparent that Girodet does not view Belley as simply half a man. By connecting Belley's figure with that of Apollo, however, Girodet is advancing the man to a godlike status,

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[126] The moment of the French Revolution known as the Terror was marked by an unprecedented number of beheadings using the Guillotine, where anyone and everyone associated with the monarchy were eliminated.

[127] Thomas Crow identifies Girodet as being the most versed of David's pupils in terms of the classics, even before beginning his artistic training. Crow, 86-88.

[128] This connection was first brought to my attention in Smalls, 49.

[129] Lynn Frier Kauffman, *The Noble Savage: Satyrs and Satyr Families in Renaissance Art* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984).

surely never before applied to any man of color. The Apollo "lizard killer" is a powerful and noble image of a man in control of his surroundings and his destiny. There is a similar control in the pose of Belley. Though he is leaning against the pedestal there is no sense of weakness, but of great power and calm. His expression also gives him a lofty air, somehow in tune with his surroundings. Belley is shown as a wise and experienced man, something associated more with Apollo than a satyr.

Though it is not clear which Greek prototype Girodet looked to, it is clear that Belley's figure hearkens to Greek styles while Raynal's follows a Roman one. Girodet was careful to connect each figure to differing styles of antiquity, each carrying with them specific connotations. Abbé Raynal's philosophical tenets connect him with Roman Republican stoicism. In the latter decades of the eighteenth century, views of classical antiquity were being refined. In Johann Joachim Winklemann's texts, he noted that Greece was the more primitive of the ancient cultures, and Rome their more civilized counterpart.[130] Winklemann himself privileged this primitive nature, seeing it as more noble, which led to the rising popularity of Greek culture during the Directoire. I would suggest that this sculptural counterpart directly associates Belley with a certain philosophical classical past—that of ancient Greece—as it does Raynal through his pairing with the *Head of a Roman Patrician*.

The republican spirit of the Revolution and Neoclassicism called for works of art that addressed the concerns of the general public. One offering given to the public through this portrait is the classical model by which one ought to pattern his life. Johann Winklemann was perhaps the single most important individual in promoting Neo-classicism. His writings on the virtues of the Greeks and Romans inspired many an artist

[130] Winkelmann.

and philosopher. Girodet was singular among the students of David in his classical education, and therefore he would have understood the subtleties of the two ancient civilizations.[131] The marble bust of G.T. Raynal is a clear representation of the Roman ancestor bust, denoting the virtues of the stoic. The figure of Belley, however, is linked with the natural Greek prototype, particularly the languid sculptures of Praxiteles. In offering both figures together, and especially in foregrounding Belley, Girodet seems to be esteeming the Greeks as a model over the Romans. During this period of Greek revival, this can be seen through the preferencing within this image of Belley as the man of nature over Raynal as the stoic. This example, of classical models by which to pattern one's life, would edify the public, further allowing the work to be considered history painting.

The critical praise in response to this portrait was equal to that expected of history painting. The varied responses of critics of the Salon of 1798 show the different French views of the painting, as well as of the historical figures of Raynal and Belley. An example of this variation is offered by one critic in the form of an imagined conversation, as follows:

> Oh! My God! How black he is! Said a certain person whom I will not identify . . . Wait a moment, I said to her, let's get closer: one must not judge people from their figure. (We advanced.) Well, what do you think now? My word, she responded:
>
> > Yes, black, but not so much a devil.
> > Seeing him closer
> > I find him admirable . . .
> > How mistaken I was.
> > Yes, learned Giraudet [sic]
> > This tableau pleases me!
> > A respite from caustic humor,
> > Not a satirical feature.

[131] Crow, 86.

> Never will criticism strike down your talent.
> Really,
> Really,
> This portrait speaks.[132]

This critique begins with a direct reaction against the man Belley. She sees his black figure as that of a devil. Her mood changes severely when prompted to take a closer look. The final phrase of her critique is very significant in her change of opinion vis à vis Belley. Darcy Grimaldo-Grigsby elucidates this:

> Nevertheless, this allegory closes with the phrase 'Ce portrait est parlant.' 'Parlant' literally means 'speaking,' but also connoted 'life-like' as well as 'eloquent' and 'discerning.' Applied to a portrait of a black man, the word remarkably identified the four terms with one another: speaking, eloquent, capable of judgment, and life-like, that is, like the actual black man. The adjectives describe a painting of course, but they cannot but implicate the painted subject as well. The power of painting as a form of aggrandizement is that the perfection, the beauty, or admirable qualities of one are unimaginable without the other. Like Girodet's picture, Belley speaks, beautifully.[133]

More directly, one can see her characterization of the figure of Belley with that of the noble savage, the devil turned admirable man. Just as the savage primitive, when further studied, can be seen as having a purer reason and soul, so Belley, when having been first identified as a savage, upon closer examination can be seen as the noble, even admirable, man that he is. It is through Girodet's subtleties that this is suggested. The immediate impression of Belley will be that of a savage, simply because of his intense dark black skin, as well as his relaxed and natural pose. It is only through examination of the title, and closer comparison between the black figure and the white bust, that the intended conclusion—that of Belley's noble nature—can be ascertained.

As has been stated, Jean-Baptiste Belley was not a typical individual, and, by extension, did not deserve a typical portrait, especially not one in following the topoi of

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[132] As quoted in Grimaldo-Grigsby, 56.
[133] Ibid.

Negro portraits (either supplicating slave, happy entertainer, servant and showpiece, allegorical stand-in for Africa or colonial expansion, etc.). Though there had been visual representations of blacks in paintings of the eighteenth century, none had been the identified subject of a large-scale portrait. Instead, blacks were most often relegated to the print medium. When blacks made their way from prints to paintings they were often depicted as owned objects along with other luxury items, to enhance the status of the actual sitter. Only the wealthiest families in France were able to own slaves, and so they were surely a mark of status. These slaves were not often individualized, but were generalized in order to heighten their nature as commodities as opposed to persons. Within the *Portrait of Belley*, his features are so detailed and individual that his ethnic heritage can be identified as Toucouleur.[134] This specificity contrasts greatly to previous representations of blacks.

In Nicholas Lancret's Escaped Bird (Fig. 16) we see the black slave attending the young woman as an adoring individual, on the level of the bird and the cage as merely an object which she owns. She pays no attention to the slave and it seems that this figure was simply added as yet another object to prove the young woman's wealth and therefore social status. A more indicative canvas of slaves being seen as mere luxury goods is one of the many paintings of collections of curiosities, here of the Yarmouth Collection (Fig. 17). In this painting, the black man is not only shoved aside to the far left of the canvas, but is simply another curiosity along with the various items pictured here. Just as the monkey on his shoulder, he is an exotic and expensive item. He is an element of the still life, not a painted subject. James Smalls has described such a work thus: "The painting

[134] This is based on my own time in Senegal and my own familiarity with the various ethnic groups and individuals belonging to such groups. Comparisons can be made in photographic works of the people of Senegal, such as Michel Renaudeau, *Senegal* (Paris: Hoa-Qui Editions, 1997).

expresses clearly the idea that black people, when 'trained' and domesticated, are merely part and parcel of the owner's dispensable material possessions."[135] Girodet's choice to make Belley the main subject of his work and give his figure such prominence in the canvas truly denotes a shift in this mentality, and we begin to see Belley himself, not as a simple commodity, but as a man. In this casting as the noble savage, it is the nobility that is emphasized and he is surely seen as a noble historical figure.

An interesting comparison between the figure of Belley and another single portrait of a black man in Western attire can be made with the *Portrait of a Black Servant* by Maurice Quentin de Latour (1741) (Fig. 18).[136] The portrait shows the torso of a young man holding the button at his neck and looking out of the picture's frame. There is nothing to indicate the personality of the man. His expression is almost sad, though the general impression is that the slave is simply fulfilling one more of his master's requests. His face is interesting in contrast with that of Belley. He seems to have been generalized, highlighting the stereotypical features of a black man, and not the specifics of his own individual features. His face has been widened and his lips and nose enlarged to emphasize those common African features. He also wears an earring in his right ear signifying the Other.[137] He is not being represented as an individual, but as a stereotype. This comparison truly acts to foil that image of Jean-Baptiste Belley and prove that this was of more importance than a simple portrait. The attributes that created Belley's

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[135] Smalls, 20.
[136] A very thorough discussion of various representations of blacks at this period is found in Albert Boime, *Art in an Age of Revolution 1750-1800*, A Social History of Modern Art, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).
[137] As was stated earlier in the thesis, Grimaldo-Grigsby describes this as "the glinting African and also chic Directoire earring" Grimaldo-Grigsby, 54.

identity made him an important figure historically, and therefore Girodet made sure to paint him as he truly was.

Some of the most acclaimed critics of the day lauded Girodet's work in a manner reserved for history painting. Within a catalogue describing the Salons of the Revolution, Girodet's portrait of Belley is considered "un sur trois" at the Salon of 1798.[138] Though this praise does not include a description of the work as history painting per se, the implications of intellect and history within the praise suggests that Girodet received the reaction he was striving for. Chaussard, one of the leading critics of the Salon described the work as such:

> Standing, a man of color, ex-representative of the colonies, leans against a pedestal on which the white marble bust of Raynal is raised. This pose is simple and grand, the design is sublime. One senses the figure even under his dress. The head is well modeled. One recognizes the touch of a master. The perfection of the hands is admirable. This is one of the most astutely painted canvases that I know ; I counsel artists to examine this painting, it will be their despair or their genius. I will often dream in front of this portrait. What sublime objects ! Raynal, the liberty of the negros and the brush of Girodet.[139]

Though the critic's focus begins on the touch, or mere physical and technical abilities of the artist, he then alludes to the greater intellectual and social issues of the combination of the technically skilled black man with the white bust. The painting is not only technically perfect, but one of the most intellectually painted canvases he knows. It will either provide inspiration or despair to artists viewing it. It brings the viewer to feelings of

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[138]Quoted in Jean Francois Heim, *Les Salons De Peinture De La Revolution Francaise: 1789-1799* (Paris: C.A.C. Sarl Edition, 1989), 64.

[139] Ibid. Debout, un homme de couleur, ex-représentant des colonies, s'appuie contre un pièdestal sur lequel le buste de Raynal en marbre blanc s'élève. Cette pose est simple et grande, le dessin est sublime. On sent les belles parties du nu sous l'habit même. La tête est bien modelée: on reconnaît la touché d'un maître. La perfection des mains est admirable. C'est un des tableaux les plus savamment peints que je connaisse; je conseille à plusiers artistes d'interroger ce tableau, il fera leur désespoir ou leur genie. J'irai souvent rêver devant ce portrait. Que d'objets sublime! Raynal, la liberté des nègres et le pinceau de Girodet.

sublimity, recalling the liberation of slaves and the prowess of the artist in invoking that within the viewer. Because of this feat, he states that he will often dream in front of this portrait, perhaps indicating that this is an ideal that will remain in the recesses of imagination because of the lofty goals of the artist. Though I am discouraged that the figure foregrounds Raynal in his discussion, and does not even mention Belley by name, it is still important in viewing the work as a history painting.

Within the *Mercure de France*, a major publication of the day, the Salon critic linked the portrait with the same sentiments of Chaussard, again not simply looking at the surface of the painting, as would be expected of a portrait, but the implications associated with the pairing of Belley with Raynal. The critic implies that the invocations of slavery and freedom are indeed an homage to the *philosophe*.[140] In discussing the ideas of freedom from slavery, the critic is tying the portrait directly to the issues relevant to the French Revolution. Though Girodet's subject deals with the actual emancipation of black slaves, it also deals with the symbolic emancipation of the French people from the slavery of the *ancien régime*. All members of the third estate felt that they had been treated as slaves by the oppressive aristocracy and monarchy, they therefore felt a sense of kinship with Belley and felt the importance of this emancipation. Just as history painters like David had used ancient subjects to signify present plights in works such as his *Sabine Women* of 1795 (Fig. 17), so has Girodet taken a subject with various connotations of black slavery and freedom, and used it to symbolize the greater French issues at hand. This bold symbolic gesture allows for the painting to be seen, not simply as a portrait, but as being elevated to the status of history painting.

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[140] Ibid.

Girodet was a very self-conscious and competitive artist, thus he was driven to create a unique history painting depicting a key figure in the French Revolution. Girodet's nature led him to rise against those who criticized him for not challenging himself with the elevated subjects of history paintings, chiding him for instead turning to the lesser genre of portraiture. He took this challenge by taking on one of the most difficult of eighteenth-century artist's tasks: that of creating a history painting from a portrait. Girodet also exhibited his own technical prowess within this work through the choice of black man as subject. The level of difficulty in rendering a black man, whose features and skin tone were foreign to artists of the day, would indeed prove the virtuosity of the artist. Also, in recasting the black man as noble savage, his portrait becomes history in the making, and exudes the intellect of the artist in creating a work not relegated to the conventions of the past. Through the juxtaposition of Belley with the Abbé Raynal, and all of the various intellectual and societal implications made by that juxtaposition, Girodet was able to exhibit the taxing of his mental capacity that was expected of history painting. The portrait of Belley is not only successful in his precise representation of the man of color, but also through his rendering of an important governmental figure and all of the politics surrounding his person. The complicated nature of the black man and his role within Republican France truly makes this a work of intellectual mastery that brings to bear its importance as history painting.

CHAPTER THREE
JEAN-BAPTISTE BELLEY AND THE GRAND TOUR

This thesis has already established the milieu in which the *Portrait de C.[itoyen] Jean-Baptiste Belley, ex-représentant des Colonies*, by Girodet (1797) was painted and how that affected the reception and interpretation of the piece. The previous chapter has argued that this portrait is successful in its presentation as history painting through its references to contemporary history—namely the abolition of slavery—its presentation of Belley as the noble savage, and its ability to edify and instruct the public. As was established in Chapter One, scholarship is lacking in discussion of the artistic precedents for this work. What is especially surprising is that no scholar has recognized the formal connection between this and portraits created to commemorate the Grand Tour. This connection has an important bearing on understanding this work, especially in terms of this radical way of portraying a black man. Not only is the presentation novel, but the implications associated with the Grand Tour, and those figures embarking on it, were not in practice applied to ex-slaves. In using this formula, Girodet at once imbues the figure of Belley with a sense of education, travel, status, wealth, and masquerade—unique when combined in the rendering of a black man—and creates a fresh new portrait further distinguishing the Portrait of Belley from the other works on exhibit. This depiction, as well as its implications, differs greatly from the more typical figuration of blacks at the time period, further enhancing this portrait's historical significance.

Grand Tour portraits were part of a trend toward specialization in portraiture. Though portraiture was seen as a lesser genre by critics and academics, it maintained a strong popularity among the public throughout the eighteenth century, as was discussed in the previous chapter. The fact remained that portraits were commissioned works and

this sometimes forced artists to pander to their patrons' wishes. Demands of sitters, as well as pricing, were such that certain styles became codified, so to speak, and tailored to specific subjects.[141] This practice produced particular styles that varied by region. It was of note, then, when a prominent artist chose a foreign style for an important portrait, such as Girodet's *Portrait of Jean-Baptiste Belley*. I would contend that one of Girodet's most innovative and instructive tactics in the portrayal of Jean-Baptiste Belley is the use of Grand Tour portraiture as his model. Not only was this a particular style associated with Englishmen, typically painted by Italian artists, but Grand Tour portraits were invested with meanings quite radical when placed upon Jean-Baptiste Belley.

Stylistic precedents to works of art are instructive in understanding the philosophical motivations behind that work of art. This is evident in the usage of Greek and Roman styles by so many artists of the French Revolution, due to these artists' ideological aspirations and their similarities with ideological concerns of the former ancient civilizations.[142] Though Girodet has not produced an exact model of Grand Tour portraiture, the portrait comes closest to this style than any other, including those portraits being produced in late eighteenth-century France, and especially when compared with portraits of black individuals being produced prior to this portrait. It seems plausible that Girodet chose this because the Grand Tour prototype better suited his needs—producing

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[141] Full-length portraits would be more expensive than if the artist only painted the torso and head of the sitter. Prices were also adjusted if the artist depicted the sitter's hands or not. Thus portraits were codified and were priced based on a complex scale of how much of their person the artist depicted, how much the artist executed himself, etc. Halliday.

[142] Though this has not been succinctly covered within this paper, it has been alluded to that the neo-classical style prevalent among artists at this period is due to the philosophical connections with the idealized past. The connections between the bust of Raynal and Republican Rome, and well as the posture of Belley with the Leaning Satyr have alluded to such connections, though not drawn them out. The ideology behind freedom and the revolution was closely tied with that of the ancients and specifically with the push to make works didactic and morally edifying as discussed in the previous chapter. For more information on this see: Boime, *Art in an Age of Revolution 1750-1800*.; Heim.; Crow.; Halliday.; and Paul Wood and Jason Gaiger Charles Harrison, ed., *Art in Theory 1648-1815: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers Inc, 2000).

a valuable history painting elucidating the character of Jean-Baptiste Belley—than other styles being practiced by contemporaries in France.

George Levitine has linked Girodet's style of portraiture in general with that of the Grand Manner in England, though this connection has not been extensively pursued.[143] There was not the same tradition for Grand Manner portraiture in France as in England in the eighteenth century, and all of the most convincing visual prototypes of Girodet's portrait are English, not French, in nationality. English artists were primarily known for their skills as portraitists. Indeed, some critics would say that English artists were only capable of creating great portraits and not history painting.[144] English artists therefore were intent on creating grand portraits of various styles, highlighting their virtuosity within the genre. Indeed, some of the most renowned English artists of the eighteenth century were portraitists, not the least of which were Sir Joshua Reynolds, president of the Royal Academy, and Thomas Gainsborough. By 1795, Salon critics were esteeming portraits as worthy of review in part through their comparisons with sixteenth and seventeenth century portraits, especially in relation to such masters as Raphael, Titian and Van Dyck, whose works were on display in the Louvre.[145]

Grand Tour portraits were works commissioned by young Englishmen hoping to commemorate their Tour of the European continent and establish their social station. The

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[143]Marie de Medici's portraits commissioned by Rubens would be an exceptional example of the Grand Manner being used in France. Levitine discusses the connections between Grand Manner and Girodet in his dissertation especially in relation to Van Dyck portraits and the English tradition of the eighteenth century: Levitine, 317.

[144]English artists strove to make a name for themselves among the artists of Europe. Where these artists differed was how they would do this. Sir Joshua Reynolds believed that this could be done through history painting. William Hogarth was adamant about not pandering to the public's desires to create portraits, and always attempted to create history painting to glorify himself and other British artists. The debate was complex, and never resolved. See:
Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth: Art and Politics, 1750-1764*, 3 vols., vol. 3 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993).

[145] Halliday, 83.

Grand Tour was seen as the culmination of a gentleman's education.[146] Not all nineteen-year-old Englishmen could afford the journey to the Continent, therefore the trip itself was a means of displaying one's social status and wealth. As well as memorializing these young men's individual travels, the commemorative portrait became a mark of their wealth, education and social standing—all of which were necessary to embark upon the Tour. The mere fact of taking the trip not only proved that one's family held a venerable position in society and that one had a large disposable income, but that one had gained the education necessary to enjoy the art, culture and history encountered on the Tour. As these portraits were then only commissioned by the select few, they were indeed marked with certain attributes. It was not expected that an older, ex-slave spending a few brief years in France would opt to have such a work painted. The fact that Girodet chose this model linking the painting with the English is indeed striking.

Though the tradition of the Grand Tour did not extend to young Frenchmen, French artists often spent a sojourn in Rome to improve their studies. Again, it was only the most elite and talented students were sent to study the great masters. The illustrious *Prix de Rome* competition, held each year, sent the most promising French artists to the Academie's extension in Rome in order to work among Europe's masterpieces. During this time of classical revival, this opportunity was afforded to only the best and most promising students. As was discussed briefly in a previous chapter, Girodet's first attempt at the Prix de Rome was not only unsuccessful but embarrassing and even

[146] For more information on the Grand Tour, see: John Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). Jeremy Black, *France and the Grand Tour* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). Jeremy Black, *The British Abroad: The Grand Tour in the Eighteenth Century*, Paperback ed. (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2003). Jonathan Scott, *The Pleasures of Antiquity: British Collectors of Greece and Rome* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

shameful. Girodet was caught cheating, and was disqualified, forcing him to wait until the next competition to redeem his artistic reputation. He was defiant about the decision and very vocal in expressing his dissatisfaction with the Academie's decision.[147] Girodet was vindicated in 1785 when he won the prize and headed to Rome. He remained in Rome for five years, where he produced and displayed some of the most popular works of his career. This time spent in Rome would have familiarized Girodet with these English individuals and the portraits they were commissioning.

As an art student in Rome, Girodet would undoubtedly not only have studied ancient works of art but also contemporary artists and their works. Though Pompeo Batoni, the greatest of these Grand Tour portraitists, was most popular decades before Girodet was in Rome, the influence of his works and reputation would have remained, especially within the artistic community. There is no way to expressly identify Girodet with these works, though his extended time in Rome proves ample opportunity for familiarizing himself with Batoni and his style. The Grand Tour is most often seen as a means by which the English were influenced by the styles of France, and not vice versa. This proves more curious that Girodet, a French artist, would be inspired by the Grand Tour to choose an artistic format more closely associated with England and Italy. Due to the French Revolution, virtually all groups who included France on their Tour left the country, and others eliminated the country from their itinerary. It was no longer safe to enter France, and, especially for these men of consequence, there was little idea of security there.[148] However, decades of exchange between these countries, and especially

[147] For a more full account of the situation see Crow, 92.
[148] Black, *France and the Grand Tour*.

Girodet's own time in Rome, would have provided the information and impetus behind his choice of portrait style.

The popularity of the Grand Tour had produced a new type of portraiture that featured the individual placed among various copies and views of art and architecture seen while in Italy and beyond. Pompeo Batoni was the Italian artist that perfected, and perhaps invented, this new genre.[149] Batoni was one of the most successful Italian artists of the day, setting up a lucrative business among touring Englishmen wishing to bring back a souvenir of their travels on the Continent. One such example is Batoni's *Portrait of John Talbot, later 1st Earl Talbot* (1773) (Fig. 18). Here, the Earl is shown leaning against a pedestal, atop which sits the Medici Vase, in much the same posture as Belley within Girodet's portrait. Talbot is outdoors, appropriate for a traveler. The Medici Vase and the Ludovisi Mars to his right are included to associate the scene and the man with antiquity, and by extension, refinement. The foreground is littered with fragments of classical columns, further emphasizing the classical past that the Earl would be studying while in Italy, and therefore his scholarly attributes. His costume and the dog at his feet identify him as a man of leisure. Each attribute identifies something of the man's nature as well as acting to commemorate his journey. A connection is made between the man and the surrounding nature, as well as the cultured and scholarly associations of the classical past. The element of ease which is demonstrated through his casual pose and the small dog at his feet also reveals his social status. This stock portrait style was very popular among travelers and therefore was very well known by other artists and was automatically associated with the Grand Tour.

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[149] For more specific information on Batoni and his oeuvre see Edgar Peters Bowron, ed., *Pompeo Batoni: A Complete Catalogue of His Works with an Introductory Text* (New York: New York University Press, 1985).

The stance of the Earl Talbot and his setting automatically bring to mind the *Portrait of Belley*. Though the positioning is not identical, it is uncannily similar. Both are nonchalant in their pose, though each commands his scene—neither man is powerless nor careless. The positioning, however, does lack a certain rigidity often associated with portraits, as well as men of martial and political importance. Each man leans against a pedestal. Though the figures within these busts are radically different, the importance lies within the portrait style being adopted and the similarity between the composition of each portrait. It is of note that the two portraits are set in the outdoors. In France, the majority of portraits done in the outdoors were of women, often due to their more sensitive and pure nature. This connection can indeed be extended to Belley, though it is not the only possible connection with nature for the black man. As with the Earl Talbot, Belley was indeed a traveler, visiting Europe for a short time. An outdoor setting, especially near the coast, connects one with a sense of travel, as opposed to a certain stability and a sense of being rooted when one is portrayed indoors. In regards to French portraits, women and colonials were both considered minorities and were often viewed in a similar light.[150] Women were more closely connected to nature through romantic sensibilities, as well as being seen as more "primitive" and innocent, and the same holds true for blacks.

While the *Portrait of Belley* contains these elements of similarity with Grand Tour portraits of setting, pose and posture, it is the element of costume that simultaneously connects and separates Belley from those Englishmen figured in Grand Tour portraits.

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[150]James Smalls has written an article connecting women and blacks in particular regard to Marie Guillaume Benoist's portrait of a Negro which covers these similarities extensively .James Smalls, ""Race" as Spectacle in Late-Nineteenth-Century French Art and Pop Culture," *French Historical Studies* 26, no. 2 (2003).

Costume was part and parcel with continental travel. It was assumed that one would don a costume of some sort while touring. In the same degree, the few free gens de couleur on true European soil were also expected to assume a certain costume. One of the greatest divergences, however, within Girodet's portrait and those commemorative images by Batoni, is Belley's mature and aged figure. It is the portrait of a wizened man, not the English youth whose extra-curricular exploits are sometimes evident within their portraits. Belley was most likely in his 60s when Girodet painted his portrait. Most young men began their Grand Tour between the ages of nineteen and twenty-one and were therefore accompanied by a tutor.

Though the Tour was taken on educational grounds, it was known that most men used the distance and the continental reputation to indulge in bad behavior. Many travel accounts tell of the masquerades in Venice and other such dalliances. It is these masquerade costumes that appear in such portraits. This costume differs greatly from the suit worn by Belley, though the sense of masquerade within his wearing of French costume does seem to correlate with the conventions of Grand Tour portraiture. Horace Walpole, one of the most prolific writers among the Grand Tourists often included descriptions of the masquerades he attended while in Italy. Viscount George Beaucamp described an evening of such masquerade in Lyon:

> When supper was over we went to a ball, where we finished the night very merrily . . . The company was all in mask and though I had hired a domino the lady I was with insisted on my being habillé en femme . . . and curled my hair so that I was more disguised without my mask than with it on.[151]

Though this may be a very frivolous example of a costume very different than that worn by Belley, it introduces the element of masquerade to the Grand Tour portrait, and

[151] Black, *France and the Grand Tour*, 188.

transmits that to Belley. There is something artificial about the French uniform when donned by an ex-slave, not least of which is the offering that the black man could only be understood by being *habillé en blanche*, or *en Français*. In essence, Belley, as the Grand Tourists, also needed to be costumed in order to fit in, or to experience more within his "tour" of the continent. This mask, so to speak, allowed for a different view of the man, and is important within Girodet's depiction of him.

This element of masquerade costume is most closely associated with the portrait of *Thomas William Coke, later 1st Earl of Leicester* (1774) that shows the young man in fancy "Vandyke dress", or French costume associated with masquerade (Fig. 19).[152] The costume is a silver silk with lace trim, with bold red flourishes in the tie, feather in the hat, and the lining of the ermine cape draped over one shoulder. Again, Batoni has placed the young tourist in front of an ancient statue of a *Sleeping Ariadne*. An inscription on the statue's plinth identifies that the work was given as a gift to the Countess of Albany, perhaps some token related with a love affair.[153] He is also, as Douglas, accompanied by a small dog. Another "stock" element of the portrait is the presence of shards of broken columns in the foreground. He is presented as noble and ornate, though in a manner very frivolous in contrast to Belley. The satin and lace embellishments on his costume show his wealth and status. He is, however, overly dressed for a traveler, with his fur-lined cape and plumed hat.[154]

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[152] Aileen Ribeiro, *The Art of Dress: Fashion in England and France 1750-1820* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

[153] The custom of exchanging portraits between lovers was especially popular during the Rococo period. Halliday discusses this type of portraiture in relation to others being practiced in France.

[154] Interestingly, the fancy dress and plumed hat can be associated with the concept of "macaroni" which was the name given to the embellishment of those tourists who adopted Italian fashion. The popular allusion to this from the song Yankee Doodle Dandy ("stuck a feather in his hat and called it macaroni") will be familiar to most readers.

While some individuals wore masquerade costumes in their portraits, others wore costumes of their native lands. Yet another portrait by Batoni, *Colonel the Hon. William Gordon* (1766), displays a nobleman fully attired in Scottish military regalia (Fig. 20). This portrait becomes, therefore, not only a commemoration of a journey, but also a reinforcement of this man's heritage and identity. This is most directly related to Belley's own costume associating him with his governmental position. It is of note that he may be wearing an outdated uniform, appearing more as though he is in costume for a commemorative portrait of the Grand Tour type. It is also of importance that Belley wears an emblem of his station as well as an aspect of his own identity while in France.

Though Belley is indeed depicted as a man of nature, his uniform sets him apart, especially among other blacks. Belley's uniform is indeed curious. The uniform itself has been traced to both his position in the Convention Nationale and the Conseil des Cinq Cents. Helen Weston states that Belley wears the costume, introduced in 1794 and still worn by members of the Directoire, of a representative of the people.[155] The moment of the costume's inception and its connections with Belley's role in the history of the abolition of slavery is of utmost importance to Weston's reading of the painting, though she overlooks the importance that it was still a contemporary costume, and more importantly a costume that commemorates Belley's role and reason for being in France. Aileen Ribeiro has studied the costumes of the French Revolution and presents varied drawings of projected uniforms for citizens of the Republic.[156] Costume became an increasingly important part of French society during the Revolution. It was proposed that a citizen's uniform would act to further unite and equalize the people. Many of these

[155] Weston, "Representing the Right to Represent: The *Portrait of Citizen Belley, Ex-Representative of the Colonies*, by A.-L. Girodet," 86.
[156] Ribeiro.

designs never came to fruition because many in the new Republic still saw uniforms as a means of dividing the people and not unifying them.

Based on images of Revolutionary uniforms, Belley's costume most closely resembles a design offered as a *Costume of a French Republican* (Fig. 21) and not one designed for a *People's Deputy* (Fig. 22).[157] Richard Wrigley, in *The Politics of Appearances*, has included a 1795 drawing of the 'Costume d'un Représentant du Peuple François près les Armées de la République, institué par la Convention Nationale, l'An 1er de la République. V[ieux] S[tyle] 1793' which does indeed match the uniform worn by Belley (Fig. 23).[158] What is interesting about this identification is that it is described as the 'Old Style', inferring that this costume was no longer being used as early as 1795, two years prior to Belley's portrait. The Directory adopted a differing rationale behind costume than that which had been adopted by the Jacobin government. As Delécluze stated, their purpose was to eradicate "'all memory of the revolutionary costume, so hideous and so untidy' and to ordain 'a costume that approaches the antique model as much as possible, enough to satisfy and flatter even the reigning taste.'"[159] This sentiment produced an antique costume for the members of the *Conseil des Cinq Cents* and the *Conseil des Anciens* consisting of a long white tunic. Ribeiro explains that this costume was soon found to be too cumbersome and replaced with a mixture of the previous uniforms: "a blue coat, pantaloons, tricolour sash and feathered *toque*" (Fig. 24).[160] She notes that this compromise was decreed on 29 brumaire, An VI (November,

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[157] Ibid., 148-149.
[158] Richard Wrigley, *The Politics of Appearances: Representations of Dress in Revolutionary France* (New York: Berg, 2002), 78.
[159] Delecluze as quoted in Ribeiro, 152. "'tout souvenir du costume révolutionnaire, si hideux et si désordonné' and to ordain 'un costume qui se rapprochait autant que possible de la forme antique, afin de satisfaire et de flatter même le goût qui règnait alors.' "
[160] Ibid.

19, 1797). This date would presumably have occurred after the completion, and certainly the inception of Girodet's portrait. As Belley is not robed in a long white tunic, he apparently was wearing the costume of the *Convention Nationale* as introduced in 1793, the year of his arrival in France, thus this was indeed an outdated costume by the time the portrait was painted.

Post-colonial theory informs the discussion of the figure of Belley as demonstrating the Western construct of a black man. The fact that Belley is depicted in a white man's uniform in Girodet's *Portrait de C.[itoyen] Jean-Baptiste Belley, ex-représentant des colonies* is deeply significant to the meanings within this painting. Military uniforms connote freedom, struggle, and power most overtly. When these uniforms are placed on an individual of color, do they still hold these connotations? Paradoxically, it is Belley's uniform that endows him with power and authority, as well as removing a part of his expected identity. Edward Said believes that for white men to accept black men, they must somehow be portrayed as white, i.e. through dress or mannerism.[161] In essence, this belief is based on the idea that in order for a black man to be acceptable by Western standards, he must be like a white European before he can be understood and valued. This imperialistic attitude of assimilation goes against the ideals of equality, fraternity and liberty that had been the foundation of the Revolution.

Belley's uniform creates his identity in that it was only through his military service that Belley was able to gain his freedom, and it was through this hard-earned freedom that Belley was allowed to represent the people of Saint Domingue in front of the *Convention Nationale* in Paris. Belley is an interesting enough individual to be figured in such a remarkable portrait because of his ability to gain power despite

[161]Said.

limitations associated with his background and color. It is precisely his uniform that signifies this masculine, active aspect of his identity. His uniform acts as the sign of his importance within the French government and society. The fact that his particular uniform marks his debut in Paris further highlights his initial importance and historical significance.

This aspect of costuming acts to further emphasize the connections of this portrait with those Grand Tour portraits being produced for Englishmen, though there are still some stylistic connections with France. There were two French artists who had created works similar to the *Portrait of Jean-Baptiste Belley* earlier in the century, which might also have inspired the artist, though they too have close connections with these Grand Tour portraits: Joseph-Marie Vien, and Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun. In 1786, Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun requested to paint two Turkish ambassadors visiting Paris. The ambassadors would only agree to this sitting if they were ordered to do so by the King, who obliged his wife's portraitist with the command. There is very little documentation about these portraits, though this information is available within her memoirs. While Girodet was a student in Rome, the academy was paid a visit by Mme. Vigée-Lebrun where the two were introduced. Elisabeth was impressed by Girodet and remarked in her own memoirs Girodet's flattery of his interest in her style, representing his respect for her abilities.[162] Though the details of these portraits have been lost to us now, Girodet, as her contemporary and an admirer of her work would most likely have been familiar with the existence of these works and could have used them as inspiration as well.

An intriguing French connection with Rome and the masquerade is the series of engravings done by Vien—David's teacher—in 1748. De Troy, the head of the French

[162] Ines de Kertanguy, *Madame Vigee-Le Brun* (Paris: Perrin, 1994), 163.

Academy in Rome at the time, hosted a procession, *la Caravane du Sultan se rendant à la Mecque*, at the end of Epiphany, among the pupils of the Academy.[163] This was an elaborate procession of individuals masquerading as exotic sultans, which was so popular that the students, directed by Vien, restaged the event around February 20, near Carnival. The parade was a huge success among the Roman citizens. Over the course of the following summer Vien proceeded to sketch, and then engrave, the costumes of each figure from the masquerade. His superiors were so impressed by the zeal of this young artist that news was sent to de Troy, the director, and Vien's time in Rome was extended.

Though these were merely sketches of French artists in costume as exotic sultans, they are indeed interesting in their connections with the Portrait of Belley. This thesis has already discussed Girodet's relationship with his master and his desire to always surpass the teacher. It is interesting then to see this connection between Girodet and Vien. If one wants to surpass the teacher, why not look to his master? These works made a significant impression on Vien himself, who spends many pages in his own memoirs discussing the event, and his pride at not only playing a part, but initiating it.[164] Sketches of certain figures within the series, namely the *Chef des huissiers* (Fig. 25) and the *Chef des Indiens* (Fig. 26), bare particular resemblance to the Portrait of Belley in their posture. These prints, as the *Portrait of Richard Pococke*, illustrate the inverse of Belley's portrait, with the Westerner clad in exotic clothing. The difference here is that Vien attempts to sketch actual exotic figures, not the actual visages of his peers. The reaction in Paris to this masquerade in Rome is best illustrated by the remarks made in a letter from the director of the academy to the Cardinal Rouchfoucauld:

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[163] Thomas W. Gaehtgens and Jacques Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien: Peintre Du Roi (1716-1809)* (Paris: ARTHENA, 1988).
[164] Ibid., 64.

> You would not believe how this masquerade, which is so fashionable in this country here, was celebrated when they paraded themselves down the avenue, not only by the people, but even by all the nobility and how it brought honor to these young men and to M. de Troy, director of the Academy, who directed them by his counsel. One must give justice to these young men ; they are vertiably wise and of exemplary application.[165]

Because this event, and its images, had been so infamous, especially among the academy members in Rome, Girodet would have most likely been familiar with these even decades later when he too studied in Rome. It is also of note that Vien was indeed influenced by Batoni and his baroque flair while he was forming his own style in Rome.[166] These images may have provided an alternative to the portraiture of David and Gerard being produced in the last decade of the eighteenth century, to allow for a freshness and a unique quality Girodet strove for in creating his portrait.

If Girodet indeed used these Vien works as models, it would have created an avenue for him to revive an outdated style and use it in a fresh new light, putting him in the spotlight he so desired. Grand Tour portraits were decades outdated. In reviving this past style, he would produce a work far different from the others on display, which was his goal as an artist. Personally, he craved the spotlight and attempted always the creation of bold new works. Though this was an established style that was familiar to serious art students, it was never a style for the Salons. The style however was imbued with characteristics that were familiar to most artists. Girodet would not have chosen this style had he been painting a white man. He created this work because he had a prominent black man as his subject, and could create a shocking portrait by not only placing these

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[165] Ibid. "Vous ne sauriés croire combien cette mascarade, qui est fort du goût de ce pays-ci, a été aplaudie, quand elle s'est promenée dans le Cours, non seulement par le peuple, mais même par toute la noblesse, et combien elle a fait honneur à ces jeunes gens et à M. de Troy, directeur de l'Académie, qui les a dirigés par ses conseils. Il faut rendre justice à ces jeunes gens; ils sont véritablement d'une sagesse et d'une application exemplaires."

[166] Ibid., 65.

characteristics common to English gentlemen on a black man, but by reviving an outdated style that would set his work formally apart from the others on exhibit.

Perhaps the tourist portrait most closely linked to Belley's portrait visually is the *Portrait of Richard Pococke* by Jean-Etienne Liotard (see Fig. 3). Pococke is presented leaning against a broken column carved in bas relief with various tools associated with the orient. The background is a beautiful Turkish port in calm and serene coloring. The most interesting point in terms of this discussion is that Pococke is dressed in full Turkish garb.[167] His head is wrapped in a turban, his face in a full beard, and his body covered by a long robe. It is also of note that this work stands alone within Liotard's oeuvre, which consists mainly of pastel miniatures of famous individuals dressed in Turkish habit. This work is full-length—one of very few painted by Liotard—and life-size, 205 cm x 135 cm. It is one of only two oil portraits done by Liotard, both of which were completed while the artist was in Constantinople. In fact, it has caused one scholar to comment that it seems to fit much better within the oeuvre of one of the students of David in the early-nineteenth century, and not by Liotard in 1738.[168] Though this statement is meant to underscore the originality and foresight of Liotard as an artist, it also underscores the point of this discussion by linking its formal style to that of Girodet. He continues by stating that no other artist at this time period was painting like this in France, further emphasizing my point that Girodet had to look elsewhere for inspiration. It is also

[167] This reversal of roles through costuming was not only being practiced in such Grand Tour portraits, but was also seen in the portraits of ambassadors by the French artist Elizabeth Vigée-Lebrun.

[168] "Lorsque l'on voit ces deux peintures à l'huile, on jurerait, à cause de leur facture précise, de leur matière lisse, de leur vision objective et véridique, que l'on se trouve en présence d'œuvres exécutées par un artist du début du XIXe siècle, qui aurait écouté les enseignements de David en même temps que ceux de Gros; par exemple, un Girodet, un Rouget ou un Pagnest. Il n'y a là rien qui rappelle le XVIIIe siècle; personne, aux alentours de 1740, ne peignait ainsi en France." Francois Fosca, *La Vie Les Voyages Et Les Oeuvres De Jean-Etienne Liotard: Citoyen De Geneve, Dit Le Peintre Turc* (Lausanne-Paris: La Bibliotheque des Arts, 1956), 21.

plausible that Girodet, always driven to distinguish himself, would have been drawn to such a unique and foreign artistic type.

When compared with the portrait of Jean-Baptiste Belley, the two seem almost identical. The *Portrait of Richard Pococke* shows the English traveler leaning against the column in a very similar fashion to that of Belley. Though there is no evidence that Girodet specifically used the *Portrait of Richard Pococke* as model for his portrait of Jean-Baptiste Belley, it is significant that they are so similar, and Girodet's portrait can be better understood through an a discussion of the portrait done by Liotard earlier in the century.[169] The most enlightening aspect of the portrait is the man himself, and what is being shown of Pococke's personality through this portrait. He was a British scholar who wrote texts on his travels, and the locations visited. Interestingly, Richard Pococke was once dubbed "the dullest man that ever traveled".[170] This portrait seems to suggest otherwise. His almost regal air gives him not only the persona of a scholar, but also of an adventurer, unafraid of foreign lands and customs.

Like Pococke, Jean-Baptiste Belley was a well-educated and well-traveled individual. Though his education and travels were not conventional, Girodet could perhaps be trying to suggest that Belley holds the same position in society as the likes of Pococke. Belley was not the only famous black man in France, but in some ways the most respected. He was the first black man to be allowed a position in the Convention Nationale, which would be considered an accomplishment for any man, regardless of his

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[169] This portrait has been largely ignored by scholars and never individually connected with Girodet's *Portrait of Belley*. I therefore have not been able to find any conclusive evidence as to whether or not Girodet would have ever had access to this very portrait to use it as model. Girodet's seriousness as an art student, however, and his penchant for both the exotic and works out of the ordinary suggest that he could have stumbled upon this work. Although the fact remains that both artists were looking to the same source for their paintings and therefore could have independently arrived at the same composition.

[170] McCarthy.

color. It is also interesting to note that both portraits were essentially one-of-a-kinds produced by their artists. There were few people to actually take up the dress of the foreign lands they inhabited. Liotard, however, was one of these individuals and often painted important figures in society dressed in Turkish garb.[171] This portrait, however, stands out among Liotard's oeuvre in its size and the treatment of Pococke in particular.

Jean-Baptiste Belley was a former slave, who was intelligent, educated and well-traveled, as well as being generally well-respected.[172] Through these attributes, he could indeed be associated with Englishmen who participated in the Grand Tour. It seems clear why Girodet would choose such a style in portraying Belley. The implications associated with the style would explain to all who viewed the work within the Salon exactly how reputable the man was, and show that all men are, and should be (regardless of color), true citizens of France. This Grand Tour portrait style adds to the ideological dimension of this portrait, and especially Girodet's aspirations of history painting.

Though this style of portraiture does indeed endow Belley with a sense of equality with Englishmen taking the Grand Tour, it also emphasizes his separateness. He is simply a traveler in a foreign land. This distinction, in a way, highlights that he is not the peer to any man in France, perhaps even on the European continent at this time. The elements of his identity covered in Chapter One act to connect him with Europeans on some grounds, but separate him from ever truly connecting with them. Though Frenchmen at the time felt a kinship with an ex-slave, seeing themselves as slaves of the

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[171] For a description and sampling of such work by Liotard see: Auguste Boppe, *Les Peintres Du Bosphore Au Xviiie Siecle*, ed. Lynne Thornton, 8 vols., Les Orientalistes, vol. 8 (Paris: ACR Edition, 1989). Fosca.

[172] There are still many questions about Jean-Baptiste Belley's person. It is not known how much formal education the man received, though it is obvious from the few extant records of his own words that he was indeed a very learned man. The travel of which I speak is related to both his status as an ex-slave, from Africa brought to Saint Domingue as well as his time traveling to France, and there in Paris: his own tour of sorts.

monarchy, there was truly no comparison. It was a long and difficult life that led Belley to his position in the French government, longer and more difficult than perhaps any other member within either the *Convention Nationale* or the *Directoire*. It is therefore appropriate that this style would reflect that of Grand Tour portraiture because Belley was simply a European tourist, he never truly lived there. It was a culmination of his political education.

Through Belley's costume, his juxtaposition with statuary, and his outdoor setting, the portrait can be connected with Grand Tour portraits of artists such as Pompeo Batoni popular among English gentlemen. Girodet's five years in Rome would have familiarized him with this style, its uses and implications. The English gentlemen commissioning such portraits were concerned with establishing themselves as men of power, wealth and intellect. Such portraits would reinforce their experience and position within society. Many portraits figure individuals who are in costume, either that of their own land, that of the foreign one in which they are visiting or other costumes which might reference the galas they would have attended. Other costumes might connote one's office or station in the military or government, such as Belley's. If Belley's costume was not contemporary to the date of the portrait, but to his position upon entering France, and in connection with the aforementioned attributes, this painting could be seen as a commemoration of Belley's initial entry into France.

The date of the portrait's execution in relation to Belley's own return to Saint Domingue is unclear, though intriguing. It is fairly clear that Belley did return to Saint Domingue where he virtually disappeared into oblivion. Perhaps the ensuing end of

Belley's Parisian sojourn inspired Girodet to use the Grand Tour portrait as model.[173] Though Belley always considered himself to be French first and foremost, this identity was not reliant upon him residing in France itself. There is no indication that Belley ever planned this trip to be more than a short visit. It is however intriguing that the coastline in the background of the portrait has been linked with Saint Domingue and not France. It is possible that Girodet was simply inspired by Belley's imminent return to Saint Domingue to use the Grand Tour style, though the work is not entirely a commemoration of a journey. There were indeed other points of Belley's important political role that had to be intensified, and the background of Saint Domingue allowed for that. This discrepancy does not however diminish the importance of Grand Tour portrait as model for the artist. It creates a strong statement about the figure of Belley and his importance within the French government. Girodet found the greatest way to highlight the individual nature of Belley and his significance within the time period, and that was through his use of the Grand Tour portrait style.

[173]Some authors are quite confident on this matter, though others have suggested otherwise. Musto: 60.

CONCLUSION

Jean-Baptiste Belley was not a typical eighteenth-century black man in France, Saint Domingue or Senegal. He was chosen as subject of the *Portrait de C.[itoyen] Jean-Baptiste Belley, ex-représentant des colonies* by Girodet because of his individual nature. He held the position of the first black official in the French government, which role elevated this portrait to history painting. Belley was also an intellectual and political equal to the white men of his day, which was unheard of to many of his contemporaries. Girodet displays this equality through adoption of the Grand Tour portrait style. Girodet's representation of Belley is remarkable in that he is presented as an individual, not a stereotype of a black man, yet this individual portrait transcended the barriers of public life to edify the Salon viewer. Even more significant is the early date at which this was painted in connection with the accepted views of black images as set forth by Said. This is not the image of a subjugated black pawn, but an empowered individual who was perhaps recognized as such in his own day as well as the present.

This portrait is a revolutionary portrayal of a black man that could only be produced *by* Girodet and *in* 1797. Without the backdrop of the French Revolution and its ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity, such a work would have been almost heretical. Girodet chose Grand Tour portraits as his model in order to further highlight his own artistic prowess, as well as to demonstrate Belley's social and political status, his travel, and most notably his education. All of these aspects were part of Belley's individuality. Belley's subject allowed Girodet to appeal to a mass audience, engaging each individual on a different level. Each of the three individuals associated with this work (Belley, Raynal and Girodet) were controversial individuals within French Revolutionary society,

and they have been studied in order to elucidate the varied understanding the audience had of their relationship within the work. This plurality causes the work's interpretation to be ever-evolving and therefore this thesis cannot be comprehensive in its analysis of the work. It does however discuss various aspects of the painting that have been previously overlooked, and it points to new avenues bearing further exploration.

Girodet's representation of Jean-Baptiste Belley expanded the possibilities of representations of blacks in many ways. Though Said's publication of *Orientalism* offered a new mode of understanding paintings of the "other" hitherto unexplored, his theory is insufficient in explaining Belley's portrayal within this work. This singular portrait resides in the gray-area of post-colonial theory. The writings of younger theorists, such as Homi Bhabha, fill in some of the gaps left by Said. Though Belley is indeed displayed as Western in what seems to be a falsely constructed manner, his personal, hybrid, identity must be taken into account. Through this viewpoint, Belley is portrayed as a French gentleman in order for the audience to recognize the black man as being important. Girodet's depiction, however, looks beyond this veneer to Belley as an individual. He was indeed a French official who dressed in this manner to fulfill his political obligations. Belley's surface appearance as a French gentleman did allow the contemporary French viewer a certain level of comfort prompting him to take a closer look. He is indeed dignified, not because he is French, but because he is an intelligent, sensitive and passionate individual. Belley's identity is hybrid, and these varied aspects of his identity are recorded on the canvas. Girodet is able to show the many levels of Belley's identity through examining a black man closer than any artist had done previously.

Post-colonial theory must be expanded to accurately understand the figure of Belley as exhibited in this work. There is no single reading that can be applied to all works figuring men of color. It is insufficient to state that he is a subjugated African who has been exploited to prove the success of French assimilation. Belley was not just another black man. It is foolish to assume that his color and his governmental position were all that defined him. It is only through an understanding of the many layers of his being that the portrait can be appreciated for its ability to display Jean-Baptiste Belley. Homi Bhabba's insights into the hybrid nature of individuals allow for this appreciation of Girodet's translation of multiple aspects of Belley's being to the canvas. The meaning of this painting is not singular and cannot be explained simply. Belley was a highly singular individual, and as befits his nature, so is his portrait.

As was discussed in Chapter Two, the portrait changed the way blacks were depicted in high art. Belley is no longer the slave acting to display his master's wealth, but is more ennobled, even if seen as a noble savage. He is displayed as an individual important in his own right. Through this painting, Girodet allowed artists to see brilliance and political power in a black man and allowed the possibility of a history painting to revolve around a prominent black figure. Previous to this work, only one painting figuring a black man had been displayed in the Salon—a lost work by a forgotten artist—though many followed it.[174] Girodet was highly scrutinized by the public because of his status as pupil of the famed David. He was a political man who was interested in proving his genius through his unconventional works. In many ways he

[174] Helen Weston describes this work by Houzeau, exhibited in the Salon 1796, as such: "From the catalogue description, it represented a conventional allegory of equality holding a level over a black and a white child, seen in fraternal embrace". Weston, "Girodet's *Portrait of Citizen Belley, Ex-Representative of the Colonies*: In Rembrance of 'Things Sublime'," 76.

tried to create a persona for himself based on nonconformity and innovation within the art world. It was very fitting then, for such an artist to create this radical representation of a black man, with no true precedent and no progeny.

In his portrait of Belley, Girodet allowed a black man to be seen as an equal to an English gentleman of education through visual connections with Grand Tour portraits. This highly specialized portraiture carried connotations of wealth, education and social status never before offered as descriptors of a black man. These connections created a radical view of freedom and equality, even for a Revolution built on the backs of such ideals. Though no artist chose to pursue the direct path as forged by Girodet, artists such as Marie Guillaumine-Benoist and Theodore Géricault were able to produce noble depictions of blacks—later displayed in the Salon—within the ensuing decades, which would perhaps have been impossible without the precedent of the *Portrait de C.[itoyen] Jean-Baptiste Belley, ex-représentant des colonies*.

One of the most immediate of such powerful images of black individuals inspired by Girodet is the *Portrait d'un Nègress* by Marie Guillaumine-Benoist, exhibited in the Salon of 1801 (Fig. 27). Unlike Belley, this unnamed black servant does not exhibit her own identity but takes on the guise of an allegorical figure. Though she does not display the individual attention given to Belley, she does adopt positive characteristics, and the attention to detail of her features was hitherto unaccepted. Black figures were deemed ugly and unworthy of grand Salon painting, though Girodet's representation appears to have proven otherwise. Albert Boime has written an article in which he credits the portrait of Belley with providing the possibility for the placement of a heroic black figure

at the apex of the composition in Théodore Géricault's *Radeau de la Méduse* (Fig. 28).[175] Girodet's depiction of a noble black man allowed future artists the opportunity of doing the same.

Unfortunately, not all works inspired by Girodet's portrayal of Belley are dignified. An entire sub-genre of the dandified Negro, mostly in advertising prints, seem to be connected to this representation as well. These artists of popular culture see the figure of a black man in official French garb as comical and use it as satire. James Smalls has written an article on Race and Spectacle, which deals with many of these types of prints, though there is no mention of their connection with the *Portrait of Belley*. There are also American prints, illustrated here as an image included in sheet music for the racist song "Zip Coon", in which not only is the costume similar to that of Belley, but even the posturing (Fig. 29).[176] The fact that this work has inspired such disparate interpretations of blacks attests to its pivotal role in the history of art. Though this would be a significant study in relation to this portrait, it is beyond the scope of this thesis. Whether positive or negative, it is significant to note that Girodet's portrait had such broad influence. Rarely does a portrait hold such significance within the canon of art history, and this painting has indeed not yet been acknowledged as the truly influential piece it is.

The significance of this painting all hinges on Belley's race and his individuality. Had he not been black, he would not have been chosen as subject for a history painting by Girodet. However, the painting also suggests that Belley should have been recognized

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[175] Albert Boime, "Gericault's *African Slave Trade* and the Physiognomy of the Opressed," in *Gericault*, ed. Regis Michel, Louvre Conferences Et Colloques (Paris: La Documentation Francaise, 1996).

[176] A fellow graduate student, Nathan Rees presented me with the most compelling of these in the form of Sheet Music to the American racist song, "Zip Coon", which is uncannily similar to *the Portrait of Belley*.

as important not simply because of his black skin. Just as Englishmen on the Grand Tour were important enough to be considered subjects for painting, so was Jean-Baptiste Belley because he had many similar attributes. Belley, however, because of the nature of his race and his freedom, becomes a symbol for the general public of the possibilities a man can achieve, and becomes a history subject important to all people, instead of a private commemorative portrait. Girodet allows for the suggestion of equality between whites and blacks never before achieved within an artistic medium. The figure, though immediately appearing to be a tribute to the abolition of slavery, is more than that. It is a tribute to an important man. The work revolves around the character of Belley and his role in contemporary philosophy and government. Through this painting, Girodet is able to suggest the greatness within black men.

Girodet understood his audience and his subject to such an extent that he created a work of art that has engaged viewers throughout time on multiple levels. This history painting of Belley's importance and character provided new possibility for future understanding and depictions of black men. As was demonstrated through this thesis, it is also highly influential to discussions of post-colonial theory because it does not fall within the categories set aside for understanding white representations of black men. Belley was an exceptional individual whose peerless nature was in part because of his position as a free black man who was numbered among the French government. His French costuming was then a part of his actuality, and not a true costume. He was intelligent, cultured and well-traveled, and Girodet's portrait of him exhibits these attributes. The painting therefore exhibits a gray area within post-colonial theory, adding an important direction of further study within the art of this time period in particular.

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Figure 1. Anne-Louis Girodet Trioson, *Portrait de C.[itoyen] Jean-Baptiste Belley, ex-représentant des colonies*, 1797. Château de Versailles.

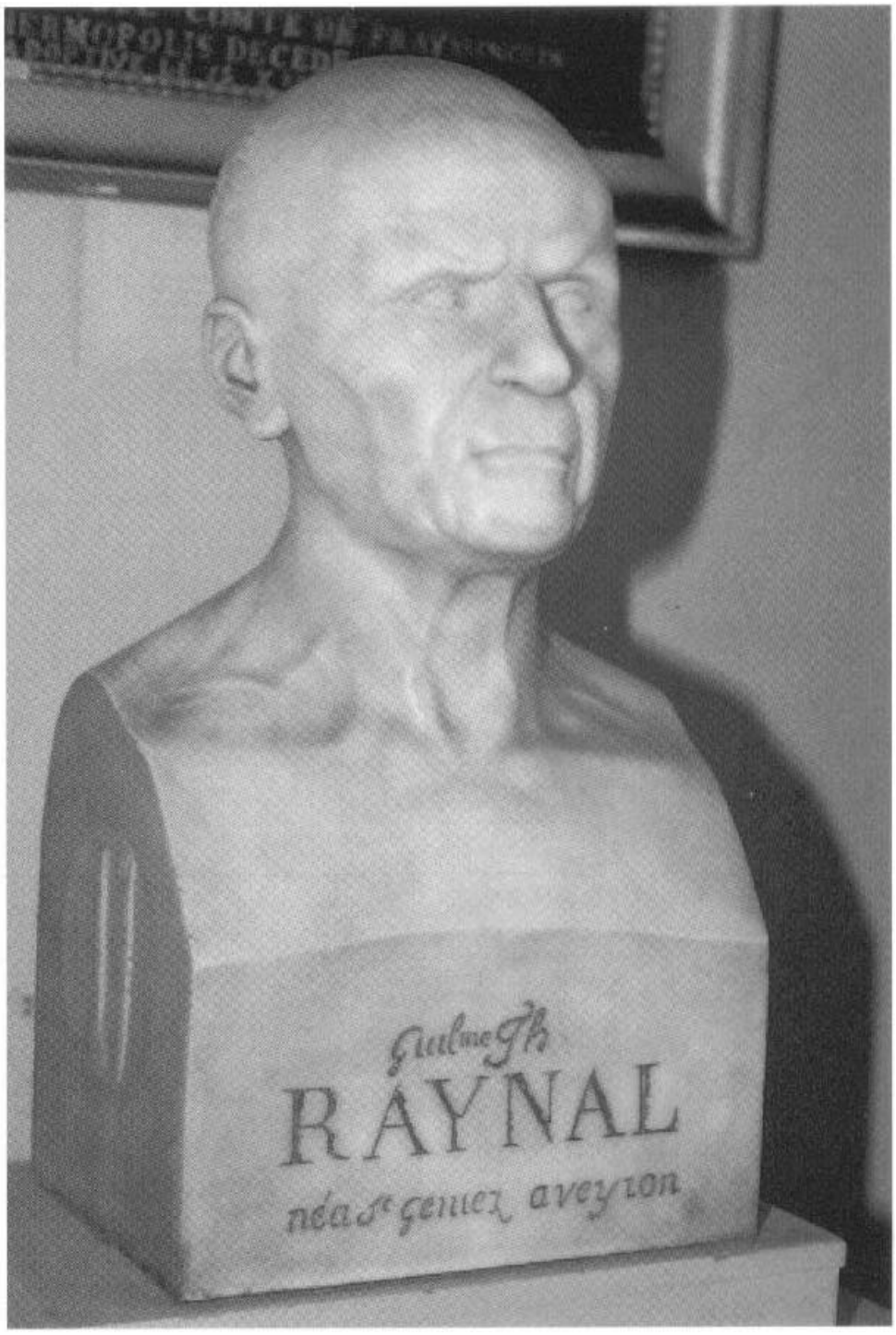

Figure 2. Jean-Joseph Espercieux, *Bust of Abbé Raynal*, 1790. Mairie de Saint-Geniez d'Olt.

Figure 3. Jean-Etienne Liotard, *Portrait of Richard Pococke*, 1738-39. Musées d'art et d'histoire de la Ville de Genève.

Figure 4. Anne-Louis Girodet Trioson, *The Sleep of Endymion*, 1791. Musée du Louvre.

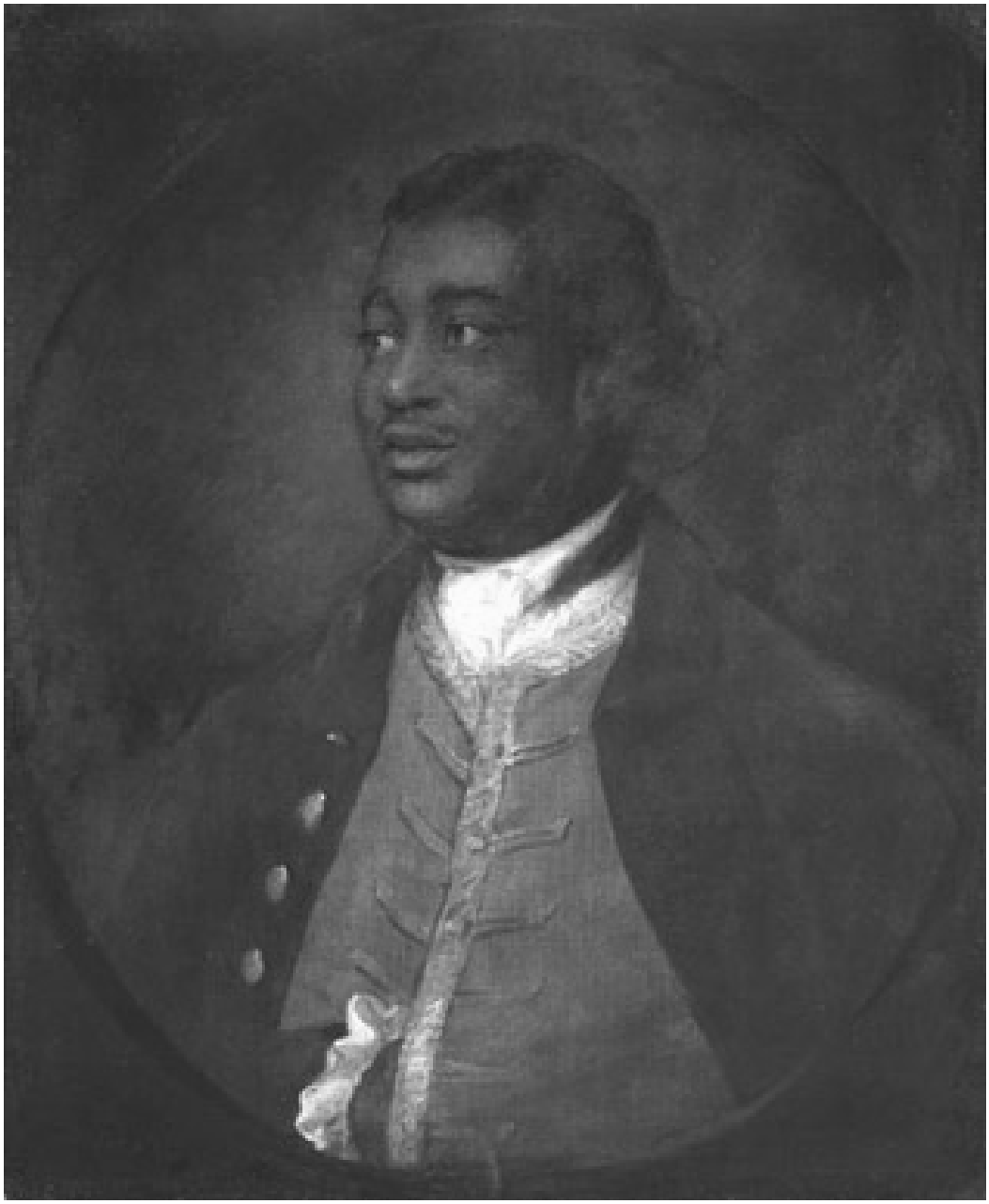

Figure 5. Thomas Gainsborough, *Portrait of Ignatius Sancho*, 1768. The National Gallery of Canada.

Figure 6. *Portrait of Olaudah Equiano*. This image from book cover based on original frontispiece of autiobiography published 1789, designed by Teresa Delgado.

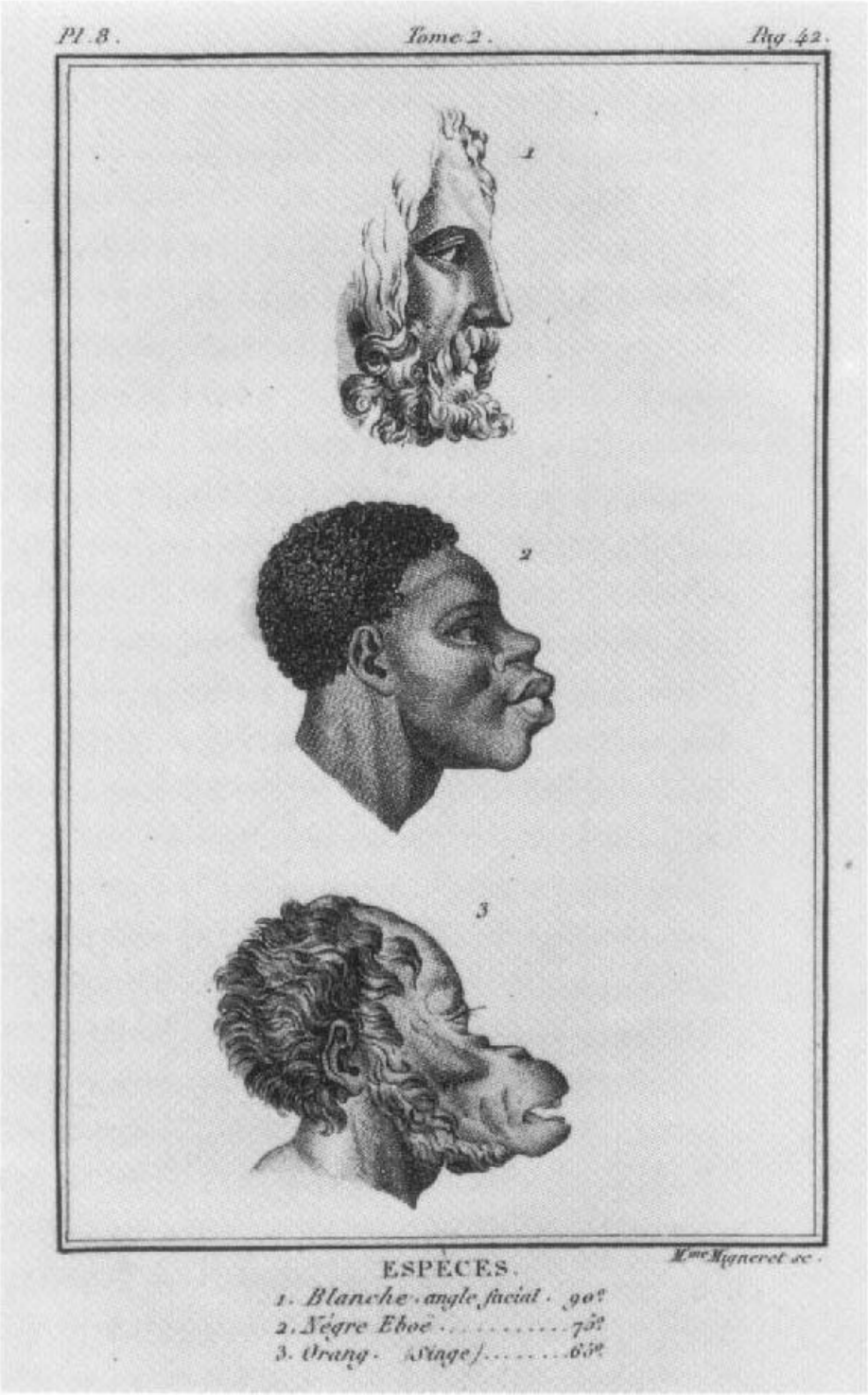

Figure 7. "Espèces. Blanche; Nègre Eboe; Orang (Singe)" (Species. White; Negro Eboe; Orangoutan [Monkey]). Illustration to Julien-Joseph Virey, Histoire naturelle du genre humain, Paris, 1824 (1st ed., 1801). Etching.

Figure 8. Benjamin West, *The Death of General Wolfe*, 1771. The National Gallery of Canada.

Figure 9. Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Sarah Siddons as the Tragic Muse,* 1784-89. The Huntington Library, California.

Figure 10. Rembrandt, *Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer*, 1653. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 11. Detail of Anne-Louis Girodet Trioson, *Portrait de C.[itoyen] Jean-Baptiste Belley, ex-représentant des colonies* (Fig. 1).

Figure 12. “Guillaume-Thomas Raynal,” 1780. Engraving by N. Launay after C. N. Cochin, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale.

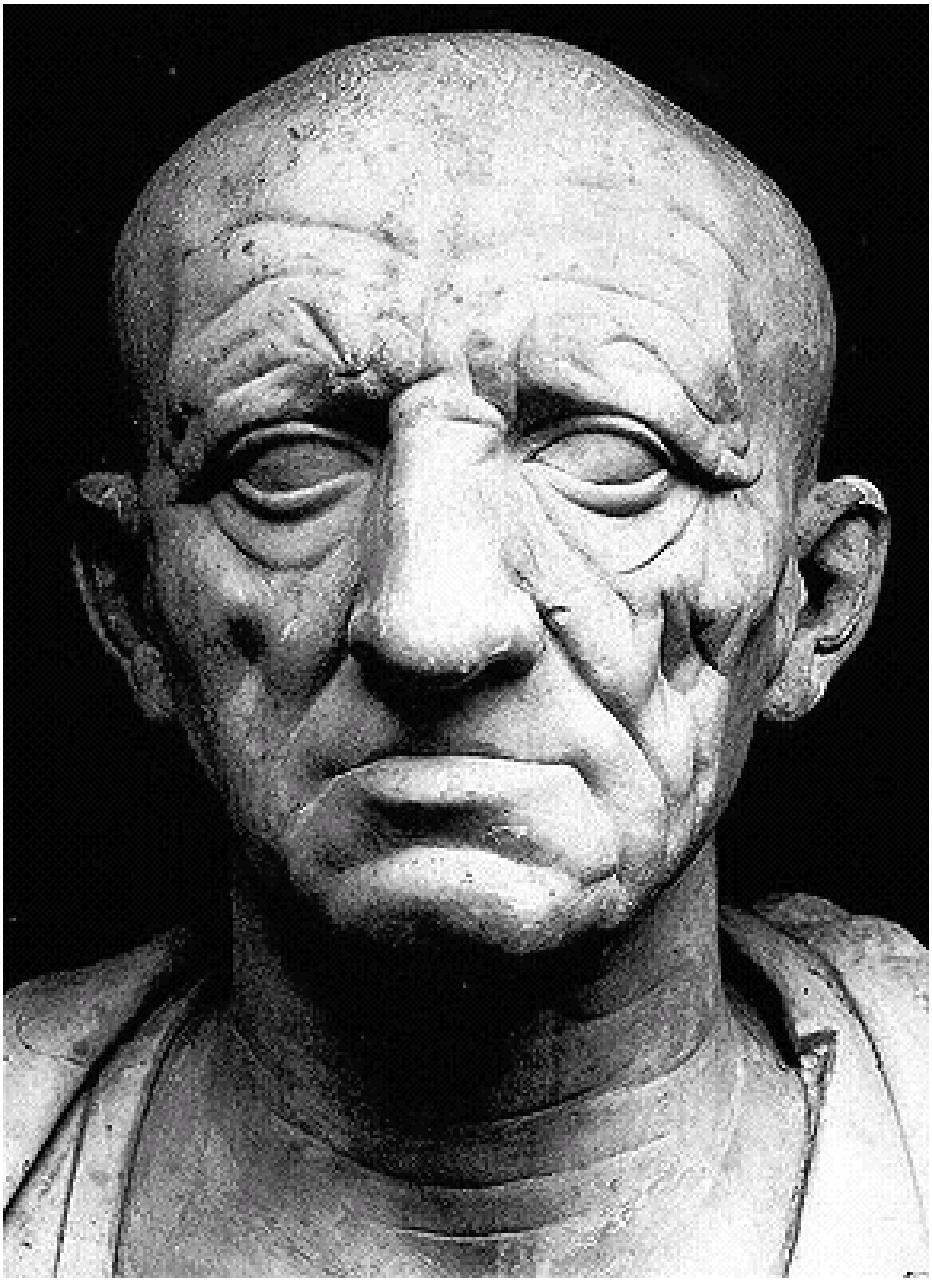

Figure 13. *Head of a Roman Patrician*, c. 100 BC. Museo Torlonia, Rome.

Figure 14. Praxiteles, *Leaning Satyr*, c. 340 BC. Museo Capitolino, Rome.

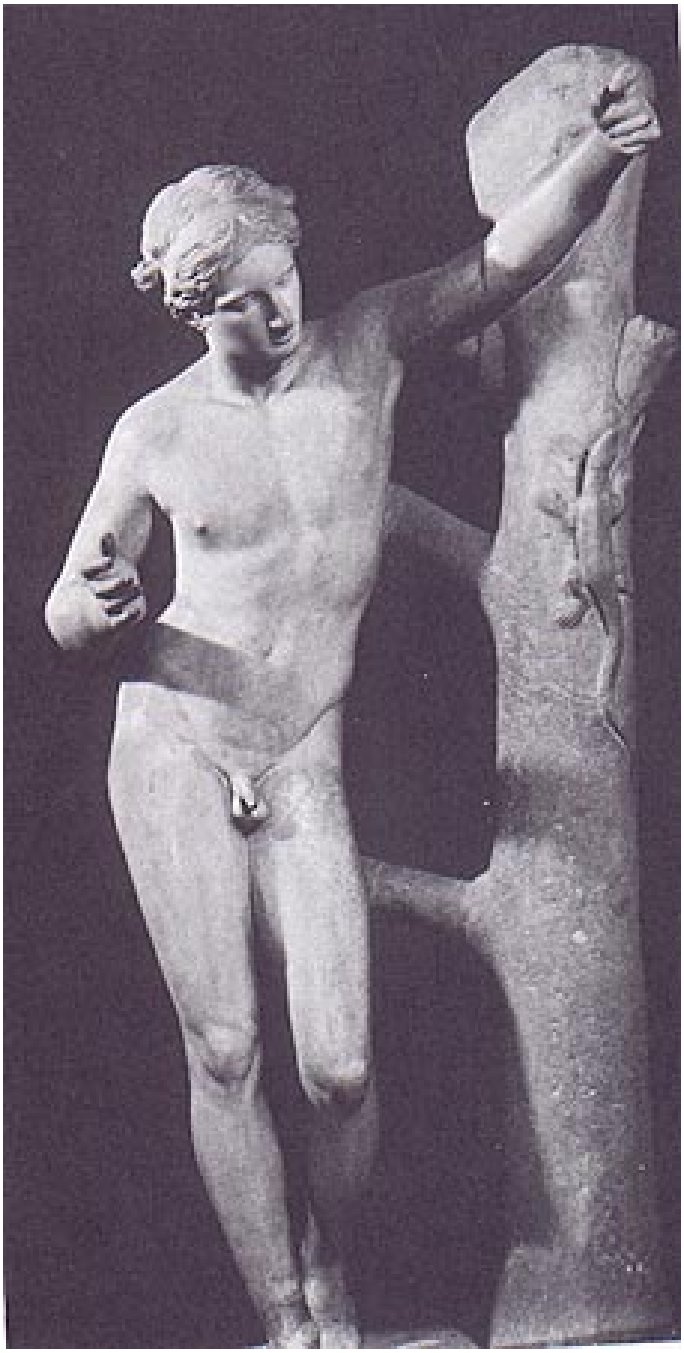

Figure15. Praxiteles, *Apollo Sauroktonos*. 340-330 BC. Copy in Louvre.

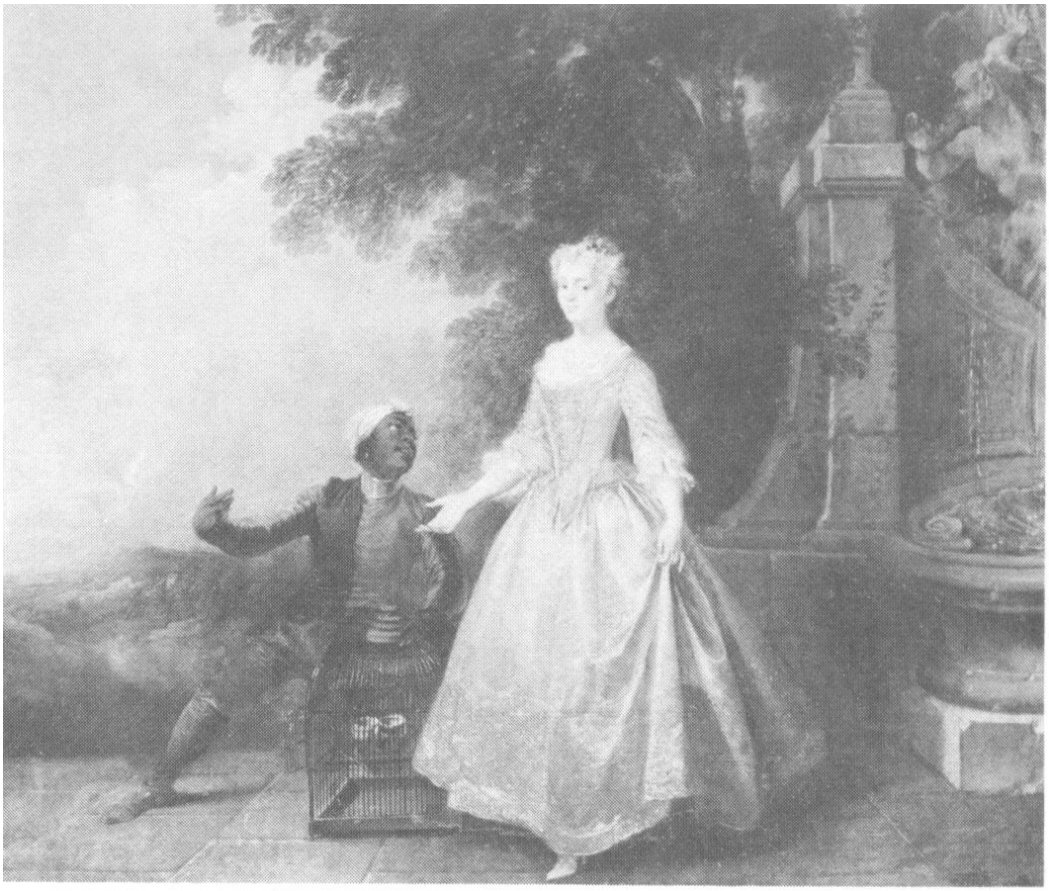

Figure 16. Nicholas Lancret, *Escaped Bird*, c. 1730. Museum of Fine Arts Boston.

Figure 17. Unknown Dutch Artist, *The Yarmouth Collection*, c. 1665. Includes many items from the collection of curiosities owned by the Patton Family of Oxnead Hall.

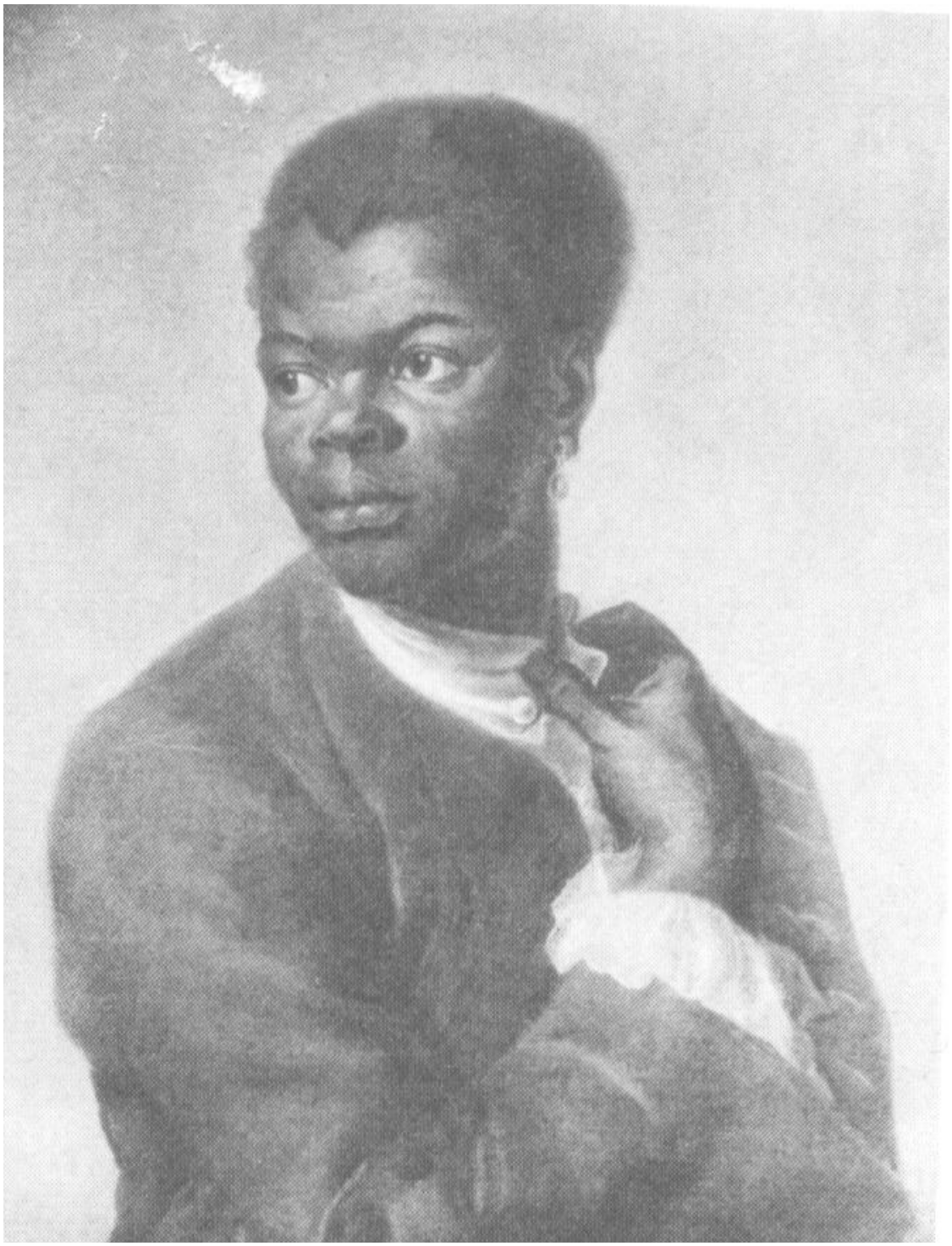

Figure 18. Maurice Quentin de Latour, *Portrait of a Black Servant*, 1741. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Geneva.

Figure 19. Jacques-Louis David, *Intervention of the Sabine Women*, 1799. Musée du Louvre.

Figure 20. Pompeo Batoni, *John Talbot, later First Earl Talbot*, 1773. The Getty.

Figure 21. Pompeo Batoni, *Thomas William Coke, later 1st Earl of Leichster*, 1774. Holkham Hall, Norfolk.

Figure 22. Pompeo Batoni, *Colonel, the Hon. William Gordon*. 1766. The National Trust for Scotland, Fyvie Castel, Aberdeenshire.

Figure 23. J.-M. Moreau, *Costume of a French Republican*, c. 1793-94. Hazlitt, Gooden & Fox, London.

Figure 24. J.-L. David, *People's Deputy*, 1794. Musée Carnavalet, Paris.

Figure 25. Pierre Duflos: 'Costume d'un Représentant du Peuple François près les Armées de la République, instituté par la Convnetiona Nationale, l'An 1er de la Répub[li]que V[ieux] S[tyle] 1793. Dessiné d'après Nature sur les lieux', 1795. Musée de la Révolution Française, Vizille.

Figure 26. J. Grasset de Saint-Sauveur, *A Member of the Directorate in his 'grand costume'*, 1795. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Figure 27. Joseph-Marie Vien, *Chef des huissiers*, 1748. Musée du Petit Palais.

Figure 28. Joseph-Marie Vien, *Chef des Indiens*, 1748. Musée du Petit Palais.

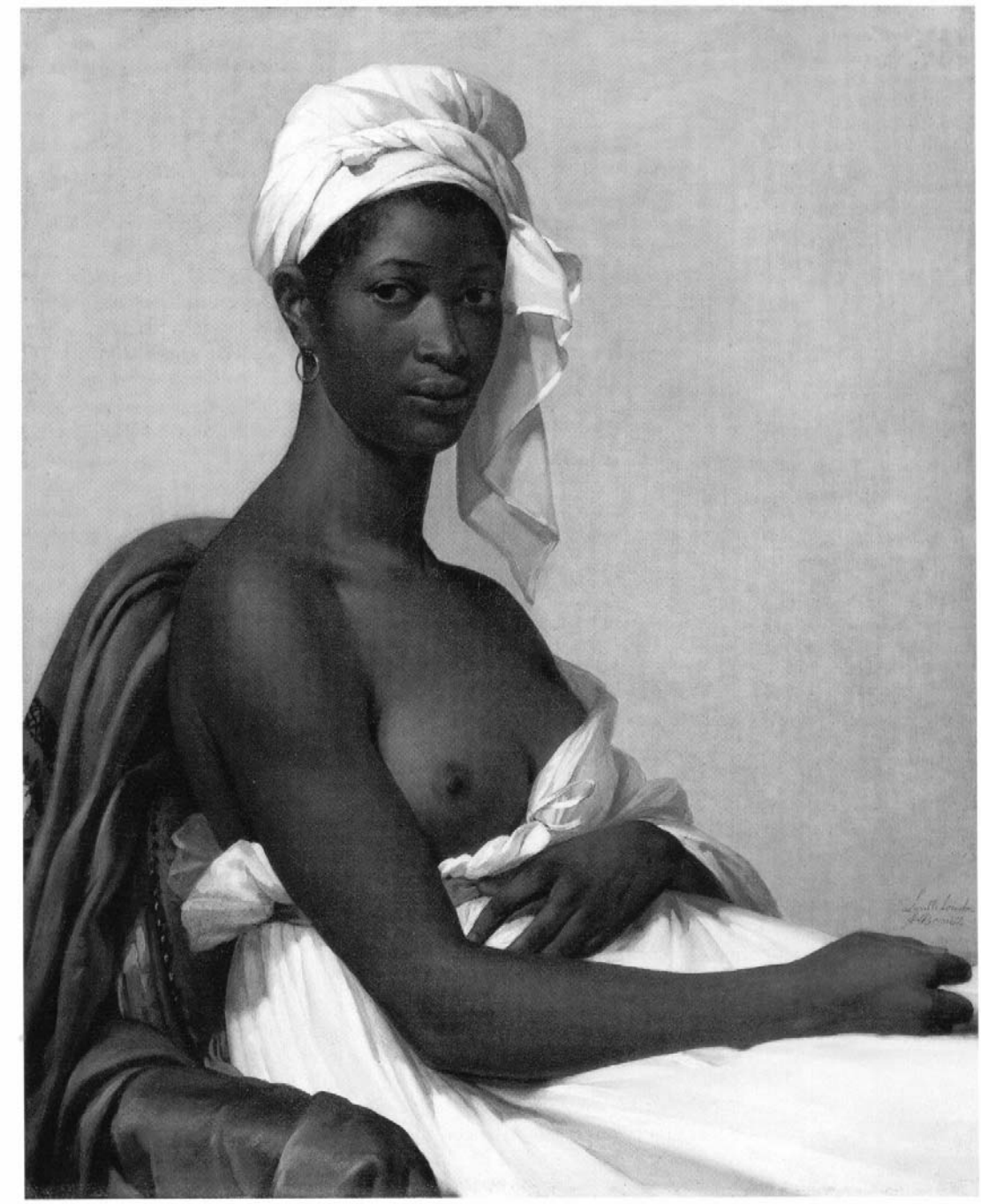

Figure 29. Marie-Guillemine Benoist, *Portrait of a Negress*, Salon of 1800. Musée du Louvre.

Figure 30. Théodore Géricault, *Radeau de la Méduse*, 1819. Musée du Louvre.

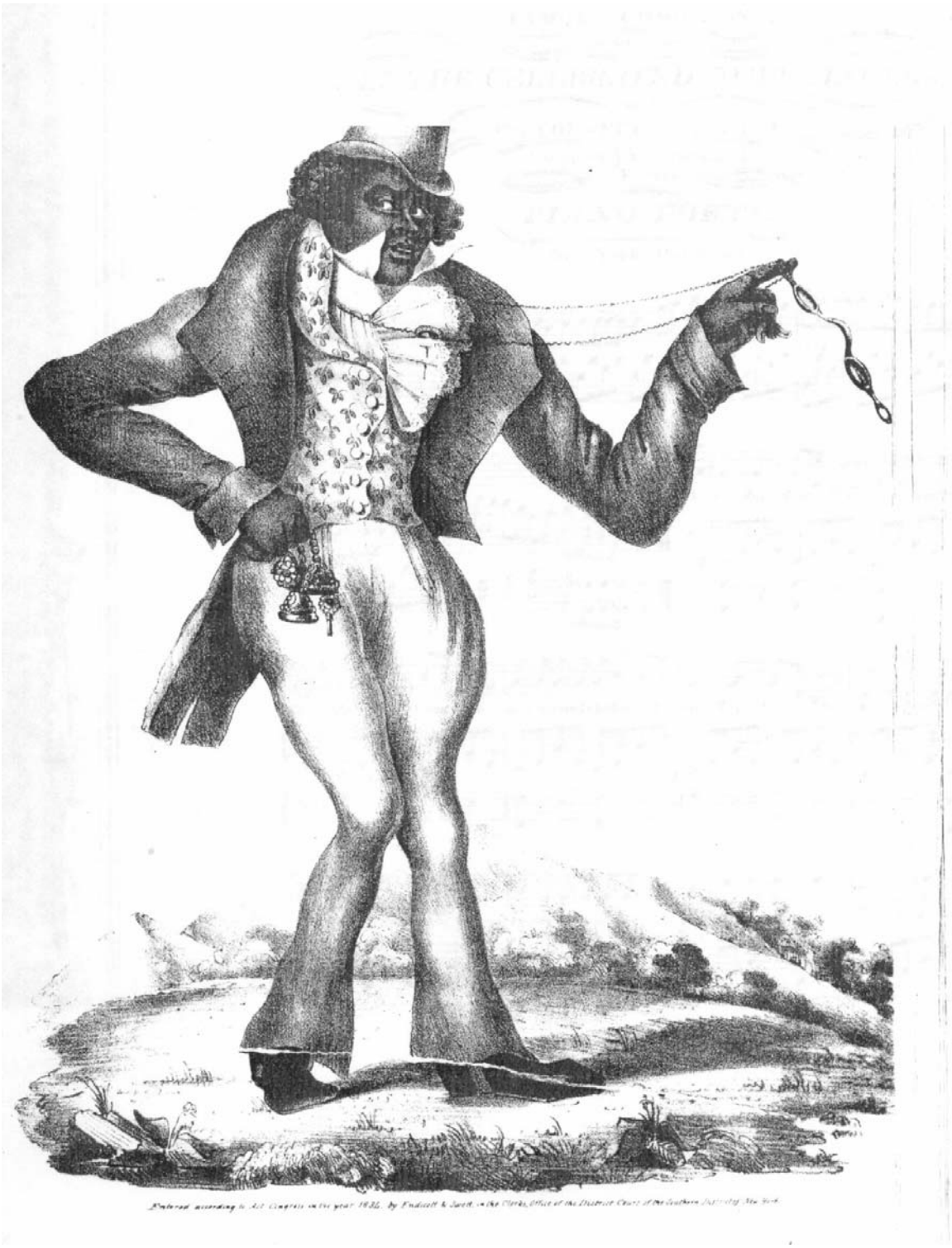

Figure 31. “Zip Coon” Sheet music from America, located in BYU Special Collections.