



Political Philosophy

Week 5.

The Rights of
Everyone Else



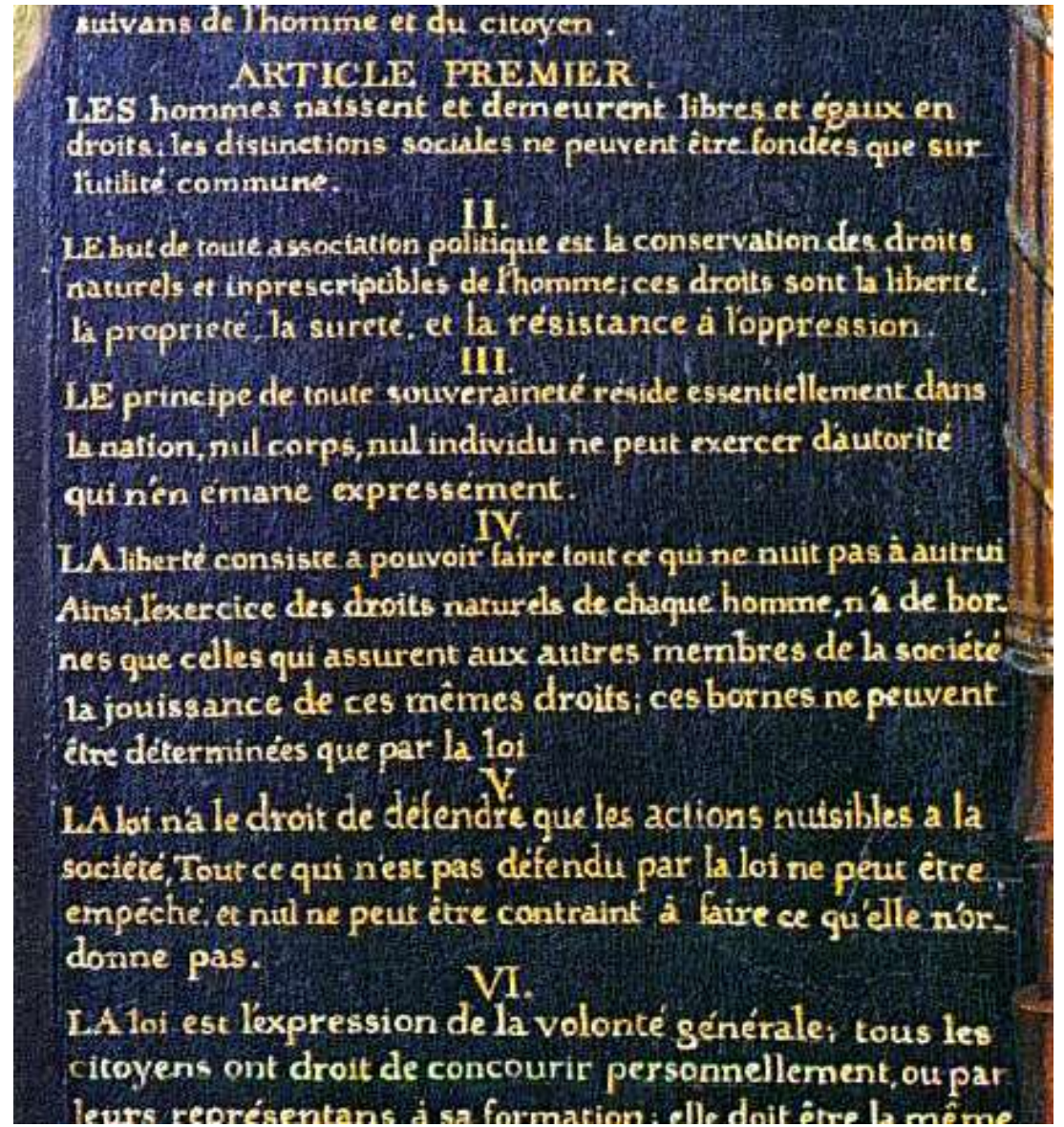
- ‘Bliss it was in that dawn to be alive, but to be young was very heaven’ – William Wordsworth
- ‘Virtue can only flourish among equals’ – Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Men*
- ‘I cannot yet give up the hope, that a fairer day is dawning on Europe, though I must hesitatingly observe, that little is to be expected from the narrow principle of commerce, which seems everywhere to be shoving aside *the principle of honor* of the *noblesse*. For the same pride of office, the same desire of power are still visible...’
– Mary Wollstonecraft





‘On the scheme of this barbarous philosophy, which is the offspring of cold hearts and muddy understandings, and which is as void of solid wisdom as it is destitute of all taste and elegance, laws are to be supported only by their own terrors, and by the concern which each individual may find in them from his own private speculations, or can spare to them from his own private interests. In the groves of their academy, at the end of every vista, you see nothing but the gallows.’

– Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790)



Equality and the French Revolution

- ‘The aim of every political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.’
 - Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789)
- ‘The *State of Nature* has a Law of Nature to govern it, which obliges everyone: And Reason, which is that Law, teaches all Mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his Life, Health, Liberty or Possessions.’
 - John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (1689)



But rights for who?

- The Women's March on Versailles in October 1789 sees thousands march and siege the king's palace at Versailles, demanding radical changes amid high bread prices and tax increases
- Many were shocked at the outspoken, confrontational behaviour
- Reformers and radicals were unwilling to extend the new freedoms
- Talleyrand's new reforms to education were only for boys, not girls
- The revolutionaries were also ambivalent about freeing slaves in the profitable colony of Saint Domingue. Napoleon eventually reimposes it.



Olympe de Gouges (1748-93)

- Wrote *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* (1791), arguing for education, equality of justice, equal marriages, a women's citizen assembly, and opportunities for women
- 'Woman, wake up... discover your rights. ... Oh, women, women! When will you cease to be blind? ... Regardless of what barriers confront you, it is in your power to free yourselves; you have only to want to...'
- 'I offer a foolproof way to elevate the soul of women; it is to join them to all the activities of man... Man... Tell me, what gives you sovereign empire to oppress my sex?'



‘The education of women should always be relative to that of men. To please, to be useful to us, to make us love and esteem them, to educate us when young, to take care of us when grown up, to advise, to console us, to render our lives easy and agreeable; these are the duties of women at all times, and what they should be taught in their infancy.’ – Rousseau, *Emile*

‘I may be accused of ignorance, still I must declare what I firmly believe, that all the writers who have written on the subject of female education and manners from Rousseau to Dr Gregory, have contributed to ...degrade one half of the human species, and render women pleasing at the expense of every solid virtue’.
– Mary Wollstonecraft



Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797)

- Born to a declining middle class family in Spitalfields; father was a violent alcoholic. Mary physically defended her mother and sisters
- Works as a lady's companion, then sets up a Dissenter school with her sisters in Newington Green (and is later a governess)
- Increasingly aware of how women's subordination is enforced through education (or lack of)
- *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787)
- Lives a vivid life in accordance with her ideals, staying in France during the Revolution (*Vindication of the Rights of Man*, 1791)
- Life tragically cut short during the birth of her second daughter, Mary

A
VINDICATION
OF THE
RIGHTS OF WOMAN:
WITH
STRICTURES
ON
POLITICAL AND MORAL SUBJECTS.

BY MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT.



PRINTED AT BOSTON,
BY PETER EDES FOR THOMAS AND ANDREWS,
FAUST'S Statue, No. 45, Newbury-Street,
MDCCLXII.





Over to you

In groups, discuss one of the following two questions:

1. What have been the causes of the apparent weakness of women? (364)
2. How does Wollstonecraft seek to empower women, and for what ultimate end? (366)

‘Civilized women are, therefore, so weakened by false refinement, that, respecting morals, their condition is much below what it would be were they left in a state nearer to nature... To remain, it may be said, innocent; they mean in a state of childhood... Fragile in every sense of the word, they are obliged to look up to man for every comfort... if fear in girls, instead of being cherished, perhaps, created, were treated in the same manner as cowardice in boys, we should quickly see women with more dignified aspects...

I do not wish them to have power over men; but over themselves...’

- 'The stamen of immortality ... is the perfectibility of reason.'
- 'It would be an endless task to trace the variety of meanness, cares, and sorrows, into which women are plunged by the prevailing opinion, that they were created rather to feel than reason, and that all the power they obtain must be obtained by their charms and weakness...'
- 'If women be educated for dependence; that is, to act according to the will of another fallible being, and submit, right or wrong, to power, where are we to stop?'
- 'The divine right of husbands, like the divine right of kings, may, it is hoped, in this enlightened age, be contested without danger.'

The vast majority of Britons think women face prejudice in the workplace but still believe feminism has gone as far it should go, a Sky Data poll reveals.

Sky News commissioned a national survey for #100Women, a special programme discussing the issues facing women in the UK.

The poll found seven in 10 Britons believe men are paid more than women for the same work, while just 1% say women are paid more.

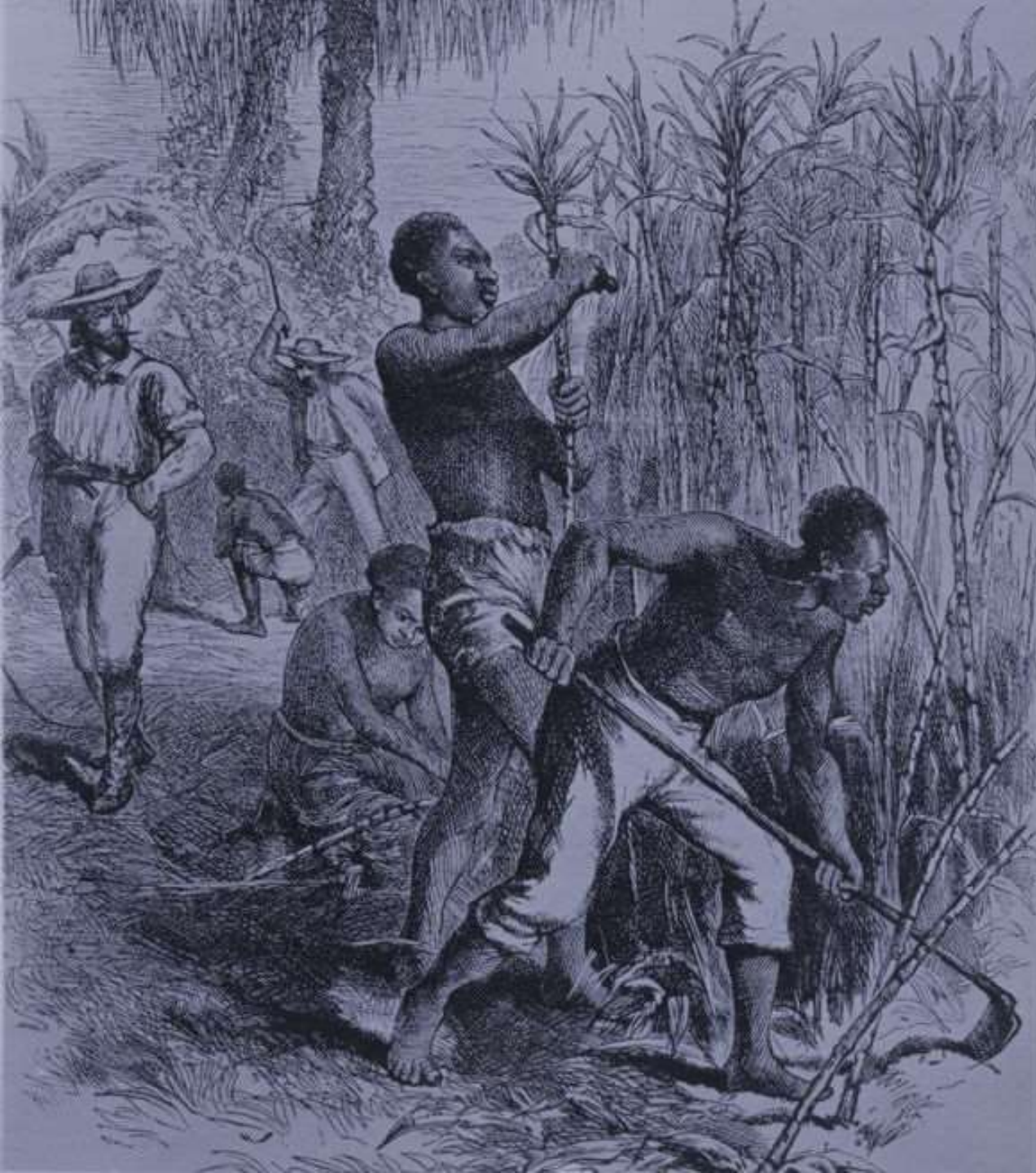
Two thirds (65%) say men are favoured over equally qualified women by British bosses, compared to 5% who say women are favoured over men.

Despite this, a total of 67% of Britons think feminism has either gone too far (40%) or gone as far it should go (27%). Just one third say it has not gone far enough (33%).

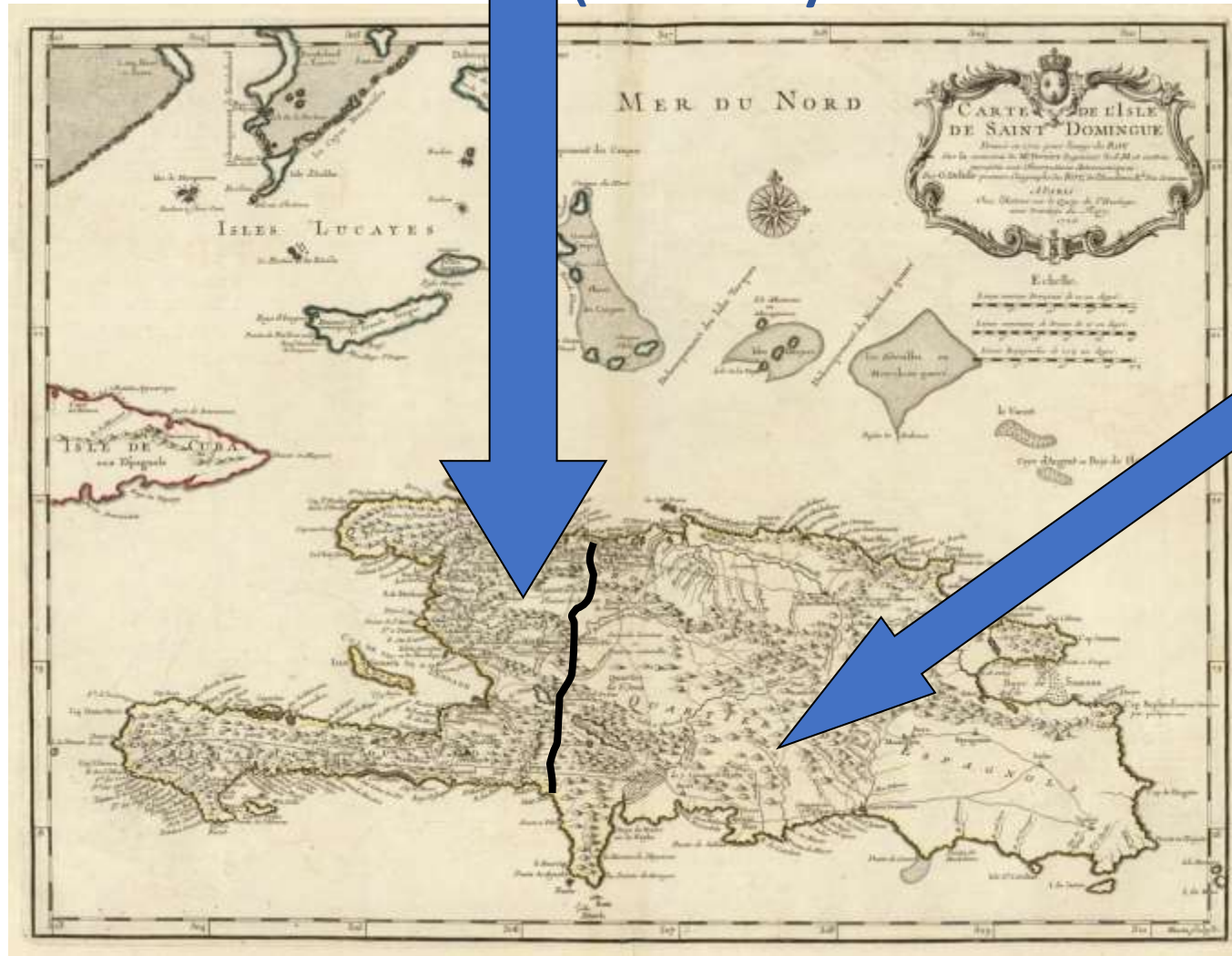
There is also little difference on this point by gender - 61% of women either think feminism has gone too far (35%) or has gone as far it should go (26%).

Only one in three (34%) Britons consider themselves to be feminists, with the figure 42% for women and 25% for men.





French (Colony of St. Domingue)



Spanish

France took western 1/3 of island from Spain

Social Structure of Saint Domingue



Whites (20,000)

Gens de Couleur
(30,000)

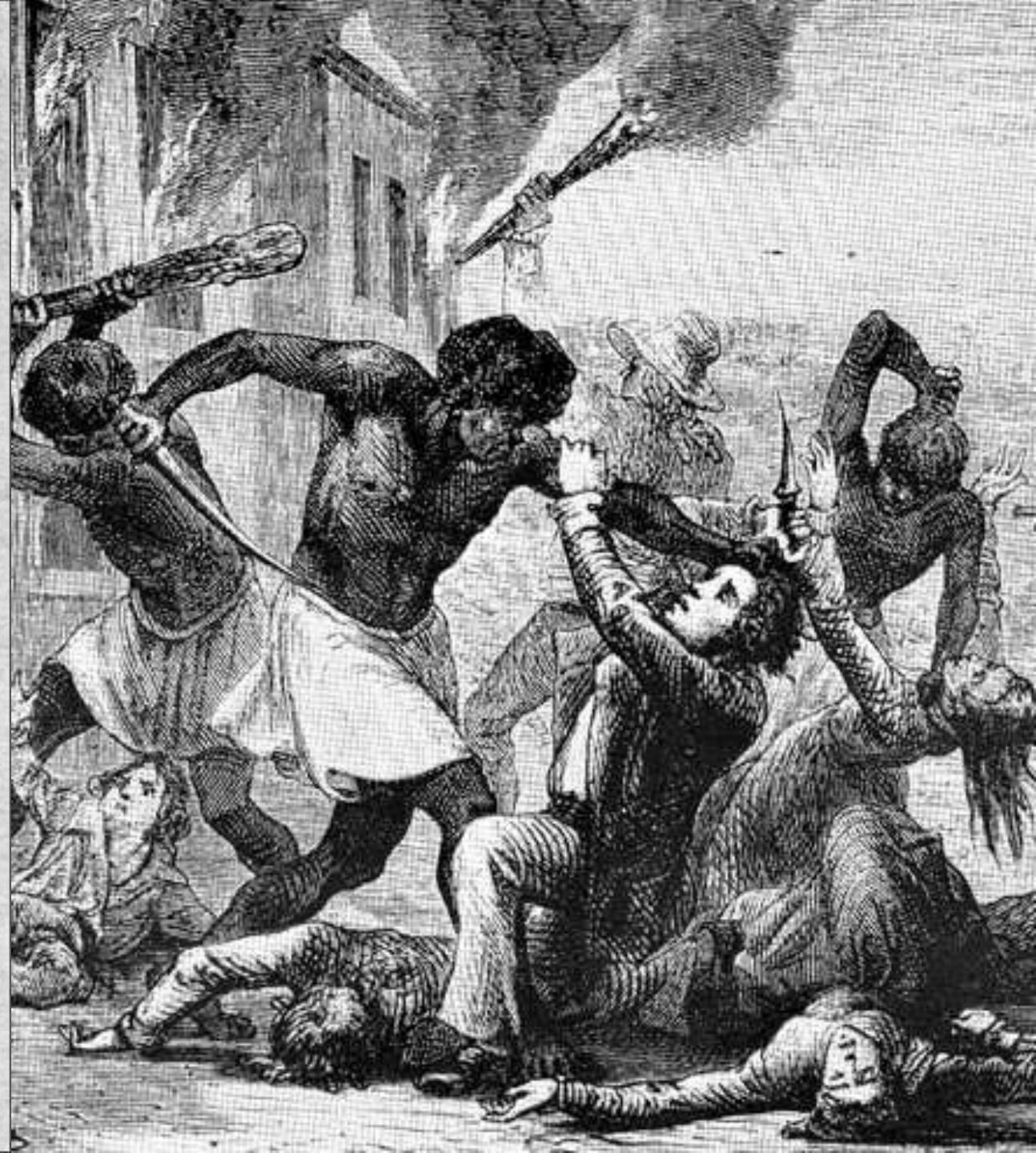
Slaves
(500,000)

Pre-Revolution on Saint Domingue

- French colonists brought West African slaves to develop large sugar and coffee plantations in the most lucrative colony in the world
- 40% of world's sugar
- 50% of world's coffee
- By 1788 – 500k slaves, 30k free people of colour, 15k gens de couleur, 20k-40k colonists (outnumbered 10: 1)
- Death rate of around 50%, mostly through overwork. Torture common
- Yet slaves allowed to retain their old religious customs, out of which emerges Vodou, a mix of Catholicism and tribal religions of Western Africa, particularly Benin



Dess. p. Jouques. gr. p. Christian inv. du Thyr. Cloître St Honoré. en 1795



The Rights of Man comes to St Domingue

- White planters wanted home rule, while freed slaves wanted full equality and citizenship
- 1790, Vincent Ogé visits France and secures these rights, but is brutally killed by white planters upon returning
- 1791, Dutty Boukman, a Voudou priest, leads a revolt of Maroons against planters across the colony, killing 15k
- 1793, Toussaint organises the rebel slaves into disciplined military units. He allies with the Spanish to defeat the French, and when France abolishes slavery, represents France to defeat the Spanish and British
- Louverture: 'opening', one who 'breaks through enemy lines'
- He rules the colony as French Governor-General until Napoleon captures him in 1802 in an effort to reinstate slavery...





Over to you

Let's explore some of Toussaint's writings, and what they tell us about the extension of Enlightenment ideas of equality

1. How does Toussaint challenge existing racist ideas? (E.g. in the Letter to the Directory)
2. How does Toussaint's constitution put into practice some of the Rights of Man? In what ways does it differ?



TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE
Chef des Noirs Insurgés de Saint Domingue.
A Paris chez Jean rue Jean de Beauvais, N° 10.

‘Such are the Negroes whom Vaublanc accuses of being ignorant and uncouth. No doubt they are, for without education there is only ignorance and crudity. But should they be criminalized for this lack of education, or should we accuse those who used terrible punishments to prevent them obtaining it? Is it only civilized people who can distinguish right and wrong, and know charity and justice? The men of Saint Domingue have been deprived of education, but thereby have remained closer to nature, and they do not deserve, because they lack the refinement that comes with education, to form a group separate from the rest of humanity and to be confused with the animals....’

– Toussaint, Letter to the Directory

3. There can exist no slaves in this territory, where servitude is forever abolished and all men are born, live, and die free and French.

4. Every man, whatever his color, has access to all types of employment.

5. No distinction other than those of virtue and talent exist there, and no superiority other than that which the law bestows on the exercise of a public function. The law is the same for everyone, with regard to both protection and punishment....

15. Each plantation is a manufacturing unit that needs both agricultural workers and artisans. It is the peaceful refuge of an active and steadfast family, of which the landowner or his representative necessarily acts as the father.



Evaluating Toussaint

- Fifty when the uprising originally broke out, Toussaint was an able doctor and later military commander, who embraces abolitionism and Enlightenment ideas after a time
- While preventing some massacres, he oversees the War of the Knives against an autonomous region of *gens de couleur*, where thousands were murdered
- Constitution of 1801 makes him Governor-General for life
- Reimposes plantations and forced labour on freed slaves to kickstart the economy
- His general Jean-Jacques Dessalines conspires in his arrest, and eventually leads Haiti to independence in 1804, massacring the entire white population in the process
- The cause of slavery abolitionism is set back decades



Next week... *Karl Marx and Capital*

- We'll turn to Karl Marx's epoch-shifting work, *Capital* (1867)
- Please read the excerpts from the end of Volume I on primitive accumulation, where Marx outlines the violent genesis of capitalism
- We'll ask: in what sense do economic relations define our political ones? Is the political and social a consequence of them? If so, what are the implications for political philosophy?
- I'll also aim to cover the broader arguments of Marx's *Capital*
- If you like the material, there's some 'bonus' readings on Moodle, from 'Value, Price and Profit', and 'The Working Day (ch 10)
- Email any questions to dan.taylor@marywardcentre.ac.uk