



Black Life, History,
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People of Color in Louisiana: Part I

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PEOPLE OF COLOR IN LOUISIANA

PART I

The title of a possible discussion of the Negro in Louisiana presents difficulties, for there is no such word as Negro permissible in speaking of this State. The history of the State is filled with attempts to define, sometimes at the point of the sword, oftenest in civil or criminal courts, the meaning of the word Negro. By common consent, it came to mean in Louisiana, prior to 1865, slave, and after the war, those whose complexions were noticeably dark. As Grace King so delightfully puts it, "The pure-blooded African was never called colored, but always Negro." The *gens de couleur*, colored people, were always a class apart, separated from and superior to the Negroes, ennobled were it only by one drop of white blood in their veins. The caste seems to have existed from the first introduction of slaves. To the whites, all Africans who were not of pure blood were *gens de couleur*. Among themselves, however, there were jealous and fiercely-guarded distinctions: "griffes, briqués, mulattoes, quadroons, octoroons, each term meaning one degree's further transfiguration toward the Caucasian standard of physical perfection."¹

Negro slavery in Louisiana seems to have been early influenced by the policy of the Spanish colonies. De las Casas, an apostle to the Indians, exclaimed against the slavery of the Indians and finding his efforts of no avail proposed to Charles V in 1517 the slavery of the Africans as a substitute.² The Spaniards refused at first to import slaves from Africa, but later agreed to the proposition and employed other nations to traffic in them.³ Louisiana learned

¹ King, "New Orleans, the Place and the People during the Ancien Régime," 333.

² De las Casas, "Historia, General," IV, 380.

³ Herrera, "Historia General," dec. IV, libro II; dec. V, libro II; dec. VII, libro IV.

from the Spanish colonies her lessons of this traffic, took over certain parts of the slave regulations and imported bondmen from the Spanish West Indies. Others brought thither were Congo, Banbara, Yaloff, and Mandingo slaves.⁴

People of color were introduced into Louisiana early in the eighteenth century. In 1708, according to the historian, Gayarré, the little colony of Louisiana, at the point on the Gulf of Mexico now known as Biloxi, in the present State of Mississippi, had been in existence nine years. In 1708, the population of the colony did not exceed 279 persons. The land about this region is particularly sterile, and the colonists were little disposed to undertake the laborious task of tilling the soil. Indian slavery was attempted but found unprofitable and exceedingly precarious. So Bienville, lacking the sympathy of De las Casas for the Indians, wrote his government to obtain the authorization of exchanging Negroes for Indians with the French West Indian islands. "We shall give," he said, "three Indians for two Negroes. The Indians, when in the islands, will not be able to run away, the country being unknown to them, and the Negroes will not dare to become fugitives in Louisiana, because the Indians would kill them."⁵

Bienville's suggestion seems not to have met with a very favorable reception. Yet, in 1712, the King of France granted to Anthony Crozat the exclusive privilege for fifteen years of trading in all that immense territory which, with its undefined limits, France claimed as Louisiana. Among other privileges granted Crozat were those of sending, once a year, a ship to Africa for Negroes.⁶ When the first came, is not known, but in 1713 twenty of these Negro slaves from Africa are recorded in the census of the little colony on the Mississippi.⁷

In 1717 John Law flashed meteor-wise across the world with his huge scheme to finance France out of difficulty with

⁴ French, "Historical Collections of Louisiana," Part V, 119 et seq.

⁵ Gayarré, "History of Louisiana," 4th Edition, I, 242, 254.

⁶ French, "Historical Collections of Louisiana," Part III, p. 42.

⁷ Gayarré, "History of Louisiana," I, 102.

his Mississippi Bubble. Among other considerations mentioned in the charter for twenty-five years, which he obtained from the gullible French government, was the stipulation that before the expiration of the charter, he must transport to Louisiana six thousand white persons, and three thousand Negroes, not to be brought from another French colony. These slaves, so said the charter, were to be sold to those inhabitants who had been two years in the colony for one half cash and the balance on one year's credit. The new inhabitants had one or two years' credit granted them.⁸ In the first year, the Law Company transported from Africa one thousand slaves, in 1720 five hundred, the same number the next March, and by 1721 the pages of legal enactments in the West Indies were being ransacked for precedents in dealing with this strange population. But of all these slaves who came to the colony by June, 1721, but six hundred remained. Many had died, some had been exported. In 1722, therefore, the Mississippi Company was under constraint to pass an edict prohibiting the inhabitants of Louisiana from selling their slaves for transportation out of the colony, to the Spaniards, or to any other foreign nation under the penalty of the fine of a thousand livres and the confiscation of the Negroes.⁹

But already the curse of slavery had begun to show its effects. The new colony was not immoral; it may best be described as unmoral. Indolence on the part of the masters was physical, mental and moral. The slave population began to lighten in color, and increase out of all proportion to the importation and natural breeding among themselves. La Harpe comments in 1724 upon the astonishing diminution of the white population and the astounding increase of the colored population.¹⁰ Something was undoubtedly wrong, according to the Caucasian standard, and it has remained wrong to our own day.¹¹ The person of color was now, in

⁸ Gayarré, "History of Louisiana," I, 242, 454.

⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 366.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 365-366.

¹¹ In 1900 a writer in Pearson's Magazine in discussing race mixture in early Louisiana made some startling statements as to the results of the miscegenation of these stocks during the colonial period.

Louisiana, a part of its social system, a creature to be legislated for and against, a person lending his dark shade to temper the inartistic complexion of his white master. Now he began to make history, and just as the trail of his color persisted in the complexion of Louisiana, so the trail of his personal influence continued in the history of the colony, the territory and the State.

Bienville, the man of far-reaching vision, saw the danger menacing the colony, and before his recall and disgrace before the French court, he published, in 1724, the famous Black Code.¹² This code followed the order of that of the West Indies but contains some provisions to meet local needs. The legal status of the slave was that of movable property of his master. Children born of Negro parents followed the condition of their mother. Slaves were forbidden to carry weapons. Slaves of different masters could not assemble in crowds by day or night. They were not permitted to sell "commodities, provisions, or produce" without permission from their masters, and had no property which did not belong to their masters. Neither free-born blacks nor slaves were allowed to receive gifts from whites. They could not exercise such public functions as arbitrator or expert, could not be partners to civil or criminal suits, could not give testimony except in default of white people, and could never testify against their masters. If a slave struck his master or one of the family so as to produce a bruise or shedding blood in the face, he had to be put to death. Any runaway slave who continued to be so from the day his master "denounced" him suffered the penalty of having his ears cut off and being branded on his shoulder with a fleur-de-lis. For a second offence the penalty was to hamstring the fugitive and brand him on the other shoulder. For the third such offence he suffered death. Freed or free-born Negroes who gave refuge to fugitive slaves had to pay 30 livres for each day of retention and other free persons 10 livres a day. If the freed or free-born Negroes were not able to pay the fine, they could be reduced to the condition of slaves and sold as such.

¹² Code Noir, 1724.

The slaves were socially ostracized. Marriage of whites with slaves was forbidden, as was also the concubinage of whites and manumitted or free-born blacks with slaves. The consent of the parents of a slave to his marriage was not required. That of the master was sufficient, but a slave could not be forced to marry against his will.

There were, however, somewhat favorable provisions which made this code seem a little less rigorous. The slaves had to be well fed and the masters could not force them to provide for themselves by working for their own account certain days of the week and slaves could give information against their owners, if not properly fed or clothed. Disabled slaves had to be sent to the hospital. Husbands, wives, and their children under the age of puberty could not be seized and sold separately when belonging to the same master. The code forbade the application of the rack to slaves, under any pretext, on private authority, or mutilation of a limb, under penalty of confiscation of the slave and criminal prosecution of the master. The master was allowed, however, to have his slave put in irons and whipped with rods or ropes. The code commanded officers or justices to prosecute masters and overseers who should kill or mutilate slaves, and to punish the master according to the atrocity of the circumstance.

Other provisions were still more favorable. The slaves had to be instructed in the Catholic religion. Slaves appointed by their masters as tutors to their children were held set free. Moreover, manumitted slaves enjoyed the same rights, privileges and immunities that were enjoyed by those born free. "It is our pleasure," reads the document, "that their merit in having acquired their freedom shall produce in their favor, not only with regard to their persons, but also to their property, the same effects that our other subjects derive from the happy circumstance of their having been born free."¹³

From the first appearance of the *gens de couleur* in the colony of Louisiana dates the class, the *gens de couleur*

¹³ Code Noir.

libres. The record of the legal tangles which resulted from the attempts to define this race in Louisiana is most interesting. Up to 1671, all Creoles, Mulattoes, free Negroes, etc., paid a capitulation tax. In February 12 of that year, M. de Baas, Governor-General of Martinique, issued an order exempting the Creoles. Those Mulattoes who were also designated as Creoles claimed the same exemption and resisted paying the tax. M. Patoulet, Intendent, rendered a decision in 1683 and said: "The Mulattoes and free Negroes claimed to be exempt from the capitulation tax: I have made them pay without difficulty. I decide that those Mulattoes born in vice should not receive the exemption, and that for the free Negro, the master could give him freedom but could not give him the exemption that attaches to the whites originally from France."¹⁴ The next year, the Mulattoes refused to pay, and the successor of Minister Patoulet, M. Michel Begou, asked for a law to compel them.¹⁵ In 1696, an agreement was reached exempting the Mulattoes and Creoles, leaving only the free black subject to the tax.¹⁶ But in 1712, a M. Robert, in a decision on a subject, again included the Mulattoes, without, however, mentioning the Creoles, so that only the free Negroes and Mulattoes paid.¹⁷ Thus they were held as a class apart. A free Negro woman, Magdelaine Debern, further contested the matter, and in 1724, in the colony of Louisiana, won a decision exempting free Negroes and Mulattoes, and again placing them on the same footing with the Creole. The Creoles had a decided advantage, however, because through the favor of those in authority, there was always a disposition to exalt them.¹⁸

It is in the definition of the word Creole that another

¹⁴ Lebeau, *De la condition des gens de couleur libres sous l'ancien régime*, p. 49.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁸ In the treaty of 1803 between the newly acquired territory of Louisiana and the government of the United States, they and all mixed bloods were granted full citizenship.

great difficulty arises. The native white Louisianian will tell you that a Creole is a white man, whose ancestors contain some French or Spanish blood in their veins. But he will be disputed by others, who will gravely tell you that Creoles are to be found only in the lower Delta lands of the state, that there are no Creoles north of New Orleans; and will raise their hands in horror at the idea of being confused with the "Cajans," the descendants of those Nova Scotians whom Longfellow immortalized in *Evangeline*. Sifting down the mass of conflicting definitions, it appears that to a Caucasian, a Creole is a native of the lower parishes of Louisiana, in whose veins some traces of Spanish, West Indian or French blood runs.¹⁹ The Caucasian will shudder with horror at the idea of including a person of color in the definition, and the person of color will retort with his definition that a Creole is a native of Louisiana, in whose blood runs mixed strains of everything un-American, with the African strain slightly apparent. The true Creole is like the famous gumbo of the state, a little bit of everything, making a whole, delightfully flavored, quite distinctive, and wholly unique.

From 1724 to the present time, frequent discussions as to the proper name by which to designate this very important portion of the population of Louisiana waged more or less acrimoniously.²⁰ It was this Creole element who in 1763 obtained a decision from Louis XV that all mixed bloods who could claim descent from an Indian ancestor in addition to a white outranked those mixed bloods who had only white and African ancestors.²¹ In Jamaica, in 1733, there was passed a law that every person who could show that he was three degrees removed from a Negro ancestor should be regarded as belonging to the white race, and could sit as a member of the Jamaica Assembly.²² In

¹⁹ Most writers of our day adhere to this definition. See Grace King, "New Orleans, etc.,," and Gayarré, "History of Louisiana."

²⁰ Lebeau, *De la condition des gens de couleur libres sous l'ancien régime*, *passim*.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 60.

Barbadoes, any person who had a white ancestor could vote. These laws were quoted in Louisiana and influenced legislation there.²³

Gov. Perier succeeded Bienville as Governor of Louisiana. His task was not a light one; the colony staggered under "terror of attack from the Indians, sudden alarms, false hopes, anxious suspense, militia levies, colonial paper, instead of good money, industrial stagnation, the care of homeless refugees, and worst of all, the restiveness of the slaves. The bad effects of slave-holding began to show themselves." Many of the slaves had been taken in war, and were fierce and implacable. Some were of that fiercest of African tribes, the Banbaras. A friendliness, born of common hatred and despair, began to show itself between the colored people and the fierce Choctaw Indians surrounding the colony, when Gov. Perier planned a master-stroke of diplomacy. Just above New Orleans lived a small tribe of Indians, the Chouchas, who, not particularly harmful in themselves, had succeeded in inspiring the nervous inhabitants of the city with abject fear. Perier armed a band of slaves in 1729 and sent them to the Chouchas with in-

²² Laws of Jamaica.

²³ Litigation on the subject of the definition of the free person of color reached its climax in the year of our Lord, 1909, when Judge Frank D. Chretien defined the word Negro as differentiated from person of color as used in Louisiana. The case, as it was argued in court, was briefly this. It was charged that one Treadway, a white man, was living in illegal relations with an octoroon, Josephine Lightell. The District Attorney claimed that any one having a trace of African blood in his veins, however slight, should be classed as a Negro. Counsel for the defence had taken the position that Josephine Lightell had so little Negro blood in her veins that she could not be classed as one. Judge Chretien held in his ruling that local opinion, custom and sentiment had previously agreed in holding that the black, and not the white blood settled the ethnological status of each person and that an octoroon, no less than a quadroon and a mulatto, had been considered a Negro. But he held that if the Caucasian wished to be considered the superior race, and that if his blood be considered the superior element in the infusion, then the Caucasian and not the Negro blood must determine the status of a person. The case went to the Supreme Court of Louisiana on an appeal from the decision of Judge Chretien who held that a mulatto is not a Negro in legal parlance. The Supreme Court in a decision handed down April 25, 1910, sustained the view of Judge Chretien. This decision was an interpretation of an act of 1908 which set forth a definition of the word Negro.—See *State vs. Treadway*, 126 Louisiana, 300.

structions to exterminate the tribe. They did their work with an ease and dispatch that should have been a warning to their white masters. In reporting the success of his plan Perier said: "The Negroes executed their mission with as much promptitude as secrecy. This lesson taught them by our Negroes, kept in check all the nations higher up the river."²⁴ Thus, by one stroke the wily Governor had intimidated the tribes of Indians, allayed the nervous fears of New Orleans, and effected a state of hostility between the Indians and the Africans, who were beginning to be entirely too friendly with each other. Then Perier used the slaves to make the entrenchments about the city. Thus we have the first instance of the arming of the Negro in Louisiana for the defense of the colony. On the 15th of January, 1730, Gov. Perier sent a boat containing twenty white men and six Africans to carry ammunition to the Illinois settlement up the Mississippi river whence tales of massacre and cruelty by the Indians filtered down.²⁵

The arming of the slaves in defense of the whites gave impetus to the struggle for their own freedom. In the massacre of the French by the Natchez, at the village of that name, over three hundred women and slaves were kept as prisoners, and in January of the same year which witnessed the massacre of the Chouchas, the French surprised the Natchez Indians with the intention of recovering their women and slaves, and avenging the death of their comrades. Some of the Africans who had been promised their freedom if they allied themselves with the Natchez Indians, fought against their erstwhile masters, others were loyal, and helped the French. The battle became an issue, as it were, between the slaves. Over one hundred of them were recovered from the Indians.²⁶

The first tribute we have paid to the black man as a soldier in Louisiana was paid by Gov. Perier in this war in his dispatch to the French government. "Fifteen negroes,"

²⁴ Gayarré, "History of Louisiana," I, 444, 448.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 365, 442, 454.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 448.

he wrote, "in whose hands we had put weapons, performed prodigies of valor. If the blacks did not cost so much, and if their labors were not so necessary to the colony, it would be better to turn them into soldiers, and to dismiss those we have, who are so bad and so cowardly that they seem to have been manufactured purposely for this colony."²⁷

But the tiger had tasted blood. Perier's cruel logic was reactionary. Since he had used blacks to murder Indians in order to make bad blood between the races, the Indians retaliated by using blacks to murder white men. In August of that same fateful year, the Chickasaws, who had given asylum to the despoiled Natchez in order to curb the encroachments of the white men, stirred the black slaves to revolt. We have noted before the prevalence of the Banbara Negroes in the colony. It was they who planned the rebellion. Their plan was, after having butchered the whites, to establish a Banbara colony, keeping as slaves for themselves all blacks not of their nation. The conspiracy was discovered by the hints of a woman in the revolt before it had time to ripen, and the head of the revolt, a powerful black named Samba with eight of his confederates was broken on the wheel, and the woman hanged.²⁸

Gov. Perier's administration did not lack interest. The next year, in 1731, we find him still struggling with his old enemies, the Natchez. His dispatches mention that a crew under one De Coulanges, with Indians and free blacks had been massacred by the Indians. One dispatch has the greatest interest for us, because of the expression "free blacks"²⁹ used. Here is one of the great mysteries of the person of color in Louisiana. Whence the free black? We are told explicitly that up to this time all Negroes imported into Louisiana were slaves from Africa, for the West Indian migration did not occur until a half century later. This dispatch from Gov. Perier recalls articles in the Black Code of 1724, where explicit directions are given for the disposition of the

²⁷ Gayarré, "History of Louisiana," I, 435.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 440.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 444.

children of free blacks. In the regulations of police under the governorship of the Marquis of Vandreuil, 1750, there is an article regulating the attitude of free Negroes and Negresses toward slaves. Here is the very beginning of that aristocracy of freedom so fiercely and jealously guarded until this day, a free person of color being set as far above his slave fellows as the white man sets himself above the person of color. Three explanations for this aristocracy seem highly probable: Some slaves might have been freed by their masters because of valor on the battlefield, others by buying their freedom in terms of money, and not a few slave women by their owners because of their personal attractions. It makes little difference in this story which of the three or whether all of the three were contributors to the rise of this new class. It existed as early as 1724, twelve years after the first recorded slave importation. It was in 1766 that some Acadians, complaining of their treatment to the Governor Ulloa, represented that Negroes were freemen while they were slaves.

Bienville returned to the colony as its governor in 1733, after an absence of eight years, and it is recorded that in 1735, when he reviewed his troops near Mobile while making preparations for an Indian war, he found that his army from New Orleans consisted of five hundred and forty-four white men, excluding the officers, and forty-five Negroes commanded by free blacks.³⁰ Here we note free black officers of Negro troops in 1735. If not actually the first regular Negro troops to appear in what is now the United States, they were certainly the first to be commanded by Negro officers.

The engagement with the Choctaw Indians was not altogether successful for the French. Disaster succeeded disaster, and the day closed with the French army deeply humiliated, and making a retreat as dignified as possible under the circumstances. A number of the French officers, as Gayarré tells us, stood under the shade of a gigantic oak discussing the defeat, and with them Simon, a free black, the

³⁰ Dumont, "Memoires Historiques sur la Louisiane," 225, 226.

commander of the troop of Negroes. He was deeply vexed because his troops had not stood fire, and expressed himself with so much freedom and disgust, that the French officers kept bantering him without mercy at the timidity of his soldiers, soothing their own wounded pride by laughing at his mortification. Stung to the heart, Simon finally exclaimed wrathfully, "A Negro is as brave as anybody and I will show it to you." Seizing a rope which was dangling from one of the tents, he rushed headlong toward one of the horses which were quietly slaking their thirst under the protection of the Indian muskets. To reach a white mare, to jump on her back with the agility of a tiger, and to twist around her head and mouth the rope with which to control her, was the affair of an instant. But that instant was enough for the apparently sleeping Indian village to show itself awake, and to flash forth into a hail of bullets. Away dashed Simon toward the Indian village, and back to the French camp where he arrived safe amid the cheering acclamations of the troops, and without having received a wound from the shots of the enemy.³¹ This feat silenced at

³¹ Another interesting story is related by Dumont, a historian of Louisiana, who published a work in 1753. The colony was then under the administration of Gov. Kerlerec, whose opinion of colonial courage was not very high. The colony was without an executioner, and no white man could be found who would be willing to accept the office. It was decided finally by the council to force it upon a Negro blacksmith belonging to the Company of the Indies, named Jeannot, renowned for his nerve and strength. He was summoned and told that he was to be appointed executioner and made a free man at the same time. The stalwart fellow started back in anguish and horror, "What! cut off the heads of people who have never done me any harm?" He prayed, he wept, but saw at last that there was no escape from the inflexible will of his masters. "Very well," he said, rising from his knees, "wait a moment." He ran to his cabin, seized a hatchet with his left hand, laid his right hand on a block of wood and cut it off. Returning, without a word he exhibited the bloody stump to the gentlemen of the council. With one cry, it is said, they sprang to his relief, and his freedom was given him.—Dumont, "Mémoires Historiques sur la Louisiane," 244, 246.

The story is also told by Grace King of one slave, an excellent cook, who had once served a French governor. When, in one of her periodic transitions from one government to another, Louisiana became the property of Spain, the "Cruel" O'Reilly was made governor of the colony. He was execrated as were all things sent by Spain or pertaining to Spanish rule. However, having

once the jests of the French officers, of which Simon thought himself the victim.³²

The beginning of the Revolutionary war in 1776 found Louisiana a Spanish province and the natives of the colony beginning to tolerate and even to like their erstwhile hated Spanish masters. Don Bernardo de Galvez was governor of the colony. His administration has a peculiar interest to us, because it was during his rule that the Court of Madrid, fully alive to the policy of extending the agriculture of Louisiana, issued a decree permitting the introduction of Negroes into Louisiana by French vessels, from whatever ports they might come.³³ This was the beginning of the rapid migration from the West Indian islands.

While Andrew Jackson was still a child, Louisiana had a deliverer from the British in the person of this brave Gov. Galvez. The strategical importance of the Mississippi River and of New Orleans was at once apparent to the British commanders, and Louisiana, being neutral territory, offered a most fascinating field of operation. Galvez, in July, 1777, had secured declaration of neutrality from the 25,000 or more Creeks, Choctaws and Chickasaws, but even this did not seem to satisfy the combatants. New Orleans was at the mercy of first the American troops and then the British. The mediation of Spain between France and England having been rejected in the courts of Europe, Spain decided to join France in the struggle against Great Britain. So on May 8, 1779, Spain formally declared war against Great Britain, and on July 8 authorized all Spanish subjects in America to take their share in the hostilities against the English. No news could be more welcome to the dashing young Galvez, to whom a policy of neutrality was decidedly distasteful. He decided to forestall the attack on New

heard of the fame of the Negro cook, he sent for him. "You belong now," said he, "to the king of Spain, and until you are sold, I shall take you into my service." "Do not dare it;" answered the slave, "you killed my master, and I would poison you." O'Reilly dismissed him unpunished.—Gayarré, "History of Louisiana," II, 344.

³² Gayarré, "History of Louisiana," I, 480.

³³ *Ibid.*, III, 108.

Orleans, which he had learned was to be made by the British, by attacking first, and on August 26 gathered his little army together. From New Orleans, as Gayarré tells, were 170 veteran soldiers, 330 recruits, 20 carabiniers, 60 militiamen, and 80 free blacks and mulattoes. On the way up the river, they were reinforced by 600 men from the coast of "every condition and color," besides 160 Indians.³⁴

On the march, the colored men and Indians were ordered to keep ahead of the main body of troops, at a distance of about three quarters of a mile, and closely to reconnoitre the woods. In capturing the two forts of Baton Rouge and Natchez, which were held by the British, Galvez found a considerable number of Negro slaves who had been armed by the British. Many of these he set free. In his dispatch to his government at Madrid, Galvez reports that the companies of free blacks and mulattoes, who had been employed in all the false attacks, and who, as scouts and skirmishers, had proved exceedingly useful, behaved on all occasions with as much valor and generosity as the white soldiers.³⁵ But not alone were the exploits of Galvez's little army celebrated in history. Poetry added her laurel wreath to its crown. Julien Poydras de Lalande, known to all Louisianians as Poydras, celebrated the victory in a poem, "The God of the Mississippi," wherein the brave deeds of the army, white and colored, are hailed in French verse, lame and halting, it may be in places, but impartial in its tribute.

The close of the Revolutionary war found the colony partially paralyzed as to industry. During the Spanish domination the indigo industry declined, tobacco was difficult to raise, and the production of cotton was not then profitable. Sugar raising was the only other industry to which they could turn. In 1751 the Jesuit fathers had received their first seed, or rather layers, from Santo Domingo and from that time sugar-cane had been grown with more or less success. But it was a strictly local industry. The Louisianians were poor sugar-makers. The stuff was badly

³⁴ Gayarré, "History of Louisiana," III, 108.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, III, 126-132.

granulated and very moist, and when in 1765 an effort was made to export some of the sugar to France, it was so wet that half of the cargo leaked out of the ship before it could make port. It was just at this psychological moment, in 1791 to 1794, when the planters of the lower Delta saw ruin staring them in the face, that there came to the rescue of the colony a man of color, one of the refugees from Santo Domingo, where the blacks had risen in 1791. From the failure of this abortive attempt to emulate the spirit of the white man, refugees flew in every direction, and Louisiana welcomed them, if not exactly with open arms, at least with more indifference than other colonies. And these black refugees were her saviors. For they had been prosperous sugar-makers, and the efforts to make marketable sugar in Louisiana, which had ceased for nearly twenty-five years, were revived. Two Spaniards, Mendez and Solis, erected on the outskirts of New Orleans, the one a distillery, the other a battery of sugar-kettles, and manufactured rum and syrup. Still, the efforts were not entirely successful, until Etienne de Boré appeared. Face to face with ruin because of the failure of the indigo crop, he staked his all on the granulation of sugar. He enlisted the services of these successful Santo Dominicans, and went to work. In all American history there can be fewer scenes more dramatic than the one described by careful historians of Louisiana, the day when the final test was made and there was passed around the electrical word, "It granulates!"³⁶

That year de Boré marketed \$12,000 worth of sugar or super. The agriculture of the Delta was revolutionized; seven years afterwards New Orleans marketed 2,000,000 gallons of rum, 250,000 gallons of molasses, and 5,000,000 pounds of sugar. It was the beginning of the commercial importance of one of the most progressive cities in the country. Imagination refuses to picture what would have been the case but for the refugees from San Domingo.

But the same revolution which gave to Louisiana its prestige to the commercial world, almost starved the prov-

³⁶ Gayarré, "History of Louisiana," III, 348.

ince to death. In the year 1791, the trade, which had flourished briskly between Santo Domingo and New Orleans, was closed because of the uprising, and but for Philadelphia, famine would have decimated the city. 1,000 barrels of flour were sent in haste to the starving city by the good Quakers of Philadelphia. The members of the Cabildo, the local council, prohibited the introduction of people of color from Santo Domingo, fearing the dangerous ideas of the brotherhood of man. But it was too late. The news of the success of the slaves in Santo Domingo, and the success of the French Revolution, says Gayarré, had penetrated into the most remote cabins of Louisiana, and in April, 1795, on the plantation of the same Poydras who had sung the glory of the army of Galvez, a conspiracy was formed for a general uprising of the slaves throughout the parish of Pointe Coupée. The leaders were three white men. The conspiracy failed because one of the leaders was incensed at his advice not being heeded and through his wife the authorities were notified. A struggle ensued, and the conspiracy was strangled in its infancy by the trial and execution of the slaves most concerned in the insurrection. The three white men were exiled from the colony.³⁷ This finally ended the importation of slaves from the West Indies.

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³⁷ Gayarré, "History of Louisiana," III, 354.