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Stewart R. King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig: Free People of Color in Pre-Revolutionary Saint Domingue*. Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2001. xxvi + 328 pp. Maps, tables, notes, bibliography, and index. \$45.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-8203-2233-4.

Review by William S. Cormack, University of Guelph.

The revolution in Saint Domingue has become a subject of increasing interest among both colonial specialists and historians of eighteenth-century France. Much attention has focused on the origins and results of the great slave revolt of 1791, but all studies acknowledge the significance of free people of color to developments in the colony. This group included not only freed slaves but also property owning inhabitants of Saint Domingue several generations removed from a slave progenitor. Free colored demands for civil equality with whites shaped much of the debate on the French colonies in the National Assembly, and many leaders of the slave revolt were in fact free blacks and mulattos — Toussaint Louverture is the most famous but far from the only example. Moreover, historians have recognized the crucial role that this group played in pre-revolutionary Saint Domingue as an intermediate class between the mass of black slaves and the minority of white planters.

Despite their importance, however, there has not been a modern social history of the free people of color in eighteenth-century Saint Domingue. This elegant study by Stewart R. King fills the gap. Specifically, the book examines the most successful free people of color in the colony. King divides these into two distinct groups: the planter elite and the military leadership group. Through a detailed examination of these two groups and the differences between their social and economic strategies, King reveals divisions within the free colored population and refutes old claims that it represented a homogeneous racial or economic class. He demonstrates the substantial free colored contributions to the colony's economy and its military structures and analyzes the complex relationship of free people of color to the rest of colonial society.

The book's first four chapters provide background and a good overview of pre-revolutionary Saint Domingue. Chapter 1 addresses the nature and use of King's principal sources, which come from the notarial record. In eighteenth-century France and its overseas empire, notaries assured that documents such as contracts, wills, and bequests were legally binding. The sample for this study includes the registers of eight notaries from six parishes in the north and west of Saint Domingue, which provide a complete series of records from 1776 to 1789. Although the cost of executing a notarial act was significant, King argues that free people of color were enthusiastic users of the system because they wanted to guarantee the security of their possessions in the face of increasing racial discrimination and because they wanted to enhance the social value of their property. These documents supply valuable evidence of economic behavior, social outlook, and family practices.

Chapter 2 gives the geographical context for the six parishes examined. It explores the variation in the colony between urban and rural areas and between the fertile plains where sugar plantations were established and the mountainous regions where coffee was grown. Chapter 3 provides a demographic analysis revealing how the free colored population was rising in the eighteenth century, so that by the eve of revolution people of color comprised almost one half the total free population of Saint Domingue.

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King attributes this growth partly to high fertility rates, which reflected that gender ratios among people of color were more even than they were among whites, and partly to low mortality rates resulting from native-born people of color being more disease resistant than white immigrants. Chapter 4 examines free coloreds in the colonial armed forces, including not only regular military forces and expeditionary corps raised in Saint Domingue but also the militia and the *maréchaussée* or mounted police. People of color sought to use a model of martial patriotism to enhance their status with whites, although it was the agents of metropolitan government rather than colonial whites who valued such contributions. Indeed, given white colonists' antipathy for military service of all kinds, free colored troops provided the internal security necessary for a colony based on slavery.

If free people of color were crucial to the colony's defense, they were also important supporters of the colonial system. The second section of the book examines free colored participation in Saint Domingue's economy and society. By the 1780s free people of color owned something like 30 per cent of the colony's slaves. After using secondary studies by Debien, Geggus, and Trouillot to establish white slaveholding patterns, King then uses notarial acts as evidence for the significantly different slaveholding practices of free coloreds. Unlike whites, free people of color owned mostly *bossale*, or African-born, slaves and valued these just as highly as creole slaves. King suggests that this reflected the survival of African cultural attitudes that distinguished between creoles as "domestic slaves," who had non-economic social value, and *bossales* as "trade slaves," who could be more easily exploited for financial gain. The survival of such attitudes, King claims, also explains the higher proportion of female slaves owned by free people of color. Colored owners also were more willing than whites to free creole slaves, who could become part of a network of pseudo-kin, but King denies the existence of racial solidarity between colored owners and their slaves.

Just as there was a net flow of colonial capital in the form of slaves from whites to people of color during the eighteenth century, so too was land moving into free colored hands. For individual families this process began typically with a donation of land (and slaves) from a white man to a colored mistress or to colored children. Often such land was in remote, mountainous areas appropriate for coffee growing. As well connected natives, free people of color were better positioned to succeed in the coffee boom following the Seven Years' War than were recent white immigrants (if this explains the success of colored coffee planters, King suggests that it also explains the resentment of poor whites which drove discriminatory legislation in the 1760s, 1770s and 1780s). People of color also acquired land through purchase and through government concessions, and what distinguished their landholding practices from those of whites was the importance they placed on the non-economic value of land. This theme is developed further in a chapter on entrepreneurship which emphasizes that, while white colonists sought only quick profits in Saint Domingue, free people of color saw the colony as their home and managed their property for the long-term. King argues that this attitude explains why colored entrepreneurs were not aggressive consumers of credit, a practice that lay behind the incessant conflict between white planters and merchants. Yet free people of color were successful as managers of rural property and as urban entrepreneurs. A varying degree of entrepreneurial aggressiveness is a major factor in King's distinction between the two leadership groups.

The final two chapters in this section address social status and behavior. In Saint Domingue status was connected to racial identity. Even before 1789, wealthy lighter-skinned people of color like Julien Raimond asked the royal government to consider *quarterons* to be legally white. King examines the ways in which free people of color manipulated non-economic markers of social status, including titles, names, displays of material wealth, and religious piety, to their advantage. Despite contemporaries' assertion of pseudo-scientific racial types, people could change racial categories: the racial promotion of an individual from "free black" to "mulatto" reflected social promotion. King also discusses free colored family relationships and social advancement, emphasizing the autonomy of free colored women and the strong family ties that transcended color and status. Beyond contemporary and modern stereotypes, King shows that many relationships between white men and colored women were stable and long lasting,

with children gaining freedom and inheriting property. Moreover *ménagères*, female companions and professional managers for white planters, enjoyed independent authority and freedom to take part in economic life.

In the book's third section King fully develops his central arguments regarding the different group strategies for economic and social advancement, and he defines the distinctions between the planter elite and the military leadership group. More than different sources of wealth, these distinctions involved contrasting *mentalités* and differing relationships to whites and to other free people of color. Most members of the planter elite were of mixed African and European ancestry, but what distinguished them from most of the free colored population in Saint Domingue was their wealth. They were principally rural land and slave owners, producing coffee, sugar, or other products for export, and the origin of this wealth was a gift or bequest from a white progenitor. This group maintained close personal and economic contacts with white colonists while keeping its distance from lower-class people of color—representatives like Raimond claimed equal status with whites for the elite, not for all free people of color. Members of the group selected marriage partners who were light-skinned in order to achieve the racial whitening of their offspring. Yet King maintains that the planter elite did not share white attitudes towards capital. Rather than being absentee landlords and speculative capitalists looking for quick profit, the members of this group invested for the long term and managed their plantations personally. Given their conservative emphasis on the non-economic value of land, their concern for family legitimacy and stability, and the fact that they were not aggressively entrepreneurial, King suggests that the free colored planter elite imitated the rural aristocracy in France.

In contrast, the military leadership group had a much more entrepreneurial attitude towards capital and was more willing to take risks for economic gain. According to King this economic strategy should not be seen as that of a transitional middle class aspiring to join the planter elite. Rather King argues that this group possessed an entirely different outlook, which was also revealed in its strategy for social advancement. Attaining rank within the colonial armed forces, primarily as non-commissioned officers in the militia and the *maréchaussée*, gave free men of color significant income and, more importantly, social standing. Beyond the patronage of white officers, these free colored soldiers established networks of military comrades that they used for economic success. Furthermore, members of the military leadership group sought to create networks of free colored pseudo-kin through participation in unrelated persons' family acts and through the manumission of slaves. Pseudo-kin became clients, and social circles became economic circles. King emphasizes that this was indeed a leadership group, rather than an elite, which was integrated with the wider free colored society. Members had close ties to lower-class people of color, and their wealth, if more modest than that of the planter elite, was independent of white donations or connections. Given this integration, King suggests that these military leaders were better placed than the planter elite to lead colored society during the revolution.

King's interpretations regarding these leadership groups and their strategies are cogent and judicious, yet there are elements of speculation in his arguments. If the planter elite's conservatism reflected emulation of the French aristocracy, King does not provide evidence to explain how this emulation developed. Very few people of color had personal experience of French rural society or contact with metropolitan nobility. King suggests that the survival of African cultural attitudes shaped free colored slaveholding practices and efforts to create pseudo-kin networks using manumission. Yet why did these attitudes influence the military leadership group and not the planter elite? This needs to be clarified, since King denies that varying distances from slavery explain the differences between the groups and that the former was a transitional class moving towards becoming the latter. Although this book has relevance to the wider social history of the Caribbean in the eighteenth century—and King does place his study of the free people of color in Saint Domingue in comparative context by referring to Jamaica, Cuba, Spanish Santo Domingo and Brazil—a discussion of the French colonies in the Lesser Antilles is curiously absent. It would be valuable to know if King thinks the situation of free coloreds in Martinique and Guadeloupe was markedly different.

Within Saint Domingue, King justifies his selection of the parishes in the north and west in part because the free people of color in the colony's south province, particularly the Raimond family, are the subject of John Garrigus's Ph.D. thesis, "A Struggle for Respect: The Free Coloreds of Pre-Revolutionary Saint Domingue, 1760-1769," (Johns Hopkins University, 1988). Given the positive references to this work throughout the book, the University of Georgia Press should be encouraged to publish Garrigus's dissertation as a companion piece to King's study. Although the revolution is beyond the book's scope, King suggests intriguing directions for further research, including the possible connections between colonial military personnel and the leadership of revolutionary and Haitian armies. On its own terms, however, this is an important book based on careful research. It should be of great interest to all students of the revolution in Saint Domingue as well as to historians of the French colonies.

William S. Cormack  
University of Guelph  
[wcormack@uoguelph.ca](mailto:wcormack@uoguelph.ca)

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