W. Miles

The irrelevance of independence: Martinique and the French presidential elections of 2002

In: New West Indian Guide/ Nieuwe West-Indische Gids 77 (2003), no: 3/4, Leiden, 221-252

This PDF-file was downloaded from <http://www.kitlv-journals.nl>

WILLIAM F.S. MILES

THE IRRELEVANCE OF INDEPENDENCE:
MARTINIQUE AND THE FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL
ELECTIONS OF 2002¹

INTRODUCTION

In 1981, one tacit issue dominated the French presidential elections in the overseas *département*² of Martinique: independence. Would not the victory by the Socialist candidate François Mitterrand result, as claimed by his conservative foes, in a leftist *largage* (dumping) of this French West Indian island? Although the French Socialists had claimed no such objective, the rightist strategy worked. No other French state, overseas or Metropolitan,³ backed Mitterrand's nemesis, incumbent president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, as strongly as the electorate in Martinique.

1. Fieldwork for this research was made possible by a sabbatical leave from Northeastern University. From September 2001 through June 2002 the author was visiting researcher with the Centre de Recherches sur les Pouvoirs Locaux dans la Caraïbe (CRPLC) at the Schoelcher, Martinique, campus of the Université des Antilles-Guyane. Special thanks go to CRPLC director Justin Daniel.

2. France calls the standard geopolitical unit into which most of the republic is divided *département*. In American terms, the closest equivalent is state: Hawaii and Alaska, for instance, are overseas states of the continental United States (whose federalism is in stark contrast to traditional French centralism). In addition to the four *départements d'outre-mer* or DOMs, there are five TOMs (overseas territories) and CTRs (territorial collectivities of the Republic), mostly in the Pacific. These are legacies of nineteenth-century colonization, as opposed to the Old Colonies from the seventeenth century. In contrast to the DOMs, whose cultures mainly emerged out of slave-populated colonialism, the TOMs are characterized by indigenous populations predating the French presence. See Aldrich & Connell 1992 and Doumenge 2000.

3. Metropole and Metropolitan refer to mainland (European) France.

New West Indian Guide / Nieuwe West-Indische Gids vol. 77 no. 3 & 4 (2003):221-252

In France as a whole, however, Mitterrand squeaked by to become the fourth president of the Fifth Republic and the first from the political left. Mitterrand's win, consolidated in the follow-up legislative elections by a Socialist landslide, did not, as it turned out, result in any cutting of juridical ties between Martinique and the Metropole. Rather, Martinique experienced the same institutional decentralization that the Socialists instituted throughout France.

Twenty-one years, and three presidential elections, later, another French national contest geared up, and Martinique faced a similar choice. A Socialist heir to François Mitterrand, Lionel Jospin, was to confront another conservative incumbent president, this time Jacques Chirac. Would Martinicans back the candidate who vigorously opposed any loosening of institutional ties with France (i.e., Chirac); or, rather, would they support the Socialist who had already gained their confidence in more recent elections (i.e., Jospin)? As it turned out, a complicating twist to the 2002 French elections deprived the overseas electorate of the expected option, forcing this Caribbean society into a Hobbesian choice. The twist simultaneously highlighted the underlying marginality of Martinique to the French body politic.

Instead of Jospin being a run-off candidate in the second round of the presidential elections, for polls indicated that he would take second place, the Socialist was edged out in the first round by the far-right, anti-immigration, and (presumed) racist candidate of the National Front, Jean-Marie Le Pen. To a populace largely composed of slave descendants, Le Pen's standing as runner-up was particularly galling. As a result, Martinican voters of even a leftist tendency were faced with the unpalatable option of voting for the "lesser evil" of Jacques Chirac or abstaining entirely. In the end, Martinique's voters backed Chirac more than did those of any other *département* of France.

Besides the Le Pen surprise, three other factors complicate interpretations of the 2002 electoral results for Martinique. One is the relative success of Christiane Taubira, the black, female, left-wing candidate, in the first round of the elections. Second is the record-high abstention rate, particularly perplexing in a presidential election of such emotional import. Third is the outcome of the follow-up legislative elections, as a result of which Martinique sent one conservative, two moderate leftist, and one independentist representative to the National Assembly in Paris. The legislative elections also constituted a rebuff to the party of Aimé Césaire, the most prominent Martinican personality of the last half-century.

Paradoxically, although the administrative status of Martinique vis-à-vis France had finally surfaced in an overtly public and freely debated way in the months just preceding the elections, it hardly factored in either the presidential or subsequent legislative contests themselves. The primary

question for outside observers of French overseas and Caribbean politics – “Will the island become independent or not?” – is a nonissue for islanders themselves. The meaning for Martinique of the 2002 French national elections is thus fraught with ambiguity. But then again, ambiguity has long been the byword for Martinique’s relationship not only with France, but with its very self.

BACKGROUND TO ELECTION 2002

Martinique’s relationship with France remains rooted in its colonial and slave plantation past. A French colony since 1635, it was interrupted by only two brief periods of British occupation. Until 1848 island society was defined principally by triangular trade and African-based slavery. Abolition in 1848 imparted both freedom and citizenship but it did not eradicate the distinctions among the white planter (*béké*), poor black, and bourgeois “mulatto” ethnoclasses. In 1946, Martinique’s representatives to the French parliament, including the poet and then-Communist Aimé Césaire, requested their island’s “assimilation” as a full *département* into the French Republic. That demand was motivated by a desire for the full equality that French colonial policy had long preached under the same banner (*assimilation*).⁴

Martinique, along with the other Caribbean “Old Colonies” of Guadeloupe and French Guiana and the Indian Ocean island of Réunion, thus typified French postcolonial exceptionalism: decolonization not through independence, as practiced by Great Britain and other colonial powers, but by integration. *Départementalisation* entailed the extension of the same rights and privileges applying in the Metropolitan French *départements* to the overseas ones. Although it took decades before they reached the same monetary levels, these *droits acquis* included social security, minimum wage, child allowance, health insurance, unemployment compensation, and all other components of the French welfare state. In large part they explain the seeming paradox of this former slave plantation colony’s rejection of a progressive, pro-Third World Socialist candidate in 1981 in favor of a conservative statesman whose very name bespoke aristocracy (Miles 1986; Satineau 1986). The proportion of the Martinican vote for Giscard d’Estaing over Mitterrand was 4:1. In follow-up elections, Aimé Césaire remained the only leftist parliamentarian (out of three) to represent Martinique in the Metropole.

Local trauma over the 1981 results did not last long. France’s new Socialist government bent over backwards to reassure the overseas

4. For a summary treatment of French assimilationist policy, see Denning 1961–62; for that of the fiftieth anniversary commemoration of the law of assimilation, Miles 2001.

populations that there were no plans to divest the Republic of its DOMs. Not only did Mitterrand personally make symbolic gestures (such as postelectoral wreath-laying at the tomb of Victor Schoelcher, icon of emancipation) but the Socialists emphasized the legitimacy of regional and cultural difference within a hitherto Jacobin and centralist French political structure (Miles 1985; McDougall 1993). Autonomist Aimé Césaire did his part by declaring a “moratorium” on the question of Martinique’s political status.

Martinique seemed convinced – even if in the Metropole itself, “right to difference” rhetoric was “largely discredited and abandoned by intellectuals and activists alike” by the late 1980s (Blatt 1997:49). In his reelection bid of 1988, the electorate swung from having humiliated Mitterrand in 1981 to giving him his highest scores in any *département* of France (59 percent in the first round, and 71 percent in the second). In 1988, it was the challenger Chirac who “took fire,” that is, was “burned,” as is said in Creole (Miles 1990). Martinique rejoined the rest of France in reelecting the Socialist incumbent. The Martinican electorate even sent leftist representatives to Paris from all four of her legislative districts (only to do the reverse in the subsequent legislative elections of 1993, with three out of four parliamentarians representing the right; in 1986, the left and right had split with two each.)

The year 1995 confirmed the seemingly leftward electoral tilt of Martinique, even though it put her at odds, as in 1981, with the French electorate at large. Although now the Socialist challenger was Lionel Jospin and not the more familiar François Mitterrand, Martinique massively backed the Socialist, giving him 59 percent of its vote in the second round. This was Jospin’s best outcome overseas, and his second best throughout the Republic. It was Jacques Chirac, however, who became president of France (Miles 1995).

Gambling that early elections might strengthen his hand as president, Chirac called the French people to the polls in 1997. It was a tactical error. The Socialists took a majority of seats, forcing Chirac to appoint Lionel Jospin as his prime minister, a scenario known in French politics as *cohabitation*. The year 1997 was also significant because it saw the election of Martinique’s first pro-independence representative to the National Assembly: Alfred Marie-Jeanne, mayor of Rivière-Pilote. (Two of the other parliamentary victors were from the right; the fourth was Césaire’s successor, Camille Darsières.)

For the first time in the Fifth Republic, then, the presidential elections of 2002 pitted an incumbent president against an incumbent prime minister. All predictions were that overfamiliarity with both candidates, combined with a general malaise gripping the French nation at large, would make for a lackluster campaign. As the U.S. presidential contest of 2000 had

demonstrated not long before, however, lackluster campaigns can generate extremely surprising outcomes.

To better contrast the stakes and symbolism of the Martinican vote in the French presidential elections of 2002 with 1981, it is useful to survey the societal and political transformations that had occurred in the intervening twenty-one years. These may be examined under the rubric of French postcolonial policy, Martinican partisan politics along the ideological spectrum, cultural changes in French West Indian society, and the state of the island economy.

FRENCH POLICY, 1981-2002

By “policy” we betoken the influence in Martinique of a relatively pluralistic approach to French postcolonialism in the nonindependent former colonies. Decentralization, instituted after 1981 by the Socialists under Mitterrand, was not merely an administrative reform with efficiency objectives. It bespoke, rather, a philosophical shift in the way the center viewed the culture of its most far-flung, overseas components. These were still to be regarded as French, but French with a difference. Cultural specificity was no longer to be feared as a potential threat to Jacobin or Bonapartist control. Rather, a multicultural France – one that would valorize regional languages – was to be acknowledged and celebrated. Over the years, this would come to include Creole.

Socialist policy vis-à-vis the overseas represented a major ideological break with the spirit of postcolonial assimilation. Not that right and center-right governments from 1946 to 1981 had actively worked to eradicate, denigrate, or repress local cultures and identities: this anachronistic notion of assimilation had already undergone much softening by the First World War (Brunschwig 1964; Betts 1970). Right-of-center governments’ conception of *départementalisation*, however, emphasized economic transformation over identity politics. Cultural differences were valuable in providing an exotic gloss (and, properly performed, a source of tourist revenue) in distant but still French lands. (Corsica proved to be an explosive exception.) To the pre-Socialist governments of the departmental era, however, they were not fundamental attributes to be promoted. This changed in 1981.

“I have been struck,” declared President Mitterrand approvingly, during a visit to Martinique in 1985, “by a vigorous effort at ... the affirmation ... of identity.” Mitterrand evocatively summed up the object of this effort in two words: “Martinican dignity.”⁵ Exactly ten years later Socialist leader Pierre

5. François Mitterrand, speech before the Corps constitués de Martinique, Martinique, December 4, 1985.

Mauroy called for “de-diabolicization” of identity politics: “Everyone must be able to show his difference ... the time of monarchies and colonizations is over.”⁶ Yet more important than rhetorical flourishes from the left has been the appropriation of similar discourse by the right. We may view this as the mainstreaming of overseas French multicultural politics.⁷

On the fiftieth anniversary marking the departmentalization of the “Old Colonies,” for example, Jacques Chirac – one year after retaking the presidency for the French right – struck an overseas tone that varied little with that of his otherwise ideological nemeses: “The overseas departments occupy a special place within our Nation.” They are justly “proud of their particular cultures, of their languages and traditions.” Now as ever, there is “no question of the overseas departments conforming to a uniform and restrictive mold.”

For Chirac, local specificity and identity in no way diminished, much less threatened, national unity. His jubilee speech also strongly emphasized the Frenchness of the overseas departments. Indeed, given the recent expansion of the European Union, it also stressed their newly expanded status within the Mother Continent. Indeed, Chirac envisioned a happy constellation of the three identities: “The overseas departments will not only be completely French but fully European, while maintaining the guarantee of respect for their own personality.”⁸

MARTINICAN POLITICS, 1981-2002

“Left” and “right” do not have the same meaning in Martinique as in the Metropole. Ideological notions of state and economy, law and order, private and collective play second fiddle to the overarching importance of the island’s integration within the French Republic. Thus, the extreme left in Martinique – regardless of its views on socialism or collectivism – is synonymous with independentism. Such is the case with the Martinican Independence Movement (MIM), headed by Marie-Jeanne. A slightly more moderate “left,” as represented by Aimé Césaire’s Progressive Martinican Party (PPM), argued for autonomy from its founding in 1956 until 1981. So

6. La charge symbolique de la visite à Césaire, *France-Antilles*, April 19, 1995.

7. This is to be contrasted with a “nationalist turn” regarding cultural policy in the Metropole. See Ingram 1998. In the overall scheme of French postcolonial politics (or at least in academic literature on postcolonialism, hybridity, *métissage*, etc.), the role of the *DOMiens* is overshadowed by that of peoples of North African and Southeast Asian origin. See Vichniac 1991; Mckesson 1994; Hargreaves & McKinney 1997; Sherzer 1998.

8. Transcript of the speech in *France-Antilles*, March 20, 1996.

does, incidentally, the much older, but now almost extinct, local Communist party. There is also an affiliate of the French Socialist Party. Leftist parties are also identified with the promotion of Creole culture and language.

"Right" in Martinique denotes adherence to *départementalisation*. The more rightist the movement or party, the more opposed it is to change that differentiates Martinique from the mainland. Such *départementalisation* parties generally identify with their French Metropolitan conservative counterparts. (Until they merged during the 2002 campaign, this meant the Union of French Democracy [UDF] and Rally for the Republic [RPR].) Traditionally, rightist/*départementalisation* parties have been suspicious or reticent about local cultural and linguistic movements that tend to promote Creole at the expense of *francophonie*. On account of the association between extreme right politics and racism, Martinique has eschewed political parties that smack of the far right. (This is in contrast to Guadeloupe, where a virulent anti-Haitian movement, headed by the disc jockey-turned-politician Ibo Simon, has tapped into an indigenous French West Indian xenophobia.)

A classic example of right-left political conflict emerged from the newly elected Mitterrand government's proposal to merge the island's general and regional councils into one.⁹ However logical the proposal – to reduce redundancy, save costs, eliminate inefficiency – the Martinican right opposed the Single Assembly proposal on the grounds that it would ominously alter Martinique's institutional profile as a regular *département* of France. In the end, the Constitutional Council – France's equivalent of the U.S. Supreme Court – agreed with the Martinican right, and ruled that a Single Assembly would be unconstitutional in its administrative differentiation of the overseas *départements*.

Socialist decentralization policies, instituted in 1982, have smoothed the edges of the left-right conflict. Embraced even under subsequent conservative administrations, decentralization has entailed a transfer of power from Paris to all locally elected institutions of government, notably the regional council. Rightist/*départementalisation* politicians have benefited from increased resource allocation at the local level as much as their leftist counterparts. Greater power to the local councils has not, in fact, entailed any movement toward independence imposed from the Metropole. Neither a process toward gradual sovereignty for New Caledonia, an overseas territory, nor institutional reform in Corsica, whose independence movement embraces violence, has unduly upset advocates of the *département* status quo in Martinique.

9. In Metropolitan France, several *départements* constitute a region; due to their insularity, each of the overseas *départements* is a region unto itself. The general council is a *département*-wide body. Regional councilors are elected by the proportional system whereas general councilors vie in single-member districts.

CULTURE

It is perhaps in the realm of culture that the impact of decentralization has been greatest over the last two decades. Socialist promotion of a “right to a difference” and the legitimacy of regional specificity has not been rolled back by conservative French governments. The most audible of the changes has occurred in the regularization of previously underground “pirate radios,” and the veritable explosion of nongovernmental radio and television channels that compete with the state-run ones of Radio France-Overseas (RFO). Some of these alternative news and information sources – notably *Radio Lévé Débout Martinik* (“Arise Martinique”) and *Radio Asé Pléré an Nou Lité* (“Enough Crying, Let’s Fight”) – openly advocate independence. Cable television programs on the former KMT¹⁰ also regularly critiqued and denounced ongoing French “colonialism.”

Such competition has unmistakably influenced state organs of communication: it is no longer taboo to hear the word “independence” uttered over the official airwaves, nor for representatives of far left movements to be seen and heard. For sure, satellite television and the Internet have also introduced pressures upon state organs to liberalize their offerings; but decentralization has minimized whatever state resistance to these outside competitors there might otherwise have been.¹¹

Liberalization of the media has favored a progressive legitimization of the Creole language. At first heard only on pirate/independent radio stations, even RFO-Television now offers some news and entertainment (mostly comedy¹²) in Creole. Commercialization, too, has favored Creole: spot ads sell products in the vernacular. As a venue for videoclips, the media have also helped promote Creole by airing new French Caribbean music – particularly *zouk*. The *zouk* phenomenon occurred precisely during the period under consideration, and speaks to the literal emergence of a French Caribbean “voice” in the cultural realm (Guilbault 1993; Berrian 2000).

It is not only in the informal culture that Creole has made great strides during the last two decades. An erstwhile imperial French national educational system has, during the last twenty years, recognized Creole as a regional language and, as such, eligible for curricular development. At the *lycée* (high school) level, there is a Creole language and civilization course option; and, as of 2002, competitive national certification examinations for

10. Kanal Martinik Tele, found and anchored by Roland Laouchez, was issued a temporary licence to broadcast and ceased to do so in the summer of 2002. It regularly featured as commentator Tony Delsham, journalist and novelist, as well as the outspoken nationalist Camille Chauvet.

11. For an analysis of the effect of globalization upon Martinique, see Miles 1995.

12. See, for example, the five-minute sitcom *Sizan et Jistan*.

Creole teaching positions have been administered. At the local university, Creole language and culture have been promoted primarily through GERECEP (Study and Research Group in Creole and Francophone Areas).

Local governments on the island have taken the initiative in reclaiming (or reinterpreting) previously suppressed and denigrated aspects of culture. In 1998 the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery in France served as a literally dramatic example (Miles 1999:24-27). Most impressive has been the steady expansion of the municipal cultural office of Fort-de-France (SERMAC); however, even in rural communes, such as Anses d'Arlet, annual performances constitute a regular, if ambiguous, expression of politicized culture within an unavoidably commodified economy (Price 1998:184-96). For some, the lengths to which cultural entrepreneurs go to extol or revivify "traditional" lifeways speak to the reification, folklorization, and "pastification" of postdepartmental culture (Price 1998).

In the early 1980s *France-Antilles*, the island's sole daily newspaper, was an unabashed supporter of conservative campaigns and the *département* status quo. It distinguished naught between editorials and articles: on the eve of the 1981 presidential elections, for instance, its headlines unambiguously called its readers to vote for Giscard d'Estaing. Two decades later, while still right-of-center editorially, *France-Antilles* had become more journalistically objective and professional in its coverage of politics. In 2002, its pre-election headlines were nonpartisan civic calls to vote.¹³

ECONOMY

Achieving parity between Martinicans and Metropolitans in terms of minimum wage and social welfare benefits was a major achievement from 1981 to 2002. No longer could disparity between what Frenchmen (and particularly Frenchwomen with children) of the Metropole and those overseas receive in wages or transfer payments be a major source of grievance. Even the thirty-five-hour working week was simultaneously applied to workers of Martinique and Metropolitan France. On the other hand, the perennial problems of high unemployment, unprofitable and undiversified agriculture, and financial dependence on the Metropole remained (Daniel 2001; Reno 2001).

That "dependence" still made for a relatively high standard of living, at least by regional standards. By the time of the 2002 campaign, Martinique enjoyed the second highest per capita income in the Caribbean, second only

13. Présidentielle: Aux urnes citoyens! *France-Antilles*, April 20-21, 2002; Voter dimanche: L'ardente obligation, *France-Antilles*, May 4-5, 2002.

to the Bahamas, and the highest of all four French overseas states.¹⁴ For a decade, already, her status as an “ultraperipheral” member of the European Union had been entrenched as *per* article 227 of the Treaty of Maastricht (Burton 1992; Jos 1995; Constant 2001). But GNP per capita was still only 58 percent of that prevailing in the French Metropole.¹⁵

Indirectly, unemployment became an electoral issue. Concentrated among young males, in the absence of alternative programs lack of employment aggravated juvenile delinquency, increased crime rates, and heightened the sense of personal insecurity.¹⁶ These would become major campaign concerns, in Martinique as well as the Metropole. Socialist underestimation of their importance, combined with right (and especially extreme right) exploitation, would contribute greatly to the outcome of the 2002 elections.

LE CONGRÈS

What have been the main obstacles to development in the French overseas *départements*? In an effort to elaborate a comprehensive answer and to elicit proposals for further administrative reform, in late 1998 Prime Minister Jospin appointed two parliamentarians – Martinican senator Claude Lise and Réunion representative Michel Tamaya – to take stock of the overseas *départements* via a comprehensive travel mission. The prime minister also requested recommendations for an intensified decentralization. Specifically, Lise and Tamaya were asked to envision an ever-greater transfer powers from the national to local government, a rationalization of the relations between the general and regional councils, and better integration of the overseas states into their surrounding regions.¹⁷ The Lise-Tamaya Report, as it came to be known, recommended the creation of an ad hoc congress that would “initiate a process leading to an eventual evolution in the status” of the DOM.¹⁸

A parallel guiding body of legislation for the overseas *départements*, the LOOM (Loi d’orientation pour l’outre-mer) was instituted by the French parliament on December 13, 2000. A notable section of the LOOM was article 62, which recognized the right to self-determination and envisioned

14. Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques (INSEE), *Tableaux économiques régionaux de la Martinique*, 2000, p. 9.

15. INSEE, *Tableaux économiques régionaux de la Martinique*, 2000, p. 11.

16. Les chiffres de la délinquance en 2001: La Martinique s’enfoncé, *Antillia*, February 7, 2002, pp. 9-11.

17. Lise & Tamaya, n.d., Les départements d’outre-mer aujourd’hui: La voie de la responsabilité. Rapport à Monsieur le Premier Ministre, Annex 1: Lettre de mission.

18. Lise & Tamaya, n.d., Les départements d’outre-mer, p. 95.

a statutory evolution specifically adapted for the overseas *départements*. Premised within all recommendations was consistency of institutional change with the French constitution – even if this would eventually entail modifying its article 73 governing the integration of the DOMs into the Fifth Republic.

Competing with such Paris-sanctioned sentiments for reform was the Declaration of Basse-Terre (Guadeloupe). In an unusual alliance, both the independentist Martinican leader Alfred Marie-Jeanne and the famously rightist stateswoman from Guadeloupe, Lucette Michaux-Chévry (presidents of their respective regional councils) affixed their signatures to a 1999 document that condemned, among other problems, the “systematic destruction of local initiative” and “generalized welfare dependence.” The Declaration of Basse-Terre concluded by calling for a new status of “Overseas Region” encompassing Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana.¹⁹

“Even the political families traditionally the most attached to the concept of the unity of the Republic,” observed Senator Lise (2001:8), “more and more adopt ... a position of openness.” Such sentiments were confirmed in a historic address – remembered as the “à la carte speech” – made in Martinique by President Chirac on March 11, 2000. Chirac recognized among the overseas French a “great demand for recognition of their personality, dignity, identity, and capacity to assume for themselves a greater share of their destiny.” He then left open the possibility of an institutional change, for “a status is never anything but an instrument in the service of a collective undertaking at a given point in time”:

This policy cannot be applied in a uniform manner. Overseas France is rich in cultural and statutory diversity ... The departmental institution ... has perhaps reached its limits ... Uniform statuses have seen their day ... Henceforth each overseas collectivity, if it wishes, must be able to evolve towards a differentiated status ... All proposals, as long as they do not put into question our Republic and her values, will be considered.²⁰

With both the Socialist prime minister and Gaullist president open to locally-initiated change in the institutional structure linking the overseas to the Metropole, the stage was set for the *Congrès*. In Martinique, it was held in two phases: June 2001 and February-March of 2002.

Between the two sessions, one poll conducted by the local branch of the Louis Harris Institute indicated that 92 percent of Martinicans wished their

19. Régions d'outre-mer, *Le courage politique au service du développement*, Réunion des présidents, 1999.

20. Speech by Jacques Chirac at the Palais des Congrès de Madiana, Martinique, March 11, 2000.

island to remain a French *département*. At the same time, fewer than half expressed faith that the *département* was the best structure for preserving their social equality, health benefits, and educational rights.²¹ In another poll, conducted by Open Soft System, 38 percent of respondents were favorable toward the creation of a Single Assembly within the existing state system, whereas 31 percent preferred no change at all in the institutional setup. Fifteen percent expressed a desire for autonomy.²² In both polls, desire for independence was expressed by only 4 percent of respondents.

The 80 delegates²³ to the *Congrès* represented 11 distinct clusters of political parties or movements. Moderate leftist groupings dominated with 39 representatives, encompassing Césaire's Martinican Progressive Party (PPM, 14 representatives); Build the Country Martinique (BPM, 7); the Martinican Socialist Federation (FSM, 5); the Franciscan Popular Movement (MPF, 2); and the unaffiliated (11). Rightist/pro-*départementalisation* delegates, numbering 21 were more united: Martinican Forces for Progress (FMP [ex-UDF], 20) and Rally for the Republic (RPR, 1). Let's Dare to Dare (Osons Oser, 6) was made up of traditionally rightist/pro-*départementalisation* delegates who, over the course of the deliberations, came to break with the FMP over some key votes. Pro-independence parties brought 16 delegates to the table: Alfred Marie-Jeanne's Martinican Independentist Movement (MIM, 14); the ecologically-oriented Movement of Democrats and Ecologists for a Sovereign Martinique (MODEMAS, 1); and the splinter Party for the Liberation of Martinique (PALIMA, 1).

The deliberations were contentious. FMP in particular waged a rear-guard action to forestall any change in Martinique's status as a French *département*. Ideological opponents found FMP's use of procedural objections to impede voting that it deemed objectionable particularly exasperating. Even more noteworthy, however, was the relative moderation of the independence parties. In previous years these had eschewed partisan collaboration with even pro-autonomy parties as tantamount to nationalist betrayal. Now, they

21. Le statut départemental plébiscité par les Martiniquais, *France-Antilles*, January 17, 2002. To the question "Which is, according to you, the status that best guarantees the rights already gained by Martinicans?" the long-standing option of *départementalisation* netted a strong plurality with 47 percent, while the novel notion of a "specific new territorial collectivity" was favored by 18 percent of respondents. Thirteen percent preferred autonomy. The poll had been commissioned by a local association of heads of private companies.

22. Sondage Open Soft System: Le département, l'assemblée unique et Marie-Jeanne président, *Aniilla*, October 26, 2001, p. 18. This poll was also commissioned by a private sector association.

23. Since five of these held double mandates (i.e., they served in more than one legislative capacity), and one deputy had not been elected to either the general or regional council, the total number of possible votes was 84.

joined in common cause with all parties to advance incremental change within an implicitly French constitutional framework.

Such significant if subtle change justifies a digression. One should perhaps speak of “so-called pro-independence” parties, given that even the MIM has explicitly recognized that outright independence is not attainable within the near future. Independence will only come by stages, in steps, acknowledges the MIM leader, Alfred Marie-Jeanne. No timetable for island sovereignty is iterated. As president of the regional council since 1998, moreover, Marie-Jeanne has deftly used the resources available to him to consolidate his personal and partisan political positions. As acknowledgment of his political pragmatism deepens, Marie-Jeanne becomes even a safer salve for the Martinican nationalist conscience. One can support the so-called independentist out of principle and worry even less about the actual economic consequences.

Success of the *Congrès* hinged on the motion to convert Martinique from *département* to a “new territorial collectivity.” A single assembly, voted in by the proportional method, would replace the dual council structure specific to the overseas departments and enjoy enhanced powers. Eventually, this motion handily passed, 62-20 with a single abstention (from RPR); but FMP won a partial victory by forcing the delegates to pronounce themselves on a seemingly redundant – but politically tricky – vote to retain Martinique’s status as a *département*. That motion handily lost. FMP, this time with RPR, fiercely resisted the motion to accrue actual legislative powers to the new deliberative body, on the grounds that this is classically a prerogative of the National Assembly in Paris. Even the Martinican Socialists (and Osons Oser) demurred here, viewing the motion as a possibly illegitimate usurpation of constitutional power. It too, however, passed 52-21-11. With recommendations for a new island structure and assembly now irreversible, pro-*départementalisation* dissidents did agree to vote with the majority on some of the modalities of their structure, organization, and sphere of action. A public opinion poll conducted in the wake of the *Congrès*’ decision reflected growing acceptance for the institutional change: 43 percent expressed themselves in favor, with 29 percent opposed.²⁴

A proposed amendment by PALIMA representative Francis Carole reignited passions in the *Congrès*. For the first time in history, a representative body duly constituted under the rubric of the French Republic was asked to acknowledge “the Martinican people and nation.” The proposed amendment brought to the fore all the hopes of some and fears of most about how the deliberations of the *Congrès* would be perceived by the

24. Open Soft, Baromètre Open Soft: Etude sur l’actualité politique, February 2002. The remaining 28 percent had no opinion.

Martinican public and Metropolitan politicians. Despite repeated statements to the contrary, were the deliberations not in fact prelude to a severance from France?

A remarkable debate ensued – among Martinique's own elected representatives – about the very existence (or not) of a Martinican nation and a Martinican people. Could such notions be compatible with the longstanding concept of “the French nation, one and indivisible”? Was there conceptual room for a (Martinican) nation within a (French) nation? Considerations played out on two levels: a theoretical one, concerning nationhood; and a political one, over how such a vote would, to use a U.S. colloquialism, “play in Peoria.”

Thus, viewers of the *Congrès* (broadcast live) were witness to the spectacle of the outspoken author of the pathbreaking *Origins of the Martinican Nation* (Darsières 1974) explaining why he and his party would not vote in favor of the amendment recognizing the existence of Martinique as a nation. Even if there *were* a Martinican nation, it was too risky to so proclaim: the people were not psychologically ready. Too many Martinicans might be alienated by such a vote. Ratifying sociological reality was not worth jeopardizing the entire work of the *Congrès*.

In the end, the maker of the motion was prevailed upon to have his amendment split in two. Separate votes were taken on recognizing a Martinican people and a Martinican nation. Thus, the *Congrès* could vote to affirm the existence of a *people* of Martinique (which it did, without any dissenting votes) separately from that of a *nation* of Martinique. The latter did pass, but only with 23 votes: 11 negatives were cast, 2 abstentions were registered, and a remarkable 38 (including all but one of the PPM delegates) actively affirmed their nonparticipation in the vote. For a rare instance in which the question of Martinican nationalism could be squarely faced by the island's leaders, the outcome pointed rather to intellectual marronage, i.e., élitist flight before critical position-taking. As with the literary créolistes who both “rail ... against French domination and benefit ... [from] lucrative literary prizes from Paris” (Price & Price 1997:16), nationalist politicians expatiate vociferously but cast their votes prudently.

It is true that all resolutions of the *Congrès* were advisory and subject to further ratification by the regional and general councils. (The latter ultimately rejected the Martinican nation amendment after the former endorsed it.) It was also understood that any alteration of the island's political system would require popular endorsement via referendum. Furthermore, no delegate contested the oft-iterated respect by the *Congrès* for the *pouvoirs régaliens* (sovereign prerogatives) of the French state, i.e., police powers, the judicial system, military defense, currency and coinage, etc. In short, the *Congrès* accepted that discussion of the hallmarks of classical independence was off-limits. Nevertheless, even within the context of a France that had already undergone Mitterrandist decentralization, the very existence of a *Congrès* –

not to mention its resolutions – was nothing short of historic.²⁵ All participants and observers understood, however, that the long-term value of the *Congrès* hinged on the outcome of the upcoming French national elections.

LES PRESIDENTIELLES – ROUND ONE

A record-breaking number of candidates – sixteen – vied in 2002 for the presidency of the French Republic.²⁶ While the electoral supply was thus very great, few anticipated the fragmenting effect this would have on the outcome.

Four of these candidates came from the extreme left and had even less of a following in Martinique than in the Metropole: Olivier Besancenot (Revolutionary Communist League, LCR), Daniel Gluckstein (Trotskyite Party, PT), Robert Hué (French Communist Party, PCF), and Arlette Laguiller (Worker's League, LO). On the extreme right, also with miniscule local support, were Jean-Marie Le Pen (National Front, FN) and his erstwhile aid, Bruno Mégret (Republican National Movement, MNR). Center-left and center-right candidates who, like the previous six, did not travel to the overseas *départements* to campaign were Alain Madelin (Liberal Democracy, DL), Corinne Lepage (Citizenship, Action, Participation for the 21st Century, CAP 21), Christine Boutin (Forum of Social Republicans, FRS), and Jean Saint-Josse (Hunting, Nature, Fishing and Traditions, CNPT). Televised interviews conducted by Stéphane Bijoux for the overseas *départements* channel confirmed that these candidates had little familiarity with the reality of the French Caribbean. It was they who most glibly entertained the notion of independence for the overseas *départements*, under the mistaken notion that this is desired by the population.

Jean-Pierre Chevènement of the Movement of Citizens (MDC) was the first of the candidates to come to Martinique to seek votes. Previously known for his left-of-center leanings, as the elections approached Chevènement came to adopt more conservative views on certain issues, including those that touched on the overseas. He was thus a staunch supporter of maintaining Martinique as a French state, while favoring greater powers to locally elected representatives.

Environmental candidate Noël Mamère of the Green Party also traveled to Martinique, and was hosted by the ecology-cum-independence party of the mayor of Saint Anne, MODEMAS. Mamère reiterated his hosts' ideological

25. The cover title of the leftist (and usually acerbic) weekly magazine *Antilla* (January 24, 2002) reflected this sentiment: "Trois votes 'historiques' des élus martiniquais: oui! oui! oui!"

26. That is the number who received the requisite five hundred signatures of other elected officials; an indeterminate number of others tried but did not make it that far.

line by linking the island's fragile environment to the large landholdings of the erstwhile colonial masters of the island, the *békés*.

François Bayrou of the Union of French Democracy (UDF), a large conservative party in France, also campaigned in Martinique. Although he received a warm welcome from the local center-right alliance (FMP) the latter made clear that it would not revise its appeal to vote in favor of the incumbent president Jacques Chirac.

Of all the quixotic presidential contenders, it was Christiane Taubira of the Radical Left Party (PRG) who elicited the most interest overseas and in Martinique. In the Taubira candidacy, ethnicity trumped ideology. One of four presidential candidates to be female (in addition to Boutin, Laguiller, and Lepage), Taubira was also black. Representative to the French National Assembly from French Guiana, Taubira, who had once favored independence, now campaigned for a plural France, under the motto "My Homeland, My Republic (*Ma patrie, ma république*). In contrast to the so-called "Iron Lady" of Guadeloupe (the conservative Lucette Michaux-Chévry, who campaigned in Martinique for Chirac), the local press – perhaps taking a leaf from a Taubira campaign sticker "Follow Your Heart, Vote Taubira" – dubbed the French Guianese stateswoman the "Lady of Heart."²⁷

For the Martinican left, Taubira's candidacy presented a dilemma. On the one hand, the appeal in Martinique for a black female presidential candidate from overseas²⁸ was perhaps understandable in the context of the history of local ethnic relations. On the other hand, however powerful its symbolism, her candidacy was certain to siphon votes away from the Socialist candidate who did stand a chance of winning the election, Lionel Jospin. Not even the (female) Martinican leader of the far left, syndicalist, and implicitly independentist Workers' Fight party supported Taubira. The Martinican Progressive Party nuanced its position, both by "supporting" Taubira but calling on its members to vote for Jospin.

Prime Minister Jospin campaigned in Martinique on March 31. Reaffirming his openness towards an evolution of Martinique's status within the French Republic, he insisted that four *a priori* principles be guaranteed: the unity of the Republic, equality of social rights, the link to Europe, and consultation of the population before any constitutional change. The Socialist candidate's formula was "a single, but not uniform, Republic."²⁹ In

27. In a bid to emphasize cultural commonality, this slogan was also placarded around the island in Creole. The vernacular version (*Pa tiré boyo pou mèté pay*) was even more evocative than the original: literally, it said "To advance the country, don't hold back your guts."

28. Had she been a negropolitan, that is, a black from the Metropole, her attraction in Martinique would have been mitigated.

29. Les beaux chœurs de Trinité, *France-Antilles*, April 2, 2002; Présidentielle: Les propositions des candidats en faveur des régions ultrapériphériques, *France-Antilles*, April 17, 2002.

an interview with *France-Antilles*, Jospin was categorical in his rejection of a separation between France and her overseas territories:

By a great majority, French West Indians are attached to the Republic, just as the West Indies are dear to the heart of our country. Personally, the France that I love includes Martinique and Guadeloupe, and I have difficulty imagining her amputated from one or the other.³⁰

Although he was of waning influence, Aimé Césaire officially endorsed the Jospin candidacy.³¹

In Jacques Chirac's campaign tour to Martinique on April 5-6, the incumbent president expressed what seemed to be a reversal of his earlier à la carte openness to change in Martinique's status. Taking particular aim at the recently concluded *Congrès*, some of whose resolutions his advisors presumably characterized as unpopular among the Martinique electorate, Chirac declared "I know but a single people, I recognize but one nation within the Republic – the French people and the French nation." Amalgamating the *Congrès* with the entire overseas *départements* policy of the government headed by Jospin, Chirac spoke witheringly of the "institutional disorder" in motion. Indeed, the incumbent president detected a veritable "project of rupture" by the Socialists. While reaffirming openness to administrative reform via constitutional amendment, Chirac distanced himself from undoing *département* status for overseas France.³²

Up to the first round Martinicans accepted, along with other French citizens, the polls that predicted the customary electoral scenario: a left-of-center candidate, in this case, Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, versus a right-of-center one, here, President Jacques Chirac. Appeals by pro-independence parties to boycott the presidential elections (on the grounds that Martinicans are "not concerned" by the elections of France) constituted little more than a usual anti-electoral refrain. Two prescient articles in *France-Antilles* did however assert that, given the anticipated closeness of the race between Jospin and Chirac, the nearly two million overseas voters, including about one million living in the Metropole, could make the difference between a new Jospin presidency and a renewed Chirac one. Even the specter of a Florida-like debacle as for the U.S. elections of 2000 was fleetingly envisioned. As in past presidentials, time zone inequity was evoked: final results

30. La France que j'aime inclut la Guadeloupe et la Martinique, *France-Antilles*, March 30-April 1, 2002.

31. Les beaux chœurs de Trinité, *France-Antilles*, April 2, 2002.

32. Chirac was simultaneously responding to a recent campaign proposal by Jospin in Corsica. See Chirac s'engage à défendre "un projet de rupture," *France-Antilles*, April 8, 2002; Désordre institutionnel, *France-Antilles*, April 8, 2002.

would, most probably, be announced in the Metropole even as Martinicans, Guadeloupeans, and Guyanese would still have several hours to vote.³³

Indeed, this is what happened. French media regulations forbade the announcement in the overseas *départements* of electoral results before the polls in those locations closed. Nevertheless, at 4:20 pm local time, Martinicans glued to their television sets witnessed the unimagined spectacle of Lionel Jospin conceding that he had already lost the opportunity to run in the second round of the elections. Yet they, as well as their counterparts in Guadeloupe, who had not yet voted, still had an hour and forty minutes to do so. There was little attempt to mobilize overseas voters in case the Metropolitan results were so close that the DOMs could change the outcome.³⁴

Supporters of Jospin were stunned and glum. Backers of Chirac were jubilant. But theirs was a jubilation tinged with unease. For even though Chirac came out ahead both in Martinique and the Metropole, and his ultimate reelection was virtually assured, they too had to come to grips with the second place showing in greater France of the candidate that Martinicans of most persuasions were at one in despising: Jean-Marie Le Pen.

Discrepancy in the degree of support for Le Pen in Martinique vis-à-vis the Metropole was anticipated. So was the much higher backing for Christiane Taubira in the *Départements français d'Amérique* (DFA) than elsewhere. The nearly 25,000 votes that she garnered in Martinique – and a competitive third place – nevertheless needs to be relativized. In French Guiana she captured first position with an absolute majority. That is not surprising, given that French Guiana is Taubira's home state. In Guadeloupe, however, she also came out on top. These results tend to confirm Martinique's long-standing reputation as the "most French" of the three DFAs.

When compared with the other overseas *départements* and territories, the results for Taubira also temper the much vaunted explanation of "ethnic proximity." In the one French overseas *département* outside the Western Hemisphere (the Indian Ocean island of Réunion), also with a predominantly African-derived population, Taubira's score was meager. She also did quite poorly in the non-Caribbean French overseas territories³⁵ of French Polynesia

33. Le choix des électeurs d'outre-mer peut être cette fois déterminant, *France-Antilles*, April 11, 2002; Plus d'un million d'inscrits sur tous les continents, *France-Antilles*, April 16, 2002.

34. Attempts were made to annul the official results on the grounds that premature reporting had affected the voting behavior of overseas citizens. A certain number of late-hour West Indian voters did change their minds and voted for Jospin (instead of Taubira or other leftist candidates) when early projections showed that Le Pen might indeed surpass the Socialist candidate.

35. Unlike the overseas *départements*, overseas territories are expected to evolve toward ever-greater autonomy. However, their natives are full French citizens.

Table 1. First Round of French Presidential Elections, April 21, 2002

Candidate	Percent of Votes Cast	
	Martinique	All France
Jacques Chirac (RPR)	32.90	19.88
Lionel Jospin (PS)	29.14	16.18
<i>Christiane Taubira (PRG)</i>	27.80	2.32
Jean-Pierre Chevènement (MDC)	2.26	5.33
<i>Jean-Marie Le Pen (FN)</i>	1.75	16.86
Arlette Laguiller (LO)	1.18	5.72
Noël Mamère (Greens)	0.99	5.25
François Bayrou (UDF)	0.86	6.84
Christine Boutin (FRS)	0.83	1.19
Alain Madelin (DL)	0.54	3.91
Robert Hué (PCF)	0.48	3.37
Olivier Besancenot (LCR)	0.47	4.25
Corinne Lepage (CAP 21)	0.26	1.88
Jean Saint-Josse (CNPT)	0.25	4.23
Bruno Mégret (MNR)	0.20	2.34
Daniel Gluckstein (PT)	0.09	0.47

Registered Voters (Martinique): 266,427

Actual Voters (Martinique) : 94,252 (35.38%)

and Wallis-and-Futuna, and scored higher, relative to other territories, among the white overseas electorate of St. Pierre and Miquelon. Yet even in St. Pierre and Miquelon Taubira was outscored by Le Pen, as was the case in New Caledonia and Wallis-and-Futuna. Taubira's appeal was thus as least as regional as it was racial or ethnic. In the eyes of the overseas electorate, Taubira did not incarnate overseas France per se. Individual histories and personalities of the various overseas states and territories continue to make for distinctive voting patterns.

Table 2. Overseas Votes for Front Runners of French West Indies

	First Round, 2002		
	Taubira	Chirac	Jospin
French Guiana*	12,479 (52.3%)	4,496 (19%)	2,515 (10.6%)
Guadeloupe*	34,210 (37.2%)	26,557 (28.9%)	21,253 (23.1%)
Martinique*	24,864 (27.8%)	29,424 (32.9%)	26,059 (29.1%)
St. Pierre & Miquelon**	119 (6.1%)	599 (30.8%)	265 (13.7%)
Mayotte**	1,120 (5.3%)	9,105 (43%)	3,972 (18.8%)
Réunion*	4,914 (2.1%)	86,830 (37.2%)	91,176 (39%)
New Caledonia**	791 (1.3%)	29,490 (48.4%)	13,667 (22.4%)
Wallis and Futuna**	28 (0.5%)	3,031 (50.6%)	2,144 (35.8%)
French Polynesia	389 (0.5%)	47,133 (62.4%)	18,670 (24.7%)

* represents *département*

** represents territory/collectivity

Graph 1. Overseas Votes for Presidential Front Runners, First Round 2002

Taubira's strong showing in Martinique muddies ideological analysis. Although candidate of a party calling itself radical left, she undeniably received votes from Martinicans, especially women, who otherwise would have cast their ballots for Jacques Chirac. Christiane Taubira was a personality with whom many conservative Martinican women identified, despite her affiliation with a leftist fringe political movement. But would these women have voted at all, had she not been a candidate?

Chirac's apparent strong first-round performance in Martinique is subject to various qualifications. On the one hand, he indisputably came out in first position; indeed, Martinique is the sole overseas *département* where he did so. He bested his Socialist nemesis from the previous election. Chirac's second-place Martinican showing in 1995 was obtained with 29.14 percent of the vote – by coincidence, exactly what Jospin gained in 2002. Compared with 1995, when there were seven fewer candidates to compete with and more voters participating, Chirac managed in 2002 to secure better scores, both absolutely (by 2,729 ballots) and proportionally (by nearly 4 percent).

On the other hand, Chirac undoubtedly profited from the Taubira candidacy. Although Chirac must indeed have lost some votes among the,

particularly female, electorate, Jospin probably suffered even more from this competition from a leftist rival. Going into the 2002 elections the Martinican left was uncontestably stronger, as measured by representation in local assemblies and municipalities, than the right. Without the Taubira candidacy, and those of several other leftist candidates, it is unlikely that Jospin would have lost all 7,286 of the votes he did between the 1995 and 2002 first rounds. Had he retained only half that number, he would have overtaken Chirac on the island. Consider, too, that in the second round in 1995, Jospin beat Chirac by well over 20,000 votes.

The discrepancy between Taubira's tally in Martinique vis-à-vis the Metropole, where she garnered only 581,533 votes, or just under 2.1 percent, indirectly raises the thorny question of ethnicity in a political system which generally eschews it. That she did so well in Martinique and Guadeloupe reflected a desire among many electors to vote their color; that she did so poorly in the Metropole – even compared with other fringe candidates – reinforced the marginality of overseas France in a nationwide contest. Thus, while her very candidacy had symbolic import for the DFA in the short run, her low standing at the Metropolitan polls raises questions previously skirted about the acceptability, at the highest level of government, of candidates of color.

Did the Taubira candidacy affect the national outcome of the first round, and at Jospin's expense? Fewer than 200,000 votes separated Jospin from Le Pen. Overseas, Taubira netted nearly 80,000 votes. In the Metropole reside approximately 300,000 French West Indians, both migrants and offspring of migrants, of voting age.³⁶ Assume that half of the eligible French West Indians residing in the Metropole voted for Taubira.³⁷ Thus, if only one in two French West Indians had given his or her vote to Jospin rather than to Taubira, then the Socialist candidate, and not the far right one, would have faced Chirac in the run-off.

When queried about her possible spoiler role for the center left (the Nader effect, in U.S. parlance), Taubira bristled defensively. She counterqueried why she alone, the overseas candidate, was posed such a question, and not the other, Metropolitan, leftist presidential pretenders.

As is usually the case, third-tier candidates from the Metropole received insignificant electoral support in Martinique. Whereas four such candidates

36. Extrapolated from the numbers of persons born in the French West Indians living in the Metropole, the percentage of those born in the Metropole of French West Indian parentage, consistent migration from 1982 to 1990, and a 25 percent rate of persons under eighteen years of age. INSEE, *Tableaux économiques régionaux de la Martinique*, 2002.

37. Inasmuch as ethnic-specific exit polling is not conducted in France, this is a hypothetical assumption.

obtained the critical 5 percent threshold vote nationally, and two more came within one percentage point of it, none did so in Martinique.³⁸

In particular, 2002 seemed to bang the final nails in the coffins of both the French and Martinican Communist parties. In France as a whole, Robert Hué's 3.4 percent was poor enough, compared to his 1995 Metropolitan score of 8.7 percent. In Martinique, however, the candidate endorsed by the Martinican Communist Party (PCM) plummeted from 3.5 percent in 1995 to under 0.5 percent in 2002. (In the 1981 and 1988 elections, the Communist party candidate received 2 percent of the Martinican vote.)

LES PRESIDENTIELLES – ROUND TWO

Round two of the presidential elections, in Martinique no less than the Metropole, revolved around the sheer and stunning fact of a continuing Le Pen candidacy. A headline from a usually fringe publication for once summed up mainstream sentiment: "What is Happening in France?"³⁹ In the past, massive protests had prevented the National Front leader from even landing on Martinican soil: now, he would be a presidential ballot choice at polling stations across the island. It made little difference that, officially, Le Pen did not exclude the overseas *départements* citizens from his vision of "a France for the French"; indeed, he even dispatched a Martinican from the Metropole, Huguette Fatna, to campaign on his behalf. Yet for virtually the entire local body politic Le Pen still incarnated racism. Reinvoking the Two France Paradigm (Miles 1986:47-48, 219, 234-35) we can say that, in the eyes of the Martinican population, Le Pen was the apotheosis of the colonial, slavist, oppressive Metropole against which French liberationist forces – West Indian as well as Metropolitan – still needed to struggle. But how?

One response was massive demonstration. High school students set the tone with large rallies in Martinique's two largest cities, Fort-de-France and Lamentin, on April 25.⁴⁰ May Day marches one week later also took on an electoral, anti-National Front dimension. Two expressions captured the spirit of the island vis-à-vis the Le Pen candidacy: *faire barrage* and *barrer la route*. Martinicans had to fend off, block the way, or otherwise stymie the far right from coming to power. But did that necessarily mean voting for Jacques Chirac?

38. Below 5 percent, parties lose a considerable portion of their deposit with the electoral commission.

39. *Que se passe-t-il en France? Révolution socialiste*, April 27, 2002.

40. *Un milieu de lycéens monte au front contre le "F-Haine," France-Antilles*, April 26, 2002.

Not for the pro-independence movements. Even faced with the prospect of a National Front presidency, PALIMA, the MIM, and the National Council of Popular Committees (CNCP) called for a repeated boycott of the voting booths; MODEMAS urged its followers to “vote blank,” that is, to turn in an envelope with no ballot inside.⁴¹

For the more pragmatic parties of the left, especially PPM and FSM, second-round reality imposed an unpalatable choice. Throughout the campaign, their voting for Chirac had been an unthinkable option. Yet not voting for him theoretically enabled Le Pen to become president of France. Even if surveys indicated that such an outcome was virtually impossible, surveys had also lulled the electorate into certainty of a Jospin-Chirac runoff. So distasteful was the prospect of a National Front victory, or even near-victory,⁴² that virtually all French West Indians with a significant following on the left, from Aimé Césaire to Christiane Taubira, appealed to their followers to vote for Jacques Chirac. They did so, however, by couching their appeal in explicit caveats: theirs was an endorsement not of Chirac per se, but of democracy in general. Indeed, they put the incumbent president on notice that he should not misinterpret the significance of a pro-Chiracian landslide.

Table 3. Second Round of French Presidential Elections, May 5, 2002

Candidate	Percent of Votes Cast	
	Martinique	Metropole
Jacques Chirac (RPR)	96.14	81.96
Jean-Marie Le Pen (FN)	3.86	18.04

Registered voters (Martinique): 266,530

Actual voters (Martinique): 120,372 (45.16%)

Martinique's race-sensitive electorate mobilized against Le Pen more than any other state in the entire French Republic. Chirac's 96 percent victory there broke several electoral records. Still, local commentary revolved not around the overwhelming score for the winner but rather around the more than doubling of actual votes, between the first and second rounds, for Le Pen (4,353, up from 1,563).

Fixation on this small minority reflected enduring apprehension among the “colored” majority about the political and racial proclivities of the white minority.⁴³ Votes in Martinique for Le Pen would have had to emanate

41. Les indépendantistes appellent à l'abstention, *France-Antilles*, April 19, 2002.

42. Le Pen had fixed for himself a threshold of success of only 20 percent for the second round.

43. The latter are of two basic origins: indigenous descendants of original French colonists; and “Metropolitans,” the French from Europe. Population of the former is between 3,000 and 4,000; the latter roughly 20,000.

from these groups, was the (usually) tacit assumption. Representatives of far left and pro-independence movements expressed these beliefs openly. Yet analysis of the Le Pen vote in Martinique – a marginal phenomenon, it bears repeating – does not unreservedly confirm this race-based voting correlation.

Between the first and second rounds Le Pen picked up 2,790 votes. Only one-fifth of these came from the capital, Fort-de-France, where Metropolitans are indeed concentrated.⁴⁴ Tourist towns (St. Anne, Trois Ilets) also had above-average (for the island) pro-Le Pen scores. Yet certain *communes* (voting districts) with hardly any *béké* or Metropolitan residents also registered relatively high support for the National Front leader. Indeed, the second highest proportional score in Martinique for Le Pen (5.43 percent) came from the northern voting district of Lorrain. Other rural, relatively ethnically homogenous communes where Le Pen picked up noticeable numbers of votes were Gros-Morne and Sainte-Marie. Call-in shows and local news reports revealed nonracial reasons among Martinicans for voting Le Pen: on the one hand, an individualist rejection of the unprecedented massive and orchestrated campaign against this one candidate; and a sincere belief that crime would be better countered under a Le Pen presidency than a continued Chirac one.

Still in all, the amount of attention paid to the Le Pen vote in the state where he received the *least* backing is remarkable. It reflects a lingering political insecurity about the place of Martinique in the French Republic, as well as a social insecurity about the role of its resident whites.

Class is less tied to political party affiliation and membership than it was in previous eras. Since *départementalisation*, the indigenization and expansion of the public administration have created a large and privileged cadre of civil servants who generally tend, with the partial exception of teachers, to support conservative parties that best represent the guarantee of continued paychecks – inclusive of the 40 percent bonus for “overseas” posting. These, along with other middle-class electorates, also gravitate, under conditions of personal insecurity, to “reasonable” law-and-order politicians (i.e., Gaullists as opposed to Le Penists). Welfare recipients and those unemployed and on the dole also, when they do vote, reflect their dependency on the French center. When in power, however, the French left has been able to reassure overseas middle and lower classes of its fiscal fidelity and thereby reverse the latters’ inclination to support more rightist parties. Overall, however, these classes are more apt to vote left locally but right nationally than to vote consistently to the left.

44. One-fifth of all Martinican voters are registered in the capital.

The Communist Party, which in Martinique had drawn its strength among agricultural workers, has virtually collapsed. Mechanization of farm work, the employment of foreigners to cut cane, and the gradual shrinking of the agricultural sector overall cut into the backbone of workers' parties. Aimé Césaire's defection from the PCM in 1956, and his creation of the rival PPM (with its vast empire of city employees) are also explanations. Trade union members constitute the core of other Trotskyite parties (Combat Ouvrier, Groupe Révolution Socialiste) but these are small and, by temperament, provide lukewarm support to their Metropolitan affiliates and candidates.

Békés, it can be surmised, consistently support rightist parties. Their numbers are relatively small, however, and their electoral turnout unknown.

THE INVISIBLE VICTOR

In a campaign as emotional as that created by the Le Pen run-off candidacy, the most significant feature of the Martinican vote was arguably its nullity: abstentionism, several pundits and pressmen declared, was the true winner. Despite the demonstrations, party appeals, and antiracist programming, fewer than half the eligible voters came out to vote in the second round.⁴⁵ Certainly, Martinican participation in French national elections has historically been low. In presidential elections, Martinique generally votes between 20 percent and 30 percent less than does the Metropole (see Graph 2).⁴⁶

Yet 2002 marked Martinique's lowest national voting turnout (second round) in its democratic history. That this should happen in the one presidential election in which race was a prominent issue in the nationwide campaign is all the more striking. Radical, pro-independence parties who customarily call for a "boycott" of "France's" elections only half-heartedly take credit afterward for low participation rates; their own candidates, after all, hardly galvanize the abstentionists when they do run. Blank and null balloting could be used more directly to express dissatisfaction with the choice of candidates or to register rejection of the political system. Yet the number of such blank and null votes (7,457) was not particularly high in 2002: it was only 78 more than in 1995. Disaffection with electoral politics, disconnection with Metropolitan society, and general erosion of civic duty better explain Martinique's receding participation in France's presidential elections.

45. In the first round, the turnout was one in three.

46. Direct voting for France's head of state was initiated with the Fifth Republic in 1965.

Graph 2. Participation in French Presidential Elections, Second Round

It is worth recalling the time zone dilemma. French West Indians have become used to nationwide voting results being announced before voting has ended on their islands. Knowledge that their ballots just do not matter to the Metropole reinforces a sense of national marginality and electoral alienation.⁴⁷ That this should occur in an otherwise close electoral contest (in the first round, only 194,600 votes separated Jospin from Le Pen) is all the more galling. Moreover, long-standing regulations banning premature broadcast of the results by local stations were blithely disregarded in the first round of the 2002 elections on the grounds that Metropolitan stations were broadcasting live by satellite anyway. Chastened by local protest, France's national media board called the local stations to task, and they did withhold the results in the second round until local polling time had concluded. But in the Internet age, where *Le Monde* posts electoral results every few minutes, such controls become increasingly irrelevant. Thus emerges a new paradox to Martinican politics: the more technologically connected the island becomes to the Metropole, the less acute can be its sense of relevance to it.⁴⁸

47. Yet on account of the same time difference, candidates in nationwide examinations must arise in the middle of the night in order to take their tests at the same time as their counterparts in the Metropole.

48. Of course, residents of the DFA have long been able to telephone friends and relatives in the Metropole to obtain electoral results early.

Technology does not transcend the geography that – in time as well as space – distances Martinique from the Metropole.

LES LÉGISLATIVES

Jacques Chirac had been reelected president of France. But unless the National Assembly could be realigned from Socialist Party control, his would be a Pyrrhic victory, undermined by continued *cohabitation* between a president of the right and a prime minister of the left. It was in the name of legislative effectiveness, and invoking law and order as a major theme, that the UMP campaigned against the Socialists in the legislative elections of June.

In Martinique, the appointment of interim Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin brought one obvious change: much greater visibility of regularly uniformed policemen and teams of black tee-shirted special intervention gendarmes. It was a moment to demonstrate the new – and potentially future – government's commitment to counter the island's crime wave.

A record-breaking thirty-four candidates vied for the four seats as deputy to the parliament in Paris. In the north Atlantic district, a staunch conservative, prodepartmentalist incumbent, Anicet Turinay, hoped to capitalize on the Chirac victory against five challengers. In the north Caribbean, a more moderate conservative, Dr. Pierre Petit, announced his retirement and tapped the pro-Chirac mayor of Schoelcher, Alfred Almont, to succeed him. In the center district, it was Aimé Césaire's handpicked successor, Camille Darsières, who hoped to retain his seat as deputy (held since 1993) for the PPM. In the south, the pro-independence Alfred Marie-Jeanne sought reelection. To summarize, on the eve of the 2002 legislative elections Martinique's deputies to the French National Assembly represented, in local political terms, the extreme left (an independentist); the far right (an unwavering *départementalisation* supporter); the "modernizing" right (a conservative open to institutional change); and the nationalist left (advocate of autonomy within the French republic).

Results of the second round of the legislative elections left Martinique's political map just as varied. The staunch *départementalisation* supporter lost to a Socialist (Louis-Joseph Manscour); the pro-Chirac mayor won by the greatest margin of any district; the PPM incumbent was defeated by an ex-Communist; and the pro-independence deputy narrowly kept his seat from the staunch *départementalisation* challenger from whom he had previously captured it. In short, the Martinican electorate – that increasingly diminishing portion of eligible voters – once again expressed little ideological uniformity.

One can draw few conclusions about Martinicans' overall views about their identification with the French Republic, and the prospect of change

within it, based on the legislative results. The greatest consistency lay in the “municipalization” of the elections: the winning candidates to the French National Assembly were all mayors who succeeded in (re)mobilizing their local island backers; the two incumbents who lost (the leftist/autonomist Darsières and the rightist/*départemental* Anicet) controlled no town hall. Local concerns and personalities trump national ones; and electoral indifference trumps all.⁴⁹

CONCLUSION

With the 2002 results, Martinique had voted in three out of the previous four presidential contests for one candidate more strongly than did any *département* of France. In two of these contests – 1988 for Mitterrand and 2002 for Chirac – Martinique’s preference was also that of the French people as a whole. Yet it is no longer accurate to speak of the Martinican electorate being merely “legitimist”; i.e., supporting only the current incarnation of the French Republic. Le Pen’s candidacy impelled the electorate, which had strongly backed Jospin in 1995, to vote for Chirac. Unlike the rest of France, Martinique did not in its 2002 legislative elections give the president a majority of like-minded conservative parliamentarians with which to govern.

In 1981, when independence for Martinique was not advocated in any Metropolitan party’s campaign plank, the right nevertheless succeeded in brandishing the prospect before a fearful electorate; hence, Mitterrand’s rout in Martinique. In 2002, even so soon after formal debate on institutional change had been activated by the French government, the question of Martinique remaining within the French Republic was strangely muted as a campaign issue, especially among local candidates to the National Assembly. Whereas Martinique’s future as a *département* of France may have been open to serious formal debate in the pre-election *Congrès*, there was hardly any question about the island’s remaining a *part* of France. Chirac’s reelection, reinforced by a rightist National Assembly, renders even tepid institutional change more problematic. Institutional change for the overseas departments, according to Chirac, will occur only within the rubric of similar reform for *all* of France’s constituent units.⁵⁰ Martinique’s foreseeable future thus

49. For a detailed treatment of the legislative elections in Martinique, see Miles forthcoming 2003.

50. Speaking on Antilles-TV, Chirac’s minister for overseas states and territories, Brigitte Girardin, put it bluntly: “The *Congrès* produced documents. They are still interesting to read. But really, I feel that the exercise has come to an end ... You don’t put the cart before the horse. You don’t begin by telling the elected delegates ‘Think about just anything – even if it is unconstitutional,’ in order to say afterwards, ‘Okay, we’re going to do some patchwork to the constitution.’”

remains ensconced within the French Republic. Not even pro-independence forces actually believe otherwise.

Such a state of politics does not necessarily reflect an enthusiastic state of mind about being black, French, and overseas. Space does not allow for a full treatment of contemporary Martinican public opinion (as opposed to the views expressed by the internationally celebrated intellectual and literary élite⁵¹). Suffice it to say that longitudinal surveying points to a dramatic individualization of Martinicans' preoccupations and a corresponding depoliticization of consciousness.⁵² Increasing abstentionism is probably a symptom of this trend. One can now even conceive of a scenario in which a local referendum on independence (were France's constitutional guardians to allow it) might result in – confoundingly low voter turnout.

It is impossible to speak of “a Martinican viewpoint” regarding the island's institutional place within the French Republic. Multiple positions nullify any collective voice. These range from staunch opposition to any change in Martinique's status as a *département* of France to (for a tiny minority) outright independence. Is this a case of democracy in action; or is it the result of a neocolonial strategy of divide-and-departmentalize? In either event, Martinicans are free, as individuals, to choose among a host of political options. They are also free *not* to choose, an option of which they are increasingly availing themselves by electoral abstention. Freedom also extends to the question of individual identity, the degree to which Martinicans choose to identify with their co-citizens of Metropolitan France.

France's democratic structure does not provide for the election of a single, islandwide leader: voters have never had the opportunity to choose directly the president of their regional or general council. The executive administrator of Martinique remains a Paris-appointed prefect. Such a system mitigates any clear-cut, not to mention uniform, personalization of a Martinican worldview. The only candidate that *all* Martinicans have the opportunity to vote for is the president of the entire republic. Not since Charles de Gaulle has a French leader inspired the Martinican population at large, resulting in passionate and personal identification. Chirac's record-breaking score of 96 percent in 2002 does not have the same emotional import as De Gaulle's 90 percent in 1965.⁵³ At a time when *proximité* has become much vaunted in Martinican and French political discourse as a democratic imperative, the citizen-president relationship requires serious reworking to stem the

51. A good treatment of this class is found in Burton 1993.

52. IPSOS, 2001-02, *Tendances styles de vie: Martinique-Guadeloupe*. Undistributed CD-rom.

53. The highest Martinican score for a presidential candidate was 91 percent in 1969 for Georges Pompidou.

hemorrhage of the citizen voter. Metropolitan presidential candidates have not only geographical but also ethnic and cultural distances to breach. For if Martinican voters fail to identify with their president, how will they identify with France? Juridically, Martinicans will remain French, but culturally – and psychologically – they will remain ambivalent.

REFERENCES

- ALDRICH, ROBERT & JOHN CONNELL, 1992. *France's Overseas Frontier: Les Départements et territoires d'outre-mer*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- BERRIAN, BRENDA, 2000. *Awakening Spaces: French Caribbean Popular Songs, Music, and Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- BETTS, RAYMOND F., 1970. *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890-1914*. New York: AMS Press.
- BLATT, DAVID, 1997. Immigrant Politics in a Republican Nation. In Alec G. Hargreaves & Mark McKinney (eds.), *Post-Colonial Cultures in France*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 40-58.
- BRUNSCHWIG, HENRY, 1964. *French Colonialism, 1871-1914*. New York: Praeger.
- BURTON, RICHARD D.E., 1992. Towards 1992: Political-Cultural Assimilation and Opposition in Contemporary Martinique. *French Cultural Studies* 3:61-86.
- , 1993. *Ki Moun Nou Ye?* The Idea of Difference in Contemporary French West Indian Thought. *New West Indian Guide* 67:5-32.
- CONSTANT, FRED, 2001. The French Antilles in the 1990s: Between European Unification and Political Territorialisation. In Aaron Gamaliel Ramos & Angel Israel Rivera (eds.), *Islands at the Crossroads: Politics in the Non-Independent Caribbean*. Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner; Kingston: Ian Randle, pp. 80-94.
- DANIEL, JUSTIN, 2001. The Construction of Dependency: Economy and Politics in the French Antilles. In Aaron Ramos & Angel Israel Rivera (eds.), *Islands at the Crossroads: Politics in the Non-Independent Caribbean*. Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner; Kingston: Ian Randle, pp. 61-79.
- DARSIÈRES, CAMILLE, 1974. *Des origines de la nation martiniquaise*. Pointe-à-Pitre: Emile Désormeaux.
- DENING, MARTIN LEWIS, 1961-62. One Hundred Million Frenchmen: The "Assimilation" Theory in French Colonial Policy. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 4:129-53.
- DOUMENGE, JEAN-PIERRE, 2000. *L'outre-mer français*. Paris: Armand Colin.
- GUILBAULT, JOCELYN, 1993. *Zouk: World Music in the West Indies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- HARGREAVES, ALEC G. & MARK MCKINNEY (eds.), 1997. *Post-Colonial Cultures in France*. London: Routledge.
- INGRAM, MARK, 1998. A Nationalist Turn in French Cultural Policy. *French Review* 71: 797-808.
- JOS, EMMANUEL, 1995. The Declaration of the Treaty of Maastricht on the Ultra-peripheral Regions of the Community: An Assessment. In Richard D.E. Burton & Fred Reno (eds.), *French and West Indian: Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana Today*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, pp. 86-97.
- LISE, CLAUDE, 2001. 1er congrès des élus départementaux et régionaux de la Martinique. Allocution de Monsieur Claude Lise, June 12, 2001, unpublished manuscript.
- MCDUGALL, DEREK, 1993. The French Caribbean during the Mitterrand Era. *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 31:92-110.
- MCKESSON, JOHN A., 1994. Concepts and Realities in a Multiethnic France. *French Politics and Society* 12:16-38.
- MILES, WILLIAM F.S., 1985. Mitterrand in the Caribbean: Socialism (?) Comes to Martinique. *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 27:63-79.
- , 1986. *Elections and Ethnicity in French Martinique: A Paradox in Paradise*. New York: Praeger.
- , 1990. Electoral Flip-Flop in the French Caribbean: Mitterrand and Martinique. *French Politics and Society* 8:39-52.
- , 1995. Déjà Vu with a Difference: End of the Mitterrand Era and the McDonaldization of Martinique. *Caribbean Studies* 28:339-68.
- , 1999. Abolition, Independence, and Soccer: Premillennial Dilemmas of Martinican Identity. *French Politics and Society* 17:23-33.
- , 2001. Fifty Years of "Assimilation": Assessing France's Experience of Caribbean Decolonisation through Administrative Reform. In Aaron Gamaliel Ramos & Angel Israel Rivera (eds.), *Islands at the Crossroads: Politics in the Non-Independent Caribbean*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner; Kingston: Ian Randle, pp. 45-60.
- , forthcoming 2003. Contradictions in the Caribbean: Martinique and the 2002 French National Elections. *French Politics, Culture and Society* 21.
- PRICE, RICHARD, 1998. *The Convict and the Colonel*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- & SALLY PRICE, 1997. Shadowboxing in the Mangrove. *Cultural Anthropology* 12: 3-36.
- RENO, FRED, 2001. Re-sourcing Dependency: Decolonisation and Post-Colonialism in French Overseas Departments. *Itinerario* 25:9-22.
- SATINEAU, MAURICE, 1986. *Contestation politique et revendication nationaliste aux Antilles françaises: Les élections de 1981*. Paris: l'Harmattan.

SHERZER, DINA, 1998. French Colonial and Post-Colonial Hybridity: *Condition métisse*. *European Studies* 28:103-20.

VICHNIAC, JUDITH E., 1991. French Socialists and *Droit à la différence*: A Changing Dynamic. *French Politics and Society* 9:40-56.

WILLIAM F.S. MILES
Department of Political Science
Northeastern University
Boston MA 02115, U.S.A.
<b.miles@neu.edu>