

CREOLE TESTIMONIES

The New Urban Atlantic
Elizabeth Fay, Series Editor

The New Urban Atlantic is a new series of monographs, texts, and essay collections focusing on urban, Atlantic, and hemispheric studies. Distinct from the nation-state mentality, the Atlantic world has been from colonial times a fluid international entity, including multiple Atlantic systems such as the triangle trade and the cacao trade that extended globally. The series is distinct in three prime ways: First, it offers a multidisciplinary, multicultural, broadly historical and urban focus. Second, it extends the geographical boundaries from an Old World/New World binary to the entire Atlantic rim, the arctics, and to exchanges between continents other than Europe and North America. Third, it emphasizes the Atlantic World as distinct from the nation-states that participate in it. Ultimately, The New Urban Atlantic series challenges the conventional boundaries of the field by presenting the Atlantic World as an evolving reality.

The first book in the series

*Creole Testimonies: Slave Narratives from the
British West Indies, 1709–1838*
Nicole N. Aljoe

CREOLE TESTIMONIES

SLAVE NARRATIVES FROM THE
BRITISH WEST INDIES, 1709–1838

Nicole N. Aljoe

palgrave
macmillan



CREOLE TESTIMONIES

Copyright © Nicole N. Aljoe, 2012.

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2012 978-0-230-33810-4

All rights reserved.

Cover image: Sugar Mill at Work. *The Illustrated London News* (June 9, 1849), vol. 14, p. 388. (Special Collections Department, University of Virginia Library) Image Reference NW0275, as shown on www.slaveryimages.org, sponsored by the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and the University of Virginia Library. Thanks also to John Weedy at iln.org.uk for a high-resolution copy of the image.

"'Going to Law': Legal Discourse and Testimony in Early West Indian Slave Narratives." *Early American Literature* 46.2 (June 2011).

"Zombie Testimony: Creole Religious Discourse in West Indian Slave Narratives." In *Assimilation and Subversion in Earlier American Literatures*. Ed. Robyn DeRosa. Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006.

"Caribbean Slave Narratives: Creolization in Form and Genre," *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal* 1.2 (spring 2004).
<<http://scholar.library.miami.edu/anthurium/>>.

First published in 2012 by

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN®

in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC,

175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Where this book is distributed in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world, this is by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN 978-1-349-34110-8

ISBN 978-1-137-01280-7 (eBook)

DOI 10.1057/9781137012807

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Aljoe, Nicole N.

Creole testimonies : slave narratives from the British West Indies,
1709–1838 / Nicole N. Aljoe.

p. cm.—(The new urban Atlantic)

1. Slave narratives—West Indies, British—History and criticism.

2. Slavery—West Indies, British—History. 3. Creoles—West Indies, British—History. I. Title.

HT1091.A68 2012

306.3'6209729—dc23

2011024162

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Newgen Imaging Systems (P) Ltd., Chennai, India.

First edition: January 2012

In memory of Beryl Morris and Agnes Aljoe

CONTENTS

<i>Series Foreword</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xi
Introduction “So Much Things to Say”: The Creole Testimonies of British West Indian Slaves	1
1 The Forms of Creole Testimony: A Poetics of Fragmentation	27
2 The Creole Voices of West Indian Slave Narratives	57
3 “Going to Law”: Legal Discourse and Testimony in Early West Indian Slave Narratives	93
4 Zombie Testimony: Creole Religious Discourse in West Indian Slave Narratives	119
Conclusion Creole Testimony and the Black Atlantic: Remapping the Early Slave Narrative	145
<i>Notes</i>	149
<i>Bibliography</i>	161
<i>Index</i>	179

SERIES FOREWORD

Since its inception, the study of the Atlantic World has been premised on the important advances in sixteenth-century technology that made transatlantic voyages possible. Colonization of the North American coast, the establishment of plantations in the Caribbean, European adoption of African slave trade practices, and the subsequent triangle trade network have formed the mainstay of this field. *The New Urban Atlantic* series adds to this set of interests by focusing on the cities (both persistent and failed) that have functioned as important nodal points for Atlantic financial, trade, diplomatic, and cultural networks. Attention to Atlantic cities, the frameworks that identify their similarities and connections both synchronically and diachronically, and their divergences from such norms expands research opportunities by allowing new questions to be asked and new problems to be posed.

Methodologically, the books in *The New Urban Atlantic* series will engage the interdisciplinary fields of literature and cultural history, with the historical framed by the *longue durée* of geophysical realities, the environment, and changes in that environment that have impacted human experience, and the cultural construed as the representational forms and systems that arose out of Atlantic rim interaction. Within this historiocultural framework, the urban is meant to encompass both coastal and riverine settlements wherever large tributaries provided access to Atlantic commerce in all its senses. Another methodological feature of the series is the attention, wherever possible, to indigenous and Western immigrant cultures in dynamic and multidirectional relations with each other, as well as with preexisting histories of coastal and riverine trade and political and social networks on all four continents and Caribbean islands, to produce a new cultural arena—the Atlantic World. In consequence of both these attributes, the historiocultural framework, and attention to multicultural interaction, individual volumes in the series will contribute to its broad purpose of bringing precontact and colonial cultural history in conversation with work on the modern era, and

with today's contemporary mediations of sociocultural, environmental, economic, and technological challenges to the Atlantic World.

In addition to an extended historical perimeter of inquiry, *The New Urban Atlantic* series is framed by hemispheric interactivity in cultural networks, trade networks, and global commerce in goods, ideas, and peoples. Of utmost importance to this conception of Atlanticism, as the series' second methodological feature underscores, are interactions and exchanges among indigenous and immigrant peoples in both hemispheres, and the mutual histories these engagements produced. Although contributions of British and Dutch colonizing projects continue to inform understandings of Atlantic systems, these must be seen in relation to Spanish and Portuguese imperial projects, as well as other culturally conditioned contacts and engagements. Moreover, if the Atlantic World is an ongoing yet changeable locus of systems, networks, and identities across and between two hemispheres and four continents, it is furthermore constituted as a system within the larger framework of world systems and is thus always in dialogue with global networks, especially in terms of trade and technological circuits.

Books in *The New Urban Atlantic* series will treat the Atlantic World as a still-ongoing reality that distinguishes the Atlantic rim by its shared concerns and maritime-oriented identity. Cities such as Halifax, Montreal, Albany, Boston, New Bedford, New York, Cahokia, Charleston, Mexico City, Santo Domingo, Rio de Janeiro, Dakar, Lisbon, Amsterdam, Liverpool, or Copenhagen may be defined according to many local, regional, and national factors but are also conditioned by their geographic location on the edge of a great ocean or with riverine access to it. Whatever other economic, social, or cultural patterns of exchange in which they are hubs, such cities are also characterized by particular relationships that are best understood as part of Atlantic systems. In this sense, through a focus on cities, *The New Urban Atlantic* series can also foreground urban effects on the environment for both land and ocean ecologies. The transplantation of botanical specimens, importation of livestock, changes in agricultural techniques on city perimeters, and fouling of waterways are just some of the ways in which the Old World-New World interactions have had profound and continuing effects on the Atlantic World. These continued effects influence global environmental activity just as the Atlantic World has been and continues to be conditioned by that activity.

SERIES EDITOR: ELIZABETH FAY
University of Massachusetts Boston

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank the following people and institutions for their vital and crucial support for this project.

Since this project began as a dissertation, I begin by thanking those who helped with its genesis. First, my deepest thanks and gratitude to my dissertation committee members: Barbara Rodriguez, Sonia Hofkosh, Modhumita Roy, and especially my wonderful outside reader, Faith Smith.

I also thank Kari Winter for introducing me to slave narrative scholarship, as well as Robyn Warhol, Philip Baruth, Elizabeth Ammons, and Christina Sharpe for offering courses that helped me to think through crucial components of this project.

I thank my graduate school colleagues who provided intellectual and emotional camaraderie: Katherine Morris, Rekha Rosha, Pallavi Rastogi, Amor Kohli, Kimberly Hebert, Sofia Cantave, and Nicole Smith. I'm also thankful to Marilyn Glater and the members of WOW.

I received crucial financial support from several institutions, which allowed me to focus on doing research for this project. I received dissertation fellowships from the Tufts University Department of English, and The Five Colleges Association, which provided a Mendenhall Dissertation Fellowship from Smith College. At Smith, I thank Elizabeth Seelye, Michael Gorra, Anne Ferguson, Kevin Everod Quashie, Richard Millington, and Michael Thurston. I also thank my Five College Fellow colleagues Nicole Guidotti-Hernandez and Carol Bailey for their support during that fellowship year and long after. And the University of Utah and Northeastern University both provided financial support for research.

As a literary historian my deepest thanks go to the various libraries, librarians, and archivists who helped throughout the years. Martin Antonetti, Curator of Rare Books at Smith College; Widener Library at Harvard University; The British Library; The Anti-Slavery Library in London; The Boston Public Library; The Institute of Jamaica;

The Jamaica National Library; The Barbados Historical Society; The Libraries of the University of the West Indies at Mona, Jamaica, and Cave Hill, Barbados.

I'm thankful to several of my colleagues at the University of Utah for their support and/or willingness to read drafts of chapters: Stuart Culver, Stacey Margolis, Katherine Bond Stockton, Vincent Chen, Brooke Hopkins, Meena Shapiro, Brian Locke, Paisley Rekdal, and especially Wilfred Samuels. I also thank my spa sisters, without whom I would not have survived the Utah winters: Erika George, Paula Smith, and Kaye Richards.

I'm incredibly thankful to my new colleagues at Northeastern University who have provided me with an exciting and vibrant intellectual community that made the completion of this project possible. I especially thank Carla Kaplan, Laura Green, Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, Mary Loeffelholz, and Amilcar Barretto.

I also owe a deep debt of gratitude to the awesome members of the New England Black Studies Collective. Your intellectual generosity and fierce support energizes me every day. Thank you Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman, Sandy Alexandre, Alisa Brathwaite, Kimberly Juanita Brown, Soyica Diggs Colbert, Régine Jean-Charles, Monica White Ndounou, Stephanie Larrieux, and Sam Vasquez.

I also thank the anonymous reviewers for Palgrave Macmillan, as well as editor, Brigitte Shull, and series editor, Barbara Fay, as well as the copyeditors. Any mistakes are mine.

And, of course, my deepest gratitude and thanks are owed to my family: Carla, Shaana, Mom, Dad, and especially Steve and Courtney, your abiding love and consistent belief in me throughout these many years has been my greatest source of strength.