



The Secret History of the Early American Novel: Leonora Sansay and Revolution in Saint Domingue

Author(s): Elizabeth Maddock Dillon

Source: *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, Vol. 40, No. 1/2, The Early American Novel (Fall, 2006 - Spring, 2007), pp. 77-103

Published by: Duke University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40267685>

Accessed: 29-03-2016 05:04 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://about.jstor.org/terms>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Duke University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*

<http://www.jstor.org>

The Secret History of the Early American Novel: Leonora Sansay and Revolution in Saint Domingue

ELIZABETH MADDOCK DILLON

Narratives Foreign and Domestic

The opening sentence of Leonora Sansay's epistolary novel, *Secret History: or, The Horrors of St. Domingo* (1808), frames an opposition between the life of the physical body and that of the social body: "We arrived safely [in Saint Domingue] ... after a passage of forty days, during which I suffered horribly from sea-sickness, heat and confinement; but the society of my fellow-passengers was so agreeable that I often forgot the inconvenience to which I was exposed" (61). One might note the tonal discrepancy between the first half of the sentence, which describes the travails of a sea voyage of biblical length and duress, and the second half of the sentence, which blithely dismisses the pains of the flesh in favor of the pleasures of sociability. An incongruity of experiential registers thus marks the opening of the novel, and while this incongruity asserts itself as slightly jarring initially, it becomes increasingly pronounced and disturbing as the novel unfolds. Indeed, the contrast embedded within the opening sentence augments hyperbolically throughout the novel such that within a few short pages we find scenes of bayoneted bodies interspersed with accounts of blushing glances exchanged at balls in the colonial palaces of Saint Domingue.

Sansay's novel takes the form of a series of letters written by an American woman, Mary, to her intimate friend, Aaron Burr, then vice president of the United States. Mary, and her sister, Clara, travel to Saint Domingue in 1802 with Clara's French husband, St. Louis, in the hopes of regaining the estate he had lost during the early years of the Haitian Revolution.¹ As a "secret history," the novel has its roots in the dalliance between its American-born author, Leonora Sansay, and Aaron Burr. Like the primary correspondent in the novel, Mary, Sansay was a close friend of Aaron Burr's and most likely his lover as well. Like Mary's fictional sister, Clara, Sansay was married to a French colonial from Saint Domingue, Louis Sansay, and the novel is loosely based on Leonora Sansay's

¹ The Haitian Revolution began in 1791 and ended with the creation of the first free black republic in the west in 1804. During the thirteen years of the revolution, French, British, and Spanish troops in a dizzying number of shifting alliances and oppositions fought white creole populations, free persons of color, and slave factions. In 1800, the famous black leader, Toussaint Louverture gained control of the island as a whole, but in 1801, the French General, Charles Victor Emmanuel Leclerc, dispatched to Saint Domingue by Napoleon to reassert French control there, captured Toussaint and sent him to France. In Sansay's novel, Mary and her sister arrive in Le Cap Français while Leclerc is in command. For recent accounts of the revolution, see Dubois, Fick, and Geggus (*Haitian and Impact*).

experience in Saint Domingue during the years 1802-03.² On a first reading, the novel seems to give scant attention to the cataclysmic events of the Haitian revolution, the complex politics of race and colonial power, and the often horrific scenes of warfare that took place during the very years of the novel's exposition. Indeed, given Sansay's predilection for descriptive accounts of, for instance, the "innumerable lustres of chrystal and wreaths of natural flowers ... and rose and orange trees, in full blossom" transported aboard a French naval ship in the harbor of Saint Domingue's Le Cap Français to form the backdrop of the Admiral's ball (74), it would be easy to dismiss the novel and its characters as exemplary of an aristocratic, "fiddling while Rome burns" disposition. That is, the novel would seem to primarily detail the excesses of a colonial regime that is willfully out of touch with the life and death brutalities of the colonial slave system that engendered the revolt occurring outside the doors of its gilded fantasy world of luxury and dissipation. But in what follows, I argue that the focus of the novel on elite, white domestic relations against the backdrop of warfare over colonial race slavery does not bespeak sustained delusion (or colonial nostalgia) so much as an astute analysis of the relations of production and social reproduction that stand at the core of colonial politics. Just as striking as the initial disparity between the narrative of domestic intrigue and that of anti-colonial revolution is the extent to which the two strands of narrative cross, recross, and displace one another as the novel unfolds.

Sansay's novel has been largely ignored by scholars of early American literature; Cathy Davidson, for instance, does not include *Secret History or the Horrors of St. Domingo* in her influential account of the early American novel, *Revolution and the Word*. One might imagine that this is the case because the novel does not fit well within the nationalizing analytics of Davidson's critical model—a model according to which, "individual conflict [in the novel] becomes a metonym for national conflict and private vice a synonym for the corruption of the polity" (6). Sansay's narrator writes both within and without the frame of the nation state: identifying herself as a native Philadelphian, she nonetheless is at home in a variety of colonial locations in the West Indies (as, indeed, were many Philadelphians of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century). In the twenty years since the publication of Davidson's monograph, the field of early American studies has shifted away from the critical framework of the nation state in favor of a variety of alternative defining terms, including transatlanticism, colonialism, and hemispheric studies—all frameworks that capture, in different ways, the fact

² There is not a wealth of biographical information available about Leonora Sansay who is also known by the name of Mary Hassal. Michael Drexler's introduction to *Secret History* gives a useful and comprehensive account of Sansay's career. See also Dayan, Lapsansky, and Vietto. Sansay did not accompany her sister to Saint Domingue, but rather traveled there with her husband. Thus the most apparent fictionalized aspect of Sansay's own history as redacted in the novel is the split between Clara and Mary—a split that enables Sansay to refashion her persona in the form of two characters rather than one. While this split is clearly fictional, it also derives from what is apparently a rhetorical ploy within Sansay's own correspondence with Aaron Burr, in which she describes the exploits of a figure named "Clara" (presumably a code name for herself) in Saint Domingue. A copy of the letter to Burr in which she uses this name is included in Drexler's new edition of *Secret History* (224-31).

that early American literature might be best understood in terms of a geopolitics of European colonialism and developing world capitalism that preceded and accompanied the national revolutions in the Atlantic world of the eighteenth century. Despite changes in the shape of the field of early American studies as a whole, however, the framework of the nation-state has remained remarkably persistent with respect to the literary form of the novel in particular.³ In this essay, I argue not only that the correspondence between nation and novel in early America should be reconsidered, but, furthermore, that the specific means of doing so should involve attending to what I describe as colonial and creole social reproduction. Readings of the novel in relation to the singular frame of the nation state obscure what is perhaps most interesting about the early American novel—namely, its complex relation to a variety of colonial, post-colonial, and transnational geopolitical formations that were constitutive with respect to the vexed and often less-than-coherent formulations of the “domestic” in the early national period.

As do a host of other early American novels, Sansay’s fiction concerns fractured domestic scenes marked by seduction, extra-marital sex, gothic violence, and failed family formation. Yet a brief account of the twisting plot of the novel indicates the somewhat different significance such scenes acquire when staged in the explicitly colonial, rather than early national, geographical space of the West Indies. After the sisters arrive in Saint Domingue, Mary descants primarily upon the trials of Clara in her marriage to St. Louis and her romantic conquests among the leading officers of the French army. The novel turns a sympathetic eye toward Clara’s coquetting ways, demonstrating repeatedly that her husband’s undeveloped sensibilities match poorly with Clara’s beauty, refined taste, and social graces. But the travails of the coquette assume a particularly dramatic cast in the arena of colonial warfare, and indeed, become themselves a form of warfare in terms that are at once figurative and literal. Thus, for example, Clara, in winning the eye of the French general, Donatien Marie Joseph de Rochambeau, experiences a “flush of triumph” (75); the application of martial language to

³ The endurance of the nation-novel equation may be attributable as much to the force of Benedict Anderson’s widely cited account of the constitutive relation between nationalism and the novel as to Davidson’s founding scholarship. Nonetheless, in the wake of Davidson’s volume, critics such as Julia Stern, Shirley Samuels, and Elizabeth Barnes have discerned in the fractured tales of incest, seduction, and infanticide that typify early American fiction a meta-narrative of nation-formation in which the family and its difficult domestic formulations stand as figures for the new nation. In the introduction to her new edition of *Revolution and the Word*, Cathy Davidson provides an extensive account of shifts in the field of early American studies, but she ultimately does not back away from her commitment to the conceptual apparatus of the nation so much as indicate that the category of nationhood is one that, at the current moment, would require more analysis and definition than she had set forth at the time of the original argument. In other words, as she astutely suggests, the term “nation” may have itself appeared to be a more coherent critical category twenty years ago than it seems to be today. Notable recent exceptions to scholarship that seeks the shape of the nation in early American fiction can be found in Drexler’s essay on Sansay and Charles Brockden Brown (“Brigands and Nuns”) and Tennenhouse’s recent book, *The Importance of Feeling English*, which argues that political and cultural identity do not coincide in early America—rather, early Americans sought to retain a cultural Britishness despite their geographical and later political removal from England.

domestic narrative later reaches a pitch when Clara's battle with her husband over attending a ball is described as one that will "decide forever the empire of the party that conquers" (81). Metaphorically, then, love is colonial warfare. Yet the love plot assumes more materially violent dimensions when St. Louis imprisons Clara in their home and threatens to kill her if she leaves. When the forces of the black leader, General Jean-Jacques Dessalines, approach Le Cap, Rochambeau exploits the occasion to invite Clara to safety aboard a French naval ship—an offer she declines out of fear of incurring her husband's jealousy and wrath. More pressing for Clara than the soon-to-be-realized threat of the massacre of all the white residents of Le Cap by black revolutionary forces is thus the threat of being murdered at the hands of her white husband. Yet colonial warfare ultimately offers Clara a surprising escape route from her husband: as Le Cap falls under siege, Mary reports, "All the women are suffered to depart, but no man can procure a passport" (105). Mary and Clara are able leave Saint Domingue and to escape from St. Louis by traveling to Cuba and later Jamaica in the company of other women uprooted by the war and dispersed across a colonial Caribbean landscape. The violence of patriarchy in the novel is thus clearly related to that of colonialism and race politics, a pairing underscored by the formation of a quasi-utopic community of unhusbanded creole women at the close of the novel.

Like Hannah Webster Foster's *Coquette*—a novel often read as allegorical of the need for public "virtue" in the early days of United States nationhood—Sansay's novel thus explores a community of women who must negotiate the complexities of heterosexual, marital ties. The community of white colonial and creole women who are displaced by the force of revolution are rendered husbandless and unpropertied by the overthrow of colonial rule, but Sansay's novel represents this change of circumstances as fundamentally liberatory for the women involved. Whereas *The Coquette* centers around the work of finding a husband—securing marital attachment—Sansay's *Secret History* thus centers primarily on effecting escape from the violent authority of husbands or slipping the knot of marital attachment. Despite the evident distinctions between Sansay's *Secret History* and Foster's more canonized *Coquette*, a number of intriguing similarities are in evidence as well—similarities that point toward the contours of an Atlantic colonial analysis of the early American novel. The national allegory model that has pride of place in interpretive accounts of the early American novel is, interestingly, almost the obverse of the "secret history" or *roman à clef*. While the secret history finds that private relations serve as the real source of public history, the national allegory model proposes that the true meaning of private drama is located at the level of public history. Thus, for instance, in *The Coquette*, Eliza Wharton's sexual virtue is often viewed as allegorical of the national, political virtue required in the new republic. In Sansay's secret history, the politics of French colonial warfare are recast as dictated by hidden, private desires that circulate among the characters. Yet both the secret history and the national allegory posit a structural relation between the public and the private: each genre privileges a different pole as the primary location of meaning, but both foreground the necessary opposition and dependence of one set of

meanings upon the other.⁴ Thus both novels explore the troubled relations of sex and gender that inform the domestic sphere and indicate that these relations have a bearing on the politics of the larger community as well. Yet in Sansay's case, the shape of the larger community—and the question of whether that community will be national, imperial, or cosmopolitan; free or enslaved; native, creole, or European—remains as marked by uncertainty as does the shape of a happy marriage. As such, Sansay disarticulates cultural production from nationalism: rather, private desire and Atlantic colonial politics become entwined in the novel in such a way as to demonstrate that both production (control of the enslaved or free labor generating the coveted riches of the sugar colonies) and social reproduction (mating, marriage, and inheritance) are matters of life and death that mutually inform one another. In this essay, I thus turn to the relation of social reproduction and production not simply as a model for analyzing Sansay's intriguing novel, but as a means of analyzing the early American novel as a genre that stands within a geopolitical framework distinct from that of U.S. nationalism—namely, that of Atlantic colonialism and creole empire.⁵

Social Reproduction and Colonial Geographies

When Sansay's narrator, Mary, arrives in Saint Domingue with her sister, the city of Le Cap is under the control of General Charles Victor Emmanuel Leclerc, the brother-in-law of Napoleon.⁶ In 1801, Napoleon dispatched General Leclerc to Saint Domingue together with thirty thousand soldiers to re-establish white control of the island. Historians describe the Leclerc expedition to Saint Domingue as the largest and "perhaps the most ill-fated" military expedition that had ever set sail from France.⁷ Although Toussaint Louverture was captured by the French

⁴ See McKeon for a discussion of the relation between the *roman à clef* and allegorical modes of novelistic fiction as well as, more broadly, the relation between the genre of the "secret history" and the domestic nature of the novel.

⁵ I use the term "creole" here and throughout the essay to refer specifically to individuals of non-New World descent born in the New World; accordingly, I use the term "creole" to describe both whites and blacks who are born in the Americas rather than Europe or Africa. For further discussion of the etymology and usage of the term "creole," see section four, below.

⁶ Some clarification of terminology may be helpful here: when Columbus settled the first Europeans on the island, he named it "Hispaniola"; the Spanish port city on the island was known as Santo Domingo. The island remained in the possession of the Spaniards until a French colony was created on the western third of the island in 1697 that went by the name of "Saint Domingue" as distinct from the still extant Spanish city of Santo Domingo. The Spanish colony on the island would later become the Dominican Republic, while French Saint Domingue was renamed "Haiti" (after an indigenous Arawak name) following the revolution. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers in the U.S. typically referred to the French colony of Saint Domingue as "St. Domingo" (just as Sansay does in the title of her novel). To avoid confusion between Spanish and French colonies, I use the term "Saint Domingue" throughout this essay to refer to the French colony on the island before the Haitian revolution.

⁷ See Zuckerman 136. In 1801, the famous black leader, Toussaint Louverture, had successfully gained control of the whole of the island of Hispaniola, but it is worth underscoring that he had done so in the name of France; nominally, at least, he governed Saint Domingue as a loyal citizen of the French Republic. During the French Revolution, the Jacobin controlled National

and sent to die in prison in France, Leclerc himself would die within less than a year of his arrival in Saint Domingue, as would twenty-four thousand French troops who arrived during that year. Black revolutionary forces were galvanized by the news that the French had re-established slavery on the island of Guadeloupe and under the leadership of Jean-Jacques Dessalines they exacted heavy losses from the French, as did yellow fever. Yet neither the ravages of disease among the French nor the daily news of the atrocities of the war appear to make a strong impression on the narrator of Sansay's novel. Rather, what sets Mary's epistolary energies in motion is the desire to render an account of the activities of General Leclerc's wife, Pauline, the beautiful sister of Napoleon.

When Mary accepts an invitation to visit Madame Leclerc at her home in the hills, she finds the first lady of the island languishing in the absence of metropolitan social life, and thus engaged, in a seemingly compensatory fashion, in a flirtation with one General Boyer:

[Madame Leclerc] was in a room darkened by Venetian blinds, lying on her sofa, from which she half rose to receive me. When I was seated she reclined again on the sofa and amused general Boyer, who sat at her feet, by letting her slipper fall continually, which he respectfully put on as often as it fell. She is small, fair, with blue eyes and flaxen hair. Her face is expressive of sweetness but without spirit. She has a voluptuous mouth, and is rendered interesting by an air of languor which spreads itself over her whole frame. She was dressed in a muslin morning gown, with a Madras handkerchief on her head. (64-65)

Most strikingly, we might note that at a historical moment during which French, African, creole, white, and black persons were dying by the thousands from disease and war around her, Pauline Leclerc, as described in Sansay's novel, seems in danger of dying of boredom on the island of Saint Domingue. Again, then, the novel indicates that the exigencies of physical survival are superseded or shunted aside by those of the social world in a manner that appears stunningly superficial. Indeed, the entirety of the French military mobilization in Saint Domingue is recast by Sansay in terms of marital and domestic drama: according to Mary's report in the same letter, the attack of Napoleon on the island is motivated by the fact that he had given his sister Pauline the island as her "marriage portion" and her husband has been sent to secure it for her. War is further recast as the less significant backdrop to affairs of the heart in this description of Madame Leclerc as General Boyer trades his martial office for the apparently more significant labor of repeatedly placing a slipper on the foot of the princess-like Pauline.

Assembly had abolished slavery in the French colonies in 1794, in part to enlist the assistance of black revolutionary forces on Saint Domingue in the French fight against the British for colonial control of the island. When Napoleon gained control of France in 1799, however, he was evidently wary of the power amassed by Toussaint and laid plans to re-establish French white authority in Saint Domingue, to eradicate blacks from positions of political and military leadership on the island, and to reinstate slavery in the French colonies of the West Indies. For further discussion of Leclerc's expedition see Zuckerman and Girard.

In her description of Madame Leclerc, Mary clearly casts a sardonic eye on this aristocratic scene. However, the nature of Mary's censoriousness is intriguing: rather than condemn Madame Leclerc for her inattention to the politics of war and the realities of race slavery, Mary censors her for her incapacity to create a social life for herself in the colony:

[Madame Leclerc] has one child, a lovely boy, three years old, of which she appears very fond. But for a young and beautiful woman, accustomed to the sweets of adulation, and the intoxicating delights of Paris, certainly the transition to this country, in its present state, has been too violent. She has no society, no amusement, and never having imagined that she would be forced to seek an equivalent for either in the resources of her own mind, she has made no provision for such an unforeseen emergency. (67)

The "emergency" that Madame Leclerc has not foreseen is evidently not one of life and death, but one of social amusement, or, one might say, social reproduction. On the one hand, Madame Leclerc has indeed reproduced biologically in bearing a son, but her capacity to find a role for herself and for her son—to survive socially if not physically on the island—seems to stand in jeopardy of failure.

Analyzing this scene in terms of social reproduction points to larger stakes than simply the failure to have a social life that plagues Madame Leclerc. The term "social reproduction" derives from a Marxist tradition and refers to the work of reproducing the relations of production of capitalism, most particularly reproducing laborers themselves. In the hands of theorists such as Louis Althusser or Pierre Bourdieu, reproducing the relations of production involves the work of ideology or, more broadly, the disciplinary effects of culture in shaping subjects who will serve to keep the operations of capitalism up and running. In the hands of feminist Marxists, however, social reproduction has taken on a more specific cast: insofar as social reproduction refers quite literally to the labor of reproducing the work force, it refers to a labor that is primarily borne by women—be this the labor of childbirth or that of non-waged domestic work performed in the private sphere of the home that is crucial to sustaining the life of the waged labor force. Understood in these terms, the activities of elite women in Saint Domingue assume a significance beyond that of demonstrating colonial excess—rather, they begin to dovetail with the questions at stake in the war that Generals Leclerc and Dessalines are prosecuting on the island—questions of *who* will reproduce and *what* will be produced that are biological as well as economic and political.

In literary terms, social reproduction is closely linked to the history and form of the novel: indeed, it seems plausible to argue that the genre of the novel is, in its eighteenth-century origins, centrally concerned with precisely the question of social reproduction—that is, with the question of how the family might best reproduce itself under the conditions of capitalism. Theorists of the English novel including critics such as Nancy Armstrong, Christopher Flint, Catherine Gallagher, Franco Moretti, and Ellen Pollak have propounded widely varied

accounts of the eighteenth-century novel that nonetheless fall within the capacious rubric of social reproduction: all of these critics demonstrate that social norms surrounding matchmaking and marriage shifted dramatically in this period as the British economy changed from a feudal, agrarian base to a mobile, commercial system of exchange. Ellen Pollak argues, for instance, that the rise of commerce and mobile property was linked to shifting norms of marriage and family formation: "Sexual exchange in England had traditionally worked to preserve a relatively fixed social hierarchy or kinship system in which power was a function more of lineage than of cash, but in the eighteenth century its role in the acquisition and transmission of property sustained it as an integral part of a social context characterized by class mobility as well" (115). The increased importance of mobile over landed property is thus associated with new models of marriage and revisions to the social rules governing the exchange of women; moreover, as both Armstrong and Gallagher point out, eighteenth-century novels served as veritable how-to-guides for readers intent on learning whom to desire as suitable marriage partners in a world where the bottom line—in both economic and marital terms—was being rewritten.

Returning to the scene of Madame Leclerc on the sofa, we see a dynastic model of marriage invoked in Mary's reference to the exchange of women together with real property—in this case, to the colony of Saint Domingue as it changes hands between men together with Madame Leclerc. But it is the problem of capitalism—specifically of the dark history Karl Marx describes of primitive accumulation—that is writ large on the island itself and that prevents Madame Leclerc from finding herself at home on what would seem to be her own property.⁸ If capitalism is defined, most simply, in terms of an economic dominance of the market that entails the separation of production from consumption, then social reproduction—the creation of people and lives that primarily registers as consumption in Marxist terms—must occur at a scene that is distinct from that of production. *Nowhere, I would maintain, is the geographical distinction between social reproduction and production so marked as it is in the Atlantic plantation economy of the eighteenth century.* While historians have debated the relation between colonial race slavery and capitalism, it is nonetheless clear that the sugar islands of the West Indies served as a primary site of production for a developing Atlantic economy.⁹ Indeed, as Sidney Mintz has argued, the sugar growing plantations of

⁸ Marx distinguishes his account of the modes of accumulation at the origin of surplus value, namely forcible expropriation and enslavement (a history "written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire" [875]) from the origin myth of classical political economy that imagines an idyll of hard-working farmers who peacefully accumulate enough surplus to propel capitalism into motion. The sugar colonies are precisely where violent forms of primitive accumulation, in a Marxist sense, can be seen to occur. For an argument that Marxian primitive accumulation continues into the present, and thus accompanies capitalism at all stages, see Federici.

⁹ A long historical debate has been waged over the relationship between capitalism and slavery, beginning, most prominently with Eric Williams's 1944 *Capitalism and Slavery* which posited that capitalism relied upon free labor and that the slave colonies declined in economic importance as British capitalism developed. For a more recent argument emphasizing that the

the Caribbean might be viewed as the first factories of western modernity. African slaves, whose stolen labor was used to generate the production of sugar and coffee in places such as Saint Domingue, were, as David Scott contends, forcibly conscripted into the developing capitalist system of economic and social relations that defines modernity as we know it.¹⁰

Sugar plantations were thus important sites of proto-industrial production, yet equally crucial in understanding their relation to capitalist modernity is the fact that the plantations of the West Indies were explicitly *not* sites of social reproduction. The system of colonial race slavery as developed by Europeans in the Caribbean—notorious in its brutalizing extraction of labor and life from slave workers—was systematically designed, in the words of Orlando Patterson, to effect the “social death” of New World Africans.¹¹ While race slavery was designed to eradicate the possibility of social reproduction among black populations at the site of sugar production, it is worth noting that the colonial plantation world was viewed as inimical to white social reproduction as well. Many historical accounts of Saint Domingue portray white Europeans as eager to earn a fortune in the colony in order to decamp to France as soon as possible. “By 1789” writes C.L.R. James, “there was a large group of absentee proprietors in France linked to the aristocracy by marriage, for whom San Domingo was nothing else but a source of revenue to be spent in the luxurious living of aristocratic Paris. So far had these parasites penetrated into the French aristocracy that a memoir from San Domingo to the King could say: ‘Sire, your court is creole,’ without too much stretching of the truth” (56-57). French colonials came to the colony with the aim of extracting wealth from sugar and coffee production, not with the aim of settling and creating a new society there. Culture, as it was understood by French

origins of capitalism are intimately related to slavery, see Blackburn. For a useful history of the debate concerning slavery and capitalism, see Christopher Brown.

¹⁰ Mintz writes: “The plantations, agro-industrial enterprises vital to the reshaping of both food habits and forms of leisure of massive urban European populations, were landmark experiments in modernity. Plantation labour was mostly organized on a crew or gang basis and not much by individual talent. Workers were disciplined to work interchangeably, and by the clock... These technical features [of sugar cane harvesting and sugar-making], many tied to careful timing, introduced more than just an aura of industrial modernity into what were operations which predated, in many cases by whole centuries, the Industrial Revolution” (295). For additional discussion of the important relation between slavery and colonialism in the Caribbean and the advent of modernity, see Fischer and Bogues.

¹¹ Even as living bodies, slaves were deprived of forms of social identity and stripped of the capacity to generate social identity for themselves and their progeny. In Saint Domingue, prior to the outbreak of revolution in 1791, more than two-thirds of the slave population at work on sugar and coffee plantations was born in Africa because the mortality rate for slaves was so high as to preclude the possibility of recreating the labor force by means of biological reproduction on the island. The majority of slaves on the island were both physically unable, because of the extreme physical duress to which they were subject, and unwilling, because of the devastating social conditions they faced, to reproduce in Saint Domingue. C.L.R. James, for instance, recounts the work of New World African midwives in Saint Domingue who assisted in poisoning the infants they delivered into life in order to deliver them out of the social death of slavery (17). As David Geggus has written, “Slavery [in Saint Domingue] did not so much, like Saturn, devour its children, but was, rather, a barren mother” (Impact 22).

colonials, emanated from the metropole: fashion, education, and civilization were not to be found in the colony. As such, the term “creole culture” was, by definition, oxymoronic. Thus the writer Baron de Wimpffen reported in a letter dated 1789 concerning architecture, food, and furniture, “Taste ... is still quite creole in Saint Domingue, and creole taste is not good taste” (113).¹² The disdain for supporting both biological reproduction and cultural work in the domestic sphere of the colony that here goes by the name of “taste” indicates an ideological disinvestment in the broad array of forms of labor that are encompassed in the term “social reproduction.” According to Cindi Katz, social reproduction includes “the material social practices through which people reproduce themselves on a daily and generational basis and through which the social relations and material bases of capitalism are renewed” (709). Following this definition, we can see that the cluster of anxieties about colonial culture—many of which center on women’s behavior in colonial Saint Domingue, including concern with the nature of women’s sexual behavior to the way in which they dress—serves to indicate that social reproduction in the colony was something of an impossibility according to the logic of colonial modernity.

Thus, as the above citations from both James’s landmark history of the Haitian Revolution and from the letter of an eighteenth-century metropolitan visitor indicate, individuals who became too closely associated with social life on the island were potentially tainted with the epithet of “creole.” Even as colonial capitalism did not ideologically sanction the reproduction of social life in the colony, individuals, nonetheless, continued to reproduce there both biologically and socially. The fundamental contradiction between colonial ideology and the experience of human bodies creating life and lives on the island underwrites the difficult structural position of the creole in the colonial setting: the creole is the white or black non-native who is born (biologically reproduced) in the colony, but whose social reproduction is thus understood to be inadequate or illegitimate precisely because reproduction has occurred at the site of capitalist production (the colony) rather than at the site of consumption (the metropole). The discursive effects of this contradiction are registered most noticeably in the accounts of white creoles and mixed-race *gens de couleur* (all of whom were creoles) who are, in colonial accounts of Saint Domingue, individuals of intense sexual fascination and moral disdain. It was the rare colonial traveler to Saint Domingue who did not immediately remark upon the sexual allure and presumed licentiousness of mixed race women who were often conscripted to live as “housekeepers” or concubines for white men. Thus de Wimpffen, in a passage that typifies such accounts, describes mixed-race women as “the most fervent priestesses of the American Venus,” who have made “voluptuous pleasure a kind of mechanical skill which they have brought to the height of perfection” (120). Indeed, representations of Saint Domingue in the eighteenth century might be characterized above all in terms of a geography of sexual license and moral degeneracy—of sensual pleasure, excess, and “voluptuousness”—that Doris Garraway has aptly captured in the term “libertine colony” (xiii and passim).

¹² Translations from the French are my own.

The excessive sexuality and allure of the mixed race woman is thus coupled with a discourse of degeneracy and danger—one that insists that for all of the sexual fecundity of the tropical geography and the tropical body, sanctioned reproduction cannot occur at this site. Moreau de Saint-Méry, for instance, argues that because creole mulatta women are sexually active at such a young age (given their “natural disposition” for “incontinence”) they become incapable of bearing and nurturing children: “From [early sexual activity] follows all evils, of which the incapacity to reproduce is not the least result, nor is the result of offspring who are feeble and debilitated” (105). As Garraway points out, sex did often result in reproduction, but a “fiction” of sterility served to deprive creoles of subject positions as legitimate bearers of culture and personhood (271). Even for free people of color in the colony, an education in France was the accepted route to achieving social status, or recognition as a subject within the colony.

Although historians have commented at length upon the hyper-sexualization of women of color on Saint Domingue, few have remarked upon the fact that an aura of excessive sexuality extended to white creole women as well. Thus Moreau de Saint-Méry writes, “Love, this need, or rather this tyrant over sensitive souls, reigns over that of the Creole” (40). Moreau de Saint-Méry further describes the white creole woman as both excessively “natural” and passionate in her emotions, and as fundamentally deformed as a result of her upbringing in the colony:

Creole women are ... naturally affable, generous, and compassionate to all who carry the mark of misfortune and sadness, but they forget, sometimes, these virtues with regard to their own slaves. Who would not be appalled to see a refined woman—one who is provoked to tears at the report of the slightest harm that she caused—preside at a punishment that she has ordered! Nothing equals the anger of a creole wife in punishing the slave that has (perhaps as a result of her husband's command) defiled the marital bed. In her jealous fury, she will do anything to serve her vengeance. These terrible scenes are rare and will become more so every day. Perhaps creole women will cease engaging in them altogether with time, this penchant for severe domination to which they become accustomed from the earliest youth. The care of educating a great number of them in France, the influence of written works that promote domestic virtues which they read with great tenderness, will, without doubt, lead to a happy revolution. (43)

One might note a number of related ideas here: first, an excess of passion is attributed to the white, married creole woman but the colonial scene is nonetheless punctuated by extra-marital and interracial sex—that is, with non-marital, non-socially reproductive sex. The cause of this scene lies in the colonial upbringing of the creole woman and, conversely, the cure for this scene lies in geographic removal to France. Motherhood—domestic virtue and proper social reproduction—simply do not seem to exist in the colonial space of sugar and coffee production. If sex at the colonial site of production is by definition non-reproductive, then it also, by definition, must be a matter of pleasure and power rather than procreation: sex in the space of the colony is the antithesis of, for

instance, the procreative sexuality of European Catholic doctrine. Moreover, the overheated sexual atmospherics of Saint Domingue cannot be described in racial terms alone: rather the geopolitics of colonialism—which draw a sharp dichotomy between metropolitan and creole—account as much if not more for the ideology of sexuality as does the related, but non-identical division between blacks and whites.

In Sansay's novel, when we meet Pauline Leclerc languishing of boredom on the sofa in her Saint Domingue mansion, we might conclude that she is *suitably* incapable of social reproduction—that is, she conforms to a colonial logic that proscribes social reproduction in colonial space. As such, Madame Leclerc (notably *not* a creole) demonstrates her fitness for colonial rule by indicating her lack of interest in making a life for herself in the colony. Further, one might speculate that she has already displayed some understanding of non-reproductive colonial sexuality as she engages, with General Boyer as her partner, in the pleasurable, pointless, and seemingly endlessly repetitive act of inserting and withdrawing her foot from her slipper. If the playful sexual behavior of Madame Leclerc seems trivial, the ramifications of a colonial logic that rigorously separates production from social reproduction are nonetheless profound. Displayed most nakedly in discursive representations of sexual excess, the colonial imperative that social reproduction occur only in the metropole generates an entire society of creole whites and blacks whose existence registers as illegitimate in a variety of legal, economic, and cultural terms.

Creole Revolution and the Secret History of Gender

With the aim of drawing together a number of the threads of the argument I have made thus far, let me propose a syllogism: If the creole is precisely the individual who cannot, within colonial modernity, be socially reproduced, and the novel is fundamentally concerned with mapping social reproduction, then there can be no such thing as a creole novel. And yet, as I argue in this section of the essay, Leonora Sansay embarks on just this task: writing a creole novel. As such, Sansay does not entirely share in the proto-capitalist, colonial logic I have delineated here: rather, her novel attempts to generate an account of the possibility and indeed, the necessity, of creole social reproduction. Sansay's efforts in this regard bespeak more than just a sympathetic view toward creoles in Saint Domingue; rather, her account of the community of creole women that is created in the wake of the Haitian Revolution indicates that she understood herself and other white U.S. citizens to be creoles as well. As such, Sansay's representations of creole social reproduction have ramifications for the early American novel set in the U.S. as well as that set in the broader colonial Atlantic world.

Sansay's interest in creole social reproduction is evident in the account we have seen Mary provide of the failings of Pauline Leclerc. Rather than condone Madame Leclerc's disdain for social reproduction in the colony (which would coincide with colonial ideology), Mary is critical of Madame Leclerc, a colonial born in the metropole, because she lacks the *resources* of the creole. Mary

describes Madame Leclerc as “voluptuous” and yet lacking in substance: this description typifies metropolitan perceptions of creole and mixed race women in colonial spaces. Indeed, the word “voluptuous”—which we have seen in Moreau de Saint Méry’s language as well as that of de Wimpffen and Sansay, seems to serve as something of a one-word shorthand for the concept of an excessive sexuality that is inimical to procreation. Ironically, however, in Sansay’s hands it is the white colonial (Madame Leclerc) who is implicitly criticized for her incapacity for social reproduction on the island rather than the creole.

Further, details of Mary’s description of Madame Leclerc are significant with respect to the question of creolization—most particularly the madras headscarf she wears with her muslin gown. The seemingly minor detail of the headscarf bears a significant iconographic history in its wake: the madras headscarf was, by law, worn by women of color in the colonial West Indies because of sumptuary codes that forbade them from wearing silk or keeping their heads uncovered—codes created to prevent women of color from competing sexually with white women. By design, however, the madras headscarf became something of a symbol of sexuality rather than a cloaking of it. Thus eighteenth-century writers habitually remark upon the allure of the colorful scarves—an allure clearly associated with the “excessive” sexuality of creole culture. Interestingly, the wearing of madras handkerchiefs was forbidden in both England and France, and thus the madras headscarf might be seen to embody an exclusively creole culture. As such, Madame Leclerc’s adoption of the headscarf represents an engagement in the aesthetics of creolization. In this instance, then, fashion (and the desire for consumer goods) is shown not to emanate from the metropole but from the colony itself, thus contradicting the notion that social reproduction cannot occur in the space of the colony. In light of Sansay’s subsequent representations of creoles in the novel, I would argue that the headscarf is the first signal of a counter-discourse of creolism in the novel: a counter-discourse, as I describe below, that represents the creole as an individual of great resources—an individual capable of social reproduction under conditions of duress—rather than a sterile figure.

Early in the novel, Mary’s language concerning the creole mirrors that of standard colonial reportage. “The Creole,” she states, “is generous, hospitable, magnificent, but vain, inconstant, and incapable of serious application; and in this abode of pleasure and luxurious ease vices have reigned at which humanity must shudder” (70). However, as the violence of the revolution unsettles the luxurious ease of the creole, so too does it unsettle Mary’s understanding of creole identity: indeed, Mary’s initial view of the creole is eventually subject to a direct reversal. Ultimately, she will contend, the apparent lack of stability and seriousness of the creole masks superior capacities for self-support that are revealed by the violent upheaval of revolution. Later in the novel, reflecting upon the abilities of the displaced creole women from Saint Domingue who are forced to find refuge in Cuba, Mary announces her revised view of creole women:

I know ladies who from their infancy were surrounded by slaves, anticipating their slightest wishes, now working from the dawn of day till midnight to support

themselves and their families. Nor do they even complain, nor vaunt their industry, nor think it surprising that they possess it.... Every talent, even if possessed in a slight degree of perfection, may be a resource in a reverse of fortune; and, though I liked not entirely their manner, whilst surrounded by the festivity and splendour of the Cape, I now confess that they excite my warmest admiration. (119)

Tellingly, the word “resource” appears repeatedly in discussions of women in the colonial setting: whereas Madame Leclerc was destitute of the inner resources to support herself in the colony, the creole women subject to revolution have precisely the inner resources for the sustenance of themselves and their children (usually their daughters) that the metropolitans do not.

In broader terms, both the plot of the novel and the evolution of the characters within the novel might be seen to hinge upon a changing understanding of the creole. As we have seen, Mary’s sympathies increasingly are revealed to lie with the creole as the novel unfolds. While this change of view coincides with the violence of the revolution, it seems to emerge, more fundamentally, from a deepening understanding of the economic and social workings of colonialism as exclusively extractive of the resources of the colonial landscape and its peoples. In a pointed anecdote that follows upon an account of colonial disregard of creole interests, Mary indicates that the extractive policies of colonialism are fundamentally duplicitous at an economic and social level:

We have here a [French] General of division, who is enriching himself by all possible means, and with such unblushing rapacity, that he is universally detested. He was a blacksmith before the revolution, and his present pursuits bear some affinity to his original employment, having taken possession of a plantation on which he makes charcoal, and which he sells to the amount of a hundred dollars a day. A caricature has appeared in which he is represented tying up sacks of coal. Madame A—, his mistress, standing near him, holds up his embroidered coat and says, “Don’t soil yourself, General.” (78)

The French colonial general seeks to extract the raw material of charcoal—a resource that is both literally black and that is produced by the labor of blacks on the plantation—from the soil of Saint Domingue, but seeks to do so in such a way as to increase his own “whiteness”—to erase his own social status as a blacksmith and replace it with that of the whitewashed colonial. In doing so, as the anecdote suggests, he must take care to disassociate himself from any mark that would besmirch his colonial credentials—he must take care not to appear to soil himself with profits from the slave trade, with interracial sexuality, and with the actual “soil” of the New World, all of which he is nonetheless deeply mired within.

In contrast to the behavior of the French colonial who hypocritically extracts the resources of the colonial soil in order to whiten and enrich himself, Mary tells the story of a white creole woman who turns to an alliance with a black woman as her final emotional resource in the face of devastation:

[A white creole woman] told me that her husband was stabbed in her arms by a slave whom he had always treated as his brother; that she had seen her children killed, and her house burned, but had been herself preserved by a faithful slave, and conducted, after incredible sufferings, and through innumerable dangers to the Cape. The same slave, she added, and the idea seemed to console her for every other loss, saved all my madras handkerchiefs. (70)

This anecdote begins with a scene of interracial violence between blacks and whites but ends with a scene of interracial alliance focused around the creole marker of the madras handkerchief. The preserved collection of madras handkerchiefs seems to stand in for the creole family that has been killed; the handkerchiefs thus link the creole black woman and the creole white woman, forming something of a common currency uniting the two. To be sure, Sansay is typically interested in the fortunes of white creole women rather than black women (creole or African), but often in Mary's narrative white creole women ally themselves strategically with black creoles and *gens de couleur* rather than frame their interests as oppositional. Sansay argues that by the time of General Leclerc's expedition to the island, the white creoles have begun to find French colonialism more destructive to their interests than the rule of Toussaint: "Many of the Creoles, who had remained on the island during the reign of Toussaint, regret the change [brought by white French rule], and say that they were less vexed by the negroes than by those who have come to protect them" (76). As such, the significant political divide between the forces of destruction and salvation is defined as that which lies between creole and metropolitan rather than between white and black.

An evolution in the reader's understanding of the creole assumes added dimensions in relation to the character of Clara, Mary's sister—dimensions that make evident the gendered nature of social reproduction and its vexed colonial setting for the creole. Upon arriving in Saint Domingue, Clara is something of a Pauline Leclerc figure—a woman who, though American by birth, has followed her French colonial husband to the island. By the close of the novel, however, her identity has evolved significantly such that she is no longer a French colonial wife but a creole American figure. Like Madame Leclerc, Clara seems destitute of resources for social reproduction when she first arrives; in search of amusement, she turns to scenes of social conquest at balls and parties, winning, most notably, the attentions of General Rochambeau. Yet the regard of Rochambeau, which initially appears to be a social prize for Clara, shortly begins to assume oppressive overtones. Given that Rochambeau embodies the pinnacle of colonial authority on the island, his high-handed maneuvers in pursuing Clara's affections often seem to involve militaristic show of force and thus unnerving, violent dimensions. Rochambeau's display of emotion ultimately engenders revolt rather than submission on Clara's part: "The heart of Clara acknowledged not the empire of General Rochambeau," writes Mary (88).

When Clara turns her back on Rochambeau's oppressive amatory tactics, so too does Sansay begin to paint the repressive tactics of Rochambeau's colonialism as reprehensible rather than charmingly aristocratic. The transition point from Clara's flirtation with Rochambeau to her attempt to escape both St. Louis

and Rochambeau occurs when Rochambeau brutally orders the murder of a white creole after demanding an exorbitant payment in cash. Clara's initial flirtation with Rochambeau was intended as a means of escaping the boredom of the island and the isolation of her marriage to a tyrannical husband; yet in moving from the violent authority of St. Louis to that of Rochambeau, Clara finds herself implicated in a greater system of patriarchal violence—one that encompasses the politics of colonialism as a whole rather than just the gendered divide between men and women. In Sansay's novel, then, the violence of colonialism is revealed to be closely bound together with unjust patriarchal authority. Indeed, despite the fact that *Horrors of St. Domingo* was published in the U.S. at a time when readers would expect such horrors to concern the violence of black revolutionaries against white colonials and creoles, Sansay's most explicit and chilling accounts of violence center on those effected by men against women without regard to race. In a letter to her sister Mary, Clara reveals that

[St. Louis] has treated me with the most brutal violence,—this you never knew ... The night before I left him he came home in a transport of fury, dragged me from my bed, said it was his intention to destroy me, and swore that he would render me horrible by rubbing aqua-fortis in my face... From this stupor I was roused by his caresses, or rather by his brutal approaches, for he always finds my person provoking, and often, whilst pouring on my head abuse which would seem dictated by the most violent hatred, he has sought in my arms gratification which should be solicited with affection, and granted to love alone. (137-39)

What is detailed in this letter, then, is the *secret* that lies between the sisters—what Mary “never knew”—about the level of physical, psychological, and sexual violence contained within the marriage between Clara and St. Louis. This language suggests that what is most hidden within the colonial scene is not interracial violence but the violence of men turned upon women.

As I suggested above, a surprising effect of the revolution is thus to enable white women to escape from the power of men; when Mary and Clara flee Saint Domingue for Cuba, they repeatedly find themselves in the company of unhusbanded women who appear to blossom in the absence of the men who previously controlled them. Thus Mary reports, characteristically, on a woman whom they meet on the ship: “There is also on board a beautiful widow whose husband was killed by the negroes, and who, without fortune or protection, is going to seek at St. Jago a subsistence, by employing her talents. There is something inconceivably interesting in these ladies. Young, beautiful, and destitute of all resource, supporting with cheerfulness their wayward fortune” (110). The resources that become available to women as they are rendered autonomous from men are resources that are internal and notably mobile. Rather than achieving value within marriage by standing as proxies for land and real property, as on the dynastic model of marital exchange, in this case, women's sensibilities and energies themselves become productive resources. In notable contrast to the blossoming widows who escape from Saint Domingue, Mary recounts the story of one Madame G—, a native of Saint Domingue, who lost her husband at the

beginning of the revolution and fled the island with her three daughters. However, “lured by the hope of reinstating her children in their paternal inheritance” Madame G— returned to Saint Domingue only to find herself subject to a black general who sought to marry her daughter. When Madame G— refused this offer, she was killed as was her daughter who was “hung ... by the throat on an iron hook in the market place, where the lovely, innocent, unfortunate victim slowly expired” (124-25). Although the tale evokes the racialized logic of black violence against whites and presents interracial marriage as a form of terror itself, the story also contains a warning to women who are “lured” by the desire for patriarchal property over a safer commitment to independent industry: it is in the marketplace of exchange among men that the daughter dies, tragically wasting her resources of beauty and innocence. In contrast to Madame G—, who returned to Saint Domingue and her own destruction, the creole women who escape their husbands and lose their real property in the revolution become allied with other women and exhibit a surprising capacity for mobile social reproduction, for cross-racial alliance, and for self-sustenance.

Clara’s story thus serves as a central instance of a new model of autonomous creole femininity presented in the novel. The narrative concludes with a final episode of escape, in which Clara’s flight from men is repeated a third time, inscribing a final iteration of feminized independence. After the two sisters have arrived in Cuba and established themselves there, St. Louis joins them, having himself escaped from Saint Domingue. However, continued violence within the marriage—the threat of physical deformation—causes Clara to precipitously flee St. Louis and the company of men to the town of El Cobre, the site of a well-known shrine to the Virgin Mary as well as the site of a famous slave revolt that occurred in 1731. The novel does not make mention of the slave revolt, but as Michael Drexler points out in the notes to his edition of the text, the large revolt at the state-run copper mine in El Cobre resulted in the formation of maroon communities in the surrounding areas that endured through the end of the eighteenth century (139n). The maroons, known as “cobreros,” were linguistically associated with the geographical locale of El Cobre—an association of mutinous revolution is thus resonant in the place name of El Cobre. In the novel itself, much is made, however, of the association between El Cobre and the shrine to the Virgin Mary. Clara’s flight to El Cobre becomes, within the narrative, mapped onto a *de facto* pilgrimage to the shrine. As Clara and her widowed friend proceed toward freedom from men, the guide sings “a litany to the Virgin,” the strain of which was “sweet” to Clara’s ears (144). The Virgin Mary, after all, is the religious figure who embodies an ideal of female social reproduction without the assistance of men.

Mary’s relatively pleasant travels to Jamaica, in the company of other women, effectively cement the model of an alternative social reproduction—one that is decidedly creole and mobile. In her final letter to Aaron Burr, Mary explains that her ambition is to return to Philadelphia with Clara; in so doing, she also details an alternative model of marriage and social reproduction that would build upon rather squander than the resources of creole women. This final account of an idealized marriage is significant insofar as it indicates not simply a rejection of

marriage and social reproduction, but a revisionary ethos of social reproduction that is predicated on feminized creole values of mobility and internal sensibility:

It is true, Clara is said to be a coquette, but have not ladies of superior talents and attractions, at all times and in all countries been subject to that censure? Unless indeed theirs was the rare fortune of becoming early in life attached to a man equal or superior to themselves! Attachments between such people last through life, and are always new. Love continues because love has existed; interests create interests; parental are added to conjugal affections; with the multiplicity of domestic objects the number of domestic joys increase. In such a situation the heart is always occupied, and always full. For those who live in it their home is the world; their feelings, their powers, their talents are employed. (153)

The model of an idealized marriage and the form of social reproduction detailed here is one that is based on shared sensibility; as such, it enables the reproduction of resources—talents are employed and hearts are full, social bounty increases through shared sensibility. This vision contrasts sharply both with the dynastic model of marriage associated with the European aristocracy and the sterile colonial model of extractive production that Sansay has portrayed as fraught with violence and waste throughout the novel.

At the close of the novel, Mary announces her intention of welcoming Aaron Burr into the circle of mobile, creole women that she and Clara have constituted in Cuba and Jamaica. Mary insists on the necessity of this sororal community, but imagines the possibility of integrating Burr into such a community of shared sensibility:

I am more than ever necessary to my sister.... Clara and myself will leave [Kingston] for Philadelphia, in the course of the ensuing week. There I hope we shall meet you; and if I can only infuse into your bosom those sentiments for my sister which glow so warmly in my own, she will find in you a friend and a protector, and we may still be happy. (154)

Sensibility as the source of social reproduction is thus imagined as an alternative source of social vitality—one that may eventuate in a marriage of sensibility, but whose reproductive capacities are located in the mobile, internal resources of individuals rather than in their ability to possess other human beings and property. Philadelphia—a city of brotherly love—thus serves as an idealized home for creole reproduction and points to its capacity to fit into a circle of post-colonial American locations—Santiago, Barracoa, El Cobre, Kingston—where unpropertied creoles may begin to deploy their own properties for social reproduction.

Creole Social Reproduction and Early American Literature

The term “creole” carries a mixed set of meanings: as used in different historical periods and within different languages, it has assumed a variety of definitions

that are inconsistent with, albeit proximate to, one another. The *Oxford English Dictionary* locates the origin of the word in the colonial Spanish “criollo,” meaning “native to the locality” and etymologically related to *criar*—to breed: while the word originally had “no connotation of colour” (rather, one of geographical nativity), the *OED* indicates that the word now refers primarily to white creoles. In the U.S.-published *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, on the other hand, the word refers either to a person of European descent born in the West Indies, or a white descendent of French or Spanish settlers living in the U.S. Gulf states, or a person of mixed French or Spanish and black descent from the U.S. Gulf states. In the U.S., the term thus tends to have a connotation of racial and cultural hybridity whereas in its colonial origins in the West Indies and Spanish colonial America, the term indicated a continuity of racial descent but a discontinuity of geographical nativity.¹³ Two points are thus significant about the term: First, its etymology points to a shifting evaluation of the importance of geographical location of birth relative to racial descent. In other words, within colonial history, the location of one’s birth was understood as essential to one’s identity much in the way race has been understood as an essentialist discourse of identity from the early nineteenth century forward. As such, the etymology of the term “creole” bears the reminder of a colonial geography that was defining in ways that overlapped with and competed with racial essentialism. Second, the term contains a reference to nativity and foreign-ness within a single word: the creole, one might say, is the native who is non-native.

While contemporary Caribbean writers have turned to *creolité* as a defining term for literature from the region, the term has had little currency in U.S. literature of recent or historical vintage. In their literary manifesto, *In Praise of Creoleness* (1989), Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant mobilize the history of creoleness as a means of evoking a diverse, anti-totalizing linguistic and poetic practice: creoleness, they write, names “the adaptation of Europeans, Africans, and Asians to the New World; and the cultural confrontation of these peoples within the same space” (93). According to these writers, “Americanization,” by way of contrast to “Creolization,” defines a process by which Europeans adapted to the new world *without* interacting with other cultures. The distinction drawn here between “Americanization” and “Creolization” is conceptually useful, less because it describes the reality of a purely European “American” culture versus a Caribbean, hybrid culture in the Americas than because it evokes two distinct and incompatible ideologies of cultural identity and nationalism. Certainly “Americanization” is an idea of enculturation that has been imagined in relation to a history of hybridity (the melting pot), but it is an idealization which has tended toward the production of a new being—the white American. The assimilative logic of Americanization is not inflected by the brutal confrontation of native, colonial, and enslaved populations that in fact dictated the history of both the West Indies and the North American colonies of what would later become the United States. The term “creole,” by way of contrast to

¹³ See Berman for a useful and extensive account of the etymology of the term creole (36-56), as well as a broader consideration of the divergent and criss-crossing histories of the term creole in Anglo-American, French, and British literature.

“American,” carries a history of coloniality about it—a history as germane for whites as for blacks. Indeed, the term “creole” points to a colonial history that unsettles the structuring racial divide of black versus white in America insofar as it names a history of geographical dislocation and non-nativity in which both whites and blacks participated.

To the extent that the term “creole” has been used to discuss early American literature, it has primarily surfaced by way of Benedict Anderson’s claims concerning the “creole pioneers” of print nationalism in the Americas.¹⁴ According to Anderson, the white, creole administrators of European empire formed new cultural communities by way of print that eventuated in new world nationalisms. Yet as Ed White persuasively argues, Anderson’s account of the proto-nationalist creole functionary is largely derived from the history of Spanish colonialism rather than Anglo-American empire in North America. The short hop from “creole” to “nationalism” proposed by Anderson tends to mask, in the case of U.S. nationalism, a lengthy and complex history of the transition from the culture and politics of empire to that of nationhood. Indeed, White contends, because the U.S. was initially imagined as imperial—as a conjoining of different colonies and peoples—the emergence of a singular national frame occurred, in cultural terms, far later than the actual formation of the U.S. as a political entity.¹⁵

Insofar as the condition of *creolité* underwrites the social and cultural history of the West Indies, so too does it underwrite the history of colonial and post-colonial social reproduction in the U.S. In order to understand the early American novel, then, it is crucial to explore the lingering colonial history of American culture: accounts of the early American novel that construe texts solely in terms of the nation fail to account for the more dominant cultural reality of creole imperialism.¹⁶ Sansay’s novel, as I have argued, provides an extensive account of both the difficulties and the possibilities of creole social reproduction in the colonial Atlantic world. Moreover, the close of her novel explicitly links the history of creole displacement in the West Indies to the possibility of an idealized creole community in the United States. Certainly Sansay’s final model of an idealized marriage is profoundly bourgeois, yet the racial politics she invokes therein are different from more familiar bourgeois domestic models found in nineteenth-century U.S. fiction. Sansay’s efforts in this regard are important because they are representative of broader political and cultural conceptions, at the

¹⁴ A recent and significant exception is Sean Goudie’s book, *Creole America: The West Indies and the Formation of Literature and Culture in the New Republic*. Goudie presents an extensive and convincing account of the way in which concepts of “creoleness” shaped early American politics and culture. See also Smith-Rosenberg’s discussion of creole identity in a later novel attributed to Sansay, *Zelica the Creole* (1820) and the novels of Charles Brockden Brown.

¹⁵ “Given the imperial framing of the original nation,” White argues, “a proper lateral ‘nationalism’ had to emerge in the decades following the appearance of the ‘nation’ itself.... Study of the development of U.S. nationalism needs to map the transition from the imperial imagined community of unbound serial ‘nations’ to the insistence upon the bound unified and singular nation, with some appreciation of the stages of this process” (76).

¹⁶ Drexler’s 2003 article on Sansay and Charles Brockden Brown offers a model for reading early American novels in relation to colonial and hemispheric, rather than solely national, geopolitics.

time, of the creole nature of the United States. The U.S. reaction to the revolution in Saint Domingue is particularly telling in this regard: President John Adams responded warmly to Toussaint Louverture's efforts to create an independent alliance between the U.S. and Saint Domingue. In so doing, he indicated an understanding of the common political and economic situations of the newly independent United States and the almost-independent Saint Domingue under Toussaint's rule. Adams's diplomacy indicated a desire to make common cause between two creole post-colonial, Atlantic nations—both of which were struggling to achieve political and economic autonomy in an Atlantic world dominated by the warring imperial powers of England, France, and Spain.

Adams's policies toward the black-ruled Saint Domingue were, however, not uncontroversial; indeed, shortly after entering office in 1801, Thomas Jefferson would reverse these policies decisively, indicating a rejection of the logic of creole nationalism. The history of this reversal is worth examining briefly insofar as it reveals a significant shift in the ideology of the broader cultural formation of the U.S. The alliance forged between the U.S. and Saint Domingue took official shape in 1799 in the form of a bill passed in the U.S. Senate known informally as "Toussaint's Clause." The bill endorsed opening free trade between the U.S. and Saint Domingue, despite the fact that Saint Domingue was officially a French colony and the U.S. was in the midst of the so-called "quasi-war" with France. In effect, the bill served to recognize Saint Domingue as an independent state under the leadership of Toussaint. Support for the bill was divided between northern commercial interests who saw trade with Saint Domingue as crucial for the U.S. economy, and vociferous opposition from southerners who were enraged by the idea of recognizing a government led by a free black man and terrified that the "contagion" of slave rebellion would spread to the U.S.¹⁷ Adams subsequently lent substantial economic and military support to Toussaint, establishing full diplomatic relations and supporting Toussaint's efforts to maintain control of Saint Domingue and rejuvenate its economy in the wake of revolution. Although Adams was far from embracing racial equality, his interest in fostering U.S. commerce in the Caribbean was guided by a pragmatic politics that, as Douglas Egerton argues, "defied racial considerations" (324). Like Sansay, Adams thus demonstrated an understanding of white U.S. citizens as creoles who stood in alliance with mixed-race and black creoles in the Caribbean in relation to the imperial powers of Europe. When Jefferson assumed office, however, he was contacted by Napoleon's *charge d'affaires*, Louis Andre Pichon, who sought to determine how the U.S. would respond to a French deposition of Toussaint: "Nothing would be more simple than to furnish your fleet with everything and to starve out Toussaint," responded Jefferson (Egerton 324). Indeed, Jefferson quickly abandoned all trade with Saint Domingue: following the election of 1800, the harbor at Le Cap "emptied of American vessels so swiftly that Toussaint was moved to ask sarcastically, 'if the change in administrations had destroyed all the American ships'" (Zuckerman 126). For Jefferson, the threat of slave rebellion

¹⁷ For discussion of the history of Adams's relations with Toussaint, see Egerton and Gordon Brown. For discussion of the importance of commerce between the U.S. and Saint Domingue in this period, see Dun.

represented by Saint Domingue was far more significant than any possibilities offered by a creole commercial alliance. Historian Michael Zuckerman concludes, "Color countermanded everything for Jefferson" (135).¹⁸

The differing attitudes and policies of Adams and Jefferson toward the revolution against colonial slavery that had occurred in Haiti bespeak a distinction between two structural oppositions that shaped understandings of U.S. nationhood—an opposition between metropolitan Europeans and New World creoles (guiding Adams's politics), on the one hand, and on the other, an opposition between whites and blacks (guiding Jefferson's politics). A Virginian slaveholder, Jefferson was clearly a member of the U.S. faction that understood a binary racial division between whites and blacks to stand at the foundation of U.S. culture and economics. Although Jefferson also imagined an expansive U.S. "empire for liberty," the contours of this empire were decidedly not creole and Atlantic-colonial but white and westward-looking. In his vision of continental westward U.S. expansion, as Peter Onuf argues, "Jefferson could not 'contemplate with satisfaction either blot or mixture'—the presence of Africans—'on that surface'" (181). It is worth noting that "white," in Jefferson's empire, is not precisely in *opposition* to the term "creole," but is nonetheless a significant revision of American post-colonial identity insofar as it eradicates the possibility of a cross-racial creole politics in which Adams, for instance, had engaged and which Sansay, as well, explores in her novel. It can only be viewed as a profound historical irony that Jefferson's most successful effort in westward U.S. expansion—the Louisiana Purchase of 1803—was made possible in large part by the revolutionary resistance of slaves and free black creoles to French colonial rule in Saint Domingue. As historians have demonstrated, Napoleon's decision to sell the Louisiana territories to the U.S. followed on the heels of the failed Leclerc expedition to Saint Domingue—an expedition originally intended to culminate in French military occupation of Louisiana. When French troops failed to survive their own attack on black revolutionaries in Saint Domingue, Napoleon abandoned his design of building a New World empire that was to have included territorial control of the Gulf Coast of Louisiana and Saint Domingue.¹⁹

Jefferson's view of white U.S. nationhood, and his understanding of a structuring racial division between white and black at the core of the nation's history, remains the account of cultural history that has predominated in the U.S. and which has largely informed understandings of early American literature as well. Michael Warner has argued that in the United States, "national culture began with a moment of sweeping amnesia about colonialism" (63); one might push this formulation further to say that national culture required an erasure of colonialism, an erasure that included actively forgetting that white Americans were, themselves, creoles rather than natives of America. The history of the Haitian Revolution has not been integrated into dominant understandings of early

¹⁸ For further discussion of Jefferson and Haiti, see Matthewson and Hickey.

¹⁹ For a useful discussion of the relation between the Haitian Revolution and the Louisiana Purchase, see Higgonet as well as Gordon Brown.

American history or culture: indeed, as Michel-Rolph Trouillot has argued, the history of the creation of the first free black republic in the New World has remained largely “unthinkable” within the paradigms of western modernity. Consideration of the creole culture of the Atlantic colonial world—a culture in which both the U.S. and the Caribbean shared—generates a fundamentally different understanding of the early national period in the U.S. and of the relatively late-coming formulations of white nationalism that gained ground during the Jacksonian era. The problems of social reproduction that are the focal points of more canonical early American novels by Charles Brockden Brown, Susanna Rowson, or Hannah Webster Foster can thus be viewed as explorations not of the desire to invent a new American identity, or the desire to avoid the pitfalls of democracy, or even the desire to remain culturally English in America—but as the cultural explorations of creole writers inhabiting a colonial modernity that proscribed creole social reproduction. As Sansay’s novel demonstrates, any consideration of domestic reproduction in the colonial New World would entail an effort to think against, through, or around the presumptive sterility of the creole and the racialized and gendered ideologies that comprised the substance of this colonial doxa. In short, I would contend, the history of creole social reproduction is the secret history of the early American novel.

Works Cited

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Rev. ed. New York: Verso, 1991.
- Armstrong, Nancy. *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*. New York: Oxford UP, 1987.
- Barnes, Elizabeth. *States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel*. New York: Columbia UP, 1997.
- Berman, Carolyn Vellenga. *Creole Crossings: Domestic Fiction and the Reform of Colonial Slavery*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2006.
- Bernabé, Jean, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant. *Éloge de la Créolité: In Praise of Creoleness*. Trans. M.B. Taleb-Khyar. Paris: Gallimard, 1993.
- Blackburn, Robin. *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800*. New York: Verso, 1997.
- Bogues, Anthony. “The Haitian Revolution and the Making of Freedom in Modernity.” Address. Political Theory Workshop. University of Pennsylvania. 25 Mar. 2005.
- Brenner, Johanna. *Women and the Politics of Class*. New York: Monthly Review, 2000.

- Brown, Christopher Leslie. *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2006.
- Brown, Gordon S. *Toussaint's Clause: The Founding Fathers and the Haitian Revolution*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2005.
- Davidson, Cathy N. *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America*. Expanded ed. New York: Oxford UP, 2004.
- Dayan, Joan. *Haiti, History, and the Gods*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1995.
- Drexler, Michael. Introduction. *Secret History; or the Horrors of St. Domingo and Laura*. By Leonora Sansay. Ed. Drexler. Broadview: forthcoming.
- _____. "Brigands and Nuns: The Vernacular Sociology of Collectivity After the Haitian Revolution." *Messy Beginnings: Postcoloniality and Early American Studies*. Ed. Malini Schueller and Edward Watts. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2003. 175-202.
- Dubois, Laurent. *Avengers of the New World : The Story of the Haitian Revolution*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2004.
- Dun, James Alexander. "'What avenues of commerce, will you, Americans, not explore!': Commercial Philadelphia's Vantage onto the Early Haitian Revolution." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 62 (2005): 473-504.
- Egerton, Douglas R. "The Empire of Liberty Reconsidered." *The Revolution of 1800: Democracy, Race, and the New Republic*. Ed. James Horn, Jan Ellen Lewis, and Peter Onuf. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2002. 309-30.
- Federici, Silvia. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation*. Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2004.
- Ferguson, Sue. "Building on the Strengths of the Socialist Feminist Tradition." *Critical Sociology*. 25.1 (1999): 1-15.
- Fick, Carolyn. *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below*. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1990.
- Fischer, Sibylle. *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*. Durham: Duke UP, 2004.
- Flint, Christopher. *Family Fictions: Narrative and Domestic Relations in Britain, 1688-1798*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998.
- Foster, Hannah Webster. *The Coquette*. Ed. Cathy N. Davidson. New York: Oxford UP, 1987.

- Gallagher, Catherine. *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1994.
- Garraway, Doris. *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean*. Durham: Duke UP, 2005.
- Geggus, David Patrick. *Haitian Revolutionary Studies*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2002.
- _____. ed. *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*. Columbia, SC: U of South Carolina P, 2001.
- _____. Introduction. *A Turbulent Time: The French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean*. Ed. David Gaspar and David Geggus. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997.
- Girard, Philippe R. "Liberté, Égalité, Esclavage: French Revolutionary Ideals and the Failure of the Leclerc Expedition to Saint-Domingue." *French Colonial History* 6 (2005): 55-78.
- Goudie, Sean X. *Creole America: The West Indies and the Formation of Literature and Culture in the New Republic*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2006.
- Hickey, Donald R. "America's Response to the Slave Revolt in Haiti, 1791-1806." *Journal of the Early Republic* 2 (1982): 361-379.
- Higgonet, Patrice. "France, Slavery, and the Louisiana Purchase." *Jefferson's America and Napoleon's France*. Ed. Gail Feigenbaum. Seattle: U of Washington P, 2003. 257-63.
- James, C. L. R. *The Black Jacobins*. Second ed. New York: Random House, 1962.
- Katz, Cindi. "Vagabond Capitalism and the Necessity of Social Reproduction." *Antipode* 33 (2001): 709-27.
- Lapsansky, Philip. "Afro-Americana: Rediscovering Leonora Sansay." *The Annual Report of the Library Company of Philadelphia for the Year 1992*. Philadelphia: The Library Company, 1993.
- Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Vol. 1. Trans. Ben Fowkes. London: Penguin Books, 1990.
- Matthewson, Tim. "Jefferson and Haiti." *The Journal of Southern History* 61.2 (1995): 209-248.
- McKeon, Michael. *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2005.

- Mies, Maria. *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labor*. London: Zed, 1986.
- Mintz, Sidney W. "Enduring Substances, Trying Theories: The Caribbean Region as Oikoumene." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2.2 (1996): 289-311.
- Moreau de Saint-Méry, Médéric-Louis Elie. *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de L'Isle Saint-Domingue*. Vol. 1. Paris: Société de L'Histoire des Colonies Françaises et Librairie Larose, 1958.
- Moretti, Franco. *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900*. London: Verso, 1998.
- Onuf, Peter S. *Jefferson's Empire: The Language of American Nationhood. Jeffersonian America*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 2000.
- Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982.
- Pollak, Ellen. *Incest and the English Novel, 1684-1814*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2003.
- Samuels, Shirley. *Romances of the Republic: Women, the Family, and Violence in the Literature of the Early American Nation*. New York: Oxford UP, 1996.
- Sansay, Leonora. *Secret History; or the Horrors of St. Domingo and Laura*. Ed. Michael J. Drexler. Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview, 2007.
- Scott, David. *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*. Durham: Duke UP, 2004.
- Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. "Black Gothic: The Shadowy Origins of the American Bourgeoisie." *Possible Pasts: Becoming Colonial in Early America*. Ed. Robert Blair St. George. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2000. 243-269.
- Stern, Julia. *The Plight of Feeling: Sympathy and Dissent in the Early American Novel*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1997.
- Tennenhouse, Leonard. *The Importance of Feeling English: American Literature and the English Diaspora, 1750-1850*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995.
- Vietto, Angela. "Leonora Sansay." *American Women Prose Writers to 1820*. Ed. Carla Mulford, Angela Vietto and Amy Winans. *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Vol. 200. Detroit: Gale Research, 1999. 330-36.

- Vogel, Lise. *Woman Questions: Essays for a Materialist Feminism*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Warner, Michael. "What's Colonial About Colonial America?" *Possible Pasts: Becoming Colonial in Early America*. Ed. Robert Blair St. George. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2000. 49-70.
- White, Ed. "Early American Nations as Imagined Communities." *American Quarterly* 56.1 (2004): 49-81.
- Williams, Eric. *Capitalism and Slavery*. New York: Capricorn Books, 1966.
- Wimpffen, Alexandre-Stanislas de. *Haïti au XVIIIe Siècle: Richesse et Esclavage dans une Colonie Française*. Ed. Pierre Pluchon. Paris: Karthala, 1993.
- Zuckerman, Michael. "The Power of Blackness: Federalists, Jeffersonians, and the Revolution in San Domingo." *La Révolution Française et Haïti*. Ed. Michel Hector. Vol. 2. Port-au-Prince, Haïti: Société Haïtienne d'Histoire et de Géographie and Henri Deschamps, 1995. 109-50.