ABSTRACT

BONDS OF MONEY, BONDS OF MATRIMONY?:
FRENCH AND NATIVE INTERMARRIAGE IN 17th & 18th CENTURY
NOUVELLE FRANCE AND SENEGAL

by Eugene Richard Henry Tesdahl

This study contributes to the burgeoning field of Atlantic history, exploring significant similarities, contrasts, and new creations that existed between the French colonies of Nouvelle France (New France or Canada) and Senegal of West Africa, 1608-1763.

The beaver felt hat, the fashion icon of the day, commercially linked the fur trade of New France with Gum Senegal production of Senegal. Growing from these economic ties, Frenchmen in both colonies engaged in loose or formal marriages with native women (Algonquians in New France and Wolofs, Jolofs, and Lebous in Senegal), termed *marriages a la façon de pays*, or “country-style marriages.” These arrangements provided sexual, commercial, military, and cultural bonds.

Native women and Frenchmen in North America and Africa used *marriage à la façon du pays* to construct economic ties and kinship networks that bound together French and native communities even after the colonial era.
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Acknowledgements and Dedication

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CHAPTER I: French Bridges Between Two Continents

“We have done so much for these poor unbelievers that they have given us some of their daughters, which seems to me an act of God. These little girls, brought up as Christians and then married to Frenchmen or Baptized Savages, will draw as many children from their nation as we shall desire.”¹ Father Paul Le Jeune, member of the Jesuit order, or Society of Jesus, penned these words in 1636 shortly after making contact with the Huron people in southeastern Nouvelle France (New France). Le Jeune, unlike most of his fellow countrymen, was not involved in the lucrative trade in beaver furs, fueling the European felt hat fashion, but rather aimed to save Indian souls by converting them to Catholicism. He described intermarriage between Frenchmen and American Indian women, an exchange that made possible the French fur trade and built sustained relationships between the two cultures. He did not know that his words would echo the experiences of scores of other French missionaries, merchants, and soldiers throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Nouvelle France. Nor did he understand the economic, military, and cultural impact that inter-marriage, known in Nouvelle France as “marriages performed in the fashion of the country” or mariages à la façon du pays, would soon have on French and Native societies.²

It is even less likely that Le Jeune realized that his countrymen across the Atlantic were at that very same time conducting a similar cultural experiment in Sénégal, West Africa. Huguenot traveler Jean Barbot gave one of the first illustrative accounts of French and African intermarriage commensurate with Le Jeune’s North American experiences. Arriving in Senegal


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in 1685, steeped in Protestant morals, Barbot captured the dominant sentiment of the time among most Europeans: “The union of a white man with a black or Mulatto girl is a compact quite peculiar.” Though a Protestant, Barbot viewed Native Africans in Senegal through the same lens of Christian values through which Le Jeune judged Native Americans. Like other Europeans, most French viewed inter-racial marriage between Europeans and indigenous peoples with great reservations. Once the French created colonial communities within these foreign lands, they easily bent or broke strict European morality and social norms to fit necessities of a new environment. Even so, the culture of seventeenth-century St. Louis and Gorée, Senegal, was already a mixture between French and Native African customs, food, and dress. Figuring prominently in this equation was the regular practice of *Marriage à la mode du pays*, the African equivalent of the common practice of Nouvelle France. Most members of the French Christian community agreed with Barbot that the races should be kept pure and that intermarriage was evil. French merchants, soldiers, and explorers, however, regarded inter-marriage as an invaluable tool of colonization and added incentive in exchange for estrangement from mainstream French society.

Within these two vignettes we get our first glimpses of two seventeenth-century French colonies. We immediately gain a sense that New France and Senegal had markedly different geography and peoples, yet at the same time their populations shared striking cultural similarities. Colonial historians have emphasized both colonies as central to the study of French colonialism, yet the French crown viewed both as less important than Caribbean sugar colonies.

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4 Literally “marriage in the mode of the country,” nearly identical to *Marriages à la façon du pays* practiced in New France.
Setting the standard for French colonial history in the mid-nineteenth century, Francis Parkman portrayed French colonialism as a one-sided exchange; savvy Frenchmen taking advantage of ignorant Indians. More often, native women and their families exercised just as much knowledge of French commercial and political interests and equally used these relationships to protect their own business, military, and social interests. Liaisons varied in degree from informal prostitution or concubinage to formal marriage ceremonies conducted by native shamans or French priests. Against most accepted racial and cultural attitudes of the mother country, these types of liaisons flourished during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, defining French colonialism and challenging French racial attitudes.

Native women of North America and Africa and Frenchmen used *marriage à la façon du pays* as a means of romantic expression and sexual contact but also as a tool of colonization and acculturation and an important medium of economic and cultural exchange. French inter-marriage in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries dramatically altered the native cultures of Nouvelle France and Senegal and forged a cultural and commercial bond between both colonies under French colonial policy. These unions resulted in increased autonomy for native women, improved trade relations for inter-marrying Frenchmen, and brought about other significant changes in French colonial life. Equally important, these unions produced significant populations of multi-ethnic children, called *Métis*, literally “mixed”, in Nouvelle France and Mulattoes or Métis in Senegal. Métis was used in both cases, yet to simplify this study we shall refer to biracial children in North America as Métis and those in Africa as Mulatto or multi-ethnic. Métis children stood as physical reminders of French intermarriage and reaped both ideal
benefits and severe injustices from the institution by living between the worlds of their French Fathers and native mothers.  

Both Métis and Mulattoes saw intermarriage and acculturation as useful tools in the French colonial empire, yet it was not an idyllic new hybrid between the two cultures. Instead, distinct features from both French and American Indian or Native African backgrounds combined to produce a unique religion, values, food, and fashion in these emergent Atlantic communities. Within such communities, fur trade posts and Algonquian villages in Nouvelle France and the coastal cities of St. Louis and Gorée in Senegal, Frenchmen, native women, and their multi-ethnic children enjoyed more liberties than they would have in France. Indigenous women enticed, coerced, and led Frenchmen into these unions, often on their own terms, creating new dynamic communities where skin color did not inhibit trade or romantic love. 

Inter-racial marriage and cultural interactions between the French and indigenous populations have long fascinated scholars studying French colonialism, particularly those associated with the North American fur trade. Since the nineteenth-century most readers of colonial history, especially influenced by the works of Francis Parkman, have often accepted French colonialism as more compassionate than the English model. While the French and Spanish entered marriages with indigenous women, for sexual, commercial, and diplomatic reasons wherever they went, their Protestant cousins, the English, rejected such practices as stooping to the level of savages. Entering into such unions made the French more accepting of native cultures, yet few Frenchmen respected such relationships enough to take their native families back to France to fight for acceptance there. We should reject Parkman’s romantic notion that the French treated indigenous women and their multi-ethnic children as equals.

Note that wherever the terms Métis, Mulatto, or “mixed-race” are used they in no way reflect the views of the author, but popular terminology of the time being discussed. Multi-ethnic, multi-ancestry, and other terms will be employed throughout the work when applicable.
throughout their empire. In the confines of multi-ethnic communities within the empire, however, Frenchmen regarded American Indians and Native Africans as more than business associates; they were wives and mothers, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, and friends.  

Parkman’s romantic depiction of French intermarriage remained the standard throughout the nineteenth century and most of the twentieth and leading many observers to accept the fact that French colonialism was kinder and gentler to native peoples. Jennifer Brown and Sylvia Van Kirk resumed the conversation on American Indian intermarriage in the North American Fur Trade adding significantly to what Parkman began. In 1980, Brown’s *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country*, and Van Kirk’s *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-1870*, proposed that American Indian women had agency in such liaisons. While the authors show native women with more control over their own lives and influence over their European husbands than depicted by Parkman and others, Brown and Van Kirk still treat the relationships as unchanging contracts rather than constant negotiations. Despite the temporal range of Van Kirk’s work, both she and Brown focus on the British fur trade between 1770 and 1870, rather than on what their titles would have us believe. Both works largely ignore the fact that French intermarriage laid the foundation for limited British liaisons and that upon British arrival many native families already practiced Catholicism and carried French surnames. Resuming study of this subject, Brown and Van Kirk still cling to the Anglo-centric romanticism of Parkman in many of their depictions, something that is in need of further revision.  

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Susan Sleeper-Smith’s 2001 work, *Indian Women and French Men: Rethinking Cultural Encounter in the Western Great Lakes* picks up Brown and Van Kirk’s arguments about agency, but provides great detail in an argument that artfully examines French intermarriage throughout the Great Lakes. Building on Sleeper-Smith’s thorough study, and arguing with Brown and Van Kirk, my study will demonstrate that Native American women and their children had choice and power in French intermarriage in colonial communities and at times throughout all of French society. Unlike the other studies, however, I extend my examination of French intermarriage across the Atlantic, comparing intermarriage in New France and Senegal through the larger lens of the French Atlantic world.\(^9\)

Though the French in Europe could not reach consensus on the issue of inter-marriage between Frenchmen and Native women, French colonizers in the Atlantic world entered such relationships wherever they went. Intermarriage immediately raises several key questions.\(^{10}\) First, why were Frenchmen and native women (often coerced into such practices by their fathers) willing to enter such arrangements? What did each party involved stand to gain or lose by entering into such a marriage? How can we uncover the voices of Natives and women in such arrangements, as they were primarily carried out and recorded by male players? Why were *Nouvelle France* and Senegal similar in their practices of intermarriage and other colonial policy? How did intermarriage and lucrative commodity trades unite seventeenth and eighteenth-century Senegal and Nouvelle France under the canopy of the larger Atlantic world? And, most significantly, how were the multi-ethnic children of these unions treated in French colonies, and how are they direct links to the French colonial past?

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10 *Mariages a la façon de pays, Mariages a la Mode de pays*, marriages, unions, relationships, liaisons, and arrangements are used interchangeably throughout the work. Rather than to create confusion this is meant to show the lack of standardization to this marital and cultural practice.
The similarities between New France and Senegal notwithstanding, it seems that the multi-ethnic Mulatto children of Senegal had many more opportunities and privileges in French colonial society than their Canadian Métis cousins. Many African women, known as Signares, or female traders, were well established as merchants within their traditional societies, which were matriarchal. Possessing added influence within Lebou, Wolof, and Jolof circles, French traders, soldiers, and officials sought out these women as wives and partners. As a direct result of the power these women held before marriage, the multi-ethnic children from these unions carried the stature of their French fathers as well as their Signare mothers. Rather than just a French last name with a local face, multi-ethnic Mulatto boys grew into men holding positions of power and influence in French colonial society. More than mere laborers or translators, many of these men received their education in France, holding positions in the military and trade. Running counter to the dominant European racial attitudes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, these French African children are cultural anomalies. I will assert that the influence and power of their entrepreneurial mothers along with other key factors afforded the Mulattoes of Senegal the opportunity to avoid the fate of the Canadian Métis.¹¹

The aim of this study is to provide readers with an intimate glimpse at the men and women who interacted in the interiors of two continents in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries during French colonialism. In that glimpse readers will recognize the complicated mixing of two cultures, actually French culture with numerous indigenous subgroups. These people came together in these unions largely for economic security, military protection, and to meet sexual and social needs. Instead of producing weak bonds, after the trade in gum in Senegal and beaver in Nouvelle France dissipated, these unions cemented bonds between distinct

ethnic groups. Reaching well beyond the agreements of commerce, these liaisons left indelible marks on the populations of both Canada and Senegal that are still visible today. In Canada the Métis are recognized as a separate native tribe with all the powers and privileges thereof. In modern Senegal, French is still the most common language spoken and French surnames and customs are intertwined with those of the Wolof and Lebou. These cultural interactions in both colonies offer clues to French attitudes of race and policies of colonization, but they also show significant opportunities for racial equality that eluded American Indians and Native Africans for over two more centuries.
CHAPTER II: North America and Senegal on the Eve of French Arrival
(Environments and the extent of Native Peoples)

By the seventeenth century, France, in competition with Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, and England sought new overseas colonies, markets and resources. Rising French populations vying for the same small plots of land, combined with French financial and commercial needs, fueled exploration. Though Nouvelle France, later called Canada, was the first large-scale interior French colony, founded in 1607 by Samuel de Champlain, it was not France’s first move towards the creation of an Atlantic empire. In the sixteenth century, colonial experiments in Florida and Acadia failed due to harsh North American climates, resistant indigenous populations, and lack of French immigration. Similarly, across the Atlantic, French merchants from Rouen and Dieppe first appeared in West Africa in 1382, following in Portuguese and Dutch footsteps and hoping to capitalize on the same stores of ivory, gold, and spices. Despite French demands for African goods, intimidating African resistance from forbidding shorelines, and well-established African markets limited the French to ship-side trading for African commodities until they founded St. Louis, Senegal, in 1638. What the French started in New France and spread to Senegal soon led to a thriving French colonial empire intent on reaping raw materials from the new lands.¹²

Avoiding expensive Trans-Saharan caravans, which meant high transport costs and long waits for the gum Senegal and other commodities, the Portuguese became the first Europeans to cut out these middlemen by sailing directly to West Africa in 1344. Portuguese sailors landed on the coast of Senegal becoming the first Europeans to set foot on the coast of West Africa, but

they departed soon thereafter, and instead established the western island colonies of Saõ Tomé and Príncipe.\textsuperscript{13} France first entered the African arena in 1382, when a French company based out of Rouen and Dieppe commenced trading European goods for ivory, gold, and gum Senegal from their ships.\textsuperscript{14} It was not until 1638 that the French established their first permanent trading post near the mouth of the Senegal River. This site shifted in 1659 up the coast to N’Dar, which later became the city of St. Louis. In 1678 the French added the coastal city of Gorée to the north as its second colonial city. Both cities became centers for French and African cultural interaction and mixed marriages.\textsuperscript{15}

It is important to note that France’s original contact with West Africa predates even Columbus’ voyage to North America by over one hundred years. Still it was in North America first that the Spanish, Dutch, English, and French first made colonial inroads. With his voyage of 1492 and later journeys, Columbus brought back to Spain gold, peppers, fifteen captured Arawaks, and tales of this “New World” giving Spain the prestige and wealth of being the first European colonial power in the Americas. The beginning of the sixteenth century marked an explosion of European exploration and colonization. From the Portuguese and the Dutch African settlements in the fourteenth century to the fifteenth-century Spanish exploits in the Americas, the French long had their sights set on the economic, political, and social advantages of colonization.\textsuperscript{16}

The Spanish brought back their gold and new foodstuffs and the Portuguese and Dutch reaped gems and ivory from their colonies; they also brought back tales of savage barbarian people un-Christian and uncivilized by European standards of the day. The Spanish told of

\textsuperscript{13} Thornton, 57.
\textsuperscript{14} France and West Africa, 28.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 35.
licentious young women of a different color and mysterious origins, whose fathers seemed to
offer them as gifts to the in-coming whites. Such tales of sexual freedom and intrigue certainly
appealed to young adventurous Frenchmen. France did not join the ranks of European
colonization with their “brown gold” of beaver fur until 1534 when Jacques Cartier, exploring
the New Foundland coast, found easy entrance into the interior of what is now Canada through
the Gulf and River of St. Lawrence.\textsuperscript{17} It was not until the 1603 voyage of Samuel de Champlain,
however, with profitable annual shipments of beaver furs for the sorely lacking hat-making
industry that France found its niche in colonial North America.\textsuperscript{18}

Champlain founded Nouvelle France as a commercial colony in 1607 with only a few
bold or foolish young Frenchmen and a plethora of Catholic missionary priests. Champlain was
a man motivated by greed and glory, but also devotion to a Catholic mission. “Their words
seemed to me good common sense,” Champlain remarked in his journal of 1604, “showing the
desire they have to get a knowledge of God. It is a great wrong to let so many men be lost and
watch them perish at our door, without rendering them succor which can only be given through
the help of kings, princes, and ecclesiastics, who alone have the power to do this.”\textsuperscript{19} He truly
believed that his work in North America brought natives out of darkness, saving their immortal
souls, and putting silver into his purse, too. Christian mission or no, by 1627 interest in the fur
trade rose and with it royal interest in the profitability in beaver fur caused Louis XIII to
designate Nouvelle France a royal colony.

\textsuperscript{17} A Collection of Documents Relating to Jacques Cartier and the Sieur de Roberval, ed. Henry Percival Biggar,
(Ottawa, Public Archives of Canada, 1930).
\textsuperscript{18} Voyages of Samuel de Champlain, 1604-1618, ed. W.L. Grant, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1907), 4;
Abraham Rees, The Cyclopedia or Universal Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and Literature, With the Assistance of
1810-1840), s.v. “Hat;” The discovery of a new source of Beaver fur on the St. Lawrence, after the extinction of the
European variety, was essential to the perpetuation of the popularity and fashion of the European fur felt hat.
\textsuperscript{19} Voyages of Samuel de Champlain, 323; Pierre François Xavier Charlevoix, History and General Description of
New France. 1743 Trans. with notes by John Gilmary Shea, Vol 1,2,6, (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1962, c.
1870), Microfiche, 74-75.
With this act, Louis XIII recognized Nouvelle France as a premier French colony and commercial success. In Champlain’s own words, without the aid of French kings, Nouvelle France would not only have remained of little concern to French interests, it also would have limited opportunities for struggling colonists, perhaps even cutting off necessary supplies. The French trading posts established in Senegal in the 1630s were not converted to a royal French colony until 1659. The French government allowed private businesses to begin trade in a region and become successful before taking over the region as a colony thereby protecting themselves from loss should the region flounder or fail. In this fashion, French officials ensured the success of colonization, for if a commodity ran out in a region or demand decreased, the colony was simply not given royal priority, leading ultimately to its demise.\(^{20}\)

It was back in New France that the earliest seeds of French colonialism were sown. At the end of Champlain’s 1618 journeys, he made this optimistic prediction: “At my departure from the settlement I took leave of the holy fathers, Sieur de la Mothe, and all the others who were to stay there, giving them to expect that I would return, God assisting, with a good number of families to people the country.”\(^{21}\) Champlain dedicated the rest of his life to encouraging immigrant settlement and development of Quebec. Still, New France soon was renowned as a rough country and for over twenty years was populated more by Jesuit missionaries, Christianized Hurons, and other Indians than by French families.\(^{22}\)

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, France was inundated with tales, some true and others exaggerations and outright fabrications, of life and people in New France and Senegal. Rumor of licentious Indian and African women, brutal Canadian winters, sultry African summers, and barren cropland, all haunted recruiters of new immigrants to both French  

\(^{20}\) *France and West Africa*, 35.  
\(^{21}\) *Voyages of Samuel de Champlain, 1604-1618*, 360.  
\(^{22}\) Ibid., 360-362.
colonies. Tales of the dregs of French society flocking to New France also reigned among the British, reinforced when British prisoners viewed Frenchmen living with native women or other coarse behavior. Stories of harsh conditions in the colonies encouraged many of France’s poor to set out for New France but at the same time turned away many wealthy French families. Disparaging tales of French colonies particularly stunted female immigration because women did not want to start new lives in the wilderness. By the 1660s, the lack of female French immigration was so pronounced in New France that the government attempted to give incentives to women who would migrate willingly, adding to negative perceptions of the colonies back in France.23

By the mid seventeenth century, Pierre Boucher, a descendent of one of the earliest French families in Quebec, had gained sizable land holdings and various public offices in the trust of his fellow Canadians. On a 1664 visit to France, Boucher proved a valuable ally in recruiting new settlers, stating, “After having said that the country is a good one, capable of producing all sorts of things, like France, that it is healthy, that population only is wanting.”24

The problem of encouraging French settlement in remote Canada lingered throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

There existed only two full families of permanent French settlers in the city of Quebec by 1627 as colonial planners battled waning French populations in the colony. That same year Cardinal Richelieu, under King Louis XIII, gave Nouvelle France renewed prominence as a colony and encouraged settlement on a large scale with the endorsement of the church.

Richelieu created the Company of One Hundred Associates that year, leaving nearly all political and commercial power in the hands of one hundred Quebecois merchants overseen by one territorial governor with nearly unchallenged authority. Champlain remained powerful in both the renamed company, “La Compagnie de la Nouvelle France,” and the colonial government until his death in 1635. As the fur trade grew even more lucrative, the Bourbon crown assumed royal control over New France in 1663. The problem of reluctant French settlement, however, is one that would haunt the colony until its usurpation by Britain in 1763.25

Even after assuming control, the French government found it easier to recruit single and independent merchants, traders, and laborers to reap the furs, lumber, and other commodities from the inhospitable woodlands than to convince entire French families or villages to migrate. In 1664, one year after the French crown assumed control of New France, Pierre Boucher, on a visit to France, spoke about the misconceptions of the growing colony. In comparing New France to New England, he wrote, “those who laid out money there (British mainland colonies) are now getting good returns from it; that country is no different from this (New France); what has been done there could be done here.”26 Financial support and government backing encouraged large-scale British migration to New England. The British had a large advantage over the French in this sense as many of their colonists were coming in fact not only as complete extended families but also often as complete villages and sometimes even townships. British Puritans, Calvinists, Anabaptists and other Protestant minority groups endured intense religious

26 Boucher, 62.
persecution in England and the Netherlands, leading many to seek new opportunities in the New World.²⁷

Religious persecution was not a means of incentive for French people to emigrate since France was over ninety percent Catholic, as it still remains today. Though some Huguenots and French Reformers did come to Nouvelle France, the majority of immigrants were largely Catholic, as exemplified by the many Jesuit missionaries and the Ursuline convent and hospital established in Quebec City in 1639. Huguenot and Catholic missionaries, ministers and priests provided many able-bodied French settlers and many of the most viable accounts of travel in both Nouvelle France and Senegal. Though they held polar views on most aspects of religion, most educated clergymen disagreed in their stance that inter-marriage between Frenchmen and native women was un-Christian. Some viewed this as a way to win over converts from the new populations, while others believed natives to be irredeemable.²⁸

Apart from the few mainstream French colonists who came to live in the eastern settlements of Quebec and Montreal in the early seventeenth century, Jesuit missionaries and coureurs de bois (runners of the woods) bore the brunt of colonization and cultural interaction with native peoples of New France. Coureurs de bois were unlicensed traders, who often penetrated deeper into the woodlands of Nouvelle France than any European, exchanging their cloth, metal tools, cooking pots, glass beads and other wares for beaver and other valuable furs.²⁹ Though well-established gentleman traders sometimes entered into mariages à la façon du pays, coureurs de bois chose them more often. As outlaws, coureurs were themselves on the fringes

of acceptable colonial French society, so their marrying into native tribes was not viewed as out of the ordinary. Colonial officials and military officers did sometimes married native women, though much more infrequently than their scurrilous counterparts.\textsuperscript{30}

Despite the rewards of the hat industry, both New France and Senegal constantly struggled to get French people to settle them, and the government encouraged single males to enter unions with native women in both cases. Intermarriage in Quebec and Montreal was far less frequent than in Senegalese cities due to slightly higher immigration rates and a higher percentage of white French women. In the interior of New France, however, intermarriage was so widespread that there were more liaisons in Nouvelle France than in Senegal. Intermarriage was more common in Africa than in New France as nearly all of the few Frenchmen there appear to have entered unions with native women. However, numerically there were more \textit{coureurs de bois} entering similar relationships in North America. Not merely relegated to the interior, intermarriage in Senegal was much more overt; Frenchmen in these cities often kept written records of their relationships. It is difficult to state in which colony intermarriage was more widespread, due to poor written records in North America, but it is evident that intermarriage was more accepted in French society in Senegal than in New France.\textsuperscript{31}

In mid-seventeenth century Senegal, Jean-Baptiste Colbert and other French diplomats faced the same problem of populating a colony as they had in Nouvelle France. The reason is unclear, but neither Colbert nor any other French official formally encouraged intermarriage in Senegal as they had in New France. It is possible that the practice was so common that it needed no encouragement from the government. Also influential Frenchwomen held even more reservations about perserved intense heat and disease of Senegal than the cold winters of New

\textsuperscript{30} Gilman, 78; Moogk, 41, 46; Barbot in \textit{France and West Africa}, 35.
\textsuperscript{31} Brooks, \textit{Africans and Eur-Africans in Western Africa}, 6; Sleeper-Smith, 19.
France, and resisted settling there. Confusion and rumors about African brutality rivaling the
savagery of American Indians added to the lack of white, female, French colonists. The few
Frenchmen in Senegal had little alternative but to seek liaisons with African women.
Surprisingly, however, these relationships would eventually spawn strong French African
communities.32

As French missionaries and traders entered Senegal in the 1630s they brought back
detailed accounts of the Wolof, Jolof, Lebou and other peoples. In some of the first inter-cultural
exchanges, thoughts of physical difference, blackness, and cultural dissimilarity immediately
took hold among the French. Traveling in the 1680s and 1690s, Jacques Le Maire describes
Wolof and Jolof houses as round huts made of palm branches and leaves and explains that people
sleep on raised platforms made of wooden rods. Foreign in comparison to French homes and
beds, such dwellings did not differ greatly from the willow mats or bark wigwams used in the
Algonquian Great Lakes. Also, like most Algonquian peoples, the Senegalese were not nomadic
hunters; they made their living through a combination of hunting, gathering, farming, and lived
in semi-sedentary villages. In Senegal, oftentimes these villages were located near large Acacia
forests where gum Senegal could be harvested for food, mixed with milk, as well as traded.
Pierre Labarthe and others before him noted three large Sahel forests just outside of St. Louis,
which by the 1780s had been harvested and utilized by local populations for centuries. The
French perceived Africans as inferior to them, but were astounded by and respectful of certain
aspects of their technology, knowledge, and culture.33

33 Michel Adanson, Histoire Naturelle du Sénégal Coquillages: Avec la Relation abrégée d’un Voyage fait en ce
pays, pendant les années 1749, 50, 51, 52, and 53, Microfiche, Translated by author, (Paris: Claude-Jean-Baptiste
Bauche, 1757), 20; Pierre Labarthe, Voyage au Sénégal, pendant les années 1784 et 1785, d’après les mémoires de
Lajaille, ancien officier de la Marine Française, (Paris: Dentu, an X-1802), 29; Jacques Le Maire, Voyages du
Surprising to the French, the cultures they encountered were not completely African, nor as primitive and foreign as the customs of Native Americans across the Atlantic. French missionaries were shocked to discover that many natives practiced Islam, and had for generations, while the Portuguese who settled in West Africa before the French had converted others to Catholicism prior to French arrival. Religious pluralism certainly did not deter dedicated French Catholic and Huguenot missionaries. The accounts show that while most priests and merchants found many traditional beliefs savage and uncivilized, they also acknowledged the possibility for conversion of an entire new set of savable souls.  

Within native communities of different faiths, missionaries formed plots to convert residents to conform to French ways, not least of which was intermarriage with incoming Frenchmen. Wolof, Jolof, and Lebou were patriarchal societies, often referred to as Mahométans (followers of Muhammad) or Moors, since Muslim missionaries arrived in West African centuries before the French. To the chagrin of Catholic priests and the envy of merchants, males practiced polygamy. Such arrangements entailed little respect and freedom for native African women. Be that as it may, being one of several wives meant that the workload could be split between several people. Michel Adanson wrote in the middle of the eighteenth century that women seemed completely subservient to men in these cultures, doing incredible amounts of work, even eating after their husbands. “There is no paradise for the female sex,” Adanson wrote, and yet he admitted there was a strict adherence to marriage claims and respect for women.  

Even so, most West African women had limited freedoms and opportunities prior to
the time of the French, both of which changed after French arrival and the growth of intermarriage in native environments.\textsuperscript{36}

Descriptions of the colonies, their inhabitants, and proposed means of maintaining them flourished in French journals and accounts, but the realities of colonial shorelines, climates, and diseases confronted French explorers on a daily basis. Craggy coastlines and African weaponry and military resistance deterred French settlers of Africa for many years. Able to fight in any terrain, hiding behind rocks and trees, both Algonquians and Native Africans were formidable enemies and valuable allies in battle. Great knowledge of terrain, woods fighting, and “guerrilla” tactics proved to be a great way to resist Europeans. Though both groups were militarily sophisticated, for centuries, African metallurgy produced iron spears and other weapons that allowed Africans to restrict Europeans to coastal trading. In the case of Canada, not only were Huron, Micmacs and other tribes unprepared to face French firearms upon European arrival, the onslaught of small pox, influenza, and other European diseases decimated Indian populations. Unlike their Algonquian neighbors, Native Africans were exposed to most European diseases long before French colonization through trans-Saharan caravan trade. These distinctions allowed Africans to resist French colonization much longer than Algonquians and to often conduct trade, settlement, and cultural interactions on African terms.\textsuperscript{37}

Another striking difference between European colonization in Africa as compared to the Americas was that although initial contact and commerce was begun in the mid-fourteenth century, exploration and colonization of the interior did not begin until well into the seventeenth or even eighteenth centuries. The delay in interior colonization was caused in part by the harsh climate and diseases that impaired Europeans, but was largely due to the rocky coasts and

\textsuperscript{36} Pierre-Raymond de Brisson, \textit{An account of the shipwreck and captivity of M. de Brisson; containing a description of the deserts of Africa, from Senegal to Morocco}, Translated from the French, (London: J. Johnson, 1789), 168.

\textsuperscript{37} Frederickson, 21; Thornton, 57.
narrow, largely unnavigable rivers, and dense tropical jungles of West Africa. Unlike the gently undulating hills of Nouvelle France and rivers such as the St. Lawrence, broad and deep enough to allow ocean-going ships deep into the interior, African rivers required smaller crafts manned by fewer sailors.

Just as Champlain founded New France on the St. Lawrence River valley as a hub of travel and trade, French traders in Senegal also established Gorée at the mouth of the Gambia and St. Louis in the Senegal River delta. Positioned on the two main arteries into the interior of West Africa, most missionaries, traders, and explorers thought that entering the interior and overpowering native populations would be as easy as in North America. French travelers soon realized that this was entirely impossible as the Senegal, like many African rivers, was narrow and shallow, passable only to small vessels, an environmental impediment to French colonialism. “But were it not for the difficulty of getting up the river,” wrote Huguenot missionary, Jean Barbot in 1685, “in almost any sort of vessels, as has been before observ’d [sic], this would avail very little to obstruct the invading of their residence.”38 Even near the close of the eighteenth century French travelers still echoed Barbot’s words, stating that one “must use small vessels on the river to be able to navigate to the interior.”39 The environment greatly influenced how the French operated in Senegal, but once established in St. Louis and Gorée, the French maintained a lucrative gum Senegal trade that directly connected with the Canadian fur trade.

38 Ibid., 35.
39 Monsieurs Saugnier and Brisson, Voyages to the coast of Africa, by Mess. Saugnier and Brisson: containing an account of their shipwreck... Trans, (London: Printed for G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1792), 266.
CHAPTER III: Importance of Trade: Fur & Gum

The link between Senegal and New France began not in the seventeenth century but on July 7, 1534, with French entry into what would later be called Newfoundland. A small group of Micmac Indians paddled out in birch bark canoes to greet the gigantic wooden structures that came towards them. Not sure what to make of the anxious paddlers, the sailing ships’ crew fired warning shots from two cannon and fire-lances, “which scattered among them and frightened them so much that they began to paddle off in very great haste, and did not follow us any more.”40 This was the party of Jacques Cartier, who sought out new lands, markets, and commodities under the permission of François I of France. Soon realizing that the Micmacs meant them no harm, Cartier and his hairy-faced boatmen landed and engaged in trade. “As soon as they saw us they began to run away, making signs to us that they had come to barter with us; and held up some furs of small value, with which they clothe themselves.”41 The Micmacs found it strange that instead of bartering for valuable copper ornaments, the French immediately negotiated for the ragged beaver-skin robes, castor-gris, worn by the native hosts. Years of wear rubbed off the glossy guard hairs that protected the fur from moisture, leaving only the dense absorbent under hairs, rendering the garments permeable to the elements and of little use to their native owners. Why then, if their owners deemed the skins useless did Cartier and his men eagerly trade steel tools, glass beads, and other goods to obtain the dilapidated furs?42

The answer to this question lies in fashion as well as fur. Since the ninth century AD Norse Vikings trapped fox, wolf, martin and other furs in the northern reaches of Europe and supplied them to eager European markets. Craftspeople used these furs mainly for winter

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40 Cartier, 51.
41 Ibid., 52-53; fire lance was a type of fragmentary explosive, a long wooden tube filled with sulfur, saltpeter, gun powder, lead, and broken glass, appendix 305.
42 Ibid., 53.
garments and decorative trim until the high Renaissance when tradesmen adapted the technique of felting hair into mats from which clothing and more importantly hats could be made. Tradesmen used sheep’s wool and rabbit fur for cheap felt caps, but soon recognized beaver under hair as the most ideal for making fine, stiff, broad-brimmed head coverings. Fashion varied from the Flemish broad brim depicted in the sixteenth and seventeenth-century works of Van Eyck and Rembrandt to the craze of the English top hat by the nineteenth century. In any case fur felt hats remained fashionable from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries.43 Throughout the eighteenth century, the most common style of hat was broad-brimmed and low-crowned, most usually pinned up on three sides among both French and British in the familiar “tri-cornered,” chapeau de trois coins, or tricorn hat associated with the Revolutionary Era. The very same popularity of the beaver hat that led French investors, hat-makers, and haberdashers to wealth led the European beaver near to extinction by the close of the sixteenth century.44

The shortage of European beaver fur left hat-makers and merchants in financial uncertainty until Cartier and, by the seventeenth century, Champlain brought the new resource as well as countless bales of beaver fur back to French consumers. Another aspect of Cartier’s first trade dealt with the hat-making process itself. Though the Micmac and other Algonquians valued the beaver’s shiny guard hairs to shed water from their robes, European hat-makers wanted only the dense hair beneath that matted together, to make felt hats. Cartier’s actions embody one of many differences in cultural values between Algonquian and French people. Algonquians, viewing the skins near the end of use and of little value, happily rid themselves of the robes, trading them to the French, yet Cartier believed he was getting the better deal since he

43 See Van Eyck’s The Arnolfini Marriage, painted in 1434, on display in the National Gallery, London and Rembrandt Van Rijn’s The Night Watch, 1642; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.
knew the robes were already plucked and would save a step in the hat-making process. A process that started as mutually beneficial eventually led to the de-population of the North American beaver by the late nineteenth century and European dependence for Algonquian peoples. Similarly Wolof and Jolof populations grew attached to European supplies and cultivated gum trees in unnatural quantities altering Senegal’s ecosystem.\(^{45}\)

Algonquians, as well as Wolofs and Jolofs, grew dependent on French wares, helped and hindered by the trade for beaver fur and gum Senegal for the sake of the European hat. During this period, *coureurs de bois*, “runners of the woods,” merchants trading illicitly for fur in the interior without royal permit. These men collected furs from native trappers and often intermarried into native tribes. French, native, and Métis canoe men, called “voyageurs,” trafficked the goods and furs of the Canadian fur trade, as did similar lower-class laborers in the Gum Senegal Trade across the Atlantic. Though this fashion was built on the sweat and toil of such men, they could never afford pure-beaver hats and instead bought hats of rabbit, muskrat, and other low-grade furs in the same tricorn style. Such cheap hats often used mercury salts and nitric acid to mimic the same sheen and mat of a beaver hat. Sadly, this process exposed many hat makers to mercury poisoning, often leading to insanity or a slow death. It also gave rise to the phrase “Mad as a Hatter.” Though the men and women in the colonies were free of this industrial danger, harvesting the raw materials was only one step in the hat-making process.\(^{46}\)

Making a beaver felt hat was not only expensive, complicated, and time consuming. Interestingly, the only part of the beaver skin used in hat manufacture was the dense under hair. If they were not already worn off, hat-makers plucked out the guard hairs using a special comb.

\(^{45}\) Ibid., 159.
then sheared off the under hair and saved it, only to discard the hide and the stiff hair. The maker next soaked the under hair of two to three beavers in a solution of water and gum Senegal, catching all hairs on a wire screen in a thick mat of hair. During the seventeenth century hat makers discovered that adding gum Senegal, harvested from the gum forests of Senegal, helped bond the felt together and kept hats rigid and durable. After the mat was stiffened, it was then dried and steamed over a wooden hat block into whatever desired style. The hatter next dyed the hat the desired shade, lined it with linen, and trimmed it with a silk band. The final product was marketed to the French public at exorbitant rates, sometimes well over one hundred pounds sterling silver.47

Gum, just as important in the hat-making process as the fur itself, could be attained only in the West African Acacia forests of Senegal, making both colonies essential to French hat production and uniting New France and Senegal in a single, focused colonial enterprise. Records do not indicate whether or not the same companies trading for beaver fur imported gum Senegal, yet the common link in the beaver hat brought the two distant colonies together. Frenchmen in the interiors of Nouvelle France and Senegal most likely paid little attention to this economic connection, but without it each separate trade would have declined considerably. The fashion world of the French aristocracy ultimately determined the lives and interactions of all involved in these two trades, both native and French. Without the commercial impetus of both colonizing ventures neither intermarriage nor the unique combination of cultures that French intermarriage yielded would have developed.48

Although the French traded for lion, zebra, beef and other skins in Africa rather than the beaver plews of North America, the African trade was not to be another fur trade. In Senegal,

47 Diderot, s.v. “Chapeau” and “Gomme;” Grant, 42.
48 Rees, Volume 2, s.v. “Arabic, gum”
French traded concentrated trade instead on beeswax, elephant’s teeth (ivory), exotic woods, enslaved Africans, and most important, Gum Senegal. The pure clear sap of the Acacia tree, gum Senegal, was indigenous to West Africa and the Middle East. Like the Micmac who donned beaver robes for centuries, Wolof, Jolof, and Lebou people in what would become Senegal had long observed the multiple functions of the Acacia tree. For Native Africans, gum Senegal, also called gum Arabic, or gomme, formed the basis of a daily diet, rather than the core of manufacturing. Wolof and Jolof women usually stewed the gum and mixed it with rice or milk for mealtime and also used it as a treatment to combat diarrhea or dysentery. West Africans even used the Gum as an adhesive in construction and handiwork. Though the French soon came to recognize the importance of this tree, they were not the first to request the commodity from the region. Before 1638 when French Senegal was founded, Senegalese merchants used trans-Saharan trade caravan routes for centuries to bring the commodity to Mediterranean markets. More than a foodstuff to Europeans, Gum Senegal soon formed the basis of paints, dyes, and other pigments for watercolors or silk production.

So, the world of European fashion and the beaver hat brought the forests of *Nouvelle France* and Senegalese Gum forests within the interests of French colonial commerce at the dawn of the seventeenth century. At this time, the French established themselves as a truly “Trans-Atlantic” empire with the colonies of *Nouvelle France* and Senegal seated on opposite sides of the ocean. The connection between both colonies began purely economic, but soon

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grew beyond exchanging European manufactured goods for the natural commodities produced in each region, to include a cultural exchange as well. French regulations and social norms had control over colonial policy, yet French merchants, soldiers, and laborers, rather than distant monarchs or bureaucrats, conducted the economic and cultural interactions. Though under the control of the French government, colonists’ new lives, mixed between native and French cultures, often challenged colonial policy. Positioned in two distinct colonies interconnected through trade and native tradition, intermarriage between male French colonists and American Indian and West African women allowed the French to gain native trust and support and secure a fur felt hat monopoly.

When speaking of the fur trade in Nouvelle France most minds turn to thoughts of the valuable skins being exchanged for muskets, powder, and lead, beads, cooking pots, silver jewelry, alcohol, tobacco, and steel weapons and tools. American Indians highly sought these items but not as much as they prized cloth in the forms of clothing, tentage, and blankets. Though Algonquian peoples had long adapted to the harsh climates and environs of the Great Lakes, they had not developed complex textiles nor a system of metallurgy making both blankets and cooking utensils incredibly useful. The British Northwest Company of the 1780s shows the same pattern of native consumption as in earlier French times with cloth and blankets accounting for forty percent or more of all trade done each year. This preference is also important as much of this cloth, beads, and other adornments were purchased by voyageurs or *coureurs de bois* as gifts for their native wives and families.52 53

Contrary to their cousins across the Atlantic, cloth and steel tools were not new novelties to the Wolof, Jolof, and Lebou, who had already developed complex processes for producing both materials before the first appearance of the French in 1382. The comparison between native peoples is not entirely fair as American Indians knew dogs as their only domesticated animals prior to European contact. This limited their textile production to natural fibers such as hemp, stinging nettle, and various tree barks, all of these required time-consuming processing before weaving could actually occur. Africans had sheep, goats, cotton, flax (linen), and other materials early on, allowing them to produce and perfect Kenté cloth well before the seventeenth century. Though Africans made their own cloth, they traded for new and different European styles at prices cheaper than the time it would take to make more Kenté. Africans played active roles as consumers of European goods since their choices and preferences towards certain styles of cloth and tools directed entire businesses.54

European traders catered to the preferences of African markets and produced desired products such as English woolens and French cottons cheaper than the African equivalents. This exposure to complex textiles and steel tools made Africans discerning consumers of European goods who demanded only particular beads, cloth, steel tools, and firearms that they wanted. Once again, Jean Barbot gives a glimpse of life in Senegal. Barbot stated the Compagnie du Senegal provided “brass kettles and basons (sic), yellow amber in the lump, blue and white margriettas, scarlet and black cloths, blue Lenen (sic), red and black large bugles, red and green /galet/, or beads, and a little iron,” in exchange for gum Senegal and other commodities.55 In comparison with goods traded in North America, desired items were nearly identical, though

Duignan and L.H. Gann, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 133; Portugal had been established in the slave trade since the fifteenth century. Trade in same commodities (minus enslaved Africans by the 1860s) remained constant up into the late nineteenth century.
54 Thornton, 57.
55 Barbot in Hargreaves, 39.
tastes and preferences differed from colony to colony and between different tribes. Native Americans also influenced traders and craftsmen to produce the jewelry and textiles they preferred, making trade a negotiation rather than a French-dominated activity.\textsuperscript{56}

Frenchmen benefited from sexual companionship and improved trade relations in both colonies, but the prevalence of \textit{marriages a la façan de pays} differed in important ways in New France and Senegal. In New France, most intermarriage was conducted in the Pays d’en Haut, the “Upper Country,” deep in the interior of the Great Lakes region, never in the French cities of Montreal or Quebec in the St. Lawrence valley. In New France, explorers, fur traders, and laborers, in the interior, entered these unions. On the contrary, in Senegal, French military officers, diplomats, and traders, living and working in St. Louis and Gorée entered similar relationships at the heart of French colonial effort. Relying on travel narratives, traders’ journals, and missionary accounts, we can construct a view that \textit{marriages a la mode de pays} were widespread in both colonies, providing economic and social benefits to both parties.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{56} Frederickson, 33; Barbot in Hargreaves, 39.
\textsuperscript{57} Sleeper-Smith, 19; George E. Brooks, \textit{Africans and Eur-Africans in Western Africa}, Forthcoming, chapter 5, 6.
Chapter IV: Growth of Intermarriage

As the French presence in both colonies grew, Native Americans and Native West Africans as well as Frenchmen connected such liaisons with ensured economic benefits, military cooperation, and relative social harmony. Missionaries’ and explorers’ detailed accounts of intermarriage taught eager Frenchmen to expect intermarriage as a benefit of colonization. Though adhering to vows of abstinence, many French Catholic priests and Huguenot ministers recorded marriage, family, and sexual habits with such detail and precision as to raise questions about their chastity and mores. Father Gabriel Sagard gives one such account, during his travels in the interior of Nouvelle France on the Great Lakes living among the Huron in 1632. Sagard details the actions of young Huron men taking young girls in a pot et a feu, literally “by pot and by fire,” Algonquians also called such arrangements tenonha in the Algonquian dialect, referring to the girl’s status as a squaw or concubine. He tells that a man may take a girl in this fashion for a long time “yet young people may be free to seek out other young lovers in the custom of the country.”58 Being in a formal union, yet able to seek out alternate sexual partners, was an attractive notion to Frenchmen who had most likely been without intercourse during their lengthy Atlantic crossing. Securing for themselves native trust and trade loyalties in the deal only enriched each transaction.

Though countless missionaries, traders, and settlers refer to mariage a la façon du pays few bother to define it as thoroughly as Pere Sagard. Frequent mention of mariage across New France shows us that the French spread such liaisons among most native tribes. The lack of frequent definition suggests that readers back in France either understood the term due to its frequent use, or did not know its meaning since they were removed from the colony. Sagard’s

description tells of the Huron ceremony conducted between two young natives, this, however, changed and became more nuanced as the Hurons converted and adopted partial or complete Catholic ritual into the ceremony. Parental consent alone was insufficient in such situations. The young girl had the choice to accept or deny the man’s advances. Once she agreed, the couple would sleep together for three to four nights. Next the girl’s family ceremonially butchered and prepared dog, bear, fish or other meats inviting all family and friends to a feast. Following the meal all followed the bride and groom into the lodge where the father of the bride pronounced highness to all animals and all present vowed never to sleep with cousins. The village granted divorce, Sagard explained. If a woman was unhappy she simply left her husband to live with her parents taking nothing with her. Men could only seek divorce if their wife stopped “making” the marriage, withholding sex. Sagard’s description gives us a typical Huron ceremony, which most coureurs de bois underwent, or a Catholic-influenced equivalent, before entering marriage with a native woman. Though Sagard uses this passage to denounce the incivility of such ceremonies and customs, the lack of pomp and strict morality associated with a Catholic marriage undoubtedly attracted interested French colonists.⁵⁹

In Senegal, the French entered into native marriage rituals similar to those in North America as illustrated by Jean Barbot’s 1740s account. “It is not indissoluble,” Barbot explains one such union, “but lasts as long as the parties have no reason to complain of each other, or till they are obliged to separate for ever; but if the absence of the man be only for a certain time, the woman remains single, waits with patience for the return of her husband, she doesn’t make choice of another, accept in case of death or the assurance that he will not return. This second union affixes no stigma on the honour (sic) or reputation of the woman.”⁶⁰ Again the morals of

⁵⁹ Ibid., 163-165.
⁶⁰ Barbot, 66.
Frenchmen in such unions were certainly not up to the standards of formal Parisian society, as these easily dissolved unions oftentimes were little more than formal concubinage. Yet while in the colonies, Frenchmen were most often faithful in honoring their native brides. Regardless of public sentiment in France, these relationships formed emotional, social, and political bonds that were essential in the development of both colonial societies.

The style of the arrangements varied under the mantle of *marriage à la façon du pays* from what could be considered prostitution or an arrangement of concubinage to even formally recognized French, American Indian, or traditional African marriage. Many priests abhorred inter-racial unions as un-Christian, whether temporary by native ritual or Christian ceremony. Father François De Crepieul advised junior priests in New France in 1671: “Let him not marry with the rites of the Church any Frenchman to a Savage woman without the consent of the parents and without Monseigneur’s commission.” Priests issued such concerns to protect and encourage Algonquian converts and because many priests deemed *coureurs*, long-removed from French settlements, as more blasphemous and irreverent than many Christianized Indians.

Another relevant concern was that these law-breaking *coureurs* would adopt a custom popular among many nations, taking multiple wives. This fear was justified since in both Senegal and New France Frenchmen did this whenever the opportunity presented itself. The Kaskaskia people in the Illinois country along with other Algonquians in the Great Lakes region had traditionally practiced polygyny. Oftentimes such arrangements degraded and confined native women, at times abusive husbands even dictated daily routines. Christian conversion and formal French marriage or even joining a religious order provided native women escape from

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abusive and unfair relationships. Becoming one of a Frenchman’s many wives, however, carried with it most traditional work roles and expectations of a native husband but the added benefits of more European goods as presents. De Crepieul in comparison to Le Jeune clearly illustrates the mistrust that many French clergy held toward intermarriage, yet whether performed by Catholic priest or native shaman, intermarriage established a Frenchman in a new family and a new culture.63

By taking a bride in a marriage, a *coureur* in New France or a merchant in St Louis immediately endeared himself not just to a wife, father, and family, but to an extended family group, a clan, and an entire people in a complex network of fictive kin relationships. Once established in such an arrangement, the bride’s entire family would go no further than their new in-law for all their material trade needs, thereby ensuring a lucrative business for the trader. French woodsmen and traders obviously benefited sexually, socially, and commercially from these marriages. What about advantages offered to the newly wed bride? Certainly more than ignorant pawns, Algonquian women entered such arrangements expecting and receiving gains for themselves and their entire kinship networks. As native families became more and more dependent upon European wares, reliable prices from someone they could trust became increasingly important, making these arrangements a necessity through Algonquian eyes.64

The French model for using such intermarriage as an influential social and political tool of colonization comes from New France. Frenchmen and native fathers of brides-to-be usually arranged marriages; native brides themselves rarely had much choice. Approval from the native family and strict adherence to local custom was extremely important in such transactions as

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64 Ibid., 78; Davis, 245.
Father Le Jeune noted. Father Le Jeune described how the *coureurs* and other merchants, constantly traveling from village to village, often disregarded traditional native marriage customs and took one wife in several villages. “Concerning the marriages, it was not necessary to go through so many of the ceremonies, - that these Frenchmen who had resolved to marry were free to take wives where it seemed good to them; that those who married in the past had not demanded a general council for that purpose, but they had taken what they desired.”

At the risk of offending some native in-laws, polygamous *coureurs* held the commercial edge by guaranteeing the trade loyalty of not one but several tribes throughout the region they traveled. They also enjoyed the benefits of ensuring that this travel through foreign territory was safe and acquired fluency in other native dialects to be used in trade negotiations and treaty diplomacy.

Le Jeune’s description of a Frenchman having more than one native bride is the exception rather than the rule, but the practice seems advantageous for a woodsman on the move, often wintering in different regions areas year to year. Though documentation is even scarcer for women engaging in multiple simultaneous liaisons, it is logical that some kept other French husbands during the time of year when their first French husbands were away. Traditionally, most Algonquians were patriarchal, differing from their Iroquoian neighbors who relied on a council of elder women to make tribal decisions. In the case of the Canawagah (Kanawagh) Iroquois, allied with the French in the St. Lawrence valley, the Hurons, and the Petuns, however, matriarchy was the social model and these women may have been inclined to exercise their traditional choice and power.

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66 Noel, 8.
Algonquian women from matriarchal societies likely realized the benefits of multiple unions and held more than one husband at a time, as traveling traders and coureurs may have been gone for seasons or years at a time. Though polygamy on the part of French and Algonquian men is well substantiated, polyandry among all Algonquian women is far more speculative. Most nations, such as the Ojibwa, Potowatomie, or Wyandotte, followed patriarchal family and governing structures leaving this generalization grossly inaccurate. A Canawagah woman with several French husbands was assured of several visits a year from different partners, each one bringing with it its own lot of gifts and food. It is difficult to discern Algonquian women’s actual attitudes since most accounts come from male Europeans, yet it is evident that many women used these liaisons to their advantages. While French husbands secured trade relations in several villages or nations, Algonquian women reaped more benefits than mere increases in their store of yearly gifts.\(^6^8\)

Just as in Nouvelle France, in seventeenth-century Senegal there existed a system of itinerant Frenchmen engaged in unions with native brides who often left their brides and new families for weeks or months at a time. Here too, husbands were required to give gifts to the father of the bride for her hand and continually lavished upon their brides gifts of jewels, food, cloth, and fine homes. “A woman,” continued Barbot, “thinks herself honoured [sic] by partaking of the couch of a white man…in short uses every art to merit his kindness and love.”\(^6^9\)

Why then, if these unions were so advantageous for the bride and her family, did no system of multiple marriages arise in Senegal as it had in North America?\(^7^0\)

\(^6^8\) Gilman, 78; Noel, 8, Sleeper-Smith, 23-24.
\(^6^9\) Ibid., 67.
Signares’ dedication to marital faithfulness fascinated a great number of Frenchmen, including Geoffroy de Villeneuve who, in the 1780s, collected numerous observations about the practices of Luso-African and French marriages. “They freely contract a type of limited marriage with Europeans, regarding themselves as legitimate wives, remaining faithful, and giving the father’s name to the children who result from the union. The departure of the white to Europe, with no expectation of returning, breaks the ties of the matrimony, and she soon after enters a new contract.”

Villeneuve accurately captured how Native African women viewed their situation, honoring their husbands and themselves as though they were in formal legal marriages. Signares carried on the family name of their child’s biological father, even if he had ventured back to France never to return, and thereby earned more prestige and respect in the colony. The power of a French name for a young Mulatto meant opportunities for advancement in the developing colonial government. While honoring these marriages, the eventual departure of most husbands was imminent. In this fashion, after only few years of marriage women could begin new relationships, permitting them to gain new gifts and benefits from yet another partner. Signares, as influential traders and shrewd businesspeople, reaped the same benefits as their American cousins. The number of partners held by African women was therefore smaller than that of Algonquian women since Frenchmen in Africa more commonly honored these relationships, and Wolof tradition dictated strict faithfulness.

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Interramarriage between Frenchmen and African indigenous women had a very different face than in the north woods of Nouvelle France. Some similarities have already been described: dowries given to fathers, ensured commercial stability, and military protection. Yet most Senegalese intermarriages were structurally different from those of North America. Some Frenchmen married Wolof, Jolof, or Lebou daughters of established native headmen, constructing a power structure nearly identical to the institution in New France. Once again hearing Wolof and Jolof names rather than Huron, Ojibwe notes the main difference between the institutions on each continent.73

More common than these unions in Senegal, however, were relationships where the native woman already owned her own property, secured her own living, and conducted her own business. *Signares* in French, “*Senhora*” in Portuguese and known as “*nharas*” in the trade language Cioulo, these women of property already wielded considerable power in Senegal’s trade. Long-established through family lines as independent women, signares traded in gum Senegal, gold, ivory, camwood (used for red dye), and enslaved Africans, long before the French ever arrived. This distinct dynamic gave Wolof and Jolof signares significant advantages over their fellow countrywomen in attracting a French husband as well as an opportunity to exercise great influence in commercial and political decisions.74

In the coastal mercantile economies of St. Louis and Gorée, *signares* wielded political power by controlling trade in ivory, gold, animal skins, gum Senegal and, at times, even enslaved Africans. Rising from different social classes, these matriarchs remained single and pursued commerce. *Signares* rose to their station through trade, sometimes even from the lower *griot* class of traveling troubadours, beginning in local markets and working their way up to large-

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73 George E. Brooks Jr., *Africans and Eur-Africans in Western Africa*, Chapter five, 3.
scale trading operations. In this way signares created spheres of influence, received desired goods at low prices, amassed great fortunes, and maintained large estates within St. Louis and Gorée. Even if romantic love was involved in these unions, French government officials, military officers, and traders viewed them first and foremost an economic and social necessity. An alliance with such a woman provided the inside track to the cultural currents of these colonial cities, the trends in coastal trade, even the attitudes of local populations towards colonial government and policy.\textsuperscript{75}

Many signares knew of such political and economic alliances prior to French arrival since intermarriage was a cultural means of bonding two families or groups together for trade or protection, much like European arranged marriages. Unlike in New France, where the French were the first whites to form permanent settlements, by the 1630s in West Africa the French encountered several reminders of earlier Portuguese colonization. Most significant, while some signares were completely Wolof, Jolof, Lebou, or Mandinka, most of them were actually part African and part Portuguese, often called Luso-Africans. Luso-Africans (Luso short for Portuguese) descended from Portuguese fathers and native mothers as early as the fifteenth century. Varying depending upon how their mother raised them, Luso-Africans usually grew-up in traditional Wolof or other West African villages, yet retained some of the traits and attitudes of their father, most noticeably, paler skin than their fellow West Africans.\textsuperscript{76}

Unlike the Métis who reaped the benefits of having a French father after the French colonial government took control, Luso-Africans used many advantages given by their Portuguese fathers or ancestors, long before the time of the French. The French first encountered

\textsuperscript{76} Brooks, Africans and Eur-Africans in Western Africa, Chapter 3, 11-12; John Mathews, A voyage to the River Sierra-Leone, on the coast of Africa; containing an account of the trade and productions of the country, and of the civil and religious customs and manners of the people; in a series of letters to a friend in England, (London: Printed for B. White and Son, and J. Sewell, 1788), Microfiche, 13-14.
Luso-Africans upon their arrival to Senegal. At that time, Luso-Africans were already converted Catholics, most wore a combination of European and African dress, and spoke Portuguese, the Cioulo trade language, and several West African dialects. In 1669 French traveler Sieur Du Bois encountered “Don Joan,” a “Portuguese” man, and his family, who provided examples of mixed Luso-African culture. “He had several wives,” Du Bois explained, “by whom he had Mulatto children. I was astonish’d (sic) to see that this man was devout, having always a large Rosary in his hands, & several Images of Our Saviour, of the Virgin, & of the Saints, around his bed. The same with his wives or concubines, who carry’d (sic) also large Rosaries round their necks.”

Luso-Africans lived between cultures just as would French-African Mulattoes in the seventeenth century. Luso-Africans also quickly engaged in West African trade networks, becoming well established in trading beeswax, ivory, animal skins, gum Senegal, and enslaved Africans by the time of French settlement. Once the French began to settle in Senegal they often turned to Luso-Africans first as business partners, due to their already well-built trade networks, and secondly as potential fathers-in-law.

How radical, then, were these inter-racial unions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries between Frenchmen and Luso-African women, since most already had some European ancestry in their gene pool? The simple answer is that though these women were lighter complected than their Lebou cousins, they still grew up African, which is how the French viewed them. However, returning to philosophies of skin color at the time, Europeans more readily accepted skin that wasn’t completely white yet wasn’t completely black than skin that was all black. Luso-Africans even referred to themselves as “white” even though their complexions and

78 Brooks, Africans and Eur-Africans in Western Africa Chapter 5, 4.
cultures often sent different messages. Most accounts show that Frenchmen preferred Luso-
African women, largely due to their physical appearances, though the commercial and social
advantages connected to their pre-existing European links cannot be overlooked. Luso-African
women resembled Algonquian women in a “tawny” or “olive” medium in skin tone but both
groups of women enjoyed new opportunities in intermarriage.\textsuperscript{79}

More than receiving mere trinkets and baubles, Algonquian women experienced true
agency in such unions. True, a father often dictated whom his daughter would marry and French
husbands often decided where the couple would live, but these women were not without voices.
Even when forced into these marriages against their wills, female populations in North America
and Senegal monopolized heterosexual sex. Never conducted as formal prostitution was in Paris
at the time, sex was definitely commodified as an integral service to be exchanged in long-term
relationships while Frenchmen engaged in the fur trade.\textsuperscript{80} In control of their own bodies, these
women influenced their sometimes-itinerant husbands to treat them well, favor native groups in
matters of trade, even to be better Catholics.\textsuperscript{81}

Along with intercourse, Algonquian women influenced many vital portions of the fur
trade and maintained this control through their marriages. While French husbands and fathers
paddled canoes and traded for furs in the \textit{pays d’en haut} of New France, native wives tanned
leather, sewed moccasins, made snowshoes and canoes, and grew integral quantities of

\textsuperscript{80} Sleeper-Smith, 24; Gilman, 78.
\textsuperscript{81} France and West Africa, 64; George E Brooks, Jr., “The Signares of Saint Louis and Gorée,” 21; Bouteiller, 22; \textit{Signares} loosely translates as female merchant, but is also often used to regard African women who married Frenchmen.
foodstuffs.\textsuperscript{82} Even on Champlain’s’ first voyage, he was astounded by the large fields of corn, squash, beans, pumpkins, and other vegetables. Along with these cultivated crops, native women gathered wild rice, cranberries, and mixed pemmican to sell to fur traders and French settlers to fuel the fur trade. These village industries supported laborers and traders who made the fur trade possible, filling their bellies and carrying them over trails, snow, and water. The freedom of choice involved in trade gave many native women a limited amount of disposable income in trade goods and valuable decision-making abilities.\textsuperscript{83}

Native women also assumed roles as interpreters and guides from opportunities such marriages provided. In some ways native women enjoyed many of the benefits of traditional European marriage at the time such as gifts, financial support, children, without their husbands present at all times. Polyglot Algonquian women and their equally skilled offspring translated important documents and interpreted treaty and trade negotiations in the cross-cultural exchanges of New France. In roles as translators these women greatly influenced negotiations, they sometimes even detected hidden meanings meant to be overlooked by French audiences. Such marriages and even religious orders represented the possibility of limited independence and freedoms for Algonquian women under French colonialism. Contrary to the sexual intercourse and childbirth required for gaining power and agency from a \textit{marriage à la façon du pays}, joining the Ursulines of Quebec, or any other religious order, provided native women with many of the same powers of choice without the obligation or dangers of sexual activity. Though Catholic convents did recruit some native women, many more were enticed by the gifts and a shift from the monotony of village life provided by liaisons with Frenchmen.\textsuperscript{84}

\textsuperscript{82} “Upper Country” used to describe most of the French controlled Great Lakes region and the Middle Ground in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Richard White’s \textit{The Middle Ground}.

\textsuperscript{83} Champlain, 62.

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 78; Noel, 8; Sleeper-Smith, 24; White, 17; Richter, 43.
Possessing all the privileges of Algonquian women and more, signares offered the French many advantages in life and trade in seventeenth and eighteenth century Senegal. Savvy businesswomen by the time the French settled, signares dressed in lavish African and European costumes, employed complete staffs of servants and slaves, and lived in large often European-style estates. Considered fine, even by French standards, these estates were comprised of expansive grounds and complete households of enslaved Africans. “The majority live in considerable affluence, and many African women own thirty to forty slaves which they hire out to the Company,” stated Antoine Edmé Pruneau de Pommegorge in his 1789 travelogue. In addition to commercial benefits, Frenchmen in these relationships enjoyed lush accommodations, servants, and beautiful exquisitely adorned women. Often, signares forced their French husbands to respect them as business partners and potential rivals before welcoming them into their homes.

Once engaged in formal marriage or sexual liaisons with a signare, a Frenchman had the opportunity to use and abuse the privileges and benefits of a relationship with such a wealthy and powerful woman. Wealthy signares commanded house servants, slaves, and grumete (freed blacks often sailors or artisans) laborers, to maintain their homes and to conduct much of their trading business. A Frenchman who worked for La Compagnie du Sénégal or another firm of the period had access to these enslaved Africans as laborers for his company. Similarly, government officials could press their wives’ servants into the service of the colonial militia or

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some other function. Just as in North America, the benefits for Frenchmen in these relationships are obvious and numerous while benefits for signares still remain unclear.  

If these women were in influential positions before French arrival, why did they bother with Frenchmen? Wolof, Jolof, Lebou, and Luso-African women got involved in such unions for the same commercial and cultural benefits they offered Frenchmen. In fact, signares played the same role as coureur de bois in North America; they were the established traders and saw struggling Frenchmen as easily coerced business partners. More than the minimal agency that sexual intercourse provided, these women carried significant power in trade networks and they realized that if they allied with Frenchmen, these men would be allies rather than competitors. Signares also quickly recognized that if French colonial power grew and their government took control of more and more aspects of life in Senegal, it would be wise to marry into the new regime. Such foresight and shrewd business sense allowed signares to retain and add to their commercial power and influence, even after marrying Frenchmen.  

Despite the evidence of intermarriage as a commercial tool, intermarriage for love and romance did occur on rare occasions, the most famous of which came in 1785 when Stanislas-Jean de Boufflers became the last royal governor of Senegal and married a wealthy signare. While in power, Boufflers even shifted the seat of colonial control from St. Louis to Gorée to be nearer his wife. On this small island at the mouth of the River Senegal, Boufflers met the signare Madame Anne Pépin de Sabran of Gorée. Soon thereafter the couple entered into a marriage notably marked by the scores of love letters written by Boufflers, even while away in Paris. Though intermarriage was accepted in the colony, Boufflers risked his position by openly supporting his marriage, showing romantic love did mature and develop in such relationships.

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87 Brooks, Africans and Eur-Africans in Western Africa, Chapter 5, 9-10.
Sabran is known mainly through Boufflers’ letters, in which he referred to her as his wife, but she traded gum, ivory, and enslaved Africans from her sizable St. Louis estate, and even owned several slaves herself. Sabran used her marriage to keep her trading open and secured by her marriage to the governor, standing as one example of what signares accomplished throughout the reign of French colonialism. \(^{88}\)

Luso-African signares used their connections to trade networks and French government to maintain their position and influence. Gifts of restricted trade goods such as fine cottons and other cloths or foods that were in short supply often appeared at the doors of these women as an added benefit of such unions. Clearly, these women were not naïve pawns in these relationships but rather discerning agents of commercial and cultural exchange. Signares stand out in the story of French intermarriage: as women of color they often possessed just as much power and freedom as their French husbands. Even in seventeenth and eighteenth-century France, it was highly unusual if not unheard of, for a French woman, even of noble birth, to own the property and make the choices of a signare. In a time when most women lived life at the mercy of fathers and husbands, Signares stand true with more agency than most women around the globe. \(^{89}\)

While both Algonquian and West African women reaped empowerment from these liaisons, the French government had drastically different intentions in encouraging such unions. In 1664, Ministre de Marine (Minister of the Navy) Jean-Baptiste Colbert (in office 1666-1683) proposed another strategy to solve the problem of sparse populations in Nouvelle France: he proposed formally encouraging Frenchmen and the Native women to intermarry. Colbert, aware that French *coureurs* and *habitants* already engaged in such unions, began a large campaign to encourage these liaisons to create a large Métis population to revitalize the staggering colony.

\(^{88}\) Ibid., 73; Brooks, “The Signares of Saint Louis and Gorée,” 32.

\(^{89}\) Brooks, “The Signares of Saint Louis and Gorée,” 28; Bouteiller, 22.
“You must try to draw these peoples,” Colbert wrote Intendant Jean Talon in 1667, “and especially those who have embraced Christianity, into the neighborhood of our settlements and, if possible, intermingle them so that, with the passage of time, having but one law and the same master, they will form thereby but a single people of the same blood.” Colbert, like many colonial officials back in France, saw the potential of a population of such mixed heritage. They would speak two or more languages, useful in trade and treaty negotiations. They would ease the racial and cultural tensions between the two peoples. Though subsequent Minister of the Navy Jean Frédéric de Maurepas (serving 1723-48) saw potential in all of Colbert’s possibilities, and realized some of the hopes, the notion of the Métis as a smooth blend of cultures was largely an illusion.

Colbert’s recommendation was directly counter to acceptable attitudes and norms of the day. Later in 1679 he suggested that the French should try to overpopulate the natives. French colonists, however, did not share his dedication. More shocking perhaps is that Colbert convinced Louis XIII and Louis XIV to follow his advice. Never before had a European nation so openly taken a stance supporting inter-racial marriage. Woodsmen most likely welcomed the policy as government support of the lifestyle they already lived since it appeared sympathetic in the short term; it encouraged them to maintain their status quo. However, overall, the government used intermarriage to create permanent social, political, and military control of the new colony, far from the interests of their male colonists. Colbert was certainly not alone in his vision of control.

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90 Colbert to Talon, April 5, 1667, in Peter Moogk’s La Nouvelle France, 106.
92 Ibid., 3.
Many Frenchmen shared Colbert’s optimism, ranging from French *habitants* transacting such arrangements to members of the Jesuit clergy, all the way up to the Bourbon monarchy itself. Jean Talon, Colbert’s Canadian Intendant during the 1670s and 1680s, used many approaches to stimulate social and economic growth in New France introducing pure-bred livestock, new varieties of seeds and, most significant to this study, recruited *Les Filles du Roi* or the King’s Daughters. Talon and his agents solicited these women, either poor young girls or older widows, to come to New France to offer an alternative to intermarriage. These white French women would intermarry with colonial officers and merchants thereby avoiding the complications of multi-ethnic children. Between 1663 and 1673 the French crown introduced 800 young women for the sole purpose of breeding with male French colonists, the description of whom noted they were of “an age suitable for reproduction and not outwardly repulsive.”

Equally as extraordinary as French intermarriage with American Indian women, such recruitment of single female French women proved difficult and eventually lost out to the ready availability of single Christianized native women.

Though not all clergymen encouraged, endorsed, or married French and Indian couples in New France, many others saw this as the logical step in perpetuating Christian mores and ideals instilled in young female native converts. Freedom of expression and increased autonomy enticed many young native girls toward the Catholic faith, and marrying Frenchmen allowed them to freely continue these beliefs and tied them directly to French culture in Canada. Once again the words of Father Paul Le Jeune offer insight into the inner workings of *marriage a la façon du pays* as well as French political interpretations of the utility of such unions. Le Jeune addressed the natives of Trois Rivieres in a 1636 speech, saying, “Your daughters have married

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93 Jean-Baptiste Colbert, Letter of 1667 in Peter Moogk’s *La Nouvelle France*, 106.
94 Ibid., 106, 119; Winks, 4; Noel, 13.
with all neighboring nations, but not with ours. Not that we have need of your daughters or your children; we are as populous as the leaves of your trees. But we would like to see one people in this land.  

95 Here Le Jeune uses his religious influence to attract native brides for French husbands in accordance with Colbert’s plan and colonial French policy. Le Jeune’s words show a distinct shift in French colonial policy, in the 1630s he and other members of the clergy fully supported this government policy and fully supported Catholic intermarriage, as never before.  

Despite the efforts of Colbert, Talon, and others, kings Louis XIII, XIV, and XV all faced the same problem in New France, its first and still very lucrative colony, into the mid-eighteenth century. Though the beaver trade continued to flourish and the New French economy matured, rumors of the Canadian wilderness still abounded in France, making the colony difficult to populate. French foreign policy on New France remained much the same since its inception. Government officials regarded the inhabitants not as independent citizens of a unique nation but as subordinant colonists of a governing state. Colonists were highly sought to preserve dominance in the beaver trade, yet at the same time Canadian influence back in the mother country was much weaker than that experienced by American colonists. In both colonies, the crown viewed French colonists as little more than expendable labor, never as important as true French subjects nor as significant as the lucrative Caribbean colonists.  

Native populations of Algonquian Indians and Wolofs, Jolofs, and Lebous provided essential labor and knowledge in the colonies but did not fit notions of standard French society. The French crown regarded French and Native people of both colonies as of little value; however, the French government did not overlook the commercial benefits of *marriages à la*

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96 Ibid., 219; Zemon-Davis, 245; Sleeper-Smith, 24.  
97 Moogk, 100, 106; Sugar profits from Martinique, Guadeloupe, and most significantly Ste. Domingue, later Haiti, always over shadowed French colonial interests in both Nouvelle France and Senegal yet commodities from all three colonies changed hands in the colonies and back in France.
façon du pays. In the colonies new laws and attitudes developed which acknowledged the
cultural value of such unions making Frenchmen in-laws instead of outlaws in their new
environs. Again, theories of race and difference permeated the attitudes of most French towards
indigenous populations. There developed enough acceptance, however, to propel intermarriage
as an invaluable institution in the French colonial formula taking the practice with it wherever it
went following its experiment in New France. The product of French fathers and native mothers,
the multi-racial offspring of these unions, Métis in New France and Mulatto in Senegal, grew
essential to the persistence of cultural integration in the colonies.98

Algonquian women gained material gifts, prestige, and a new language from their French
lovers in North America, as did their African counterparts. The difference, however, lies in the
organization of native cultures prior French contact. To many Algonquian peoples, marriage
was a fluid institution, easily broken when a partner left or died. They were also quite
comfortable permitting the seasonal polyandry practiced between women of their tribes and
French woodsmen.99 Wolof, Jolof, and Lebou peoples ended arrangements similarly if a partner
left or was killed; however, they remained committed to monogamous relationships more often
than their North American counterparts. Such attitudes suggest that despite the economic and
political motivations for these unions, over time they grew into long-term relationships that
challenged French social norms at the time.

98 George F. G. Stanley, New France: The Last Phase 1744-1760, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1968),
xv; White, 68; James H. Merrell, Into the American Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier, (New York:
99 Plane, 132.
CHAPTER V: Métis and Mulatto Challenges & Advantages

Though Métis and Mulatto children, with a French father and Indian or African mother, possessed many cultural traits from both sides of their families, the French government did not treat each group equally. The mixture of cultures created new Creole cultures. Creole in that colony-born French children had different identities than their Old World cousins, and also in that the new colonial cultures had elements of both indigenous and French societies. Logic would suggest that French society would favor the Métis, closer in complexion to the Frenchmen their mothers married, but surprisingly it was the mulattoes who enjoyed more benefits of French colonial society. Due to pronounced acculturation and usefulness in French colonial governments Mulatto children discovered many more advantages in French culture than their Algonquian counterparts. Multi-ethnic children, on both continents, grew up speaking both French and one or several native languages and dialects that made them natural choices as interpreters. Most were raised as good French Catholics but were also given at times to practicing traditional tribal rituals as well. Despite commonalties, Mulattoes and Métis developed differently because of different lifestyles and different levels of exposure to French culture leaving Mulattoes in Senegal with more opportunities.

In Nouvelle France, rather than immediately embracing all French tradition and custom, Métis children clung to many traditional beliefs and practices. Despite their various French attributes, Métis never worked to assimilate or acculturate their native kin as French officials had hoped. Often combined with a Catholic education or French learning from their fathers, Métis also acquired knowledge of native foods and herbal remedies such as pine needle tea to ward off scurvy helpful to French populations. Such knowledge was valuable to the French in New
France, but not as essential as the trade networks and cultural brokering that influential signare mothers established for their multi-ethnic children in Senegal.¹⁰⁰

Children of mixed French and African ancestry faced similar cultural problems as their Canadian Métis cousins across the Atlantic. In Senegal these mixed ancestry offspring enjoyed racial majority over the French and benefited from the influence of their powerful mothers as well as French fathers. As a result of these differences, Mulattoes rose to greater power, prominence, and esteem in French colonial Senegal than would the Métis of North America. Why does this discrepancy exist? Under nearly identical French colonial policy at the time, why did Mulattoes avoid being swept under the rug of French and Senegalese society? There is no clear-cut answer to this question. Proportionally, Wolof, Jolof, and Lebou populations were much higher than Algonquian populations in New France, and fewer French came to Senegal. African numerical superiority and French colonial government that focused only on trade in Senegal gave Africans and Mulattos more opportunities for acceptance than their colonial Canadian cousins. Also, many African women, already established traders, held more cultural influence in their community than their “country-style” cousins across the Atlantic. A combination of these and other factors gave Africans and Mulattoes numerical advantages over French colonists.

Instead of sharing equally in both parent cultures, Métis and Mulattoes never gained full acceptance from either party and never rose very high in the ranks of colonial French society. The main reason behind this resilient view of Métis and Mulatto inferiority lay largely in persisting European notions of race and barbarism. In the mid-eighteenth century, French philosophes Georges Louis Leclerc Comte de Buffon and Cornelius De Pauw argued that races far from the ideal climate of Europe, including Native Americans and Native Africans, were

¹⁰⁰ JR, Vol. 12, 269; Sleeper-Smith, 52.
mentally, physically, and culturally degenerate. De Pauw even went so far as to propose that much like the offspring of the horse and the donkey, the mule, the Mulatto or Métis would be sterile as well.¹⁰¹ Frenchmen and native women on both continents had already discovered quite the contrary by the mid-eighteenth century when Métis populations continued to soar. Though these unions continued taking place and the children resulting from them continued being born, most Europeans maintained many of these social and philosophical mind-sets beyond the eighteenth century.¹⁰²

Differing greatly from the notion that Indians were redeemable humans, both Cornelis De Pauw and Louis Leclerc Comte de Buffon advocated that natives of both continents deviated from the European ideal. Along with Englishman David Hume, De Pauw and Buffon argued that harsh environmental conditions caused the degradation of American Indians and black Africans. Noticeable gaps in these theories became evident early on due to observations such as Swedish botanist Peter Kalm’s 1750 claim that neither enslaved Africans nor French masters changed color after enduring harsh Quebecois winters. “Hence many people concluded that a Negro or his posterity did not change color,” Kalm observed, “though they continued ever so long in a cold climate: but the union of a white man with a Negro woman, or of a Negro man with a white woman had an entirely different result.”¹⁰³ As philosophers made claims about places they had never before visited, Canadian fur traders and gum merchants in Senegal understood physical difference but accepted their indigenous families.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ The term, “Mulatto” was derived from the word “mule” during the eighteenth century, it has long since been viewed derogatory and been supplanted by the multi-racial, or mixed heritage.
¹⁰⁴ Pagden, 117; Thornton, 44.
Rousseau and Montesquieu saw the tawny-skinned American Indian as a shady reflection of the European, even holding them up as Plato’s idyllic children of nature uncorrupted by modern culture. While praising American Indians, both men argued that black Africans were irreconcilably different from and inferior to whites. Most European thinkers and writers even before the Enlightenment characterized Africans as libidinous and licentious, lacking constraints of sexual morality. Rousseau and Montesquieu often characterized Indians as having less sexual drive but still described native women as beautiful and seductive. Rather than disrupt patterns of sexual intimacy between Frenchmen and native women on both continents, such condemnations instead fueled European curiosity and further encouraged French colonists to assert their perceived sexual privileges once in either colony.\textsuperscript{105}

Along with advantages for these people of color came discrimination particularly back in Europe. Though most French and English referred to these offspring as Mulattoes or “mixed – bloods,” in early years the French referred to these children as \textit{fils de Terre} (“Sons of the Earth”), following the Portuguese model \textit{Filhos da terra}. This derogatory attitude toward these children was not widespread throughout the colony itself, but always arose when outsiders came to visit and take reports of Senegal back to France and the rest of Europe. Most Europeans still regarded racial miscegenation as a taboo, one that went against nature and morality and should be avoided at all costs. While attitudes persisted back in France, most Frenchmen in Senegal married Wolof, Jolof, Lebou, and Luso-African women, fathered these multi-ethnic children, provided for them and accepted them as their own. Canadian Métis endured more racism and fewer

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 261-262; Pagden, 117.
advantages than Mulattoes in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but when it came back to the mother country, both received criticism for intermarriage.\textsuperscript{106}

Even in British North America, as in Nouvelle France, these cultural negotiators hardly ever managed to straddle the gap between European and Native societies as Colbert and so many others presumed. Instead, Métis usually leaned more towards one side of their heritage and were rarely fully trusted by either group. Particularly in Quebec City, Montreal, and France, Métis appeared as dark-skinned strangers to their French brethren, even when converted Catholics complete with French surnames, and dress. This same combination of material cultures and physical appearance sent mixed messages among native groups as well. Donning a waistcoat and a tricorn showed that the wearer negotiated with the whites yet at the same time might cheat his native family in lieu of his new French one.\textsuperscript{107} Dressed in a mélange of costumes, a mixture of both cultures’ clothing, both French and native groups found the Métis visually confusing and untrustworthy. Both Natives and Europeans alike questioned the loyalties of such interpreters when they were called to translate treaties for either side. As a result of this cultural confusion on the North American continent, the Métis never became the panacea to Nouvelle France’s population problem or the superior cultural hybrid for which Colbert had hoped.\textsuperscript{108}

Though old world attitudes remained largely unchanged, by the close of the seventeenth century the Métis of New France did (though much smaller than anticipated) provide a new work force, as laborers, translators, and engages.\textsuperscript{109} Most Métis identified themselves as Catholics, yet many still remained faithful to many traditional religious customs and rites. The Métis had

\textsuperscript{106} Brooks, “The Signares of Saint Louis and Gorée,” 19; Filhos da terra in Portuguese and fils de Terre in French translates as “Sons of the Earth.”

\textsuperscript{107} Merrell, 38; Moogk, 46, 50.

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid, 38; Sleeper-Smith, 125.

\textsuperscript{109} Also known as voyageurs, these canoe men were essential to the fur trade as paddlers and haulers of furs and goods, though placed at the very lowest rung of colonial society in New France.
become fluent in two or more languages that often impressed their French families but worried their Native relatives. In learning traits and customs of both peoples, the Métis partially estranged, rather than endeared, themselves to both cultures. Contrary to Colbert’s ideal, by the close of French colonialism in North America the French government recognized the Métis as a unique new race separate from mainstream French society rather than an integral part of the whole.\textsuperscript{110}

The Mulatto of Senegal gained more advantages and respect than did their colonial Métis cousins in New France for a variety of reasons, but none more significant than a more pronounced need for acculturated subjects in Senegal. The Métis possessed knowledge of Algonquian and French culture, most took French names, dressed French, spoke French, cooked French, were devout Catholics, and some even received French educations. In most ways, it is difficult to differentiate the Métis experience from that of the Mulatto. However, in Senegal where the number of Frenchmen was fewer than in Canada, the French government needed black or multi-ethnic subjects to maintain colonial control. Mulattoes were completely acculturated and though they appeared to be Senegalese, their loyalties often went to their fathers, ideally serving the French government. Some of the Métis attempted to acculturate themselves to French society, but living in the interior with less opportunity for education and cultural contact this proved much more difficult.\textsuperscript{111}

The striking beauty of the Luso-African women of Senegal described in most accounts sets them apart as more enticing than Algonquian women, and also already possessing some European traits from their Portuguese ancestors. In 1669, Sieur Du Bois, writing from Rufisque,


\textsuperscript{111} Knight-Baylac, “Gorée au XVIII siècle,” 33-34.
near Senegal, explained a very appealing encounter with two Luso-African women.\footnote{Luso short for “Portuguese,” descendents of Portuguese traders of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and their African brides, defined in further detail later in the chapter.} “The dress and attire of these women is a petticoat with which they cover themselves from their waist to their feet; the remainder of their body is nude. These women are very shameless,” Du Bois wrote, “and esteem it an honour (sic) to have to do with a white man, indeed their parents solicit them for the purpose: thus it happened to some of our folk who were solicited by the Fathers themselves for the gifts of this country.”\footnote{Du Bois, 14-15.} Such seductive descriptions whetted the sexual curiosities of generations of French travelers and traders to Senegal.

In 1757, nearly ninety years after Du Bois’ account, French naturalist Michel Adanson recorded similar encounters with West African women in Senegal. “One could say,” began Adanson, “that the Negroes of Senegal are the most beautiful men (people) of Nigritiè (The black world). The women have black eyes, nice cleavage, mouths and small lips, and the features of their faces are of good proportions.”\footnote{Michel Adanson, \textit{A Voyage to Sénégal, the Isle of Gorée, and the river Gambia}, Trans., Microfiche, (London: J. Nourse … and W. Johnston, 1759), 39.} Descriptions like Adanson’s proved very compelling for French and European audiences, not merely for the adventurers who sought out native intermarriage but even for the aristocrat who explored the Acacia forests of Senegal through the pages of a travelogue.

The importance of Adanson’s writing does not end with his descriptions of Wolof feminine beauty. Curiously, Adanson’s 1757 account was translated into English only two years later in 1759. The translation accurately states: “There are some of them (Wolof women) perfect beauties,” however, there are many other instances where the translators misquote and abuse their artistic license.\footnote{Adanson, \textit{Histoire Naturelle du Sénégal coquillages}, 22} Under the above quote in the translation, the obviously English editors
wrote, “The vast numbers of children, and children’s children, the French begat by them, and left there, prove our author is not singular in his opinion.”116 This statement shows that by 1759 Frenchmen had been engaging in intermarriage with Wolof and Jolof women for over a century. It also displays clearly the contemptuous British perception of the French as equally as sexually reckless as indigenous women. Though French attitudes and actions supported the intermarriage that created Afro-French communities, the British and most of Europe disapproved of such liaisons.

In the face of European discrimination, like their North American counterparts, Mulattoes of Senegal were distanced from their native African families due to their status as cultural oddities, neither fully French nor any longer fully African. This sort of cultural purgatory led many Mulattoes to fully acculturate to the French even though blacks maintained a strong population base in Senegal. This was less complicated in Africa, as many signare mothers had already adopted French dress, language, religion, and other cultural traits, leading their children towards French life and away from traditional African culture. Mulattoes who worked onboard French ships and on French docks formed tight bonds of friendship and occupational identity that broke down further cultural barriers into French life.117

Though Mulatto children in Senegal experienced some discrimination, by the mid-eighteenth century acceptance had grown to the point that many free blacks, sons of Frenchmen and Luso-African or native mothers, worked on ships, traded for themselves, served in public office, and even joined the French military. In 1780, St. Louis had a black mayor, who directed the police and oversaw other services, proving that blacks could gain power and respect under white government. In 1747, Louis XV granted the Maréchal du Saxe royal permission to

116 Ibid., 39.
117 Colonialism in Africa, 133.
establish six groups of soldiers of color, mainly cavalry units, though this was more the exception than the rule. This action broke new ground in inter-racial relations and challenged many French cultural norms of the time and offered these multi-racial children unfound freedom and opportunity in the white world. Along with Mulattoes, du Saxe constructed his corps out of other groups like freedmen, maroons (escaped slaves), and some enslaved West Africans. Many West African tribes seemed logical choices with traditions of horsemanship and military experience developed from years of trans-Saharan travel and trade. Du Saxe believed he had found a new revolutionary source of soldiers to aid the French in battle, yet his troops met so much social resistance in France that the program was short-lived.118

Though the first large unit of black troops du Saxe’s troops were not the first blacks to serve in the French military. In 1628, 1646, and other times throughout the seventeenth century, French Marine units often took an attaché from a local population to act as a guide and translator. Du Saxe, however, achieved far more than forced conscription. The Maréchal had little trouble filling his ranks as the French paid their wages, provided uniforms and travel. These units fought in Tobago, Flanders, and particularly Germany under Colonel de Knackfussen, proving their worth as loyal French soldiers. However, though they fought as well as their white counterparts, the prejudice and discrimination they received made them more of a spectacle than useful soldiers, however, in the end, even if de Saxe’s ambition was only an illusion, it offered the Senegalese and the world a glimpse of what would happen after the French Revolution, allowing French blacks more privileges than many other countries. Unfortunately, the failure also paved the way for future African French colonial regiments, who bore the brunt of many nineteenth-century French campaigns, while at the same time enduring heightened inequality.119

118 Bouteiller, 28; Corvisier, 367.
119 Ibid., 392-398.
Propelled by the need for French subjects in a land where the French were the minority, Mulattoes held political offices, served in the French military, and enjoyed more opportunities than did the Métis of New France. Powerfully influential signare mothers strived to ensure a place of respect for their children under the French regime in the face of discrimination fueled by the teachings of Buffon and De Pauw that had skewed French attitudes against inter-racial marriage and reproduction. Just as the Métis of New France, Mulattoes in Senegal spoke both French and native dialects and wore combinations of clothing, for example buckle shoes paired with African hand-woven garments. Even though restricted to the lower ranks of colonial Senegalese society, Mulattoes in Senegal formed an integral part of the economy in French colonial cities and commanded more respect than the Métis.\footnote{Ibid., 19; Colonialism in Africa, 133; Pagden, The Fall of the Natural Man, 67; Young, 7.}

These racial barriers were continually assaulted in Senegal during the late eighteenth century, and by 1789 in the wake of the French Revolution, many French already viewed their Mulatto coworkers, friends, and relatives as fellow Francophiles. During that same year, French trader Dominique Harcourt Lamiral declared, “Negroes or Mulattoes, we are all French, since it is the blood of Frenchmen that flows through our veins, or in those of our nephews.”\footnote{Lamiral, in France and West Africa, 84.} In his statement, Lamiral acknowledged two important changes in the role of people of color in Senegal by the 1780s. First, he recognized that many of the French in Senegal married into African families, and worked in favor of these people in the colonial community. Second, the French had finally come to accept Mulattoes and black Africans as fellow French subjects who were not only united in common Senegalese experiences, but who were also entitled to more respect than was given in the past.\footnote{Ibid., 84.}
Chapter VI: Development of Senegal and Canada

In the early years of colonization, intermarriage rates soared and with them cultural bonds between the French and indigenous peoples that led to the maturation of both colonies. As colonies developed it was clear that they were as rooted in a Catholic mission as they were in an economic one. French clergymen and businessmen often regarded colonization on similar terms. Even Champlain himself, who benefited greatly from the fur trade and the foundation of New France, often wrote of his dedication to educating the savages around him. In 1628, the transfer of la Compagnie de la Nouvelle France from a private to a royal company maintained a focus on the fur trade but at the same time vowed “to make all business in the name of the Catholic church.”\(^{123}\) As in most post-colonial nations, Catholicism took hold due to enormous teams of eager priests and missionaries awaited their call to go to new and hostile territories to spread the word of the Christian god. These priests flooded the shores of Senegal and the forests of Nouvelle France as well as China or the Caribbean, and locations. Bombarding native populations with Christian dogma alone was not enough to win over native populations rooted in belief systems developing over thousands of years.\(^{124}\)

While Frenchmen in Nouvelle France entered intermarriage for the same reasons of trade and companionship, mainstream French society scrutinized groups of colonizing Frenchmen for their adoption of native customs. Most French coureurs de bois entered these unions through native ceremonies as described by father Sagard, raising many suspicions as to their devotion to the Catholic faith. As a rule, these Frenchmen turned to religious piety in times of need, often signing themselves in the way of the cross in times of danger, carrying rosaries, and other Christian iconography on rings and other adornments. On both continents these Frenchmen were

\(^{123}\) Edict du Roy pour L’établissement de la Compagnie de la Nouvelle France; avec l’Arest de vérification de la Cour de Parlement de Paris, avec privelage du Roy, (Paris: Sebastien Cramoisy, 1657), 5.

\(^{124}\) Sleeper-Smith, 33; Edict du Roy, 6.
just as eager as natives to adopt the charms and beliefs of the other for protection in a strange place.\textsuperscript{125}

With Frenchmen adopting native customs nearly as frequently as natives adopted Catholicism, a new combination of Christian and native ritualistic belief and living soon emerged. In New France, for example, Frenchmen often gave ritual sacrifices of food, tobacco, or other material to ensure safe journeys. At the same time, these men remained Catholic, encouraging the Christian conversion of their wives and children. Algonquians soon developed a taste for crosses, crucifixes, and rings of silver and brass even before the church achieved their widespread conversion. Such adornments resembled sacred copper talismans and amulets and ritualistic Catholic faith melded easily with native rituals. Initially given as gifts to converts these silver tokens soon appeared on common trade lists to be worn as decoration and ceremony rather than solely displaying newfound Catholicism. New converts brought new interpretations to bear on Catholics rituals, such as the transmogrifying view of transubstantiation in the bread and wine of the Eucharist as similar to feasting on a slain enemy.\textsuperscript{126}

Another factor of success in French Catholic colonialism lay in the fact that Catholicism’s reliance on sacrament and ritual mirrored many native practices. Much like a native shaman, Catholic priests dressed in certain proper vestments, conducted marriage ceremonies, forgave one’s sins, offered the “body” and “blood” of Jesus in the Eucharist, even performed baptisms. French Catholic and Protestant missionaries actively sought African converts but also advocated intermarriage as first suggested by Capuchin Father Alexis de Saint-Lô in 1635. In most early Algonquian and Jolof traditions, though not wholly cannibalistic, people literally ate their enemies after battle believing this bestowed upon them their enemies’

\textsuperscript{125} Frederickson, 22.
\textsuperscript{126} Brooks, “The Signares of Saint Louis and Gorée,” 60.

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powers. Though not a literal act of consuming human flesh and blood, the Eucharist was easily understood, or creatively misunderstood, and adapted by Algonquians and West Africans. Most Algonquians viewed baptism as a water blessing for the journey of life, similar to how they blessed water with a tobacco offering before a long canoe voyage. Cultural appropriation of both belief systems was essential for native mothers to provide their children with traditions and knowledge to use in both heritages.127

Sharing, ostensibly, similar customs not only provided missionaries and the Catholic Church with the souls it wished to save; it also allowed Frenchmen in the interior a common bond with the women and native families of which they would soon become part. Again, rather than a smooth blending of religions, some distinct differences stood out, as when a *coureur de bois* might cross himself as he made a tobacco offering for a voyage or a native may first kiss their cross before performing a traditional song. In West Africa, to a lesser extent, some traditional belief systems also adopted some Christian concepts and beliefs.128

Prime examples of the merging of religions, St. Louis and Gorée thrived during this period by supporting Catholic mission and French trade interests. Frenchmen flocked to these ports, as did many single Wolof and Jolof women, actively engaging in the Gum Senegal and Ivory trades, and eventually marrying French traders, soldiers, and government workers. These cities were not large but they were hubs of African and French trade and they are also the large communities where intermarriages took place. Rather than dispersed in native villages and fur trading camps as in Nouvelle France, the Frenchmen who married Native African women did so publicly in Senegal’s most important trade centers.129

127 Sleeper-Smith, 112; The French in Africa, 28.
128 Sleeper-Smith, 112-114.
In Nouvelle France, Montreal and Quebec City remained the largest cities throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, yet they were still incredibly small by today’s standards. At the same time, Boston and Philadelphia, Britain’s largest North American cities contained only about 20,000 of the British mainland colonies’ total population of 200,000 colonists by the end of the seventeenth century. Though dwarfed by British populations, French colonial cities still emerged as essential hubs of commerce, military presence, and French society. Even smaller than their sister cities in Nouvelle France Gorée and St. Louis emerged as the two most dominant cities in Senegal.130

Equally integral to maintaining a French presence in the African colony, these small, yet vibrant cities represented French military and commercial interests in Senegal. Often referred to as a large city, in 1749, Gorée’s population was 257 people, only growing to 1,840 by 1785. City populations remained small since few Frenchmen and families immigrated to Senegal and also because most Senegalese remained in their villages. These populations, however, were far from static or unchanging. Shockingly different from Quebec or Montreal, in Gorée and St. Louis French officers, sailors, traders lived side-by-side with Wolof, Jolof, Lebou women as well as the multi-ethnic children of intermarriage. Such coexistence suggests that Frenchmen in Senegal treated African women and their children with much more respect than French Canadians gave Algonquian and Métis children in the cities of New France.131

As the small populations of these cities grew, there grew with them increased opportunities and choices for African women married to Frenchmen and their Mulatto children. Women already established in African trade networks now had a more European and urban


131 Knight-Baylac, “Gorée au XVIII siècle,” 33-34.
Such women enjoyed much more freedom, decision-making power, and agency than most Wolof and Jolof women, but it was their multi-ethnic children who enjoyed the most significant changes and opportunities. In the cultural bubbles that encapsulated both Gorée and St. Louis, these children often grew up with Catholic educations, French ideas of dress and civilization, even limited options to join the French military. Due to their fairer skin, French dress, and European educations these children gained the trust of French leaders in Senegal. Ultimately descendants of these offspring would gain more power after the French Revolution and complete political independence from France in the twentieth century.  

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132 Ibid., 33; Durand in *France in West Africa*, 67.
Chapter VII: Status at the Seven Years War

New France and Senegal became essential parts of a sizable French colonial empire by the mid-eighteenth century. Intermarriage with Algonquian women in Canada and Wolof, Jolof, Lebou, and Luso-African women in Africa guaranteed positive trade relations, mutual military protection, and created new cultural communities. Beginning in 1754 and lasting until 1761 in Canada, 1763 in Senegal and other parts of the globe, the Seven Years War pitted France and Britain, the two largest European powers of the time, against each other. By the Treaty of Paris in 1763, Britain not only won the war but control of the lucrative North American fur trade. Britain threatened dominance of French gum Senegal and Caribbean sugar, but the French narrowly retained these commodities and the territories that contained them. The outcome of this war established Great Britain as the main European colonial power. Under British rule intermarriage lost popularity as more and more native groups became acculturated and native peoples enjoyed less opportunities for equality. As the French colonial experiments of Nouvelle France and Senegal drew to a close they left behind a legacy of cultural compromise and ethnic understanding. The lessons, however, were far from over.¹³³

Throughout Nouvelle France’s history, French officials faced the serious threat of losing dominance over its valuable fur trade due to sparse populations in their prized colony. This lack of colonists is one of the many factors that would ultimately lead, in 1763 at the close of the Seven Year’s War, to the loss of Nouvelle France as a colony to Great Britain.¹³⁴ To combat this threat, the Bourbon monarchy enacted several strategies throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to increase the sparse population of both colonies. First the notion of importing enslaved Africans from Senegal and the Caribbean was suggested and rejected. This

¹³³ Anderson, 306.
proposal was not abandoned on the grounds of the original thought that the climate of New France was too cold for Africans; enslaved Africans and freedmen who came to live in the colony as early as the seventeenth century proved this. Few blacks came or were taken to Nouvelle France because *Nouvelle France* lacked the cleared expanses necessary for a successful plantation-based economy like the ones the French already practiced in the low flatlands of Louisiana or the Mississippi River Valley.  

For a glimpse at the importance Senegal as a French colony and the commercial connection between Canada and Senegal, we must look to the close of France’s reign in Canada rather than its colonial beginnings in African. The Seven Years War (1754-1763), was an international conflict which not only gave Britain control over the lucrative North American fur trade, but also established them economically, politically, and militarily as a world power. In 1758, the British captured two key French possessions: Louisbourg, a citadel and port on the Nova Scotia coast, and St. Louis, the gum trading fort at the mouth of the Senegal River. The loss of Louisbourg led ultimately to French defeat by the British in 1761, when Louis XV ceded all French Canadian territory to England, thereby ending almost two centuries of French dominance in the fur trade. This loss seriously hurt the French economy and forced the French to try to maintain their African and Caribbean possessions. The war continued on other global fronts, until the Treaty of Paris ended it in 1763. Fortunately, for the French, though they ceded most colonial territory to the British, Britain returned control of Senegal to the French in that same year. Narrowly averting losing both the North American fur trade and the Gum Senegal

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135 Robin Winks, 1.
trade in West Africa, the French devoted renewed interest to its lucrative gum-producing colony.  

The 1758 raid on St. Louis was not led by powerful British military forces, but rather independent British merchants, among them Thomas Cumming and Samuel Touchet. With France focused on fronts in Canada, both men planned on appearing in Senegal to undermine French gum trade in the region. After fitting five vessels at his own expense, Touchet, backed by the British government, approached St. Louis and took the post after little resistance. Though the gum market was unstable, the British government already saw the advantages in maintaining control over it in Senegal and wished to expand its operations from the Gold Coast (Ghana).

“But we are to expect it [price fluctuation],” wrote Touchet in a letter back to London, “in the case of a commodity so subject to variation in its price as Gum Senegal.” Fluctuation or no, British interest in the colony was high and potential profit was worth the risk. Never condoning intermarriage, British policy relied on alliances with powerful African headmen to secure their trade and commodities; they never attempted to create close bonds between cultures in the style of the French. Touchet and Cumming succeeded and took St. Louis and all of French Senegal in 1758, allowing British dominance until the 1770s. After the brief stint of British control, the French regained control of Senegal and their precious gum trade to close out the eighteenth century.

Witnessing this change of military power, then French Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Count de Choiseul, expressed more concern about economic shifts. In 1762, Choiseul wrote his

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136 Giraud, 32; Anderson, 306; Brown, xvi; Van Kirk, 4-10; French Canadians remained essential to the British fur trade 1763-1890’s. At first French traders and merchants worked with British investors under English rule, but they were soon bought out. Man power and interpretive skills remained essential to the British, however, long relying upon French and Métis engagés to paddle goods and furs, and conduct trade and treaty negotiations with various tribes.

137 A letter to a merchant at Bristol, concerning a petition of S--- T--- Esq. to the King, for an exclusive grant to the trade of the River Senegal … (London: Kearsley, 1762), Microfiche, 39.

138 Ibid., 12-17.
assessment of the situation in a secret dispatch back to France. “The English in retaining
Canada,” he explained, “have sole possession of the commerce of beaver. Now the gum resin of
Senegal is as necessary as beaver for the manufacture of hats. It is for this manufacture, a basic
material of absolute necessity. It is completely natural that if we are obliged to get beaver from
them, and since we are in a position to sell them gum resin, it would be a supreme injustice on
their part to overtake the entirety of the trade.” Choiseul alone captures the importance and
integral link between both the North American fur trade and the gum Senegal trade of West
Africa. Along with lucrative sugar imports from the Caribbean, monopolies on North American
fur and gum Senegal had fueled the French mercantile economy for over a century and the
French were determined to retain them.

Choiseul, in his statement, reveals many attitudes of the French governments of the 1760s
and earlier. First, he acknowledges that even though France lost Canada and Senegal to the
British, they retained the sugar islands Ste. Domingue, Martinique, and Guadeloupe. Diplomats
signed the Treaty of Paris the year after Choiseul’s letter, but in 1779 the British returned
possession of Senegal to the French, permitting some French control in felt hat production. He
clearly explains how crucial gum was to the manufacture of hats as a stiffening and binding
agent and laid forth a clear plan on how to retain some influence in the hat business. Without
gum, the French economy as a whole would have been even more severely impaired after the
Seven Years than it already was. Choiseul ironically chastises the English for their potential

139 Choiseul, 21-22; Dominique Harcourt Lamiral, “1789 in Senegal,” Personal Notebook, in France and West
1969), 84.
140 Choiseul, 21.
domination of both beaver and gum trades, keeping hat profits to themselves, since for over two centuries the French had done precisely that.\footnote{Ibid., 21-22; André Delcourt, \textit{La France et les etablissements Français au Sénégal entre 1713-1763}, (Dakar: Institut Français d’Affrique Noire, 1952), 77.}

Choiseul’s writing illustrates the economic, political, and social bonds between Senegal and Nouvelle France and how the French government used this information in economic and military strategy. The trades of the two mercantile colonies combined to produce the felt hat industry, one of the most lucrative and long lasting of the period. At the same time the problem of encouraging French settlement in each location was daunting. Both colonies had already earned a reputation for harsh environments, frigid and blustery during Canadian winters and sweltering heat and humidity in the river valleys of the Senegal. The few French that ventured to either location were largely single, male, most intended to return to France after growing wealthy in the colonies though few accomplished this goal. After settling in either colony, Frenchmen shared an incredible sense of loneliness, fully aware that these colonies meant little to their royal government in comparison to Caribbean sugar colonies.\footnote{Choiseul, 22; Anderson, 309.}

Frenchmen tolerated the notion of interracial contracts to guard their African colony from intense colonial competition from the British in Gambia and the Gold Coast and the Portuguese in Saô Tomé and Principe. By the close of the eighteenth century, however, worried about their own freedoms, the French changed their attitudes to nearly zero tolerance for interracial liaisons. As French industry advanced, gum Senegal became less necessary. Also, acculturated French Mulattoes still maintained political and commercial control in Senegal so intermarriage lost its value as a tool of ensuring trade. At the close of the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth, blacks, Métis, and Mulattoes in French colonies experienced more racism than ever before.
Significantly, after the fall of Nouvelle France to Britain in 1761 and the birth of British Canada, tolerance for “mixed-bloods” drastically decreased and most Europeans even questioned their usefulness, even in meager roles as laborers and translators. Also after asserting its military might in the Seven Years War, Britain began questioning the need for its native allies, having conquered most of North America and now quite accustomed to the new environment. Improvements in firearms and decreases in native populations made native military aid and approval less important and intermarriage nearly obsolete. The climax of this sentiment came in the mid-nineteenth century with the notoriety of one of the most famous Métis of all time, Louis Riel. As New France gave way to British Canada, Louis Riel emerged as the main exception to Métis submission by leading the Red River Resistance in Winnipeg, Manitoba in 1869, and the North West Rebellion in northern Saskatchewan in 1885, both for the cause of Métis rights and freedom. Though he was hung in 1885 after a rigged jury convicted him, he soon became a martyr for Métis and French Canadian rights and his struggles won the Canadian Métis much of the political power and respect they still possess today.\(^{143}\)

As French influence in both Canada and Senegal decreased in the nineteenth century, intermarriage and its impact were certainly not forgotten. Abbé P.D. Boilat, a Wolof of Senegal stands as a testament to liaisons of the eighteenth century and before and the powerful assimilation and acculturation that transformed multi-ethnic children in Senegal to the founding generation of a truly Senegalese society, free of direct French control. Though Boilat’s account is not of the same period, it is extremely important since it is one of the only Wolof accounts of a cultural practice that went on for over two centuries. His account should be valued but examined carefully due to the fact that Boilat was an acculturated black, ordained a Catholic priest in 1841 after study in France, and wrote with many of the same biases as his fellow French clergymen.


Boilat reported in the early 1840s: “Most of the French merchants, many of the storekeepers, and other Europeans, have contracted legitimate marriages with daughters of habitants, as have a few employees of the administration. Free or temporary unions, which as several travelers pointed out took place under the name of ‘marriage country-style,’ have now (1841) fallen into disgrace and dishonour, [sic] at least in St. Louis.”\footnote{Boilat, 93; Habitants “Inhabitants” or “country folk,” in this case referred to Mulattoes with respectable ranks in nineteenth-century Sénégal, however, was used in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Nouvelle France to denote French colonists – often farmers.} It seems strange that racial segregation and bigotry would increase at this point since only seven years later in 1848 France outlawed slavery and abolished its formerly lucrative trade in enslaved Africans. As in other areas of the world, members of the poor white classes escalated this shift in racial attitude. The end of French slavery brought with it the shift in perspective from Africans as assets in French cities to fear of their labor as competition for employment in all fields. Though not at the rate of the mid-eighteenth century, similar perceptions of race, nationality, class, and parentage continued through the nineteenth century to mold the experiences of partners in marriages à la mode du pays and the multi-ethnic children of such unions.\footnote{Colonialism in Africa, 133; “The French Fort at Whydah [1763-1767],” translated by Simone Bargain, in Le compote français de Juda (Ouidah) au XVIIIe siècle, (Paris: Larose, 1942), in France in West Africa, 52. Brooks, “The Signares of Saint Louis and Gorée,” 19; Filhos do terra in Portuguese and fils de Terre translates as “Children of the Earth.”}

\footnote{Moogk, 50.}
During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries French colonists and government officials shaped interactions between Frenchmen and native cultures through the sanctioning of intermarriage. Using lessons learned in the successes and failures of colonial imperialism, acculturation and assimilation in Nouvelle France, the French government approached the colonization of Senegal in nearly the same way. In Africa, the French desperately needed the social, political, and economic bonds that intermarriage had provided in North America. Though desired commodities differed between colonies, the fashion industry and the manufacture of beaver felt hats inseparably linked the trades and interests of both colonies. Yet just as in Nouvelle France, exchanges in the colony of Senegal were far from merely economic. These commercial dealings spawned a distinct Atlantic society constructed from traditional African and French components. Spanning the Atlantic, the similarities in these unions and French colonial policies towards them in Senegal and Nouvelle France demonstrate the connections and similarities between colonies throughout the Atlantic region. These marriages demonstrated the possibility of cooperation across ethnic and racial boundaries, as a result participants in such unions made cultural compromises found few places outside the Atlantic world.148

*Marriages a la façon de pays* thrived in both Senegal and Nouvelle France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. More than merely leaving French names with Métis or West African families, these relationships began the journey for French racial understanding and connected two colonial economies, all for the sake of fashionable hats. Through unique circumstances of trade and racial acceptance, Frenchmen and native women overcame their

differences to construct multi-ethnic communities that would not be rediscovered until centuries after. Despite Métis children growing to become laborers and translators in the Canadian fur trade or Mulattoes growing to serve in De Saxe’s black corps, French rule provided improved conditions, but certainly not complete racial equality. Intermarriage provided only limited benefits to Canadian populations while Senegalese mixed-ancestry children grew in power and influence. Their mothers’ influence and their higher number over the few French in Senegal, gave Mulattoes more opportunities in French colonial cities and society than their backwoods Métis cousins.

While studying marriages a la façon de pays provides us many more insights into what French colonial life was like in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Senegal and Nouvelle France, it raises nearly as many questions. Why did the French treat these colonies similarly? Why did native population enter marriages with colonizing Frenchmen? How did such unions endure for so long under French colonial rule? Considering these questions and more allow us to examine practices and views that united European activities in the early Atlantic World. Marriages a la façon de pays demonstrated the potential for new ideas and opportunities to take root during a period when diverse populations came together for the first time; these unions also foreshadowed compromises and conflicts that would mark nearly all Atlantic interactions that followed.
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