This so-called man-ape, drawn in 1749, was actually a chimpanzee. In the West, scholarly interest in plant and animal species had increased during the Scientific Revolution of the 1700s.

Figuring Out Differences

Europe in the 18th century saw people rethinking the nature of government, religion, and social structure. Moved by expanding trade and colonization, they continued to puzzle over global social, cultural, climatic, geographic, and racial differences. The Dutch, who in this period were prime Western slave traders and active colonizers, took a particular interest in why blacks and whites were unlike. In this account from the mid-century *Encyclopédie*, white superiority differs from more modern racism in that scientists attempt to find biological justification for calling other races inferior.

Negroes have possibly been on the earth just as long as Whites. The almost six thousand years which have passed between the first man and us prevent us from knowing if he was white or black. The holy scriptures are completely silent in this regard. However, we may with good reason think that he was white; firstly because Negroes are seldom seen beyond the lands between the tropics. Adam was formed and lived four hundred miles to the North of the Tropic of Cancer. Secondly, seldom, if ever, has the Negroes' color been known to pale through a change in climate, while Whites become yellower as they near the scorching climate. This one observation is sufficient in order to conclude with certainty that blacks must be descendant from whites and must have acquired the darker color which distinguishes them over the course of the centuries. Thirdly, there are far fewer Negroes than whites. Almost all the territories inhabited by Negroes are known; their area is about two million square miles, while the territories occupied by whites comprise more than eight million square miles.

One very influential European way of looking at cultural differences involved seeing some African and Asian societies as freer than European ones. In the state of nature, reform-minded thinkers maintained, one had natural rights—rights that had been lost in European states. "Man is born free and everywhere he is in chains," as one French reformer put it. During the Enlightenment that followed the coming of modern science, liberty from tyrannical rule became an important rallying cry for political and economic reformers. This concept motivated the American and French

Revolutions, along with a host of other uprisings inspired by their success.

But the so-called "noble savages" whose "natural rights" revolutionaries admired and even enshrined in the U.S. Constitution disappeared, replaced by the actual Africans enslaved on New World plantations. When the French made their famous "Declaration of the Rights of Man" in 1789 during the French Revolution, various groups immediately debated whether Jews, women, blacks, and slaves could have the same rights. Among the many issues raised in these debates was that of the fate of the prosperous sugar colonies like St. Domingue (the island now shared by Haiti and the Dominican Republic) and Martinique in the Caribbean, and of slavery in them. In this 1790 speech a French lawyer and politician, Antoine Pierre Barnave, argues to keep both colonies and slaves and to prevent the "Rights of Man" from applying to them.

The interest of the French nation in supporting its commerce, preserving its colonies, and favoring their prosperity by every means compatible with the interests of the metropole [the French nation] has appeared to us, from every angle of vision, to be an incontestable truth. . . .

Abandon the colonies, and these sources of prosperity will disappear or diminish.

Abandon the colonies, and you will import, at great price, from foreigners what they buy today from you. . . .

Here then, Sirs, is the project for a decree that your committee has unanimously voted to propose to you:

The National Assembly, deliberating on the addresses and petitions from the cities of commerce and manufacturing . . . and on the representations made by the deputies from the colonies.

Declares that, considering the colonies as a part of the French empire, and desiring to enable them to enjoy the fruits of the happy regeneration that has been accomplished in the empire, it never intended to include them in the constitution that it has decreed for the kingdom or to subject them to laws which might be incompatible with their particular, local proprieties. . . .

"All mortals are equal. It is not birth but virtue that makes for difference among them," reads the caption of this engraving. A woman representing love of country measures a black man and a white equally, in line with Enlightenment beliefs in liberty and equality.