

ENSLAVED WOMEN AND MOTHERHOOD: SAINT DOMINGUE ON THE EVE OF
THE HAITIAN REVOLUTION

By

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To my mother, Renea, a true survivor

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Called the “Pearl of the Antilles,” Saint Domingue in the years leading up to the Haitian Revolution was the world’s leading exporter of sugar and coffee. However, like most in the Caribbean, Saint Domingue slaves were unable to sustain their own population, exhibiting a steady natural rate of decrease due to either high mortality or low natality. It is the latter of these two causes, low fertility, which this thesis investigates. Surveying eighteen Saint Domingue plantation inventories (13 coffee plantations and 5 sugar plantations), with a total of more than 2,000 slaves, from the period 1778-1792, the central purpose of this thesis is to distinguish slave mothers from those who did not give birth and compare their levels of reproductive success across the axes of croptype and ethnicity. Four major facets of fertility are considered: 1) fertility indexes 2) birth spacing 3) onset, peak, and duration of fecundity 4) distribution of mothers across age bands. An examination of slave demographics is first pursued in this paper at the plantation level. The plantation groups are then compiled into larger population samples distinguished by ethnicity and plantation type. The results of this study clearly indicate how reproductive success varied across the slave population and prompt a discussion of the potential influences behind these fertility trends. Offering a

quantitative portrait of slave motherhood at the most critical moment in the colony's history, this thesis makes a modest contribution to the relatively undeveloped field of slave demography in Saint Domingue.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

French Saint Domingue on the eve of the Haitian Revolution had the third largest slave population in the Americas, totaling almost 500,000, and the region's leading export economy.¹ However, this substantial slave population, like most in the Americas, had a negative natural growth rate and therefore could not sustain itself without recourse to the Atlantic slave trade.² Historians remain divided in their explanation of this widespread phenomenon and tend to stress either high mortality or low natality as the principal cause. Apparently low birth rates might, in fact, have been due to under-reporting of infant mortality, and this remains an intractable problem. Birth rates were also affected (negatively) by the plantations' uneven sex ratios and (usually positively) by slave populations' skewed age distributions, as well as by the fecundity of enslaved women and the spacing of their children's births. These issues of fertility are the focus of this demographic investigation, but it should be understood that the data discussed were also shaped to an uncertain degree by infant mortality. The purpose of this paper is to shed light on enslaved women's experience of child-bearing in the Caribbean's most important colony. Compared to the slave societies of the United States and the British Caribbean, there has been very little research into the slave demography of Saint Domingue; much remains to be learned.³ In addition, by prioritizing the female sex and

¹ Bernard Moitt, ed., *Sugar, Slavery, and Society: Perspectives in the Caribbean, India, the Mascarenes, and the United States* (Gainesville, FL: The University Press of Florida, 2004), 57.

² For a unique exception to the trend of negative population growth rate see: Stuart B. Schwartz, "The Plantations of St. Benedict: The Benedictine Sugar Mills of Colonial Brazil," *The Americas* 39, no. 1 (July, 1982), 1-22. Schwartz suggests that the fostering of stable marital and familial unions on Benedictine *engenhos* (sugar mills) allowed for slightly positive levels of natural increase on some Brazilian sugar estates owned by individual monasteries in the second half of the eighteenth century (see pages 18-19).

³ The most notable examples of demographic analysis on Saint Domingue are: David Geggus' "Sugar and Coffee Cultivation in Saint Domingue and the Shaping of the Slave Labor Force" in Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan, eds, *Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas*

reproduction this study attempts to contribute to a revisionist history of slave societies wherein the slave women's reality becomes more visible.⁴

This thesis will be focused on identifying slave mothers and comparing them to slave women who did not give birth. Eighteenth-century Saint Domingue's slave population was extremely diverse. By the 1780s, roughly one-third of adult slave women were "creoles," locally born and raised in slavery; close to two-thirds had been transported from Africa and represented dozens of different cultures. Most African and creole women worked as field slaves, but some were house servants, and a few were nurses. Creole slaves were higher up on the occupational hierarchy, often gaining positions with particular privileges to which other slaves were not privy. A small minority of creoles of mixed racial descent, identified as "mulattos," benefited from kinship with white owners or overseers. Creole slaves were characteristically healthier than African slaves who had endured the middle passage and had to adapt to an unfamiliar disease environment. Historians have suggested that the creole women's occupational and epidemiological advantages, and their integration since birth into the local culture, made them more likely than their African counterparts to become mothers.⁵ Therefore, one of the main axes of this exploration of slave fertility will be a comparison of African and creole women.

(Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993); and most recently, David Geggus' "Saint Domingue on the Eve of the Haitian Revolution," in D. Geggus and N. Fiering, eds, *The World of the Haitian Revolution* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009).

⁴ Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph C. Miller, eds., *Women and Slavery: The Modern Atlantic, Vol.2* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2008), 253-275. Specifically, this study is a response to Claire Robertson and Marsha Robinson's contention that historical "analyses have suffered from the normalization of the male slave and the omission of women slaves," rendering slave women "invisible" in the historiography (See page 273). Also see Chapter 1 of Barbara Bush's *Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650-1838* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990) entitled "The 'Invisible' Black Woman in Caribbean History."

⁵ Michael Craton, *Searching for the Invisible Man: Slaves and Plantation Life in Jamaica* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1978), 94-99.

Close to one-third of Saint Domingue's slaves worked on the large sugar estates of the lowlands; a similar proportion worked on much smaller coffee plantations in the mountainous interior. Coffee and sugar plantations were characterized by differences in terrain, climate, disease environment, and the type and severity of their work regimes. Sugar plantations typically had large labor forces of more than 150 slaves, and were subject to the most rigorous work regime of any plantation system due to the nature of sugar's production.⁶ Coffee plantations generally had a much smaller labor force, about 50 slaves on average, and they made far less physical demands on their workers.⁷ These essential differences in the coffee and sugar slave experience probably affected enslaved women's capacity to reproduce in diverse ways. Therefore, the second essential comparison of this thesis is concerned with the relative fertility of coffee workers and sugar workers.

As reliable birth data are extremely rare for most slave populations, the question of fertility usually has to be approached "retrospectively," through general population counts using a child to woman ratio, or fertility index.⁸ This is true of the limited amount of research conducted on slave fertility in Saint Domingue. Such measures are crude and distorted to an unknown extent by infant mortality. Additionally, they offer no information on the constituent variables of fertility such as spacing between births, the proportion of women who never give birth, and the average age of menarche.⁹ While this study uses the fertility index as its standard tool of analysis, it will also investigate

⁶ The average size of the sugar plantations examined in this study was much larger than this, at 265 slaves.

⁷ The average size of the coffee plantations examined in this study was slightly larger than this, at 65 slaves.

⁸ The best available measurement of fertility is held to be the ratio of children below age 5 to women aged between 15 and 44 (fertility index = (children 0-4 years/ women 15-44 years) x 1000)

⁹ Menarche is the achievement of puberty in a female's life. It signals the onset of fecundity, the initial age at which women possess the ability to reproduce.

further the distribution of births by age group, the average age at which mothers experienced their first birth, and the question of birth spacing. Where sample size permits, I also attempt to measure the importance of occupation and racial intermixture as variables in determining the reproductive success of Saint Domingue slaves.

The primary sources of my study consist of eighteen plantation slave lists from late eighteenth-century Saint Domingue, five from sugar estates and thirteen from coffee plantations, spanning the years 1778 to 1792. Derived from estate inventories drawn up by notaries, owners, and managers, two were manuscript originals (from the University of Florida Library), eleven were photographic duplicates, and the remainder were typescript transcriptions made by different scholars. These inventories describe a total of 2,172 slaves. Organized by gender and age, they typically distinguish nègres (slave men), négresses (slave women), négrittes (slave girls), and négrillons (slave boys). For the purposes of this study, and in most of the documents, children were defined as those under fifteen years of age. In addition to gender and age, the lists usually provided details on ethnic identity, occupation, value, and sometimes notes about the slave's health or other characteristics. Most importantly, all of these lists record the identity of the mothers of at least the youngest children, and sometimes of young adults as well. These data form the basis of this thesis. Although they do not reveal the entire population of mothers on a plantation, they allow us to identify the minimal proportion of women who gave birth and to examine the relative incidence of motherhood in different sectors of the enslaved population.

Though the slave inventories originate directly from a primary source, the data they contain are not always straightforward. Any ambiguity or missing data within the

document require interpretation by the researcher, who is often forced to make difficult decisions. Such situations became problematic during my research on only two occasions: when the same name was used for multiple women and there was a lack of further specification, or when a small number of mothers were not identified by their ethnic identity. In the first instance it was necessary to use an educated guess; in the second instance mothers of unknown ethnicity were included only in the comparisons between plantation types. The age at which women gave birth had to be estimated by subtracting children's ages from those of their mothers. As the ages colonists assigned to slaves, particularly those born in Africa, were only approximate, the procedure has obvious flaws. A few slave mothers are recorded as giving birth at implausibly young or old ages. However, there is no way to avoid these complications when relying on original documents, the historian's bread and butter. One can only work to minimize the effect of outliers on the outcome by having a large sample size and allowing the data to speak for themselves. Another drawback of these inventories is their failure to list all a woman's children, whether or not they were living. Therefore, it should be understood that the data presented here offer a baseline, or minimum estimate, of fertility rather than a full accounting.

The documents on which I have based my thesis reveal only a snapshot in the history of a handful of plantations. However, the collated demographic results allow us to construct a better picture of slave motherhood and fertility in one of the most materially successful of all slave societies at a critical point in its history. The relationship between reproductive success, work regime, and ethnicity is a subject of broad significance for the early modern Atlantic world, but one that remains little

researched in the case of Saint Domingue. Whether it sheds light on the origins of the great insurrection that would destroy the colony soon after these documents were written, remains to be seen.

CHAPTER 2 THE SLAVE WOMAN'S EXPERIENCE

Sex Ratios

In general, women in Caribbean slave populations were in the minority.¹ Planters placed a premium on men's strength and height, believing it translated into optimal plantation productivity. However, the most crucial attribute of productive labor was unquestionably youth, and therefore the Africans shipped to the Americas were quite young, with the great majority of them between 15 and 30 years of age.²

Gender ratios in the slave trade reflected both planters' demands and the ready supply of Africans on slaving coasts.³ A great number of male criminals and prisoners were sold into slavery in Africa due to the high incidence of inter-territorial warfare and political turmoil. Additionally, African polygamist cultures valued women as wives, concubines, and agricultural laborers.⁴ Therefore, Africans paid proportionately more for women than whites were willing to.⁵ A combination of African supply and American demand caused twice as many males as females to cross the Atlantic.⁶ About one-third of all slave imports to the French West Indies were female, and the sex ratio for Africans "fresh off the boat" in Saint Domingue reached as high as 2.01.⁷ However, women

¹ The single exception to this may be some islands of the British West Indies after 1800. See Marietta Morrissey, *Slave Women in the New World: Gender Stratification in the Caribbean* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1989), 42-43.

² *Ibid.*, 35.

³ *Ibid.*, 38; James Walvin, *Questioning Slavery* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 96. These and other scholars argue that supply shaped the sex ratios of slave societies more than demand.

⁴ African polygamy discouraged the sale of women and there was a well-established practice of retaining captured females as wives. Additionally, African societies' conception that field labor was "women's work" made women intrinsically valuable. See Morrissey, *Slave Women*, 36-39.

⁵ Walvin, *Questioning Slavery*, 96.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ David Geggus, "Sugar and Coffee Cultivation in Saint Domingue and the Shaping of the Slave Labor Force" in Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan, eds, *Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 79; Morrissey, *Slave Women*, 35.

survived the transatlantic trip in greater numbers than men and, in general, were healthier throughout their lifetime.⁸

By the late eighteenth century the sex ratio of Saint Domingue slaves had somewhat leveled off. Male slaves died more quickly than females, and creoles were born in approximately equal numbers of males and females. Creole slaves in Saint Domingue had a sex ratio of about .95, and African sex ratios fell between 1.33 and 1.60.⁹ Alongside the relatively low fertility levels of African women, such disproportional sex ratios amongst new Africans made for a dreadfully low birthrate, one that was much too low to offset Africans' soaring death rate in the colony.¹⁰ Since Africans always formed the majority of slaves in Saint Domingue, natural growth rates were negative.

Recent scholarship indicates that during the last few decades leading up to the revolution, the average sex ratio on sugar plantations was about 1.15, and coffee displayed a slightly higher sex ratio of 1.20.¹¹ The results of this study present slightly higher figures than this as they include solely adults; the overall adult sex ratio for coffee plantations was found to be 1.84, while sugar plantations exhibited a lower adult sex ratio of 1.38.¹² The gap between sex ratios on coffee and sugar plantations is consistent – on Saint Domingue sugar plantations' sex ratios were more balanced, if only slightly, than those of coffee plantations. An explanation for this trend is found in the fact that highland coffee plantations were several decades younger than most sugar estates, and, therefore, contained a larger percentage of young Africans, among whom males

⁸ Geggus, "Sugar and Coffee," 89.

⁹ Ibid., 79. This dramatic difference in sex ratio between Africans who had experienced "seasoning" and those who hadn't implies an obviously high death rate for newly imported African males.

¹⁰ Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1974), 27.

¹¹ Geggus, "Sugar and Coffee," 79.

¹² This is an average, not cumulative, sex ratio which is calculated by the summation of individual plantations' sex ratios.

predominated. In contrast, older sugar plantations in the north had experienced a greater degree of creolization.¹³ The creolization of a slave community points to its gradual feminization and a leveling out of its initially skewed gender ratio.¹⁴ Therefore, the more even sex ratio of sugar plantations reflects the greater degree of creolization within their slave populations.

Occupation, Status, Color, and Gender Relations

By the 1780s, most of the agricultural work on Saint Domingue plantations was performed by slave women who had few pathways of advancement in its occupational hierarchy. Only about 5% of “specialist” positions on sugar or coffee plantations were occupied by females.¹⁵ Rather, most non-field positions of power and status belonged to males. Men were eight times as likely to escape the backbreaking toil of field work to a position of autonomy.¹⁶ The jobs of skilled laborers (sugar boiler and furnace man¹⁷), artisans (coopers¹⁸, carpenters, masons, and wheelwrights¹⁹), carters, coachmen, and slave drivers were invariably assigned to slave men.²⁰ The only non-field positions available to slave women, other than midwifery and nursing, were domestic, for instance washerwoman, seamstress, or housekeeper.²¹ Such roles did not offer female slaves

¹³ Creolization of a population refers to a gradual growth in the percentage of locally born people within a community. It can also refer to the fusion of foreign and local cultural elements to create a new unique kind of cultural identity. The latter often occurs simultaneously with the former. This is certainly the case in late eighteenth-century Saint Domingue.

¹⁴ Morrissey, *Slave Women*, 34.

¹⁵ Geggus, “Slave and Free Colored Women in Saint Domingue” in David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine, eds, *More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 262.

¹⁶ Geggus, “Sugar and Coffee,” 84.

¹⁷ These are positions related to the processing of sugar in the plantation factory.

¹⁸ A cooper is a person who makes barrels.

¹⁹ A wheelright is a person who builds or repairs wheels.

²⁰ Geggus, “Slave and Free Colored Women,” 260.

²¹ Though some non-field positions for women were not domestic in nature, for example some women tended to livestock or watched over small children, these jobs were regularly given to invalid or elderly

the mobility or independence that males' non-field positions granted. In addition, as Higman's demographic analyses of the British Caribbean have articulated, the opportunity to become a domestic slave depended on the size of the plantation as well, as "relatively few (only about 10%) of the slaves living on sugar estates worked as domestics... compared to 20% on coffee, cotton, cocoa, or other small, minor stable plantations."²² While domestic servitude was regarded by both master and slave as an improvement to field work, these women's close proximity to their white owners incited a great deal of anxiety as they were under constant watch and continuously experienced domestic abuse.²³ As one scholar aptly notes, "white homes posed particular dangers for slave women" such women were often the victims of not only "malicious penalties, capricious pains, and open violence" issued by white women, but also "predatory sexual approaches of white men in and around the household."²⁴

A plantation's occupational hierarchy marked significant degrees of social differentiation within the slave community. The elite echelons of slave society were comprised of men and creoles while Africans and women dominated the lowest social classes.²⁵ Creole slaves were preferred for all positions of privilege, particularly ones with close proximity to whites or those that allowed travel off the plantation. The reason for this was mainly because of their mastery of the local language and customs.²⁶ However, creoles also tended to be younger and healthier than their African

women and therefore should not be considered positions of status within the slave occupational hierarchy.

²² B.W. Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean, 1807-1834* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 172-173.

²³ *Ibid.*, 262; Also see Walvin, *Questioning Slavery*, 105: "the surest way of punishing an errant domestic slave was to relegate her to menial work in the fields...."

²⁴ Walvin, *Questioning Slavery*, 105-106.

²⁵ See Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean*, 190-191, Figures 6.2 and 6.3.

²⁶ Geggus, "Sugar and Coffee," 84.

counterparts and were therefore more preferable apprentices to train in artisan or skilled labor professions.²⁷ African women had virtually no opportunity for social mobility and therefore the majority of them worked in the first or second field gangs.²⁸ In general, opportunities for social mobility depended largely on the size of the work force.²⁹ Huge sugar plantations with their factories and complex production processes offered a slew of skilled labor and artisan jobs that coffee plantations did not.³⁰

It is also recognized among historians that, in addition to ethnicity, color had a great deal of influence on who was selected for elite plantation positions. Light skinned creoles were more likely to be selected as artisans and domestics than either dark creoles or Africans. Caribbean planters everywhere made a practice of assigning the children of mixed unions, especially their own, to privileged occupations.³¹ Mulatto slave women in Saint Domingue were six times more likely than black creoles to avoid field labor, and most were employed as domestic servants.³² In several plantation inventories of this study, one can find multiple generations of creole, and especially mulatto, women who were employed in the “Big House.” For example, 26 year old mulâtresse (mulatto woman) and domestique (domestic slave) Bonnefemme of the Peyrac sugar plantation and all three of her young children worked in the plantation

²⁷ Geggus, “Slave and Free Colored Women,” 263.

²⁸ See Richard S. Dunn, “A Tale of Two Plantations: Slave Life at Mesopotamia in Jamaica and Mount Airy in Virginia, 1799 to 1828,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Jan., 1977): 54.

²⁹ Geggus, “Sugar and Coffee,” 84.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.* At the Jamaican plantation of Mesopotamia mulatto slaves were favored by plantation managers. Of the seventeen mulattos on the estate, six were house servants, two were carpenters, one attended the local missionaries, and the rest were too young for employment. See Dunn, “A Tale of Two Plantations,” 54.

³² Geggus, “Slave and Free Colored Women,” 263.

house, yet her older and younger black creole sisters were all field slaves.³³ A preference for light skinned slaves in the plantation's domestic realm was a feature of Caribbean slavery that was not replicated in the United States.³⁴ Planters of the American South "enjoyed being served by blacks –the blacker the better – as well as by light skinned negros."³⁵ Frequently the domestic housekeeper on Caribbean plantations, sometimes called the "ménagère," was the mother of multiple brown babies, likely serving as a live-in mistress to the planter. This most certainly was the case of the 16 year old domestic slave Anne of the Hamelin coffee plantation, the daughter of an aging "ménagère"; as a housekeeper-in-training, she birthed a mulatto baby at the tender of age of 15.

Slave women's sexual relations with whites spanned a wide spectrum extending from occasional instances of violent abuse to long-lasting stable unions or even marriage.³⁶ In any case, it is widely recognized among historians that the relative scarcity of females in Saint Domingue put their sexual favors in high demand.³⁷ Therefore, slave women were exceptionally vulnerable to the predatory attacks of white males.³⁸ Creole and mulatto slaves, as they monopolized positions of domestic servitude, were most likely to engage in relations with white men due to their closer proximity to them in the "Big House." Additionally, African women, though they did occasionally submit to white men's advances, seemed to have maintained a strong

³³ Peyrac. Archives départementales d'Eure et Loire, Chartres. 24 J 145, inventory, 1783. Photocopy.

³⁴ The exception to this was Charleston and New Orleans, where the Caribbean three-caste system never fully disintegrated. See Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 327-328.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Geggus, "Slave and Free Colored Women," 265. Also see Douglas Hall, *In Miserable Slavery: Thomas Thistlewood in Jamaica, 1750-86* (London: Macmillan, 1989).

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Walvin, *Questioning Slavery*, 102.

preference for black males as sexual partners.³⁹ Slave women who participated in sexual liaisons with white men often received “gifts,” such as monetary payment, or were allowed coveted plantation privileges.⁴⁰ For this reason it has been suggested that slave women may have wielded a degree of sexual power over their white male partners. However, the extent of these women’s influence is questionable considering their altogether subservient position in society. Most scholars agree that slave women entered into interracial unions out of both fear that resistance would prompt punishment, and hope that compliance would yield tangible or intangible benefits.⁴¹ The sexual economy of the plantation has been appropriately described by one scholar as “a labyrinth of sexual power which served as a basis not only for social control but also for social development.”⁴² This reality, and the retention of African polygamous practices,⁴³ would contribute to accusations of slave women’s promiscuity throughout the Caribbean. For example, one Jamaican slave owner complained that “the loose conduct” of slave women on his estate led to a mass of stillbirths and miscarriages resulting from that “disease” of “moral depravity.”⁴⁴ Others, of course, linked the slave communities’ negative rate of natural increase to more purposeful attempts at sterility such as contraception and abortion.⁴⁵

³⁹ Geggus, “Slave and Free Colored Women,” 265.

⁴⁰ For example, money and privileges were afforded to the slave Phibbah, the famous creole lover of Jamaican plantation manager Thomas Thistlewood. Again, see Hall’s *In Miserable Slavery*.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 266.

⁴² Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society*, 111.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁴⁴ Campbell, *Women and Slavery, Vol.2*, 36. Here the slave owner, Richard Bright, is referring to the sexually transmitted disease of syphilis.

⁴⁵ Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society*, 139-142. Bush argues that there is sufficient evidence of slave women in the Caribbean using of abortifacients in the form of herbal concoctions to end unwanted pregnancies. She explains that “absence of hard evidence should not be taken as proof that the practice did not exist.” In contrast Kenneth Morgan, though he agrees that many women may have used certain herbs and infusions for contraception purposes, is less willing to acknowledge the practice of abortion amongst slave women. Instead, he insists that “it is doubtful that slave women had significant control over

Nutrition, Work, and Amelioration Policies

Malnutrition was a constant threat to women laboring in the fields, particularly mothers. An imbalanced diet weakened female slaves more than men,⁴⁶ and the physiological demands of pregnancy often resulted in protein and calcium deficiencies for expecting mothers still engaged in excessive labor.⁴⁷ The basic diet of Caribbean slaves usually included imported rations such as salt meat or dried fish.⁴⁸ However, on the largest islands owners expected their laborers to grow most of their food themselves, on small garden plots located near their quarters and more importantly on provision grounds that might be located on marginal land several miles away. Most slave women tended modest plots of land during their free time, if it can be said they had any.⁴⁹ A recent regional study of colonial Saint Domingue has indicated that slaves in the north were better fed than others; the north's higher rainfall, its better and cheaper access to imported food staples, and the fact that coffee plantations, more numerous in the north, had greater reserves of land for provision grounds, may all have contributed to better health for slaves in this region of the colony.⁵⁰ Yet there remains a good deal of uncertainty regarding the caloric intake of slaves in any part of the Caribbean. As Higman has suggested, ration allowances prescribed by colonial slave law do not offer

their bodies to combat the overpowering effects of disease, malnutrition, and brutal overwork," and no testimony from the women themselves either supports or denies their white masters' widespread accusations with regard to abortion." See Campbell, *Women and Slavery, Vol.2*, 39-40.

⁴⁶ Female physiology requires three times more iron than men, owing to menstruation. *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴⁹ Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean*, 204; Sidney Mintz and Michael Craton have both suggested that provision grounds changed slaves' conceptions of land and property: "slaves [with provision grounds] had come to regard the land they worked for food and the tenements they lived in as virtually their own.... In other words the transition from 'proto-peasant' to true peasant was more advanced on plantations which relied on provision grounds for the feeding of their labor force." See Michael Craton, "Hobbesian or Panglossian? The Two Extremes of Slave Conditions in the British Caribbean, 1783 to 1834," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, third series, vol. 35, no. 2 (Apr., 1978), 355.

⁵⁰ David Geggus, "Slave Society in the Sugar Plantation Zones of Saint Domingue and the Revolution of 1791-93," *Slavery & Abolition* 20, no.2 (1999): 37-38.

a full picture of slave diets by any means, and there is little hard evidence available on the typical output of provision grounds.⁵¹ Therefore, historians have looked to more quantifiable data as indicators of slave communities' health, namely slaves' heights.⁵² In the case of Saint Domingue, David Geggus has found that locally born creole slaves in the colony's North Province were, on average, a full centimeter taller than those in the South and West provinces. This seems to indicate less childhood malnutrition and better dietary standards in the northern region.⁵³

Strenuous physical labor in plantation fields during pregnancy and sometimes severe physical punishment detrimentally affected slave women's fertility. As has been noted previously, cultivating sugar was more physically demanding than any other plantation crop, and in most colonies pregnant women worked in the cane fields well into their eighth month of pregnancy.⁵⁴ Kenneth Morgan points out that "in the early months of pregnancy, when women were the most susceptible to miscarriage, female slaves on sugar plantations were subject to excessive stooping, carried heavy weights, and toiled under unceasing compulsion during the crop period."⁵⁵ By comparison, the work required of women on coffee plantations was considerably less arduous; there was usually no planting, and harvesting (which consisted of plucking "cherries" and carrying them in a basket) was less time-sensitive. The harshest labor, clearing land and turning the hand-operated mills that extracted beans from "cherries," was exclusively done by

⁵¹ Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean*, 205.

⁵² See: Gerald C. Friedman, "The Heights of Slaves in Trinidad," *Social Science History* 6, no. 4 (Autumn, 1982), 482-515; Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean*, 280-292.

⁵³ Geggus, "Slave Society in the Sugar Plantation Zones of Saint Domingue...", 38.

⁵⁴ Campbell, *Women and Slavery*, Vol.2, 33.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

men. And though women often performed the weeding, pruning, and picking on coffee plantations, these tasks were largely performed in the shade of the coffee trees.⁵⁶

The Caribbean slave population's failure to successfully reproduce became an object of concern in the second half of the eighteenth century, after the price of African slaves had risen considerably. Planters attempted to address the extremely low birth rates of their labor forces in various ways. Their solutions to the problem mostly involved improving the treatment of pregnant women and eradicating their "undesirable African practices," notably polygamy, prolonged lactation, and postpartum abstinence.⁵⁷ Planters sometimes offered cash, extra provisions, or special privileges to attentive and successful mothers, for instance some planters provided compensation for the birthing and weaning of a child who reached the age of two.⁵⁸ Organized amelioration efforts also emerged from the municipal level. For example, in 1789 the Jamaica Assembly began to reward prolific slave women by exempting them from field work after the successful birth of their sixth child.⁵⁹ A similar policy, known as "freedom of the savannah," was practiced informally in Saint Domingue, and was evidently in place at the sugar plantation of Peyrac, located in the heart of the colony's West Province. At the time the inventory was recorded in 1783, six of the 75 women at Peyrac designated as mothers were listed as "free," having birthed at least six children each. However, pro-

⁵⁶ Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean*, 167.

⁵⁷ Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society*, 120. Apparently, there were a variety of reasons why planters disliked these African practices. Higman explains that "slaveowners and white medical practitioners believed that the prolonged breast-feeding practiced by slave mothers in the West Indies reduced their fertility." See Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean*, 353. In addition, Kenneth Morgan indicates that some planters thought the nursing of a child for several years compromised mothers' health, putting them in an "emaciated state... in which they linger for a few years." This would, no doubt, also compromise a mothers' labor productivity. See Campbell, *Women and Slavery, Vol. 2*, 38-29.

⁵⁸ For example, at Mesopotamia, a Jamaican sugar plantation, all mothers of newborn infants were paid a cash bonus "for raising their children," and nursing mothers received "a quart of oatmeal and a pint of sugar" for each week they nursed their babies. See Dunn, "A Tale of Two Plantations," 54.

⁵⁹ Campbell, *Women and Slavery, Vol. 2*, 43.

natalist polices were riddled with chronic problems including racial prejudice, obstetric and hygienic ignorance, and continual denial of the lethal effects of the severe plantation labor regime.⁶⁰ For these reasons, most amelioration efforts proved unsuccessful.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Table 2-1. Plantation overview (raw data and fertility indexes)

Plantation	Croptype	Total Number of Slaves	Men	Women	Children	Number of Mothers	Fertility Index*
Gruel	Coffee	27	12	5	10	2	2000
Clément	Coffee	89	43	29	17	11	285
Clément/Baudu	Coffee	64	24	18	22	8	437
Hamelin	Coffee	189	64	67	58	34	466
Labole	Coffee	50	20	15	15	7	416
Carteau	Coffee	19	15	2	2	1	500
Claubry	Coffee	27	15	8	4	3	200
Dugas	Coffee	106	49	42	15	8	200
Les Faurier	Coffee	52	22	9	21	6	1500
Moulin de Récy	Coffee	18	6	6	6	2	400
Courtois	Coffee	57	13	17	27	10	588
Oudart	Coffee	60	32	20	8	2	158
de Sevré	Coffee	92	28	25	39	2	550
Orléans	Sugar	104	40	36	28	8	285
Fleuriau	Sugar	256	110	87	59	43	261
Gérard	Sugar	160	78	48	34	14	222
Peyrac	Sugar	484	218	156	110	75	324
Bellevue	Sugar	318	136	90	92	29	453
Totals		2172	925	680	567	265	

*Fertility Index = (children 0-4 years/ women 15-44 years) x 1000

CHAPTER 3 COFFEE PLANTATIONS

Gruel Plantation

The rather small coffee plantation of Thomas Gruel was in the mountains of Limbé parish in the northernmost of Saint Domingue's three provinces.¹ Only two out of five women on the plantation were identified as mothers, one African and one creole. Both were 29 years old, had an average of 3.5 children each, and their average interval between births was about 3.5 years. From what we can tell, these mothers experienced their first birth at 19 and 22 years of age, the African giving birth later. There were no adult women identified on this slave inventory under the age of 20 or between the ages 30 and 54. The largest group represented on this plantation was adult males between 15 and 19 years old; they comprised half of all the adult slaves, and 75% of all the adult males were African. Half of all the African females were 12 year old girls. It was obviously a very new estate with a workforce largely made up of young recently purchased laborers from slave ships.

Clément/Baudu, Labole, Dugas, and Claubry Plantations

The coffee plantations of Clément/Baudu, Labole, Dugas, and Claubry were all located in the central mountains of the North Province of Saint Domingue; Clément/Baudu, Labole, and Dugas in the parish of Limonade, and Claubry slightly west of them, in Grande Rivière du Nord parish.²

In 1788, the average-size Clément/Baudu plantation totaled eighteen adult women, slightly less than half of whom were identified as mothers. While there was an

¹ *Gruel*. ANOM, Aix-en-Provence, SDOM 1185, inventory, 7 May 1788.

² *Clément/Baudu*. Centre des Archives d'Outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence, SDOM869, inventory, 22 March 1788. Photocopy; *Labole*. Public Record Office, London, HCA 30/280, inventory, 20 June 1778. Photocopy; *Dugas*. ANOM, Aix-en-Provence, SDOM 1396, inventory, July 1780; *Claubry*. Centre des Archives d'Outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence, SDOM 866, 15 November 1785. Photocopy.

equal proportion of African and creole mothers on this plantation (four creoles and four Africans), 80% of creole women were mothers, but only 30% of African women were mothers. There was a total of nine childless Africans, eight of whom were well within the fertile age band. This implies that on this plantation creoles showed a greater proclivity to being mothers. The mean age at which women entered into motherhood was 21.29 years of age, but in every case creoles experienced their first births at significantly younger ages.³ Clément/Baudu's workforce displayed a (for Saint Domingue) relatively high fertility index of 437. Both African and creole mothers had an average of 2.75 children each, and while creole mothers had their children, on average, 2.47 years apart, African women averaged nearly 4 years between births. This slave list, like that of Clément, mentioned two mulatto children, both born to creole women in their early twenties.

Like Clément/Baudu, Labole was an average size coffee plantation with slightly less than half of its adult female slaves identified as mothers, with a fertility index of 416. However, the average age of the women at Labole was significantly older. Only one in four women in their twenties was a mother, but three in four women in their forties were mothers as well as both women in their fifties. Additionally, all women over the age of 22 were African, roughly 73% of the adult females. The creole population was unusually young. The oldest, and only, creole mother was 22 year old Fanchette. One of only three creole women on the plantation, she and her 15 year old sister were the first generation of women to be born on the plantation. The average age at which mothers on this plantation experienced their first birth was 22.85 years of age. Interestingly, the

³ One creole mother is recorded as having had her first birth at 9 years of age. This indicates that she (or her child) was assigned an inappropriate age. Therefore, I have excluded this case from the calculation of mothers' average age at the time of their first birth, as it would significantly skew the result.

single creole mother, Fanchette, entered into motherhood at the tender age of 15 and birthed her children an average of 2.33 years apart. On average, the rest of the mothers, all Africans, had their children 5.65 years apart, and did not experience their first births until 24.16 years of age. Similar to Clément/Baudu, the adult sex ratio for Labole is a little high, at 1.33 males per female.

Dugas was a comparatively larger coffee plantation with almost twice the number of slaves as Clément/Baudu and Labole. Although its sex ratio (1.17) was only slightly skewed, a mere nine women were identified as mothers, one of whom was dead at the time of the inventory, July 1780. These eight living mothers, on average, had their first recorded births extremely early in life at around 19 years old, and three-quarters of these mothers had not had another child. As might be expected, the fertility index was very low (200). This rather anemic demographic picture is partially explicated by the fact that 80% of the women on the Dugas plantation were young (29 years old and younger) African women not born in the colony who had likely endured capture and the middle passage in the previous 5-10 years. In comparison, the creole women of this plantation were more fertile; nearly 40% of them became mothers before the age of 30, whereas less than 15% of African mothers were mothers by the same age.

Claubry, a fairly small coffee plantation with less than 40% of its women identified as mothers, shared many similarities with the nearby plantation of Labole. Most centrally, the ages of the adult female slaves at Claubry were older than was typical; more than 60% of all women were over the age of 30, and all identified mothers were over the age of 32. The average age of the African women was 53.5 and that of the creoles 28.83. However, unlike the neighboring Labole or Dugas estates, the majority of

the women on this plantation were creoles. The fact that this labor force was thoroughly creolized and had an unusually elderly population of mothers doubtless reflects the plantation's relatively early foundation. Mothers at Claubry had their first children seemingly late in life, at an average 29.67 years old, with African mothers having their first child significantly later. This plantation also had an uncharacteristically high adult sex ratio (1.88), and one of the lowest fertility indexes of any plantation surveyed (200). These statistics seem to indicate a degree of unhealthiness at Claubry, at least amongst women, and may point to the presence or effect of an unknown variable, such as disease or malnutrition.

Carteau Plantation

The Carteau coffee plantation was located in the northwest of Saint Domingue in Port Margot parish.⁴ It was a very small plantation, the smallest one presented in this thesis, with only one mother listed and an incredibly high sex ratio (7.5). The women on this plantation were more than outnumbered. Although the North was the most creolized province, there were very few creoles here and no creole women. The 23 year old Senegalese mother had her first child at 16 years of age and her next before the age of 20; these were rather young ages for an African woman to have given birth.

Courtois Plantation

Slightly southeast of Carteau, the Courtois Plantation was situated in the nearby Acul parish of the northern highlands.⁵ Impressively, more than half of the women of this plantation were mothers; 70% of them had had their first child by the age of 20. In addition, the average age of first birth for this plantation, like the neighboring coffee

⁴ *Carteau*. Centre des Archives d'Outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence, SDOM867, inventory, 22 July 1787. Photocopy.

⁵ *Courtois*. ANOM, Aix-en-Provence, SDOM 789, inventory, 15 June 1787.

plantation of Dugas, was extremely young at 19 years of age. The average age of the female population at Courtois was also relatively young; at the time of this inventory in 1787 not a single woman was over the age of 38, and their average age was 27. This may indicate that Courtois was a relatively young plantation at this moment in its history. Yet, unlike many of the other nascent coffee plantations, this plantation had a high fertility index (588) and its women slightly outnumbered its men. It also had almost even numbers of African and creole women and mothers. Finally, women in their 20s represented the most fertile age group on this plantation, with 100% of 20 years olds identified as mothers. Overall, it seems the demographic growth potential for this plantation was altogether positive.

Oudart and Moulin de Récy Plantations

A little south of Courtois lay the Oudart and Moulin de Récy plantations, both located in the Plaisance parish of the colony's northeast.⁶ Oudart was a midsize plantation of about 60 slaves with an adult sex ratio of 1.6. The fertility index at Oudart was dismal at 158 and only two mothers were identified out of a total of 20 women. Every adult on this plantation was imported from Africa, probably within the previous ten years, and most were of Congolese origins. Also, unsurprisingly for a coffee plantation, the female slave population here was very young; only one woman was over 36 years old at the time the inventory was recorded in 1786. It seems that even in the healthier environment of the highlands these young women were unable to have successful pregnancies.

⁶ *Moulin de Récy*. ANOM, Aix-en-Provence, SDOM 865, inventory, 11 July 1778; *Oudart*. ANOM, Aix-en-Provence, SDOM 788, 26 June 1786.

Moulin de Récy had a much smaller labor force, with a total of only 18 slaves, and these slaves were older than those at Oudart; women's average age at Moulin was 30, six years older than the average age of those at Oudart. Nevertheless, they seemed to fare better than their neighbors in terms of fertility, exhibiting a fertility index of 400. Despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of all adults on this plantation were imported from Africa (most from the Congo), mothers on Moulin had an average of 2.5 children and began having their children at relatively young ages; remarkably, the average age at which mothers experienced their first birth was just over 18 years old. However, the average time between successful births was nearly 4 years. This may point to the use of prolonged nursing practices and perhaps the maintenance of African cultural norms by slave women and mothers.

Les Faurier Plantation

Les Faurier was also a moderately sized coffee plantation located in the northeastern highlands.⁷ Its slave community was amazingly prolific considering the unfavorable sex ratio it expressed (2.44) and the small number of women (only 6) occupying the fertile age band of 15-44 years old at the time of its inventory in 1786. One woman especially stands out as a particularly successful mother; having had 7 successful pregnancies by the age of 56, Marthe, a Congo woman from the first generation of slaves to occupy the plantations, had children into her early fifties. On average, she had her children every 6.5 years from the time of her first recorded pregnancy at 27 years old. However, Marthe's ostensibly later entrance into motherhood and her ability to remain fertile even into her later years may be an indicator of dubious age statistics. She could have appeared or been perceived by the

⁷ *Les Faurier*. ANOM, Aix-en-Provence, SDOM 290, inventory, 5 September, 1786.

record keeper as older than her true age, and therefore her case should be cautiously evaluated before being incorporated into vital statistics. In addition, the long stretches of time between Marthe's recorded births (for example, the 10 years between her first and second birth) suggests that she experienced one or multiple failed pregnancies between successful births; infant mortality is rarely, if ever, recorded on such inventories, and therefore birth spacing can be misleading in such instances.

Clément and Hamelin Plantations

The Clément and Hamelin coffee plantations were in the Grand Anse region of Saint Domingue at the tip of the southern peninsula, the frontier of the 1780s coffee boom.⁸ The Clément brothers were merchants from Le Cap, a bustling port town on the north coast, who had invested in the fast developing south. By the time of the inventory, in 1792, both brothers were dead; in fact, Jean-Baptiste was the first planter killed in the 1791 insurrection. The slave population of this region in the late eighteenth century was generally African and quite recently arrived.

Though the Clément coffee plantation was quite large, its inventory only identified eleven mothers. In all, 38% of the adult females were identified as mothers, and every woman had been imported from Africa, the oldest creole identified being an 11 year old girl. The majority (63%) of women on this plantation were in their twenties, and more than half (54%) of these women were mothers. In general, the average age of adult females was quite young, with fewer than 25% of women being over the age of 35. Despite the fact that the great majority of these women were within the fertile age band, this plantation displayed a very low fertility index of 285, and most mothers had no more

⁸ *Clément*. University of Florida, Special Collections, Jérémie Papers, 9-27A, inventory, 1792; *Hamelin/Ducasse*. University of Florida, Special Collections, Jérémie Papers, 6A-3, inventory, 25 January 1780.

than one child. On average, mothers experienced their first birth at 22.55 years of age, and only two women had had children in their thirties, but there was only one childless woman. As on the Gruel plantation, the presence of three 13 year old African girls testifies to the very young age at which Africans were being sold at this time.

Hamelin was an even larger plantation than Clément, and in 1780 was also comprised of mostly Africans. At least 85% of adult males and over half of adult females were African. However, unlike Clément, this coffee plantation had an unusually balanced sex ratio of 0.96. Half of the adult women on this plantation were mothers, and one-third of these mothers were Creoles. About 35% of mothers were in their twenties and slightly fewer (30%) were in their thirties. The average age of adult females was about 31 years old, and mothers, on average, entered into motherhood at 23.65 years of age. Women on this plantation exhibited a rather high fertility index of 466, and each mother had on average 1.91 children. Interestingly enough, African mothers spaced their births an average of 3.61 years apart, while Creoles averaged only 2.5 years between births. Like other plantations in this study, Hamelin's inventory mentioned several mulatto children whose mothers were creole women identified as "domestics." For example, one year old Marguerite was a third generation creole of mixed racial background whose mother and grandmother were domestics. She was named after her grandmother, the *ménagère*, or housekeeper.

de Sevré Plantation⁹

De Sevré was a larger than average coffee plantation in Tiburon parish also located at the far end of the southern peninsula.¹⁰ Its inventory from 1787 offers very

⁹ de Sevré. ANOM, Aix-en-Provence, SDOM 868, inventory, 18 September, 1787.

little explicit information on slave mothers; only two mothers were identified though there are as many as 39 children listed. However, despite the document's lacuna regarding mothers' identities, this community's very high fertility index (550) and reasonably even sex ratio (1.12) indicates that it was fairly prolific. Uniquely, this inventory lists two sets of *marrons* (runaway slaves); the first a 24 year old creole (supposedly mulatto) mother and her 2 year old quadroon child, and the second a 32 year old Congo woman with her two Congo children.¹¹ As Bernard Moitt has noted, neither children nor unforeseen perils excluded women from *marronnage* (slave flight).¹² *Marronnage* was particularly common in Saint Domingue's mountainous highlands where the terrain provided excellent hiding places for maroons.¹³

¹⁰ *de Sevré*. ANOM, Aix-en-Provence, SDOM 868, inventory, 18 September, 1787.

¹¹ The term quadroon was used to designate a person of one-quarter African ancestry.

¹² Bernard Moitt, ed., *Sugar, Slavery, and Society*, 54.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 54,57.

CHAPTER 4 SUGAR PLANTATIONS

Orléans and Peyrac Plantations

Both the absentee sugar plantations of Orléans and Peyrac were situated in the Cul de Sac plain in the West Province of Saint Domingue.¹ The Orléans plantation belonged to the duc d'Orléans, the king's cousin, who was guillotined in 1794. It was located on the coast, a little north of the capital, Port au Prince, at the mouth of the Grande Rivière du Cul de Sac. The Peyrac sugar plantation was several miles further inland and was said to have had a very imposing set of buildings.

Orléans was a small sugar plantation and had been recently purchased by the duke. Less than a quarter of its adult female population was identified as mothers, and its fertility index was very low (285). Africans accounted for 64% all women on the plantation, and three-quarters of the population's mothers, which reflects its rather young age at the time of the inventory. There were 50% more African mothers than creole mothers, who had, on average, more children; while Africans averaged 2.5 children per mother, creole mothers had 4 children each. The most noteworthy example of a successful creole mother was 40 year old Guitte, who had total of six children at an average 2.8 years apart from one another, giving birth from age 26 up until age 40. The average age at which women on this plantation experienced their first recorded birth was 26.13 years old, though both creole mothers first gave birth at the slightly younger average age of 24. Most mothers, both African and creole, had their children at

¹ *D'Orléans*. Archives nationales, Paris. 300 AP I 144, inventory of January 1779. Transcription by D. Geggus; *Peyrac*. Archives départementales d'Eure et Loire, Chartres. 24 J 145, inventory, 1783. Photocopy.

approximately three year intervals. The population of mothers in general was relatively old; 50% of mothers were 40 year olds and only one in eight was younger than 30.

Peyrac, by far the largest plantation sampled in this survey, had a slightly higher than desirable sex ratio at 1.40 males per female. Its female population was significantly creolized; 62% of all women and 68% of all mothers were creole. It seems that creoles at Peyrac were also slightly more likely to be mothers than their African counterparts. Whereas 52% of all creole women were mothers, only about 40% of African women had children at the time of the inventory. Also, African women had their first children, on average, later in life (at 25.9 years of age), while creole women experienced their first births at the younger age of 23. Though the best represented age group for all females was women in their twenties, there were nearly equal percentages of mothers in their twenties, thirties, and forties. African mothers on this plantation exhibited notably wider birth spacing (5.87 years) than creoles (4 years), but both groups displayed particularly long intervals between children. All mothers on this plantation had an average between 1.63 and 1.80 children each, and nearly 48% of the women were mothers. The fertility index is better than most sugar plantations at 324.

Fleuriau Plantation

The less massive Fleuriau sugar plantation was also in the Cul de Sac plain and, like many Saint Domingue estates, was owned by an absentee wealthy merchant.² Forty-three percent of women of known identity at Fleuriau were creole. About half of the female workers were mothers, who were similarly balanced between creoles and

² *Fleuriau*. Jacques Cauna. "Une habitation coloniale à la fin du XVIIIe siècle." Thèse de 3me cycle, Université de Poitiers, 1983.

Africans. In contrast to the large Peyrac plantation, creoles do not seem to have been any more likely than Africans to be mothers at Fleuriau; nearly 50% of both African and creole women were mothers. There was, however, a larger than usual percentage of elderly mothers listed on this plantation. Nearly two-thirds of women in their 60's were listed as mothers, and, as might be expected, four out of five of these were African. African mothers on this plantation had, on average, slightly fewer children in their lifetime (1.47) than creoles (2.11), and also displayed an average of 6.5 years between births, while creole women, had their children an average of every 4.7 years. African women also seem to have entered motherhood significantly later in life, at about 28.32 years of age, on average, while creoles experienced their first birth at 22.22 years of age. Clearly, the fact that the estate manager chose to identify the mothers of many young adults as well as children made these data more likely to be skewed by infant mortality. Yet it seems safe to deduce that Africans on the Fleuriau plantation were less successful mothers than their creole counterparts. This sugar plantation's fertility index was low, even for sugar, at 261.

Gérard Plantation

The moderate size Gérard sugar plantation was located in the South Province, in the plain of Les Cayes, where estates tended to be somewhat smaller.³ It was owned by Jean-Baptiste Gérard, a self-made man and resident planter, who at the time of this inventory in 1789 was soon to become a deputy in the French National Assembly. The adult slave population on Gérard was overwhelmingly African in its composition, particularly for adult females, and the average age of women was rather young; there

³ *Gérard*. Centre des Archives d'Outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence, 92APC/5/16, inventory, 11 April 1789. Transcription by D. Geggus.

were no female slaves identified over the age of 47. About 77% of all women and 71% of slave mothers were identified as African. Slave mothers represented 30% of all the plantation's women, and the majority (64%) of them were over age 30. However, the average age at which these mothers had their first child was rather young at about 22.5 years old. Unusually, creole mothers on this plantation had, on average, fewer children than did Africans; African mothers averaged 2.86 children each while creoles had only an average of 1.25. Creole mothers, nonetheless, exhibited shorter birth spacing intervals (every 3 years), in comparison to African mothers who experienced their births nearly 5 years apart. The high sex ratio of Gérard's adult workers (1.63) indicates that this plantation suffered from gender imbalance. In addition, its low fertility index (222), the lowest of any sugar plantation in this survey, highlights its lack of reproductive success.

Fournier de Bellevue Plantation

The very large Fournier de Bellevue sugar plantation was in the most prosperous part of the North Plain, in Limonade parish, not far from Cap François.⁴ This was the most creolized region of Saint Domingue, and the only place where locally born slaves formed a majority of the adult population.⁵ About 32% of women on this estate were mothers, of whom nearly 80% were creole. In fact, a great majority (75%) of the entire female population was creole, and creoles seemed to have been slightly more likely than Africans to become mothers. While only 23% of African women were mothers, over 35% of creole women had given birth. However, creoles did not seem to have had significantly more children nor have them more often than did Africans. All mothers had, on average, between 1.30 and 1.33 children, exhibiting average birth spacing between

⁴ Centre des Archives d'Outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence, Notariat de Saint-Domingue 1388, inventory, 3 February 1783. Transcription by D. Geggus.

⁵Geggus, "Slave Societies in the Sugar Plantation Zones of Saint Domingue,"36.

2.5 and 2.67 years. Also, African women experienced their first birth, on average, at 28.5 years old, while creoles had their first child only slightly earlier in life at about 27.22 years of age. Most mothers (57%) were in their twenties and a similar percentage were in their thirties. There were very few teenage mothers (ages 15-19), less than 10%, and no mother was older than 46. Fournier de Bellevue's fertility index was extremely high at 453. Such a high rate of reproductive success on this sugar plantation may indicate significant fertility advantages associated with thorough creolization of a slave community.

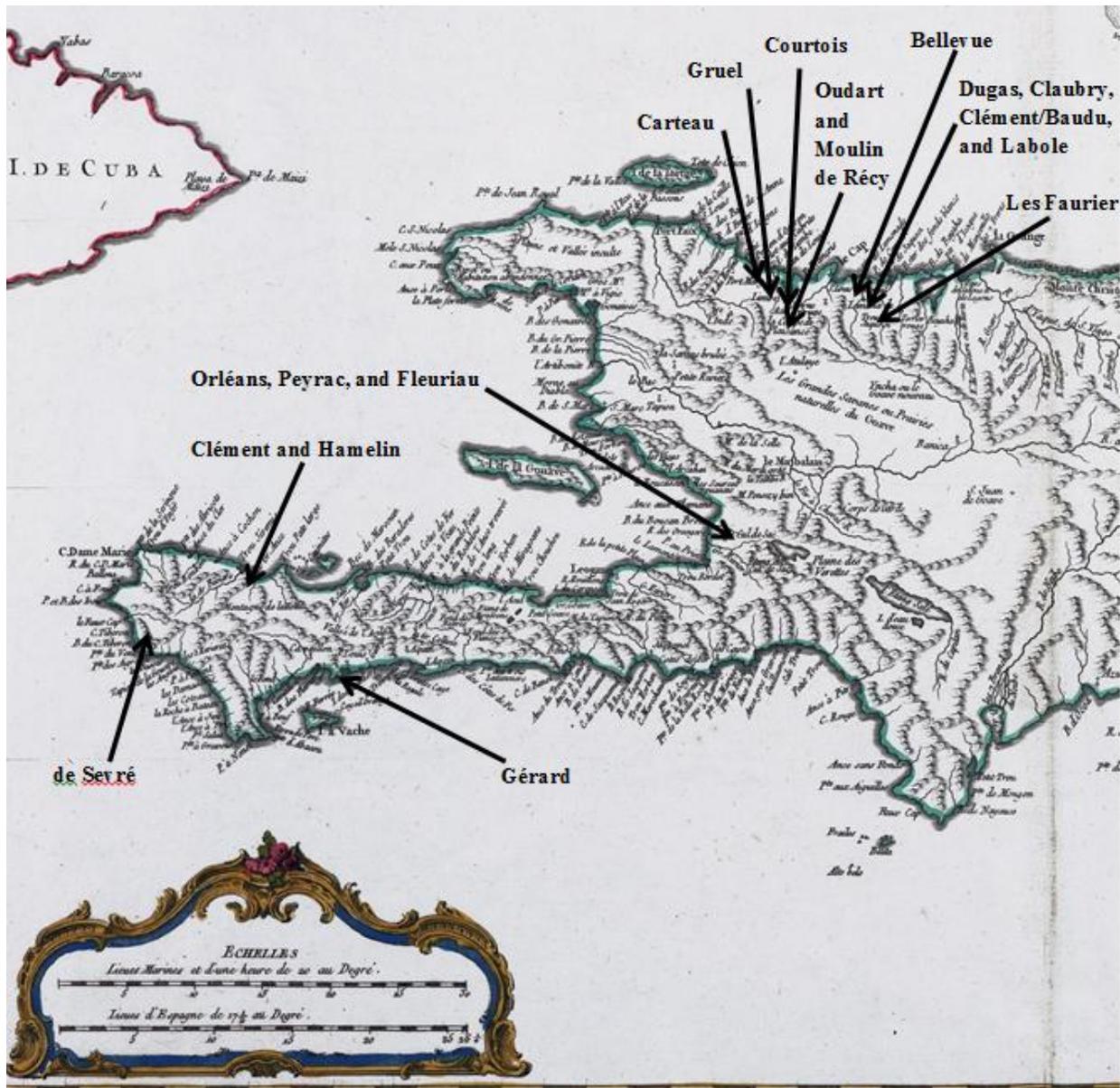


Figure 3-1. Map of “Isles de Saint Domingue ou Hispaniola et de la Martinique,” s.n., 1750, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida. Used with permission from University of Florida Special Collection and Area Studies Library.

Table 3-1. Plantation overview (results)

Plantation	Croptype	Adult Sex Ratio	Percentage of Mothers who are African	Percentage of Mothers who are Creole	Average Age of African Mothers at the Time of their First Birth	Average Age of Creole Mothers at the Time of their First Birth	Average Birth Spacing for African Mothers	Average Birth Spacing for Creole Mothers
Gruel	Coffee	2.4	50%	50%	22	19	3.75	3.3
Clément	Coffee	1.48	100%	0%	22.55	NA	2.1	NA
Clément/Baudu	Coffee	1.33	50%	50%	25.25	14.25	4	2.47
Hamelin	Coffee	0.96	66.67%	33.33%	23.14	25.09	3.61	2.5
Labole	Coffee	1.33	85.71%	14.29%	24.16	15	5.65	2.33
Carteau	Coffee	7.5	100%	0%	16	NA	3	NA
Claubry	Coffee	1.88	33.33%	66.67%	41	24	NA	8.5
Dugas	Coffee	1.17	62.50%	37.50%	21.4	17	2	5
Les Faurier	Coffee	2.44	50.00%	50.00%	30.5	20.33	4.67	3
Moulin de Récy	Coffee	1	100.00%	0.00%	22	NA	3.5	NA
Courtois	Coffee	0.76	50.00%	50.00%	18	19.6	1.5	3.11
Oudart	Coffee	1.6	100.00%	0.00%	27.5	NA	NA	NA
de Sevré	Coffee	1.12	50.00%	50.00%	23	22	8	NA
Orléans	Sugar	1.11	75%	25%	26.83	24	3.07	2.9
Fleuriau	Sugar	1.26	44.18%	41.86%	28.32	22.22	6.5	4.77
Gérard	Sugar	1.63	71.43%	28.57%	22.2	23.25	4.9	3
Peyrac	Sugar	1.4	32.20%	67.80%	25.9	23.1	5.87	4.01
Bellevue	Sugar	1.49	20.69%	79.31%	28.5	27.22	2.67	2.5

Adult Sex Ratio = number of males over the age of 14/ number of females over the age of 14

NA - Not Available (there are no data to interpret)

CHAPTER 5 RESULTS

Fertility Indexes

Because of poor record-keeping by planters and the colonial administration, little is known about the birth rates or death rates of Saint Domingue slaves. The fact that planters and managers rarely recorded miscarriages or the death of infants makes the topic of fertility especially difficult to tackle. The few demographic investigations of Saint Domingue slavery have therefore tended to use the fertility index as their main analytical tool, which is usually constructed as the ratio of children aged 0-4 years to the number of women aged 15-44. At the end of the colonial period, it appears that the fertility levels of slaves in Saint Domingue were exceedingly low, especially in comparison to North American slave societies.

One of the central findings of this study is the influence of croptype on fertility levels.¹ It is generally recognized by historians that sugar production was the most punishing form of slavery in the Americas.² This was mostly due to the heavy labor involved in planting and the breakneck pace at which sugar had to be harvested and processed, involving long hours of night-work. In recent fertility studies on Saint Domingue sugar estates it was concluded that the only variable correlating with fertility was that of work load, measured as the ratio of slaves to cane acreage.³ The sugar plantations of Saint Domingue were some of the largest in the Americas at that time,

¹ Also see: David Geggus "Sugar and Coffee," 73-98; Geggus, "Indigo and Slavery in Saint Domingue," *Plantation Society in the Americas* 5 (1998): 189-204; Geggus, "Saint Domingue on the Eve of the Revolution," 11.

² See Stuart Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society, Bahia, 1550-1835* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004) 146-151; Bernard Moitt, *Sugar, Slavery, and Society*.

³ Geggus, "Sugar and Coffee," 91.

and their relatively low slave-cane ratio suggests a truly grueling labor regime.⁴ The effects of overwork on sugar plantations were not experienced solely by male field laborers. By the late eighteenth century, it was typical for two-thirds of agricultural laborers on Caribbean sugar estates to be women, even in the “great gangs” where the hardest work was done.⁵ The intensive physical labor that slave women endured in the fields seems to have been enough to not only compromise their level of fecundity but also place limits on their own life expectancy and that of their children.⁶ In fact, the reason that so many infant deaths went undocumented was because of their extremely common occurrence. Demographer and historian Robert Fogel supposes that half of the children born to slave mothers in the Americas did not survive their first year.⁷

Indisputably, conditions were better on the smaller highland coffee plantations. Coffee estates allowed for a lighter work regime, less restricted diet, and healthier epidemiological conditions for slaves.⁸ Though the gang system might also be employed on coffee plantations, the nature and pace of the agricultural work required of slaves was less fierce.⁹ Also, because of its high altitude, life in the mountains was

⁴ Slave-cane ratios may offer an insight into the work load of slaves in a given area. However they can prove unreliable when the ages of the plantations in question are dramatically different. The younger plantations in the west and south regions of Saint Domingue were still pioneering into “frontierland” and therefore required more slaves during this early stage of development. See Geggus, “Slave Society in the Sugar Plantation Zones of Saint Domingue,” 36. However, this does not negate the fact that sugar production was by far the most grueling labor for Saint Domingue slaves.

⁵Dunn, “A Tale of Two Plantations,” 37; Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 151: “few women of African descent escaped the fields...”

⁶ Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 149: “Sugar cane field work was, in part, responsible for the low fertility of enslaved women”; Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean*, 324-326, Tables 9.6 and 9.7 : “It had been shown that slaves living on coffee plantations had significantly lower mortality rates than those on sugar estates.”

⁷Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1989), 147. Births often went undocumented in ecclesiastical documents as well, as infants who did not survive until baptism were rarely recorded.

⁸David Geggus, “Slave Society in the Sugar Plantation Zones of Saint Domingue,”38.

⁹ The invention of gang labor arrived first on sugar plantations and then made its way to coffee, rice, and cotton economies. See Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract*, 26.

healthier for slaves who were exposed to fewer insect-borne diseases.¹⁰ Demographic studies of coffee plantations found only weak correlations between fertility and other factors. However, the strongest degree of correlation was found in a consideration of work force size.¹¹ This may reflect the difficulty of finding a suitable sexual partner out of the “slim pickings” available on a single coffee plantation; such plantations had on average fewer than fifty slaves. Also, Africans who entered into the coffee plantation community were less likely to find others of the same ethnic or linguistic background; this may have added to the difficulty of their cultural assimilation and delayed or even prevented women from finding an appropriate sexual partner.¹² However, since Caribbean plantations were never far apart, this was nowhere near as restrictive a factor as it was in North American slave societies.¹³ Slave women on small coffee estates were in fact less likely to remain childless than women on large sugar plantations.

Considering all of the above, it is perhaps surprising that the mean average fertility indexes so far revealed for Saint Domingue plantations during the second half of the eighteenth century do not, in fact, show a larger difference between coffee plantations (356) and sugar plantations (328).¹⁴ The eighteen plantations examined in this thesis, though they constitute a very small sample size, reveal a more dramatic difference in fertility indexes. Overall, the slaves on the thirteen coffee plantations examined displayed a fertility index of 428, and those on the five sugar plantations fared even

¹⁰ In addition to fewer diseases, slaves of the coffee plantations had fewer accidental injuries due to the less hazardous work regime. See: Geggus, “Sugar and Coffee,” 89;

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹² *Ibid.*, 80.

¹³ Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract*, 152. . Saint Domingue slaves did find partners on other estates, but such unions were less likely to be fertile because of diminished opportunities for intercourse.

¹⁴ Geggus, “Sugar and Coffee,” 91.

worse, with a fertility index of 308.¹⁵ While there are many factors that affect these statistics, the impact of work regime on reproductive success here seems beyond doubt.

The difference in fertility between the labor forces of sugar and coffee plantations would no doubt have been even greater if the impact of workload was not blunted by the competing influence of another factor: ethnicity. Some historians have argued that the most potent contributor to Caribbean slaves' infertility was the continuous and overwhelming influx of Africans to the colonies.¹⁶ Confronting an unfamiliar disease environment after the debilitating "middle passage," Africans certainly suffered higher death rates in the Americas than locally born slaves, and some evidence also suggests that they experienced lower rates of fertility. On the eve of the Haitian Revolution, African arrivals in Saint Domingue were at an all-time high due to the booming sugar and coffee industries. In fact, for nearly the entire second half of the eighteenth century Saint Domingue was the world's leading producer of sugar and coffee.¹⁷ However, as Saint Domingue coffee plantations were of much more recent creation than most of colony's sugar estates, their labor forces were dominated by newly arrived Africans and contained much smaller proportions of creole slaves than the long-established sugar estates.

Small bodies of data from Jamaica, collected by Craton, from Tobago, collected by Higman, and from Saint Domingue, collected by Geggus, suggest that those mothers who could be identified as creole seem to have been generally more fertile than their

¹⁵ This calculation does not include the fertility indexes of the Gruel and Les Faurier coffee plantations as they are outliers. If these outliers were included, the average fertility index for coffee plantations would be 593.

¹⁶ Craton, *Searching for the Invisible Man*, 96.

¹⁷ Geggus, "Sugar and Coffee," 73.

African counterparts in nearly all age groups; there were fewer childless creoles than Africans, and creole mothers had, on average, more children.¹⁸ The reasons for Africans' low fertility rates are uncertain. The physiological and psychological effects of dislocation, stress, and overcrowding during the transatlantic passage, and the traumatic introduction to plantation life and work, may have resulted in low rates of ovulation, sexual intercourse, and conception.¹⁹ As one scholar has explained, "under such extreme conditions, women's desire and physical ability to have children was reduced."²⁰ Additionally, the foreign epidemiological environment of the Americas may have made African women highly vulnerable to diseases or epidemics that could negatively affect their fecundity.²¹ Historians have argued that because Africans were still undergoing the process of physical and cultural adaptation they were quite unlikely to give birth within their first five or ten years in the colony.²² However, it is important to note that use of the fertility index understates African women's fertility relative to that of creoles, because an unknown number of them had been in Saint Domingue only a short period of time. Hence, one of the aims of this paper is to use other measures of fertility to help clarify this issue.

In this study, creoles, irrespective of crootype, exhibited an overall fertility index of 382, while Africans were less successful, displaying a lower fertility index of 303.²³ The

¹⁸ Craton, *Searching for the Invisible Man*, 93-94; Geggus, "Sugar and Coffee," 91; Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean*, 158-160.

¹⁹ Craton, *Searching for the Invisible Man*, 97.

²⁰ Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society*, 137. Bush points to the negative "psychological impact of physical and emotional stress on enslaved women's menstruation (and hence conception)." See page 138.

²¹ Common diseases in the Caribbean included syphilis and yaws, and epidemics such as smallpox and scarlet fever decimated black and white populations alike.

²² Geggus, "Sugar and Coffee," 92.

²³ See Table 4-1 for a summary of the fertility indexes from this study.

disparity in average fertility levels between creoles and Africans was thus smaller than that found between coffee and sugar workers. Creoles on coffee plantations revealed a much higher fertility index (662) compared to their African counterparts' fertility index of 364. Sugar plantations' fertility indexes were altogether worse, and though creoles still fared better there, it was not by such a wide margin. Sugar plantation creoles displayed a fertility index of 337, while fertility indexes for Africans was as low as 257. These results imply that creoles on sugar estates had fewer children than Africans on coffee plantations, and that work regime trumped ethnicity as a determinant of fertility. Also, it seems that in the case of fertility indexes, the variable of ethnicity was far more important on coffee plantations than on sugar plantations. Finally, it is evident that the intense work regime of the sugar plantation affected creoles far more than Africans; the former's fertility indexes on sugar plantations were barely half of those exhibited by creoles involved in coffee production, whereas the disparity between Africans' fertility on coffee and sugar plantation was only around 100 points.

Recently developed coffee plantations were most numerous in the western and southern regions of Saint Domingue, and often had the largest percentages of newly imported young African slaves.²⁴ Conversely, sugar estates further north were the most creolized plantations, as they were the oldest. Nonetheless, in a regional study of the colony's sugar production zones, the northern estates exhibited a lower fertility index than those of western or southern areas.²⁵ This is enlightening because women in the north were more likely to be creoles, who typically had more children than African born slaves. However, this advantage was more than canceled out by the heavier workload

²⁴ For example, the coffee plantations of Clément, Hamelin, and de Sevré examined in this thesis.

²⁵ Geggus, "Slave Society in the Sugar Plantation Zones of Saint Domingue," 37.

enforced on northern sugar estates. Even when holding constant the factor of croptype, workload appears to have been more important than creolization as an influence on fertility. This is a testament to the incapacitating nature of large-scale Caribbean sugar economies, and may explain why some historians have argued that it was nearly impossible for slave populations there to establish even a slight rate of natural increase.²⁶

Birth Spacing

Birth spacing, though affected to an unknown degree by unrecorded instances of infant mortality, has emerged for historians as a central component in fertility analysis. The average time interval between successive births for mothers in the West Indies was exceedingly long, averaging about four years, whereas the North American slave population experienced on average only about 2.9 years between births.²⁷ The explanation for this widely recognized demographic phenomenon is, at least in part, attributable to West Indian slaves' poor diets and rigorous work regimes. Richard Dunn, among other scholars, has found that inadequate nutrition may have yielded depressed fertility, effectively impairing female reproductive development, hindering recuperation in the event of pregnancy, and diminishing the likelihood of a second pregnancy.²⁸ He also speculates that the debilitating work regime of Caribbean sugar economies in particular, may have caused such extraordinary strain to slaves' bodies that women experienced only intermittent fecundity and men and women alike suffered from general sexual

²⁶ Craton, *Searching for the Invisible Man*, 85.

²⁷ Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract*, 148; Herbert S. Klein and Stanley L. Engerman, "Fertility Differentials between Slaves in the United States and the British West Indies: A Note on Lactation Practices and Their Possible Implications," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Apr., 1978): 386.

²⁸ Dunn, "A Tale of Two Plantations," 54; Geggus, "Slave Society in the Sugar Plantation Zones of Saint Domingue," 62

apathy.²⁹ Demographers and historians Herbert Klein and Stanley Engerman have stressed the significance of cultural mores in explaining discrepancies in the birth spacing between North American and Caribbean slave societies. They argue that, since the majority of the Caribbean's slave population was imported from Africa, social and parental conduct of slave mothers in the West Indies may have been influenced by foreign traditions that encouraged lengthy intervals between births, most notably prolonged lactation and postpartum abstinence.³⁰ West Africans in the late eighteenth century generally nursed their children for two to three years. They also strictly abided by sexual taboos which encouraged abstinence during nursing.³¹ These practices were aimed at preventing infant mortality, a common fate of children immediately following their weaning in nutritionally deficient environments.³² Indeed, African mothers in the West Indies would likely have continued this tradition with the same goal, as infant mortality was endemic in the challenging environment of the Caribbean. While Klein and Engerman proposed that the difference between North American and West Indian slaves' birth spacing intervals could be attributed to a stronger African presence in the islands, their data did not differentiate between African and creole women in the West Indies, as this study does.³³

²⁹ Dunn, "A Tale of Two Plantations," 61.

³⁰ See Klein and Engerman, "Fertility Differentials," 371: "West Indians retained more elements of African culture than did the North American slave community.... Given the limited contact with white society in the West Indies, and the higher concentrations of blacks within larger plantation units, a stronger residue of cultural practices from Africa could have remained."

³¹ Klein and Engerman, "Fertility Differentials between Slaves," 369-70.

³² Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean*, 354.

³³ Klein and Engerman, "Fertility Differentials," 372: "The more intensive experience of the slave trade, and the much higher rates of African participation within the total population in the West Indies, marked a strong contrast between the two areas. For example, at about 1770 in the United States, the African-born represented only 30 percent of the black population, while in Jamaica they numbered over 70 percent...."

According to the results of this study, African slaves in Saint Domingue exhibited significantly longer intervals between births than creole slaves. Overall, the average birth spacing displayed by African mothers was 3.83 years while their creole counterparts averaged 3.43 years between births. The difference of .40 years (nearly five months) may be interpreted as miniscule, but it is statistically significant, especially in comparison to the even more minute difference revealed between slaves of different croptypes.³⁴ Mothers on sugar plantations exhibited an average birth spacing of 3.73 years, while mothers on coffee plantations averaged 3.46 years between births; these averages reveal a difference of only .27 years (about three and a quarter months), one which is not statistically significant.³⁵ In the case of slave birth spacing trends it seems that the mother's ethnicity rather than the type of plantation was the most influential determinant.

Since it is likely that diet was held relatively constant amongst Africans and creoles, at least at the plantation level, this trend cannot be explained solely by poor nutrition. And, since creole and African women alike conducted grueling labor in sugar plantation field gangs, one cannot just explain this trend by sugar's harsh work regime.³⁶ Cultural influences, specifically the retention of African nursing practices, may also have contributed to the differences between African and creole birth spacing. Like West

³⁴ Richard Dunn, in his comparison of two plantation microcosms, discovered a similar difference in birth intervals between a large highly creolized Virginian plantation and a similarly large predominantly African plantation in Jamaica. The average Jamaican slave mother, if she had more than one child in her lifetime, birthed her children five months farther apart than the average Virginian slave mother (See Dunn, "A Tale of Two Plantations," 59).

³⁵ Statistical significance is determined in this case by a ten (or more) percent difference between data points.

³⁶ Though creoles were less likely to labor in their fields due to their elevated social status, a majority of creole women on sugar plantations were field hands. "A typical gang of 70 field slaves consisted of 50% Africans (equal numbers of males and females), 10 creole men, and more than 1/3 young creole women." See Geggus, "Sugar and Coffee Cultivation," 88.

African women, African slaves in the West Indies were said to breastfeed their children for a minimum of twenty-four months.³⁷ While it remains unclear if African mothers in the Caribbean practiced strict sexual abstinence during their two years of breastfeeding, a social norm in contemporary West Africa, it seems that continued lactation was itself an effective contraceptive.³⁸ Therefore, for either physiological or social reasons, those slaves who continued to practice prolonged lactation were unlikely to become pregnant in the years immediately following childbirth, resulting in comparatively longer intervals between births.³⁹ Creoles, having been raised locally rather than in Africa, may have been less likely to adopt this practice, especially as it was opposed by plantation managers. Although it has been previously noted that Saint Domingue's planters sometimes provided incentives to mothers who breastfed and properly cared for their young during their first years of life, the African practice of extended suckling was seen as unnatural and, importantly, interfering with plantation productivity. Women who nursed their children for extended periods were often reluctant to return to the plantation work regime and resisted separation from their babies; these, of course, were highly rational responses to the typically high infant mortality rates that most plantations exhibited.⁴⁰ But the strict labor schedule of the plantation would always remain the priority for planters, even those who worried about the long term viability of their labor force.

In addition to exhibiting longer birth spacing patterns, slave women in the Caribbean had smaller families than those in North America. An average enslaved

³⁷ Higman, *Slave Population of the British Caribbean*, 353.

³⁸ It is now medically recognized that lactation is an effective contraceptive.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society*, 127.

mother in the United States who lived to age 49 had about 9.2 children.⁴¹ In contrast, in Trinidad women appeared to have averaged only 2.4 live births in a lifetime, and in Jamaica mothers had fewer than half as many children as their North American counterparts.⁴² Like its Caribbean neighbors, Saint Domingue was characterized by small family units. Though this study cannot reveal lifetime fertility patterns, it does show that Saint Domingue mothers averaged between 1.8 and 2 children each, with those on coffee plantations having slightly more children, on average, than those on sugar plantations.⁴³ While the birth spacing of Caribbean mothers was surely a contributor to this demographic contrast, historians have also suggested that the window of fertility for these mothers may have been significantly more abbreviated than that of their healthier North American neighbors as the great majority of them were brought from Africa during their earliest childbearing years.

Fertility and Age

It is speculated that slave women in the Caribbean had a dramatically reduced fertility span in the course of their lifetime, particularly in comparison to contemporaneous slaves in the United States. This has been attributed mostly to a later age of puberty, as West Indian slaves tended to have their first child later in life.⁴⁴ Slave mothers in the United States, on average, had their first child around 22 years old.⁴⁵ In contrast, the mean age at first birth results of this study indicate that Saint Domingue

⁴¹ Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract*, 149

⁴² Ibid; Dunn, "A Tale of Two Plantations," 59.

⁴³ Due to the nature of the plantation sources consulted, there is no lifetime data available for this study.

⁴⁴ While it has also been implied by a few historians that Caribbean slaves may have suffered from an early onset of menopause, as many had their final child at a relatively early age, this aspect of slave fertility is not explored within this thesis due in part to the limitations of the plantation samples.

⁴⁵ Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, 137-138.

mothers experienced the birth of their first child after 23 years of age.⁴⁶ Additionally, a large number North American slave mothers gave birth in their twenties.⁴⁷ It seems that Saint Domingue slaves experienced a later peak in fecundity, as the largest percentage of their births occurred between ages 25 and 34. Instances of late onset and peak of fecundity, as this thesis will suggest, seems to be most abundant on Saint Domingue sugar estates.

Slave mothers on Saint Domingue sugar plantations, between the ages of 15 and 39, experienced their first recorded birth at 23.18 years old.⁴⁸ This is rather late, particularly in comparison to the average age when slave mothers on Saint Domingue coffee plantations had their first children; they were typically mothers by age 20.⁴⁹ Nearly half of all births on the five sugar plantations sampled were experienced by mothers between the ages of 25 and 34 (Figure 5-2). In contrast, only a little over 30% of children born on coffee plantations were born to women between the ages of 25 and 34; rather, up to half of all births could be attributed to younger mothers who gave birth between 15 and 24 years of age (Figure 5-2). In fact, while the peak age for giving birth on sugar plantations was 25, for mothers on coffee plantations it was at least five years earlier at age 20 (Figure 5-2). This trend is confirmed by Saint Domingue historian

⁴⁶ This is consistent with Richard Dunn's study which states that the average mother on a Jamaica sugar plantation entered into her first successful pregnancy more than a year later than the average U.S. mother. See Dunn, "A Tale of Two Plantations," 59. The results concerning mothers' ages at the time of their first birth omit any data for children over 17 years of age in an attempt to correct for the presence of outliers.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ In all cases where a fertility trend is displayed by slave women between the ages of 15 and 39, the same trend can be confirmed by a larger pool of women, those aged 15 to 49. However, the smaller sample of women, those between 15 and 39, is used throughout this paper in order to minimize the effect of outliers that the oldest women of plantations can sometimes contribute.

⁴⁹ Though the average age of mothers on coffee plantations is somewhat younger than the average age of mothers on sugar plantations in these plantation samples (for the most part this is due to the great number of young Africans in the highland workforce), the trends noted in this study are consistent across the axes of both ethnicity and croptype, and are significant enough to deserve analysis.

David Geggus who noted that, “to a striking degree slave women on coffee plantations gave birth at much younger ages than those in the plain.”⁵⁰

It has been speculated by Geggus that early pregnancy, on both coffee and sugar estates, was somewhat related to miscegenation, as white or mulatto men fathered 20% of the children born to women under the age of 20 on coffee estates and 25% of those on sugar estates.⁵¹ Likewise, Richard Dunn noted that more than half of the babies produced by mothers under the age of seventeen on a large Jamaican sugar estate were mulattos.⁵² Yet, examples of unions between young African women and white men are so scarce that if mixed race relations are implicated in early pregnancies it is only in the case of creoles.⁵³ In this study, of the women who gave birth to “*mulâtre*” children, all but two were of creole background, and in every instance the birth occurred before mothers reached the age of 20. In fact, most (83%) of these mixed race babies represented first births for mothers, some as young as 13 and 14 years old, the youngest of whom labored on coffee plantations. The central reason behind the presence of relatively young mothers on coffee plantations may be explained by their comparatively better work regime, diet, and disease environment. In contrast, the physiological afflictions associated with Saint Domingue sugar production erected barriers to entry into motherhood for slave women. Interestingly, instances of miscegenation identified in this study were overwhelmingly more common on the highland coffee plantations. This trend can, perhaps, be accounted for by the fact that

⁵⁰ Geggus, “Sugar and Coffee,” 92.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 93. Miscegenation refers to the mixing, in this case, of different racial groups. The children resulting from the union of parents of different races, more specifically between a white and a black person, were called “*mulâtre*” in the French Caribbean. Here they are referred to as mulatto.

⁵² Dunn, “A Tale of Two Plantations,” 59.

⁵³ Geggus, “Sugar and Coffee,” 93.

these newer frontier regions were more isolated and intimate communities where white planter families resided, unlike the more typical absenteeism of Saint Domingue sugar estates, and day to day contact between whites and slaves was more typical. Although the counterpart scenario of the large sugar plantation with its staff of European bachelors might also point to opportunities for sexual interaction between slave women and white plantations employees, the five sugar plantations examined here indicate that racially mixed unions were not necessarily more common in the diverse and densely populated plains environment.

In terms of slave women's fertile age span, the horrendous conditions of sugar plantation life affected African women considerably more than creoles in Saint Domingue. Evidence from sugar plantations suggests that the low fertility of African women may have been largely due to delayed puberty and therefore a shorter span of fecundity.⁵⁴ This is revealed in the fact that the average age at which African mothers, between 15 and 39, on sugar plantations experienced their first birth was 23.44 years old, slightly older than creoles on sugar plantations who typically had their first child at closer to 23 years of age. Similarly, the most recorded births for creole mothers on sugar plantations occurred at 21 years of age, while Africans did not reach their peak number of births until age 25 (Figure 5-4). On both sugar and coffee plantations African women, who had experienced the middle passage and the subsequent "seasoning" process, were less healthy than their creole counterparts for the entirety of their lives. This may be why the greatest number of births for African mothers on coffee plantations occurred at the ages of 21 and 22, while creoles' most successful age to give birth was at least a year earlier at 20 years old (Figure 5-3). Not distinguishing croptype, nearly

⁵⁴ Ibid.

40% of all African births in this study occurred between the ages of 25 and 34, while a similar proportion (about 46%) of creole births occurred between the ages of 15 and 24 (Figure 5-1). In general, it seems that creoles on coffee plantations had the longest span of fertility, and this may be a key reason why they were the most successful slave mothers in Saint Domingue slave society.

Distribution of Mothers

Table 5-3 presents the distribution of Saint Domingue slave women identified as mothers in the inventories consulted distinguishing age, ethnicity, and crootype. Arguably, these data represent the most significant results of this study because, unlike most of the conclusions already discussed, they are independent of the age structure of the plantation samples, ensuring their reliability. Overall, these results confirm the findings presented thus far and are further reinforced by their close alignment with the most current data on Saint Domingue fertility.⁵⁵ Low fertility can be expressed in three different ways: truncated fertility spans within a woman's lifetime (due either to late achievement of menarche or early onset of menopause), protracted spaces between successful births, and finally, complete sterility. The former two aspects of fertility have already been discussed here. However, the data above provides new insight concerning the third and final measure of fertility – childlessness.

According to the results of this study, women of African descent on coffee and sugar plantations were more often childless than their creole counterparts in almost every age group as well as in the overall sample.⁵⁶ These statistics align with the fertility ratio trends previously discussed, indicating that, though African women exhibited

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ The exception to this seems to be women in their 40's, but this age group probably represents an anomalous segment of the female population as it is constructed from a relatively small sample size.

longer birthspacing intervals, they were also less often mothers. In addition, it seems that, overall, a larger proportion of women on coffee plantations had children than those on sugar plantations. More specifically, this trend holds true for most women in this study under the age of 40, a substantial portion of the female population.⁵⁷ It seems clear that the preferable environment for African and creole slave mothers was the coffee plantation; slave women on small estates, despite their limited choice of sexual partners, were less likely to remain childless than women on big plantations.

As might be expected, the largest percentage of mothers identified was creoles on coffee plantations in their 20s and the second largest was the same group in their 30s, though African women in their 30s exhibited a similarly impressive percentage. In contrast, the least likely women to become mothers were Africans younger than 20 years old. Notably, not even one mother between the age of 15 and 19 on any of the five sugar plantations was African, and less than 15% of African women in their teens on coffee plantations were identified as mothers. Young African mothers were in short supply throughout the Caribbean as they were more vulnerable than second-generation slaves to disease, had recently endured the hazardous middle passage, were perhaps less willing to be sexually active in a new and traumatic environment, and, of course, had likely spent very little time (perhaps just a few years or even a few months) in the colony.⁵⁸

As in the instance of slave fertility indexes, croptype remains a critical determinant in the distribution of slave mothers; the percentage of creole mothers on sugar

⁵⁷ The exception to this is the group of African women in their 20s; there were about 5% more mothers on sugar plantations in this age group.

⁵⁸ Philip Curtin also suggests in his "Nutrition in African History" that since famine in West Africa was a major source of slaves the poor nutritional history of African slave women may have resulted in sporadic bouts of, or even permanent, infertility. See Morissey, *Slave Women*, 110.

plantations, though greater than that of their African counterparts, did not surpass the percentage of mothers from either ethnic group on coffee plantations. However, ethnicity also seems to be a key factor in determining who experienced motherhood, especially for women in their 20s and 30s; creole women on coffee plantations in their 20s were more than twice as likely as their African counterparts to be mothers and those in their 30s on sugar plantations were about one and half times more likely. These results also imply, overall, that work regime affected African mothers only slightly more than creoles, and ethnicity was a more important factor for mothers on sugar plantations. However, such results are in direct opposition to the fertility index trends specified earlier in this paper (see page 49) and thereby confound any conclusions that might have been deduced concerning associations of fertility across ethnicity and croptype.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ On page 49 of the current work the author concludes that, "in the case of fertility indexes, the variable of ethnicity was far more important on coffee plantations than on sugar plantations."

Table 5-1. Fertility indexes

	Sugar Plantations	Coffee Plantations	Total
Creoles	337	662	382
Africans	257	364	303
Total	308	428	

Table 5-2. Average age at which mothers (15-39) experienced their first birth

	Coffee	Sugar
African	21.19	23.44
Creole	19.45	23.07
Overall	20.44	23.18

Table 5-3. Percentage of women designated as mothers by age and croptype

	Coffee		Sugar	
Overall	41.1%		37.32%	
Age Bands	Africans	Creoles	Africans	Creoles
15-19	14.3	26.9	0.0	17.5
20's	31.0	66.7	35.5	41.5
30's	54.0	58.4	36.4	57.4
40's	41.4	40.0	50.0	45.2
50's	33.3	40.0	34.8	42.9
Overall	43.4	45.6	38.2	42.2

NB: The percentages for coffee plantations are derived from relatively small sample sizes, particularly those of creoles who are over the age of 30.

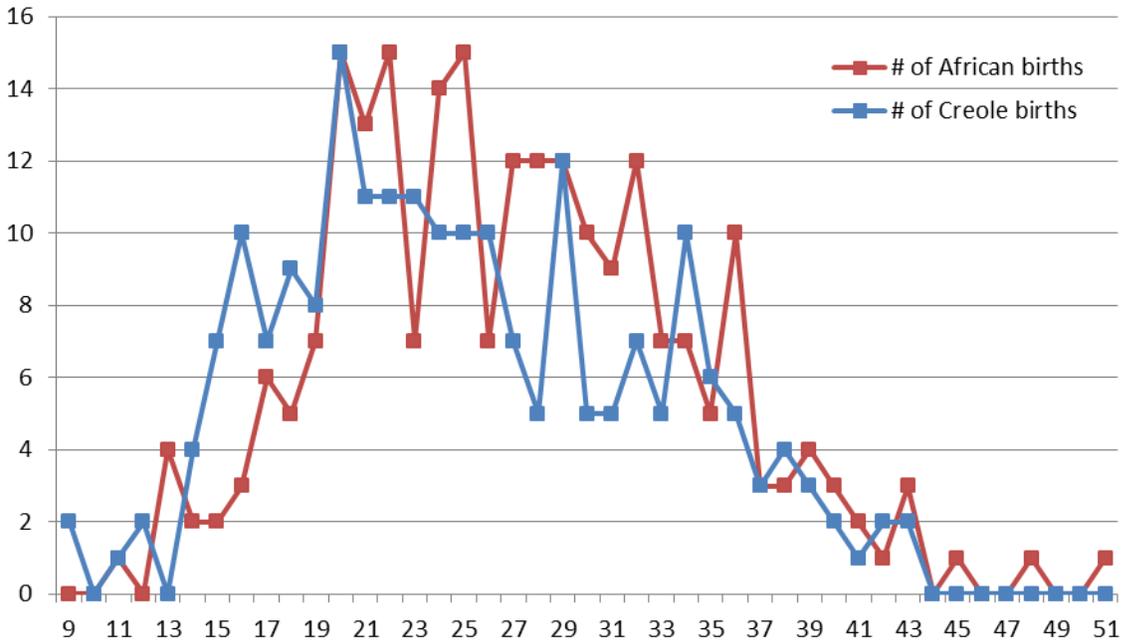


Figure 5-1. Number of African and creole births by mothers' ages

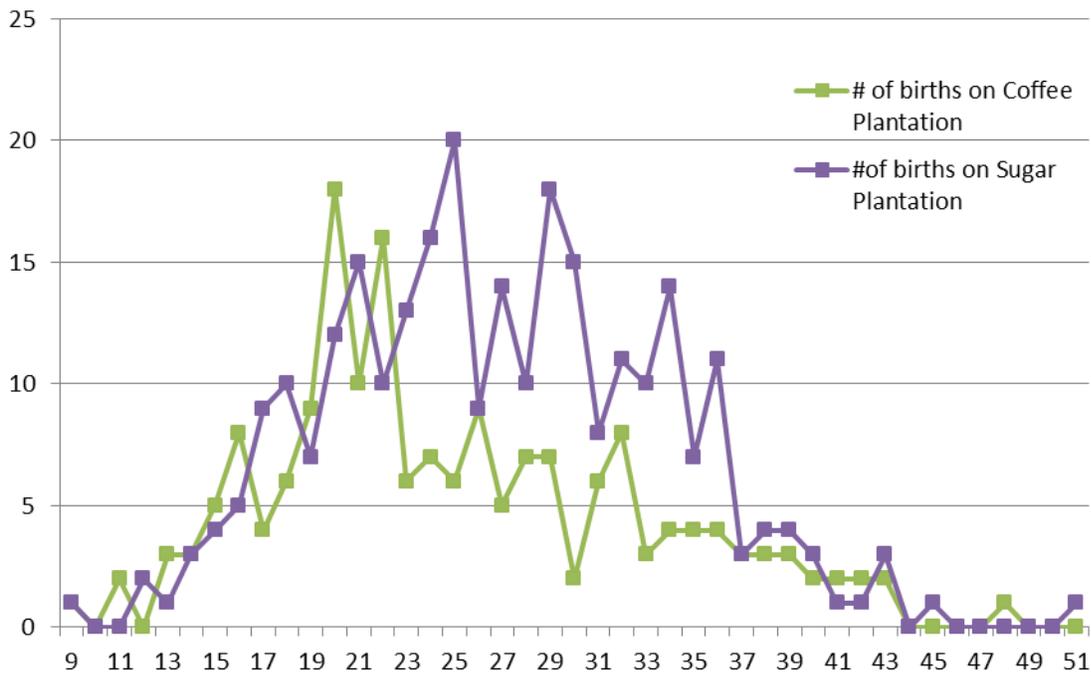


Figure 5-2. Number of births on coffee and sugar plantations by mothers' ages

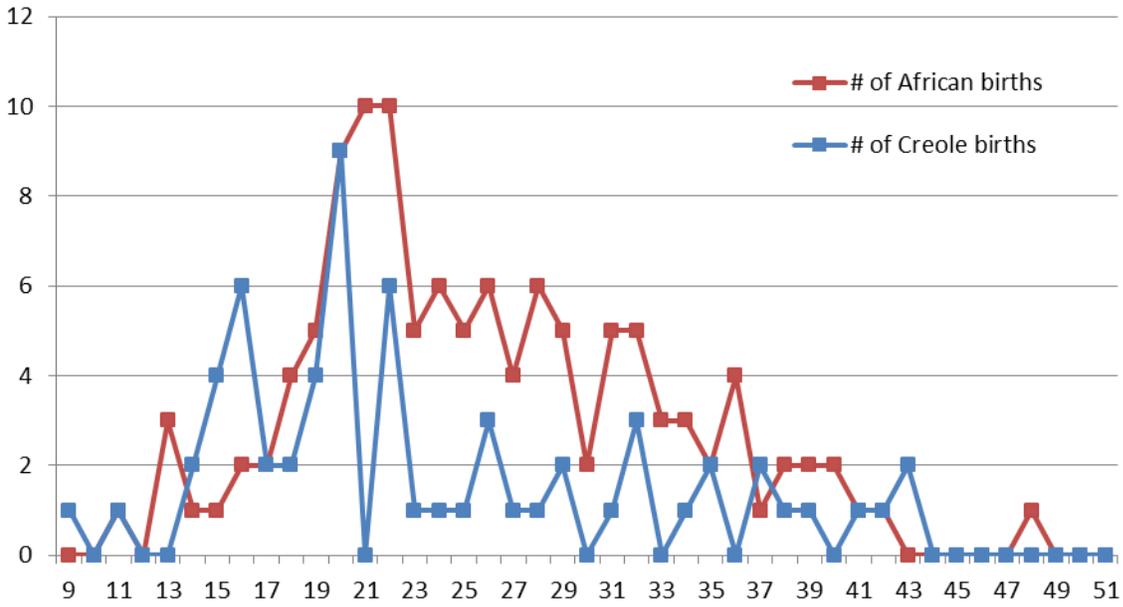


Figure 5-3. Number of African and creole births on coffee plantations by mothers' ages

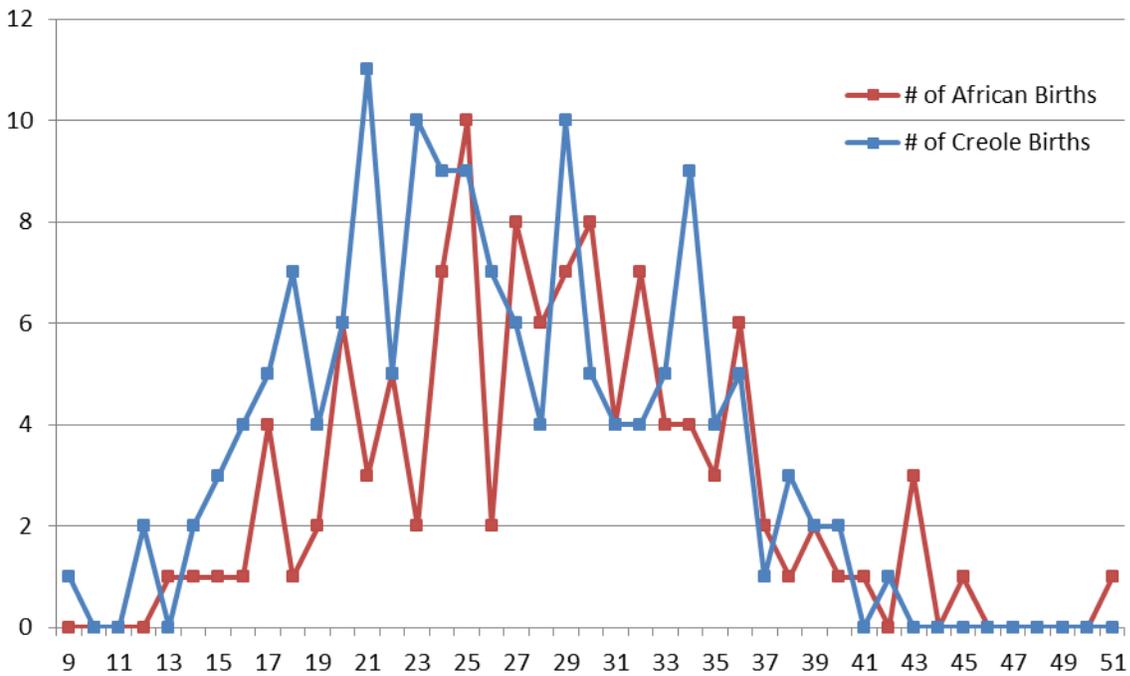


Figure 5-4. Number of African and creole births on sugar plantations by mothers' ages

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

At the moment of the Haitian Revolution Saint Domingue fertility levels were extremely low. The “double burden” of crop production and reproduction that enslaved women endured compromised their health so that the achievement of motherhood was difficult and the birthing of multiple children unlikely. This thesis has established that croptype, and its divergent work regimes, was the most central determinant of slave fertility. Women in the economically vibrant plains region suffered from generally poor fertility that was apparently due to delayed reproductive development and intermittent fecundity within their lifetime. There was a substantially smaller percentage of mothers identified on sugar plantations in almost every age group compared to that of coffee plantations, and these mothers had their first children several years later in life.

However, the competing influence of ethnicity further complicates this picture of slave fertility. The majority of slaves in Saint Domingue were Africans who had recently experienced dislocation, malnutrition, disease, and abuse as well as psychological trauma. Slaves born in the colony were healthier, having already adjusted to the colony’s disease environment, and were well socially and culturally acclimated. Creoles often dominated the less labor intensive positions of a plantation, and were more likely to benefit from relations with white men, especially those younger than 20 years old. For all these reasons African slaves displayed extremely high sterility rates in comparison to locally born creoles. Also, African mothers on both coffee and sugar plantations were comparatively older than creoles, on average, giving birth to most of their children at a later stage in life, and their efforts to abide by West African nursing customs resulted in longer intervals between their births. However, it may be emphasized that though there

was a larger percentage of Africans in the Saint Domingue highlands, the fertility rate and total percentage of mothers there exceeded that of the plains. This demonstrates the primacy of work regime as an influence on fertility and implies that its impact on slaves' reproductive success was ubiquitous beyond doubt.

Behind the seemingly sterile façade of statistics and numbers presented here lies a meaningful historical reality experienced by hundreds of thousands of enslaved women in colonial Saint Domingue. These women, a key component of colony's vital labor force by the second half of the eighteenth century, drove the highly profitable and expanding agricultural sector of France's most prized economy. Yet the overwhelmingly negative growth rate of Saint Domingue's slave population at this crucial moment in its history seems to indicate that its economic success came at a devastating social and biological price for slave women. In addition to the exhausting labor regime and sociocultural (as well as personal) violence endured by this population of slave women, most also faced the physical and psychological hardship of reduced fertility, late and sporadic fecundity, frequent miscarriages and infant deaths, and in many cases complete sterility. While we can glean from the data presented here numerous cases of personal triumph in those women who were able to generate families amidst the cruel and unforgiving environment of Caribbean slavery, it seems that reproductive success was much more likely for the smaller proportion of locally born slaves who escaped working in the colony's deadly cane fields by engaging in either coffee production or domestic servitude. Of course, some of these families represent the living embodiment and sociological consequences of the plantation violence which many enslaved women regularly encountered while at work. The results of this study reveal a story of both

social and biological struggle, one that does not end with the legendary slave revolt of 1791. The women represented here, the great majority of whom were born in Africa, produced the first generation of independent Haitians. They and their families, who would go on in the following decades to experience the disturbance and violence of revolution and civil war, carried the legacy of slavery (in body and in mind) into the next chapter of Haitian history.

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