

Introduction *Creolization in the Old Regime*

This is a study of published narrative sources from the French Caribbean from the inception of colonization in the 1640s until the onset of the Haitian Revolution in the 1790s. My goal in reading these sources is to contribute to the study of cultural contact, exchange, and social transformation, which resulted in the rise of one of the most profitable yet brutal slave societies in history. I believe that literary criticism and theoretical interpretive methodologies offer crucial insights into some of the most fascinating yet elusive questions encountered by writers and scholars on the historical Caribbean. How are cultural traits and belief systems shared between individuals and groups in social relations of domination? What are the relationships between cultural interaction and boundary crossing, on one hand, and the construction and maintenance of repressive regimes enforced by exclusions and violence, on the other? Alternatively, at what point do exchanges, desires, and intimacies across the boundary of power subvert regimes of violence and at what point do they encourage, reinforce, or even produce them? In posing these questions, I focus on a productive paradox in recent theories of creolization, namely, the notion that a common culture may be constructed in a social system marked by asymmetrical power relations and the threat of violence. By attending to the power dynamics governing the development of Creole societies, I examine the ways in which social conflicts inherent in slavery and a racialized social structure impacted processes of cultural syncretism. Most importantly, I call attention to what has often been masked or misapprehended in discussions of both creolization and colonial slavery: the role of desire and sexuality alongside violence

in shaping Creole society. Far from being mitigating factors in structures of oppression, desire and sexuality contributed in fundamental ways to practices and ideologies of domination in the colonial French Caribbean.

Descriptive writings on the Old Regime French Caribbean were first published soon after the creation of the second state-sponsored trading company in 1635 and continued until the fall of French Saint-Domingue in the late 1790s. Throughout this time span, colonial narratives changed significantly in subject matter, authorship, and ideological orientation. From this corpus, I have made selections based on the ethnographic interest of texts and their reception and influence. These include missionary histories and relations written to provide superiors, donors, the company administration, and the French reading public with information on the colonies. In the seventeenth century, missionaries Jean-Baptiste Du Tertre, Raymond Breton, Jean-Baptiste Labat, and a score of minor writers documented the history, customs, and morals of the three main population groups in the colonies: Island Caribs, French settlers, and captive Africans. In the same time period, there appeared what I call narratives of adventure and transgression. Writers such as the pirate Alexandre Oexmelin and the libertine Pierre-Corneille Blessebois operated outside the official civil and religious power structure and offered a more satirical and sensational portrait of the colonies as a space of piracy, violence, libertinage, and creolized spirit beliefs. In the eighteenth century, a number of travel narratives were influenced by the new Enlightenment philosophy. Works by Baron Wimpffen and Girod de Chantrons, for example, provided documentary information mixed with scathing criticisms of colonial slave societies, which they viewed as moral and economic dystopias. Yet concomitant with the escalation of colonial wealth and the slave trade the eighteenth century saw the publication of numerous procolonial descriptions and treatises on slavery and administration, including works by Hiliard d'Auberteuil, Moreau de Saint-Méry, and Émilien Petit. These texts offer valuable insight into the dynamics and mentalities of colonial slavery and the consolidation of white racial hegemony in the French Caribbean. While most of these narratives are nonfictional, my corpus also includes the first colonial novel written in French, *Le Zombi du Grand-Pérou*, published in 1696 by Blessebois. In addition, I analyze the earliest linguistic description of the Carib language, Raymond Breton's encyclopedic bilingual dictionary of 1665. Throughout the study, I examine the Code noir and other laws that codified slavery and racialized power relations. In particular, legal discourses on miscegenation and racial discrimination indicate the extent to which the products of cul-

tural exchange and race mixture were subject to legal control by colonial authorities.

Part of the intent of the project is to provide historically contextualized interpretations of many little-known works on the Old Regime Caribbean colonies. It must be said, however, that to read these texts is to enter into a corpus and a world largely disavowed, forgotten, or silenced by scholars and readers in France and the French Caribbean. For Édouard Glissant, the roots of this forgetting in his native Martinique are deep and reflect the ideological conditioning of the metropole, under whose influence the Caribbean people live, he argues, in a collective amnesia regarding their ancestral bondage and their material conditions of dependency in the present.¹ Michel-Rolph Trouillot attributes what he calls the “silencing” of French colonial slavery to French historiography’s continuous evasion of colonialism in the Old Regime, as well as its suppression of the revolution that almost ended slavery in all French territories and inexorably changed the course of French colonialism.² For Louis Sala-Molins, the history of denial began with the Enlightenment avoidance of colonial slavery, and it has continued to this day, to judge from state commemorations of the bicentennial of the French Revolution, where, as Sala-Molins points out, little mention was made of colonial slavery, the Haitian Revolution, or the momentary abolition of slavery brought by the National Convention in 1794.³ An examination of the circumstances and progressive enactment of this forgetting—what I call historical abjection—will suggest both the challenges and the urgency of rereading Old Regime colonial narratives.

On Memory and Forgetting

By the time Jacques Bouton published the first missionary relation from the Caribbean colonies in 1640, French readers had developed a distinct taste for travel literature from the Americas.⁴ French writings largely followed the tradition of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century narratives from colonial Spanish America and New France, whose pages were rich with natural historical and ethnographic information. Works by Lopez de Gómara, Garcilaso de la Vega, and Bartolomé de Las Casas went through numerous French editions from the sixteenth century to the eighteenth.⁵ Among the best-known early French publications on the New World are those documenting the establishment of colonies in South America, such as André Thevet’s *Les Singularitez de la France Antarctique* (1557) and Jean de Léry’s more polemical *Histoire d’un voyage fait en terre du Brésil* (1578). When French attempts

to settle the Brazilian littoral and other points along the Atlantic coast faltered, Canada emerged as the center of French colonial activity in the seventeenth century, as evidenced by the published works of Cartier, Champlain, Lescarbot, and the priest Gabriel Sagard.⁶ In the following century, however, Canada was overtaken in geopolitical importance by the Antilles, a fact that is reflected in the number of published works on the island colonies. Whereas in the seventeenth century the total number of books on the French Caribbean did not exceed several dozen, this number increased to over three hundred in the eighteenth century, thus signaling the new centrality of the Caribbean to the Old Regime colonial empire.⁷

The fact that few of these works were popular successes in France is due in large part to the late date at which colonial slavery became a topic of interest for metropolitan readers and writers. For much of the eighteenth century, the fiction of American exoticism was concerned with pastoral utopian settings or representations of idyllic natives, *not* slavery.⁸ Some Caribbean texts were popularized through multivolume compilations such as Buffon's *Histoire naturelle* (1749–67), Prévost's *Histoire des voyages* (1746–59) and the *Encyclopédie* (1751–65), and they influenced the anthropological thinking of Enlightenment philosophes such as Rousseau.⁹ Yet colonial slavery had little impact on French literature until the mid-eighteenth century, with the publication of Montesquieu's *De l'Esprit des lois* (1748), which contained a satirical critique of contemporary rationales for the slave trade, and Pierre Antoine de Laplace's enormously successful theatrical adaptation of the English writer Aphra Behn's antislavery novel, *Oroonoko* (1688), published in 1745. Behn's novel was one of the nine most frequently read English novels in France at midcentury, and it went through seven editions by 1800.¹⁰ In the second half of the eighteenth century, the colonies were at the center of growing debates about the economic viability of slave labor, humanitarian objections to the slave system, the feasibility of monopolistic trade restrictions, and the significance of American expansion for the well-being of Europe. Hence we find some antislavery sentiment in the writings of such Enlightenment luminaries as Condorcet, Raynal, Diderot, Montesquieu, Mirabeau, and Prévost. The plight of heroic slaves was imagined in poetry, plays, novels, and the genre of harangue, or prosopopoeia, in which black characters, most often men, were fictively ventriloquized by European sympathizers. These appeared most notably in Prévost's *Le pour et contre* (1735), in the novel *Ziméo* (1773) by the minor philosophe Jean-François de Saint-Lambert, and most importantly in Raynal's *Histoire des deux Indes* (1770, 1774, 1780), the third edition of which was secretly edited by Diderot,

who inserted numerous inflammatory passages critical of colonial slavery. With its detailed historical descriptions of the Caribbean colonies, notably Saint-Domingue, this work constituted the most radical critique of colonialism to emerge from Enlightenment France.¹¹ Finally, physiocratic inquiry into the issue of slavery appeared in political and economic tracts and philosophical forums such as the physiocratic journal *Ephémérides du citoyen*, founded in 1765 by the Abbé Baudeau and edited by Du Pont de Nemours.¹²

Yet, even as French metropolitan writers engaged with the issue of colonial slavery, they arguably repressed the specifics of France's own interests in and practice of it in the Caribbean colonies. Much of the so-called anti-slavery literature was situated not in the French Caribbean but in Surinam (Voltaire, *Candide*; Laplace, *Oronoko*), Spanish America (Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois*), and Jamaica (Saint-Lambert, *Ziméo*; Prévost, *Le pour et contre*).¹³ In an astute critique of the eighteenth-century literary obsession with an eroticized Orient, Madeleine Dobie rightly maintains that French writers masked the magnitude of French interests in slavery in its own Atlantic colonies by transposing the problem of slavery to the oriental context.¹⁴ Furthermore, as many have argued, philosophical contestations of slavery and the colonial system usually led to reformist arguments or contradictory positions rather than endorsements of actual abolition.¹⁵ Beneath the rhetoric lay the assumption that slavery could not be immediately discarded and that colonial commerce and industry had nonetheless contributed to the benefit of mankind. Thus, in Condorcet's *Réflexions sur l'esclavage des nègres*, written under the pseudonym "Schwartz," the author advocated a complicated scheme of gradual abolition so as to "train" slaves for freedom.¹⁶ And, while Raynal is often heralded as an antislavery hero, his famous *Histoire des deux Indes* was followed in 1785 with the *Essai sur l'administration de St.-Domingue*,¹⁷ in which he defended slavery on the basis of the legendary argument that enslaved Africans were better off living in a progressive civilization.¹⁸ Perhaps the most famous example of flawed anti-slavery concerns the revolutionary organization La Société des Amis des Noirs, founded in 1787 by Brissot. Condorcet served as president, and its members, drawn from the social elite, included Lafayette, Volney, Mirabeau, and Abbé Grégoire. The society publicized abuses of the slave trade and advocated its abolition. It did not, however, advocate the immediate emancipation of the slaves. Likewise, its support for ending the slave trade was premised on an imperialist program of European expansion into Africa whereby Africans would be made to work for Europeans on their own soil. During the revolutions in France and Saint-Domingue, members of the

society fought for mulatto rights to the detriment of the cause of freedom for slaves, and by the time the National Convention passed the abolition decree of 1794 the society had almost completely disbanded and none of its members had taken an active role.¹⁹

The repression of colonial slavery and its narrative corpus only increased after the Haitian Revolution, though within a new geopolitical landscape. Whereas French Enlightenment antislavery proved inadequate to the cause of emancipation, nineteenth-century political upheavals resulted in the re-establishment of slavery and the Code noir, followed by a legislative act of abolition by the provisional government of the Second Republic in 1848. The loss of Saint-Domingue and the massacre by former slaves of the remaining white French residents in 1804 greatly undermined abolitionist fervor while reducing France's interest in and dependence on slavery and the slave trade, as French imperial power turned its attention to Egypt, Algeria, and sub-Saharan Africa.²⁰ The 1848 act of abolition and its accompanying ideological discourse of republicanism signaled the official disavowal of slavery. The proclamation by the French commissioner Louis Thomas Husson to Martinican slaves in 1848 cast the abolition as the good news of an enlightened republic free from monarchical despotism in all its guises.²¹ Official French history of slave emancipation in French territories has since championed the antislavery activist Victor Schoelcher and the Second Republic as its heroes and reinvented the Enlightenment as the source of revolutionary values driving republican abolitionism.²² According to this narrative, the abolition of slavery represented the achievement of the liberal ideals of the philosophes and a definitive break with the past crimes of an unenlightened, despotic monarchy. Slavery became, in the words of Françoise Vergès, the "*secret de famille*" that was repressed "for the sake of reconciliation."²³ Furthermore, by forgetting slavery France proclaimed itself the harbinger of the Enlightenment values that could "civilize" Africans on their own soil, thus laying the ideological groundwork for nineteenth-century imperialist expansion.²⁴

This suppression of Old Regime colonialism and slavery is nonetheless surprising given the enormous economic significance of the Antilles for France. In terms of material rewards, the Caribbean plantation system represented by far the most successful colonial venture of the Old Regime. Yet it was founded on what was by far the most brutal experiment in social engineering and physical repression ever engaged in by France. The initial consolidation of the territory required decades of territorial warfare with the islands' indigenous inhabitants, the Caribs. From 1626 to 1664,

the islands of Saint-Christophe, Guadeloupe, Martinique, and the western half of Hispaniola (later known as Saint-Domingue), as well as several adjoining islands and their dependencies, all came under French rule. Following the initiative of the privateering explorers Pierre d'Esnambuc and Urbain de Roissey, Richelieu backed the creation of the first colonies, which were first administered through successive incarnations of the trading company established for that purpose. In 1674, the company was definitively liquidated and the colonies were brought under direct royal rule as provinces of France itself. Settled by impoverished noblemen, traders, missionaries, farmers, bondsmen, vagabonds, women, and, most importantly, captive Africans and their descendants, the islands grew into profitable plantation enclaves producing large quantities of tobacco and sugar by the latter part of the seventeenth century. Channeled back to France according to a monopolistic policy that later became known as the *Exclusif*, these products and the ensuing trade in humans mapped out a triangular shipping route between Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean. France's monopolistic colonial policies were perfected under Richelieu's renowned successor and the minister of the royal navy, Colbert. He regarded the development of overseas trade as the most important foundation for the regeneration of French commerce, the navy, and the merchant marine.²⁵

All kinds of domestic French industries grew rich supplying the colonies and slave trade, including textiles, distilleries, manufactures, and shipbuilding. This industrial clamor contributed greatly to the growth of the merchant and marine bourgeoisie, first in Norman and Breton ports such as Le Havre, Dieppe, Nantes, Rochefort, and Saint-Malo. In the late seventeenth century, as the northern ports were increasingly tied up in wartime naval activities with England, the southern cities of La Rochelle, Bordeaux, and Marseilles benefited from colonial trade. Even more remarkable, however, was the productivity of the island colonies themselves, as they were able to supply both the French and European demand for tropical commodities. Though small in territory, the Caribbean colonies far exceeded French possessions in North America in their capacity to generate wealth using slave labor. As early as 1685, the French Antilles ranked second in world sugar production. War would hardly break this trend. Several international conflicts raged in the Caribbean seas in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, involving England, France, Spain, and Holland. When in 1763 the Treaty of Paris was signed ending the Seven Years' War, Great Britain claimed Canada from France but returned Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Saint-Domingue to France. Western Louisiana had been sold in 1762 to the

king of Spain, an ally in the conflict. Despite this seemingly disproportionate loss of land, Choiseul, the French foreign minister, deemed the treaty a victory in that it secured the most profitable colonial domains, the key to further colonial expansion. In the eighteenth century, the Caribbean islands were the most prized colonial possessions in the Western Hemisphere.²⁶

By 1789, the runaway success of the French Caribbean colonies had reached its outer limit. The single island of Saint-Domingue was the world's largest producer of sugar and was considered by some the most valuable province of France. Likewise, this island dominates the historical imagination of eighteenth-century French colonialism, for it best encapsulates the horrific contradictions plaguing the Old Regime's colonial project. The colony originated on the small island of Tortuga off the northwestern coast as a loose settlement of pirates, buccaneers, and vagabonds, who for many years resisted the imposition of colonial authority. Only in 1697 did the Treaty of Ryswick officially annex the western side of the island to the French state. Yet, although the island was a latecomer to the plantation sugar economy already established in Martinique and Guadeloupe, Saint-Domingue's explosive growth during the first three decades of the eighteenth century led France to assume a dominant position in the world's sugar market. Between 1686 and 1720, the population of slaves in the Lesser Antilles quadrupled, while in Saint-Domingue their numbers increased fourteen times.²⁷ By midcentury, the single island of Saint-Domingue was producing more sugar for France than all of the British islands did for England.²⁸ Despite international tensions in the region, sugar production continued to escalate due to the obsessive reliance on slave laborers brought into the colony by the thousands and the development of irrigation technologies that allowed arid plains to be made over into new plantations. Added to this was a boom in coffee production after 1760. This new source of profitability, met largely by the class of free people of color in Saint-Domingue, was responsible for the agricultural development of the mountains.²⁹ Thus, at the close of the eighteenth century Saint-Domingue was indisputably the richest colony in the world, providing France with untold wealth from imported and reexported colonial goods.³⁰

In 1792, the colonial lobby of the National Assembly maintained that prior to the revolution over 40 percent of French commerce with foreign powers derived from reexported colonial goods. This colonial system in turn supplied labor to six million French people throughout the kingdom.³¹ At the same time, however, the system that supported the French labor market literally consumed hundreds of thousands of captive Africans and their

descendants. They were brought to the colonies in such escalating numbers that in the last decade of French colonial rule in Saint-Domingue the proportion of slaves to colonists was greater than ten to one. Modern population figures on this period put the total population of the colony at approximately 500,000 persons: 30,000 whites, an equal number of free non-whites, and over 400,000 slaves.³² In the last two decades of French rule, the slave population increased twofold due to an escalation in slave trade activity, not natural reproduction. Thus, an extraordinarily brutal form of slavery underwrote French commercial success in the eighteenth century at the very moment when the philosophes were proclaiming the rights of man. Their so-called antislavery writings did precious little for the people who were sacrificed to the colonial system.

Still, the predominant view of the French Enlightenment was long purified of its imperial sympathies and complicities. The Age of Enlightenment has been upheld in French culture as progressive, antislavery, cultural relativist, and even primitivist with regard to writings by luminaries such as Rousseau, Diderot, Raynal, Voltaire, and Montesquieu.³³ It is no wonder that, at the end of the nineteenth century, the first historian of the social aspects of colonial slavery, Lucien Peytraud, lamented that historical scholarship had thus far favored the achievement of French abolition over the discussion of slaves in history.³⁴ Breaking with the tradition of studying only the military, political, or economic dimensions of colonialism, Peytraud and Pierre de Vaissière were the first historians to make use of narrative sources from the Old Regime colonies, while Jacques de Dampierre compiled the first critical study of published sources on the Antilles.³⁵ Yet, whereas historians regarded this material as a vital source of information about slavery as a social system, scholars of French literature have shown considerably less interest in these texts. Since the appearance in 1931 of Gilbert Chinard's in-depth study of several colonial narratives in relation to what he called the "American imaginary" of French literature, most literary research on French colonialism, slavery, antislavery discourse, or early anthropology has concerned metropolitan French literary, scientific, or philosophical texts, thus leaving the narratives of Caribbean colonialism largely unexamined.

By contrast, it is in the study of the French Caribbean itself that early modern colonial writings have been explored more deeply, a fact that points to the importance of the politics of location in the remembrance of colonial legacies. Understandably, however, literary historians of the region have registered uncertainty about how to place colonial writings in relation to the oppositional poetics of Caribbean writers of color, who championed the

end of racism and colonial domination. If we consider two literary histories, *La Transgression des couleurs* by Roger Toumson and *Les Écrivains français et les Antilles* by Régis Antoine, the methodological difficulty becomes obvious. As Toumson's title suggests, he conceives the identifying feature of the history of francophone Caribbean literature as the subversive emergence of Afro-Caribbean contestations of colonialist literary forms, tropes, and ideologies. Toumson thus identifies Caribbean literary traditions in terms of a racial binary—"la littérature blanche et la littérature nègre"—seen to inherit the vision of the world of the colonizer and colonized, respectively.³⁶ Antoine, on the other hand, distances himself from the formative phase of Afro-Caribbean literary consciousness by choosing as an endpoint to his study the year 1932, the date of the appearance of the periodicals *L'Étudiant Noir* and *Légitime Défense*. His title—*Les Écrivains français et les Antilles: Des premiers Pères blancs aux surréalistes noirs*—suggests that he considers both white and black writers to be "French," even as he maintains a distinction between the French national identity and the islands themselves. In his preface, the author avoids the tensions among race, place, and national identification by conflating the French nationality with the use of the French language: "We therefore took into consideration all the French literary texts . . . that speak of the Antilles."³⁷ Yet the very scope of the work represents a certain drawback from the perspective of this study, for the literary historical approach limits the degree to which, through the work of interpretation, the author may contribute to or challenge dominant understandings of the historical, social, and cultural phenomena treated by these texts. In contrast, Joan Dayan's *Haiti, History, and the Gods* demonstrates the advantages of abandoning strict disciplinary methodologies in examining colonial writings.³⁸ Through the critical practice she calls "literary fieldwork," Dayan engages the literary and spiritual archive of French colonialism in late Saint-Domingue as well as that of nineteenth-century Haiti, thus offering a penetrating interpretation of the culture, history, and memory of the island nation as it has been constructed both within Haiti and by outside observers.

Toward a Historicist Literary Interpretation

My interest in this corpus of forgotten narratives from the early French Caribbean is compelled in part by the move in postcolonial studies to reread the narrative archive of colonialism for evidence of the ways in which European accounts of the non-European world enabled the progressive deploy-

ment of colonial and imperial power. Yet my approach and objectives differ substantially from that project. Dissenting from what have become conventional and often limiting orthodoxies about the relation between discourse and colonial power, I maintain that the mere deconstruction of colonialist categories, stereotypes, and ideologies only further centers the history of Western imperialism and confines the scholar to a critique of representation that presumes the hegemony it seeks to expose. Instead I believe that any critique of colonial texts has inescapable ramifications for the ways in which both scholars and living communities understand and create new narratives about the past, understandings that are not limited to the abstract structures of colonial domination but include the formation of cultures and societies. This is especially true in cases such as the Caribbean, where, as Peter Hulme has noted, the only remaining evidence of the past is often the very European texts that constitute the discourse of colonialism.³⁹ If, for Hulme, there is little hope of contesting the European narratives through recourse to some alternative evidence, what he calls the “protocols for critique” may very well lead to a new appreciation of what these narratives say about colonial dynamics and cultural shifts. To examine further the relation between literary and cultural historical interpretation, we may review briefly the terms in which poststructuralist and postcolonial literary critics have redefined their objects of analysis.

The rise of literary and theoretical approaches to colonialism must be seen in the context of poststructuralism’s attack on the limits of Western epistemologies and structures of knowledge, among them historicism. As Robert Young has shown, colonial discourse analysis has participated in a larger project aimed at exposing the ways in which the presumed universal validity of those epistemologies was an effect of an “ontological imperialism,” whose corollary was the actual subjugation of alternative cultures and systems of knowledge through imperialism.⁴⁰ Historicism epitomized the linkages between structures of knowledge and forms of domination, for, taken in its Hegelian sense, History was a unifying, totalizing discourse that assimilated non-European cultures, peoples, and forms of difference into one universal story, whose beginning, center, and endpoint was the West. This position is echoed in much postcolonial criticism. The late Edward Said viewed historicism as the basis of orientalism, which he attacked for its self-validating tendencies and what he considered to be an avoidance of its own relationship with European imperialism.⁴¹ Similarly, Gayatri Spivak has pointed out the ways in which historical narratives depend on multiple and strategic silences, exclusions, and marginalizations, suggesting that the

work of criticism is not to recover an alternative viewpoint or historical narrative but rather to chart the “itinerary of the silencing.”⁴²

Suspicious of revisionist histories and counternarratives of colonialism as themselves based on nationalist essentialisms and a nostalgia for lost origins, postcolonial theorists have attempted to dismantle colonial histories and discourses through theoretical analysis and deconstruction. Critics of this approach charge that colonial discourse analysis relies on a set of ahistorical, overreaching suppositions that reduce all of Western knowledge and representation to its instrumentality in colonialist expansion, thus tacitly assuming the unchallenged efficacy of European imperial power around the globe.⁴³ Said, despite his Foucauldian bent, considered fifteen hundred years of Western discourse on the “Orient” to be a unified discursive formation that produced an object for Western domination and control.⁴⁴ Yet, whereas Said traced the institutions, disciplines, and discourses in which “orientalist” knowledge developed over time, critics such as Homi Bhabha have invoked transhistorical theoretical concepts to critique colonialism as a discursive system. In his psychoanalytic framework, singular abstractions such as “the colonial subject,” “ambivalence,” “mimicry” and “hybridity” pose a serious impediment to thinking through variations in colonial discourses and their effects in different times and places.⁴⁵ In general, the very concept of “colonial discourse” itself condemns much of the analysis to tautology, since critics define the object in terms identical to the arguments made about it. The designation almost always prejudices the discourse it seeks to critique as that which, either by design or effect, produces non-Europeans as denigrated, domesticated others of a Western imperial self.

From the perspective of this study, the most troubling historical blind spot resulting from postcolonial theory’s concentration on nineteenth-century imperialisms and the attendant fetishization of the category of “native/colonized” is its almost complete neglect of one of the most important features of early modern European colonialism—colonial slavery in the Americas. The exclusion of slavery and slave societies from most recent “theories” of colonial discourse raises many questions about the kinds of issues this subdiscipline is willing to raise and why. Why does the cultural critique of colonialism eschew those cultures forged on the basis of relations of domination obtaining from two or more transplanted populations? What happens in cases in which the native is eliminated and deep settler colonialism persists with imported populations of exploitable labor, extracted from both the colonial center and a third peripheral site of encounter, exchange, and coercion? How do such conditions affect the way colonial discourse con-

structs its object and the stories it has to tell? The presence of slave societies is one of the unifying traits of the colonial cultures of the Americas, dating from the first modern European colonial enterprise in the fifteenth century. While slave societies have informed much thinking about the relationship between race and class oppression, specifically in the development of capitalist power relations, the postcolonial theorists have largely stayed out of the debate.⁴⁶

In one of the most forceful critiques of postcolonial theory's flight from history, Benita Parry has argued that postcolonial criticism's refusal to provide any account of change, discontinuity, and social conflict homogenizes the many states of imperialism and "obliterate[s] the role of the native as historical subject."⁴⁷ Although recent work on eighteenth-century colonialisms attends to many of these issues, there remains a significant methodological chasm between the project of contextualizing historically the discourses under study and that of providing interpretations of the cultural or social dynamics of colonialism through the analysis of those discourses. Alternatively, when cultural or historical claims are advanced, they often do not concern specific areas of colonial influence but rather broad structural relationships between Europe and the non-European world. Madeleine Dobie's study of literary representations of the Orient laments the failure of previous studies to assess "the historical evolution of French colonial policy and the changing interplay between this policy and the literary sphere."⁴⁸ While she justifiably departs from the tendency to couple eighteenth-century French orientalism with an undifferentiated concept of "colonial discourse," her contextualizations mainly relate to French domestic politics, aesthetic movements, and colonial policies toward the Orient. Srinivas Aravamudan, on the other hand, takes up the question of subaltern agency in European cultural texts pertaining to a range of geographic regions and political relationships between Europeans and non-Europeans.⁴⁹ However, since many of the works he analyzes do not concern actual colonies (or if they do they represent derivative or fictional discourses about them), his larger claims concern what might be called the global imagination of Enlightenment Europe rather than the eighteenth-century colonies themselves. In a more radical attempt to merge colonial discourse studies with historical interpretation, Ann McClintock arrives at a "situated psychoanalysis . . . that is simultaneously a psychoanalytically informed history."⁵⁰ Rejecting the textualist mode of literary scholarship, McClintock deals with what she considers to be "the more demanding historical task of interrogating the social practices, economic conditions, and psycho-

analytic dynamics that motivate and constrain human desire, action and power.”⁵¹ Yet, given McClintock’s interest in the relation between imperialism, industrial capital, and categories of race, class, and gender in the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century British empire, her methodology ultimately leads her to make broad claims about the role of imperialism in the formation of Western industrial modernity rather than to analyze in depth the dynamics of a particular colonial locale.

By contrast, what motivates this study of French colonial narratives is neither a concern with early modern French imperial power writ large nor a deep interest in studying colonialist representations for their own sake. I am compelled, rather, by the role literary analysis has to play in reinterpreting narrative sources that in some cases constitute the only surviving written account of peoples and cultures of the colonial French Caribbean at particular points in time. My aim is both to contribute to the literary history of a region best known for its postcolonial literatures and to interrogate the cultural, sexual, and racial dynamics of emerging slave societies by exploring representations produced by the colonizing culture itself. If I willingly tread on the unstable ground that lies between “history” and “representation,” it is because I wish to blur the distinction between them. In this respect, I defer to the poststructuralist claim that no narrative bears a privileged relation to “reality” and that the very idea of referentiality or representation fails to recognize the role of narrative itself in constituting the reality it pretends only to describe. This is not to say that there are no events, materialities, or feelings in human experience, but rather that they are always constructed in and mediated through language, most often in a narrative structure that, as Roland Barthes reminds us, derives from myth and imposes certain meanings and constraints intrinsic to the form on what then becomes knowable as “reality” or “the past.”⁵² Whereas narrative sources are the stories told by contemporary actors about their lives, experiences, and beliefs, historical discourse builds new narratives by deducing from the former what it considers to be the truest or most plausible stories about the events they describe. As Hayden White has argued, traditional historiography has maintained the assumption that narrative offers a simulacrum of the structure and processes of “real” events and that the significations of narrative accord with the imagined historical referent.⁵³

Of course, the other and perhaps more difficult lesson of poststructuralism is that, in the words of Spivak, “we cannot but narrate,” and thus we are forever caught within the epistemological and linguistic structures that we critique.⁵⁴ The challenge, then, is to forge a critical practice that takes

this into account. Literary scholars such as Peter Hulme have managed the radical antifoundationalism of poststructuralist thought by professing not a transcendental truth but rather a subjective or provisional one informed by the political agenda of the present. In this respect, they acknowledge that their stories are not entirely representative of the pasts to which they ostensibly refer. I would add to that the claim that, if the past is only knowable as a succession of narratives, then the work of interpreting those stories becomes a central, if not *the* central, task of scholars who concern themselves with it. By interpretation, I do not mean the distillation of “truth” from “falsity” but rather the critical analysis of extant narratives; their truth claims; the conditions of their production; their allegorical, rhetorical, and formal features; and the latent and manifest meanings of the stories they tell. I therefore part company with some poststructuralist critics of colonialism by assuming that texts exist in contexts (cultural, economic, social, or political) that are in many cases evidenced by the texts themselves. In addition, authors are critical to my project both as personages in the stories they recount and as writing subjects operating in a discursive field they reflect and at times challenge.

In these respects, I share some of the contentions of New Historicist criticism, notably the belief in the “mutual embeddedness” of art and history and the idea that it is possible to treat “all of the written and visual traces of a particular culture as a mutually intelligible network of signs.”⁵⁵ New Historicists approach texts previously considered nonliterary or non-canonical and illuminate the “cultural matrix” out of which representations emerge. However, I differ from the response offered by Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher to the most challenging and productive attack on historicist criticism, namely, the suggestion that the application of literary interpretive strategies to nonliterary objects leads critics to aestheticize culture or, in the worst case, to “endorse as aesthetically gratifying every miserable, oppressive structure and every violent action of the past.”⁵⁶ I formulate the problem in relation to Arun Mukherjee’s critique of postcolonial criticism, which, in her view, leaves scholars only one discursive position: “We are forever forced to interrogate European discourse, of only one particular kind; the ones that degrade and deny our humanity.”⁵⁷ How and why do we read sources that denigrate and offend our humanity? What are the goals of reading nonliterary narratives of domination with a literary interpretive methodology? What Gallagher and Greenblatt implicitly suggest, and what I have discovered, is that what has been kept out of the canon reflects the most disavowed aspects of a culture, what it must expel, or, in

Julia Kristeva's terms, abject, in order to create an image of itself and its past consistent with its ruling ideology.⁵⁸ In Western liberal discourse, slavery is either repressed or treated as a kind of refuse that has been dutifully shed in order to universalize liberal ideologies of freedom, individuality, and the rights to property, even as each of these ideas developed in parallel with and were arguably informed by contrary notions of bondage, nonpersonhood, and property in persons.

Gallagher's and Greenblatt's response to the question of how to avoid aestheticizing the cultural is to retreat to the canon, the interpretation of "the writers we love," as what is truly in question, what really stands to gain from serious attention to "culture." The intent, they argue, has not been to "leave works of literature behind" but to "venture out to unfamiliar cultural texts," so that "these texts—often marginal, odd, fragmentary, unexpected, and crude—could in turn begin to interact in interesting ways with the intimately familiar works of the literary canon."⁵⁹ Yet recourse to the canon as the justification for cultural work eschews the more interesting and radical challenge New Historicism poses to both literature and history, that is, the idea that reading cultures as texts means that some of our conclusions will concern peoples and cultures as well as texts. This is especially true in the case of slavery, in which there are no "great" works of literature and in which the entire system constitutes the abject that has been expelled from the colonizer's cultural memory. Whereas many postcolonial critics have essentially adopted the New Historicist approach by invoking colonialism and slavery as a lens through which to reread the "greats"—Montesquieu, Diderot, Raynal, Voltaire—I have chosen to study these abjected systems as cultures in themselves. While demonstrating the interest of certain works individually and in relation to metropolitan discourses of witchcraft, magic, libertinage, nobility, and race, for example, I am equally concerned to situate them within the environment in which they emerged, and to use my literary training to say something about that context as I read it in the texts. There are many questions about cultures that historians do not or cannot ask and literary scholars can. In my view, literary interpretive strategies offer the most powerful means of probing the ideas, beliefs, power relations, anxieties, and fantasies of a society through the partial accounts left in its cultural narratives. The goal is not to aestheticize the abject but to serve memory by refusing to forget or to accept uncritically inherited accounts of the past.

The contours of this project thus reveal my fascination with origins. The mixed cultures and societies of the New World offer rather precise circum-

stances of origin, and we refuse to acknowledge them at our peril. Origins here are not a fetish on which to found claims of truth or authenticity but rather a point from which to gain an understanding of culture as a process of change. In this sense, historicity functions as an antidote to cultural fundamentalisms of all kinds. The particular availability of origins in the Caribbean is also reflected in my openness to Freudian psychoanalysis and its idea of primary repression, which becomes especially important when discussing the sexual aspects of racial slavery. Otherwise I employ a range of tools that literary and cultural theory bring to bear on these texts, together with the widest possible awareness of subsequent narratives (historical, literary, or anthropological) about the early French Caribbean. In this respect, my approach is inspired by the work of Peter Hulme, Joan Dayan, and Françoise Vergès.⁶⁰ Like them, I refuse to limit myself to a critique of representation, or even ideology, as though there is something outside of representation that is the province of History alone. I contend that literary interpretation of narrative discourse produces forms of truth that are theoretical in nature, that is, whose explanatory potential derives not from a presumption of fact but rather from the critic's ability to make meaning from the analysis of a set of discourses in their relation to one another.

Creolization in the Old Regime

In maintaining that no narrative has a privileged relation to something like "reality," I analyze a range of genres, both nonfictional and fictional, as every source offers insight into the values and dynamics of the culture in which it was produced. The questions I ask of the corpus address blind spots in prevailing explanations of the cultures of slavery offered by theorists, historians, novelists, and literary scholars. A key concept framing this study is the idea of "creolization," which scholars commonly invoke, alongside notions of *mestizaje* and hybridity, to describe processes of fusion and syncretism between radically different cultures and ethnicities. Due to the speed, intensity, and violence of the migratory movements and cultural flows that characterized the development of colonialism and racial slavery in the Caribbean islands, many critics and scholars regard the region as a paradigm for the cross-cultural contacts, transformation, and heterogeneity that have come to typify a globalized, postcolonial world. Yet the generalized espousal of creolization theory has arguably obscured the local specificity of the concept and its different valences in anglophone and francophone Caribbean cultural theory.

On one hand, the term *creolization* refers to what many consider to be a cultural nationalist view of Caribbean social history formulated by anglophone West Indian intellectuals in direct refutation of prevailing notions of the Caribbean colonies in British imperial historiography. Building on the idea of cross-cultural transfer defined by the sociologist Fernando Ortiz as “transculturation,” the Jamaican historian Kamau Brathwaite’s notion of creolization conceives of the plantation as a transformative, productive space, not just for tropical exports but also for cultures and languages. Following Ortiz’s emphasis on the mutual exchange of culture between groups, where each is both active and passive, impacted by and influencing the other in the dynamic production of a new, derivative culture, Brathwaite sees creolization as a “cultural action—material, psychological and spiritual—based upon the stimulus/response of individuals within the society to their environment and—as white/black, culturally discrete groups—to each other.”⁶¹ During a time of Caribbean nationalisms and independences, “creolization” and the corollary notion of “creole society” were meant to oppose the prevalent assumption among British colonial historians that Jamaican society was, as Brathwaite puts it, merely “a declining appendage of Great Britain [whose] internal structure and body was, at best, a parody of the metropolitan, at worst, a disorganized, debased and uncreative polity.”⁶² In contrast, Brathwaite’s theory stresses the importance of integration and change within and across groups in a stratified power dichotomy.⁶³ While on one hand this adaptation led newcomers to adopt behaviors and attitudes linked to their new position with respect to the other group in the racial hierarchy—racial prejudice for whites and socialization into plantation labor and Afro-Creole forms of recreation for slaves—Brathwaite’s theory also conceives of cultural flows and influences between groups, such as the slaves’ imitation of white culture and privilege and the impact of black Creole linguistic and cultural forms on white Creole speech, tastes, and styles of dance.

Departing from Brathwaite’s historical analysis and interest in social relations, francophone Caribbean cultural theorists have emphasized the Creole language as a paradigm for other forms of cultural exchange between groups in the region. Creolization is thus a process of cultural transformation productive of new ways of thinking, knowing, and imagining that diverge from colonialist epistemologies and exclusionary identity formations based in fixed notions of race, language, and nation. Important here is the idea that linguistic and cultural creation was instrumental as a practice of resistance for slaves. Building on Édouard Glissant’s notion of orality as the

privileged site of collective memory,⁶⁴ the *créoliste* writers Raphaël Confiant, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Jean Bernabé locate Caribbean literary agency in the sonorities of the slave, the silences of the maroon, and the orality of the Creole storyteller. Their view of creolization highlights the complex dialectic between violence and accommodation marking social relations on the plantation: “For three centuries, the islands . . . proved to be the real forges of a new humanity, where languages, races, religions, customs, ways of being from all over the world were brutally uprooted and transplanted in an environment where they had to reinvent life.”⁶⁵

While their theory remains intimately tied to a historical consciousness of colonial fusions and hybridities, the *créolistes* follow Glissant in privileging literature over history as the discourse best able to represent the creolizing process. Like many Caribbean writers, Glissant sees history as unable to speak to a populace whose collective memory has been repeatedly erased by the brutality of colonialism and the manipulations of official ideologies and whose lived experience is constantly defamiliarized by the globalizing consumer culture to which it increasingly aspires. In a society that has been abused by prejudicial and partial accounts of the past, history as a discourse is associated with colonial ideologies. For Glissant, the role of the writer is to articulate a relation between present and past, what he calls “a prophetic vision of the past.”⁶⁶ Similarly, Derek Walcott, who views history as problematic in the Caribbean, writes that “what has mattered is the loss of history, the amnesia of the races, what has become necessary is imagination, imagination as necessity, as invention.”⁶⁷ In addition to rejecting official history, the *créoliste* writers question the ability of colonial texts to represent the creolization process: “In its propaganda, self-censorship, colonial apologies, and heavy, almost mathematical deployment of information, the writing of the record (*registre*) clamors with more literary silence than even the smallest stone engraved by the Savages.”⁶⁸ The writer of “*créolité*” thus writes over and against “la Chronique coloniale,” proclaiming literature to be the privileged site of the restitution of Creole identities and the tradition of the *conteur créole*.⁶⁹

Yet, creolization theory raises pressing questions about the very colonial histories rejected by the *créolistes*. These relate to the very term *créole*, which they claim as a cultural signifier. In Martinique and Guadeloupe today, *créole* refers to an “*enracinement local*,” in counterdistinction to exterior reference points for cultural identity.⁷⁰ However, the use of this term to valorize an identity distinct from that of “Africa” or “Europe” has a long history within colonialist discourse. The word *créole*, in French, origi-

nates from the Hispano-Portuguese terms “*criollo/crioulo*,” which originally referred to both blacks and whites born in the colonial Americas.⁷¹ The colonial missionary writers Du Tertre and Labat used the term to mean simply “born in the colonies,” a designation used for both the master and servile classes.⁷² From the revolutionary period on, the word *créole* developed a more restricted usage, referring only to whites by the nineteenth century. This meaning becomes solidified in the *Dictionnaire Littré*, for example, where *créole* is defined as “homme blanc, femme blanche, originaire des colonies.”⁷³ The fact that today the *Petit Robert* retains the primary meaning of *créole* as a “person of the white race, born in the tropical colonies, notably the Antilles,” indicates the persistence of the term’s racial connotation in France. This meaning also points to the double contestation inherent in its reappropriation by contemporary writers to oppose divisive notions of racial difference. A return to the historical record thus reveals an ironic continuity with postcolonial meanings applied to the term *créole*.

My adoption of the term *creolization* to refer to cross-cultural negotiations within and between ethnic groups in the Caribbean is in fact conditional on the critical investigation of the literary traces and narratives left by colonial writers who witnessed, described, and produced their experiences in discourse. Rather than taking creolization as a stable signifier whose objective historical referent is knowable through historical research or imaginative reconstruction, I collapse the study of creolization onto the study of representations of colonial cultures and societies. Brathwaite began that project, but his own readings were often burdened by a positivist attempt to lay out the precise parameters and components of Creole society, which led him to reproduce unwittingly the same style of ethnographic inventory prevalent in colonial discourse. Furthermore, as Chris Bongie has argued, Brathwaite does not call into question the existence of culturally distinct groups he defines as white and black and links to “cultural bases” in Europe and Africa, thus betraying an essentialist belief in the presence of precolonial identities that converge in the creolization process. Yet, while cautioning against notions of autonomous culture that underlie theories of cultural fusion and hybridity, we must bear in mind the historical processes of colonization and enslavement whereby internally diverse populations from different parts of the world were structured into rigidly defined socio-ethnic blocks primarily on the basis of color. When creolization theorists err on the side of essentialism, it is, I would contend, because they momentarily naturalize these historically constructed colonial social or ethnic categories (African/black slaves, European/white colonists, Island Caribs, etc.) as dis-

tinct cultures that contribute to a Creole mosaic of culture, elements of which are shared by all groups in the colonies. Whereas this narrative is meant to overturn the discriminatory logic of colonial discourse by positing the cultural interrelatedness of different groups in the colonial hierarchy, it has the effect of masking the specific mechanisms of violence and segregation meant to keep colonial populations artificially separated and contained along lines of race and class. As Nigel Bolland has argued, the integrationist, synthetic logic of creolization theories tends to neglect the structural contradictions and social conflicts of the plantation. Although the French *créolistes* gesture to the “brutal entry into contact” and “non-harmonious mixing” of peoples and cultures, they nonetheless imagine the “transactional aggregate” of cultural elements as having the power to transcend and subvert relations of force by creating a “kaleidoscopic totality.” What gets left out is a consideration of how the cultural flows both within and between diverse groups were impacted by the violence of plantation slavery.⁷⁴

Since the French narrative sources I analyze were produced almost exclusively from the perspective of those in power, the view of creolization I distill mainly concerns the colonizing group, while suggesting the kinds of exchanges, negotiations, and resistances that took place within and between the Carib, slave, and free colored populations. My inquiry also responds to the inadequacies of creolization theories on the question of the relation between the evolution of shared cultural forms and social antagonisms in French colonial slave societies. Several important questions arise from the resultant ambiguity: How did culture cross boundaries of power and violence? In what ways were Creole syncretisms and fusions instigated by specific practices of domination, and how did the process of cultural exchange itself impact those practices? Whose culture was being exchanged with whom, and under what circumstances? Finally, were syncretisms and forms of integration always liberatory for the subalterns, or did they just as often serve the interests of the colonizing group?

Nowhere are these questions more pressing than in relation to the issues of gender, sexuality, and desire which occupy an important place in colonial narratives but have often been underexplored in male-authored Caribbean cultural theory. Whereas the creolization thesis conceives of cultural flows in the presence of relations of domination, sexuality is viewed as enabling greater integration through miscegenation.⁷⁵ In Brathwaite’s brief consideration of the subject, sexuality contributes to the creolization process by binding members of radically opposed social groups biologically,

socially, and culturally: “It was in the intimate area of sexual relationships that the greatest damage was done to white creole apartheid policy and where the most significant—and lasting—inter-cultural creolization took place.”⁷⁶ For Brathwaite, the biological product of miscegenation—the colored population—provided a sort of social cement to further integrate society. Francophone writers are far less explicit about the roles of gender and sexuality, tending to invoke *métissage* only to pass immediately to its metaphorical rather than literal meaning. For Édouard Glissant, *métissage* refers to the “encounter with the Other,” one step along the way to the full complexity of creolization, defined as a “*métissage* without limits.”⁷⁷ Glissant thus moves away from negative images of the *métis* formulated in what he calls “traditional literature.”⁷⁸ Likewise, Chamoiseau, Confiant, and Bernabé reject the ideology of racial naming in favor of the linguistic metaphor for cultural fusion: “In multiracial societies such as ours, it seems urgent that we drop the usual racial distinctions and return to the habit of calling our countryman by the only term that suits him: Creole.”⁷⁹

The problem is that by setting aside issues of gender and sexuality, or by viewing them as mitigating factors in an otherwise brutal system of domination and subordination, these writers overlook the ways in which certain sexual practices contributed to and reinforced those very power structures.⁸⁰ This contention relates in many respects to the first black American feminist critique of male historians’ avoidance of the sexual exploitation of female slaves in the antebellum United States. Repudiating decades of historical research by male scholars whom they considered to have downplayed the reality of sexual violence, portrayed slave women as complicitous, or cast sexual relationships as benevolent expressions of white male desire, black feminist critics such as Angela Davis and bell hooks redefined sexuality between master and slave in terms of rape. As such, sex became a “weapon of domination,” an “institutionalized form of terrorism” through which male slaveholders exploited the bodies of female captives, degendered them with respect to Euro-American codes of femininity, and “extinguished [their] will to resist.”⁸¹ In a moderated formulation, Hortense Spillers has questioned whether “‘sexuality’ as a term of implied relationship and desire is . . . appropriate, manageable, or accurate to any of the familial arrangements under a system of enslavement, from the master’s family to the captive enclave.”⁸²

I am committed to evaluating slavery as a system of sexual domination, but my perspective is closer to that of Saidiya Hartman, Joan Dayan, and Arlette Gautier, who regard desire as an unavoidable component of the

violence that structured gendered relations of power between masters and slaves.⁸³ Far from being irrelevant in a system in which slaveholders claimed right of access to the bodies they “possessed,” desire was a function of power that deeply impacted practices and ideologies of domination. The question then becomes who desired and what were the uses, parameters, and consequences of those desires and their pursuit, both real and imagined? In her discussion of nineteenth-century antebellum slave law, Hartman analyzes “the dynamics of enjoyment in a context in which joy and domination and use and violence could not be separated.”⁸⁴ In her view, desire and seduction are strategies of mastery as well as terms in a logic that celebrates the surrender and perfect submission of the enslaved.⁸⁵ Arlette Gautier and Joan Dayan offer subtle discussions of the conditions under which sex, desire, and love were possible, and for whom, in Old Regime French Caribbean slave societies. For Gautier, desire existed only for the master, who constituted the female slave as an object of his desire, unable to refuse herself.⁸⁶ Similarly, Dayan has analyzed what she calls the “cult of desire” in late-eighteenth-century Saint-Domingue, whereby white men were consumed with frenetic passions for slaves and especially free women of color. “No matter how degrading, how despotic the effects of slavery,” she writes, “there remained a place for love, a kind of excrescence from the everyday oppression and torture, an experience that could be named and claimed by the ‘civilized’ agents of an odious institution.”⁸⁷

This insistence on “loving” their slaves coexisted with the most extreme performances of terror, thus raising the question of the role of desire and sexuality in strategies of denial that undergirded the masters’ sense of legitimacy. On the other hand, the frequency with which masters imagined frenetic passions to reside in the slave women they subjugated and abused suggests as well their desire for sexual hegemony in the Gramscian sense, that is, a kind of power accrued through the consent of the subordinated group.⁸⁸ To examine the relation between the masters’ sexual practices and the ideologies and practices of racial domination under slavery, I embrace the psychoanalytical valences of the term *desire*. Moving beyond issues of attraction and seduction, white colonial sexuality may thus be placed in relation to individual psychology, the emotions, gender identity, filial relations, and the unconscious, all of which had a formative role in shaping individual displays of mastery, as well as the imaginary justifications for structures of racial rule in the colonies.⁸⁹ Drawing on carefully selected concepts in Freudian theory in my analysis of colonial narratives, I show that libidinal dynamics were both legible on the surface of colonial relationships and activated fantasies,

displacements, wishes, and fears in the white colonial unconscious that were no less central to the functioning of a brutal regime. Especially important here is the notion of fantasy, by which I mean the imaginary or unconscious fulfillment of a desire that is otherwise prohibited by reality or social norms. In classical psychoanalytic theory, fantasies are linked to reality in that they block out shameful memories or unpleasurable aspects of experience, and they can also play a formative or structuring role in a subject's life, behavior, and actions.⁹⁰ As I will argue, interracial sexual fantasies were the primary means through which white men legitimated their desired social and racial supremacy while at the same time repressing the brutality and sexual violence of racial slavery. At various points in my analysis, I place legal codes and discriminations enacted in the colony under scrutiny as themselves symptomatic of often unacknowledged desires, anxieties, and fantasies among the colonial elite. Finally, desire as a concept allows, in certain cases, for the careful redistribution of agency across the power dichotomy, such that slave women and free women of color may be viewed as agents and negotiators of desire, as well as victims of sexual violence.

The Libertine Colony

Through the concept of “libertinage,” the second half of this book examines the roles of desire and sexuality in mediating colonial power relations. Interestingly, the earliest appearance of the word *libertine* was in the context of a slave society, that of ancient Rome. Its etymological roots go back to the Latin *libertinus*, meaning “freed slave.” Roman law opposed this concept to *ingenuus*, or “free man,” but the true opposite of a libertine was a slave. In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France, the word referred to religious disbelief, a refusal to submit to religious authority, and immorality. Thus, the first literary movement by that name embraced an *esprit critique* characterized by skepticism, epicurism, and a critique of religious belief and dogma. This literary revolt took a philosophical turn with the emergence of *libertinage érudit*, a movement concerned with sensualist philosophy and empiricism. By the eighteenth century, this style of thought came to be known simply as “philosophy,” whereas *libertinage*, while retaining the meaning of irreligion, referred mainly to the refusal of conventional sexual morality and the unbridled pursuit of sensual pleasures. The accompanying literature celebrated gallantry and eroticism, attacked transcendental ethics, and advanced earlier inquiries into materialist philosophy.⁹¹

When deployed by representatives of church and state, *libertine* and

libertinage were almost always used to identify and proscribe practices that threatened royal power and religious authority. The title of this study, *The Libertine Colony*, refers on one hand to a central anxiety in colonial texts concerning the nature of the creolization process. From the inception of colonization to its apex in the late eighteenth century, missionaries, writers, and travelers consistently invoked the terms *libertine* and *libertinage* to describe the colonies as a space of immorality, religious heresy, violence, and sexual license. The discourse of *libertinage* was largely a reaction to what observers considered to be threatening and uncontrollable about the creolizing process as French emigrants reacted and accommodated to the cultural difference of native Caribs and imported Africans while spontaneously fashioning new identities outside the bounds of traditional authority, morality, and social codes. As early as 1640, the Jesuit missionary Jacques Bouton expressed his shock at the nearly complete lack of religious supervision on the island of Martinique: “With respect to morals, our Frenchmen are like a people almost completely abandoned by spiritual assistance, without Mass, priests, preachers, or sacraments, in too great a state of license, liberty, and impunity.”⁹² While Bouton limited most of his criticisms to religious deviants and protestants—“heretics, a handful of libertines and atheists, slow-witted and brutish minds”—other early missionaries openly criticized sexual immorality in the colonies.⁹³ For Du Tertre, both religious and sexual indiscretions had led to the bad reputation of the colonies in France, a reputation he claimed was no longer merited: “Although the licentious life of some of the first settlers [*habitants*] has disgraced the Islands and made them known as a land of *libertinage* and impiety, I can truthfully attest that God has so greatly blessed the zeal and work of the missionaries, that one will soon find as much virtue and piety there as in France.”⁹⁴ Yet Du Tertre’s self-interested optimism was belied by later observers and colonial officials, who almost universally decried the lack of public decency in the colonies. Among the most contentious and volatile issues in colonial history, sexual *libertinage* took many forms, from the traffic in Indian and European women and the taking of African slaves as wives and concubines to sordid attacks and sexual indulgences on the plantation and the libidinal excesses in colonial cities, where free women of color rivaled their white competitors for the richest white men.

In invoking the term *libertinage*, I intend not only to trace the discourse through which colonial writers criticized religious, moral, and social discipline in the Caribbean but to propose an alternative understanding of the centrality of desire and sexuality to the ideologies and practices of domina-

tion in Creole society. In this respect, I reconceive libertinage not merely as the moral deviance of particular colonial subjects but rather as a libidinal economy undergirding exploitative power relations among whites, free nonwhites, and slaves in the colonies. This understanding of libertinage relates to the literary tradition insofar as, in the libertine imagination, desire and sexuality were detached from sentiment and instrumentalized within gendered relations of power. Most famously, writers such as Crébillon and Laclos portrayed figures of a declining aristocracy, male and female, competing among themselves for pleasure, influence, and social prestige through an endless cycle of seduction, manipulation, and abandonment.⁹⁵ Voluntarily sequestered in the castle, boudoir, or monastery, fictional libertines are supremely idle, filling their time by deploying desire and pleasure to satisfy their vanity, greed, and desire for power. Critics have repeatedly made the connection between the pleasure principle and the will to power in libertine fiction, in some cases characterizing the erotic situation as a form of slavery.⁹⁶ In Peter Brooks's classic interpretation of Laclos's *Dangerous Liaisons*, eroticism among the leisure class gives rise to a conception of the group as a closed order of social conformity, "a society which has given exclusive value to games of domination and control, pursuit and enslavement, which can, in human logic, find their outcome only in the erotic relationship."⁹⁷ The Marquis de Sade in particular insisted on the mutually reinforcing relation between exploitative social relations and libertinage and broadened the parameters of the social to include relations between different classes. Yet, what is fascinating is that Sade's most horrific scenarios of terror and pleasure may have in fact been inspired by the French colonial slave societies of his time. Joan Dayan first drew attention to stunning parallels between the Sadean imaginary and colonial reality when she placed *The 120 Days of Sodom* and *Juliette* in the context of planter discourse and the infamous Code noir. As she argues, Sade's literary imaginary was fundamentally shaped by his reading of colonial discourses and histories: "Sade brought the plantation hell and its excesses into enlightenment Europe. . . . The debauchery and unbridled tyranny of Sade's libertines have their sources in the emblematic Creole planters, dedicated to the heady interests of pleasure, greed, and abandon."⁹⁸

The correspondence between the Sadean imaginary and practices of colonial subjection may be further inferred from Marcel Hénaff's analysis of *The 120 Days* as a scintillating critique of both aristocratic privilege and protoindustrial regimes of labor exploitation.⁹⁹ Though Hénaff reads mainly through a Marxist, structuralist framework, with no reference to

colonialism, he reveals the author's deep insights into the relations among desire, power, and domination, thus enabling provocative comparisons with the social order of slavery. For Hénaff, Sadean libertinage functions as a highly rationalized system of exploitation in which the *jouissance* of the one is based on the pain of the others. In Sade's libertine factory, the primary product is pleasure itself, "fabricated" through the expenditure of proletarian bodies for the benefit of the aging libertine *maitre* and his coterie of aristocrats. The master's wealth and membership in the nobility afford him an immense store of political and economic capital with which to secure an endlessly renewable sexual labor force, comprised of anonymous individuals selected for their diverse domestic and erotic tasks. In Hénaff's analysis of "the libertine proletariat," what becomes abundantly apparent is the ease with which arbitrary social relations of domination are mediated through libidinal means. In the Sadean imaginary, extreme power inequities between the nobility and their social subalterns are enacted and indeed enforced through the domination of the latter as bodies in the service of libertinage. Writes Hénaff, "Silling tells the dirty little secret about this mode of production: that masters of capital, through the factory system, become masters of bodies as well, and that the sexual exploitation of these bodies is the only logical conclusion of their industrial exploitation."¹⁰⁰

In some respects, Hénaff's reading of Sade is useful as an analytic model for thinking through the role of desire in colonial practices of domination, for only in a slave colony were the extreme scenarios envisioned by the author possible. Yet Sade's theoretical insight alone cannot account for the political and social dimensions of libertinage in the French Caribbean, where the great majority of human beings were held in perpetual bondage, sexual agency was attributed to more than one class and gender, and, as I shall argue, the reproductive consequences of informal sexual relationships greatly impacted the discourse on libertinage and the emergent social order, as well as white attitudes toward racial and gender differences. These complicating factors are evident from the testimony of contemporary travelers and colonists, who never failed to comment on one of the most shocking aspects of Creole society—the prevalence of interracial libertinage amid a system of extreme segregation based on race. Nowhere was this more apparent than in Saint-Domingue, the largest and most "prosperous" of France's sugar-producing colonies, where, according to a late-eighteenth-century Swiss traveler, Girod de Chantrons, libertinage was the main diversion and principle topic of conversation among whites after their own self-interests.¹⁰¹ From the inception of the plantation economy, colonial au-

thorities frequently denounced relations of concubinage between whites and slave women, which were discouraged by the Code noir.¹⁰² The repeated legislation passed in the eighteenth century to reiterate this law, combined with continuous denunciations by colonial officials and writers, indicates the persistence of the practice. For Baron de Wimpffen, who visited the island in the last three years before the onset of the Saint-Domingue revolution, concubinage posed one of the greatest threats to the health and survival of the white Creole populace: “Let us have morals in Saint Domingue; let the colonists, spent by villainous libertinage, instead of these black concubines—livid, yellowed, bruised—who besot and cheat them, marry women of their color, and soon enough this country will offer, to the eye of the observer, a completely different countenance.”¹⁰³

While the lack of white women during the early history of the colony surely contributed to its culture of interracial concubinage, this is an insufficient explanation for the later persistence of interracial liaisons in late-eighteenth-century Saint-Domingue, which exceeded concubinage to include various kinds of sexual relationships and intimate encounters, both coerced and consensual.¹⁰⁴ Numerous colonial narratives attest to the emergence of a veritable cult of the free mulatto woman in the eighteenth-century French Caribbean. She was deemed superior in charms, intelligence, and sexual savoir faire to white women, thus leading white men to shun women of their own race in favor of colored lovers and concubines. Whereas in the Sadean imagination libertinage was synonymous with a social relation of subjugation in which the master extracted pleasure from the other, eighteenth-century colonial representations of libertinage were much more varied in their attributions of sexual power and moral indiscretion. Despite the social relations of race, which placed women of color in a doubly subordinate position vis-à-vis white men in the island, colonial writers and observers cast interracial libertinage less as the libidinal expression of white hegemony or the abuse of the weak than as a political strategy whereby women of color accrued agency and control over whites. The usual eighteenth-century distinction between libertinage and love—sex and sentiment—was thus apparent in the widespread notion that libertinage constituted the only political weapon for those condemned by their color to live a debased existence in the shadow of white supremacy. The colonist Dubuisson, for example, decried women of color as “objects of unbridled debauchery who can inspire love and all of its frenzy, but who will never be capable of the delicate emotions of a tender heart.” Pleasure in Saint-Domingue was only physical, limited, he contended, to the “lascivious ca-

resses of these women, destined by the blemish of their birth and the color of their skin, for the dishonorable life of a woman of pleasure.”¹⁰⁵ For Girod de Chantrans, mulatto women displaced their white female rivals through a combination of nature and culture: “These women, naturally more lascivious than European women, and pleased by their influence over White men, have, in an attempt to retain it, mustered all of the voluptuousness in their power. . . . Shamelessly wanton, they have easily acquired a decided superiority in the realm of libertinage.”¹⁰⁶ Hilliard d’Auberteuil, a colonial lawyer and critic of immorality in Saint-Domingue, assessed the relative power of mulatto women in even more symbolic terms. They had, he maintained, arrogated to themselves a veritable *empire* over white men, founded on libertinage.¹⁰⁷ The colonial discourse of libertinage thus displaced much of the stigma and responsibility for the material extravagance, luxury, and debauchery of the colonies onto free women of color, at once celebrated and vilified as peons of pleasure, dedicated to cultivating the erotic excess to which “nature” predisposed them. Similarly, black slave women were designated as sexual savages ready to manipulate their white masters in their own self-interest.

Implicit in this rhetoric of libertinage was the idea that interracial intimacy was subversive to the colonial social order. Wimpffen, for one, derided colonists for what he considered to be sexual self-sabotage: “The colonist, who would blush with shame to work with his Negress, does not blush to live with her in a degree of intimacy that necessarily establishes relations of equality between them, which precedent challenges in vain.”¹⁰⁸ In raising the specter of relations of equality in the sexual as well as sentimental relations between whites and nonwhites, the colonial discourse on libertinage referenced the rigid caste system, which divided the society into slaves, free people of color, and whites. By the late eighteenth century, the colony of Saint-Domingue had one of the largest populations of free people of color in the Caribbean, with its proportion of the total free population far exceeding those of other French and English islands.¹⁰⁹ Over time, colonial courts and the royal administration subjected this group to a severe regime of legal apartheid and social dispossession that stripped them of all social privileges and political rights. Believed to have derived mainly from interracial libertinage on the plantation, free people of color (also known as mulattoes or freedmen) constituted a racially and socially diverse class made up of freed slaves and their descendants. As successful and highly educated planters, skilled laborers, business owners, slaveholders, and military leaders, the free colored population held substantial economic power, had strong roots in the

colony, and by the end of the century owned as many as one-third of all slaves.¹¹⁰ As such, members of the free colored elite aspired to join the ruling class of whites and desired access to titles of nobility, political offices, and full civil and political rights. Throughout the eighteenth century, the colonial order in Saint-Domingue responded with an increasingly stringent segregative order founded on notions of racial purity. Barred from the legal and medical professions, free people of color were forbidden to wear luxurious attire, use the names of whites, gather for celebrations, sit at the same table with whites, go to Europe, and even play European games. In addition, mulattoes were coerced into special units of the colonial militia charged with the pursuit of runaway slaves, internal policing, and the general defense of the colony. And, whereas in the seventeenth century and the early eighteenth there were no restrictions on interracial marriage, the second half of the century saw a proliferation of social penalties against whites who committed the misdeed of *mésalliance* (marrying a nonwhite person). The irony of such legal discrimination in the presence of unbridled sexual libertinage was not lost on Baron Wimpffen, who remarked sardonically that the social abjection of free people of color “prevents them from cultivating with whites relationships close enough not for sleeping together, but for eating at the same table.”¹¹¹

In *Haiti, History, and the Gods*, Joan Dayan offers a riveting description of the colonial contest for love and luxury in Saint-Domingue, in particular the ways in which a system of terror gave rise to the most tumultuous passions and public displays of lust, envy, and love. Building on these insights, my theory of libertinage establishes a relation between the two most distinctive and seemingly contradictory features of Creole society—the extreme racial segregation and discrimination that resulted in a rigid three-tiered caste system, on one hand, and interracial intimacies and boundary crossing, both coerced and consensual, on the other. Rather than viewing the coincidence of racially exclusionary law and interracial libertinage as a contradiction, I consider these phenomena to be mutually reinforcing and constitutive of the system of white supremacy and racial domination that shaped French slave societies. Several questions motivate this inquiry. What roles did gender and sexuality play in regimes of bodily discipline and racial repression? In what ways did the law of exclusion respond to the phenomena of colonial desire, libertinage, and *métissage*? How much did white supremacist ideologies accommodate colonial practices of interracial desire, sexuality, and reproduction, and how much did they repress them? My point in retaining the disparaging term *libertinage* is to stress that whatever their affective di-

mensions, these relationships were overdetermined by the broader system of racial subjugation and gender oppression in the colony and in turn impacted it. While many historians accept that slavery involved a system of sexual domination, there has been little attempt to analyze the specific discourses, fantasies, and mentalities underlying interracial sexual practices and much less to relate these to the logics of racial discrimination and segregation that characterized slave societies in the Caribbean.¹¹²

Central to my analysis is the signal irony of a repressive tripartite racial caste system in which the middle group is considered by the ruling caste (white) to be the result of sexual union with the inferior caste (black). I argue that such prejudice implicated the ruling class itself and in particular its role in the biological reproduction of colonial society. Laws of exclusion, by restricting the political, economic, and social opportunities of free people of color, also functioned to displace anxiety about the conditions of their production—interracial sexuality, and libertinage—away from the white minority. At the same time, the colonial regime of racial exclusion enabled the white elite and colonial administration to suppress the multiple ties—sexual, emotional, affective, and filial—that bound them to the subordinated classes, both slaves and free people of color. My argument is based on an interpretation of the languages, discourses, and rhetoric through which sexual libertinage was articulated, together with ideas about racial difference, throughout colonial history. This has meant abandoning certain assumptions that underlie descriptive accounts of legal discrimination against free people of color in French slave societies. Whereas historians often attribute the systematized racial prejudice in the French colonies to whites' fears about the threat free nonwhites posed to their supremacy, social scientists have analyzed it as the inevitable response to the mulatto's subversion of the socioracial binary between black slaves and white masters that collapses racial difference onto social status (black = slave, white = free).¹¹³ Jean-Luc Bonniol, after Yvan Debbasch, suggests that prejudice represented whites' mode of reacting against the internal threat posed by mulattoes to the Manichaean order of racial slavery, thus revealing the contradictions posed by the practice of manumission, on one hand, and métissage on the other. Writes Bonniol: "This model of biracial slavery is marred by two internal contradictions, leading to the appearance of a third term, unexpected at the start and destabilizing the initial structure"¹¹⁴

In my view, this argument goes awry in supposing a stable Manichaean order of race and status that preexisted métissage and that it in turn upset. In contrast, I suggest that métissage and the consolidation of racial determin-

ism within slavery occurred simultaneously and thus fundamentally influenced ideologies of race and status that evolved within and have since been largely accepted as natural to that institution.¹¹⁵ My perspective is informed by Robert Young's insight into the relation between nineteenth-century scientific racism and fantasies of libidinal boundary crossing. Young argues that insofar as theories of racial difference stood or fell on the basis of claims about the fertility of the product of interracial union, debates about race "focused explicitly on the issue of sexuality and the issue of sexual unions between whites and blacks."¹¹⁶ Polygenetic propositions that collapsed "race" into species thus belied an obsession with interracial sex and hybridity, what Young calls "colonial desire." I expand on Young's analysis by considering the reproductive implications of colonial desire in a slave society. The emergence of ideas of racial difference in the French slave colonies contributed to the formation of juridically actionable categories of exclusion that over time enabled the emergence of a tripartite racial caste society. I argue that this process of exclusion and the resultant social condition of the colonial mixed-race population represent the response by colonial authorities to interracial libertinage. In particular, it represents their attempt to control and manage the consequences of sexual relationships between free Europeans and captive Africans and later between whites and nonwhites, slave and free. Taken together, the coexistence of segregationism and libertinage typifies a critical ambivalence in the colonies between whites' obsession with and disavowal of interracial sexual union.¹¹⁷

My first contention, therefore, is that the coincidence of unbridled interracial libertinage and an extreme segregationist regime reflected both the extent of white anxieties about interracial sex and the efforts of colonial authorities to punish, displace, and suppress such practices. Reading legal and narrative discourses of miscegenation, I trace the emergence of racial prejudice and discrimination against persons of mixed race to a central ambiguity in official discourse as to the licitness or illicitness of sex between slaves and free people. I argue that discriminatory legislation figured free people of color as the illegitimate children of white men and slave women and functioned to displace onto them the anxieties of the dominant class about interracial libertinage. Making illegitimate children taboo meant not only defining them in terms of immorality, concupiscence, and sexual savagery; it also meant making them forbidden, untouchable, and unclean, capable of polluting white society if allowed any elite social privileges, political offices, or conjugal ties to whites. In Saint-Domingue, the very word

mulatto became synonymous with notions of illegitimacy and immorality, which in turn justified the treatment of the entire class of free people of color as tabooed objects of social reprobation. The stereotype of the mulatto woman voluptuary is symptomatic of the mechanisms of displacement and repression whereby whites both acknowledged colonial desire and libertinage and displaced it onto the interracial other. What is fascinating is the radical circularity of this system of desire and exclusion, for the very exclusionary measures that indirectly punished the unbridled libertinage also enabled its continuance through the legal impunity of desiring white men. The astonishing “truth” of the libertine colony is that the law of exclusion ensured both the sexual and political hegemony of white men.

My second contention concerns the specific fantasies through which the white elite configured their sexual and racial dominance in highly allegorical ethnographic accounts of colonial society. Central here is the invariable conflict between sexual libertinage and the phenomenon of interracial reproduction, which, regardless of its causes, both benefited whites and posed a threat to their rule. This ambivalence is apparent in the ways in which they figured colonial society in terms of a metaphor of filiation. I argue that in the libertine colony the identity and sense of political legitimacy of the white elite depended on an imaginary conception of colonial society as an interracial family. Whereas in the case of exclusionary legislation the implicit narrative of filiation functioned to displace the taboo of *métissage* onto the class of free people of color considered to derive from it, in the late eighteenth century many whites in positions of authority actively and openly embraced familial metaphors of the social order in order to capitalize ideologically on colonial libertinage and its reproductive effects. This was arguably a response to the drastic demographic imbalances of late-eighteenth-century Saint-Domingue, as whites began to view free coloreds as their only protection against the mass of slaves. Imaginary constructions of the filial or libidinal relation between ethno-classes thus functioned as fantasies that enabled the white elite to deny relations of force, coercion, and violence between masters and slaves and to naturalize its political authority over subjugated classes on the island. Essential to this fantasy was the suggestion that white men could control the reproductive implications of their libidinal relations with nonwhite women, slave and free. In colonial ethnographies and racial taxonomies, white men were cast as the symbolic fathers of both the slaves and free people of color, capable of producing the latter through their sexual commerce with slave women. In the work of Moreau

de Saint-Méry and others, slave women were positioned as the sexual subordinates of white men and the mothers of slaves as well as free people of color.

Moreau's text suggests as well the incestuous underpinnings of white Creole ideologies of desire and reproduction in French Caribbean slave societies. I argue that Moreau's racial theory is representative of a larger fantasy informing colonial slavery in the Caribbean and elsewhere, which is a fantasy of incestuous family romance. In a society in which white men placed themselves in the position of symbolic fathers of all the races, and biological fathers of free people of color in particular, while at the same time erecting a cult of desire around mixed-race women and fantasizing their effective sterility, the structure of interracial desire was decidedly incestuous. The question thus arises as to the importance of incest as an acknowledged or repressed sexual narrative of racial slavery in Saint-Domingue and the extent to which incestuous fantasies impacted the discourses and practices of desire and subjection in the colony. Drawing on psychoanalysis, anthropology, libertine fiction, and literary research on slave societies, I theorize the role of incest in the sexual order of racial slavery, while testing the limitations of available scholarly understandings of incest and its prohibition.

* * *

Although the theory of the libertine colony is articulated in the last three chapters of the book, all chapters address the various valences of the term *libertinage* invoked by writers and observers to characterize creolization in the early French Caribbean. The organization of the book is both thematic and chronological and reflects the shifting relations between French settlers and the three other main population groups in the Caribbean—Island Caribs, African captives, and free people of color—over time. Through a historically contextualized interpretation of narrative sources, I examine these relations around specific topics that represent especially productive points of exchange and/or subjection at particular junctures in colonial history such as religion, culture, race, and slavery.

The first chapter concerns seventeenth-century missionary representations of the encounter between French settlers and the indigenous people present at the time of colonization, the Island Caribs. Here I depart from the tendency to critique early modern colonial narratives either as self-referential constructions of the French cultural imaginary or as ideologically coded misrepresentations of the colonial other. The challenge in reading early colonial accounts is to see what they reveal, wittingly and unwittingly,

about French attitudes toward the relation, or border, between the French and the Caribs at a specific time and place. In particular, I analyze the tension in missionary narratives between representations of violence toward and desire for the other, that is, between stories of war and the ideology of conversion and incorporation of the Caribs into the French social body. Through readings of the missionaries Du Tertre, Breton, the protestant Rochefort, and a host of minor writers, I argue that the border of violence is discernible in the kinds of information recorded about the Caribs and that this representation in turn suggests the kinds of exchanges—cultural, linguistic, material, and religious—that took place between the French and the Caribs. Yet, whereas the border is always implied in French representations of the Caribs, it is itself fundamentally unrepresentable except in the remarkable genre of the dictionary, which escapes the logic of incorporation that absorbs the other into the time and story of the same. Drawing on the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin and Emmanuel Levinas, I examine Raymond Breton's *Dictionnaire français-caràibe* as the quintessential border text, one that offers the possibility of nonhegemonic readings of colonial encounters.

Chapter 2 deals with the representation of creolization among whites of different ethnic and class origins, whose migration to the colonies resulted in dramatic changes on the levels of culture and social identification. Narratives by the pirate writer Alexandre-Olivier Oexmelin and the Dominican missionaries Du Tertre and Labat suggest the extent to which colonial settlers resisted the social order imagined by colonial authorities and representatives of the church. Anarchy, piracy, irreligion, and social travesty were only some of the behaviors writers attempted to both describe and disparage. Through the concept of “white noble savagery,” I theorize the seemingly contradictory impulse among colonists toward lawlessness, libertinage, and freedom from social norms, on one hand, and a desire for social promotion and class ascension on the other. I read the two most diametrically opposed social activities in the seventeenth-century Caribbean—piracy and plantation agriculture—as fundamentally similar performances of nobility and aristocratic privilege denied to the lower classes in France. Finally, I relate the tendency toward social travesty, reinvention, and cross-dressing in the colonies to the parallel move by writers and colonial authorities to regulate colonial access to social rewards and noble status. Narratives written from the perspective of colonial authority counteract the varied and unstable colonial performances of nobility with an ideology of production, domesticity, and military service to the king.

In chapter 3, I explore the colonial spirit world on the basis of repeated

associations in narrative sources among supernatural beliefs, violence, and sensuality. The central contention here is that narratives of the spirit world serve as allegories of relationships found in the material world. Through the concept of “colonial demonology,” I first consider the ways in which missionaries such as Du Tertre, Breton, and Labat adapted early modern discourses of witchcraft to describe the unfamiliar beliefs and spiritual practices of Caribs and Africans. Beginning with an examination of the figure of the suffering, abused body in missionary narratives, discourses of salvation and colonial slave law, I move on to a libertine rewriting of demonology’s obsession with the body to exploit its erotic subtext. The first colonial novel in French, *Le Zombi du Grand-Pérou*, satirizes white colonial spirit beliefs as both creolized and dedicated to the interests of sexual libertinage. In this respect, the novel offers insight into the relationship between regimes of bodily discipline and libertine sexual practices. I show that, through the figure of the “*zombi*,” Pierre-Corneille Blessebois documents the syncretic nature of white colonial beliefs while at the same time exposing the ease with which the colonial elite transformed modalities of colonial violence into libertine fantasies of desire.

Chapters 4 and 5 constitute a detailed analysis of the libertine colony, that is, the system of desire and exclusion whereby the white male elite secured a position of sexual and political hegemony. Chapter 4 deals with the relationship among desire, miscegenation, and the law as seen in legal codes and narrative discourses in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. More specifically, I argue that the presence of a family metaphor at the heart of the juridical discourse of race prejudice suggests that the development of a caste society in the Caribbean colonies reflected an attempt by whites to manage the many consequences (political, biological, affective) of interracial libertinage in the interest of white supremacy. Drawing on Freud’s notion of taboo, I show that, although the law originally declared sex between free men and slave women to be a crime, colonial authorities gradually shifted responsibility and the burden of punishment onto both slave women and, importantly, their mulatto offspring. Colonial discourse and the law thus transferred the stigma of immorality, forbidden interracial desires, and pathological sexuality onto the growing population of mixed-race persons, leaving the desiring white male subjects free from legal retribution. In addition, as free people of color were legally assigned second-class status below the white elite, antimanumission laws proliferated, thus shutting down avenues for black female entitlement. Reading exclusionary measures against

works by Hilliard d'Auberteuil, Girod de Chantrans, Baron Wimpffen, and others, I argue that these laws displaced anxiety about white involvement in continuing relations of métissage which bound members of different colors and social stations, while at the same time ensuring that no social rewards devolved to free people of color or slaves. Late-eighteenth-century representations of the mulatto woman served this system by projecting onto her the debauchery, luxury, and excess that marked the libertine colony in the minds of colonials and travelers alike. In this sense, I show that segregationism was driven largely by the efforts of colonial authorities to repress white libertinage and control its social effects.

In chapter 5, I build on the thesis of the libertine colony by exploring the relation between interracial libertinage and white Creole identity in the work of the most important colonial writer and Creole political figure of the eighteenth century, Moreau de Saint-Méry. An Enlightenment thinker, lawyer, colonial historian, political activist, and author of the massive *Description . . . de la partie française de l'isle Saint-Domingue*, published in 1797, Moreau self-consciously represented his voice and that of the white elite of Saint-Domingue. In examining the ethnographic portion of this work and its extensive racial taxonomy, I argue that narratives of sexuality, reproduction, and filiation functioned in the colonial imagination to veil relations of force, coercion, and violence between social castes and to naturalize white authority over those whom they subordinated. Thus, in Moreau's ethnographic portrait of colonial society, Creole identity is collapsed onto the idea of métissage and the entire social edifice of colonial society is viewed through a metaphor of desire and filiation. Moving on to the racial taxonomy, I contend that the racial text is a privileged site for the inscription of covert or unconscious fantasies of desire and reproduction, as well as the invariable conflict in the white Creole imagination between the desire for sexual hegemony and the fear of proliferating numbers of free people of color. In my interpretation, Moreau's reproductive hypothesis solves the dilemma by revising Enlightenment notions of race and fertility. Through the figure of the sterile mulatto woman, Moreau fantasizes an end to the "rule of consequence"—reproduction—even as he exposes the incestuous underpinning of the structures of interracial desire in colonial discourse. While white Creole men vest their authority in their sexual power and the corollary idea of symbolic (if not biological) paternity over subordinate classes, at the same time they greatly eroticize their "daughters," those stereotypical mulatto voluptuaries who dominate colonial fantasies. I argue that the en-

ture pattern of desire and sexuality in colonial representations is essentially incestuous and raises questions about the ability of slave societies to uphold the incest taboo. Drawing on anthropological, psychoanalytical, and libertine representations of incest, I propose a theory of incestuous “family romance” in Saint-Domingue through which to reinterpret mechanisms of exclusion and social control in late-eighteenth-century Saint-Domingue.