

# White, Sophie. Voices of the Enslaved: Love, Labor, and Longing in French Louisiana

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souffrant, qui abuse des drogues pour combattre la douleur, doit encore s'infléchir. En 1913, il quitte la *Guerre sociale* pour fonder *Le Bonnet rouge*, hebdomadaire de luxe qui se transforme l'année suivante en quotidien du soir. L'ancien anarchiste, devenu socialiste blanquiste, y soutient la politique radical-socialiste de Caillaux, le ministre des finances – celui-là même dont la femme, excédée par les critiques incessantes du *Figaro* contre son mari, tue le directeur du quotidien de cinq coups de pistolet. Les relations du révolutionnaire deviennent plus choisies. « [É]légance des tenues, fréquentations mondaines, Miguel s'est tout à fait coulé dans le moule du journaliste bourgeois de la Belle Époque, et *Le Bonnet rouge* quotidien n'est rien d'autre qu'un journal "blocard" sans âme ni originalité. Une métamorphose qui déçoit [...] » (209). Le financement du *Bonnet rouge* paraît équivoque. Après le début de la guerre, lorsque l'ancien antimilitariste s'est rendu aux sirènes de l'Union sacrée, il arrive même de l'argent de Malvy, ministre de l'Intérieur, dont les rapports avec Almereyda sont assez étrangement étroits. Daudet et Maurras, ravis de pouvoir trouver des motifs de s'en prendre à leur vieil adversaire, traitent Almereyda d'indigène, d'agent provocateur et d'être un espion à la solde de l'Allemagne. Désormais devenu « un dandy tragique miné par la maladie » (236), celui-ci est incarcéré à Fresnes, accusé d'espionnage. Il y meurt le 14 août 1917, dans des circonstances encore et toujours douteuses. Meurtre ? Suicide ? Conséquence de son état de santé qui n'avait cessé de s'empirer ? Les hypothèses sont nombreuses, mais la réponse définitive demeure fuyante.

Francis Jourdain, un de ses vieux compagnons, a défini Almereyda « une attachante figure que mille légendes tendent à déformer, et dont le vrai portrait reste à faire » (271). Grâce à ce volume, basé sur des recherches extrêmement approfondies dans nombre d'archives et de bibliothèques, et nourri de la consultation de documents jusqu'ici inconnus des historiens, mis à la disposition de l'autrice par l'arrière-petit-fils d'Almereyda, nous avons maintenant un portrait complexe, multidimensionnel et très évocateur d'un personnage clef du monde politique et journalistique de la Belle Époque. Anne Steiner signe ici une belle biographie, infuse de sympathie pour son sujet, captivant et original, mais qui sait demeurer strictement objective – une peinture toute en ombres et en lumières, qui restitue, dans une belle langue, de lecture très agréable, un parcours de vie unique et le milieu qui a été le sien.

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White, Sophie. *Voices of the Enslaved: Love, Labor, and Longing in French Louisiana*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press and Williamsburg: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2019. 286 p.

Sophie White is richly deserving of the seven awards (2020 Frederick Douglass Book Prize, Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition; 2020 James A. Rawley Prize, American Historical Association; 2020 Mary Alice and Philip Boucher Book Prize, French Colonial Historical Society; 2019 Kemper and Leila Williams Prize in Louisiana History, The Historic New Orleans Collection and the Louisiana Historical Association; Co-Winner of the 2020 Rosalyn Terborg-Penn Prize, Association for the Study of the Worldwide African Diaspora; Co-Winner of the 2020 Summerlee Book Prize, Center for History and Culture of Southeast Texas and the Upper Gulf Coast at Lamar University; and, Honorable Mention, 2020 Merle Curti Social History Award, Organization of American Historians) and two recognitions (Shortlisted, 2020 Kenshur Prize, Center for Eighteenth-Century Studies and Finalist, 2020 Sterling Stuckey Book Prize, Association for the Study of the Worldwide African Diaspora) she has received for *Voices of the Enslaved: Love, Labor, and Longing in French Louisiana*. Her detailed analysis of the legal testimony of approximately 150 enslaved women and men in

eighteenth-century New Orleans provides a unique entry into their lives. White adeptly shows how the questioning of these women and men in criminal trials, whether they were testifying as a defendant, victim, or witness to a crime, allowed for their personal stories to emerge, whereby demonstrating how these testimonies so rightly merit to be identified as autobiographical narratives. Each testimony literally had me deeply engrossed in the plight of each person, so much so I felt that I was right there in the courtroom. For example, Chapter 3: “Not So Denatured as to Kill Her Child” begins with the July 17, 1748 testimony of Marie-Jeanne:

Interrogated why she had not told Matis and Dame Braseau that she was pregnant when they asked her?

Said that when she was asked if she did not feel anything move in her stomach she told them no and that those who asked her these questions said that it must be a mole [molar pregnancy] and that she did not know what a mole was, that she does not know this.

Interrogated why she hid from Dame Beauvois that she had brought a child into the world before the mole, the said Dame Beauvois had told you that you could well have given birth to a child before the mole?

Said that she does not know if she gave birth to a child, lots of stuff came out of her body but having fainted she did not know what happened to her since then, that having come to she found next to her lots of stuff that had come from her body, and having said to the little *sauvagesse* [female Indian] of Mr. Braseau’s to go warn her mistress, which she did not want to do, and having gathered into her apron everything that was around her that was left from what she had delivered from her body, she went to the house as best she could. (96)

White’s ability to transmit the feelings of these enslaved people and bring to the forefront the struggles they faced is nothing short of remarkable. She helps the modern reader to appreciate how these women and men navigated too often abrupt and painful changes in life, especially as they moved from West African to indigenous to colonial cultures. Across all the chapters (Chapter 1: “Only in Default of Whites”: Slave Testimony and Court Procedure; Chapter 2: “It’s Only from God That We Ask Forgiveness”: Louison; Chapter 3: “Not So Denatured as to Kill Her Child”: Marie-Jeanne and Lisette; Chapter 4: “Our Place”: Francisque, Démocrite, and Hector; and Chapter 5: “Asleep in Their Bed at the Door of Their Cabin”: Kenet and Jean-Baptiste) that detail four highly significant court cases, the stories offer insight into eighteenth-century New Orleans morals, societal values, as well as perspectives on labor, violence, and familial bonds that were imposed upon the enslaved populations. Especially helpful for appreciating the stories at a deeper level is how White punctuates her analysis with records in French, paintings, maps and architectural drawings. The epilogue, “Toward an Intellectual Critique of Slavery?” furnishes the perfect denouement as well as an ideal springboard for further discussion on the trauma of slavery in all its forms. In conclusion, White’s *Voices of the Enslaved: Love, Labor, and Longing in French Louisiana* sheds much needed light on the multiple intricacies of different cultures forcibly coming into contact with one another and as a result, can be used in a wide variety of courses, including but definitely not limited to francophone culture of North America and U.S. history.

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