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**Slaves and Slavery in Louisiana:
The Evolution of Atlantic World Identities, 1791-1831**

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**Slaves and Slavery in Louisiana:
The Evolution of Atlantic World Identities, 1791-1831**

by

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Dedication

For Michelle and Emma Claire

Acknowledgements

One never really leaves Louisiana. It has that quality—an almost indescribable pull—that I suppose most Southern places do. Even as I began my graduate study in history at Virginia Tech, a place striking in its topographical and cultural differences with Louisiana, I wondered if I might respond to that pull not by physically returning there, but by studying it. With a timely nudge from my thesis advisor, Randy Shifflett, I realized that Louisiana was more than an adequate intellectual pursuit.

During my doctoral studies at the University of Texas, my dissertation evolved from using Louisiana as a component of a comparative project, to my deciding that Louisiana itself was worthy of a study unto itself. Once again, subtle but persistent nudging by mentors and friends—as well as that strange, almost inexplicable tugging by Louisiana itself—convinced me to focus on my home state. Personally and intellectually, I am glad that I have. The story that follows has been a labor of love and a rewarding experience, both personally and professionally.

I owe many people thanks for helping me along the way. All of my graduate school friends provided support in several ways, not the least of which

was pooling resources to fund a cooperative fellowship that allowed me to research longer in Louisiana than I otherwise could have. In my Garrison Hall orb, I owe special thanks to friends and professors who made my time at Texas the right blend of fun and productive. Special thanks to Austin’s informal “Louisiana Mafia”—our beer-drinking cadre of muses that has tolerated my strange ideas about Louisiana history and even stranger political beliefs. These mafia members, including Kenny Aslakson, Lissa Bolletino, Tim Buckner (an ad-hoc Mississippianist), Sara Fanning, and Sandra Frink provided important support in a large program. To my dissertation committee members Aline Helg and Shirley Thompson, thanks for the on-target comments and helpful suggestions.

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Finally, I reserve the most important thanks for the two women in my life. My wife Michelle passed on a honeymoon so that I could get back to classes at Virginia Tech. Not much has changed since then, as the honeymoon still has not occurred. Michelle has provided unwavering support for my career while reminding me of the need to work less. I am forever indebted for both. During the height of that work—dissertation-researching and writing—Emma Claire arrived. Her entry into this world proved to be the right combination of distracting and inspiring. She is my sunshine, as is her mother, thus I dedicate this project to them.

**Slaves and Slavery in Louisiana:
The Evolution of Atlantic World Identities, 1791-1831**

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Kevin David Roberts, Ph.D.
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Supervisor: James Sidbury

Using two Atlantic World events—the Haitian Revolution and Nat Turner’s Rebellion—as temporal bookends, this study examines the ways in which enslaved peoples of African descent were not only affected by, but influenced, the major societal and economic changes in Louisiana’s evolution into a slave society. In addition to analyzing Louisiana as a geographical and imperial borderland, I situate my study at the convergence of several sub-fields of Atlantic World slavery: studies of the impact of specific West African cultures on the New World, the scholarship on the Age of Revolution, and the literature on slave resistance. Relying on an array of Spanish, French, and English sources—from civil documents to church registers, and from judicial cases to plantation records—I re-construct the various identities that enslaved people developed as participants in the contested construction of a slave regime.

Slaves were faced with two demographic upheavals that dramatically altered their culture, communities, and social relations during this period. First, in the 1790s, the slave population of Louisiana became “re-Africanized” as thousands of African-born slaves were shipped to the colony for the first time in several decades. Using the Catholic Church to incorporate these new arrivals, many of whom were Congolese, into their communities, enslaved people in Louisiana navigated this internal challenge at the same time they continued to tweak the slave control regime that American governance sparked.

Second, with the close of the trans-atlantic slave trade in 1808, Louisiana’s slave population entered its second period of creolization. Given the immense numbers of forced migrants from the Upper South during the 1810s and 1820s, I argue that the domestic slave trade presented similar cultural challenges to the state’s re-Africanized slave population. In the end, slaves in Louisiana minimized African ethnic differences so much that the long-held goal of whites—establishing a biracial hierarchy that equated race with slavery—was fulfilled. While the Haitian Revolution had created near hysteria among frightened white Louisianans during the 1790s, their later counterparts perceived Nat Turner’s Rebellion to be evidence of their society’s stability.

Table of Contents

Introduction and Chapter 1 From Backwater to Boom: Louisiana' s Society with Slaves, 1699-1790	1
The Place	5
The Century	12
The Argument.....	18
Chapter 2 Saint-Domingue in Louisiana? Slave Resistance, White Hysteria, and a Fledgling Slave Regime	35
Marronage and Resistance Before Haiti.....	39
Jacobinism in Louisiana, Real and Imagined	54
Praying and Dancing	69
Putting "Depraved Subversions into Execution"	85
"When we will be Republicans/We will hang all the Rascals"	98
Chapter 3 Congolization: Constructing Community Through Afro- Catholicism.....	101
Sugar, Cotton, and the Slave Trade	105
Congolization.....	112
Godparenting, Fictive Kin, and Community	122
Marie Therese	129
Congolization, via Charleston	133
From "Bambara" to "Congo"	138
Gendered Markets.....	146
The Birth of Congo Square.....	150

Chapter 4 Congolization Manifested: Louisiana' s Tumultuous Slave Society, 1811-19.....	153
Why the German Coast?.....	157
"The greatest of all human calamities"	166
"A terrible example to all..."	173
Aftershocks	179
Free Blacks	186
Trans-Atlantic to Domestic Worries.....	196
Chapter 5 Toward Re-Creolization: Sugar Slavery, Cotton Slavery, and the Domestic Slave Trade, 1820-31	199
More Sugar, More Cotton.....	203
The Expanding Slave Trade	208
Losing Redress	222
Performing the Sale	226
Slaves' Time.....	230
Conclusion Evolutions.....	238
Bibliography	246
Vita	265

Introduction and Chapter 1: From Backwater to Boom: Louisiana's Society with Slaves, 1699-1790

Louisiana struggled. Working feverishly to block further expansion by the Spanish in the Gulf Coast region, Pierre Le Moyne, Sieur d'Iberville, constructed forts at the Biloxi and Mobile Rivers in 1699. Inhabited only by a handful of soldiers, these fledgling outposts symbolized for Louis XIV the bleak outlook for future settlement. The king thus began leasing the colony to a private investor, Antoine Crozat, who by 1717 concluded that the monarch's suspicions were correct and returned Louisiana to the French government. Only through the efforts and seemingly unrealistic vision of Iberville's brother, Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville, did the southern portion of New France take root. To spur that development, Bienville planned and founded New Orleans, which would become both the capital and epicenter of the entire Louisiana country.¹

That so much of the planned city, which was merely a glorified frontier outpost for decades, was below sea level posed significant problems for human life. Frequent hurricanes, seasonal rainstorms, and subtropical humidity year-round provided a fertile breeding ground for both marine, land-based, and airborne pests. The smallest of these, the mosquito, posed the greatest threat to life, as its transmission of yellow fever and malaria to humans started dozens of

¹ Marcel Giraud, *A History of French Louisiana*, vol. 1, *The Reign of Louis XIV, 1698-1715*, trans. Joseph C. Lambert (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), 80-101; Thomas N. Ingersoll, *Mammon and Manon in Early New Orleans: The First Slave Society in the Deep South, 1718-1819* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 3-6; James T. McGowan, "Planters Without Slaves: Origins of a New World Labor System," *Southern Studies* 16 (1977): 5-26.

epidemics during the eighteenth century. Little did the French know that the slow-moving, pest-infested bayous—not to mention the heavy, sticky, humidity-laden air—surrounding New Orleans symbolized Louisiana’s squalid society and languishing economy during the eighteenth century.²

The environment, as well as its effect on colonial society, did not go unnoticed by contemporary observers. In the 1770s, remarking on the Amite River near Baton Rouge, William Bartram could easily have been describing any waterway in the colony, and the sensations it elicited from inhabitants:

There is scarcely a perceptible current: the water deep, turgid, and stagnate [*sic*], being from shore to shore covered with a scum or pellicle of a green and purplish cast...in short, these dark loathsome waters, from every appearance, seem to be a strong extract or tincture of the leaves of the trees, herbs, and reeds...insomuch as these stagnate rivers, during the summer and autumnal seasons, are constrained to pass under a load of grass and weeds...until the rising of floods of winter and spring, rushing down from the main, sweep them away, and purify the waters.³

The conventional wisdom among colonists and colonizers throughout the eighteenth century was that the geological morass of Louisiana had spilled into the colony’s social structure. As early as 1723, one resident declared, “this is a country which, to the shame of France be it said, is without religion, without

² Colonial Louisiana begs for treatment by environmental historians. On the frequent epidemics during the early colonial period, see John G. Clark, *New Orleans, 1718-1812: An Economic History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), 8, 23, 49, 57; Ingersoll, *Mammon to Manon*, 30-32.

³ Mark Van Doren, ed. *The Travels of William Bartram* (n.p., Macy-Masius, 1928), 339-40.

justice, without discipline, without order, and without police.”⁴ Nearly seventy years later, few colonists would have disagreed.

Like other colonial enterprises, Louisiana’s bleak early period belies its subsequent economic vibrancy. By the eve of the American Civil War, New Orleans was the most cosmopolitan city in the South, and the state possessed the highest per capita income in the nation. The root of this change—a profitable, slave-based economy, with its attendant socioeconomic ordering of white society and politics—is central to understanding Louisiana’s development. For the French, whose experience with slavery in their Caribbean sugar colonies made them appreciate the necessity of finding a cash crop in Louisiana, using unfree and indentured laborers was the basis of that evolution. In the absence of such a crop, however, and, in the absence of technological innovation in agricultural production, this means of achieving prosperity would never be realized under French governance.⁵

Most centrally, this study is an examination of two simultaneous and interlocking events: the evolution of Louisiana from a society with slaves, dominated by frontier agricultural districts, to a plantation-based, slave society in the early nineteenth century; and the attendant evolution of Louisiana’s enslaved population from being largely creolized to largely Africanized, only to become re-creolized during the 1820s. Thus, the intertwining economic, social, political, and

⁴ Jacques de La Chaise to the Directors of the Company of the Indies, September 6, 1723, in Dunbar Rowland and A. G. Sanders, eds. and trans., *Mississippi Provincial Archives: French Dominion* (Jackson, Miss.: 1919-1932), 3 vols., II, 317-19.

⁵ Charles C. Gayarré, *A History of Louisiana*, 4 vols. (New York: W. J. Middleton, 1866), II and III.

diplomatic events provide the context within which the crux of this study—how creole and African-born slaves dealt with the cultural and demographic upheavals within their communities, while simultaneously re-ordering the ways in which they contested being enslaved—occurred.⁶

Using two Atlantic World events—the Haitian Revolution and Nat Turner’s Rebellion—as temporal bookends, I focus on the ways in which enslaved peoples of African descent were not only affected by, but influenced, the major societal and economic changes in Louisiana’s evolution into a slave society. In addition to analyzing Louisiana as a geographical and imperial borderland, I situate the case of Louisiana at the convergence of several sub-fields of Atlantic World slavery: studies of the impact of specific West African cultures on the New World, the scholarship on the Age of Revolution, and the literature on slave resistance.⁷ Relying on an array of Spanish, French, and English sources—from civil documents to church registers, and from judicial cases to plantation records—I re-construct the various identities that enslaved people developed as participants in the contested construction of a slave regime.

Twenty years ago, Rhys Isaac, in his magisterial *The Transformation of Virginia*, prompted historians to focus on interpreting events from the perspectives of the historical actors we study. “Through a process of elucidating

⁶ I adopt the language of Ira Berlin regarding societies with slaves, which contained enslaved people but did not develop the racial hierarchy necessary for slavery to be the primary labor system. Slave societies, on the other hand, were dominated by the institution, not only in terms of labor, but also politically and socially. See Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), introd.

⁷ I explore this literature fully below.

contexts, structures, and meanings,” Isaac explains, “we can learn to reconstruct something of the participants’ worlds as they experienced them.”⁸ Taking a cue from Isaac’s directive, and building upon recent slave-culture scholarship, I have constructed the fascinating drama of Louisiana from 1791 to 1831 within which peoples of African descent suffered and mitigated, altered and accommodated, influenced and resisted, the burgeoning slave regime in that fledgling Atlantic World society.

THE PLACE

Most studies of colonial Louisiana have focused on New Orleans.⁹ While this focus is understandable—three-quarters of the colony’s eighteenth century

⁸ Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1998 [1982]), 325. Isaac’s “Discourse on Method,” pp.323 -57, remains one of the most compelling methodological explanations for historians of non-elite peoples.

⁹ Examples include Ingersoll, *Mammon to Manon*; Clark, *An Economic History*; Kimberley Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1769-1803* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

¹⁰ Philip D. Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998). I use the term “plantation frontier” to denote those areas in Louisiana (and elsewhere) that were beyond the scope of the two agricultural “revolutions” in this period, sugar- and cotton-production. In time, the “plantation complex”—the system whereby plantations dominated economic transactions and, as I see it, macro-level political decisions—encroached and subsumed much of this frontier. Throughout this study, I argue that the Natchitoches and Attakapas districts, both west of the Mississippi River, are examples first, of the plantation frontier, and second, of the plantation complex. See Edward E. Baptist, *Creating an Old South: Middle Florida's Plantation Frontier Before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Richard Beeman, *The Evolution of the Southern Backcountry: A Case Study of Lunenburg County, Virginia, 1746-1832* (Philadelphia, 1984); Alan Galloway, *The Formation of a Planter Elite: Jonathan Bryan and the Southern Colonial Frontier* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989); Donald P. McNeilly, *The Old South Frontier: Cotton Plantations and the Formation of Arkansas Society, 1819-1861* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000); Sarah Russell, “Ethnicity, Commerce, and Community on Lower Louisiana’s Plantation Frontier, 1803-1828,” *Louisiana History* 40 (1999): 389-405.

inhabitants lived in or immediately around the city—it becomes less defensible with the advance of time. By the turn of the nineteenth century, migrants, both enslaved and free, were pouring into Louisiana’s frontier, western districts, steadily increasing the proportion of the population that lived outside the New Orleans area. By 1830, the city remained the economic engine for the state, and one-third of Louisiana’s inhabitants lived there. Thus in terms of sheer numbers, New Orleans cannot accurately stand as the only place of inquiry. More importantly, the emergence of Louisiana’s hinterlands from plantation frontier to plantation belt, reveals much about patterns of slave-based, economic change, and the ways in which slaves navigated such change.

Not focusing solely on New Orleans also allows for an examination of a notion that has received little attention by scholars: the evolution of the colony’s districts from plantation frontiers to modern sites of the plantation complex.¹⁰ Chronologically, this development occurred earliest in the eastern districts of New Orleans and Pointe Coupée. With the sugar and cotton “revolutions” in Louisiana, this transition was underway in the other two districts on which I focus, Attakapas and Natchitoches. With significant differences in the ethnic composition among slaves in these districts—namely, that slaves in New Orleans between 1790 and 1820 were largely African, while slaves in the other districts were not—exploring slave culture provides an illustrative intrastate comparison. This comparison underscores the larger social factors and individual, local relations that combined to create slave communities in a given place.

Table 1.1 *Population of Colonial Louisiana and Spanish West Florida, 1785*¹¹

District	Whites	Free People of Color	Slaves	Total
<i>Northern La.</i>				
Natchitoches	404	8	344	756
Rapides	63	0	25	88
Avoyelles	149	0	138	287
Ouachita	198	0	9	207
<i>Southwestern La.</i>				
Attakapas/Opelousas	1,204	22	1,182	2,408
Pointe Coupée	482	4	1,035	1,521
<i>Florida Parishes</i> ¹²				
Baton Rouge/Manchac	68	2	100	170
Galveztown	237	0	5	242
<i>New Orleans & Vicinity—River Parishes</i>				
Iberville	451	0	222	673
Valenzuela	306	0	46	352
Acadian Coast	912	18	402	1,332
First German Coast	561	69	1,273	1,903
Second German Coast	714	5	581	1,300
Chapitoulas Coast	1,128	263	5,645	7,036
<i>New Orleans & Vicinity—Southeastern La.</i>				
New Orleans	2,826	563	1,631	5,028
Fourche	333	0	273	606
Bayou St. John	91	14	573	678
St. Bernard	584	2	0	586
New Orleans to Balize	387	67	1,664	2,118
<i>Totals</i>	<i>11,409</i>	<i>1,037</i>	<i>15,210</i>	<i>27,656</i>

¹¹ Lawrence Kinnaird, comp., *Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, 3 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1949-53), II, 355-6.

¹² Consisted of the portion of present-day Louisiana that had been part of Spanish West Florida (hence known as the ‘Florida parishes’) and the listed districts in Louisiana.

Adopting such an approach reinforces my agenda in promoting geographically broad studies that focus on the fuzzy interactions of peoples from different cultures. In short, I envision the present study to be as much about the Atlantic World as about Louisiana. That task is made easier by Louisiana's inherently compelling position as a quasi-American, quasi-Caribbean slave society. Thus the case of Louisiana requires that scholars explore its social and cultural evolution with significant attention to Old World traditions and other New World societies where similar processes played out. As I emphasize, Louisiana's Atlantic qualities were reinvigorated with the arrival of several thousand Africans during the 1790s and early 1800s.¹³

Settlers of various nationalities had pushed the Louisiana frontier farther west and northwest, but the center of Louisiana's economic, political, and cultural life was New Orleans. In 1785, of the 27,656 residents living in the part of the colony that is now the state of Louisiana, three-fourths of them lived in and immediately around New Orleans (see Table 1.1, page 7). In addition to most of the whites (66 percent) in the colony living in the New Orleans vicinity, the vast majority of free people of color (96 percent) and slaves (80 percent) lived in the district. Though the hinterlands of the colony would eventually thrive and grow, New Orleans was clearly the colony's economic, political, and cultural center, a

¹³ On this issue, see Ingersoll, *Mammon to Manon*, ch. 6; Thomas Fiehrer, "Saint-Domingue/Haiti: Louisiana's Caribbean Connection," *Louisiana History* 30 (1989): 419-37.

feature that would facilitate its emergence as one of the New World's chief entrepôts in the nineteenth century.¹⁴

Thirty miles northwest of New Orleans lay the "German" and "Acadian Coasts." Peopled first by German immigrants, the east-bank parishes on the Mississippi River became centers of Louisiana's sugar boom in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Likewise, across the river on the west bank, thousands of Acadian, or "Cajun," migrants from Nova Scotia during the 1780s arrived, and quickly helped to fuel a similar economic boom, also based on sugar, in their own district. The presence of Germanic peoples, Acadian migrants, and "Isleños," or Canary Islanders, in these parishes created a white population that was often the object of scorn by continental French and wealthy planters. The part-class, part-ethnic distinctions made between white Creoles¹⁵ and these colonists created a wedge that free blacks and slaves would exploit.¹⁶

¹⁴ Computed from Table 1.1, page 7. I include all the areas in the subheadings "River Parishes" and "Southeastern La."

¹⁵ Prior to 1800 in Louisiana, capital-C "Creole" was used to refer only to whites, and in particular to descendants of the continental French (as opposed to the Acadians) and/or the continental Spanish (as opposed to Canary Islanders). Little-c "creole" referred to Louisiana-born people, white and black, though in a variety of historical records one most frequently sees the term applied to slaves. As the free black community expanded in the nineteenth century, however, people of mixed ancestry (that is white and black "racial" heritages), many of whom wanted to distinguish themselves from slaves, adopted the usage. For the best treatment of this issue, see Virginia R. Dominguez, *White By Definition: Social Classification in Creole Louisiana* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1986), esp. 12-15, 93-132; Shirley Elizabeth Thompson, "The Passing of a People: Creoles of Color in Mid-Nineteenth Century New Orleans," (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2001).

¹⁶ On the German Coast, see "German Immigration to French Colonial Louisiana: A Reevaluation," in *Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Meeting of the French Historical Society, April 6-8, 1979*, ed. Heggory and Cooke, 70-81; J. Hanno Deiler, *The Settlement of the German Coast of Louisiana and the Creoles of German Descent* (1909; reprint, Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, 1970). On the Acadian Coast, see Carl A. Brasseaux, *The Founding of New Acadia: The Beginnings of Acadian Life in Louisiana, 1765-1803* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987).

Nonetheless, during the 1790s, this region would grow in tandem with New Orleans, to the point where it and the city were intertwined in the sugar economy of south Louisiana.

Upriver 150 miles was the slave-heavy district of Pointe Coupée, which occupied the western bank of the Mississippi River, across from the administratively distinct Spanish West Florida. As earlier studies, namely Gwendolyn Midlo Hall's, have shown, this district was equally important to New Orleans in the arena of slavery and slave culture during the eighteenth century. Examined together with Spanish West Florida in this study, the region would be the seat of unsettling slave conspiracies throughout the late eighteenth century.¹⁷

In addition to New Orleans, its adjacent sugar district, and the Pointe Coupee/Spanish West Florida area, two additional districts in Louisiana comprised the colony's frontier. West of the Mississippi River by sixty miles, and lying just barely north of New Orleans's latitude, the Attakapas District of south-central Louisiana had emerged as a place of opportunity for settlers who could not afford the rising land prices of New Orleans and its surrounding parishes. Settlers

Though this situation might appear to some scholars of race as evidence of eighteenth-century "whiteness," I find that to be an untenable position. Not a single document in my research gives evidence of these groups' "whiteness" being attacked. Obviously, to do so would be to relegate these groups to the status of slaves, for which even Louisiana's nascent racial order would not provide. For a compelling study of ethnic tensions, though still not in the vein of "whiteness" studies, see Sarah P. Russell, "Cultural Conflicts and Common Interests: The Making of the Sugar Planter Class in Louisiana, 1795-1853," Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 2000; Dominguez, *White By Definition*; Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon, eds., *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992).

¹⁷ Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992); F. Andrew McMichael, "Reluctant Revolutionaries: The West Florida Borderlands, 1785-1810," (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 2000).

living in the frontier Attakapas region extracted profitability not through a single cash crop, but from several. Throughout the late eighteenth century the district reported earnings on a variety of agricultural goods ranging from corn to indigo to sugar to rice. Bridging the sugar-producing and cotton-producing regions of subsequent periods, the Attakapas District's diversified, agricultural economy in the eighteenth century was much like it would be in the early nineteenth century, though significantly smaller in scale.¹⁸

Though Attakapas was two days' hard travel from New Orleans, it was merely halfway between the colony's capital and its northernmost outpost, Natchitoches. Founded early in Louisiana's history as an obstacle to Spain's eastward expansion from Texas, Natchitoches flourished as the truest "middle ground" of all the districts in the colony.¹⁹ Located on Louisiana's Red River, which until 1827 was a major conduit of traffic to the Mississippi and then New Orleans, the town had a thriving economy of diverse agriculture and trading goods. Given its strategic location as a station between white settlement and nearby American Indian groups, and given its early population of African slaves, Natchitoches, like its much larger capital city, New Orleans, would emerge as Louisiana's second-most culturally diverse city.²⁰

¹⁸ Harry Lewis Griffin, *The Attakapas Country* (Lafayette: Pelican Books, 1959).

¹⁹ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Daniel Usner's notion of a "frontier exchange economy" is particularly applicable to the Natchitoches region, as Usner himself explains in *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley Before 1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

²⁰ Gary B. Mills, *The Forgotten People: Cane River's Creoles of Color* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977).

THE CENTURY

Three major issues characterized life in eighteenth-century Louisiana: the evolution of New Orleans from a frontier town to a regional center of trade, politics, and social life; the establishment of a new frontier west of New Orleans, essentially centered around the three towns of Natchitoches, Opelousas, and St. Martinville; and the expansion of the institution of slavery and its attendant influx of African-born slaves. Each of these themes carried over into the early nineteenth century, and both affected and were affected by the two evolutionary processes that are the center of this project. By examining all three themes, and exploring how the different components of the colony of Louisiana interacted with the others, this study, in addition to using Louisiana as an exemplar for Atlantic World studies, also fills a significant omission in the burgeoning scholarship on Louisiana.²¹

Following the founding of New Orleans in 1718, the French government initiated an ambitious settlement program to the colony. Envisioning New Orleans as the linchpin of a vast empire that stretched from Canada, through the Lower Mississippi River Valley, to the French Antilles, the duke of Orléans, minister for the youthful Louis XV, saw the ambitious plans for New Orleans as an example of France's shifting imperial goals after the death of Louis XIV. No longer

²¹ For example, see Hanger, *Bounded Lives*; Hall, *Africans in Louisiana*; Ingersoll, *Mammon to Manon*; Russell, "Cultural Conflicts"; Virginia Meacham Gould, ed., *Chained to the Rock of Adversity: To be Free, Black, and Female in the Old South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998); Thompson, "The Passing of a People."

beholden to the unimaginative, half-hearted colonizing efforts that had plagued Louisiana's development since 1699, Orléans proposed a sweeping shift in the funding mechanism for French imperialism.²²

The puppeteer behind the duke's bold pronouncement was John Law, an investor who knew Orléans well. Law suggested that France establish two institutions that in tandem would result in a government monopoly on foreign trade: a national bank and a joint-stock company to oversee a tobacco venture in Louisiana. Such a program would diminish France's reliance on Virginia tobacco and buttress the economic and social development of Louisiana. With the implementation of these plans by Orléans, Louisiana went from the lowest of imperial priorities for France to captivating its grandest imperial dreams. Dubbing his enterprise the Company of the Indies, Law successfully promoted its shares, which eventually totaled 100 million livres in market capitalization. Unfortunately for Law, the Company of the Indies, and the French government, the magician-financier had marketed the idea too successfully. Quickly shares of the company became the source of rampant speculation, creating one of the most over-inflated financial bubbles in the imperial age. In 1720, when the hysteria over purchase calmed to realization that the company would have to realize profits that matched such wild speculation, the bubble burst. Brilliant in design, the Company of the Indies dissolved in a wave of panic that paralyzed France's stillborn imperial schemes.²³

²² Ingersoll, *Mammon to Manon*, 3-13.

²³ *Ibid.*

Nonetheless, Law's scheme jumpstarted Louisiana's economy. By 1731, under programs initiated by the company, over 5,000 Africans had been imported to the colony, most from a northwestern region of Africa, Senegambia. Moreover, for the first time in its existence, Louisiana contained non-military white settlers. With over 7,000 white settlers arriving in the colony under the auspices of the Company, Louisiana finally had a demographic foundation upon which some semblance of a society could be constructed.²⁴

Life in Louisiana was indisputably harsh for the approximately 12,000 European and African immigrants who arrived between 1719 and 1731. By 1731, not even half (5,741) that number remained in the colony. Most of those who were no longer in the colony in 1731 appear to have been driven away or dead by the colony's natural pestilence and barely-existing sociopolitical infrastructure. Only by the determination of the colony's planters, most of whom had not realized the dream of producing high-quality tobacco, did the colony withstand the mismanagement of the French government. By 1746, the population of the colony was approximately 7,930. As with the earlier census and subsequent estimates, the majority of the colony's population was black.²⁵

That the colony maintained a black majority through the eighteenth century indicates the centrality of slavery to early Louisiana. Even with the failure of tobacco, indigo, and rice production from a macro-level, French perspective,

²⁴ Hall, *Africans in Louisiana*, 97-118; Peter Caron, "Of a nation which the others do not Understand: Bambara Slaves and African Ethnicity in Colonial Louisiana, 1718-60," *Slavery & Abolition* 18 (1997): 98-121.

²⁵ Estimates are found in Ingersoll, *Mammon to Manon*, 18; 361(*fn*70).

individual planters were able to scratch out a living. With their economy volatile, however, and with their counterparts in the French Caribbean able and willing to pay higher prices for African slaves, planters in Louisiana did not import many Africans following 1731. In fact, with the exception of one trans-atlantic voyage from Senegambia to Louisiana in 1743, almost no Africans arrived in Louisiana between 1731 and the early 1780s. The result was that the “charter generation” of slaves, most of whom were apparently native Bambara, Mandinga, and other Mande peoples, became distinctly Senegambian in character.²⁶

The transition from this charter generation of Upper Guinea Coast peoples to a second generation of Africans did not occur until the 1790s, but as early as the 1730s white settlers in Louisiana realized that their own culture existed organically with the Senegambian-dominated traditions of their bondpeople. Le Page du Pratz, who lived in Louisiana during the early period and wrote a detailed history of the colony in 1758, observed that the slaves “are very superstitious and attached to their prejudices and to charms which they called *gris-gris*.” This Mande term for the prevalent Bambara practice of using harmful charms had become commonplace in the colony, where a handful of high-profile cases involving *gris-gris* occurred during the period. In 1743, 1768, and 1773, the practice was discussed in New Orleans court cases; the 1768 case attracted particular attention, as a female slave, Maria, was charged with using *gris-gris* against her owner. Though white authorities had significant testimony and

²⁶ On “charter generations” see T. H. Breen, “Creative Adaptations: Peoples and Cultures,” in Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole, *Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University, 1984), 195-232, esp. 204-7. On Mande peoples in Louisiana during this period, see Hall, *Africans in Louisiana*, ch. 3.

evidence that Maria was a practitioner of *gris-gris*, her acquittal indicated the difficulty in proving conclusively such claims. As I argue in subsequent chapters, enslaved Afro-Louisianans exploited that knowledge to create traditions that were distinctly their own, and that were creations of their African traditions and New World experiences.²⁷

The *gris-gris* controversies illustrate a much broader tension among slaves and masters in eighteenth-century Louisiana. Throughout the eighteenth century colonial officials and masters faced a two-pronged challenge to establishing a stable society predicated on the labor of enslaved blacks. Whites in Louisiana struggled with an issue common to all slaveowners in the New World: how much should masters bow to the constant tugging by slaves for greater social and economic freedom? Prior to 1763, when Louisiana was ceded to Spain as a result of the Seven Years' War, the French *Code Noir* had established a practice of paternalism in reference to masters' treatment of slaves. Once the Spanish assumed control of the colony in 1769, that paternalism—at least on paper—promoted a state paternalism whose major engine of control was the Roman Catholic Church. With the introduction of the 1789 *Réal Cedula* in Louisiana, as I explain in Chapter Two, at least some Afro-Louisianan slaves put the spirit of the law into practice by petitioning the government for redress of mistreatment.²⁸

²⁷ Du Pratz, *History of Louisiana*, I, 334; Helen Catterall, *Judicial Cases in American Negro Slavery* (Washington, 1940), III, 417; Viviana Paques, *Les Bambara* (Paris, 1954), 94; Laura L. Porteus, "The Gri -Gri Case: A Criminal Trial in Louisiana During the Spanish Regime, 1768," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 17 (1934): 32-59; Marcus Bruce Christian, "For a Black History of Louisiana," (Typescript in Archives and Manuscripts Department, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans).

²⁸ On the *Code Noir* in Louisiana, see Joe Gray Taylor, *Negro Slavery in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana Historical Association, 1963), 17-22. For the best discussion of the 1789 *Real Cedula* in

Within that policy of paternalism lay a spectrum of allowed and controlled slave behaviors, and a spectrum of slave and master responsibilities. If masters clamped down too harshly on slaves, the assumption in Spanish and colonial law was that this would bring greater reaction by slaves. Conversely, if masters did not clamp down enough, would slaves exploit this ostensible weakness to gain even greater freedom, or to overthrow the entire system? Always a menacing possibility in slave societies, the specter of rebellion overshadowed the more frequent ritual contest between slave and master. Slaves, as has been demonstrated in three decades of convincing scholarship, did not accept passively the accommodation offered by masters. A tiny opening of physical, economic, or social mobility—such as having Sundays off to worship, garden, participate in the town market, or all three—was used by opportunistic bondpeople to widen the constricted scope of their daily lives.²⁹ Nonetheless, with white Louisianans

Louisiana, see Thomas McGowan, "Creation of a Slave Society: Louisiana Plantations in the Eighteenth Century," (Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, 1976), 262-295. On the transfer of Louisiana to Spain, see Clark, *Economic History*, 159-80.

²⁹ For examples of this scholarship, see John Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Sylvia Frey, *Water From the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (1991); Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Pantheon, 1976); Larry E. Hudson, Jr., *To Have and to Hold: Slave Work and Family Life in Antebellum South Carolina* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997); Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Mechal Sobel, *The World They Made Together*; Lorena Walsh, *From Calabar to Carter's Grove: The History of a Virginia Slave Community* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997). Still the magnum opus in this field, Eugene Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World The Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon, 1976) provides the theoretical framework on paternalism, resistance within accommodation, and reciprocity for this study. For a pithy discussion of these issues, see Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, pp. 89-92. Genovese's framework has not gone unchallenged, however. In recent years a handful of intentionally or unintentionally given by scholars of the slave community school. For the most compelling criticisms, see William Dusinger, *Them Dark Days: Slavery in the American Rice Swamps* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Norrece

learning of the rebellion in Saint-Domingue, their strategies changed, which in turn altered the entire system of master-slave relations, both locally and collectively. With Saint-Domingue serving to verify that the contested relationship established by Louisiana slaves during the preceding eighty years could result in successfully ending the slavery regime, slaves simply added it to their spectrum of resistance strategies.³⁰

THE ARGUMENT

I argue that enslaved Africans and African-Louisianans employed a variety of tools—cultural traditions, secret and overt resistance, and a distinctive ideology of politics “from the ground up”—to tweak, alter, and challenge the fledgling order that white authorities attempted to impose. Slaves incorporated two factors unique to the late eighteenth century that altered their long-standing strategies in negotiating slavery: egalitarian languages of revolution, and a wholesale change in the ethnic composition of their population. Thus, at the very time Spanish, French, or American officials thought that they had established effective slave-control regulations, enslaved people of African descent added the

T. Jones, Jr., *Born a Child of Freedom, Yet a Slave: Mechanisms of Control and Strategies of Resistance in Antebellum South Carolina* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1990).

³⁰ On the Haitian Revolution, see C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Overture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York, 1963 [1938]); Carolyn Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville, Tenn.: 1990); Thomas Ott, *The Haitian Revolution, 1789-1804* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1973). On the Revolution's importance to the Atlantic World, see Catherine Reinhardt, “French Caribbean Slaves Forge Their Own Ideal of Liberty in 1789,” in Doris Y. Kadish, ed., *Slavery in the Francophone Caribbean World: Distant Voices, Forgotten Acts, Forged Identities* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000), pp. 19-38; David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (London, 1975).

ideology of the Haitian, French, and American Revolutions to their existing template of resistance and accommodation strategies. Slaves employed an impressive array of tactics: petitioning governors for the enforcement of slave-treatment regulations, sabotaging plantation equipment, setting fire to New Orleans, and planning two major conspiracies.

Though slaves saw such overt resistance as effective exploitation of white hysteria, they also understood that subtle, day-to-day tactics undermined the slave regime. They used both the theology and public spaces of the Catholic Church to cement kinship ties and preserve elements of African cultures, which inverted whites' hopes to use the conversion of slaves to Catholicism as a means of curbing black resistance. Likewise, the seemingly benign semi-autonomy slaves won by participating in weekly market activities actually afforded them independent time and space, which they used to trade stolen and forbidden goods, and to expand market Sundays into all-day festivities replete with alcohol, African dances, and a curious white audience. Juxtaposing the disproportionate participation of enslaved women in Catholic rites and secular market activities to the male-dominated slave rebellions, I show that men and women both resisted slavery, but that they did so in specifically gendered ways.

But just as whites had to contain ethnic and political fractures within their group, slaves, too, were faced with an unusual challenge: during the same period that the sugar boom was bringing large waves of Africans to Louisiana for the first time since the 1730s, the cotton boom in the upland districts sparked a stream of Anglo-American planters who brought enslaved African Americans from

Upper Southern cultures that had been creolized for decades. In order to deal with that challenge, slaves in Louisiana minimized African ethnic differences so much that the long-held goal of whites—establishing a biracial hierarchy that equated race with slavery—was fulfilled. While the Haitian Revolution had created near hysteria among frightened white Louisianans during the 1790s, their later counterparts perceived black responses to Nat Turner’s Rebellion to be evidence of their society’s stability.

Thus my analysis of these processes begins with the Saint-Domingue rebellion, which prompted both the sugar revolution and Africanization in Louisiana. In response to events in Saint-Domingue, Spanish colonial officials rushed to close the slave trade to their colony to West Indians, particularly slaves and free blacks from Hispaniola. Though this policy would seem to have been inconsequential given Louisiana’s economic troubles, the Haitian Revolution led to the invigoration of Louisiana’s volatile economy. With the demise of the Saint-Domingue sugar business—by the end of the 1790s the island’s sugar exports totaled merely one-tenth their levels in 1790—Louisiana planters had an opportunity that they did not ignore. Having experimented unsuccessfully with sugar cane refining since the 1760s, planter Etienne de Boré of the New Orleans district grew and refined his first crop of sugar cane in 1795. From that point, Louisiana joined Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Martinique in replacing the once-crown jewel sugar colony of Saint-Domingue.³¹

³¹ J. Carlyle Sitterson, *Sugar Country: The Cane Sugar Industry in the South, 1753-1950* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1953), 3-5.

³² Paul Lachance, “The Politics of Fear: French Louisianans and the Slave Trade, 1786 -1809,” *Plantation Society in the Americas* 1 (1979): 162-97.

Thus the same event caused sociopolitical concerns and economic opportunity for Spanish Louisiana. As Chapter Two, “Saint Domingue in Louisiana? Resistance, Hysteria, and a Fledgling Slave Regime, 1791-95,” illustrates, much of the political rhetoric by colonial officials and planters in the 1790s was beset with concerns over the colony’s slaves being “infected” by dangerous Caribbean, and most notably, Saint-Domingue, imports. Worrying incessantly about the threat of a slave rebellion in Louisiana that resembled the one ongoing in Saint-Domingue, Spanish officials initiated a series of spasmodic slave-trade policies. On one hand, the Spanish believed that such slaving laws would minimize the “infiltration” of “dangerous” slaves; on the other hand, the authorities also needed to keep the slave trade open enough to meet the growing demand for additional laborers by the emerging class of sugar-cane planters. In the middle of this debate, which usually pitted pro-constraint Spanish authorities versus anti-constraint Creole planters, both groups of whites were shaken by the event they most feared: a major slave conspiracy.³²

The 1795 slave conspiracy at Pointe Coupée contained two characteristics that particularly worried Spanish officials. First, the setting in the Pointe Coupée district meant that the plot’s leaders could tap into a massive population of enslaved blacks, many of whom were either born in Africa or were first-generation creoles. Second, Spanish officials believed that the conspiracy was provoked by the spread of French Jacobinism. The belief by authorities that an assortment of slaves, free blacks, disaffected soldiers on the frontier, and outside

Jacobin agitators could all be motivated by the ideology of egalitarianism indicates the perceived strength of that ideology. Though most historians of the rebellion equate Spanish fear over the plot with the reality that the plot was large, the captured leaders appear to have played into Spanish fears and exaggerated their connections with Jacobinism.³³

Though the potential congruence of egalitarianism and slave rebellion is tantalizing to historians of enslaved peoples, most studies of slave rebellions during the revolutionary period have exaggerated the extent to which such ideology instigated slave rebellion. So doing ignores the existing template of resistance strategies by slaves, who most often employed daily resistance to ameliorate the condition of enslavement. Less frequent, yet disproportionately studied by scholars of slave resistance, are rebellions, which, by approximately 1800, “shifted decisively from attempts to secure freedom from slavery to attempts to overthrow slavery as a social system.”³⁴ Focusing too much on rebellions as a result of slaves being influenced by revolutionary ideology denigrates the varied strategies enslaved people used to negotiate the rigors of being enslaved; though the ideology of the Age of Revolution was important to slaves, it was but one factor within a spate of long-standing strategies used in a

³³ See Hall, *Africans in Louisiana*, ch. 11; Jack D. L. Holmes, “The Abortive Slave Revolt at Pointe Coupée, Louisiana, 1795,” *Louisiana History* 11 (1970), 341-62.

³⁴ Eugene D. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 3.

particular time and place. In Louisiana, as I show, such ideologies were important, but not nearly to the degree that officials believed.³⁵

In the case of Louisiana's two best-known slave conspiracies—the 1795 Pointe Coupée plot and 1811 German Coast Rebellion—my analysis demonstrates that the sometimes quixotic portrayal of these slave plots as being fueled by grand, revolutionary ideology, and having grand, revolutionary aims is simply untenable. Though all of us who study enslaved, marginalized, or subaltern peoples would love for our subjects to have exhibited such characteristics, we unwittingly minimize the horrors, rigors, and tragedy of human enslavement when those emotions obtrude our analysis. These rebellions in Louisiana, like most (but not all) in the Atlantic World, were aimed at the day-to-day, immediate issue of being enslaved and, as I show, the particular rigors of sugar regime slavery and social upheaval that attended the massive importation of Africans near the turn of the eighteenth century.³⁶

In Louisiana, Spanish officials eventually understood that Pointe Coupée was no Saint-Domingue, in spite of their helter-skelter approach to restricting the

³⁵ An important correction to this emphasis on “external” factors is James Sidbury, “Saint Domingue in Virginia: Ideology, Local Meanings, and Resistance to Slavery, 1790-1800,” *Journal of Southern History* 63 (1997): 531-52. Sidbury argues that distinguishing between “internal” and “external” factors, rather than assessing the organic nature of such factors as creolization, sex ratios, ethnic origins, with ideology of the Age of Revolution “distorts enslaved people’s relations to the Atlantic World”(532). For a compelling Africanist perspective, see John K. Thornton, “I Am the Subject of the King of Congo’: African Political Ideology and the Haitian Revolution,” *Journal of World History* 4 (1993): 181-214.

³⁶ The most important correction is the wonderfully provocative, and equally convincing, analysis of the 1822 Vesey conspiracy by Michael P. Johnson. See “Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 58 (2001): 915-76, and “Reading Evidence,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 59 (2002): 193-202. I present a fuller discussion of this issue in Chapters Two and Four.

slave trade and controlling their slaves. Louisiana's fluid social relations, however, provided slaves and free people of color an opportunity to undermine whites' social control efforts. This situation, along with the second major result of the Haitian Revolution—the importation of nearly 10,000 Africans to the colony between 1795 and 1808—would create the ideological and demographic foundation for a Haitian-style rebellion outside New Orleans in 1811.

That massive influx of Africans is a process described by Gwendolyn Midlo Hall and Ira Berlin as "reafrikanization." In Chapter Three, "Africanization: Constructing Community through Afro-Catholicism," I argue that the process is best termed "Africanization," given that this turn-of-the-century forced migration of Africans dwarfed the number of Africans who were shipped to Louisiana in the 1720s and 1730s; as I discuss, one might even term this process "Congolization," given the preponderance of Congolese peoples being sold to Louisiana planters. Most importantly, this chapter illustrates the social and cultural consequences of thousands of African-born slaves flooding into an enslaved population that had been creolized since the mid-1700s. Unique among North American slave societies in that its creolized slave population was interrupted by an African migration that doubled its size, and uncommon among Caribbean slave societies whose periods of Africanization continued through the nineteenth century, Louisiana serves as a somewhat-American, somewhat-Caribbean example on the continuum of New World slave societies. Exemplifying Ira Berlin's statement that "people of African descent in mainland North America crossed the lines between African and creole and between slavery

and freedom many times, and not always in the same direction,” Louisiana’s evolution from a society with slaves to a slave society was irregular. When examined in tandem with the manner in which those Africans and African-descended peoples were affected by, and influenced, that evolution, Louisiana’s slave society is therefore illustrative of most Atlantic World slave societies.³⁷

Moreover, within Louisiana during this period significant geographical delineations existed. The frontier districts of Natchitoches and Attakapas, which entered the plantation revolution after New Orleans and Pointe Coupée, reinforce the notion of uneven evolution and complicated cultural processes. It is in Chapter Three that the differences between the New Orleans region and the colony’s western districts—that is, the colony’s plantation frontier circa 1800—can be seen clearly. In particular, institutional structures that both Louisiana-born and African-born slaves used were much more prevalent in New Orleans. The Catholic Church, whose rites were by law to be cultivated among all slaves, was established throughout the colony, but maintained a more central visible presence and social importance in New Orleans. By analyzing several thousand slave baptisms from 1791 to 1811, I illustrate in this chapter the dual strategies that slaves adopted in their use of the theology and space of the Church. First, slaves inverted whites’ use of Catholic rites as social control. By participating fully in baptisms and Mass, people of African descent created public cover for the subversive power they gained by appearing to be loyal and docile bondpeople. In particular, in New Orleans, enslaved women used their notable participation in the

³⁷ Hall, *Africans in Louisiana*, ch. 5; Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 339, 5.

Church as a means of participating in the city's vibrant market activities. These Sunday afternoon, post-Mass markets in turn led to the creation of an independent space and time—not far from the physical location of the Church—that would become known, not coincidentally, as Congo Square. On the other hand, with most godparents during this period being creoles, it is evident that the rite of baptism and act of godparentage was a means by which creoles and *bozales* could create intertwined fictive and affinal kin networks. Just as Kimberley Hanger demonstrated that free people of color used godparenting as a means of solidifying these networks, I argue that urban slaves had and exploited the opportunity to advance their own standing and those of their godchildren by frequently serving as godparents.³⁸

In the frontier districts of Natchitoches and Attakapas, and to a lesser extent Pointe Coupée, the institution of the Church was less visible and helpful for enslaved people in mitigating enslavement. The swelling wave of Anglo American migrants, most of whom were Protestants, to these regions undermined what little institutional power the Church had. As a result, and in part because of the absence of a large urban center, whatever identity forged by slaves in Natchitoches and Attakapas was less collective, less African, and less visible than

³⁸ Kimberley Hanger, *Bounded Lives*, 104-108. A recent study builds upon the work of Hanger, and makes an impressive case for free black women using church participation as a means of social advancement. See Emily Clark and Virginia Meacham Gould, "The Feminine Face of Afro-Catholicism in New Orleans, 1727-1852," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 59 (2002): 409-448. For studies of godparentage in the Atlantic World, see Ana Maria Lugao Rios, "The Politics of Kinship Compadrio Among Slaves in Nineteenth-Century Brazil," *History of the Family* 5 (2000): 287-296; Stephen Gudeman and Stuart Schwartz, "Cleansing Original Sin: Godparenthood and the Baptism of Slaves in Eighteenth-Century Bahia," in Raymond T. Smith, ed., *Kinship Ideology and Practice in Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 39-58.

that created in New Orleans. With most of the Africans who arrived in Louisiana between 1795 and 1808 being sold to owners in and around the capital city, its slave culture was considerably Africanized. Thus, one cannot speak about a singular slave culture or identity in Louisiana during this period. In short, slave cultures in the frontier regions of Louisiana resembled the creolized population of New Orleans from the mid-eighteenth century more than the city's highly Africanized population of the early 1800s.

To some extent, then, this study blends older scholarly emphasis on institutions and structures with recent attention on culture, identity, and nebulous political power. The biggest challenge facing any historian of non-elites is to extract from research materials some semblance of how these oppressed historical actors saw and lived their world. Yet one does disservice to the study of "politics from the bottom up" by ignoring the macro-level social factors within which those bottom-up politics operated, against which non-elites reacted, and which they often influenced. Historian Stephan Palmié explains, "The study of slave cultures, therefore, is inseparable from the study of those social institutions within which certain behavioral patterns and cultural forms could stabilize and turn into incipient traditions." Thus my study revives, albeit partially, the structuralism of Frank Tannenbaum's once-influential, now-beleaguered *Slave and Citizen* by blending such a framework with culture-heavy, context-light approaches as exemplified by many slave-culture studies during the "contributionist" wave of historiography in the 1970s and 1980s.³⁹

³⁹ Frank Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen, the Negro in the Americas* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947). Examples of this slave culture scholarship, most of which was written during an earlier

I focus on how enslaved people engaged their larger world—the Church, the plantation, the city, the social institution of slavery—so that I can assess how they were influenced by, and how they influenced, the significant changes in Louisiana society. Nearly thirty years after its publication, Eugene Genovese’s *Roll, Jordan, Roll* remains the foundation for understanding this complicated, even convoluted, relationship between slaves and masters, and between slaves and the regime of slavery. Genovese’s emphasis on the plantation South as a “precapitalist” economy has sometimes obscured his brilliant description of the “contested terrain” of master and slave. By using one geographical area as a case study for slaves’ resistance within accommodation, I illustrate the variety of strategies Afro-Louisianans used to inhibit the power of their masters.⁴⁰

The root of that resistance within accommodation was constituted through daily, regular, and even mundane actions. Though four of the major events in this study are slave rebellions, I consciously attempt to place those important events within the broader context of day-to-day slave resistance in the colony. The most informative model for adopting this approach is Thomas Holt’s compelling essay on the “everydayness” of race-making. Though Holt explores this process in

phase in slave-culture historiography in which isolating “Africanisms” and identifying African “survivals” were changing the field, are John Blassingame, *The Slave Community*; Gutman, *The Black Family*; Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Charles W. Joyner, *Down By the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984); Michael Mullin, *Africa in America: Slave Acculturation and Resistance in the American South and the British Caribbean, 1736-1831* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

⁴⁰ Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*. A pithy overview of these issues is Stephan Palmié’s introduction to *Slave Cultures and the Culture of Slavery* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), ix-xlvii.

postemancipation eras, it is directly applicable to the process of making race and making slavery. Challenging historians of race to “explicate more precisely the relation between individual agency and structural frameworks” and to “conceptualize more clearly just how one’s consciousness of self and other are formed,” Holt—in spite of his emphasis on the twentieth century—speaks directly to one of the central themes in slavery historiography: the process of why New World slavery occurred. In particular, Holt emphasizes the necessity of historians focusing on where, how, and why individuals engage their larger world.⁴¹ Using Afro-Louisianans as a case study for positing such a model, I argue that the most effective subversion of the slave regime was not slave rebellions, but day-to-day resistance. Ironically, historians have seemingly taken at face value what white authorities were focused on—rebellions, revolutionary intrigue, Jacobinism among peoples of African descent—while glossing over the subtle yet powerful ways enslaved people tweaked, altered, and undermined the slave regime’s absolute control of their personal liberty. Thus, while speaking to the vicissitudes of being enslaved in Louisiana, the crux of my study also addresses potential contours of slave societies throughout the New World.⁴²

⁴¹ Thomas C. Holt, “Marking: Race, Race -making, and the Writing of History,” *American Historical Review* 100 (1995), 8. On “marking” race in the context of nineteenth -century slavery, see Walter Johnson’s *compelling Soul By Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), esp. ch. 5, “Reading Bodies and Marking Race.”

⁴² Studies of the 1795 Pointe Coupée conspiracy are especially given to reading the trial records as they were written, that is, from the perspective of the Spanish. See Hall, *Africans in Louisiana*, ch. 11; Holmes, “The Abortive Slave Revolt,” 349 -57. Sidney Mintz offers an important corrective to the burgeoning field of slave resistance studies by exposing the obstacles to inferring “the will of the actor” in a particular act of resistance. Mintz emphasizes —perhaps unrealistically—the need for empirical evidence to make such judgments. See Sidney W. Mintz, “Slave Life on Caribbean Sugar Plantations: Some Unanswered Questions,” in Palmié, ed., *Slave Cultures*, 12-22 (quoted

When that relationship broke down in a particular location, as with slaves in Pointe Coupée in 1795, slaves resorted to challenging the institution of slavery. Compelling examples of this strategy exist from a host of New World societies. Studies of rebellions in Antigua, Cuba, Virginia, and Demerera all demonstrate how local conditions impact the manner in which enslaved people formulate resistance ideologies. In addition, the most compelling of these studies accomplish what Peter Wood first did, in demonstrating how social, cultural, and demographic changes in South Carolina led to the 1739 Stono Rebellion. Just as Wood's narrative gravitates toward an explanation for that rebellion, my own narrative analyzes how four rebellions—the Haitian Revolution, the 1795 conspiracy at Pointe Coupée, the 1811 Deslondes rebellion, and Nat Turner's revolt in 1831—are illustrative of the larger themes I have sketched regarding Louisiana slave society and the culture of enslaved peoples.⁴³

Chapter Four, "Congolization Manifested: Louisiana's Tumultuous Slave Society, 1811-19," explores one of the largest slave rebellions in American history. Sixteen years after Spanish officials thought that slaves in Pointe Coupée

phrase, pp. 14). Also see Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

⁴³ David Barry Gaspar, *Bondmen and Rebels: A Study of Master-Slave Relations in Antigua, with Implications for Colonial British America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); Emilia Viotti da Costa, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood: The Demerara Slave Rebellion of 1823* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); James Sidbury, *Ploughshares into Swords: Race, Rebellion, and Identity in Gabriel's Virginia, 1730-1810* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Robert L. Paquette, *Sugar is Made with Blood: The Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict Between Empires over Slavery in Cuba* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1988); Matt D. Childs, "The Aponte Rebellion of 1812 and the Transformation of Cuban Society: Race, Slavery, and Freedom in the Atlantic World," (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, 2001); Joao Jose Reis, *Slave Rebellion in Brazil: The African Muslim Uprising in Bahia, 1835* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

had orchestrated a conspiracy based on the rebellion in Saint-Domingue, a massive slave rebellion near New Orleans exhibited similar characteristics. Led by Charles Deslondes, a possible immigrant from Saint-Domingue, slaves in Louisiana's German Coast district nearly overwhelmed white forces. A consequence of Africanization, which swelled the colony's slave population, and which in the New Orleans area produced an enslaved population that was much larger than the white population, the German Coast Rebellion represented the fears of whites that had subsided following the suppression of the 1795 Pointe Coupée conspiracy. My examination of the African dimensions of the rebellion—an aspect that has been virtually ignored by scholars—demonstrates that white citizens and officials were just as wrong about the cause of the 1811 rebellion as they were in 1795.⁴⁴

Reprisal was swift and thorough, which rendered the 1811 uprising but one event in the momentum toward re-creolization. With the trans-atlantic slave trade effectively halted, the influx of African-born slaves had waned by the early 1810s. In Chapter Five, "Toward Re-Creolization: Sugar Slavery, Cotton Slavery, and the Domestic Slave Trade, 1820-31," I explore the consequences of Africanization ending. Though the African slave trade had stopped, the increasingly important domestic slave trade was importing from the Upper South thousands of slaves, in particular to the cotton-producing Natchitoches region. As an institution, the domestic slave trade was making Louisiana society, both white

⁴⁴ Genovese, *Rebellion to Revolution*, 43-44. For the "African dimensions" framework, see John K. Thornton, "African Dimensions of the Stono Rebellion," *American Historical Review* 96 (1991): 1101-13.

and black, considerably more Southern than it had been at any point previously.⁴⁵ Thus, the already distinctive slave cultures in each region of the state became even more so, with the long-creolized and recently-arrived African slaves also having to integrate these truly African American slaves. With these three groups of slaves all aiming for the same thing—the amelioration of enslavement—this chapter, and the case of Louisiana in general, is demonstrative of creolization in Atlantic World slave societies.

Thus the rich literature on creolization buttresses my approach. Most notably, Sidney Mintz and Richard Price argue that scholars of slave culture ought not reify African cultural traits in their attempt to analyze the ability of slaves to preserve such traditions. Instead, Mintz and Price insist on scholars examining the context within which enslaved people altered their cultures. Thus in Chapter Five, I identify three contexts within which that process of creolization played out; as much as possible, I reconstruct those sites from the perspective of slaves, paying particular attention to moments when slaves attenuated their

⁴⁵ On becoming Southern, see Christopher Morris, *Becoming Southern: The Evolution of a Way of Life, Warren County and Vicksburg, Mississippi, 1770-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Eugene D. Genovese, *The Political Economy and Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (New York, 1965); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism* (New York, 1983); James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York, 1982); *Slavery and Freedom: An Interpretation of the Old South*; Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeomen Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York, 1983). Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800* (Chapel Hill, 1986).

On the domestic slave trade, see Frederic Bancroft, *Slave Trading in the Old South* (Baltimore: J. H. Furst, 1931); Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); Robert W. Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract: The Rise and Fall of American Slavery* (New York: Norton, 1989); for an example of the human and race-marking dimensions of the domestic slave trade, see Johnson, *Soul By Soul*.

oppression. When considering Melville Herskovits' notion of a "grammar of culture," and the ways in which Philip Morgan illustrates its influence in melding slave communities in the Lowcountry and Chesapeake, one can see similar processes at work in Louisiana, in particular in church activities, market participation, kinship networks, and expressive culture.⁴⁶

Studies by two Africanists, Michael Gomez and John Thornton, provide scholars of enslaved Africans in the New World a compelling, trans-atlantic bent to understanding the process of creolization. Using a specificity regarding cultures in Africa and where they were most represented in the American South—something that had been lacking in slave culture scholarship—Gomez re-centered the debate from generalizations about cultures and creolization to the precise locales where slaves of specific cultures created such traditions. Likewise, John Thornton argues for a greater similarity among African cultures than many Africanists would allow. His emphasis on the cultural similarities among many Africans provides for the greater possibility that in a single slave society Africans from many cultures would have adopted a "grammar of culture" that emphasized similarity over difference. The pressures of enslavement simply added to that focus on similarities.⁴⁷ Using databases by David Eltis and Gwendolyn Midlo

⁴⁶ Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (1972, originally published as *An Anthropological Approach to the Afro-American Past*; reprint, Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 38. On the "grammar of culture," see Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (New York, 1941), 81; Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), ch. 10.

⁴⁷ John K. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* (1992; reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Michael Gomez, *Exchanging Our*

Hall to extract an even greater specificity than Gomez, I explore how, in the case of Louisiana, the similarities that Thornton posits were especially salient under the pressures of enslavement.⁴⁸

Most centrally, I argue in this chapter that by the time of the Nat Turner Rebellion, Louisiana's slave society had succeeded in accomplishing what every other southern slave society had done for decades: the establishment of a biracial hierarchy predicated on the belief that blackness equaled servitude. Though this hierarchy could not be perfectly implemented in Louisiana, given its large free black population, the response by planters and authorities to the Turner Rebellion was very telling: rather than respond hysterically, whites in Louisiana saw Turner as such a lunatic that someone like him could never challenge the stable slave regime they had established. Whereas in 1795 and 1811 whites feared collusion among "dangerous" Caribbean, African, and creole slaves, the fading ethnic differences since Africanization made marking race in the 1830s an easier task. In short, in the forty years between 1791 and 1831, Louisiana had evolved from an Caribbean to a Southern place.

For the duration of this period, people of African descent in Louisiana possessed a social, cultural, economic, and even political power that belied their condition as slaves. The story of that power, and of the fractures in the slave

Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

⁴⁸ David Eltis, et al., *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-ROM* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Databases for the Study of Afro-Louisiana History and Genalogy, 1699-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2000).

regime that they exploited, exposed, enlarged—and to some degree, created—
follows.

Chapter 2: Saint-Domingue in Louisiana? Slave Resistance, White Hysteria, and a Fledgling Regime, 1791-1795

Sarrasin and Lambert squabbled. “Don’t you know we are free?” an exasperated Sarrasin asked Lambert, imploring him to join the slave conspiracy he was forming in early 1795 in Pointe Coupée. A skeptical Lambert replied, “Do you believe that the French who have worked for so long to buy us would give us our freedom without any conflict?” Not wanting to attract undue attention to his conspiracy, and perhaps unsure of how to respond, Sarrasin ended the conversation, saying, “I do not want to say any more, there is time to tell you the rest.”¹

This single conversation between Sarrasin, a leading conspirator, and Lambert, a local slave, encapsulates the still-born 1795 Point Coupée slave plot, illustrating both the compelling and complicated nature of the event for historians. On one hand, Sarrasin represents the possibility that slaves in Louisiana were imbued with the spirit of the Age of Revolution; the influx of some slaves from Saint-Domingue lends credence to such an interpretation. On the other hand, Lambert’s skepticism indicates that such revolutionary spirit had not radicalized all slaves. Indicating a more limited dispersal of revolutionary ideology or that ideology’s lack of resonance among slaves, Lambert’s ultimate lack of

¹ Testimony of Lambert, slave of Widow Bourgeat, May 8, 1795, in Trial Summary by Manuel Serrano, May 22, 1795, folios 254-259, in “Procès contre les Esclaves du Poste de la Pte. Coupée (Trial against the Slaves of the Pointe Coupée Post),” [hereafter “Trial”], Original Acts of Pointe Coupée Parish [hereafter OAPCP], May 6–22, 1795 Pointe Coupée Parish Courthouse, New Roads, La.

participation led directly to the plot being discovered by Spanish colonial officials. This chapter explores the 1795 plot, arguing that in spite of officials' rhetoric, sheer demographics meant that this conspiracy, even if it had reached the rebellion stage, could have been no Saint-Domingue.²

More, however, than demographics distinguishes Louisiana's aborted slave conspiracy from the only successful slave revolution in the history of the Americas. Placing the 1795 plot within a broader temporal context shows that white Louisianans' concern over Saint-Domingue "seeping" into Louisiana was overblown. This chapter illustrates how enslaved and free people of color engaged the changing sociopolitical milieu around them, particularly by exploiting the

² The percentage of slaves in Pointe Coupée's population was higher than in any other district in Louisiana. In 1785, there were 1,035 slaves and 482 whites (free people of color unaccounted for in 1785 census). See Lawrence Kinnaird, comp., *Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, 3 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1949-53), II, 355-6. By 1790, there were 1,492 slaves, 488 free people of color, and 511 whites. See Antonio Acosta Rodríguez, *La población de la Luisiana española, 1763-1803* (Madrid: Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Dirección General de Relaciones Culturales, 1979), 438, 440, 458.

I am very much indebted to Gwendolyn Midlo Hall's work on this and other aspects of the African Louisianan experience, but her analysis of the 1795 plot appears to be wishful thinking, particularly in her assessment that the rebellion was fueled by revolutionary ideology, which in turn bred a plot that transcended race. In fact, a careful reading of the trial records indicates that even before the investigation started, Spanish officials had concluded that the rebellion resulted from slaves in Louisiana following the example of Saint-Domingue. See Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), ch. 11; Jack D. L. Holmes, "The Abortive Slave Revolt at Pointe Coupée, Louisiana, 1795," *Louisiana History* 11 (1970), 341-62.

Slaves who testified, then, were asked leading questions that produced what the investigators wanted to hear. For a similar historiographical example, the equally wishful analysis of the 1822 Denmark Vesey plot in Charleston, see Michael P. Johnson's excellent and provocative recent analysis. In "Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators," *William and Mary Quarterly* 58 (2001), 915-6, Johnson maintains, and I agree fully, that "almost all historians have failed to exercise due caution in reading the testimony of witnesses recorded by the conspiracy court, thereby becoming unwitting co-conspirators with the court in the making of the Vesey conspiracy." This idea is wholly applicable to the scholarship on the 1795 plot. Also see Johnson, "Reading Evidence," *William and Mary Quarterly* 59 (2002): 193-202.

political and ethnic divisions among whites and by using Spanish policies on slavery to their advantage. Slaves and free blacks both understood that white citizens and officials thought that the specter of Saint-Domingue presaged disaster in a mainland colony. With Jacobin machinations reaching a peak in the mid-1790s, both slaves and free blacks played to whites' fears and exploited small openings in individual relationships to expand the semi-independence that Spanish law allowed them.³

This process of stretching boundaries through day-to-day resistance culminated in the 1795 slave conspiracy in Pointe Coupée. In April 1795, when authorities confirmed rumors of a major slave conspiracy in the area, whites in Louisiana looked to the plot as evidence of their worst fears about the combustible mixture of Jacobinism and the example of Saint-Domingue. Contemporary interpretations of the conspirators' testimony has been taken at face value by some historians who have too readily accepted whites' fear that the slaves acted in tandem with Jacobin agitators, but I show that slaves were merely tapping into whites' often-expressed fears about such a cooperative effort.⁴ In

³ In particular, the 1789 Real Cédula reinvigorated the state's role in ameliorating abusive treatment of slaves by their masters. See "Real Cédula sobre la educación, trato y ocupaciones de los esclavos en todos dominios de Indias," Archivo General de Indias, Papeles de Santo Domingo [hereafter AGI-SD], folio 552, Historic New Orleans Collection, microfilm. For an overview of how the Real Cédula was a "humane," "liberal" departure from earlier slave codes, see David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), 239-40; Franklin W. Knight, *Slave Society in Cuba During the Nineteenth Century* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), 125-26; José Antonio Saco, *Historia de la esclavitud de la raza africana en el nuevo mundo*, vol. 3 (Havana: 1938), 16-17.

⁴ For examples of this interpretation, see Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 344-80; Jack D.L. Holmes, "The Abortive Slave Revolt at Pointe Coupée, Louisiana, 1795," *Louisiana History* 11 (1970); James T. McGowan, "Creation of a Slave Society: Louisiana Plantations in the Eighteenth Century" (Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, 1976).

short, Pointe Coupée was no Saint-Domingue, which underscored what would have been surprising to whites in Louisiana in 1795: because of, and in some cases, in spite of, their convulsive policies, they had built a relatively stable slave society. Enslaved people in the colony constantly negotiated their conditions of enslavement, but the belief that the contagion of Saint-Domingue had infected Louisiana in 1795 anticipated what would happen sixteen years later.

MARRONAGE AND RESISTANCE BEFORE HAITI

Nicolas Girod seethed. In January 1792, the Louisiana planter petitioned the Cabildo, or New Orleans city council, to allow him to land a cargo of African slaves on property owned by the city. Under normal circumstances, well-known citizens such as Girod would not have needed the Cabildo's permission, as Louisiana had long been without a steady supply of African laborers. Girod, discovered, however, that his cargo was infected with smallpox, which necessitated the landing of the vessel on the side of the River opposite the city. Always a concerned about smallpox, the city council was especially wary in 1792, as that year had been one of the epidemic years for the disease. Introducing additional infected people would only make the situation worse.⁵

In spite of this epidemic, however, a different affliction dominated the Cabildo's agenda during the early 1790s. That Girod's slaves had smallpox merely masked colonial officials' deeper fear about incoming slaves carrying an

⁵ Petitions, Letters, and Decrees of the Cabildo [hereafter PLDC], #197, January 30, 1792, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library [hereafter CA-NOPL]. See also PLDC, #204, March 22, 1792, CA-NOPL.

ideological contagion from France and St. Domingue. Having learned recently of the upheaval in Saint-Domingue, a former sister colony and one with which Louisianans still maintained close family and economic relations, the Cabildo was more interested in origins of slaves than in their physical health. Whites assumed that slaves from Saint-Domingue would reproduce the island's massive slave rebellion in Louisiana, so the governors of Louisiana and the Cabildo had clamped down on imports from the Caribbean since the mid-1780s. Thus, given the apparent decision to allow Girod's cargo to land, the slaves must have been from Africa, which was considered a less dangerous source of slaves than any Caribbean port.⁶

Deeming Africans "safe" produced a conundrum with which colonial officials and residents in Louisiana were intimately familiar. Throughout the early 1790s, both colonial officials and white citizens exaggerated—in some cases, grossly—the potential for the Saint-Domingue rebellion to be replicated in Louisiana. The result was a spate of spasmodic slave control and slave trade policies that reflected the colony's simultaneous and often antithetical needs: on one hand, sugar cane planters demanded additional enslaved laborers as they

⁶ There is no record in the Cabildo minutes of the Cabildo's decision. Given the examples of other similar cases, however, it is likely that Girod received the council's approval. For overview of Caribbean slave rebellions, see Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982); Sylvia R. Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); David Barry Gaspar, *Bondmen and Rebels: A Study of Master-Slave Relations in Antigua, with Implications for Colonial British America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); David Barry Gaspar and David P. Geggus, eds., *A Turbulent Time: The French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1997); David P. Geggus, ed., *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001); C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963 [1938]).

attempted to supplant Saint-Domingue's drastically -reduced sugar production; on the other hand, colonial officials demanded that those imported laborers be shipped from Africa so that the slaves would not be infected by the principles of egalitarian revolution. Hence, masters and the Spanish colonial government were often at odds regarding how stringent regulations of slave behavior should be, with one Spanish governor apparently cultivating free blacks as his informants against Jacobinism within the French population. Underlying these policy differences were national tensions between the governing Spanish and the governed French, as well as ethnic tensions within the white population, in particular between continental French and the recently arrived Acadians and Canary Islanders. Ironically, whites' fears about Saint-Domingue created opportunities for slaves to exploit such fear; in turn, whites perceived such actions by slaves—either in individual cases or in collective examples such as the 1795 plot—to be evidence of the revolutionary surliness inspired by the Age of Revolution.

To beat back the possibility of slave unrest, slaveowners and colonial officials were concerned chiefly with determining which unfree laborers—Africans, West Indians, or creoles—were least likely to foment rebellion. Not surprisingly, given the disagreements between Spanish governors and French colonists, this issue became a regular struggle between government officials and masters. Examples of slave resistance, both preceding and subsequent to the start of the Haitian Revolution, illustrated the reality of each of these groups leading a rebellion; hence the slavery regime in Louisiana, like all in the circum-Caribbean

during the 1790s, focused on limiting the example of major slave rebellion to Saint-Domingue. Not surprisingly, then, Saint-Domingue dominated Spanish officials' and white citizens' interpretations of slaves' actions, which during this period had more to do with long-standing contexts than with the ideology of revolution. Nonetheless, in the revolutionary milieu of the 1790s, whites in Louisiana perceived any resistance by slaves—even minor acts common in the colony's history—as a Jacobin challenge to the colony's political order. The actions of slaves, whether through daily resistance, conspiracies, or exploiting Louisiana's tumultuous political situation, therefore did rattle the political foundation of slavery in the colony. This was especially true because the biracial order that equated race with slavery, would not be imposed until the American period, so colonial Louisiana society contained many fissures for people of African descent to exploit.

Even before news from Saint-Domingue began to reach Louisiana in late 1791, planters and government officials perceived the danger of importing slaves from the island. To emphasize the continuity of slave resistance in Louisiana through the period, as well as to place the “external” factor of that rebellion and the revolutionary age in its proper, local context, a discussion of earlier examples is warranted.⁷ The 1750s Macandal conspiracy, in which slaves in Saint-Domingue plotted to poison all whites in the colony, left an indelible mark on Louisianans prior to the age of revolution. In 1763, when the Spanish officially

⁷ On these external factors, see James Sidbury, “Saint Domingue in Virginia: Ideology, Local Meanings, and Resistance to Slavery, 1790-1800,” *Journal of Southern History* 63 (1997): 531-52; Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995). I discuss this further in my Introduction and Chapter One.

possessed Louisiana but had not yet taken practical control, the French Superior Council issued a decree that reflected the prevalence of poisoning on the island: “the evil is so widespread that the prisons are constantly full and the councils have been forced to tolerate executions on the plantations.”⁸ Noting the perceived intertwining between Louisiana and Saint-Domingue, historian Paul Lachance argues that Louisiana planters and officials possessed “a predisposition to see events in Saint-Domingue as prefiguring their own fate in the absence of adequate safeguards.”⁹ Thus, whether in the 1750s in light of the Macandal conspiracy, or in the 1790s in light of the Haitian Revolution, whites in Louisiana looked to the Caribbean, and especially Saint-Domingue, as evidence of what path not to take in the realm of slave control. Considering Saint-Domingue slaves’ lack of rebelliousness prior to 1791, this connection made by Louisiana planters suggests how easily their misperceptions created an alternative to reality.¹⁰

With little imposition of control by the French Superior Council and then the Spanish Cabildo, Louisiana planters accepted “adequate safeguards” against the moral “poisoning” of their slaves. Though relatively few slaves were actually introduced, the period following 1763 was one of unregulated slave-trading in Louisiana, a situation that persisted in spite of several rumored slave conspiracies,

⁸ Marc Villiers du Terrage, *Les dernières années de la Louisiane française* (Paris: E. Guilmoto, 1904), 161. The author cites the July 9, 1763, decree of the French Superior Council in Louisiana.

⁹ Paul F. Lachance, “The Politics of Fear: French Louisianans and the Slave Trade, 1786-1809,” *Plantation Society* 1 (June 1979), 167. For the Macandal conspiracy, see Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 164-65.

¹⁰ In no records is the imposition of such a misconstrued perception clearer than in the trial records of the Pointe Coupée rebellion. I discuss the trial records in footnote 2. See, on the lack of rebelliousness among Saint-Domingue slaves, see James, *Black Jacobins*, 21-2.

such as one in the Baton Rouge area that was discovered at the William Dunbar plantation. In June 1776, as many as twenty slaves in the area were discovered to have been plotting a revolt. Four of Dunbar's slaves were involved, and the plans for the conspiracy had evidently been formulated at his estate. In questioning one of the presumed conspirators, Dunbar reported that the man was "stung with the heghnousness [sic] of his guilt, ashamed perhaps to look a Master in the face against whom he could urge no plea to paliate [sic] his intended Diabolical plan; for he took an opportunity in the middle of the River to throw himself overboard & was immediately drowned—This was sufficient evidence of his guilt." Though a quick trial resulted in the hanging of two Dunbar slaves and one slave of a neighbor, the planters were quick to make their own sense of the debacle they had narrowly averted. In his diary Dunbar concluded, "Judge my surprise! Of what avail is kindness & good usage when rewarded by such ingratitude; 'tis true they were kept under due subordination & obliged to do their duty in respect to plantation work, but two of the three had always behaved so well that they had never once received a stroke of the whip." To compensate for both the loss of slaves and for the absence of a government council that would have remunerated the slaveowners, each of the area planters contributed to a fund to replace the lost human property.¹¹

That William Dunbar's slaves had been purchased in Jamaica was not lost on slaveowners and officials in the region. Though no documentation makes

¹¹ William Dunbar Diary Entry, July 12, 1776, in Dunbar Rowland, *Life, Letters, and Papers of William Dunbar* (Jackson, Miss.: 1930), 27-28. Also see John Fitzpatrick, Letter to John Stephenson, July 2, 1776, in Margaret Fisher Dalrymple, ed., *The Merchant of Manchac: The Letterbooks of John Fitzpatrick, 1768-1790* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1978), 204.

explicit a connection between the Baton Rouge conspiracy and the origins of the slaves involved, in subsequent years the Cabildo prohibited at least one resident from purchasing Jamaican slaves.¹²

The fear of Jamaican slaves did not last, however, for the British governance of West Florida stimulated an influx of shipments from that island to the Gulf Coast. Historian Robin Fabel has shown that Jamaica may have been the most important source of imported human labor for West Florida and Louisiana during the 1760s. Similarly, with slaves trickling in from other British colonies such as Georgia, South Carolina, and even Pennsylvania, the enslaved population of the two districts was increasingly diverse, a phenomenon underscored further by the number of slaveowners from other British colonies who migrated to West Florida during the American Revolution. Likewise, Gwendolyn Midlo Hall's database for Afro-Louisianan history, shows that the demand for slaves in Louisiana outweighed any fears of Jamaican slaves: 929 slaves from Jamaica were sold in New Orleans from 1785 through 1789. With these figures representing the bare minimum of human traffic between Jamaica and the Gulf Coast, the island was an important source of slaves—either through direct traffic or the re-export trade—for planters in the lower Mississippi Valley.¹³

¹² Quoted in Dalrymple, *Merchant of Manchac*, 221.

¹³ Robin F.A. Fabel, *The Economy of British West Florida, 1763-1783* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1988), 30-38; Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, et al, *Databases for the Study of Afro-Louisiana History and Genealogy, 1699-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000). Using Microsoft Excel's "data sort" command, various queries, including the origins of slaves, can be posed to the database.

Based on the available numbers, which are sketchy, Jamaican slave imports to Louisiana likely accounted for nearly half all imported slaves to Louisiana during this period. In addition to the aforementioned sources, see David Eltis, et al., *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A Database on*

In 1786 the governor of Louisiana, Esteban Miró, drastically altered the colony's slave-trade policy. On June 2, Miró prohibited the importation of slaves from the French and British Caribbean, citing such slaves as "detrimental to the province." The governor's order mandated that all ships be searched at "the Baliza," or Balize, which was a small outpost at the mouth of the Mississippi River. Upon inspection, if slaves from the islands were found, they would be detained until they were sent back to their port of origin at their owners' expense. Vessels from Africa, such as those that brought the aforementioned slaves from Jamaica, were exempt if they carried only *bozales*.¹⁴

The governor's decree exemplifies why the Spanish struggled initially to curtail a potentially chaotic situation. That Miró exempted creole, or island-born, slaves who possessed agricultural, industrial, or domestic skills indicates whom the Spanish saw as the reason for Saint-Domingue's troubles: creolized slaves who resided on plantations. To a degree, Miró was correct in this assumption. Gerald Mullin, in his compelling study of slave resistance, notes that "plantation slaves turned their limited rebelliousness back toward the plantation setting itself; their reactions were usually easily contained...But some of this resistance was cooperative, and it was especially effective because the plantation was so vulnerable to acts of sabotage." What Miró did not seem concerned about, however, was the ability of skilled, or "assimilated," slaves to "challenge the

CD-ROM (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Query: time period=1776-1800, region of disembarkation=Mississippi Delta.

¹⁴ Governor Esteban Miró, "Bando de buen gobierno (Edict of Good Government)," June 2, 1786, in Records and Deliberations of the Cabildo [hereafter RDC], City Archives, New Orleans Public Library [hereafter cited as CA-NOPL]. A *bozal* was an African-born slave.

security of the society itself.”¹⁵ As the slave rebellion in 1795, and the larger one in 1811, would demonstrate, both groups of slaves would be causes of concern for the security of the slavery regime.

In issuing the edict, Miró was responding to increased pressure from whites to take action against several perceived problems. Chief among complaints by whites was the practice of *petit marronage*, which in the New Orleans area entailed short-term, fugitive slaves visiting the numerous grog-shops, taverns, and gambling establishments on the city’s outskirts. Evidently knowing well that the jurisdiction of the New Orleans police patrol extended only to the city limits, these slaves expanded their physical and social space by seizing upon leeway granted by their masters, and filled the legal hole created by officials who theretofore had not dealt with such extensive subversion. Buying alcohol and trading for weapons with stolen goods, the slaves who frequented these taverns proved that they could enlarge, albeit slightly, any opening in the law.¹⁶

Perhaps most interesting, and certainly most telling about the independence of people of African descent, was a part of the governor’s 1786 edict that outlawed what he and other whites perceived to be the outrageous hairstyles of women of color in the city. In particular, the governor chafed at the women’s tall, bouffant hairstyles. The governor declared that ‘negresses, mulatresses, and quadroons were forbidden to wear feathers or furbelows in their

¹⁵ Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 162, 161.

¹⁶ RDC, vol. 3, book 2, pp. 134, May 27, 1791, CA-NOPL. On *petit marronage*, see Richard Knight, ed., *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas* (1973; reprint, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 3, 110-112.

hair but must wear it low or covered with a handkerchief.” Miró saw such hairstyles as being too seductive for a white male population that vastly outnumbered women in the city. Though some of these women may have intended their hairstyle to do just that, they may also have been performing a popular cultural tradition among African women. Miró’s order that the women either comb their hair flat or cover it if worn high challenged a prominent practice among many West African cultures. That the governor justified his order by claiming the hyper-seductiveness of the hairstyles provides one small, though powerful, example of the way that fluid racial lines created by Spanish colonial law had converged with the city’s well-deserved reputation for being sexually liberated, as well as with one physical vestige of certain West African cultures.¹⁷

Concern over hair, however, was minor when compared to the colony’s difficulty in curtailing several bands of maroons in the area. Since the early 1770s, residents of New Orleans and its vicinity had been plagued by the reality and exaggerated imagery of at least one band of maroon slaves who lived in the marshes outside the city. The easily identifiable band led by St. Maló presented a new challenge for colonial officials, as the very meaning of the leader’s name may have resonated with the African and African-descended slaves more than the officials realized.

¹⁷ Miró’s curious decree is cited in John G. Clark, *New Orleans, 1718-1812: An Economic History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), pp. 254. One of the more intriguing sub-fields of recent slave culture scholarship has been the examination of black women’s hairstyles in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century United States. See Shane White and Graham White, “Slave Hair and African American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” *Journal of Southern History* 61 (1995): 45-76; and Shane White and Graham White, *Stylin’: African-American Expressive Culture from its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998).

The maroon chieftain's appellation may have derived from the port town in Brittany of the same name, which must have struck the Acadians who had migrated from Brittany to Louisiana as curious. Almost certainly, the Spanish officials who recorded his name as 'St. Maló' understood that, for whatever reasons, the maroon had come to be known by the name of the French town. For Spanish-speaking citizens who did not see the name in written form, to their ear the name almost certainly was the Spanish word 'malo,' meaning 'bad.' But yet another understanding of the name was likely for the colony's Mande-speakers and descendants of Mande-speaking slaves. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall contends that 'malo' in the Bambara dialect of Mande refers to a 'charismatic leader who defies the social order, whose special powers and means to act may have beneficial consequences for all his people when social conventions paralyze others.'¹⁸ For the colony's enslaved people, the Mande meaning of the word has special resonance. In microcosm, the very definition of St. Maló's name accentuated the boldness of his actions, and contributed to all groups of Louisianans recognizing 'St. Maló' as both a powerful image and a powerful maroon leader.¹⁹

Slaves in the area might indeed have seen St. Maló and other maroons as the main challengers to the order of Louisiana, for maroons and slaves interacted

¹⁸ Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 213. Also see Charles S. Bird and Martha B. Kendall, "The Mande Hero," in *Explorations in African Systems of Thought*, eds. Ivan Karp and Charles S. Bird (Bloomington, Ind., 1980), 13-26.

¹⁹ The best example of this is the savvy manipulation of white authorities by slaves on the Jean Baptiste Prévost plantation below New Orleans. See Francisco Boulogny to Governor Miró, May 18, 1784, legajo 10, folios 128-132, Archivo General de Indias, Papeles de Cuba. Microfilm copy in Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, La [hereafter AGI-PC, HNOC].

frequently. Reporting in the early 1780s about the activities of the maroon band in which he was a member, Zéphir, a male slave in the area, mentioned a friendly trading and employment relationship with a white slaveowner, and daily relations with that owner's slaves. "We also cultivated a piece of land which he [Bonne] indicated, sowing it with some corn and vegetables during our leisure time, with the knowledge and consent of Mr. Bonne. We were also in touch with Mr. Bonne's slaves, giving them baskets, sifters and other items which we wove from willow which they brought to the city to sell." This allowed exploitation of the colony's blurred physical and social mobility was clearly not conducive to whites gaining control of the enslaved population. Moreover, this fluid physical and economic movement created a parasitic relationship that subtly yet steadily undermined the plantation order, as examples of relatively free bands of enslaved people roaming the countryside ate away, sometimes literally, at the control whites were attempting to impose.²⁰

Maroon bands, whether permanent like St. Maló's, or *ad hoc*, like Zéphir's, were a particular problem for the colony prior to the eruption at Saint-Domingue. As early as 1773 the Cabildo had spent nearly an entire session arguing over the best manner to capture the band of runaway slaves.²¹ Eventually

²⁰ Spanish Judicial Records, May 27, 1781, Louisiana Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum. On the undermining of the plantation order by these "truants" and "outlaws," see Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion*, 55-58. Eugene Genovese employs the effective imagery of a "parasit e" to argue a similar point. See Eugene D. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 52-54, 77-79.

²¹ The minutes of that meeting are in Records of the Cabildo, Book 1, pp. 129, August 6, 1773. See also Records of the Cabildo, Book 1, p. 163, October 15, 1773; pp. 279, February 6, 1778; Book 2, pp. 27, May 12, 1780, all in CA-NOPL.

opting for eradication, the Cabildo approved a system of bounties for individuals whose slaves were executed for spurious activities, as well as for people who killed “savage Negroes” attempting to escape arrest.²²

In May 1784 St. Maló and his lieutenant, “El Caballero de la Hacha (Knight of the Hatchet),” were reported to have established a village named Gaillard on the northern side of Lake Pontchartrain (north of New Orleans). From this base the maroon leaders led several “large bands” of “savage Negroes” to British West Florida, where at Bay St. Louis they murdered five American men. In pursuit of St. Maló and El Caballero, twenty enslaved African Americans—in this case, explicitly identified as “creole”—came upon the bands and their leaders. St. Maló’s men fired upon the official detachment. This incident so incensed the Cabildo that they ratcheted up military operations against St. Maló, instructing Lieutenant Colonel Francisco Bouigny, commandant of the colony, to formulate a plan to eradicate the band of maroons.²³

Bouigny, however, had no greater success at containing and arresting the maroons. On June 4, 1784, the attorney general reported to the Cabildo that Bouigny, who had complied with the request to pursue St. Maló, had far too few men to succeed. The “superior number of savages” would be enough to hold off pursuit by the colonial militia, but St. Maló’s men also had another advantage that theretofore had not been uttered at a Cabildo meeting. The attorney general, Andrés Almonester, asserted that future expeditions involving free blacks and

²² Ibid. See also Records of the Cabildo, Book 1, pp. 132, August 27, 1773; pp. 135, October 8, 1773; pp. 165, November 12, 1773; pp. 190, June 9, 1774.

²³ Records of the Cabildo, Book 2, pp. 221, May 28, 1784, CA-NOPL.

mulattoes were “useless,” as they were reluctant to pursue the maroons. Almonester’s reasoning was that the maroons were “mostly creoles of this Province,” and the blacks participating in the expeditions feared reprisals against their families by the maroons. The integration of the maroons with both free and enslaved blacks accelerated the parasitism of marronage on the plantation order.²⁴

Nonetheless, the combined expedition of free blacks from New Orleans and a larger number of regular militia meant success for the next expedition just three days later. After capturing St. Maló and most of his men, the militia turned the prisoners over to the civil authorities. By the fall of 1784, St. Maló and his closest compatriots had been hanged, which marked the beginning of the decline of *grand marronage* in southeastern Louisiana. Even after death, though, St. Maló’s significance to slavery and slaves in the colony continued. First, in the area in which St. Maló’s band was based, Bas-du-Fleuve just east of New Orleans, the number of settlers trended downward throughout the 1780s and 1790s. Though Midlo Hall concludes that “evidently, there was a policy of population removal,” the absence of such a policy being debated in extant records suggests that individual whites themselves needed no government edict to indicate the obvious: the physical space of those marshes was one that had been and could continue to be dominated by people of African descent. In the colony’s fledgling slavery regime, living there was no longer sensible. Second, the imagery of St. Maló—whether in life, as the successful leader of mostly creole maroons, or in death, after which his body parts were used to make charms for future “battles”

²⁴ Records of the Cabildo, Book 2, pp. 224, June 4, 1784, CA-NOPL.

between whites and blacks—remained a potent source of resistance ideology for the region’s enslaved blacks.²⁵

That most of St. Maló’s followers were creoles complicated the major policy questions of subsequent years regarding the slave trade to Louisiana. In May 1790, Governor Miró received a royal directive to expand his 1786 decree by banning all enslaved or free blacks from the French Carribean.²⁶ As part of this royal decree that was duly enforced by Miró, anyone wishing to introduce enslaved blacks into the colony would have to obtain a permit from the colonial government. With nine licensees in 1791, thirty-one in 1792, twenty-seven in 1793, and five in 1794, the trade in Africans remained open, while opportunities to deal in the profitable Caribbean trade waned.²⁷ According to historian Thomas Ingersoll’s figures, approximately 700 slaves, mostly Africans, were introduced during the period 1791-1795. This influx of *bozales* met the demand for labor at a time that Louisianans were finding it increasingly difficult to purchase slaves from the Caribbean.²⁸

²⁵ On the population decline of Bas-du-Fleuve (modern-day St. Bernard Parish), see Antonio Acosta Rodríguez, *Población de la Luisiana española, 1763-1803* (Madrid: Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, 1979), pp. 219, 225, 246. On St. Maló’s capture and post-mortem significance, see Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 230-236. On a similar situation with Nat Turner, cf. Kenneth S. Greenberg, “Name, Face, Body,” in *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory*, ed. Kenneth S. Greenberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3-23.

²⁶ Lachance, “The Politics of Fear,” 165.

²⁷ Gilbert C. Din, *Spaniards, Planters, and Slaves: The Spanish Regulation of Slavery in Louisiana, 1763-1803* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999), 151.

²⁸ Because of the unreliable censuses of this period, the number of imported slaves is difficult to ascertain. Nonetheless, between the studies of Paul Lachance and Thomas Ingersoll, one can at least make a reasonable estimate, as I do above. See Thomas Ingersoll, *Mammon and Manon*, 184-186; Thomas Ingersoll, “The Slave Trade and the Ethnic Diversity of Louisiana’s Slave Community,” *Louisiana History* 37 (1996), 147-49; Paul Lachance, “Politics of Fear,” 170 -71,

JACOBINISM IN LOUISIANA, REAL AND IMAGINED

But the colony's confidence in the safety of importing Africans would prove to be ill-founded, as events in the summer of 1791 attest. In early July, Louisiana slaveowners learned of two disturbing incidents that had occurred in Pointe Coupée (or "Punta Cortada," as the Spanish referred to it), the region with the highest proportion of slaves in its population and the epicenter of slave conspiracies in the colony. The first, July 7, was a slave conspiracy. Most troubling about this plot was that it belied the conventional wisdom of creole and skilled slaves leading insurrections. Slaves from the Upper Guinea Coast, who were identified as "Bambara" and "Mandinga," had organized the revolt. After sending militia stationed at Baton Rouge, the nearest town, to Pointe Coupée, the governor had eleven people—seven slaves and four free black accomplices—imprisoned. Unlike the vast majority of punishments for slave insurrection, and at the behest of owners unwilling to lose their investments, the governor-general did not order that the plot leaders be executed. In spite of whites' rhetoric, in reality they did not see this plot as threatening, or even real, for no accused conspirators were executed.²⁹

The second Pointe Coupée event in fewer than three days proved more unsettling. Claude Trénonay, one of the largest slaveowners in Pointe Coupée

196-97; Philip D. Curtin, *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 82.

²⁹ Miró to Las Casas, July 16, 1791, *Dispatches of the Spanish Governors in Louisiana* (typescript in Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans), V, 24, 44-45. Also see Holmes, "The Abortive Slave Revolt," 343.

Parish, had in 1785 purchased forty native Africans during the indigo boom. Told by the slave traders that the slaves were “of good nations,” Trénonay understood that no slaves in the cohort would be from cultures of ill repute, such as the Igbo, whose reputation for suicide was well-known in planter culture. Nonetheless, the preponderance of Igbos in Pointe Coupée inventories and in various records in New Orleans indicates that these tendencies may not have been taken seriously by owners, perhaps because the supply of native Africans to Louisiana in the eighteenth century often consisted of slaves not purchased first in Caribbean ports.³⁰

Whatever the reason, Trénonay owned an Igbo slave, Latulipe, who had run away for three weeks in response to Trénonay flogging him for stealing. On July 9, while Trénonay was eating supper with his friends, Latulipe shot and killed him. In keeping with the reputation of his culture, Latulipe remained at large for several days before returning to his cabin, where he hanged himself. The white authorities, hoping to curb additional murders or suicides, ordered Latulipe’s fellow slaves to mutilate his body and place the body parts on poles throughout the area. The gruesome dismemberment of Latulipe’s body demonstrated that authorities’ earlier decision not to execute the alleged

³⁰ Vente d’esclaves, Oct. 17, 1785, in OAPCP; Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 67-8; Michael Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 115-22.

conspirators was a result of the conspiracy not being real. leaders of the other plot was nothing more than a rare exception.³¹

News of the slave unrest in Pointe Coupée further excited wary whites when in October of the same year a free mulatto in New Orleans was accused of inciting rebellion. Pedro Bailly, a free pardo who was also an officer in the free black militia, endured a three-week trial full of circumstantial evidence. In the records of the case, Bailly was reported to have declared that he and other free blacks were planning to “strike a blow like at the Cap.” Having already received word of the ensuing rebellion at Cap Français, Bailly would appear to have been guilty. Nonetheless, Bailly was acquitted of these charges, mainly because the level of hearsay evidence was not enough to demonstrate Bailly’s direct statement to that effect.³²

Thus, the news from Saint-Domingue in late 1791 reached a society that had already experienced serious challenges to its social order. The degree of fear among Louisianans was notable, and found expression in that of government officials. On February 10, 1792, the Cabildo requested that the new governor, François Louis Héctor, Baron de Carondelet, initiate an inspection program whereby all blacks “who are not brutes” and imported to the colony from “foreign

³¹ For a thorough account of the Latulipe Igbo and Trénonay case, see Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 252-54. Planters in many New World slave societies often ordered the mutilation of the bodies of slaves who committed suicides. For examples of widespread suicide among Igbos in Cuba, see Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Social Control in Slave Plantation Societies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), 20-21.

³² See “Criminales seguidos de oficio contra el Pardo Libre Pedro Bailly,” Spanish Judicial Records, Louisiana State Museum, October 7, 1791, Case #15. Also see the excellent, longer analysis of the Bailly case in Hanger, *Bounded Lives*, 150-62.

islands” be inspected.³³ Slaves from Africa, such as those brought from Havana aboard *La Rosalía* in February 1792, were seemingly safe entrants to the colony.³⁴ Once again, colonial officials in Louisiana recognized the centrality of creole slaves in the major rebellions and conspiracies in recent years. But even this increased inspection did not curtail the influx of slaves from places deemed dangerous by whites.

In July 1792, members of the Cabildo heard testimony from syndic Andrés Almonaster that a large shipment of slaves had recently arrived from what was, in the estimation of white Louisianans, the most dangerous of sources: Guarico, or Cap Français, of northern Saint-Domingue. Referred to as “marked Negroes,” these slaves had been branded, which of course made them easily recognizable in Louisiana. Though the Cabildo could tolerate the introduction of Africans, even those whose vessels re-supplied at Caribbean ports, continuing to allow slaves from Saint-Domingue into the colony did not further the Cabildo’s attempts to create a stable, slave regime. On July 23, 1792, in direct response to the arrival of the “marked” slaves aboard *La Victoria*, the Cabildo, requested Carondelet’s permission to forbid the entry of any slave from the French colonies or Jamaica.³⁵

But that order only covered slaves who were imported for sale, meaning that whites fleeing Saint-Domingue, or migrating from any Caribbean island to

³³ Records of the Cabildo, Book 3, Vol. 2, pp. 192, February 10, 1792, CA-NOPL.

³⁴ Gov. Carondelet to Enrique White, New Orleans, April 26, 1793, leg. 19, AGI-PC, HNOG.

³⁵ Records of the Cabildo, Book 3, Vol. 3, pp. 9, July 16, 1792, CA-NOPL. King Charles IX of Spain ratified the ordinance on January 1, 1793, and expressly encouraged Spaniards and Spanish colonists to engage in the slave trade in Africa.

Louisiana, could bring slaves with them. Though only a trickle compared to the massive influx of white refugees from Haiti in the early 1800s, approximately 100 whites arrived in 1791 and 1792, creating an opening through which the contagion of rebellion could enter the colony; as long as that was the case, whites would continue to exaggerate the importance of Saint-Domingue to the events underway in Louisiana.³⁶

When Governor Carondelet succeeded Governor Miró, who had been bogged down by the St. Maló crisis, new challenges arose for the new governor that would presage what whites perceived to be the insidious seep of rebellion from Saint-Domingue into Louisiana. Reacting to the news about Saint-Domingue, Governor Carondelet set out quickly to calm the fears of his fellow officials and those of concerned citizens. In August 1792, Carondelet noted, ‘From the beginning of the insurrection in Santo Domingo, having been advised of the consequences which might result, I made public a regulation regarding the slaves, on one hand directed to the fact of maintaining them in strong subordination to their masters, and on the other, preventing the owners from inflaming them by severe punishment.’ What Carondelet was referring to as a public regulation was his own *bando de bueno gobierno*, which, like Miró’s in 1786, provides clues not just to the daily and cultural activities of slaves, but also to the ways in which those activities aggravated concerns about the colony’s disintegrating social order.³⁷

³⁶ See Paul Lachance, “The 1809 Immigration of Saint -Domingue Refugees to New Orleans: Reception, Integration, and Impact,” *Louisiana History* 29 (1988), 110.

³⁷ From *Dispatches of the Spanish Governors*, III, Aug 21, 1792.

Most notable about Carondelet's *bando* was not just the prohibited actions by slaves but the requirements of owners of them. Like Miró before him, Carondelet enumerated the rations to be distributed to bondpeople, as well as the proper length of the workday. Each slave was required to receive at least one barrel of corn monthly. For those who toiled in the fields, the proper workday was dawn to dusk, with a two-hour lunch break during the summer months and a ninety-minute lunch break in the winter. Sundays were to be days of rest, and could be used by slaves for a variety of activities, including visiting relatives, working their personal or family garden plots, or selling their wares.³⁸ Emphasizing the necessity of these actions, Carondelet wrote the commandant at Natchitoches, Louis DeBlanc, that legal tradition in the colony meant "inhabitants must give to their Negroes so that they may get a suitable usefulness out of them without infringing with impunity the laws of humanity." Anyone violating these "laws" would be fined and suffer "the sale of the Negro who shall have been unjustly maltreated or used beyond measure."³⁹

A series of extraordinary formal complaints by slaves against their masters influenced the governor's actions.. In fact, the very day that the governor issued his *bando*, he directed the commandant of a nearby district to conduct an investigation of runaway slaves who had turned up in New Orleans. Surmising that the nine slaves had run away because their owner, M. Bourgens, had violated the basic principles of the new slave code, and those that had been established by

³⁸ Carondelet's "bando de bueno gobierno," July 11, 1792, legs. 18 and 205, AGI -PC, HNOC.

³⁹ Carondelet to DeBlanc, July 11, 1792, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, III, 58-9.

Governor Miró, Carondelet urged the commandant to impress upon masters in his district the necessity of treating their slaves “humanely.” While waiting for the conclusion of the investigation, Carondelet remarked that he would put the nine to work for the city.⁴⁰

Though the outcome of that investigation is unclear, it nonetheless demonstrates that local contexts—in this case, the implementation of Spanish law, and the apparent willingness of a particular official, Governor Carondelet, to enforce that law—were more important in fashioning slaves’ response to society than were the new influences—Saint-Domingue and Jacobinism—that so concerned white officials and citizens. That slaves formally petitioned the government also demonstrates a social ownership, or at least perception thereof, on their part; such a process provides a tangible example of slaves accommodating and resisting at the state level. This idea was made more possible by additional cases taken up by the governor in the early months of his tenure. In August 1792, the governor responded to Valentin LeBlanc, the commandant of Pointe Coupée district, and informed him of his decision on a case that also involved slaves’ testimony about mistreatment. Slaveowner Maria Bara LeBlond, along with her son and husband, was accused of chaining and excessively beating several of her slaves. One of these slaves, the female Saya, had fled to New Orleans, and at the time of the correspondence was under the care of Carondelet himself. Violating his own calls for LeBlanc’s “impartiality,” Carondelet had

⁴⁰ Carondelet to Michel Cantrelle, July 11, 1792, leg. 18, AGI-PC, HNOG.

concluded that he would sell Saya so she could avoid living “under so burdensome a yoke.”⁴¹

Carondelet continued to side with such slave petitioners, much to the chagrin of owners. In particular, Carondelet drew significant criticism from slaveowners in Pointe Coupée, probably because this district—in spite of its distance from New Orleans—was the main one from which slaves, both creole and Africans, came to seek redress for violations of the slave code. The local regime of slave control, which was a necessity from the perspective of whites given the high proportion of slaves in the district’s population, engendered considerable reaction of all types by slaves. The governor was clearly focused on redressing mistreatment in that district, a result in his mind of the considerable slave unrest that had plagued the district prior to his appointment as governor. Just as individual owners would provide their bondpeople with semi-independent time and space as a type of safety valve, Carondelet saw his willingness to act on valid slave petitions as a means of preventing Saint-Domingue. In so doing, however, the governor irritated his constituency, and provided an incrementally increasing opening through which slaves attempted to undermine the system.

The preponderance of Pointe Coupée slaves among those who petitioned the governor indicates some conflicting regional norms in slave treatment between New Orleans and Pointe Coupée. It also points to a slave community that understood what treatment was beyond the pale. Slaves complained about a

⁴¹ Valentin LeBlanc to Carondelet, Pointe Coupée, August 2 and 4, 1792, leg. 25, AGI-PC, HNOG; Carondelet to LeBlanc, New Orleans, Aug. 8 and 10, leg. 18, HNOG.

variety of abuses: excessive whipping, not being paid for working on Sundays, inadequate food, midday lunch breaks shorter than the requisite two hours, working in inclement weather, and for women, being forced to perform domestic duties after a full day in the field. Though slaves in the New Orleans area registered similar complaints, the proximity of their plantations to the seat of government seems to have limited such mistreatment. Moreover, with no slaves from the Attakapas and Natchitoches areas venturing to New Orleans to petition Carondelet, the mode of resistance that Pointe Coupée slaves chose differed from that of their rural counterparts in those districts, probably because of the long tradition of slave activism in the region.⁴²

Two cases from the district illustrate the political dilemma for the governor, and more importantly, the bold actions of slaves. In July 1792, slaves of two neighboring slaveowners, Colin Lacour and Jean Baptiste Bara, lodged complaints against their owners. In Lacour's case, his slave André had fled to New Orleans in response to death threats Lacour had issued when André incited the Africans on the plantation to stop working as a collective protest to their master's failure to provide the mandatory corn ration for three consecutive days. Wary of the example that André was setting in front of the *bozales*, Lacour made the threat that André used to as justification for his petition.⁴³

⁴² Original Acts, Pointe Coupée Parish, #1762, Jul. 31-Aug. 4, 1792; Carondelet's Code, July 11, 1792, #119, W.P.A. typescript, Special Collections, Louisiana State University Library, Baton Rouge, La.

⁴³ For the Lacour and Bara cases, see McGowan, "Creation of a Slave Society," 303 -309.

In the case of Jean Baptiste Bara, it was newly-arrived slaves who exhibited neither reluctance nor political ignorance in taking action to ameliorate their circumstances. At the same time that André initiated his complaint in New Orleans, five Bara slaves—one from the British West Indies, two Carabas, a Nar, and a Chamba—fled to the city in protest of having been forced to work three consecutive Sundays. This was in clear violation of Miró's 1786 edict and was especially problematic for slaves, whose social, cultural, and economic activities were usually concentrated on Sunday. In response to both cases, Carondelet chastised the owners, but returned the slaves, citing the need for labor at harvest time. In the case of Colin Lacour's slaves, the governor cited testimony that Lacour usually treated his slaves "with great indulgence and humanity." But, in order to establish a framework by which he could justify stricter punishment in the future, the governor essentially reissued Miró's 1786 edict.⁴⁴

In spite of the impressive actions of slaves and in spite of his own conclusions in some of these cases, Carondelet knew that he had to please the planter class. Maintaining the social and political order of the colony meant that he had an obligation not only to curtail abuses of the law by masters but also by slaves. The most frequent complaint by whites at this time was of groups of slaves who wandered recklessly onto private property throughout the New Orleans district. During a one-year period in 1793 and 1794, several whites living immediately outside New Orleans complained to syndic Andrés Almonaster, who in turn reported to the Cabildo, of slaves crossing fences to hunt on their land. To

⁴⁴ Ibid.

boot, the trespassers appeared to have no regard for the livestock that occupied the enclosures, for the complainants accused the hunters of “discharging their guns too close to the houses and sometimes killing animals.” After discussion on August 16, 1793, the Cabildo waited until its meeting on January 31, 1794, to pass a resolution requesting Governor Carondelet to prohibit this trespassing and hunting.⁴⁵

But several months later the same white residents were still complaining of the trespassing and hunting. Evidently frustrated with the inability of civil officials to curb the trespassing, and wanting to stop this practice before it became *marronage*, the complainants bypassed Almonaster and appeared in person at the Cabildo meeting on September 19, 1794. Representing the leading slaveowners in the area, the six men reiterated the accusations about trespassing and hunting, but also added new allegations that these activities were risking the lives of their families. In addition, the men complained, blacks living in the city and along Bayou St. John—an important site for black culture in the region—frequently cut wood on their property, destroying the cypress trees. The most troubling news for the Cabildo, though, was that some of the white inhabitants reported that many of these slaves, after hunting or cutting wood, “scatter themselves in the cypress groves belonging to the complainants.” With the specter of St. Maló and other maroons still fresh in their memories, New Orleans officials moved to restrict this literal and figurative freedom of slaves in the region.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Acts and Deliberations of the Cabildo [hereafter ADC], Book 3, Vol. 3, pp. 81, August 16, 1793, NOPL; ADC, Book 3, Vol. 3, pp. 118, January 31, 1794, NOPL.

⁴⁶ ADC, Book 3, Vol. 3, pp. 156, September 19, 1794, CA-NOPL. The six most prominent of the petitioners were Beltran Gravier, Juan Bautista Macarty, Thomas Sales, Pedro de Marigny,

The actions by some whites converged with the increased concern over black mobility. Spanish officials feared not only slave rebellion, but also the prospect of French revolutionary ideas taking root in the minds of the thousands of continental and Acadian French citizens in the colony. Memories of the rebellion in 1768, in which French residents of Louisiana bucked the arrival and governance of the Spanish, were still fresh in the minds of Spanish officials.⁴⁷ A daily tightrope act by Carondelet in negotiating his colony and metropole through the diplomatic intrigue of the United States, Britain, France, and American Indians of the Lower Mississippi River Valley kept officialdom in New Orleans on edge. The combination of old forces—fears of slaves and diplomatic uneasiness—seemed to be quick tinder for the fire of Jacobinism that colonial officials thought threatened the stability of the colony.

To stave off the perceived threat of a biracial, Jacobin-influenced assault on that order, Carondelet clamped down on white immigration to the colony almost as much as he and Miró had done with that of blacks. Using the Spanish navy to patrol the Mississippi River and its immediate Gulf of Mexico shoreline, Carondelet embarked on an ambitious program to prevent the landfall of blacks or whites from Saint-Domingue. The governor also began militarizing the colony, beefing up outposts along the Mississippi River, near Natchitoches, and across the river at Natchez. By July 1793, Carondelet's initiative had discovered sixty-eight

Etienne Boré, and Bautista Sarpy. Also see Petitions, Letters, and Decrees of the Cabildo, #235, September 19, 1794, CA-NOPL.

⁴⁷ Carl A. Brasseaux. *Denis-Nicolas Foucault and the New Orleans Rebellion of 1768* (Ruston, La.: McGinty, 1987).

suspected Jacobins from Saint-Domingue, all of whom were deported immediately. The colony also sponsored a repatriation program for former Saint-Domingue planters living in Louisiana so that the white-black ratio on the island could be increased.⁴⁸

Though Carondelet's efforts allayed the concern of whites that French and Saint-Domingue revolutionary thought could infect the colony's slaves, these programs did not succeed in wiping out Jacobinism among whites. With so much attention paid to slaves, and to whites' attempts to curb the mobility of slaves, whites propagating revolutionary ideology alarmed Carondelet. For example, in 1794 a copy of the secret Jacobin journal in Saint-Domingue, *La Radateur*, turned up in Louisiana. The ensuing trial of the two men suspected of smuggling the paper into Louisiana, Jean Pierre Pisgignoux and Auguste La Chaise, captured the fear of Carondelet and the Cabildo vividly. Pisgignoux had fought in Saint-Domingue, and Louisiana officials had long suspected him of spying . More intriguing was La Chaise, a native of Louisiana and member of a prominent New Orleans family, who was a central figure in a French- and American-sponsored plot to "free" Louisiana from Spanish rule. ⁴⁹

This plot merged into the Genêt mission in the early 1790s, and weighed heavily on the mind of Carondelet by 1794. Jacobinism in Louisiana appeared to the Spanish to be real, as one French military officer was plotting to exploit this

⁴⁸ Alfred N. Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press), 25.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* Also see Charles Gayarré, *History of Louisiana*, vol. 3 (New York: Redfield, 1854), 341-44.

weakness of Spain's governance of Louisiana. Genêt, with American help, planned an assault on Louisiana that would leave from Vicksburg and drive the Spanish from the region. Though the Genêt Mission was foiled, it merely added to the Spanish insistence that the next logical place to be infected by the French Revolution was their colony of Louisiana.⁵⁰

The tracts of Jacobins operating in Louisiana melded the ideas of a colony's political independence with an individual's personal freedom. One such essay, which was printed and circulated in Louisiana in 1794 by a society of French Jacobins in Philadelphia, was addressed to "The Freemen of France and their brothers in Louisiana." After summarizing the aims and accomplishments of the French Revolution—most notably the execution of "a perjured king, prevaricating ministers, vile and insolent courtiers, who fattened on the labors of the people whose blood they sucked"—the essay took aim at local circumstances in Louisiana. Most troubling for the authors was the situation of Frenchmen being governed by Spaniards. Louisiana's French citizens were urged "to cease being the slaves of a government, to which you were shamefully sold," and concluded that because of Spain's despotism and tyranny, "all those it rules over must groan under the chains of slavery." Obviously, from the perspective of Spanish officials, their control was under attack from a host of groups, which led them to suspect, not unreasonably, that some common ideology bound those groups together.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Frederick J. Turner, "The Origins of Genêt's Projected Attack on Louisiana and the Floridas," *American Historical Review* 3 (1898): 650-71; Richard Lowitt, "Activities of Citizen Genêt in Kentucky, 1793-1794," *Filson Club Historical Quarterly* 22 (1948):252-267. Also see Marigny, *Thoughts Upon the Foreign Policy of the United States*, 18-19, and *AHA Annual Report, 1896*, I, 930-1107.

⁵¹ Quoted in Gayarre, *History of Louisiana*, III, pp. 337-340.

The fever pitch over potential Jacobin rebellion involving both blacks and whites created an atmosphere in Louisiana in which politically marginalized people found it difficult to escape suspicion. Naturally, chief among these were slaves themselves, whose actions and perceived potential actions provoked the social control imposed by the governors and Cabildo. In addition to slaves, free blacks in New Orleans and other districts of Louisiana found the situation much different than earlier eras. For example, Carondelet exiled one free black tailor who had recently immigrated to New Orleans from Saint-Domingue. Justifying this action, Carondelet remarked, ‘He is a native of that part of Santo Domingo that belongs to the French and is mixed up in all the intrigues and harassments of the French colony..Having such a character around under the present circumstances in which I am placed might produce bad results.’⁵²

As Carondelet would soon learn, taking the initiative in banning free black migrants from Saint-Domingue was good policy for the stability of Louisiana. Pedro Bailly, the free pardo who had eluded conviction in 1791, was charged once again in 1794 on similar accusations. Though news of the Saint-Domingue rebellion likely led to Bailly’s accusers bringing charges against him in 1791, the perceived danger of St. Domingue being replicated in Louisiana had had three years to germinate among colonial officials. In such a charged atmosphere, Pedro Bailly stood little chance of withstanding the new accusations, especially given what appear to have been his real, pro-Jacobin activities. Upon concluding that

⁵² Quoted in Hunt, *Haiti’s Influence*, 26-27.

Bailly possessed “diabolical ideas of freedom and equality,” Governor Carondelet convicted Bailly and had him deported to El Morro Castle in Havana.⁵³

PRAYING AND DANCING

One powerful strategy that free people of color used to offset such successful accusations was to participate fully in the social life of their home cities. Historian Kimberley Hanger’s compelling work on New Orleans demonstrates that daily acts historians once considered routine—participation in the church, market, social life, and military—actually were effective, conscious methods employed by the city’s free black population in their efforts to improve their station. Though extant evidence of social affairs is sparse for the frontier districts of the colony during this period, much exists for such activities in New Orleans. A central feature of life for whites, dances and balls constituted the central part of the Mardi Gras season that was celebrated from January 1 until Ash Wednesday. Both free blacks and slaves participated fully in the rituals of New Orleans’ carnival season, with some members of the former group even hosting parties attended by whites. Clearly dangerous to the nascent social order that white authorities sought to impose following Saint-Domingue, the Cabildo passed new regulations prohibiting free and enslaved blacks from wearing masks, and mandated that separate balls for whites and free people of color be established. That the balls and carnivalesque routines remained into the nineteenth century

⁵³ Hanger, *Bounded Lives*, 150-62.

indicates that legal regulations did not alter long-standing social traditions, even in the face of chaotic times.⁵⁴

For slaves, participation in such festivities brought a harsh rebuke from Governor Miró in his 1786 edict, and continued harassment through the early 1790s. Though the Cabildo had no problem with white citizens of the city attending the city's first theater, which was founded by and featured "a troupe of comedians" from Cap Français, St. Domingue,⁵⁵ the amusement choices by slaves were severely circumscribed. Among the many regulations spelled out in the governor's proclamation was that slaves could not assemble without their master's permission. Slaves from other plantations who did not possess such permission were not allowed to enter a party already organized at a given plantation. To curb the frequency of slave parties and to limit the degree of social inversion inculcated by the carnival season, Miró also proclaimed that the festival-day "tangos or Negro dances" held at the *Plaza de Armas*, located directly between the river and the adjacent Cabildo and church buildings, could not be held until after vespers. Curiously, this apparent desire to protect the sanctity of the church's space was in direct opposition to the major concern in the rural areas to prevent large gatherings of slaves after sundown.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Hanger, *Bounded Lives*, 1-16, 142-43; Randall Couch, "The Public Masked Balls of Antebellum New Orleans: A Custom of Masque Outside the Mardi Gras Tradition," *Louisiana History* 35 (1994): 403-431.

⁵⁵ Fortier, vol. 2, 146. Also see Rene Le Gardeur, *The First New Orleans Theatre, 1792-1803* (New Orleans, 1963).

⁵⁶ RDC, Miro, "Bando..," article 10, June 2, 1786, NOPL. Not until 1817 did the city council and mayor formally regulate the Congo Square festivities. See Chapter 5.

In terms of social control, denying slaves the opportunity to participate in the long-awaited ritual of Carnival was a double-edged sword. Though slaves and masters had exerted considerable pressure on the governor to curb abuses of the slave code, Miró failed to recognize that events such as Mardi Gras festivities could actually work to keep the slaves in order. By 1786, however, Miró was responding to the common wisdom that creole slaves, especially those who exploited the fluid, incomplete lines of division between blacks and whites, were most dangerous. Given the city's burgeoning free black population, the majority of which was of mixed ancestry, the practice of "passing"—for free blacks and slaves—had always been easy. Now, with the specter of Saint-Domingue agitating white fears, white authorities and residents began to question, though not stamp out, the practice. Though officials' response to the balls was aimed specifically at the practice, that incrementally-tightening restriction against blacks' semi-autonomy foreshadowed the imposition of a biracial notion of race that Americans would impose in the 1810s.⁵⁷

Given the consternation over Mardi Gras celebrations and parties during the rest of the year, slaves found market activities to be one realm where whites were generally willing to leave them alone. In fact, evidence from Cabildo meetings and reports of travelers throughout the late eighteenth century remark on the dominance of people of color in the city's markets. Whether selling "vegetables, milk, wild fowl, quartered venison and mutton" for their owners in the town market, or whether peddling their own wares produced during their

⁵⁷ I discuss this further in Chapters Four and Five.

Sunday “free time,” slaves in New Orleans were integral parts of the vibrant market in the city.⁵⁸

Though rich records like those of New Orleans do not exist for Attakapas, Natchitoches, and the Greater Florida Parish regions, some extant sources do indicate similar activities in those areas. For example, the commandant at Natchitoches, Louis DeBlanc, wrote to Governor Carondelet regarding the vibrant market activities in his region, and in particular, the prevalent sale of liquor to slaves. DeBlanc complained that it was impossible for him to regulate the commerce between people of his district and those in Texas because “the merchants are scattered throughout my district,” rather than all based in Natchitoches. The commandant complained further of “the illicit trade which they carry on along the coast in liquors,” claiming that it attracted “the Negroes especially and results in most evil consequences and infinite disorders as I am experiencing every day.”⁵⁹ As in New Orleans, the free and enslaved blacks of Natchitoches used the economic necessity of market transactions to increase their autonomy.

Though selling and buying goods were important strategies for enslaved blacks to test how far they could stretch their masters’ willingness to

⁵⁸ Quoted statement in RDC, September 10, 1784, NOPL. For a thorough discussion of the regional context within which slaves in New Orleans operated, see Daniel Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley Before 1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 191-218.

⁵⁹ DeBlanc to Carondelet, February 18, 1792, in *Spain in the Mississippi Valley, 1765-1794*, ed. and trans. Lawrence Kinnaid, part I, vols. II-IV of American Historical Association, *Annual Report for the Year 1945* (Washington, D.C., 1946-1949), 9-11. DeBlanc’s letter, as with all documents in the three-part volume, are in the Spanish Archives, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

accommodate them, other strategies were subtler, and therefore less likely to spark consternation. Both free blacks and slaves found participating in the rites and sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church to be the most effective tool in reducing suspicion. An institution intertwined with the colonial government under both the French and Spanish regimes, the Catholic Church in Louisiana provided early European settlers with a stable institutional foundation familiar in their native societies. Though church-going among whites in the colony was not universal, it was, during the 1790s, more prevalent than it would be in subsequent decades, when the largely Protestant Anglo-Americans would dilute the colony's Catholic majority. Foreshadowing this development, the Anglo Protestant traveler John Pope, upon witnessing a Catholic ceremony in Pointe Coupée in 1791, observed, "The French and Spanish subjects of Louisiana, are strict Romanists, and therefore, enthusiastically fond of Pageantry in their religious festivals." Obviously put off by the ceremony he saw, Pope concluded that the inhabitants of Louisiana, or "Orleanois," in his words, "consider People of all other religious Denominations as Heretics, and to whom they not long since denied christian Burial."⁶⁰

Slaveowners believed that Roman Catholicism offered a powerful means of social control of the enslaved population. According to both French and Spanish law, slaveowners were required to provide for a basic Catholic instruction for their bondpeople. Though the Church would always have a stronger presence

⁶⁰ John Pope, *Tour Through the Southern and Western Territories of the United States of America; The Spanish Dominions on the River Mississippi, and the Floridas; The Countries of the Creek Nations; and Many Uninhabited Places* (Richmond: John Dixon, 1792), 39-40.

in New Orleans than in other parts of Louisiana—both among whites and blacks—even those whites who did not abide the royal directive to baptize their bondpeople were aware of the Church’s power. Giving public, if not sincere, genuflection to the Church was necessary. As one visitor to Louisiana noted, “The Catholic religion is the only one allowed in this country; every other is interdicted. Attendance at public worship is, however, not indiscriminately exacted; a man has only to profess an outward respect for the prominent worship, and he need be under no inquietude.”⁶¹

For multiple reasons, however, slaves did not see Roman Catholicism simply as a tool of their masters. They recognized that the faith and institution of Catholicism could actually be used to their advantage. Inverting the usual flow of accommodation and resistance, slaves accommodated their masters’ desires to convert them in an effort to allay white fears; this in turn provided many slaves with greater leverage in other aspects of the contested terrain between master and slave, such as not working on Sundays, obtaining passes for visiting kin at another plantation, or even permission to attend parties. Slaves who sincerely believed, reaped the additional reward—as they viewed it—of a spiritual home, not to mention feeling part of an institution that itself complicated masters’ control of slaves. Knowing whether peoples of African descent sincerely practiced Catholicism is less interesting and important than understanding the opportunities that faith—in a micro-level “political” sense —gave them.

⁶¹ Berquin-Duvallon, *Travels in Louisiana and The Floridas, in the Year 1802, Giving a Correct Picture of those Countries*, John Davis, trans. (New York: I. Riley, 1806), 55.

As in most Spanish colonies of the New World, the Catholic Church in Louisiana appealed to a number of free and enslaved blacks. First, Louisiana church officials exuded a sincere paternalism toward slaves. Under Spanish control, Catholic churches in Louisiana were part of the Diocese of Cuba and Louisiana, whose diocesan seat was Havana. As in Havana, most of the priests serving parishes throughout the colony were Capuchins. Founded in the early eighteenth century, the Order of the Capuchins was dedicated to converting the poor and spiritually unwashed.⁶² Though French Capuchins created the earliest missions and thereby were responsible for the Catholic presence in Louisiana, the most important Capuchin friar to slaves in the colony was the Spaniard Antonio Sedella. ‘Père Antoine,’ as he was affectionately known soon after his arrival in New Orleans in 1779, was particularly effective, as the locals’ quick Frenchification of his name suggests. Whites and blacks alike appreciated Sedella’s almsgiving and his determination, unlike his French predecessors, to live like those to whom he preached. Sedella lived in a hovel behind the church, and his close proximity to the center of market and social activity in the city, made him as visible a presence in the city as the edifice of St. Louis Church itself. The quirky friar won great affection from the many free and enslaved blacks who frequented the center of town.⁶³

Antonio Sedella secured his position as a political outsider by attempting to impose the Inquisition in the colony in 1790. The first in a series of conflicts

⁶² Roger Baudier, *The Catholic Church in Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1939), 243-49.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 275-76.

with civil authorities and church superiors, Sedella's action particularly angered planters, whose papers Sedella claimed to have authority to peruse in an effort to stamp out seditious and heretical thought. Though Spanish officials led the rebuke against Sedella, he was merely searching for what civil authorities themselves would be attempting to stamp out in a few years: revolutionary materials from France. Free blacks and slaves surely appreciated Sedella's interference within the ranks of whites, for it gave them yet another opportunity to gain traction in their multi-pronged assault on the colony's social order.⁶⁴

Aside from Sedella and the educational aims of the Capuchin Order, the fundamental theology and practices of Roman Catholicism appealed to people of African descent. With so many slaves from Senegambia in the colony, Louisiana contained a number of Africans and their descendants who used amulets and icon worship as central aspects of their religion. Consequently, the iconography of the Catholic Church provided an appealing Christian home for Africans and African Americans in the eighteenth century.⁶⁵ Lending itself to a religious syncretism in

⁶⁴ Sedella's experience as a judge of the Inquisition appears to have influenced his decision to impose the process on the colony. After causing much uproar from Governor Miró and Bishop Penalver of Havana, Sedella was ordered back to Spain. He would return, however, in 1795, and would create an important schism in the colony in 1805 that is covered in Ch. 3. For the 1790 dispute, Charles Edwards O'Neill, "A Quarter Marked By Sundry Peculiarities": New Orleans, Lay Trustees, and Père Antoine," *Catholic Historical Review* 76 (1990), 260-68.

⁶⁵ On Senegambian religious practices see, Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 162-64; Kevin D. Roberts, "Africa in Louisiana: In Search of 'Bambara' and Creole Identities in Literary and Statistical Sources," in *African Historical Research: Sources and Methods*, Toyin Falola and Christian Jennings, eds. (Rochester: Univ. of Rochester Press, 2003). A thorough analysis of Afro-Catholicism in Louisiana and the Atlantic World is Chapter 3 of this study. For the attractiveness of Catholicism to peoples of African descent in the U.S. South, see Randall M. Miller, "Slaves and Southern Catholicism," in John B. Boles, ed., *Masters and Slaves in the House of the Lord: Race and Religion in the American South* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1988), 141-42, 144-45. Though Miller concludes that "the syncretic process of Afro-Catholicism that developed in the Caribbean and Brazil never flowered in the Old South"(141), he does argue that the best

which Africans could include their own gods and practices, Catholic theology, institutional power, and political vagaries in Louisiana converged with the political and social needs of the colony's black population. Participating in the three major sacraments for Catholic lay people—baptism, marriage, and burial—free and enslaved blacks throughout the colony composed a significant portion of priest's parish services. In all four districts included in this study, the rate of black baptisms—the sacrament I focus on because of its frequency among African Americans—was astounding.⁶⁶

St. Louis Parish Church, which would become a cathedral in 1794, was a prominent site for blacks attempting to ameliorate the effects of enslavement. Following news of the Haitian Revolution, this strategy of amelioration was attended by a strategy of reducing suspicion. Both free and enslaved blacks could accomplish those aims in one act of baptism. From the perspective of slaves, the benefits of baptism were numerous. The three groups who would decide if an enslaved child was to be baptized—the owner, the parents, or the godparents—each, of course, had their own ends. Devout owners saw baptism as a requisite

examples for such syncretism in the region would be New Orleans and Natchitoches. My research challenges Miller's statement that the Catholic Church "never established a firm institutional foothold in the region, not even in Louisiana, where it faced vigorous, rising opposition from the Protestant elements who came to dominate the state"(141). The Church's influence did, as Miller argues, wane even in Louisiana once Protestant denominations gained influence and members in the state. Nonetheless, up to the 1810s, Catholicism in Louisiana, particularly among blacks, was as fervent as in the circum-Caribbean. Also see James Hennessy, *American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community* (New York, 1982); and Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the American South* (New York, 1978).

⁶⁶ To arrive at this conclusion I examined the sacramental records of the four earliest church parishes in these districts, St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans, St. Martin de Tours Church in St. Martinville (Attakapas District), and St. Francois Parish in Natchitoches. Specific register books are cited in subsequent footnotes.

theological step for their bondpeople, while owners less concerned with the Church saw it as a tradition that grew out of Article 2 of the French *Code Noir*, which required conversion of slaves to Catholicism. Both groups, though, realized the value of “conversion” to social control. Parents of baptized slaves chose to do so either out of a religious desire, or out of a practical desire to please their master. In some cases, obviously, parents had little choice. Regardless of the motivation, during this period, the godparents were most likely to be slaves owned by the same master of the baptized slaves, though in several cases slaves of other masters were sponsors. This familiarity among slaves and masters helped to build larger and deeper communities of slaves, as well as preserve large networks of biological and fictive kin.⁶⁷

Between 1791 and 1795 there was a constant rate of baptism among enslaved blacks at St. Louis Church (see Table 2.1, page 79). The Capuchin priests in St. Louis parish baptized 213 slaves in 1791, and averaged 230 slave baptisms per year through 1795. This rate indicates that a preponderance of the city’s 1,869 slaves in 1791 were baptized Catholics. In 1791 alone, the bondpeople baptized in 1791—all but three of them children—represented two-thirds of the slaves estimated to have been born in that year.⁶⁸ In the subsequent censuses taken in 1804, 1810, 1820, and 1830, this proportion of enslaved children being baptized would never be higher. Two factors altered the contours

⁶⁷ New Orleans Slave Baptism Database, years 1791-1795. On the *Code Noir*, see Ingersoll, *Mammon and Manon*, 134-36. On these communities and networks, see my chs. 2 and 3.

⁶⁸ On natural increase estimates, see Lachance, “Politics of Fear,” 196-97; Curtin, *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade*, 82; Ingersoll, *Mammon and Manon*, 184-86.

of slave baptism in New Orleans after 1795. The influx of African-born slaves between 1795 and 1810—the core subject in Chapter Three—drastically reduced the proportion of enslaved children in a given year, while the influx of Anglo-Americans who brought with them slaves familiar with Protestantism accelerated the decline of the Catholic Church’s influence, particularly in the 1810s and 1820s. Before that decline, however, accepting, if not practicing, Catholicism—at least in the white-dominated, public sphere—was a central strategy for enslaved blacks.⁶⁹

Table 2.1 Slave Baptisms in St. Louis Cathedral, New Orleans, 1791-1795⁷⁰

<i>Year</i>	<i>Baptisms</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sex Ratio</i>	<i>Africans</i>
1791	213	91	122	75	1
1792	247	133	114	117	1
1793	224	113	113	100	8
1794	240	124	117	105	10
1795	234	113	120	94	16

⁶⁹ Slaves and Free People of Color Baptisms, St. Louis Cathedral, New Orleans, Book 4, Part 3, 1790 to 1792; Slaves and Free People of Color Baptisms, St. Louis Cathedral, New Orleans, Book 5, Part 1, 1792 to 1794; Slaves and Free People of Color Baptisms, St. Louis Cathedral, New Orleans, Book 5, Part 2, Archdiocesan Archives, Archdiocese of New Orleans, New Orleans, Louisiana. Every entry for these years is part of my New Orleans Slave Baptism Database, which contains 7,947 slave baptisms from 1791 to 1831. Every slave baptism at St. Louis Cathedral between 1791 and 1809 is included; ten-percent sampling is used thereafter. For census figures, see Census of 1791, NOPL.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

In the frontier districts, the total number of slave baptisms was much lower than in New Orleans, but the proportion of the enslaved population being baptized in each district was similar to that in New Orleans. At St. Francis Church in Natchitoches, the numbers of baptized slaves increased every year during the five-year period. From sixteen slave baptisms in 1791, priests at the church steadily increased the number to forty-three and fifty-four in 1792 and 1793, respectively. By 1795, the spike continued, with eighty-two slaves baptized that year.⁷¹ At St. Martin de Tours Parish church in Attakapas, extant records indicate a slow period of slave baptisms from 1791-1794, when a grand total of six slaves were baptized. Likely a result of sporadic priest assignments in the area, which was a casualty of severe administrative disruption within the Diocese of Havana at this time, these low figures, were bookended by consistently high rates of baptism, so they do not reflect a lack of interest in the Catholic Church by either blacks or whites. In 1795, with the arrival of a new parish priest, the number of slave baptisms increased to eighty-seven, and were accompanied by fifteen free people of color receiving the sacrament.⁷²

Though the number and rate of baptisms among baptized slaves remained constant in St. Louis Parish, one trend that had started to develop during this period was a higher proportion of native Africans being baptized (see Table 2.1).

⁷¹ Numbers of slave baptisms at St. Francis Church cannot be determined from July 13, 1793, through the end of 1794, as that portion of the register has been permanently damaged by water and deterioration. Given the number of baptisms up to July 13 in 1793, and the number in 1795, it is likely that 1794 was part of this upward trend.

⁷² *Baptemes de Couleur 1765 a 1802 et Sepultures de Couleur 1765 a 1818*, Archives, St. Martin de Tours Catholic Church, St. Martinville, La.

Though miniscule in comparison to the numbers of Africans who would enter the colony in the ensuing eleven years, the increasing trickle of African slaves to Louisiana by 1794 and 1795 indicates a reversal in the long-stagnant African trade to the colony. Between 1755 and 1786, the slave trade from both Africa and the Caribbean had dried up, a result of lackluster demand in the colony, turbulent supply in the Atlantic World, and overwhelming demand in Saint-Domingue. Moreover, the late 1780s and early 1790s had witnessed a host of natural disasters—from hurricanes to an onslaught of caterpillars—that decimated the colony’s chief cash crop, indigo. According to the governor, “five hurricanes, many floods and two great fires” had beset New Orleans alone between 1779 and 1794.⁷³ Likewise, another important cash crop, tobacco, had never reached its perceived potential, and became less popular among planters once the Spanish government ended the practice of guaranteed purchases in 1792. With these debilitating turns of events the African slave trade to the colony should have been nonexistent.⁷⁴

But the unexpected demise of Saint-Domingue sugar production altered such conventional wisdom. Though characterized by Paul Lachance as a period in which demand was “unusually low,” the increase in Africans—whether judged through baptismal registers or civil sources—indicates that the colonial regulations that had slowly come to encourage the importation of Africans were

⁷³ Carondelet to the Cabildo, ADC, Book 3, Vol. 3, December 19, 1794, pp. 180, CA-NOPL.

⁷⁴ Lachance, “Politics of Fear,” 170.

having the desired effect.⁷⁵ In cultural terms, the Africans who would enter the colony starting in 1795, and continue essentially uninterrupted through 1808, would themselves alter the cultural milieu, ethnoracial identity, and manner of manipulating the political order of Louisiana's enslaved people.⁷⁶

In fact, the influx of native Africans was so stark a contrast to the recent past that as early as 1795 their presence altered the ways in which people of color identified themselves or were identified by others. Of the fifty slaves baptized at St. Louis Parish church Cathedral between 1791 and 1795 whose record entry contains some information on place of origin, thirty-two are for slaves whose parents' origins (mostly mothers' origins) are identified. Nearly half of these are identified as *criollas*, the first time during this period that priests took the time to note what had been practically universal for three decades. Clearly, the civil authorities' wrangling over "safe" origins of slaves had entered the minds of ecclesiastical officials who recorded these entries, and had altered the ways in which slaves in the colony asserted their identity. The remaining half of the mothers identified were from at least five different west and west-central African cultures, with most of them being identified either as "Congo" or from the generic origin of Guinea. The possibility that some of these slaves, if from Kongo, were

⁷⁵ This evidence alters the argument by Lachance and others that the re-Africanization of Louisiana started after 1796, when laws allowed for the trade.

⁷⁶ It is plausible, if not probable, that slave traders disguised Caribbean slaves as Africans in order to circumvent the laws governing the slave trade to Louisiana. Nonetheless, as I discuss in Chapter Three, most of the purported African-born slaves who entered Louisiana during this period were trans-shipped through Charleston, South Carolina; ship manifests there indicate clearly that Charleston-based slave traders traded with a relatively small number of west-central African groups along the Luango Coast. Thus, most of these slaves were indeed African-born.

familiar with Catholicism, underscores the Atlantic quality of slave culture and syncretic religion in Louisiana.⁷⁷

The remainder of the fifty slaves whose records include origin information also came from a variety of cultures, though most were part of the large Mande linguistic group so central to Louisiana slave culture. Nonetheless, even this fact is obscured by a significant change in the composition of slaves to Louisiana following the 1780s and 1790s. From this period forward, Angolan slaves, most of whom were identified, or identified themselves, as ‘Congo’, would dominate the ranks of Louisiana’s forced African migrants. In 1795, before this development was in high gear, already nine of the eighteen slaves who were baptized at St. Louis church, and who were native Africans, were Congolese.⁷⁸

The evidence from Natchitoches in 1795 points to a similar phenomenon. Though many cultures were represented, slaves identified as ‘Congos’ dominated. In a group of twenty, seven Congolese were joined by two Macao slaves, two Chamba slaves, and two natives of Jamaica. In addition, just as group baptisms had become common in New Orleans, especially in the spring season, the majority of these Africans and West Indians were baptized on April 4. And, as in New Orleans, the sudden influx of Africans heightened the awareness of both priests and creole slaves toward ethnicity. The incidence of priests recording

⁷⁷ For example, see the baptism of Juana, April 2, 1795, who is identified as ‘de Guinea, Mina.’ See John K. Thornton’s articles, ‘I Am the Subject of the King of Congo’: African Political Ideology and the Haitian Revolution,” *Journal of World History* 4 (1993): 181-214, and ‘The Development of an African Catholic Church in the Kingdom of Kongo, 1491-1750,” *Journal of African History* 25 (1984), 147-67.

⁷⁸ See Chs. 2 and 3 for a thorough examination of this process.

‘native of this parish’—which had been nonexistent before—was now necessary to note.⁷⁹

In Attakapas, the new priest at St. Martin de Tours, Father Bernardo Barriere, was as busy as his colleagues in Natchitoches and New Orleans. Though no Africans were baptized in 1795 at his church, Barriere administered the sacrament to 102 people of color, eighty-seven of whom were enslaved. This was an astounding figure for the small church and district, given that in the previous four years only six people of African descent had been baptized. Like Father Quintanilla in Natchitoches, Barriere attempted to make up for the previous four years by traveling extensively through his district. On June 15, he set out along the Bayou Teche, located immediately behind his church and as important to Attakapas as was the Mississippi River to New Orleans and Red River to Natchitoches. Barriere did not return until October 4, after having administered the sacrament of baptism to dozens of people of color living in at least twelve different locations. Barriere followed up this mission with a shorter one in November, which took him northward along Bayou Vermilion.⁸⁰ Clearly, both the government and the Church saw baptism as a means of social control, which, ironically, suited the aims of slaves looking for any avenue to exploit the soft underbelly of the white world. In most cases, such avenues consisted of everyday, seemingly harmless, resistance. In others, that resistance took collective forms.

⁷⁹ Natchitoches Slave Database, 1795.

⁸⁰ Baptemes de Couleur 1765 a 1802 et Sepultures de Couleur 1765 a 1818, Archives, St. Martin de Tours Catholic Church, St. Martinville, La.

PUTTING “DEPRAVED SUBVERSIONS INTO EXECUTION”

As part of the Spanish efforts to increase military presence throughout the colony, one such patrol in the Pointe Coupée district unearthed the root of rebellion, not among white invaders, but among the slaves whom authorities had so earnestly attempted to protect from the “contagion” of Saint Domingue. On April 9, 1795, the captain of the patrol reported to the commandant at Pointe Coupée, Guillermo Duparc, that his men had overheard slaves in a cabin discussing plans for an imminent slave uprising. Claiming that the slaves were planning another meeting “to decide upon the day that they would revolt with the idea of conspiring against the masters,” the commandant quickly ordered a thorough investigation. Though his soldiers could not find physical evidence of the original meeting, assembling bits of information from various planters caused officials to conclude that some sort of plot was afoot. The multiple sources that corroborated the existence of a conspiracy—short of all the white officials completely manufacturing such evidence—indicate that the plot was real.⁸¹

In only two days, Duparc’s investigation had turned up testimony from planters, slaves, and neighboring Tunica Indians. Collectively, the informants’ knowledge pointed to an insurrection that would occur the night of April 12. Beginning at the plantation of Julien Poydras, one of the largest slaveowners in the district, slaves would set fire to the plantation house in an attempt to draw neighboring whites to the estate. Once neighboring whites arrived, the

⁸¹ Carondelet to Las Casas (governor of Cuba), June 16-18, 1795, Dispatches of the Spanish Governors of Louisiana, typescript in the Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University.

conspirators, while hiding in the woods, would ambush them, massacring everyone except the women, whom whites claimed they planned to keep as concubines. With the betrayal of three people—one slave and two Tunica women—who ostensibly agreed to join the conspirators, planters in the district snuffed out the plot just before it was to begin.⁸²

For white officials and citizens throughout the colony, the 1795 Pointe Coupée conspiracy evidenced the spread of the revolutionary contagion that they had attempted to keep at bay since the beginning of the Haitian Revolution. For the slaves who organized the plot, the Haitian Revolution appears to have been an influence, but not in the direct, ideological sense that whites interpreted it to be: rather, slaves in Pointe Coupée were aware of the political havoc that the Saint-Domingue rebellion was causing among whites in the colony, and planned to exploit whites' well-primed fears about slave rebellion. Though the ideology of the revolutionary age may indeed have played a part in the conspiracy, nineteenth-century historians accepted at face value the hysterical claims of the investigators, and thus perpetuated the mischaracterization of the plot as Saint-Domingue in Louisiana.⁸³ In hindsight, the investigating authorities understood

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ For earlier studies that mischaracterize the rebellion, see Francois Xavier Martin, *The History of Louisiana, from the Earliest Period*, rev. ed. (New Orleans, 1882), p. 266; Charles Gayarré, *History of Louisiana, the Spanish Dominion* (New York, 1854), pp. 354-6; Paul Alliot, "Historical and Political Reflections on Louisiana," reprinted in James Alexander Robertson, ed., *Louisiana Under the Rule of Spain, France, and the United States, 1785-1807*, 2 vol. (Cleveland, 1911), 116-21.

Contemporary scholars have also examined the 1795 Pointe Coupée Rebellion. See especially the analysis of Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, ch. 11. Also see Thomas McGowan, "Creation of a Slave Society," ch. 8; Jack D. L. Holmes, "The Abortive Slave Revolt at Pointe Coupée, Louisiana, 1795," *Louisiana History* 11 (1970). The major difference between the depictions by Hall and McGowan versus my own is that for them the rebellion is a

that simple demographics, even in the majority-slave district of Pointe Coupée, would not sustain a Saint-Domingue-style rebellion. Nonetheless, that the Pointe Coupée conspiracy at least appeared to transcend races and nationalities merely exacerbated the heightened fears of white officials and planters.

Given this context, whites became fixated on what they saw as the similarities between Pointe Coupée and Saint-Domingue, and the influence of the latter on the slave conspirators. In his report on the conspiracy, colonial official Antonio Serrano concluded, “It is evident that these slaves proposed to put their depraved subversions into execution under the barbarous tyranny of those of Guarico.” In addition, wrote Serrano, “there were various whites as well as blacks who instigated and animated the scheme to attract supporters to this frightful enterprise which if successful would have spread throughout the Province.”⁸⁴ The actions of slaves, in concert with at least some whites, meant that the fledgling order of the early 1790s was arrested by social upheaval.

Led by slaves at the plantation of Julien Poydras, the conspiracy at Pointe Coupée involved a network of slaves in the area. According to the testimony of conspirators and informants that can be found in extant civil records and in the correspondence of Governor Carondelet, the Poydras slaves enjoyed significant physical mobility because of the absenteeism of their owner. In fact, while his

culmination of trends in slave control, importation, and the spread of revolutionary ideology through the eighteenth century, while I situate this plot as an early event in Louisiana’s main period of economic expansion. Both Hall and McGowan portray the 1795 plot as a near-replication of the Saint-Domingue rebellion, downplaying the differences in demographics that make such a comparison untenable.

⁸⁴ “Trial,” May 22, 1795, OAPCP.

bondpeople were organizing the conspiracy, Poydras was essentially living in Philadelphia, trusting his *commandeur*, or slave overseer, to tend to the plantation's indigo crop. Given free rein of the plantation, tools, and weapons, the slaves at the Poydras estate were the logical leaders of the plot, as Spanish regulations issued in the late 1780s and early 1790s centered slave control upon masters. With no master present to regulate the Poydras slaves' visitation to other plantations, nor gatherings of nearby slaves at the Poydras estate, the plantation became the nexus of the plot. Such absenteeism is as credible an explanation for the plot as any "contagious" and "dangerous" ideology of the era.⁸⁵

Not surprisingly then, of the fifty-seven slaves implicated in the plot, fifteen were Poydras slaves, and all the plot's leaders benefited from white male absenteeism on their respective estates. The alleged main conspirator was Antoine Sarrasin, a mulatto slave owned by Julien Poydras. Considered the internal police patrol of slave communities, the mulatto slaves such as Sarrasin who participated in the plot unnerved the excitable whites. At least four other slaves joined Sarrasin as leaders of the plot. Grand Joseph, a slave of Colin Lacour, lived on a plantation that had been the subject of his fellow slave's petitions in 1792. The actions and eventual disappointment of André, who had petitioned the governor to no avail in that year, may have caused the Lacour slaves to work "outside the system" in 1795. Three slave *commandeurs*, Stanislas Anis, Antoine, and Jean Baptiste, exploited their positions of authority to help organize the rebellion. In the cases of

⁸⁵ Testimony of Françoise and Louis, slaves of Goudeau, and of L'Eveille, slave of Poydras, in "Trial," May 6, 1795, OAPCP.

Anis and Antoine, each was owned by a widow, and was given great authority over plantation operations in the absence of a white man on the estate. Similarly, Jean Baptiste, with his male owner absent, had so much authority that he ordered the slave workforce to plant corn instead of indigo, evidently planning to provide subsistence for the slave rebels once the conspiracy was successful.⁸⁶

In addition to Poydras's absenteeism, the timing of the conspiracy, the night of April 12, suggests a link with the Catholic Church calendar. At a time of year when Mass obligations went from every Sunday to every few days, slaves, some of whom were genuinely participating in the rituals of Lent, and others who were simply using the church as a tool for their subterfuge, had the ability to communicate with each other on a regular basis. With the typical high Holy Day attendance at Easter Mass on April 5, slaves had an opportunity to relay their plans to each other, as well as to seek religious motivation from Scripture readings: perhaps not coincidentally, the Bible readings on Easter Sunday were the most evangelical in the Catholic Church's liturgical calendar. The imagery of dying and being raised from the dead—while not in the full-fledged evangelism of subsequent Afro-Protestantism—could easily be a source of inspiration or justification by the Pointe Coupée conspirators. That Christ's crucifixion came at the hands of an illegal, immoral system may have reinforced any potential connections slaves made with the Catholic teachings of Easter Week, and may

⁸⁶ Ibid.

have made Catholicism theologically and practically important to the plot's formation.⁸⁷

As an edifice within which slaves found both theologically genuine and strategically useful ways to contest masters' authority, the Catholic Church in the district, St. Francis, was central to the plot's organization. First, it was that church's doors upon which one of the alleged white conspirators, a French schoolteacher named Bouyavel, claimed to have seen a document announcing the abolition of slavery in Louisiana. Spreading the "news" to slaves, Bouyavel likely found some interested bondpeople, as slaves throughout the colony were usually aware of the events uprooting the New World and its mother countries. In particular, the ongoing war between Spain and France seems to have been followed closely by slaves, as the French had declared an end to slavery throughout their empire. Locally, Bouyavel was a major conduit of this news and ideology to slaves, as he often read passages from revolutionary tracts such as *Théorie de l'impôt*, in which the Declaration of the Rights of Man was included.⁸⁸ With a stream, albeit small, of refugees from Saint-Domingue who were accompanied by their slaves, obtaining news about the island's rebellion possible.

⁸⁷ None of the conspirators mention Catholic Church teachings in their testimony, but the timing of the plot suggests a strong, if ultimately undocumentable, correlation with the Church calendar. Some excellent, recent studies on revolts in South Carolina and Virginia explore similar relationships that have more direct evidence. See John K. Thornton, "African Dimensions of the Stono Rebellion," *American Historical Review* 96 (1991): 1101-13; James Sidbury, "Reading, Revelation, and Rebellion: The Textual Communities of Gabriel, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner," in Kenneth Greenberg, ed., *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Mark M. Smith, "Remembering Mary, Shaping Revolt: Reconsidering the Stono Rebellion," *Journal of Southern History* 67 (2001): 513-34.

⁸⁸ Testimony of Rockenbourg, Bouyavel, and Philie, slave of Goudeau, May 6, 1795, in "Trial," OAPCP.

The communication network among slaves in the Atlantic World could have provided—though there is no absolute evidence of this in Pointe Coupée—the conspirators with news from Saint-Domingue.⁸⁹

Second, an event on Easter Saturday signifies both the importance of the Church and the ease with which the slave leaders were able to communicate resistance strategies. On April 4, after returning from a nearby estate spreading the message of Bouyavel, Antoine Sarrasin reported to his co-conspirators that he witnessed several slaves being flogged, and that the whites flogging them announced that any slaves found on an estate which was not their own would be flogged as well. For Sarrasin, this was evidence that Bouyavel was right: whites were ignoring the decree of emancipation from the Spanish government. In response, he worked quickly to whip up a strategy for Easter Sunday, undoubtedly one day that slaves could make the best spectacle for all the whites in the district.⁹⁰

Sarrasin's quickly organized plan was for slaves in the district to assemble in front of the church in large groups. Thinking that occupying the space in front of the church would cause whites to react as they did the previous night, Sarrasin planned for the armed slaves to massacre the whites as they attempted to flog them. Though the latter did not occur—the leaders of the plot were awaiting the arrival of more members integral to planning the larger conspiracy—Sarrasin and

⁸⁹ Julius Sherrard Scott III, "The Common Wind": Currents of Afro -American Communication in the Era of the Haitian Revolution," Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1986; Sylvia R. Frey, *Water from the Rock*, 229-32.

⁹⁰ Testimony of Jean Baptiste, slave of Poydras, May 10, 1795, in "Trial," OAPCP.

his followers evidently did show up to the church. The specter of so many slaves standing defiantly in what whites saw as their space, and the whites doing nothing about that, illustrates either an impressive degree of power held by the Pointe Coupée slaves, or an unimpressive display that was exaggerated by the slave witnesses. With no white citizen commenting on the display, the main witness to the event, Mr. Goudeau's slave Petit Pierre, exemplified the importance of exaggeration and perpetuating whites' fears to the conspiracy.⁹¹

In addition to the significance of this precursor event being overblown by Petit Pierre, many slaves in the district refused to join the plot. For instance, the entire quarter at the Goudeau estate rejected out of hand the thought of joining the plot, even when one of the conspirators accused the men of being "women" for their decision.⁹² Likewise, many slaves were skeptical of Bouyavel and his ilk, such as one other Jacobin activist in the area, a German tailor named George Rockenbourg. Not coincidentally, Rockenbourg claimed to be from Philadelphia, which Governor Carondelet had identified as a main source of Jacobin activists now agitating in his colony. After hearing from an obviously drunken Bouyavel that all the slaves of the colony would soon be emancipated, one slave passed along the message "without positively believing it." Often looked over by historians of the plot, this remark seems to indicate that the direct connection historians portray between slaves and ideology may not have existed.⁹³

⁹¹ Testimony of Petit Pierre, slave of Goudeau, May 9, 1795, in "Trial," OAPCP.

⁹² Testimony of Lucas, Françoise Mulâtre, and Louis, slaves of Goudeau, May 8, 1795, *ibid.*

⁹³ Testimony of Louis, slave of Goudeau, May 9, 1795, *ibid.*; McGowan claims that slaves "accepted" Bouyavel's "proclamation as Gospel." See McGowan, "Creation of a Slave Society,"

Rather, planter absenteeism and willingness to give their slaves significant latitude helped shape a distinctive mode of resistance by slaves in Pointe Coupée. For the leaders of the plot, the Jacobinism spouted by Bouyavel and Rockenbourg may have been additional justification, but local, historical memory—not the least of which was the failed petitioning of some key Pointe Coupée slaves—had created the context within which Sarrasin and others incorporated such ideology.

In addition, the nerve center of the conspiracy—the Julien Poydras estate—signifies the centrality of local contexts to the plot. Julien Poydras was one of the few planters in the colony during the 1780s and 1790s whose success in indigo allowed him to purchase new slaves. Estate inventories demonstrate that approximately two-thirds of Poydras's slaves in 1795 were African-born. Typical of such estates, only four of Poydras's seventy-two slaves in the early 1790s were women of childbearing age. That, coupled with the preponderance of older and presumably African women, led the numerically dominant men on the estate to leave their home plantation in search of wives elsewhere.⁹⁴ This in turn led to the development of two kinship networks in the area: first, geographically-widespread families; and second, a reinforcement of a distinct West African practice of fictive kinship, both among slaves in the district, and within the slave quarters at the Poydras plantation itself. For these reasons, the influence of the Poydras men was probably impressive in the district.

381. This claim is exaggerated, given the testimony of other slaves regarding their skepticism about the often drunk Jacobin activist.

⁹⁴ Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 362-65.

Even more deeply, though, this practice of fictive kinship on the Poydras estate in particular created a tighter bond with Africa even for creole slaves. For example, Poydras's slave Joseph became known as Joseph Mina, likely a result of fictive kin connections with older Mina men on the estate (and perhaps in the district). Through this public, important act of appropriating a certain identity, Joseph Mina accentuated his connections with the West African culture most known for producing leaders among slaves in the region. In addition, with their leadership in the 1791 conspiracy in Pointe Coupée, Minas had a deserved reputation for being organizers of plots in the region.⁹⁵

Joseph Mina perpetuated such perceptions of Minas, as he was identified as a leader of a second conspiracy, set to begin on April 21. Three slaves of a Pointe Coupée planter, Mr. Goudeau, reported that Joseph Mina had urged them to join this reorganized plot, the aims of which shifted from the local institution of the plantation to civil buildings. Antoine, Lucas, and Héctor claimed that Mina spoke of freeing the slaves who had been jailed, beating back the militia, and murdering Commandant Duparc. By quickly reporting this overture by Mina to their master, the three bondsmen likely staved off yet another plot.⁹⁶

For Spanish officials, there was little doubt that Jacobinism was to blame for the radical action taken by slaves. In the first Cabildo meeting following the conspiracy, Attorney General Fortier declared that the group was "without doubt encouraging the perverse ideas shown by the slaves here." The Spanish could not

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 364-65.

⁹⁶ See Carondelet to Las Casas, June 18, 1795, and Duparc to Carondelet, April 22, 1795, both of which are in leg. 31, AGI-PC, HNOG.

accept the possibility that slaves in the colony could organize such a rebellion without the specter and motivation of Saint-Domingue and the French Revolution. As a result, they focused on the Jacobins as the reason for the plot's near-success, which merely accentuated the opportunities slaves had to exploit divisions within the white world. For the first time in the Spanish period, the civil authorities explicitly voiced understanding that building a stable order would require erring on the side of the planters, which in the issue of controlling slaves meant stricter control of behavior and less concern over "humane" treatment.⁹⁷

The Cabildo in New Orleans launched its own investigation into what members perceived as an overwhelming plot against the government. Attorney General Miguel Fortier, who requested the "extraordinary session" that ensued, was filled with hysteria over reports from Pointe Coupée. Fortier reported to the Cabildo, "there is strong suspicion of revolt among the slaves, since there are many apparent suspicious indications of unrest among them." But Fortier was not referring only to the main conspiracy at Pointe Coupée; in fact, the language of his letter indicates that he and other authorities had been touched more by the potential spread of rebellion across the colony, something that from their perspective was evidenced by the minor plots that had been unearthed in Opelousas in February. Nevertheless, Fortier did seem to understand that the conspiracy's nerve-center was located in Pointe Coupée: "these indications [of revolt] have been increased at the same time as the news of the rebel junta had

⁹⁷ Records and Deliberations of the Cabildo [hereafter RDC], April 25, 1795, vol. 4, book 3, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library [hereafter, CA-NOPL].

been scattered and plotted for the same purpose amongst the slaves in the district of Punta Cortada.” To nip the plot in the bud, Fortier suggested that four citizens of New Orleans and four from Pointe Coupée lead an investigation with Commandant Duparc. The attorney general’s additional request, which also was granted by the Cabildo, that eight landowners “obtain secret information,” indicates the degree to which these officials saw the extent of the conspiracy.⁹⁸

That perceived depth and breadth of the rebellion was clearly tied to Saint-Domingue. The Cabildo and governor were motivated by Fortier’s insistence on avoiding “a certain catastrophe, similar to the mournful case in the French Cape [Cap Francais], which pernicious example no doubt incites the perverse ideas manifested by the slaves here.” During the late spring and summer of 1795, Spanish colonial officials continued their investigation of Pointe Coupée. As white authorities unfolded the many layers of the rebellion, their initial concern turned to outright surprise. Even though the discourse of Cabildo meetings and government officials prior to the plot indicates a thought that something like this was going to occur, the reality—once it did occur—was unsettling. The initial response by Carondelet was to maintain active military patrols in all posts of the colony. Frequent dispatches not only to the districts of Lower Louisiana but also to the governor at Natchez indicate the governor’s appreciation of the extent and gravity of the threat. Once equivocating on the issue of death sentences for the captured conspirators, Carondelet quickly understood the necessity of being stern. “My denial to enforce capital punishment,” Carondelet wrote to Governor Las

⁹⁸ ADC, April 25, 1795, book 4, vol. II, CA-NOPL.

Casas of Cuba, ‘will be enough to cause general commotion which would incite, or probably cause, the insurrection so desired by the seditious parties.’⁹⁹

To quell any subsequent secondary plots such as the one planned by Joseph Mina, Carondelet sent emergency dispatches to the commandant of each district. Violating one of the tenets of the accommodationist perspective toward slaves by both masters and the colonial government, Carondelet ordered all of the commandants to raid all slave quarters in their district at an appointed morning hour on April 30. Because the slaves in Pointe Coupée had overstepped their bounds in the master-slave relationship, the governor was not hesitant to intrude upon the relatively independent space of the slave quarter. The imagery of white patrols blasting into cabins in April 1795 in every district of the colony foreshadowed a slowly constricting noose around such symbolic and real space of independence for enslaved people of African descent.¹⁰⁰

With the secondary plot foiled, authorities focused on rooting out the schemers in Pointe Coupée. Like the investigation, reprisals were swift and thorough. Sixty-two people—fifty-seven slaves, two free men of color, and three whites—were implicated in the two plots. Twenty-three slaves were hanged and their bodies dismembered. In addition to the usual gruesome practice of placing the heads of the executed slaves on poles, an execution boat drifted downriver from Pointe Coupée to New Orleans to perform each execution in a different town, maximizing the effect of discouraging future plots. Slaves who were not

⁹⁹ Carondelet to Las Casas, May 3, 1795, *Dispatches of the Spanish Governors*, vol. 9.

¹⁰⁰ Carondelet to commandants at Pointe Coupée, Natchitoches, Attakapas, and Opelousas, April 18, 1795, leg. 22, AGI-PC.

sentenced to death were flogged, and thirty-one of them sent to prisons throughout New Spain. The two free men of color, one a translator suspected of aiding Joseph Mina, and the other an immigrant from Saint-Domingue, were banished from Louisiana. Three whites—including Bouyavel and Rockenbourg—were sentenced to six years' presidio duty in Cuba.¹⁰¹ In the mindset of the Spanish, white Jacobinism was harmful, but even an inkling of black Jacobinism had to be stamped out completely.

Though it is impossible to know the “real” intentions of Sarrasin and the other conspirators, what slaves in the area had reinforced was that the misperceptions of whites could be a powerful tool when employed against the slave regime. The percolating geopolitical tensions in and near Louisiana would give them just the opportunity to use such knowledge in 1811.

“WHEN WE WILL BE REPUBLICANS/WE WILL HANG ALL THE RASCALS”

In the midst of investigating the plot, Governor Carondelet interpreted the conspiracy not as a challenge to slavery, but as a challenge to the authority possessed by the Spanish and himself. Driving him to such conclusions was a song that an unnamed source had sent him, and which purportedly was popular among white Jacobins and enslaved conspirators: “When we will be Republicans/We will hang all the rascals/Carondelet will be the first/To be guillotined./The auditor will get his turn/We will hang him on the ramparts/The

¹⁰¹ Juan José Andreu Ocariz, *Movimientos rebeldes de los esclavos negros durante el dominio español en Luisiana* (Zaragoza, 1977), 171-72; Holmes, “Abortive Slave Revolt,” 352 -53. On the free men of color, see Carondelet to Las Casas, June 18, 1795, AGI-PC, HNOC microfilm.

auditor will be of it/The public will laugh at it./The fat Ariel [the auditor], master thief/Will closely follow his good patron/He will hang in the wind/He will swing.” That the song was sung to the tune of *Carmagnole*, an important song of the French Revolution, did not allay the governor’s fears about the revolutionary ideas of some whites in the colony.¹⁰²

Carondelet’s actions in the subsequent weeks suggest that such an interpretation is correct, as he worked swiftly to solidify his support among planters. Spurred by the Cabildo’s investigation, Carondelet issued a new list of regulations for slaves and slaveowners. For the first time in Carondelet’s tenure as governor, the pendulum of social control had swung in favor of slaveowners. Just as the principles of the Age of Revolution could be used by slaves and free blacks to ameliorate their circumstances, white property owners could find ideological ammunition in the rhetoric of individual property ownership. Using this line of reasoning, Louisiana planters pressed upon Carondelet the necessity of allowing individual owners greater leeway in punishing their slaves, especially without fear of their bondpeople petitioning the Spanish for redress.¹⁰³

Having touched the nerve of white fear about a Saint-Domingue-style rebellion in Louisiana, Africans and African Americans sustained their efforts in

¹⁰² ADC, May 2, 1795, book 4, vol. I, CA-NOPL.

¹⁰³ For Carondelet’s regulations of June 1, 1795, see James Padgett, comp., “A Decree for Louisiana Issued by Baron de Carondelet, June 1, 1795,” *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 20 (July 1937): 590-605. On the notion of property ownership, see the pithy analysis in William W. Freehling, *The Reintegration of American History: Slavery and the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), ch.2. This chapter, “The Founding Fathers, Conditional Antislavery, and the Nonradicalism of the American Revolution,” is a “much -altered” version of Freehling, “The Founding Fathers and Slavery,” *American Historical Review* 77 (1972): 81-93.

the collective contest between themselves and slavery, and in the individual, day-to-day contests between slave and master. Over the next several years, and into the early nineteenth century, the diplomatic story of Louisiana shifting from Spain to France to the United States was merely a macro-level, political backdrop to fundamental changes occurring in the culture, daily lives, and resistance strategies of enslaved blacks in the colony. Most notably, the advent of two technological innovations—one, a reliable sugar refining process, and the other, the cotton gin—reinvigorated demand for unfree laborers. This change, which was driven by purely economic motives of white planters, would unleash fundamental social and cultural upheaval for the colony's slaves.

The irony, however, is that in spite of the impressive organizing of the plot, and in spite of elements of the plot that smacked of Saint-Domingue, the 1795 plot itself was not evidence of Saint-Domingue in Louisiana: the events that flow from it, namely the massive influx of slaves, both African and creole African Americans, from 1795 to 1811, would make the next major slave conspiracy, in 1811, more plausible as a Saint-Domingue style rebellion. Thus, the story about the 1795 rebellion and the years immediately subsequent to it is not that the spirit of Haiti had invaded Louisiana, but that leaders of the revolt exploited white fears about a massive slave uprising. Even in defeat and in execution, leaders of the 1795 rebellion took advantage of the social and physical mobility granted to them, which was a consequence not of Saint-Domingue, but of decades of negotiating, strategizing, and manipulating the local slave regime.

Chapter Three: “Congolization: Constructing Community Through Afro-Catholicism”

Juana prayed. An enslaved woman owned by Madame Foucher in New Orleans, Juana must have swelled with pride at the baptismal font of St. Louis Cathedral on April 17, 1798. In spite of her legal status, Juana, as a godmother, played a significant social role by helping to integrate three newly arrived slaves to Louisiana into the larger slave community. One of those receiving the sacrament, a Mandinga woman, took Juana’s name, which accentuated the bond s created among the elder Juana and her three godchildren. In addition to Juana’s namesake, who was owned by Mr. Girodeau, another of Girodeau’s slaves, Carlota, was sponsored by Juana. Carlota was a native of Charleston, which was becoming an increasingly important conduit for both creolized slaves from mainland North America and for trans-shipped native Africans. Slave traders often shipped one particular cultural group, the Minas, to Charleston en route to New Orleans, and the third of Juana’s godchildren was a Mina slave, named Martial and owned by Louis Foucher, became part of the instant fictive family related through a shared godmother.¹

The experiences of Juana, Carlota, and Martial were not unique in Louisiana, for the late 1790s or even for the afternoon on which they were baptized. Baptisms of adults typically occurred during the Easter season, and

¹ April 17, 1798, St. Louis Cathedral, Baptisms of Slaves and Free People of Color, Book 9, 1797-99, Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, New Orleans, La [hereafter ADNO].

often involved as many as 100 slaves being baptized on a single afternoon. Along with Juana's three godchildren, eleven other adult Africans also received the sacrament the same day. All fourteen slaves who were baptized were Africans. As a group, they reflected the growing presence of African slaves in Louisiana during this period. Moreover, their participation in the Catholic Church illustrates the central role the Church played in minimizing African ethnic differences, and in providing the space in which the slave community would be more unified than its ethnically pluralized groups indicate.²

Thus this single day in 1798 at St. Louis Cathedral encapsulated a much larger trend that was fundamentally altering the ethnic composition and social identities of Louisiana's enslaved people: the massive, forced migration of nearly 10,000 African slaves to the colony between 1796 and 1810. Though termed 're-Africanization' by two scholars of the period, this process is more aptly described as 'Congolization,' given the preponderance of Congolese peoples within this most recent influx of Africans. Not since 1743 had a major wave of Africans arrived in the colony, and even that migration, for all its significance in the historiography, was dwarfed by the size of this later one.³

² Ibid.; estimate of these cultures being so numerous is from my Slave Baptism Database, which contains every slave baptism at St. Louis Cathedral from 1791 to 1810, and which has a total of 7,700 entries. I used a one-tenth sampling method for the years 1811-1831. Figures also from Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Databases for the Study of Afro-Louisiana History and Genealogy, 1699-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2000).

³ Most notable in using the phrase 're-Africanization' are Ira Berlin and Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, though practically every study of Louisiana since the early 1990s has adopted this language. See Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 340-50; Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), ch. 9.

From 1743 to 1790, the dearth of Africans in Louisiana's enslaved population had created a culture that was largely creolized. Even though specific African cultures had been important during key episodes of this period, in particular during the Pointe Coupée slave conspiracy in 1795, slaves used a template of strategies to negotiate the "everydayness" of being enslaved.⁴ Consequently, the influx of Africans for well over a decade—at rates that dwarfed the colony's original period of Africanization in the 1720s and 1730s—altered not only this creolized norms for dealing with the regime of slavery but also the very contours of slave culture in the colony. Even more important than the sheer numbers was the variety of African cultures whose presence would alter the Senegambian-dominated traditions and public identities of the colony's enslaved population.

The timing of this process coming after creolization created an unusual situation in Louisiana compared to most other Atlantic World slave societies.⁵ Africanization altered the colony's evolution toward a slave society that resembled the naturally increasing, creolized slave populations of the Chesapeake and Lowcountry. Moreover, the economic impetus for having so many Africans arrive accelerated the plantation revolution, particularly in the colony's hinterlands. Culturally, Louisiana, with its growing proportion of African-born slaves, did resemble Caribbean slave societies more than it did North American

⁴ As I discuss in Chapter Two the notion of the "everydayness" of race is particularly useful for studies of slave culture and resistance. See Thomas C. Holt, "Marking: Race, Race-Making, and the Writing of History," *American Historical Review* 100 (1995): 1-20.

⁵ See Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Boston: Beacon Books, 1992 [1976]).

societies, whose periods of creolization had occurred much earlier in the eighteenth century.⁶ Adding to the connections between Louisiana and the Caribbean influence were several thousand slaves from Saint-Domingue who arrived in Louisiana via Cuba in 1809. Nonetheless, in its part-Caribbean, part-North American characteristics, Louisiana slave society was *sui generis*, which explains its attractiveness to scholars both in its own right and in contrast to all other Atlantic World slave societies.

Reinforcing this Africanization, and complicating the cultural milieu within which slaves' negotiation of servitude operated, these arrivals also reinvigorated whites' concerns over the "contagion" of slave rebellion. Thus, given the unusual circumstances of Louisiana's Africanization, this chapter explores the contours of this process, and explores how slaves used a particular institution and space—the Catholic Church—to build community, to construct networks of kin, and to erect webs of personal relations that transcended the increasingly pluralized ethnicities of slaves. Subsequent chapters use this notion as a springboard for delving more deeply into changes in resistance strategies and culture.

If Africanization had been the only cultural force influencing enslaved African-Louisianans, their evolution toward a second period of creolization would have been relatively predictable. But in addition to innovations in sugar refining

⁶ In particular, the comparison of Louisiana to Cuba and Puerto Rico in this regard is compelling, as the latter two societies, like Louisiana, were striving to replace Haiti's sugar production, which meant that more slaves had to be imported. This process seems to refute Thomas Ingersoll's claim that Louisiana was more like U. S. slave societies, in particular Virginia and South Carolina, than Caribbean slave societies. See Ingersoll, *From Mammon to Manon*, ch. 5.

that caused planters in southern Louisiana to demand African laborers, the development of the cotton gin created a similar demand for laborers in the colony's northern region. Because so many of Louisiana's new cotton planters were Anglo-Americans, they brought with them enslaved African Americans from Upper Southern cultures that had been creolized for decades. Simultaneously, then, the twin economic evolutions in sugar and cotton cultivation imposed oppositional cultural forces upon the colony's existing slaves. Though African and American slaves appear in records from all districts of the colony during this period, clear geographical delineations existed: slaves of Anglo-American owners arrived primarily in the upland cotton districts, Natchitoches and the Florida parishes, while the newly-arrived Africans dominated the sugar region immediately north and west of New Orleans. Attakapas and Opelousas—given their location in between these two regions—served as a transition zone with a blend of cotton and sugar cultures that produced a meeting place for African and American slave cultures.

SUGAR, COTTON, AND THE SLAVE TRADE

Africanization in Louisiana began, ironically, with the Spanish response to the 1795 Pointe Coupée conspiracy. As Chapter Two illustrates, the first response by the Spanish was to maintain slave control. In addition to Governor Carondelet's sweeping edict in June 1795, the Spanish eventually turned to the second component of their strategy: regulating the slave trade. Once punishments had been meted out, the governor and the Cabildo began to consider changes to

the colonial policy that allowed Africans to be shipped into the colony. Although Africans had been considered the “safest” of slaves earlier in the decade, the fact that several of the Pointe Coupée conspirators were African-born caused the officials to reconsider this assumption. Thus, on February 19, 1796, the Cabildo petitioned the king to “prohibit the importation of Negroes or Mulattoes of any class whatever from the Guinea Coast or from the Americas, until such time as circumstances less critical and more peaceful will permit.” In the interim, the Cabildo asked Governor Carondelet to issue a decree to that effect, and he happily complied.⁷

But such a decree created a paradox for the Spanish slavery regime in Louisiana. On the issue of slave control, authorities had sided with the planters, while on the issue of the slave trade, they opposed the wishes of most planters. At the very time the Cabildo and the governor were wrangling over slave-trade policies, an agricultural experiment exacerbated the usual contentiousness between the Cabildo and planters: on the Mississippi River, just below New Orleans, planter Etienne de Boré was experimenting with the refining process, in which the cane was boiled until it reached the granulation stage. Having had little success in doing this previously, Louisiana planters had abandoned any hope of turning to sugar cane as a replacement for the problem-plagued tobacco and indigo crops. But with Boré’s success in producing granulated sugar, and with the absence of Saint-Domingue sugar during the 1790s, the planter’s successful

⁷ Las Actas y Deliberaciones del Cabildo [hereafter ADC], February 19, 1796, book 4, vol. I, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library, New Orleans, La. [hereafter CA-NOPL]. Translations from the Spanish by the author.

experiment caused a sea-change in Louisiana that first manifested itself economically, but would have tremendous social and cultural implications for both whites and blacks in the colony.⁸

The colony's most politically influential planters lived in the New Orleans region, near Etienne de Boré, and thus they first heard of his success. After investing approximately \$4,000 in a mill, necessary buildings, and salary for a former Saint-Domingue sugar maker, Boré and forty slaves created the first, large-scale manufacture of refined sugar in the colony. Learning that Boré's massive investment had paid off—Boré sold his refined product for \$12,000—planters quickly copied him. By 1800, the New Orleans district was filled with planters jumping at the opportunity to invest the requisite four to five thousand dollars, with knowledge that sugar production could be profitable.⁹ Average yearly exports from New Orleans quadrupled in value to \$5 million between the 1790s and 1803. In lower Louisiana, sugar was king.¹⁰

Obtaining slaves, however, proved difficult. First, according to a 1796 estimate, each field hand would add \$1,200 to a sugar planter's capital expenses. In addition, the 1796 prohibition of the slave trade had made it difficult to purchase new slaves. With an immense labor force required, especially during the harvest and milling season, planters became dismayed that Spanish authorities

⁸ John G. Clark, *New Orleans, 1718-1812: An Economic History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1970), 218-19.

⁹ J. Carlyle Sitterson, *Sugar Country: The Cane Sugar Industry in the South, 1753-1950* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1953), 3-5.

¹⁰ Clark, *New Orleans*, 219-20.

continued to block purchasing much-needed laborers. Consequently, in 1800 forty planters petitioned the Cabildo to re-open the slave trade, claiming that “the only way to develop this colony due to the cultivation of the sugar-cane” was to have a reliable source of laborers from Africa.¹¹

Etienne de Boré’s technological innovation would have been enough to change the contours of Louisiana’s slavery regime, especially for the colony’s southern and southeastern districts, but another technological advancement secured a colony-wide rush to change. In 1793, Eli Whitney had perfected a simpler machine than the sugar mill, the cotton gin. The simplicity of that invention, while a hindrance to Whitney’s personal financial gain, had allowed it to spread across the South and break open the bottleneck of cotton production. For inhabitants living on a line stretching from central Louisiana through central Georgia and northward, Whitney’s invention would be as important as Boré’s was to the planters of southern Louisiana. In Louisiana, the two upland districts of Natchitoches and Spanish West Florida, both too cold in the winter to grow sugar, became booming cotton regions. Along with the Natchez District, which was one of the earliest cotton centers, these two regions provided many of the 18,000 bales of cotton that were exported from New Orleans between October 1801 and May 1802.¹²

¹¹ On the price estimate, see Claude C. Robin, *Voyages dans l' interieur de la Louisiane: de la Floride occidentale, et dans les isles de la Martinique et de Saint-Domingue, pendant les annees 1802, 1803, 1804, 1805 et 1806* (Paris: Chez F. Buisson, 1807), 134-41; ADC, August 8, 1800, Book 4, part 3, pp. 202-17, CA-NOPL.

¹² Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 343-44; Clark, *Economic History of New Orleans*, 202-3, 217-20; John Hebron Moore, *The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom of the Old Southwest* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press), 1-17.

The technological transformation of sugar and cotton production produced the first true wave slaves into Louisiana since the 1720s and 1730s and sparked yet another tug-of-war between colonial officials and planters over the slave trade. Colonial authorities, made anxious by events in St. Domingue, sought to close the trade while planters, recognizing the economic opportunity created by those same events, wanted it open. One high-profile case in the wake of the slave-trade decree signified the discontent with the new ban on slave imports. In June 1796, Alejandro Baudin, a well-known New Orleans merchant and trafficker in slaves, petitioned the Cabildo for exemption from the prohibition. Baudin argued that he had received permission from the government in 1793 to introduce a shipment of slaves for his own use. Refusing to accept that the new prohibition on importing slaves rendered his earlier permit useless, Baudin prevailed upon the Cabildo to allow his cargo to land. Though some of the planter-members of the Cabildo seemed open to granting Baudin an exemption, the attorney general, Guillermo Fonvergne, flatly denied Baudin's request, and cast doubt upon Baudin's claim that the slaves would be for his own use. Fonvergne argued that if Baudin had 'more love for the general interest than he has for his personal interest..he would have..given up a business which is very damaging to himself and above all, more so to the Province.'¹³

Fonvergne couched his decision in the imagery of Saint-Domingue. Speaking to the general problem of importing slaves of any origin, he issued the following diatribe: 'What will the Colony come to..should the number of

¹³ ADC, June 10, 1796, book 4, vol. I, CA-NOPL.

Negroes be increased..up to the point where there is no alternative except to either abandon our properties in order to save our lives as well as those of our wives and children, or of revenging ourselves to become victims of sacrifice? If the terrible catastrophe of the Island of Santo Domingo does not open our eyes, how long will we be blind to our own interests?"¹⁴ The words of Fonvergne evidently resonated with the Cabildo members, who in July once again refused Baudin's request. In spite of his claim that he should not be "financially ruined solely because of the general welfare of the Province," the Cabildo or the governor never granted Baudin's exemption.¹⁵

Notwithstanding the Cabildo's refusal to admit Baudin's cargo, a number of Africans were smuggled into the colony during the late 1790s. The plethora of waterways in southeastern Louisiana provided smugglers with ample opportunities to bypass the closely guarded Mississippi River. In particular, the intricate lake and bayou system above New Orleans, in which a vessel could evade patrol vessels on the Mississippi River, provided smugglers with an easy route to the area immediately surrounding the city. With the construction of the Carondelet Canal, which connected Lake Pontchartrain to the city in the early 1790s, the more brazen smugglers could get even closer to New Orleans. The Spanish Crown's interest in promoting "*la trata*" likely influenced the

¹⁴ Attorney General's remarks, June 17, 1796, ADC, book 4, vol. I, CA-NOPL.

¹⁵ Statement from Baudin in the second meeting in which his petition was discussed, ADC, July 15, 1796, book 4, vol. I, CA-NOPL.

conspicuously diverted attention of officials in Louisiana when it came to rooting out slave-smuggling in the late 1790s.¹⁶

But the marshy region of southeastern Louisiana was not the only place out of reach from Spanish officials. In June 1799, the syndic of New Orleans reported to the Cabildo that he had been notified of frequent violations of the governor's order against "the importation of Negroes, mulattoes, or others of suspicious character." Though New Orleans officials were well aware of the ease with which slave smugglers could exploit the topography of their immediate surroundings, the syndic's report that land-based smugglers were active in the upper-river section, or present-day Arkansas, caused significant consternation for some Cabildo members.¹⁷

Thus, in spite of most officials' opposition to importing slaves, planters in Louisiana were able to obtain the laborers they demanded. After very little direct trade from Africa between the 1730s and early 1790s, the period 1796 to 1810 became one of a reinvigorated trans-atlantic slave trade to Louisiana. This era drastically altered the order that the Spanish arrived at through their slave-control schizophrenia. Most notably, with Africans arriving in Louisiana from cultures that had not been major components of the colony's slave culture prior to 1795,

¹⁶ "La trata" was the commonly -used phrase by Spanish authorities for the trans-atlantic slave trade. Though smuggling was important during this period, the most famous of the smugglers, Jean Lafitte and the Baratarians, were not yet well-established. See Joe G. Taylor, "The Foreign Slave Trade in Louisiana After 1808," *Louisiana History* 9 (1960): 36-43. The Spanish government's overt support for Spanish slave -trading is discussed in Chapter Two.

¹⁷ ADC, June 28, 1799, book 4, vol. III, CA-NOPL.

the highly creolized slave population of Louisiana would have to integrate these new arrivals into their culture and traditions of resistance.

CONGOLIZATION

A variety of historical sources attest to the change in ethnic composition among slaves. Unlike the French and early Spanish period, when slaves identified as ‘Bambara’ dominated ethnic origin notations in plantation and sales records, the extant evidence from this period indicates a shift in the cultural composition of slaveholding in all districts of the colony. For example, in St. John the Baptist Parish, above New Orleans, seventy-five of the 114 slaves sold from 1794 to 1803 (66 percent) were native Africans. The most common ethnic identifications, were ‘Congo’ (24 percent), ‘Bambara’ (9 percent), and ‘Mandinga’ and ‘Mina’ (each 7 percent). New ethnic identifications—in particular ‘Congo,’ whose cultural and religious traditions were markedly different from those of Senegambian peoples—reflect the trend toward a slave culture, at least in the New Orleans area, dominated by west-central Africans.¹⁸

The ethnic breakdown in St. John the Baptist Parish records mirrors what is found throughout the colony in a variety of civil documents. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall’s figures show the same ethnic plurality and proportions of various cultures of origin within the colony’s enslaved population. Most notably, Congolese slaves

¹⁸ These records are transcribed in Grady W. Kilman, ‘Slavery and Forced Labor in Colonial Louisiana, 1699 to 1803,’ (M.A. thesis, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1972), pp. 181-91. On Kongo culture, see John Thornton, *The Kingdom of Kongo: Civil War and Transition, 1641-1718* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983).

become an increasingly dominant group from the 1780s and 1790s, when they account for approximately 25 percent of all Africans mentioned in Hall's sales, inventories, and probate records. By the first decade of the nineteenth century, Congolese slaves comprised 39 percent of all Africans mentioned, and an impressive 47 percent during the 1810s. Next came the Mandingas (10 percent in the 1810s), followed by Minas, Wolofs, and Igbos (7 percent each). The Bambara remained one of the most common groups (4 percent), accentuating the traditions of the colony's charter generation of Mande-speaking slaves.¹⁹

Though civil documents are helpful in understanding the timing of Africanization, they offer little, if any, information on the lives and behaviors of individual Africans. In particular, in being simply a snapshot—and, even then, more of a particular moment in a slaveowner's life than in a bondperson's—such documents are not conducive to exploring how African ethnicities became part of the colony's newly-creolized slave culture. By contrast, perhaps the best sources for obtaining information both on the contours of the new ethnic composition of the slave population, and in exploring the ways in which slaves expressed their recently Africanized identity during this period, are baptismal registers. Even though planters did not universally abide the Spanish regulations on Catholicizing slaves—and although the Catholic Church's centrality to Louisiana society began to erode following the Louisiana Purchase in 1803—enough people of African descent saw church participation as a source of subtle power that church registers do offer a reliable picture of the colony's increasingly African face. Most

¹⁹ Hall, *Database*.

importantly, the Church was a major site of community-building for all slaves, thus its records are essential to understanding the lives and cultures of Louisiana's enslaved people.²⁰

Between 1796 and 1810, nearly 6,700 slaves were baptized at St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans. Of these, 2,414 were Africans, who comprised 36 percent of the total. Coinciding with the proportion of Africans in slave sales in selected civil parishes during this period, figures from the church registers are representative of the ethnic composition within the colony's enslaved population. As such, rather than simply using the church figures to discuss Afro-Catholicism, which I do below, I also use them to explore the specific nature of the increasingly pluralized slave culture in Louisiana (see Table 3.1, page 115). In fact, the church registers may be the single best source for such an examination.

²⁰ The scholarship on the relationship between the Catholic Church and enslaved people of African descent in the Atlantic World is rich. For classics, see Frank Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen, the Negro in the Americas* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947); Herbert S. Klein, *Slavery in the Americas: A Comparative Study of Virginia and Cuba* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), 86-126; Fernando Ortiz, *Hampa afro-cubana: Los negros esclavos, estudio sociológico y de derecho publico* (Havana: Revista Bimestre Cubana, 1916). The obvious exception to this compelling scholarship is the literature on slave religion in North America, which is dominated by studies of Protestant conversions and theology among enslaved Africans and African Americans. For example, see Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1978); Sylvia R. Frey and Betty Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion: African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Jon Sensbach, *A Separate Canaan: The Making of an Afro-Moravian World in North Carolina, 1763-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998). For an important correction to this exception, and for a groundbreaking study in general, see Sue Peabody, "A Dangerous Zeal: Catholic Missions to Slaves in the French Antilles, 1635-1800," *French Historical Studies* 25:1 (2002): 53-90.

Table 3.1 *Number and Sex Ratios of Enslaved Africans Baptized at St. Louis Cathedral, by Region and Culture, 1796-1803*²¹

<i>Region</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>% of Total Africans</i>	<i>Sex Ratio</i>
<i>West-Central Africa</i>			
Congo	254	33.6	0.90
<i>Senegambia</i>			
Mandinga	105	13.8	0.75
Wolof	32	4.2	1.29
Bambara	29	3.8	4.80
Pular/Fulbe	25	3.3	1.78
<i>Bight of Benin</i>			
Chamba	66	8.3	1.00
Nago/Yoruba	21	2.8	2.00
Fon	18	2.4	0.64
Hausa	13	1.7	5.50
Addo	5	0.7	---
<i>Gold Coast</i>			
Mina	62	8.2	1.00
<i>Bight of Biafra</i>			
Ibo	37	4.9	0.85
'Carabali'	9	1.2	0.80
<i>Windward Coast</i>			
Quissi	8	1.1	1.00
Temne	7	0.9	0.75
Canga	4	0.5	3.00
<i>Mozambique</i>			
Makwa	9	1.2	1.25
<i>Brutas/ Unidentifiable Origin</i>			
	55	7.3	1.29

²¹ Slave Baptism Database.

Between 1796 and 1803, over 2,800 slaves were baptized at St. Louis church; of these, 760, or 27 percent of all baptized slaves, were native Africans (see Table 3.2, below). This stark change in the proportion of Africans being baptized from the earlier period, which occurred even as Africans were supposed to be banned from being imported into the colony, indicates the growing demand for laborers by planters of sugar cane and cotton. The numbers also illustrate that once again, planters circumvented the policies of the Spanish, regardless of whatever real and perceived effects that practice would have on the colony's efforts at slave control.

Table 3.2 *Number, Proportion of Baptized Slaves who were African, and Sex Ratio of Slaves, St. Louis Cathedral Registers, 1796-1803*²²

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>% African</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Ratio</i>
1796	268	23.5	136	132	1.03
1797	305	20.0	138	167	0.83
1798	296	17.2	139	157	0.89
1799	286	10.8	131	153	0.86
1800	370	25.4	195	175	1.11
1801	693	59.5	365	338	1.08
1802	296	33.4	152	144	1.06
1803	370	35.1	137	156	0.88
<i>Totals</i>	<i>2,808</i>	<i>27.1</i>	<i>1,393</i>	<i>1,415</i>	<i>0.98</i>

²² Ibid.

The spike in the number of slave baptisms in 1800 and 1801 reflects the fact that planters no longer had to circumvent Spanish policies on the slave trade. In 1800, the Cabildo and the new governor of the colony, Nicolas Vidal, reopened the African trade. Repealing the prohibition was not an easy decision, as evidenced by the six-to-five vote in the fall of 1800. The first attempt to re-open the trade had come in early August, when Governor Vidal presented to the Cabildo several letters written by planters who requested that the trade be opened in order to meet the growing demand for slave labor. Motivated by the planters' "urgent need for *brutas*" in the expanding sugar business, the governor investigated the hasty decisions made by Carondelet in the wake of the Pointe Coupée conspiracy. In a matter of days, Vidal discovered that there had been no royal order officially prohibiting the importation of native Africans. Rather, Carondelet had only received a letter of acknowledgement from the Spanish government regarding his petition to have the trade closed. With no evidence of an official decree from Spain mandating the closing of the trade, and with planters demanding a new infusion of African laborers, the Cabildo eventually relented in October.²³

With large number of Africans now entering the colony, Louisiana planters rushed to make legal purchases. This wave of purchases is reflected in the St. Louis church baptisms, where over 1,000 slaves, nearly half of whom were Africans, were baptized in 1800 and 1801. Not surprisingly, of the 693 slaves

²³ See RDC, August 8, 1800, book 4, vol. III, pp. 202; August 16, 1800, book 4, vol. III, pp. 204; October 24, 1800, book 4, vol. IV, pp. 13, CA-NOPL.

baptized at St. Louis Cathedral in 1801, nearly 60 percent were Africans. For the rest of the colonial and territorial periods, in only one other year (1805) would as large a number of slaves and a larger proportion of Africans be baptized at the church. Further complicating the cultural milieu, Congolese peoples had come to outnumber the once-dominant Senegambian cultures.²⁴

Baptisms in the frontier districts of Attakapas and Natchitoches, however, indicate that Africanization was less prevalent outside New Orleans. Of the 195 slaves baptized between 1796 and 1801, only six were natives of Africa or the Caribbean. Of the six, four were identified as being from “the coast of Guinea,” suggesting that they were not representative of the trade to New Orleans, which was dominated by the non-coastal Congolese. In Attakapas, in the sample year 1797, a total of ninety-five slaves were baptized. Of these, ten were native Africans. Unlike priests in New Orleans and Natchitoches, the clergymen at St. Martin de Tours were not specific about the African origins of these ten adult slaves all of whom are listed as “natural de Africa.” Perhaps the smaller proportion of native Africans entering these districts meant that priests were paying less attention to specific African ethnicities, claimed by those being baptized.²⁵

²⁴ Slave Baptism Database.

²⁵ Natchitoches baptisms compiled from Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Natchitoches, 1729-1803: Abstracts of the Catholic Church Registers of the French and Spanish Post of St. Jean Baptiste des Natchitoches in Louisiana* (New Orleans: Polyanthos, 1977); Attakapas baptisms in *Baptemes de Couleur 1765 a 1802 et Sepultures de Couleur 1765 a 1818*, Archives, St. Martin de Tours Catholic Church, St. Martinville, La.

Though the Attakapas and Natchitoches districts were part of the sugar and cotton booms, respectively, a combination of factors limited the availability of Africans to these hinterland planters. First, the distance from New Orleans meant that planters seeking new slaves would often buy them inter-regionally; to that end, Natchez, which was half as far from Natchitoches as was New Orleans, was the slave market of choice. That the Natchez market had a higher proportion of creole slaves for sale than Africans impacted the lower proportion of African slaves in Natchitoches than in New Orleans. Second, even though the Catholic Church was influential in these districts, it did not have the stable structure of the New Orleans area, which benefited from the close eye of both ecclesiastical and civil authorities. The influx of protestant Anglo-Americans further attenuated the Church's waning influence in the area. Observing this migration, the French administrator of Louisiana in 1803, Pierre Clement de Laussat, remarked, "the Americans are coming down in droves—they are all over Louisiana in the same way as the holy tribes once swarmed over the land of Canaan."²⁶

Louisiana may very well have been Canaan for many of the incoming slaves, both Africans and African Americans. Even though most of these Americans were Protestant, and therefore brought with them slaves who were imbued with those traditions, the baptismal registers from 1804 to 1810 show a steady increase in the percentage of slaves from the United States who received the sacrament. As Table 3.3 (page 120) illustrates, even in New Orleans—the least Americanized of the four major agricultural districts in the colony—the

²⁶ Laussat quoted in Sitterson, *Sugar Country*, 23.

proportion of American-born slaves who were baptized in the city increased each year. Not coincidentally, as the proportion of native Africans began to wane after 1807, slaves originating in the United States made up a larger share of newly arrived slaves to the colony. Though the bulk of these migrants would come following the Louisiana Purchase, the combination of profit potential and Spanish policies that promoted greater settlement meant that the influx of Americans preceded the diplomatic wrangling of the early nineteenth century.²⁷

Table 3.3 *Number of Baptisms, Proportion of Baptized Slaves who were African, Proportion of Baptized Slaves who were American-born, and Total Sex Ratio of Baptized Slaves Baptized, St. Louis Cathedral Registers, 1804-1810*²⁸

<i>Year</i>	<i># of Slave Baptisms</i>	<i>% African</i>	<i>% American</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Ratio</i>
1804	370	34.1	.03	160	210	0.76
1805	585	54.4	.09	273	312	0.88
1806	492	39.2	1.01	239	253	0.95
1807	641	52.0	1.40	315	326	0.97
1808	737	54.4	2.99	412	325	1.27
1809	546	32.6	3.85	241	305	0.79
1810	495	21.2	5.05	250	245	1.02
<i>Totals</i>	<i>3,866</i>	<i>42.8</i> <i>(n=1,654)</i>	<i>2.28</i> <i>(n=88)</i>	<i>1,890</i>	<i>1,976</i>	<i>0.96</i>

²⁷ See Gilbert Din, "The Immigration Policy of Governor Esteban Miró in Spanish Louisiana," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 73 (1969): 155-75, and "Spain's Immigration Policy in Louisiana and the American Penetration, 1792-1803," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 76 (1973): 255-76.

²⁸ Slave Baptism Database.

Because most Anglo-American migrants and their slaves were Protestants, few of these people chose to be baptized in Catholic churches. This accentuated the decline in the Church's influence that had begun in the 1790s. In 1798, to combat the decline in church membership among whites, Governor Carondelet's successor, Manuel Gayoso de Lemos, had issued a comprehensive edict that required a public reiteration of the Catholic faith in the colony. In addition to stamping out the common practice of people working unnecessarily on Sundays and holy days, Gayoso assailed anyone who challenged the theology or social centrality of Roman Catholicism: "All persons, of whatsoever class..who..have the audacity to blaspheme the name of God our Lord, the Virgin Mary our Lady, or sacred things, or make use of threatening oaths, will incur the penalties established by the laws of these kingdoms." Such penalties, ranging from fines to imprisonment, were clearly aimed at working-class whites. That this regulation had no special punishment for slaves suggests that the order was not aimed at them. Indeed, of all the social groups in the colony—before and after 1803—enslaved peoples of African descent were the most devout Catholics. Their Catholicism would mean the difference between a fractured slave community along ethnic lines, and one that was reasonably unified in spite of the social and cultural tumult that Africanization created.²⁹

²⁹ Edict in Gayoso, "Regulations," in Billon, *Annals of St. Louis*, 275-283. For the first regulation, see pp. 276.

GODPARENTING, FICTIVE KIN, AND COMMUNITY

In fact, although Africanization did present social and cultural challenges to Louisiana's slaves, it invigorated Catholicism among them. The continued high rate of baptisms among slaves and free people of color indicates that the Church was still seen as a source of social power for both groups. Particularly through the act of godparenting, slaves could construct kinship ties that otherwise would be lost during this period of demographic upheaval. As a result, many slaves participated as godparents, and helped to build intricate networks of fictive and affinal kin that transcended skin color, slavery, and geography. In addition, for godparents, the act of sponsoring a baptism was a means of achieving higher status for themselves, as well as a means of minimizing cultural differences between the creole culture of slaves and the culture of these newly arrived slaves. Though the economic benefits for enslaved godparents were more limited than those of free people of color, slaves of devout Catholic owners could increase their standing in their owners' eyes by participating in this important rite of the church. Godparents also enjoyed the status that their sponsorship—particularly of adult slaves—provided them within the slave community. That their actions also happened to build a slave community that transcended ethnicities made such networks stronger.³⁰

³⁰ Two excellent studies of free people of color in New Orleans illustrate the centrality of godparenting as a means of achieving higher socioeconomic status. See Kimberly S. Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1769-1803* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 104-108; Emily Clark and Virginia Meacham Gould, "The Feminine Face of Afro-Catholicism in New Orleans, 1727-1852," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 59 (Apr. 2002): 409-448.

From the perspective of slaves, godparenting during the period 1796-1810 was a central means of constructing community in spite of the increasingly pluralized ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the colony's slaves; in fact, godparenting was a central tool that slaves used to minimize such differences. Moreover, a significant proportion of slaves of different ethnicities shared godparents, which facilitated the construction of multi-ethnic, fictive kin networks of slaves. Examining the entire time period, taking into account a godparent sponsoring multiple slaves over the course of several years, one finds that a significant majority of slaves in New Orleans shared their godparent with at least one other slave.³¹ With such a high proportion of slaves sharing godparents, the fictive kin networks established by godparenting became a central means of building community.

In addition to the multiethnic, fictive kin network created by Juana's act of godparenting, multiple examples of similar networks exist in the St. Louis Cathedral records. The day after Juana sponsored her three godchildren, José, an enslaved man owned by Mr. Dillieux, sponsored a Chamba man of a different owner. In addition to taking his godfather's name, the newly-baptized José enjoyed the benefit of being baptized at the same time with thirteen other slaves, all of whom were African-born, and among whom seven different ethnicities were

³¹ I took a twenty-five percent sampling of the 2,414 records for which ethnicity of baptized slave is given (n=604) in my Slave Baptism Database. In one sample, over one-third (33.8 percent) of slaves of different ethnicities shared a godparent. In the same sample, 12.2 percent of slaves of the same ethnicity shared a godparent, and 54 percent of slaves did not share a godparent at the time of baptism. The percentage of slaves sharing a godparent, when examining the entire period, was 60 percent.

represented. Two of those slaves were owned by the godfather José's owner, which reinforced Chamba José's connection to his godfather's own kin network. That group grew yet larger later in the year when José again sponsored three new arrivals: two Congolese men, Pedro and Francisco, and a Mandinga woman, Juliana. All three slaves were owned by Mr. Delmas, which extended the elder José's influence to slaves of that estate, and made the newly arrived José part of an intricate web of fictive kin.³² Ultimately, this small snapshot of the workings of godparenting reveals the creation of a kinship network that included eight people, two of whom were creoles and six of whom were African-born. Among the Africans three distinct ethnicities were represented—Congolese, Chamba, and Mandinga—and the network tied together the estates of three different masters. Moreover, with the frequency of multiple baptisms during this period, one godparent's coterie became interlocked and overlapping with those of other godparents. In these seemingly small daily rituals, a cohesive, cross-ethnic and cross-plantation slave community was built.

Some godparents also built kin networks over long spans of time, connecting slaves of different ethnicities to each other through sponsorship. The best example during this period is that of Theodore, a slave owned by Alejandra Almonaster of New Orleans, who was a major figure in rebuilding the cathedral after it burned down in 1794. Between 1797 and 1808, Theodore sponsored eighteen different godchildren, half of whom were adult Africans. That all were

³² April 18, 1798, and July 1, 1798, St. Louis Cathedral, Baptisms of Slaves and Free People of Color, Book 9, 1797-99, ADNO.

owned by someone other than Dona Almonaster helped to integrate these bondpeople into the larger slave community, as well as to strengthen Theodore's position as a leader in the city's slave population. Theodore pushed other enslaved people of African descent to minimize their ethnic and cultural differences in building a new world slave identity.³³

Theodore, José, and Juana committed to supporting those slaves they sponsored throughout their lifetimes. One might speculate that in times of duress—a judicial proceeding, for example—that godparents or kin came to each other's aid. Though a search of some of the more frequent godparents and owners in judicial records revealed no evidence to buttress such speculation, the frequency with which certain slaves served as sponsors over a period of several years, and the centrality of the Church in Louisiana society (particularly New Orleans), indicate that such actions would have occurred.³⁴

In addition to building networks that connected slaves of various owners to each other, godparenting also reinforced preexisting familial ties on some estates. For example, in late 1795 the slave Maria Theresa, owned by Mr. Harang, brought two of her children, Josef, 3 months old, and Marianna, 2 years old to the baptismal font. The small family was joined by another of Harang's slaves, Antemira, whose daughter Luisa shared a godmother with young Josef. The

³³ Slave Baptism Database.

³⁴ In an attempt to push this interpretation beyond informed speculation, I searched the Spanish Judicial Records of the Louisiana State Museum. No names mentioned in the baptismal entries corresponded to any in the judicial records. That is not to say, however, that further research in additional church parishes and holdings of judicial records would not reveal such a correlation.

godmother, Magdalena, was a slave of another owner. Thus, Magdalena's sponsorship created a network of at least six slaves on two different plantations.³⁵

Godparenting also created stronger communities on individual plantations. For example, on Easter Saturday in 1801 six slaves of four different African cultures, all of whom were owned by Mr. Prevo, shared the same godparents, one of whom was a free woman of color, and the other an enslaved man of a different owner. Interestingly, all four men in the group were named Antonio, perhaps after the charismatic priest, Antonio Sedella, who conducted the baptism. Whether building cross-plantation communities, or strengthening the community on an individual estate, godparenting was a central means of slaves constructing relationships during the turmoil of Africanization.³⁶

Group baptisms also helped to solidify the bonds of Louisiana's new enslaved arrivals. Usually occurring during the Easter season, most African adults were baptized with at least two other slaves. Between 1796 and 1810, the registers at St. Louis Cathedral illustrate that over half the baptized African adults were baptized in such groups; in some years, particularly after the Louisiana Purchase, the number of slaves baptized at a single time swelled to well over one hundred. Thus, even if they did not share the same godparent, the slave would always maintain the connection of having been baptized at the same time with a few, or in some cases, dozens of other slaves.

³⁵ December 27, 1795 (entries 997-999), *Slave and Free People of Color Baptisms, St. Louis Cathedral, New Orleans, Vol. 5, Part II, ADNO.*

³⁶ April 4, 1801, *Slave and Free People of Color Baptisms, St. Louis Cathedral, Book 6, Vol. 3, ADNO.*

Theodore, for instance, often served during periods of group baptisms. The unusually high church attendance during holy day celebrations was an opportunity for the church congregation to welcome these mostly adult, and mostly African, converts. For example, on Pentecost Sunday, May 12, 1799, a total of forty-four different adult Africans were baptized. Owned by twenty-seven different people, these forty-four—ranging from the Congo woman Adelaide to the Mandinga man Manuel—not only became part of the larger church community but also shared the experience of communal baptism. Further strengthening these bonds, twenty-three godparents sponsored more than one slave, which created several smaller fictive kin groups.³⁷

As the end of the transatlantic slave trade on January 1, 1808 approached, traders and owners were shipping in slaves in tremendous volume. In March 1807, as a result of this increased traffic, sixty-eight slaves were baptized together at the cathedral. Hailing from ten different cultures (yet dominated by Congolese), these slaves represent in microcosm the social and cultural transitions of Louisiana's Africanization period. Two of the slaves—George, a twelve-year-old creole boy from Jamaica, and Antonia, an eighteen-year-old Igbo woman—shared a godmother, Margarita, who was owned by their master, Mr. Cenas. Thus, whether accentuating the bonds with their fellow baptized slaves that day, or reinforcing the relationships among slaves on the Cenas estate, George and

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Antonia entered into a ready-made kin network that made their transition into the New Orleans slave society much easier.³⁸

But who were the godparents? Well over half of the godparents of slaves baptized between 1796 and 1810, (61.6 percent) were slaves, most of whom were identified as “black.” *Libres*, or free blacks, served as godparents in 21.6 percent of the sampled baptisms. Over half the *libres* were of mixed ancestry. Whites accounted for a substantial proportion of godparents (16.9 percent). This illustrates that godparenting could be used not only by enslaved and free people of color as community-building and status-improving. In fact, one well-known white citizen in New Orleans, José Velasquez, served as a godfather to eleven different slaves of six different African cultures in 1800 and 1801. That all but one of Velasquez’ godchildren were women indicates that someone involved in the decision to select Velasquez as godfather—the slave, the owner, the priest, or Velasquez himself—saw these women as needing the special status and protection one could gain by having a white godfather.³⁹ Whether white or black, slave or free, godparenting accelerated the construction of community, which in some cases reflected the fuzzy boundaries between whiteness and blackness in ethnoracially fluid New Orleans.

³⁸ March 29, 1807, Slave and Free People of Color Baptisms, St. Louis Cathedral, Vol. 9, Part 2, ADNO.

³⁹ All eleven of Velasquez’ godchildren were baptized in 1800 and 1801, and the entries are in Slave and Free People of Color Baptisms, Vol. 7, Part 1, ADNO. The sponsorship by Velasquez of so many female slaves suggests strongly that other factors were at work than appears in the evidence. Unfortunately, I have not yet found what his motives—altruistic or otherwise—were.

As other historians have shown in reference to free people of color in New Orleans, godparenting was a conscious strategy to improve one's status. For slaves, it was a central means of mitigating the social and cultural challenges that Africanization posed. Without it, the thousands of people from multiple African cultures likely would have been more separated from the existing slave community than their cultural heritages already made them. The result was the construction of individual networks and a collective slave community that was less fractured than it otherwise would have been. Though ethnic, linguistic, and cultural differences certainly continued, godparenting accelerated the predictable path to re-creolization of the African Louisianan slave community.

MARIE THERESE

In some cases, godparenting connected slave communities that stretched across the colony. For example, in one of the large group baptism of adult Africans in 1799, Francisco, an Ibo slave of Guido Dreux, was baptized at St. Louis Cathedral. Surprisingly, given the distance of travel, Francisco's godfather was Francisco Metoyer, who is described in the register as a slave of Pierre Metoyer, "an inhabitant of the Post of Natchitoches." Evidently, Dreux and Peter Metoyer had a business or personal connection that in the act of Francisco Metoyer's godparenting reached into the relationships among their slaves. Further intertwining these long-distance slave communities was that Francisco's

godmother Margarita was a slave of Margarita Bellon, whose other slave Maria Magdalena was baptized with the large group.⁴⁰

That Pierre Metoyer of Natchitoches would have a hand in a slave baptism in New Orleans was not surprising, for he often conducted financial and legal business in the city. A settler from France who had found financial success in and around the Natchitoches post, Metoyer's greatest significance was that he was the progenitor of an immense clan of free people of color in the Natchitoches region. Pierre Metoyer and his slave, Marie Therese Coincoin, had six children in a span of eighteen years. Marie Therese was an Ewe native whom Metoyer had purchased in the 1770s, and who never benefited from the Frenchman's official admission of the relationship. Once freed in 1786 at the age of forty-four, Marie Therese continued to pressure Metoyer, who was now married to a white woman, for ample child support. Relenting, by the 1790s Metoyer turned over a sizable parcel of land. Over the next several decades Marie Therese, her children, and grandchildren, turned it into a source of financial success, and one of the most vibrant centers of free black culture in all of the American South.⁴¹ For historians, the Metoyers of color offer an intriguing example of the ways in which free people of color employed ethnoracial identity during the period of Africanization.

⁴⁰ Slave Baptism Database. On slave godparenting and community-building through Catholicism throughout the New World, see Clark and Gould, "The Feminine Face of Afro-Catholicism," 409-448; Ana Maria Lugao Rios, "The Politics of Kinship *Compadrio* Among Slaves in Nineteenth-Century Brazil," *History of the Family* 5 (2000): 287-296; Stephen Gudeman and Stuart Schwartz, "Cleansing Original Sin: Godparenthood and the Baptism of Slaves in Eighteenth-Century Bahia," in Raymond T. Smith, ed., *Kinship Ideology and Practice in Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 39-58.

⁴¹ Gary B. Mills and Elizabeth S. Mills, *Melrose* (Natchitoches: The Association for the Preservation of Historic Natchitoches, 1993 [1973]), 21-28.

Initially, Marie Therese toiled away at her estate with only a handful of laborers, extracting every ounce of profit from the land in order to purchase her still-enslaved children. In 1792, the commandant at Natchitoches documented the contents of Marie Therese Coincoin's first shipment to New Orleans: in addition to 9,900 rolls of tobacco, she also shipped 300 bear hides and two barrels of bear grease, the latter two goods being in high demand in Europe, and indicating the continuation of trade with American Indians in the region. By the 1810s, when all of her children were free, the Metoyers of color owned 6,400 acres. By 1832, they possessed double that acreage, which ranged for thirty miles in length in some of the most fertile cotton lands of upland Louisiana.⁴²

The center of that immense landholding was Marie Therese Coincoin's plantation Melrose, which has enjoyed significant attention by architectural historians for the possible evidence it provides of the persistence of Marie Therese's African heritage. On the estate were three buildings that indicate the continuity of African traditions within the Metoyer clan. The Yucca house, constructed in the late 1790s, served as the main living quarters of the estate until the mid-nineteenth century. Constructed of *bousillage*, a mixture of mud, moss, and deer hair, the home's high-pitched roof resembled the architecture of west and west-central African cultures. Likewise, the Ghana House, of similar construction, mirrored typical West African architectural style. By far, however,

⁴² 'État de la Cargaison d'un Bateau Apartenant a Pierre Metoyer et d'un Gabarre a Marie Thérèse,' Reel 1, Jack D. L. Holmes Collection, Microfilmed Documents Relating to Natchitoches and Adjacent Territory, Papeles de Estado, Archivo Historico Nacional de Seville, Eugene P. Watson Memorial Library, Northwestern State University, Natchitoches, La; G. Mills and E. Mills, *Melrose*, 43.

the structure which has gotten the most attention as evidence of Coincoin's and her descendants' maintenance of African cultural traditions was the African House. With a pitched roof that the Historic American Buildings Survey has characterized as "unmistakably African in character," the mushroom-shaped structure appears to have been used as a storage building on the plantation. More recent assessments, particularly by Jon Michael Vlach, throws into question the African-ness of the African House, concluding that it resembles "more than anything else... a French barn shorn of its usual encompassing sheds."⁴³

But that is precisely the point: given the structure's resemblance to both French and west African architectural styles, and given that it was erected well after Marie Therese's death, the building is a reflection of her sons' part-French, part-African ancestry. There is no evidence indicating a conscious decision by Louis Metoyer, Marie Therese's son who succeeded her as owner of Melrose, to erect a building that reflected his ancestry, but that, too, is precisely the point: manifestations of identity—such as the African House—need not be reflections of a conscious decision to promote a certain image. The structure itself illustrates the post-mortem legacy of Marie Therese's African heritage for Louis, who had every reason to emphasize the source of his "whiteness" rather than his "blackness." Perhaps wanting to strengthen his claim as an important French-descended planter in the area, Louis and his brother Francois financed the establishment of a Catholic church in Isle Brevelle, the name of the growing free black community

⁴³ "Melrose Plantation, African House," Historic American Buildings Survey No. LA-2-69-B, and "Melrose Plantation, Yucca House," HABS No. LA -2-69-C, September 8, 1985, Historic American Buildings Survey, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior (Washington, D.C.); John Michael Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 85-86, 104-105.

outside Natchitoches.⁴⁴ Whether for slaves or free people of color, identity was a shifting, paradoxical force.

CONGOLIZATION, VIA CHARLESTON

In the same year that the Metoyers built St. Augustine Church, the purchase of the Louisiana Territory by the United States ramped up the two economic forces that had already created foundational changes to the colony's slave community: the domestic and trans-atlantic slave trades. Most immediately, the stream of American settlers into Louisiana became a river, especially to the upland cotton districts. Moreover, the lives of white colonists and black slaves in Louisiana were again affected by Saint-Domingue. Unaware of the treaty in which Spain had given Louisiana back to France, the Jefferson Administration benefited from Napoleon's desire to re-conquer Saint-Domingue, which would require maximum financial resources and minimal diplomatic concerns. Though Napoleon's aims in making the deal with the Americans would be unfulfilled, the Louisiana Purchase not only altered the history of slavery's expansion in the United States but in the portion of the territory that would become the state of Louisiana.⁴⁵

Aside from the obvious significance of the Louisiana Purchase, the transaction had a momentous impact on the process of Africanization. Now an

⁴⁴ Mills, *The Forgotten People*, 145-55.

⁴⁵ Among many good sources on the Louisiana Purchase, the best as the event pertains to slavery is Paul Lachance, "The Politics of Fear: French Louisianans and the Slave Trade, 1786-1809," *Plantation Society* 1 (1979), 176-80.

American territory, Louisiana was subject to the whims of Congress regarding slave-trade policy. At the same time that the United States obtained Louisiana, South Carolina's governor and legislature were attempting to open the slave trade to their state. Given that the French interregnum had produced constraints on the trade in 1802 and 1803, and that the United States favored the French policy, planters in Louisiana clamored at the inequity of only South Carolina having a legal trade in Africans. At the root of this envy was that Louisiana slaveowners knew that South Carolina slave traders would profit from Louisiana planters' dire need for laborers. Planters in Louisiana already relied on Charleston as a source of slaves. In March 1803, the *Charleston Courier* reported: "We have several Frenchmen here, soliciting our African Houses to send eight or ten thousand slaves to Louisiana." Given the total traffic in Africans to Charleston during the period of the reopened slave trade, December 1803 to December 1807, such a figure would have been one-third of Charleston's total imports. Though extant records indicate a lower number of trans-shipped slaves arriving in Louisiana via Charleston, the decision by the South Carolina legislature was nonetheless instrumental in helping Louisiana sugar planters find African laborers. In January 1804 alone, authorities in New Orleans reported the arrival of four different slaving brigs carrying a total of 513 slaves.⁴⁶

The tensions over the slave trade between officialdom and planters continued after 1803, when the territorial governor, William C. C. Claiborne,

⁴⁶ *Charleston Courier* quoted in Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade*, Vol. IV, *The Border Colonies and the Southern Colonies* (Washington, D.C., 1969 [1935]), 661. Estimates of slaving vessels and slaves in *Ibid.*, 661-62.

refused to open the trade. Nonetheless, just as they had done under the most recent Spanish ban of the late 1790s, planters in the territory found smuggling relatively easy. In 1806 and 1807, the *Charleston Courier* reported on five vessels leaving the city for New Orleans; since each of these was newsworthy because of odd events in their voyage, they must represent only a fraction of South Carolina's re-export trade to Louisiana. That trade, which has been largely overlooked by scholars, was as important to Louisiana as the Caribbean re-export trade during the 1780s.⁴⁷ In short, the most important consequence of the Louisiana Purchase to both white and black Louisianans was not the diplomatic wrangling over their territory, but the resulting change in the colony's slave population, and the changing slave culture that accompanied these demographic shifts.

That South Carolina was Louisiana's chief source of Africans is reflected in the similarities between the ethnic composition of the trade to South Carolina and that of the re-export trade to Louisiana. Estimates on the volume of Africans imported to South Carolina between 1804 and 1807 range from 24,017, garnered from Charleston newspaper advertisements, to 47,713, from the *Slave Trade Database*, which relies on a host of documents from both sides of the Atlantic. Even with the lack of correlation in overall numbers, the sources that list region of origin and ethnicity of the human cargo indicate that slaves from west-central Africa dominate the trade to Carolina during this four-year period. Thus, even

⁴⁷ A recent solid analysis begins to rectify this historiographical gap. See Jed Handelsman Shugerman, "The Louisiana Purchase and South Carolina's Reopening of the Slave Trade in 1803," *Journal of the Early Republic* 22 (2002): 263-90.

with the virtual absence of custom house or civil records in Louisiana on this illicit re-export trade, the similar ethnic composition of Africans shipped to South Carolina and then Louisiana illustrates the reliance of planters in the latter on slavers to Carolina.⁴⁸

Both newspapers and slave-trade records illustrate the ethnic composition and breakdown of origins in the human traffic to South Carolina. Peoples from west-central Africa (48 percent), the Gold Coast (15 percent), and Sierra Leone (14 percent) predominate. Similarly, using advertisements from the *Charleston Courier*, one can see that peoples from the same regions figure prominently: slaves from west-central Africa (59 percent) and the Gold Coast (9 percent) are the most numerous. Unlike the database figures, however, slaves from Sierra Leone (1 percent) barely show up, while Windward Coast peoples (12 percent, compared to 5 percent in the database) are significant.⁴⁹ Compared to the ethnic information extracted from the baptismal registers at St. Louis Cathedral, these regional origins and ethnicities nearly mirror Louisiana's enslaved population, particularly in the dominance of Congolese slaves.

The slaves coming from South Carolina—Louisiana's primary source for Africans between 1804 and 1807—were much younger than the sources from which slaves were coming prior to that point (see Table 3.4 and Table 3.5, page 140).

⁴⁸ Numbers are from David Eltis, et al., Slave Trade Database, query= "region of disembarkation, Carolinas," time period 1803-1807. The smaller estimate, garnered from Charleston newspapers, is obtained by adding the numbers of slaves in the annual vessel list in Donnan, *Documents of the Slave Trade*, IV, 504-5, 508, 513-15, 521-22, 525.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Table 3.4 *Age Structure of Selected African Cultures Baptized at St. Louis Cathedral, 1796-1803*⁵⁰

<i>Culture</i>	<i>Avg. Age Males</i>	<i>Avg. Age Females</i>
Congo	25.47	22.70
Mandinga	28.61	24.34
Chamba	28.53	28.42
Mina	26.45	24.66
Ibo	25.88	27.60
Wolof	20.40	24.43
Pular	29.93	26.11
Nago/Yoruba	31.77	31.28
<i>All Africans</i>	26.98	24.43

Table 3.5 *Age Structure of Selected African Cultures Baptized at St. Louis Cathedral, 1804-1810*⁵¹

<i>Culture</i>	<i>Avg. Age of Males</i>	<i>Avg. Age of Females</i>
Congo	19.49	20.17
Mandinga	20.08	18.41
Ibo	24.64	17.67
Wolof	16.91	18.41
Mina	22.05	15.92
Canga	18.57	19.24
Pular	23.88	17.00
Bambara	23.53	16.60
Chamba	18.08	20.17
Makwa	22.25	18.60
<i>All Africans</i>	20.21	18.81

⁵⁰ Slave Baptism Database.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Though a higher proportion of children were being taken from Africa than during the early and mid-1700s, this drastic change in age structure must have been a result of the different slave-traders now operating in Louisiana.⁵² For the long term, the shift not only from Mande peoples to west-central Africans, but also to those west-central Africans being of younger ages was significant. With more childbearing years ahead of them, Louisiana's newly arrived Africans, and especially Congolese, would implant deep-seeded, long-term cultural influence in the colony's slave communities.

FROM "BAMBARA" TO "CONGO"

That transition is reflected clearly in the baptismal registers. In fact, the most important change signified by these sources was the shift from Mande-dominated slave culture to one dominated by Congolese peoples. Prior to this period of reinvigorated African-ness in Louisiana's enslaved population, Upper Guinea Coast peoples dominated the language and culture of black society in Louisiana. Unusual among New World slave societies, Louisiana during the French period received slaves primarily from the single location of Senegambia. Slave imports to Louisiana began in 1719, when a shipment of 450 slaves from

⁵² Of the 202 vessels involved in the Charleston trade between 1803 and 1807, 188 were American- or British-owned. See "Summary of Entries" in Donnan, *Documents of the Slave Trade*, IV, 525. For evidence of planters' dissatisfaction with Claiborne's policies on the slave trade, see Memorial to Congress by the Territorial House of Representatives, November 15, 1805, *Annals of Congress*, 8 Cong., 2 sess., pp. 30. For an explanation of the intricate methodological balancing act this requires, see David Richardson, "Slave Exports from West and West-Central Africa, 1700-1810: New Estimates of Volume and Distribution," *Journal of African History* 30 (1989): 1-22.

the Bight of Benin arrived in the fledgling colony. By 1731, Louisiana had imported 5,790 Africans. Unlike the origin of the first shipment of Africans, subsequent shipments from the French Company of the Indies originated in Senegambia. Of the Africans imported to Louisiana from 1719 to 1731, over half, 3,040, came from Senegambian slave-trading ports. The remainder consisted of 1,748 people, or one-third the period's total, from the Bight of Benin, and 294, or less than 1 percent, from West Central Africa. During the remainder of the eighteenth century, slave shipments to Louisiana slowed as the Company of the West Indies, still drawing its supply of humans from Senegambia, found it more profitable to sell its slaves to the French Caribbean islands of Saint-Domingue, Martinique, and Guadeloupe. Thus, by 1743, when another shipment of slaves from Senegambia arrived in Louisiana, it was the first such voyage in twelve years.⁵³

This process has caused significant disagreement among scholars, most notably growing out of Gwendolyn Midlo Hall's depiction of a particular Senegambian people, the Bambara, as the most important cultural force among slaves in the colony. See Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, pp. 31-35. Midlo Hall argues that "there is little doubt that the Bambara brought to Louisiana were truly ethnic Bambara." Hall's equating of "Bambara" with slave culture in Louisiana, however, has spurred a devastating backlash to her contention, and therefore to her entire argument, that the majority of Senegambians in Louisiana were "truly ethnic Bambara."

Most notably, historian Peter Caron rejects Hall's claim about the "Bambara" truly designating people of that cultural group. Second, he emphasizes that the Kingdom of Ségu, of which the Bambara were the dominant ethnic group, consolidated its power in 1721, thereby minimizing the supply of Bambara at the exact time Louisiana was receiving human cargo from the region. It is likely, given Caron's compelling assessment of events in Africa during the period, that Hall's "Bambara" consisted instead of a host of Mande speakers from the Upper Guinea Coast. Caron explains, "for Louisiana's Africans, 'Bambara' may not have referred to an ethnicity *per se* but instead to a group identification of another sort." See Caron, "Of a nation," *Slavery and Abolition*, 102, 107.

In its African usage, "Bambara" referred to three categories of slaves: those found east of the Senegambia River, where the Kingdom of Ségu was and where ethnic Bambara lived; slave soldiers, no doubt the origin of the reputation slaves identified as Bambara in Louisiana had as being fierce and indignant; and non-Muslims. It is this last category of identification that may have caused the "Bambara" identity to be almost synonymous with "Senegambian" in the

Louisiana's "charter" slave culture thus was one dominated by Mande speakers from the Upper Guinea Coast, particularly people identified as "Mandinga," "Wolof," and "Bambara." Mande thus became slaves' "grammar of culture." Akin to what T. H. Breen depicts as "charter generations" in colonial British America, and akin in particular to the original slave generations of the Chesapeake and Lowcountry that Philip Morgan analyzes, Louisiana's enslaved population during most of the eighteenth century followed a typical North American pattern. As Ira Berlin argues, however, Louisiana's path from Africanization to creolization, and back again, was unique for North America.⁵⁴

eighteenth century. The term "Bambara," while fraught with complications as an ethnic identifier in Africa and Louisiana, actually became a meaningful term in Louisiana, as it referred not only to those slaves who were, indeed, ethnic Bambara, but those who were identified as such and kept the designation. Even if Caron is correct that many non-Bambara slaves were simply identified as Bambaras by their African captors, the reason for that designation contributed to the term "Bambara" in Louisiana being as ascendant an identity among all slaves, regardless of their ethnicity, as the ethnic group itself was in Africa during the 1720s and 1730s.

Historian Thomas Ingersoll adds a wrinkle to Caron's complication of the Hall argument when he focuses on her methodology in studying the Senegambians once they were in Louisiana. Ingersoll explains, "While Hall does not limit her interest to the remote plantation region of Pointe Coupée, she focuses on it, a place that was far from the main concentration of slaves and masters in the New Orleans district...Moreover, while the Bambaras may have been a distinctive and particularly rebellious group in the earliest period, they were merely one of many tiny minorities by the end of the colonial era, and they do not figure prominently in New Orleans records." See Thomas N. Ingersoll, "The Slave Trade," *Louisiana History*, 134.

⁵⁴ On "charter generations" see T. H. Breen, "Creative Adaptations: Peoples and Cultures," in Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole, *Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University, 1984), 195-232, esp. 204-7. At the vanguard of creating what Melville Herskovits has described as "grammar of culture," the almost assuredly non-Muslim, Mande speakers—whether they were "real" Bambara or not—formed the basis for slave culture in Louisiana. For the similarities among the Mande linguistic group, see Michael Gomez, *Exchanging our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 38-39, 45-50. On the "grammar of culture," see Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (New York, 1941), 81; Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), ch. 10. For Louisiana's atypical path toward creolization, see Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 89-91, 340-50.

‘Congo’ may have referred to a handful of distinct ethnicities from west - central Africa. Nonetheless, as with the Mande language, western Bantu tied all these cultures together. Moreover, all Congolese peoples shared very similar cultural and religious traditions that they would emphasize under slavery.⁵⁵ With more Congolese than any other African people baptized at St. Louis, they dominated early-nineteenth-century slave culture just as Senegambian peoples once had during the eighteenth century. If ‘Bambara’ was synonymous with ‘slave’ in 1730s -era Louisiana, ‘Congo’ had replaced it by 1805.

Senegambian slaves remained a significant proportion of baptized slaves, and of the slave population as a whole. With 191 of the 760 baptized slaves at St. Louis between 1796 and 1803, and 296 of the 1,654 baptized slaves between 1804 and 1810, Senegambia was the second-most-common region of origin after the Congo-dominated West Central African imports. Nonetheless, an important change had occurred within this group: rather than being dominated by Bambara slaves as it had been during the 1720s and 1730s, Bambara slaves were a distinct minority of slaves from their region. Overwhelmingly, Mandinga, or Malinke, people outnumbered other Senegambians, with Wolofs remaining significant as well. The only other Senegambian culture mentioned in the parish registers were the Fulbes, identified as ‘Pular’ or ‘Poulard’ by the French. Even with this divided number, the strong similarities among these four cultures—namely, their

⁵⁵ Obviously, I agree with scholars who emphasize the similarity, rather than differences, of certain west African cultural groups; this is especially the case when one considers this question in the context of being enslaved. See John Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, who argues that ‘the degree of diversity in Africa can easily be exaggerated’(191); Gomez, *Exchanging our Country Marks*. I discuss this thoroughly in Introduction and Chapter One.

language, centrality of oral history, and even shared folktales—provided many opportunities not only to strengthen such similarities but also reinforce, to some extent, the Senegambian-dominated charter generation of Louisiana’s enslaved population.⁵⁶

Imports from the Gold Coast consisted entirely of Minas. Long part of the slave population in Louisiana, the Minas appear to have had a more significant role in slave conspiracies than their numbers in the colony would predict. The importation of Mina slaves remained constant through the period, though their share among baptized slaves dropped off in the second half of Africanization. Likewise, slaves from the Bight of Benin, which as a region contained a handful of cultures that were important to Louisiana’s slave population, dropped off precipitously after 1803. The most notable example of Benin slaves becoming less numerous after 1803 is the case of Chambas. Some of the most commonly-seen slaves at the baptismal font of St. Louis in the late 1790s, only nineteen Chambas were baptized between 1804 and 1810.

Though Americanist historians tend to search the demand side of the equation to explain changes in ethnic composition of imported slaves, Africanists remind us that often those changes were effects of events in Africa.⁵⁷ Scholars of New World slave societies must remember that Africans arrived not only with

⁵⁶ On the similarity in oral traditions, particularly in folktales that survive enslavement in Louisiana, see my chapter, “Africa in Louisiana: In Search of Bambara and Creole Identities in Literary and Statistical Sources,” in *African Historical Research: Sources and Methods* eds. Toyin Falola and Christian Jennings (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2003), 156-68.

⁵⁷ For this argument in quantitative terms, see David Eltis and Stanley Engerman, “Fluctuations in sex and age ratios in the transatlantic slave trade, 1663-1864,” *Economic History Review* 46 (1993): 308-323.

particular cultural traditions but also with experiences and historical memories of already having dealt with Europeans before arriving in the New World. The possible presence of Roman Catholic Congolese suggests that some slaves may have arrived with Catholic traditions; similarly, the presence of Hausas leads one to expect a node of Islam in the colony. Nonetheless, no evidence exists to support either suspicion.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Probably the most important such case in reference to Louisiana were the Congos, whose experience in being Catholicized by the Portuguese raise important questions for studying Africanization in Louisiana. In particular, given what historian John Thornton describes as “wide acceptance” of a syncretic Catholicism throughout the Kingdom of Kongo by 1750, is there evidence of Congolese slaves in Louisiana establishing nodes of Congo-Catholic culture? Tantalizing as the possibility is, neither direct evidence in Louisiana nor events in Angola during this period that make the presence of an existing Congo-Catholicism likely. With the virtual monopoly of the Portuguese at the Ndongo port of Luanda, slave traders from other nations, including those operating in the Charleston trade, were usually forced south and north of the Ndongo kingdom. In these northern and southern regions that were the most likely sources for Louisiana’s trans -shipped Congo slaves, Portuguese-sponsored Jesuits had not made the significant inroads that they had to the south. Nonetheless, if Thornton’s arguments are correct, it is possible that the Congos in Louisiana would have seen the prevalent practice of Catholicism as a vaguely familiar practice that they could find comfort in, and the number of Congos baptized at St. Louis Cathedral supports such a possibility. An excellent analysis of this is John K. Thornton, “I Am the Subject of the King of Congo’: African Political Ideology and the Haitian Revolution,” *Journal of World History* 4 (1993): 181-214.

Besides the specific issue of the Congos in Louisiana, the plea of Africanist historians for scholars of New World slave societies to incorporate events and processes in Africa has been answered, perhaps too well, on the issue of Islam. The arrival of many slaves who either identified themselves or were identified as members of African cultures who had become Islamicized by the 1790s raises the question about Islam in the colony’s enslaved population. Sylviane A. Diouf criticizes Gwendolyn Midlo Hall for dedicating only “twenty -five lines out of 422 pages to Islam” in *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, yet finds only two examples that can be construed as evidence of Islam in Louisiana. More work should, indeed, be done on this subject, but Diouf’s book veers toward polemics and away from convincing historical analysis. See Diouf, *African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 71, 130-31, 200, 203. Quotation from p. 203.

In addition to the Wolof, who were becoming increasingly Islamicized at the very time Wolof slaves arrive in Louisiana in the 1790s, two notable bastions of Islam in West Africa—Hausas and Nagos—are reflected in the parish registers for the first time. As with the Wolofs, Hausa and Nago culture were experiencing frequent jihads in the region. But the virtual silence in extant records on Islam suggests that Louisiana did not have the Islamic presence in its slave population that other New World slave societies such as Brazil and Cuba did. Two arguments qualify this idea: first, as with the Bambara, which appears to have been a New World appellation for non-Islamic slaves rather than only ethnic Bambara, it is likely that the Nago and Hausa slaves,

In spite of Louisiana's near-absence of Muslim slaves, and in spite of the small possibility of Catholicized Kongo slaves being present, some indigenous African religions became prominent in Louisiana. Most notable was the use of charms and the worship of amulets, two practices that could be perceived by peoples of African descent to mesh well with the icon worship of the Catholic Church. Earlier in the eighteenth century, white colonists learned of Senegambian slaves using harmful charms, or *gris-gris*, and attempted to stamp out the practice in two high-profile cases in 1743 and 1768.⁵⁹ During the period of Africanization, the judicial records lack references to such cases. In 1806, however, one case in the Baton Rouge area involved a plot by six slaves to poison their master, George de Passau. Organized by Passau's slave Edmund, the plot involved obtaining a special mixture from a free man of color, Glascoe, who was described as being "old and blind." For the poison, which was blue, "salt-like in texture," and resembled "powdered Bark," Edmund and his co-conspirators gave Glascoe some tobacco, chickens, and an unspecified amount of cash. Though it is unclear

even if truly ethnic Hausas and Nagos, were non-Muslim members of those cultures. The strict Muslim regulation of not enslaving other Muslims—universal in application throughout western Africa—would seem to prevent Muslim slaves from arriving in Louisiana during the 1790s and early 1800s. See João José Reis, *Slave Rebellion in Brazil: The Muslim Uprising of 1835 in Bahia*, trans. Arthur Brakel (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Lavtzion and Pouwels, *The History of Islam in Africa*.

The more important point, even if future research were to turn up additional examples of Islamic names—is that in Louisiana, an Islamic identity did not exist. It is likely, given the timing of events in Bahia, that events in Africa between 1800 and 1830—much of which was closed to slave importations to Louisiana—were key in the development of Islamic identities in New World slave societies.

⁵⁹ The 1768 case is described in Laura L. Porteus, "The Gri-Gri Case: A Criminal Trial in Louisiana During the Spanish Regime," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 18 (1934): 39-60; the 1743 case is described in Helen Catterall, *Judicial Cases in American Negro Slavery*, III (Washington, 1940), 417.

whether Glascoe was also a practitioner of *gris-gris*, the case caused significant alarm among the white officials investigating the case. Interestingly, the investigation was closed and no punishments were meted out when Paussau abandoned his Louisiana estate for the United States in March 1808.⁶⁰

The influx of so many Congolese, who referred to charm practice as *ouanga*, reinforced this practice among Louisiana's enslaved people of African descent. But even their traditions were perceived to pale in comparison to the more than 3,000 slaves who arrived in New Orleans from Cuba in 1809. Accompanying their owners, who were refugees from Saint-Domingue, these Haitian slaves had a cultural importance that exceeded their sheer numerical dominance. Increasing the New Orleans slave population by 40 percent, these bondpeople, most of whom were Congolese, Fon, Ewe, and Yoruba, accentuated the cultural changes already underway in the colony. Though their owners dispersed throughout the colony, most settled in and around New Orleans, which had become the epicenter for the colony's Africanization. Among all of their influences, two were particularly important: an already-established Afro-Catholicism, and long traditions of voodoo, both of which reinforced the religious syncretism that slaves in the region had forged as distinctive New World identities.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Spanish West Florida Archives, Vol. 10, November 12, 1806, to March 7, 1808, WPA Transcript, Louisiana Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, La.

⁶¹ The best source on this migration, which totaled 9,059 whites, free people of color, and slaves, is Paul Lachance, "The 1809 Immigration of Saint-Domingue Refugees to New Orleans: Reception, Integration and Impact," *Louisiana History* 29 (1988): 109-141. Because voodoo did not acquire public prominence until the 1820s, I discuss its development in Chapter 5.

GENDERED MARKETS

Another arena in which the traditions of Louisiana's two main African groups converged was in the marketplace. In both the Upper Guinea Coast and west-central Africa, women controlled the marketing of wares. In Louisiana, this was already an established practice, likely a result of the important Senegambian migrations of the 1720s and 1730s. By the 1790s, when an increasing proportion of Africans in the colony were Congolese, this practice continued to be a central feature of New Orleans life.

As a result of Sundays being reserved for slaves' independent production, church-going and marketing went hand-in-hand. Not surprisingly then, women seemed to have cornered the market on church activities as well. Though an equal proportion of enslaved men and women were baptized in New Orleans, contemporaries observed a considerable gender imbalance in church-going among all ethnoracial groups, especially among people of color. According to one white traveler during this period, "women, Negroes, and officers of the governor's staff are almost the only people who go to church."⁶² For enslaved women, this was a result of their tying together church participation with the weekly market activities that occurred after Sunday mass in a public square near the cathedral.

Reinforcing the evident practice of women attending church more than men was the very public space that women tended to occupy in the city: in close proximity to the church itself. Several sources illustrate the preponderance of enslaved women who were active in the city's vibrant, often loosely regulated,

⁶² Robin, *Voyages*, 2:72.

market activities. For example, a 1798 regulation in New Orleans restricted the locations and practices of the city's numerous market merchants. Among them were a large number of enslaved women, who are mentioned in the regulation in the common, gender-neutral terminology "slaves," but as "negresses" and "mulatresses." In particular, authorities mandated that "no negress or mulatress slave will be permitted to sell in the streets, or on the levee without a written permission from the government, and a list of her articles for sale signed by her master." Even where the market policies applied to free people of color, it distinguished them according to sex, and required that the commissioner of the market district provide the same permission that masters would for their slaves.⁶³

This process, as with any involving Africans in the New World, was based on both African traditions and New World realities. It may not be a coincidence that at the very time the market was becoming more important, that more Congolese women were entering the colony. Of all the West African cultures in Louisiana's enslaved population, none had more central social and economic roles for women than the Congolese. In west-central Africa, Congolese women controlled production in their own society, which reinforced the existing New World practice of slave women in Louisiana participating in market. The circumstances in New Orleans reinforced what was common already among Congolese and other West African peoples who dominated the colony's enslaved population: women often held positions of authority in both economic and

⁶³ Regulation of January 1, 1798, by Governor Manuel Gayoso de Lemos, "Regulations for the Government of New Orleans," in Frederic Billon, comp., *Annals of St. Louis: In its Early Days Under the French and Spanish Dominion* (St. Louis: Printed for the Author, 1866), 279.

religious life. Considered to be the protectors of morals and the purveyors of faith in West African cultures, these descendants of those native Africans were performing a dual task similar to that held by women in their native cultures. The proximity of church and market in New Orleans symbolized the deep, spiritual and economic meanings of these gendered obligations.⁶⁴

The location of these women's market activities may explain to some degree the disparity in baptism rates between enslaved men and women. Most of the city's market activities occupied the city square between St. Louis Cathedral and the Mississippi River levee. With their daily activities in this space that ostensibly were economic but also were social and cultural, the market women maintained a proximity—literally and figuratively—with the Catholic Church. That many of the active church-goers were free women of color served to strengthen this connection made by physical space, and extended that connection to the plantation districts immediately outside New Orleans.

⁶⁴ On the centrality of Bakongo women in the agricultural production in their society, and therefore their appeal as slaves, see Susan Herlin Broadhead, "Slave Wives, Free Sisters: Bakongo Women and Slavery c. 1700-1850," in Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein, eds., *Women and Slavery in Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 160-184. For female-dominated market practices throughout the Atlantic World, see David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine, *More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); Larry E. Hudson, Jr., *To Have and to Hold: Slave Work and Family Life in Antebellum South Carolina* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997); and Sidney Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989 [1974]), 214-24. The closest comparison to the New Orleans market appears to have been the Charleston market. See Robert Olwell, *Masters, Slaves, and Subjects: The Culture of Power in the South Carolina Low Country, 1740-1790* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 166-78. Olwell's analysis of enslaved women in Charleston as subject to being "subordinated within the larger patriarchal social order" (175) is particularly apt in understanding the role of women in the markets of New Orleans.

In the twinned activities of church-going and marketing, enslaved women in the colony provided all enslaved people with an institutionalized time and space that was all their own: Sunday afternoon and evening festivals, replete with African cultural traditions, in the market square. As early as the 1790s, visitors noted how the colony's slaves combined church-going, market activities, and fun. In June 1797 traveler Francis Baily noted the simultaneous secular and religious significance of Sunday to the black population of New Orleans: "Scarcely had the priest pronounced his benediction, ere the violin or the fife struck up at the door, and the lower classes of the people indulged themselves in all the gaiety and mirth of juvenile diversions."⁶⁵ Baily noted that this gaiety existed especially among blacks, who, "arrayed in their best apparel, forgetful of the toils they had endured the preceding part of the week, and let loose from the hand of their master..would meet together on the green, and spend the day in mirth and festivity."⁶⁶

The absence of gender distinctions in Baily's message indicates that on Sundays, the festivities that followed Mass and market activities were attended by both sexes. Nonetheless, there appears to have been clear distinctions between the ways in which enslaved women and men challenged the slave regime. Contrasted with the marronage, *petit* or *grand*, and men's conspiracy formulating that created massive backlashes by authorities, the subtle, almost unnoticeable efforts of enslaved women helped to preserve the regular, almost institutionalized period of

⁶⁵ Francis Baily, *Journal of a Tour in Unsettled Parts of North America in 1796 and 1797*, ed. Jack D. L. Holmes (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), 173.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

festivities on Sundays. Together, the gendered work of slaves, and the public manifestations of that work, often complemented those of the other by tweaking the slave control system to maximize the limited, but significant opportunities, for social, economic, and physical semi-autonomy.

THE BIRTH OF CONGO SQUARE

By the early 1800s, the physical space in which women marketed their wares and in which slaves of both sexes held regular festivities became dominated by the colony's recently arrived Africans. In this public place, which the French and Spanish had both called the "Place of Arms," an increasing number of native Africans congregated for the festivities and for economic and religious purposes. Benjamin Latrobe, who observed the activities of the plaza in 1819, witnessed "5 or 600 persons assembled," all of whom were clustered in individual groups with their own instruments. As Latrobe got closer, he witnessed men and women performing dances and playing music that were neither European nor American. One man sang "an uncouth song to the dancing which I suppose was in some African language," wrote a curious Latrobe, "for it was not French, and the women screamed a detestable burthen on one single note." Unbeknownst to Latrobe, he had discovered New Orleans' famed Congo Square.⁶⁷

Once the Americans took control of the colony, they attempted to re-name the plaza *La Place Publique*, emphasizing its role as a public square rather than

⁶⁷ Benjamin Henry Latrobe, *Impressions Respecting New Orleans: Diary and Sketches, 1818-1820*, ed. by Samuel Wilson, Jr. (New York, 1951), 21-25, 49-51.

former site of a French and Spanish fort. But the appropriation of that space by so many enslaved blacks intervened. The *bamboulas* and other Congo musical traditions—not to mention the most famous dance one could witness at the square, the Congo—caused both whites and blacks to begin referring to the space as “Congo Plains” or “Congo Square.” The subsequent founding of a traveling circus that took its name from the plaza’s predominant African cultural group helped to cement the appellation “Congo Square” for the duration of the nineteenth century. Hence, as evidenced by the most public identity of Louisiana slaves, the colony’s slave population had undergone a significant transition, with the once-ascendant “Bambara” identity giving way to “Congo,” which whites appear to have equated with any native African in the city.⁶⁸

That Africans now dominated the colony’s public spaces—from market squares to Congo Square—created for the first time since the 1740s a distinctly Africanized identity among enslaved people. No public square, however, was as important a space for peoples of African descent as was the Catholic Church. In New Orleans, where the imposing St. Louis Cathedral occupied the literal space between the market area and Congo Square, the church also occupied a figurative space of power that peoples of African descent exploited.

For some of them, such as Juana, serving as godparents elevated them to a position of higher status among slaves and whites alike. Just as she had done with her three godchildren in 1798, once again, this time in 1805, Juana sponsored a newly arrived African. Though this new arrival from the Wolof culture was male,

⁶⁸ Jerah Johnson, “New Orleans’s Congo Square: An Urban Setting for Early Afro-American Culture Formation,” *Louisiana History* 32 (1991): 117-57.

his name, Juan Luis, reflects the power obtained from his godmother. Moreover, with sixty-seven adult slaves from thirteen different cultures baptized on Easter Sunday, 1805, Juan Luis joined an immense kin network that, ironically during the period of Africanization, would necessarily celebrate their cultural similarities rather than their differences. For those like Juana, whose frequent godparenting indicates a spiritual fealty to Catholicism, celebrating such large and strong community bonds—both through prayer and festivities—was now imminently possible.⁶⁹

But, with the close of the transatlantic slave trade in 1808, South Carolina's profitable trans-shipment traffic to Louisiana had to come to a halt. The escapades of slave-smugglers following 1808, while notable, would not be able to continue the period of Congolization. For the remainder of slavery's history in Louisiana, the main cultural force would no longer arrive from the Old World. Nonetheless, the process had drastically altered the cultural milieu of slaves, whose communities would take generations to be completely integrated. For unsuspecting whites, who had always viewed Africans as "safe" human cargo, the dangerous result of importing so many Africans would soon become apparent. In 1811, slaves would spark a rebellion that whites, as they had in 1795, would mistakenly perceive as Saint-Domingue being replicated in Louisiana.

⁶⁹ Slave Baptism Database.

Chapter Four: Congolization Manifested: Louisiana's Tumultuous Slave Society, 1811-19

Deslondes was beheaded. Just three days after leading the largest slave revolt in American history, Charles Deslondes was executed and decapitated, his head placed on a pole as a warning for any other slave thinking of committing a similar act. With Deslondes, twenty-eight other conspirators were put to death, leaving a trail of gruesome poles along the river that mirrored the scene weeks after the 1795 plot at Pointe Coupée.¹

Like that 1795 plot that took place upriver, the 1811 German Coast Rebellion attracted significant attention by authorities who blamed the revolt on the specter of Saint-Domingue. That Deslondes was thought to be from the island—a “fact” that is now in doubt—accentuated the typical reaction that authorities had in response to slave rebellion. In addition, as in Pointe Coupée, the German Coast was predominantly black: nearly two-thirds of the district's population consisted of people of African descent. Thus any slave rebellion in the

¹ A handful of secondary sources examine the rebellion. See Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (1943; reprint, New York: International Publishers, 1963), 98-9, 249-52; James H. Dormon, “The Persistent Specter: Slave Rebellion in Territorial Louisiana,” *Louisiana History* 18 (1977): 389-404; Eugene D. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1979), 43-4; Thomas N. Ingersoll, *Mammon and Manon in Early New Orleans: The First Slave Society in the Deep South, 1718-1819* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 292-95; Junius Rodriguez, “Rebellion on the River Road: The Ideology and Influence of Louisiana's German Coast Slave Insurrection of 1811,” in John R. McKivigan and Stanley Harrold, eds., *Antislavery Violence: Sectional, Racial, and Cultural Conflict in Antebellum America* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 65-88; John Marshall Thompson, “National Newspaper and Legislative Reactions to Louisiana's Deslondes Slave Revolt of 1811,” *Louisiana History* 33 (1992): 5-29.

area might tap into that immense demographic advantage. Imbued with resistance traditions that had governed master-slave relations in Louisiana for decades, Deslondes and his rebels marched southward, leaving many contemporaries and all historians to conclude that the slaves were targeting New Orleans. According to this line of reasoning—one that I aim to dispel—the rebels wanted to free themselves and other slaves in the region by massacring any white person standing in the way of their goal. The evidence simply does not support such a conclusion.²

Obviously, with trial records that are, like those of most slave rebellions, typically cryptic, much about the rebellion is open to interpretation. In dampening the wishful thinking of historians that the 1811 rebels, like their 1795 counterparts, were on the brink of revolution à la Saint-Domingue, I emphasize in this chapter two key factors that caused the rebellion to take the shape that it did. First, the local regime of slavery in the German Coast, a region that was at the vanguard of Louisiana's sugar boom, prompted the male-heavy slave community to lash out violently against their enslavement. As I discuss in detail, this type of conspiracy was aimed more at the immediate problem of being enslaved than at a long-term dissolution of the institution that the rebels' supposed marching toward New Orleans implies.

Second, in framing the rebellion within the context of Congolization, I argue that the rebels, the uprising itself, and the possible reasons for sparking the

² For a summary of the rebellion, see "Trial for Slave Uprising," Jan. 13 -15, 1811, OASCP, #2, Book 41, St. Charles Parish Courthouse, Hahnville, La. [hereafter OASCP]. See Rodriguez, "Rebellion on the River Road," pp. 69 -70, for a discussion of Deslondes.

plot resemble those of Stono, South Carolina in 1739, which one recent study analyzes in light of that colony's forced African migration. In short, as with the 1795 rebellion, historians have perpetuated the flawed perspective of white contemporaries who imposed their reasoning on the trial, the post-rebellion rhetoric, and therefore the historical record. Examining geopolitical events in Louisiana at the time of the rebellion, as well as through the Battle of New Orleans in 1815, will underscore that officials in Louisiana felt threatened by Spanish and British machinations in the lower Mississippi Valley, and projected that fear upon their slaves. Thus, the story behind the German Coast Rebellion, and 1810s-era Louisiana in general, is not one of Saint-Domingue becoming real, but of macro-level events converging with local circumstances.³

The proximity of the rebellion to New Orleans cemented the success of alarmists in creating the belief that the German Coast rebels represented the reality of Saint-Domingue in Louisiana. With news of the revolt reaching the city the morning of January 9, hysteria ensued. Hundreds of residents fled the city, which belied the success that the Spanish, French, and Americans had had in maintaining social stability during the period of Africanization. Because of that massive influx of native Africans, white Louisianans' fears were more realistic than those expressed in response to Point Coupée: with so many slaves and free blacks in the area, a small revolt might indeed have snowballed into a massive,

³ Michael Johnson's work on the 1822 Denmark Vesey plot in Charleston buttresses my cautious approach to the trial records in this case. See Johnson, "Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators," *William and Mary Quarterly* 58 (2001): 915-76, and "Reading Evidence," *William and Mary Quarterly* 59 (2002): 193-202. On Stono, see Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974); John K. Thornton, "African Dimensions of the Stono Rebellion," *American Historical Review* 96 (1991): 1101-13.

perhaps successful slave revolution. Thus, the rhetoric that ensued, while unrealistic, nonetheless demonstrates for historians that white Louisianans appreciated the significance of southern Louisiana having a black majority.

In hindsight, white residents in New Orleans had little to fear, though their neighbors across the river had good reason to be unnerved. By the second day of the revolt, the rebels' forces continued to swell, and General Hampton needed an additional dispatch of soldiers from Baton Rouge to encircle the rebels. Though the slaves were stopped, the specter of Saint-Domingue had come as close to reality as it ever would on North American soil.⁴

Unlike the 1795 Pointe Coupée plot, however, the German Coast Rebellion sparked waves of legal repercussions that rolled out of New Orleans throughout the 1810s. Coinciding with the efforts of American officials to impose a more coercive regime upon all people of color, the rebellion galvanized support for such measures that in its absence would not have existed. Suddenly, more whites took seriously long-time territorial governor William C. C. Claiborne's arguments for limiting the intrastate slave trade. Likewise, the legal reforms of Spanish slave policies that had begun in 1806 took permanent root through new, stricter codes passed by the legislature, and through court decisions that permanently eviscerated Spanish slave law. While one must be careful not to

⁴ For the estimate, see Manuel Andry to Governor Claiborne, Jan. 11, 1811, in Clarence Edwin Carter, ed. and comp., *The Territorial Papers of the United States*, vol. 9, *The Territory of Orleans, 1803-1812* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1940), 915-6. Given other accounts, and the number of slaves executed, killed in battle, or who fled, the number of rebels was, at most, 180. Nonetheless, it does appear that as they continued to advance from plantation to plantation, more slaves joined them; this points to a less organized, and more nebulous, plot than the histories of Charles Deslondes as an inspirational leader suggest. It also points to the importance of immediate anger over the difficult grinding season as the impetus for the plot.

characterize Spanish law in too positive a light, the code that replaced it in Louisiana—based on the much stricter French *Code Noir* and American slave law—meant that the limited but significant legal autonomy won by, and granted to, slaves and free people of color during the Spanish regime was scaled back. The German Coast uprising provided the impetus for completing this legal crackdown.

WHY THE GERMAN COAST?

Geopolitical events in the lower Mississippi Valley and demographics of the German Coast reveal the context for Deslondes' successful organizing of the plot. Two political events involving Spain, the United States, and settlers in the Valley point to a possible context that Deslondes and his fellow organizers may have been trying to exploit. First, in the preceding year, settlers in Spanish West Florida had organized what became known as the West Florida Rebellion. Chafing at continued Spanish rule of the region, the increasing number of American settlers organized a political revolution and claimed independence from Spain. Eventually, that independence led to American governance of the region beginning in 1812, when Louisiana was admitted to the Union as a state. Being only fifty miles from West Florida, whites on the German Coast surely would have followed the events closely, and word of the rebellion would surely have reached the slave quarters. Though no direct evidence exists linking the German Coast conspirators with the Florida Rebellion in 1810, they may have seen that political turmoil as an opportunity to strike, much as slaves in Pointe Coupée in

1795 saw tensions between the Spanish colonial officials and planters as a fissure to exploit.⁵

Second, a similar event took place simultaneously in Mobile. Americans there were also growing uneasy with continued Spanish governance, and Governor Claiborne became so frustrated with the lack of response by the United States that he had dispatched a contingent of regular army troops to Mobile just days before the slave rebellion began. Though it is unlikely that Deslondes was aware of all the most recent developments of this issue, even a general awareness of events must have added further evidence that whites were divided, and therefore that conditions were ripe for slave rebellion. General Hampton left no doubt that he saw the slave rebellion not as an opportunistic ploy by slaves, but as a conspiracy engineered by the Spanish. Writing to Claiborne in the days after the rebellion, Hampton noted, “The plan is unquestionably of Spanish Origin, & had had an extensive Combination.” For Claiborne and other authorities, the knowledge that part of the territory’s military defenses was not present simply accentuated the usual hysteria over a slave rebellion. That Claiborne and Hampton tied the rebellion to these geo-political events reveals the uncertain relations among powers in the area that slave rebels probably hoped to exploit.⁶

⁵ The best analysis of the West Florida Rebellion is Andrew McMichael, “Reluctant Revolutionaries: The West Florida Borderlands, 1785-1810,” Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 2000.

⁶ Hampton to Claiborne, Jan. 12, 1811, *Territorial Papers*, p. 917. (Emphasis is Hampton’s.) Much of Claiborne’s correspondence about the slave rebellion also contains updates about the Mobile situation. For example, see Claiborne to Secretary of State, Jan. 12, 1811, *Letter Books*, 5:97.

Demographics also help to explain why a successful slave rebellion would have seemed possible in the German Coast parishes. The 1810 territorial census reveals that the German Coast, and St. Charles Parish in particular, had some of the largest concentrations of slaves and free people of color in the entire Orleans Territory. The German Coast, which consisted of St. Charles and St. John the Baptist Parishes, contained 3,839 slaves, who accounted for 61 percent of the district's total population. When combined with the 220 free people of color living in the region, nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of the German Coast's population was people of African descent. In St. Charles Parish, where the plot originated, the proportions of slaves and free blacks were even higher. The 2,321 people enslaved in St. Charles in 1810 composed 71 percent of the parish's total population; adding the free people of color pushes the proportion of people of African descent in the parish to 75 percent of the total. No other parish in the entire territory had as high a proportion of its population enslaved, though Pointe Coupée—not surprisingly—was a close second.⁷

Moreover, the reasons for the German Coast's heavy proportion of slaves accounted for day-to-day frustrations from the perspective of slaves. The timing of the revolt—just after the sugar harvest season—indicates that this work pattern likely played a central role in inspiring slaves to overthrow the system. Census data indicates that 38 sugar planters operated in the district, producing 3,142

⁷ Third Census of the United States, 1810, Territory of Orleans, in U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Aggregate Amount of Each Description of Persons within the United States of America, and the Territories thereof, Agreeably to Actual Enumeration Made According to the Law, in the Year 1810* (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Census Office, 1811; reprint, New York: Norman Ross Publishing, 1990).

hogsheads of sugar and 1,630 hogsheads of molasses in 1810. These figures put German Coast sugar production behind only the Orleans district in sugar production, and first among the territory's sugar cane regions in molasses production. While cotton had become "king" in upland Louisiana, sugar cane had transformed the lowland German Coast into a booming region. The backbone of that economic expansion, slaves, experienced this expansion differently, chafing under conditions during the fall and winter grinding season that violated the balance in the master-slave relationship.⁸

The sugar boom in the district not only made slavery more prevalent, but likely caused friction that provided ample sparks for the rebellion. In 1810, 91 percent of heads of households in St. Charles, and 72 percent in St. John the Baptist, owned slaves. Slavery was clearly expanding, and dominated this region. This proportion of slaves in the district had increased steadily during the sugar boom. In 1806, for example, the slave population was 58 percent of the population, meaning that the population of slaves increased 17 percent in only four years. In fact, the pace of population growth among slaves in the German Coast was so much faster than that of the white population that slaves accounted for 93 percent of the district's total growth between 1806 and 1810. With such rapid expansion, and with most of it likely involving Africans, slaves in the area were navigating a series of both internal and external disruptions.⁹

⁸ 1810 census.

⁹ The 1806 territorial census can be found in *Territorial Papers*, 9:923.

On a day-to-day basis, this upheaval meant that whites struggled to maintain control of the slave population. As the numbers of slaves surged, planters, overseers, and drivers sought to strike the delicate balance between “safe” semi -autonomy for slaves and the repressive use, or threat, of force. Some evidence indicates that the resulting friction had become palpable in the German Coast, particularly through the continued problem of runaways. With the area’s many marshes, dense woods, and bayous providing safe haven, runaways in the district found the backwaters more hospitable than the grueling working conditions on the Coast’s sugar estates. In June 1808, authorities found a free man of color, Charles Paquet, guilty of harboring runaways. Interestingly, parish officials did not levy any punishments against the two runaways, who had been traveling about in the cypress swamps of the German Coast with “a band of runaways...killing animals on the neighboring farms for food.” Likewise, appraisers wrote nonchalantly when conducting an inventory in 1810 of 12-year-old Louis, who was in jail in New Orleans for being “a habitual runaway.” As the sieve that bled away profit margins and slave discipline, slaves’ stealing themselves was a regular problem in the district. The relative indifference of authorities toward runaways, at least those who were local and not involved in any violent acts, speaks both to the regularity of the enterprise and to a possible acceptance by whites that slaves running away was not a big problem. From the perspective of slaves, however, abandoning one’s job, even for the murky

marshes behind an owner's estate, was an improvement over the rigors of sugarcane agriculture.¹⁰

Like almost every civil parish in the vicinity of New Orleans, the German Coast consisted of a heavily Africanized slave population. Slave sales and estate inventories for St. Charles and St. John the Baptist Parishes in 1810 indicate that African-born slaves were as numerically dominant in the German Coast district as they were in New Orleans. Of all slaves whose place of origin is listed, over half (56 percent) were African, and, much like New Orleans, nearly half (47 percent) of these Africans were Congolese. Following west-central Africans in descending order of frequency were Fulbes, Mandingas, Nars, Minas, and slaves from Charleston. "Africanization" had indeed been "Congolization" in the German Coast, creating a cultural and social upheaval that, in addition to the addition of a large number of Africans, may have created further tensions within the enslaved population of the German Coast that escaped the record-keeping of white authorities. As with historian John Thornton's assessment of the 1739 Stono Rebellion in South Carolina having African characteristics, the presence of Africans, and in particular, Congolese, may have been an important impetus for the uprising in the German Coast.¹¹

¹⁰ "Depositions of Runaway Slaves Found in the Cabin of Charles Paquet, Free Negro," June 1, 1808, #38, Book 38, *ibid.*

¹¹ A total of 304 slaves appear in sale and inventory records from St. Charles and St. John the Baptist Parishes in 1810. Of these, 208 were in the St. Charles records, while ninety-six appear in St. John records. Sixty-three slaves in St. Charles and eighty-six slaves from St. John did not have place of origin information. Compiled from the Original Acts of St. Charles Parish, 1810, Book 40, and Original Acts of St. John the Baptist Parish, 1810, both microfilmed, Louisiana Collection, University of Louisiana at Lafayette. On Africans in the Stono Rebellion, see Thornton, "African Dimensions."

A “back-door” method of understanding one way that internal tension among slaves may have manifested itself is to use these inventory records to examine the tasks assigned to slaves of different origin. The evidence is clear: African-born slaves almost universally worked the fields; skilled or semi-skilled jobs, such as blacksmithing, operating the sugar works, carpentry, and domestic jobs went to creoles. For example, on Augustin Meullion’s plantation in St. Charles Parish, Africans held only four of the twenty skilled or semi-skilled positions, though they comprised about half of the slaves on the plantation (at least thirty of seventy-four). Though such job distribution was not unusual in American slave societies with significant numbers of newly arrived Africans, it does reveal a potential source of tension for the German Coast’s newly arrived Africans, especially with the rigors of the grinding season fresh in their minds.¹²

From the perspective of slaves, the two factors of rapid growth and new ethnic composition converged with of the neighborhood’s large slaveholdings to

¹² “Inventory and other papers relating to the succession of Louis -Augustin Meullion,” OACSP, October 5, 1810, LC-ULL. For the differentiation in work patterns among creole and African slaves, see Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 36-38. Philip Morgan argues that “planters generally preferred to train native-born slaves for skilled work.” See Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1998), 232.

Other evidence indicates, as slave resistance scholarship would lead one to expect, that the plot’s leaders were predominantly skilled and creole. Though the trial records lack information on the defendants’ places of origin—of course, a curious omission for people so obsessed with such information—scattered information survives on the place of birth of some conspirators. At least one of the twenty-one slaves executed appears to have been African-born. Jean, owned by Mr. Arnauld, had apparently been sold to Arnauld in April 1808, and was then listed as a “native of the Congo.” See “Slave Sale,” Jean Labranche to Jean -Eléonore Arnauld, Apr. 16, 1808, OACSP. Other records of executed slaves are less clear. For example, see “A Statement of negroes Executed and killed.. belonging to William Kenner and Stephen Henderson,” Mar. 5, 1811, OACSP.

allow the new tensions in the district to ferment into rebellion, as large estates provided Deslonde and his lieutenants with large numbers of men whom they could recruit. In St. Charles, 28 percent of heads of households were planters, owning twenty or more slaves; 14 percent of household heads owned fifty or more slaves, and 2 planters owned 100 or more bondpeople. In St. John, the proportion of planters was smaller: 10.5 percent owned twenty or more slaves, 2.2 percent owned fifty or more, and no owner possessed 100 or more bondpeople.¹³

Moreover, two elements of the demographic structure in the German Coast limited such relations. First, the German Coast's slave population, as in most regions of the New World where a cash crop was quickly transforming the economy of the area, was overwhelmingly male. The 1810 census does not disaggregate the slave population according to sex, but two sources indicate the high sex ratio in the region. The 1820 census, by which time the sex ratio in the district would presumably have become more equal, shows that in St. Charles Parish, 64 percent of the slave population was male; in St. John the Baptist Parish, the proportion of males was 58 percent. Likewise, the sale and inventory records from 1810 provide a clue into the sex ratio in 1810: for the German Coast in total, 61 percent of the slaves involved in a transaction were men. Not surprisingly, the sex ratio was highest among Africans, at 72 percent, though creoles were not significantly different, at 62 percent. The proximity to New Orleans, in which the preponderance of domestic duties increased the proportion of slave women, likely

¹³ Figures based on the manuscript version of the 1810 Census, National Archives microfilm M252.

impacted the sugar-dominated districts of the German Coast. Moreover, the high proportion of males made the formation of families— a restraining factor on the development of slave rebellions—less likely.¹⁴

Second, in spite of the impressive number of large slaveholdings, the majority of owners, particularly in St. John, owned smaller slaveholdings, which would have caused prevalent inter-estate relations that also helped in the conspirators' recruiting. Deslonde himself is probably the best example, as he was owned by the Widow Labranche, hired out to Manuel Andry, and had a girlfriend who was owned by Etienne Trépagnier. Thus, Deslonde not only had friends and kin spread out across the district, but also was able to exploit whites' lack of concern in seeing him travel from estate to estate. The demographic structure of the German Coast, both in terms of the density of slaves in the population and in the number of small slaveholdings, meant that the district's slaves maintained an extensive communication and kin web that facilitated the conspiracy. This demographic foundation provided a fertile ground for Deslonde's efforts, and did so on many levels. First, the sheer numbers of slaves and relatively few whites—again, only 25 percent of the population—meant that planters like had every reason to be worried. Approaching the imbalanced racial population of Saint-Domingue on the eve of the revolution, St. Charles Parish was an ideal breeding ground for discontent.¹⁵

¹⁴ *Ibid.*; Fourth Census of the United States, 1820, State of Louisiana, U.S. Census Bureau.

¹⁵ The average slaveholding in the German Coast was high relative to most other areas of the South: the average was 18.4 slaves per owner in St. Charles, and 12.1 in St. John the Baptist. *Ibid.*

Several, consecutive weeks of harvesting, grinding, and refining the cane could easily have created a receptive atmosphere in the various slave quarters for Deslondes' recruiting. As part of the epicenter for the sugar boom in lower Louisiana, the German Coast contained a heavily pluralized slave population that had not yet been able to assimilate the multitude of recently arrived Africans. Frustrated both by the heavy work pace and internal challenges to their communities, the German Coast rebels saw their typical mode of subtle subversion and master-slave negotiation breaking down. Ironically, the process that largely created the social, cultural, and demographic circumstances slaves in the German Coast found so appalling—Congolization—also may have proved to be instrumental in recruiting. Rebellious, especially given the promise of what had happened in Haiti, seemed to be reasonable recourse to the disintegration of an old order that they had helped to create.

“THE GREATEST OF ALL HUMAN CALAMITIES”

The rebellion began the night of January 8, 1811, when slaves at Manuel Andry's plantation attacked the Andry men with axes. Charles Deslondes and other slaves at the Andry estate apparently organized the plot. There, on a plantation with eighty-six slaves, over half of whom were men, Deslondes may have found recruitment easier than on estates with more balanced sex ratios. The timing of the conspiracy—coming at the end of the long grinding season—suggests a strong correlation between the local regime of slavery and Deslondes' success in attracting fellow rebels. Even if the suspicions about Deslondes are

true—namely, that he was a native of Saint-Domingue and that he was aware of events ongoing in Haiti—it seems that the timing of the rebellion was a result of local circumstances rather than inspiration from events in Haiti.¹⁶ The records are not clear on Deslondes recruiting efforts, suggesting that perhaps he was not as central to the plot as historians have thought him to be; nevertheless, he may have found the post-grinding holiday to be ideal for visiting several estates, whipping up support for the plot. By the time the rebels surprised the Andrys, fellow conspirators on other estates were likely apprised of the initial plans. Though Manuel Andry survived the attack, his son became the first casualty of the rebellion.¹⁷

With Manuel Andry bleeding and grieving, Deslondes and his men were able to seize his store of weapons. The rebels then proceeded from the Andry estate, rendezvousing with slaves from other plantations, still under the cover of darkness. During the morning of January 9, the rebels proceeded down the river

¹⁶ Almost all studies of the rebellion point to Deslondes being inspired by events in Haiti. See especially, Ingersoll, *From Mammon to Manon*, pp. 292-95; and Rodriguez, ‘Rebellion on the River Road,’ 69-70. This assessment was made shortly after the rebellion, and perpetuated by nineteenth-century scholars. See, for example, Alcee Fortier, *A History of Louisiana*, vol. III, 78-9; Charles Gayarré, *History of Louisiana*, vol. IV, 249-50; and Francis-Xavier Martin, *History of Louisiana*, vol. II, 300-01. The most recent studies accept such a conclusion, typically citing an essay whose author claims, with no explicit evidence, that the rebels were led by ‘men who had participated in the uprising in Hayti.’ See John S. Kendall, ‘Shadow over the City,’ *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 22 (1939), 143. This is a testament to the staying power of local folklore, which constituted much of the evidence used by Martin and Fortier. Local folklore illustrates how quickly white authorities connected the German Coast uprising with Haiti, and how that rush to judgment has essentially not been examined critically since 1811. This is precisely the reason that historians of slave rebellions must heed the rousing warning by Michael P. Johnson about employing trial records regarding slave rebellions. See Johnson, ‘Denmark Vesey,’ and ‘Reading Evidence.’

¹⁷ Andry to Claiborne, Jan. 11, 1811, *Territorial Papers*.

road, killing two more white men along the way. Antoine Thomassin, evidently a local farmer, met his death under circumstances that remain unknown, likely a result of his lower socioeconomic status than Andry and the planter class. Jean-François Trépagnier, a well-known planter, was one of the few whites who did not flee, choosing instead to defend his plantation single-handedly. Though the sources are not entirely clear, it appears that Trépagnier was hacked to death by one of the rebels.¹⁸

Eventually, the slaves arrived at the estate of Bernard Bernoudy, a well-known planter in the district. To their surprise, Bernoudy and his family were gone, as word of the rebellion had begun to spread. In fact, the plot had been betrayed just as it was underway at the Andry estate. The key figure in warning Bernoudy and nearby planters that a rebel force was in the area was Bernoudy's slave Dominique. On the evening of January 8, Bernoudy had given Dominique permission to visit the slave quarters of Etienne Trépagnier's estate, perhaps to visit a relative or friend. While there Dominique learned that "a large number of rebels" planned to attack whites along the river road. Dominique first warned Trépagnier to hide in the woods behind his house in order to escape harm, then left to warn Bernoudy and other whites who lived between the two plantations.¹⁹

Dominique almost certainly learned of the rebellion from slaves in the Trépagnier quarter, who were familiar with Deslondes because of the presence of

¹⁸ Dormon, "Persistent Specter," 399. Local folklore suggests that Trépagnier, who did not flee his home and attempted to fend off the attackers on his own, was hacked to death, purportedly by one of his own house servants. See Rodriguez, "Rebellion on the River Road," 73.

¹⁹ "Depositions Regarding Those Slaves Who Acted Against the Designs of the Slave Insurrectionaries," Feb. 20. 1811, OASCP, #18, Book 41.

his wife or girlfriend in their quarter. Earlier in the evening, before Dominique arrived at the Trépagnier estate, Deslondes himself had arrived, drumming up support for the revolt, and coercing one slave to join. That slave, Augustin, initially followed the rebels but escaped, hiding from them and authorities until well after the conflagration ended.²⁰

Word of the rebels' advance traveled quickly, in part because of actions by Dominique and two other slaves. Before arriving back at his own quarters, Dominique warned the slave of a nearby white farmer to spread the news, particularly to whites. Then, once he told Bernoudy of the impending danger, the master sent him to New Orleans to warn residents there. Apparently, Dominique's message was the first to reach the city. The relatively short distance between the scenes of the revolt's first stages—about thirty-five miles from New Orleans—allowed Claiborne and other officials to organize a quick response. In dispatching an order to a militia commander in the area, the governor pleaded with him to “maintain order and discipline” on the Coast, as the citizens of New Orleans were “on the alert.” As more residents from the region between the German Coast and New Orleans streamed into the city, an increasing fear of a broad-based rebellion gripped the territorial capital. In the vicinity of the plot, warnings from two slave men almost assuredly allowed the white Labranche family to escape across the river.²¹

²⁰ The jury found Augustin innocent of contributing to the rebellion after he was found in a cane field. Given the date of the proceedings—six weeks after the revolt—Augustin was either terrified or was exploiting the situation by remaining at large for so long. See “Trial of a Runaway Slave Belonging to Etienne Trépagnier,” Feb. 25, 1811, OASCP, #20, Book 38.

²¹ Claiborne to Major St. Amand, Jan. 9, 1811, in Dunbar Rowland, ed., *Official Letter Books of W. C. C. Claiborne, 1801-1816* (Jackson: Mississippi State Department of Archives and History,

With Dominique's warning, Colonel Andry and Governor Claiborne initiated a quick military response. In the immediate vicinity of the rebels, Andry regrouped from his wounds to organize eighty militiamen who would be key to the initial weakening of the rebel forces. In addition, Claiborne prevailed upon two U. S. army units to aide Andry's men. The most important of these was a regiment of army regulars, stationed at New Orleans, and headed by General Wade Hampton. Numbering nearly 300 men, Hampton's regiment coordinated with the army troops of Major Elmer Milton at Baton Rouge. By the morning of January 10, the three units were working in tandem to defeat the uprising.²²

The next phase of the rebellion provides the strongest evidence of the African—and, in particular, Congolese—influence on the rebellion. The zenith of the rebellion came in the afternoon of January 9, when, with their ranks swelling, likely with African-born fieldhands, the rebels marched southward, in the direction of New Orleans. But New Orleans apparently was not the rebels' target, at least not in the near term. After covering fifteen miles and putting themselves two days' march from New Orleans, the rebels reached the estate of Jacques Fortier about 4 p.m. There they broke into his stores of alcohol. Though contemporary observations described the ensuing hours as being filled with "killing poultry, cooking, eating, and rioting," the rebels may have been performing a ritual common in west-central African warfare. "Military dancing," according to Thornton, "was a part of the African culture of war." Though the

1917), vol. 5, p. 94. Pierre and Francois, slaves of the Labranche brothers, betrayed the rebellion and helped their owners to safety.

²² Wade Hampton to W. C. C. Claiborne, Jan. 12, 1811, *Territorial Papers*, 9:916-17.

“rioting” and dancing may indeed been a simple reaction to imbibing Fortier’s alcohol, the rebels may also have been preparing for the battle that they knew was coming.²³

That the rebels stopped their advance for such an extended period throws into question that their ultimate goal was New Orleans. The forces appear to have been making a stand on ground some of them knew very well, foregoing the march they stole on whites earlier in the day. Perhaps the absence of whites on the abandoned plantations altered their plans, or perhaps New Orleans was never the goal in the first place. Little evidence exists regarding what the rebels did the night of January 9, but one certainty is that they remained on the Fortier estate. By the next morning, the battle that the rebellion’s leaders seem to have been expecting commenced.

Manuel Andry’s militia troop was the first to encounter the slaves, reporting that they had spotted the rebels about 4:30 a.m. on January 10. The insurrectionaries occupied a formidable position behind a large picket fence on the Fortier estate, and some were stationed behind “two strong brick buildings” that were part of Fortier’s sugar mill. This tactical arrangement at least some semblance of military organization, a skill that only the African-born rebels would have possessed. Displaying a motley assortment of weapons—axes, hoes, pistols, knives, and shotguns loaded with birdshot—the Deslondes army also displayed banners and colors that lend credence to an “African dimensions” interpretation of

²³ Manuel Andry to Governor Claiborne, Jan. 11, 1811, in Clarence Edwin Carter, ed. and comp., *The Territorial Papers of the United States*, vol. 9, *The Territory of Orleans, 1803-1812* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1940), 916; Thornton, “African Dimensions,” 1112.

the rebellion. Manuel Andry noted that the rebels had their “colors displayed” and were “full of arrogance,” which, taken from the perspective of an angry, grieving, planter, may have been disguised adulation for the surprising organization of the slaves. In that light, the comments by other white observers regarding the disorganization of the rebels may actually have been unfamiliarity with African tactical organization. Thus, what some historians have seen as evidence that Deslonde and other conspirators had participated in the military conflicts of the Haitian Revolution may actually be evidence of Africanization and Congolization.²⁴

Such an interpretation is strengthened when one considers the response of rebels to the initial assault by Colonel Andry’s militia. Shortly after the whites opened fire, the rebels recoiled, an action that Andry saw as evidence of the slaves’ weakness. In fact, Deslonde and his men may have been practicing a central tenet of central African warfare, skirmishing tactics. When writing about the Stono rebels, John Thornton concluded that they “were not revealing their rude origins when they fought in the way they did. Instead, their tactical behavior was perfectly consistent with tactics of the battlefields of Kongo. They withdrew after a brief encounter, relocated, and fought several battles over a protracted period, a pattern typical of Angola.” Though Andry’s forces killed several slaves in their assault, the leaders of the rebellion, all on horseback, evaded them by retreating into the woods. Though the process of Congolization had manifested

²⁴ Andry to Claiborne, Jan. 11, 1811, *Territorial Papers*, 9:916. Central Africans’ tactics varied considerably from those of Europeans, mainly in their prevalent use of skirmishing over protracted periods. See Thornton, “African Dimensions,” 1113.

itself in many respects, the tactics of the German Coast rebels may be the clearest indication of Louisiana's increasingly Africanized slave population.²⁵

For the rebellion, though, the retreat of the rebels marked the beginning of the end. Unable to draw the whites into the dense, marshy woods—surely, a tactically superior position for west-central Africans—Deslondes and his men were eventually encircled by the militia and two army detachments. By the morning of January 11, when Hampton's and Milton's forces arrived, the rebels had been subdued and the uprising was over. White soldiers suffered no casualties, but killed sixty-six rebels and captured sixteen. Seventeen were listed as missing, including at least ten lying dead of wounds in the interior of the swamp. On January 12, General Hampton pronounced the revolt—"the greatest of all human calamities"—over.²⁶

**"A TERRIBLE EXAMPLE TO ALL WHO WOULD DISTURB THE PUBLIC
TRANQUILITY IN THE FUTURE"**

Not surprisingly, reprisal was swift. The proximity of the revolt to New Orleans, and the conspirators' clear desire and physical progress toward marching on New Orleans, galvanized whites' angst over slave unrest like no other slave conspiracy in Louisiana's history had done. For authorities and citizens, Saint-Domingue had entered Louisiana and needed to be eradicated. Governor Claiborne made sure that the various militia commanders and judges in all the

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Hampton to Claiborne, Jan. 12, 1811, *Territorial Papers*, 9:916-17, and quoted statement in Hampton to Secretary of War William Eustis, Jan. 16, 1811, *Territorial Papers*, 9:917-19.

river parishes followed up the defeat of the rebel army with a regular display of force equal to that which ended the uprising: “Order strong Militia patrols by day and night; and cause a strict police among Slaves to be maintained.” Unlike the previous day in the city, the governor concluded, “New Orleans is in perfect safety.”²⁷

One day after General Hampton confirmed to Governor Claiborne that the “shocking insurrection” was quashed, St. Charles Parish Judge Pierre Bauchet St. Martin initiated the judicial proceedings at the estate of Jean-Noél Destrehan. Judge St. Martin charged the authorities to move quickly and with resolve, as he feared that future revolts might ensue with “a ferocious character if the chiefs and principal accomplices are not destroyed.” For St. Martin and other whites serving in the proceedings, the conspirators had regressed from creole slaves to the savage state of “chiefs”; at least in their minds, the quick -paced Africanization of the colony must have played some role in this conspiracy.²⁸

As with most trials involving slave unrest in New World slave societies, the trial at the Destrehan plantation was little more than a charade. With five planters from the area serving on the jury, depositions were taken from suspected slaves in quick order. The proceedings lasted two days, and more than forty slaves were deposed. Most accused of being “lieutenants” confessed. With so many interrogated in such a short time, however, only fragments from the depositions

²⁷ Claiborne to the Several Colonels of Regiments, and the several Parish Judges on the Coast, Jan. 10, 1811, *Letter Books*, 5:96.

²⁸ “Trial,” OASCP. Wade Hampton to Governor Claiborne, Jan. 12, 1811, *Territorial Papers*, 9:916-17.

have survived; this is particularly disappointing in reference to Charles Deslondes' testimony, for historians are left with too little information regarding his own motives.²⁹

But the motives of some slaves involved were clear. One of Colonel Andry's slaves, Jupiter, reported that he joined the rebellion in order "to kill the white." This sentiment was the most frequently mentioned motive for participating in the rebellion. Quite clearly, the rebels planned to proceed to New Orleans once they killed any whites standing in their way. The rebels' rhetoric and plan indicated an understanding that "killing the white" in New Orleans would also mean toppling the slave regime.³⁰

Though slaves in the German Coast could certainly have instigated such a revolt on their own, Charles Deslondes may have been the catalyst who made this rebellion take its final shape. The militaristic organization of the rebels—from banners, to chants, to formations—not only mirrored the organization of rebels in Saint-Domingue but also stood in stark contrast to previous slave conspiracies in Louisiana. Even if Deslondes was not an immigrant from the island, it appears that he was, at least, from the Caribbean, which of course Spanish and American officials had regarded as a "dangerous" source of slaves for several years. More important than Deslondes' origin, however, was his status as an assimilated slave, a status that gave him the tools to organize the rebellion without making whites suspicious. Deslondes may conceivably have timed the uprising with an eye

²⁹ With the unreliability of such records, as Michael Johnson explains, this shortcoming of the record may not be much of a problem anyway. See "Trial," OASCP.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

toward Haiti, though local events appear to have been considerably more important.³¹

More importantly, Deslondes possessed the classic characteristics of rebellion leaders. He was a skilled slave, being a well-known slave driver. He was multilingual. As a mulatto, Deslondes could exploit the territory's fluid ethnoracial boundaries, and because he was hired out, Deslondes also had even greater freedom to travel than did most of his fellow slaves, who appear to have had considerable leeway in that regard themselves. Moreover, with a forceful personality—something that is evident from the testimony of several slaves, both those who joined the revolt and those who did not—Deslondes possessed the charisma necessary to convince several dozen slaves to revolt.³²

At the end of the trial proceedings, St. Martin and the jury sentenced twenty-one slaves to death. Among this group were Deslondes, his main lieutenants, and slaves who had committed particularly gruesome acts of violence. The twenty-one men, “all of whom confessed and declared that they took a major part in the insurrection,” were ordered by the judge to be shot by the militia on

³¹ I did not come across any clear evidence that Deslondes planned the rebellion because of particular events in Haiti. Thomas Ingersoll notes, however, that on Jan. 8, 1811, the New Orleans newspaper *L'Ami des Lois* reported that Henri Christophe had seized control of Port-au-Prince by defeating Alexandre Pétion. Ingersoll's observation is worth noting, even without corroboration from other sources. Nonetheless, Ingersoll's contention that the newspaper article might have been the spark because there was “little or no advance planning” by Deslondes is questionable, as the trial records clearly indicate that Deslondes had been whipping up support for several days. See Thomas N. Ingersoll, *Mammon and Manon in Early New Orleans: The First Slave Society in the Deep South, 1718-1819* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 292.

³² These “classic” characteristics are described in Eugene D. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1979), esp. pp. 27-28, 44-45.

their home plantations. St. Martin evidently hoped to make as large an impression on the region's slaves as possible. Moreover, in order to set "a terrible example to all who would disturb the public tranquility in the future," St. Martin ordered that the bodies of the executed slaves be decapitated and their heads placed on poles. With seven slaves found condemned to death during the proceedings in Orleans Parish, most communities between the German Coast and New Orleans witnessed firsthand the gruesome spectacle and symbolic punishment. In fact, several months after the rebellion ended, one observer reported "a number of Negro heads" still "sticking on poles on the levee."³³

At the conclusion of the trial in St. Charles, Governor Claiborne commended Judge St. Martin for his success in rooting out the major conspirators while showing restraint with accused slaves who were not guilty. Claiborne extended that restraint himself by commuting the sentence of one of eight rebels found guilty by the trial held in Orleans Parish. But after both trials had ended, six more slaves were charged with participating in the rebellion. Explaining, "The Judge and Jury of the Parish of St. Charles will be obliged therefore to resume their Sessions," Claiborne sent the six men to Judge St. Martin on January 19. All six were apparently found guilty and hanged.³⁴

³³ Quoted in Rodriguez, "Rebellion on the River Road," 77. On April 25 and April 30, 1811, the legislature approved compensating slaveowners whose slaves had been killed or executed. Owners received \$300 per slave, payable in three annual installments through 1813. The act of April 25 also indemnified "dwelling house s" that had been burned by the rebels. See An Act providing for the payment of Slaves executed and killed..., April 25, 1811, and its supplementary act, April 30, 1811, Louisiana Territorial Legislature.

³⁴ Claiborne to Judge St. Martin, Jan. 19, 1811, *Letter Books*, p. 104. No record exists in the Original Acts of St. Charles Parish for a subsequent trial of the six slaves, but a summary of executions indicates twenty-eight slaves executed in the parish. The New Orleans six likely constituted the higher number, along with the following slave: on Feb 20. 1811, however, the last

As Claiborne's commendation of the proceedings' toughness and mercy suggests, white officials did not want to ignore those slaves who had alerted their owners of the impending threat. In the months following the insurrection Bazile, a thirty-six-year-old slave of the estate of Louis Augustin Meullion, was freed because of his heroic actions in attempting to save the home of the Meullion family, which had been "entered and pillaged" by the rebels. According to Meullion's heirs, Bazile "did alone fight the fire set to the main house of this plantation by the slaves of the recent uprising. Moreover, he, alone, prevented them from stealing many of the effects of the late Meullion." Judge St. Martin declared Bazile free on March 20, 1811.³⁵

Given the makeup of the jury, the number of executions, in light of the possible size of the rebellion, actually seems small. But Governor Claiborne had set the tone for handling the rebellion. Fearing that too severe a reaction would simply initiate further rebellions, the governor urged Judge St. Martin and other authorities to be lenient. Like his Spanish predecessors, Claiborne now understood that slave control was a balancing act between force and leniency. Writing to Jean-Nöel Destrehan, on whose plantation the main trial of rebels was held, the governor pleaded, "for the sake of humanity..it is greatly to be desired,

of the revolt's leaders, Jupiter, was hanged for his part in the insurrection. Jupiter had been in the custody of Justice of the Peace Alexandre Labranche since Feb. 7, when he was discovered hiding in the woods. Jupiter was owned by Manuel Andry. See "Slave Trial," Feb. 20, 1811, in OASCP.

³⁵ "Judicial Sale of the Estate of the Late Louis Augustin Meullion," Jan. 28, 1811, and "Manumission," Feb. 1, 1811, in OASCP. The Muellion home, given its location, was probably pillaged in the early stages of the rebellion. See *Map of St. Charles Parish, 1804-1812: Some Landowners of the Era*, comp. by Gertrude C. Taylor and Glenn R. Conrad (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, 1981), in Map Collection, Perry-Castañeda Library, University of Texas at Austin. There is no evidence of Dominique, the chief betrayer of the plot, being freed.

that the list of the guilty may not be found still greater.” Claiborne was clearly trying to moderate the conventional response to slave rebellions by handpicked, planter-dominated juries. He believed that a combination of local conditions—namely, brutality toward slaves, which seemingly increased as the sugar boom raised the profit stakes for owners—and external influences—namely, the importation of “dangerous” slaves—was to blame for the insurrection.³⁶ Though the governor did not cast his explanations in terms of “Africanization” and “Congolization,” the presence of African-born slaves had shaped the German Coast Rebellion, and would continue to agitate the evolution of Louisiana’s slave society.

AFTERSHOCKS

Once the executions were completed, citizens and officials in the territory set out to assess the extent of collusion in the revolt. The initial reactions by Manuel Andry and Governor Claiborne indicate their sense that the conspiracy was not broad-based, in spite of the number of slaves involved. Even in the midst of quashing the rebels, Andry relayed to Claiborne, “I hope we are now free from any fear of this plot, because it does not appear to be general.” Claiborne, after a week of investigations and trials, concurred with Andry’s initial assessment: “It does not appear that the late Insurrection in this vicinity was of extensive combination; but the result only of previous concert between the Slaves of a few

³⁶ W. C. C. Claiborne to Jean-Noel Destrehan, Jan. 19. 1811, *Letter Books*, 105-106.

adjoining Plantations.”³⁷ Given these statements, the number of rebels was more likely near the lower estimate of 180 than the upper estimate of 500, which if true would explain Claiborne’s relatively tempered response following the uprising.

The governor’s actions after the rebellion demonstrate the balancing act he was performing between displays of force and mercy. They also illustrate the somewhat surprising, measured reaction by a regime that had just experienced the largest slave revolt in North American history. For example, on January 24, 1811, Claiborne granted a reprieve to Theodore, a slave found guilty of conspiring with the German Coast rebels. The New Orleans City Court had sentenced Theodore to death, but then recommended to the governor that he be pardoned. Claiborne approved the recommendation, delaying Theodore’s execution three times as he investigated the slave’s situation. Finally, on April 1, he granted Theodore a permanent pardon from the charges. Claiborne’s premise was that Theodore made his “frank and ful confession, under promises of Pardon made him by three highly respectable citizens of this Territory.” With accompanying testimony from Theodore’s owner, Achilles Truard, that he knew Theodore “to have been heretofore of fair character, and a most faithful domestic,” Claiborne granted the redeemed rebel a reprieve. In death’s stead Theodore received thirty lashes and a requirement not to run away for two years; the latter sentence indicates clearly the expectation by owners that their bondpeople frequently absented themselves in lower Louisiana.³⁸

³⁷ Andry to Claiborne, Jan. 11, 1811, *Territorial Papers*, p. 916; Claiborne to Col. John Ballinger, Jan. 20, 1811, *Letter Books*, pp. 108-109.

³⁸ A brief summary of the case is in “Returns of Ordinances, Pardons, Proclamations &c issued by the Executive of the Territory of Orleans, during the year 1811,” in *Territorial Papers*, pp. 982-83.

Claiborne took an even more extraordinary step in a case involving a slave in Pointe Coupée. Pierrot had been found guilty by a jury in that parish and sentenced to death by the parish judge for “having administered poison” to his master. In spite of this frightening case, Claiborne pardoned Pierrot as well. Like his Spanish predecessors, particularly Carondelet, Claiborne was discovering that abject force in responding to slave unrest had to be used sparingly, and in tandem with policies that maintained the safety valves so important to slave control.³⁹

Not everyone agreed with Governor Claiborne, however. One editorial in a New Orleans newspaper blamed the governor himself for the rebellion. Pointing to Claiborne’s “doctrine of passive obedience and non-resistance” in the management of slaves, the editorial argued that the governor’s policy led to excessive physical mobility and personal autonomy for slaves in the territory. The New Orleans Town Council decided that quick action was needed on its own, and took aim at a problem that had long troubled many whites in the city: the prevalent practice of slaves renting and living in dwellings on their own accord, virtually independent from their masters save the money paid them as a share of their being hired out. Just days after the rebellion, the Council required the city police to inspect such dwellings on a regular basis. Noting that slaves who lived in those quarters were “far from the surveillance of their master,” the Council a few weeks later expanded the ordinance to include the “neighboring places of the

A more extensive summary can be found in Pardon, April 1, 1811, *Letter Books*, pp. 198-99, from which the quoted statement comes. Also see New Orleans City Court Records, Folder 192, in Criminal Records, Louisiana Division, New Orleans Public Library.

³⁹ “Returns of Ordinances,” *Territorial Papers*, 9:982-83.

City and the Faubourgs of New Orleans.” Whether a plantation slave or a city slave, the government was increasing its surveillance, something that Claiborne’s “doctrine” had not called for prior to the uprising.⁴⁰

Even after the immediate dust settled, residents and officials in New Orleans kept their eyes on the German Coast for more unrest. Evidently, the preponderance of Africans in the population, in combination with the tumult that influx created, caused whites to maintain their fear for several months. That fear came to fruition in December 1811, when city residents reached hysteria about a rumored uprising in the German Coast district. By Christmas Eve the entire city was so gripped with fear that Governor Claiborne dispatched the militia to patrol round-the-clock in both the city and the German Coast. Though nothing happened, and though Claiborne pronounced the rumors false the day after Christmas, the scare was a reminder of the demographic advantage people of African descent held in the greater New Orleans region.⁴¹ The following September, when a more substantial rumor gripped the city, Claiborne and other authorities responded by again sending out the militia as well as keeping news of the possible plot from the citizens.⁴²

⁴⁰ *L'Ami des Lois*, Jan. 19, 1811, quoted in Ingersoll, *From Mammon to Manon*, 293; Proceedings of the New Orleans Town Council, Jan. 10, 1811, Jan. 16, 1811, and Feb. 22, 1812, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library. This regulation likely was not enforced in the long-term, as the council passed a similar ordinance in 1817. See “An ordinance in relation to slaves...,” Oct. 15, 1817, Records of the Council, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library.

⁴¹ Claiborne to Commanders, Dec. 24, 1811, *Claiborne Letter Books*, 6:16-18; Claiborne to Paul Hamilton, Dec. 26, 1811, *ibid.*

⁴² See Ingersoll, *From Mammon to Manon*, 294, and Aptheker, *Slave Revolts*, 254.

That not all slaves in the German Coast participated in the plot—and that a few were instrumental in betraying it—likely tempered the reactions by whites, even in the face of continued tensions in New Orleans. White officials were quite curious about the slaves who betrayed the plot. In early February 1811, the territorial legislature even passed a resolution requiring the judges of the German Coast parishes to “make an enquiry for the purpose of ascertaining the number and names of the slaves who have distinguished themselves during the late insurrection by saving the life of their master or of some other white person.” Complying with the decree, Judge St. Martin convened a hearing in St. Charles two weeks later in which five owners gave accounts of the commendable actions by their slaves. Dominique, the slave of Bernard Bernoudy whose actions likely saved the lives of several whites, received considerable praise. In addition, three other male slaves were commended: Pierre and Francois, slaves of the Labranche brothers who betrayed the rebellion and helped their owners to safety, and Orestes, a slave of Jacques Charbonnet who was entrusted with getting Charbonnet’s “aged mother” to a safer location. Curiously, however, with no directive from the legislature regarding what reward these slaves ought to receive, the hearing ended with no action taken.⁴³

Claiborne pointed to two long-term changes that needed to be addressed in order to prevent such rebellions in the future. On the one hand, the territory needed a strong permanent militia. Perhaps the governor was impressed more

⁴³ “Depositions Regarding Those Slaves Who Acted Against the Designs of the Slave Insurrectionaries,” Feb. 20, 1811, OASCP. Junius Rodriguez argues that some whites initially considered “compensating those slaves who remained loyal,” but ultimately decided that such action would set a dangerous precedent. See Rodriguez, “Rebellion on the River Road,” 81.

with Andry's ability to respond so quickly to the rebellion compared to the almost belated arrival of General Hampton's troops. Second, Claiborne returned to an issue that had almost derailed his initial years as governor: the slave trade. In a series of letters and in his annual message to the legislature he urged the assembly to "interpose some check to that indiscriminate importation of slaves from the southern states," or else, Claiborne concluded, "A continuance of this traffic... may be easily anticipated." In spite of the governor's pressure, however, the legislature would not pass limitations on the trade until 1817. For most members of the legislature, even those whose plantations and lives were threatened by the German Coast uprising, slave control—not the slave trade—was what demanded attention.⁴⁴

Thus, the legislature continued to scale back the autonomy of both free and enslaved people of color, a process they had started in 1806. The transfer of the colony from Spain to France to the United States entailed a steady erosion in the special guarantees of treatment for slaves in Spanish law. In the *Digest of 1808*, the Orleans territorial legislature effectively deleted the Spanish legal tradition from the territory, adopting instead the traditions of the old French code. Though the practical application of the law was far from universal, the changing

⁴⁴ Speech Delivered by Governor Claiborne to both Houses of the Legislative Body of the Territory of Orleans, Jan. 29, 1811, *Letter Books*, 5:121-26. That neither the House response nor Legislative Council response to the governor's message mentioned taking action on the slave trade indicates the lack of interest in limiting importation. See Answer of the Legislative Council to Governor Claiborne's Speech, Jan. 29, 1811, *Letter Books*, 5:127-29, and Answer of the House of Representatives to Governor Claiborne's Speech, Jan. 29, 1811, *Letter Books*, 5:129-31. Thomas Ingersoll suggests that Claiborne's legislative allies submitted a slave importation bill following his speech, but I found no evidence of that being considered. See Ingersoll, *Mammon to Manon*, 293.

legal conditions circumscribed the autonomy of Louisiana slaves and free people of color to an extent unmatched since the first French period.⁴⁵

The *Digest of 1808* also did away with two other important provisions of Spanish slave law. First, it ended *coartación*, one's legal right of self-purchase, which had resulted in the explosion in the number of free people of color during the Spanish period. Second, new restrictions were placed on manumissions. A slave not only had to be thirty years of age or older, and have proof of good behavior for four years prior, but also owners desiring to manumit their slaves had to seek judicial permission to do so. Manumissions still occurred, but decreased significantly following the act. The result—and motivation—of this legislation was to diminish the size of the free colored population in an effort to conform to the biracial system that prevailed in the rest of the United States.⁴⁶

Nonetheless, Louisiana's slave laws were still unique compared to those in the rest of the American South. One vestige of the Spanish slave code—punishment for owners who were too harsh—remained. Louisiana, once it became a state in 1812, was the only state in the nation to provide for a court-ordered sale of slaves if owners were proven to have mistreated them. Still, the lack of suits

⁴⁵ For example, Spanish law provided slaves the right to petition the government to seek redress for inhumane treatment, but by 1808 the territorial legislature had revoked that right. For a cogent analysis, see Judith Kelleher Schafer, *Slavery, the Civil Law, and the Supreme Court of Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), 1-30.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* Also see Black Code: An Act Prescribing the rules and conduct to be observed with respect to Negroes and other Slaves in this Territory, *Acts Passed by the Territorial Legislature of Orleans*, 1806. Even after the Spanish period, self-purchase was still practiced, as nearly 200 slaves bought their freedom between 1803 and 1806.

brought against owners for such violations indicates that this unique legal characteristic of Louisiana slave society offered slaves little comfort.⁴⁷

In 1819 the Supreme Court of Louisiana took the final step toward more rigid legal control of black Louisianans by clarifying the state's unique legal definition of slaves as both persons and immovable property. Whereas prior laws and social traditions left no doubt that the state's slaves were active participants in the construction of Louisiana slave society, the Court used the *Gomez v. Bonneval* case to relegate slaves to the legal status of "passive beings." Though bondpeople were far from passive in their relations with masters, other whites, or the state, the decision nonetheless destroyed the legal agency slaves had theretofore enjoyed, particularly during the Spanish regime.⁴⁸

FREE BLACKS

As a group under siege from the American government, free blacks benefited significantly from the German Coast Rebellion. In the context of *coartación* coming to an end, participation by free men of color in subduing the rebellion helped the entire population of free blacks retain some semblance of their pre-Louisiana Purchase status. Free blacks' role repressing the rebellion helped their cause when they lobbied the federal government to get their militia units reconstituted. They were successful in this effort, thus recreating an

⁴⁷ On this issue, see Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South* (New York: Knopf Publishers, 1956), 141; Schafer, *Slavery*, 28-30.

⁴⁸ On this issue, see Schafer, *Slavery*, pp. 21-23.

institution that had been crucial to free black social mobility but that had been disbanded by the territorial legislature.⁴⁹

For whites who doubted the wisdom of having such units, the participation of free black militia in stamping out the German Coast rebellion allayed such concerns. In his flurry of correspondence commending each of the military units involved in subjugating the uprising, Governor Claiborne made clear the territory's appreciation. Writing to the white commander of the free black militia involved in subduing the rebels, Claiborne asked him to "convey to each and every member of your meritorious Corps assurances of my confidence, in their patriotism and bravery, accompanied with my best thanks for the Services they have rendered the Territory." The same day, Claiborne reported to the Secretary of State that "the free men of color..manifested the greatest zeal for the public safety." As with his Spanish predecessors, Claiborne was learning that Louisiana's tripartite racial society could work to his and white citizens' advantage.⁵⁰

In fact, whites were so struck by this development that in the first session of the state legislature in 1812, their representatives authorized the creation of a standing militia corps made up of free men of color. The requirements established for consideration reflected the continued concern over the free black population, but those should not outweigh the importance of the development. To be eligible to serve under the requisite white officer, a free man of color had to be "Creole"

⁴⁹ Rodriguez, "Rebellion on the River Road," 77 -78.

⁵⁰ Claiborne to Mr. Dubourg, Jan. 14. 1811, and Claiborne to Secretary of State, Jan. 14, 1811, *Letter Books*, 5:99-100.

and for at least two years the owner, or son of an owner, of ‘landed property’ worth \$300 or more.⁵¹

The involvement of free black militia units in quelling the German Coast uprising was the first, and lesser known, of two engagements in which they distinguished themselves. The other, the Battle of New Orleans, cemented free blacks’ position as an important militia force, which of course mitigated skepticism about free blacks in the general population of the state. On January 8, 1815, precisely four years after the German Coast Rebellion commenced, British soldiers initiated an assault on American forces just below New Orleans. Under the command of General Andrew Jackson, the American defenders consisted of a hodge-podge of regular troops, militia, and scurrilous characters. For the two free black militia units, the battle was an opportunity to once again prove their worth, and to illustrate their loyalty to the new American regime.⁵²

In the weeks leading up to the battle in St. Bernard Parish, white citizens of southern Louisiana became increasingly concerned about the British invasion. Residents in the sugar parishes west of New Orleans fretted about their region’s nonexistent defenses. But the presence of a potential internal enemy—thousands of slaves—and the knowledge of their invaders’ attempts to draw slaves from revolutionary estates during the American Revolution led whites in the Attakapas

⁵¹ An Act To organize in a Corps of Militia for the service of the State of Louisiana., Sep. 6, 1812, *Acts Passed by the First General Assembly of the Louisiana State Legislature*.

⁵² Abundant sources recount the military events of this battle, so I will not repeat their efforts here. See especially Frank L. Owsley, *Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands: The Creek War and the Battle of New Orleans, 1812-1815* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1981); Robert V. Remini, *The Battle of New Orleans* (New York: Viking Books, 1999).

district to focus on the soft underbelly of Louisiana society. Thus, most official rhetoric focused not on the military threat posed by the British, but on the stimulus the British Army might provide for slave insurrection. Tensions were so high that the governor, who had exuded calm confidence in the aftermath of the German Coast uprising, now sought preventive action that threatened the delicate balance in the ongoing tug-of-war between masters and slaves. Claiborne instructed the militia to arrest any person “whose conduct, and character, should furnish reasonable ground of suspicion, of his or their intrigues with the negroes, or being in any manner connected with the Enemy.” With such intrusions often being carried out beyond the symbolic physical boundary between masters and slaves—the door of a slave’s cabin—Claiborne’s edict, which was carried out, violated an implicit yet understood agreement between master and slave.⁵³

Two months later, the governor wrote David Rees, a well-known sugar planter in Attakapas, directly. Claiborne requested that he raise a militia of fellow slaveowners to patrol the entire Bayou Teche region, which the governor thought was being threatened by a detachment of British forces. Whether or not Rees’s militia unit encountered the “Plundering party,” the governor believed that it would prove significant “in the case of insurrection among the Negroes, whether in St. Mary, in Attakapas or Opelousas.” Claiborne hoped that the increased

⁵³ Governor Claiborne sent a widely-distributed circular to the St. Martin Parish militia commander, which explained that the British were “busily engaged in inciting our negroes to insurrection” and implored owners to search “all negro cabins and other places where Arms are most likely to be concealed.” See Circular of Governor William C. C. Claiborne to Colonel Alexander Declouet, Sep. 19, 1814, David Rees Papers, Special Collections, Howard-Tilton Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, La.

patrols and sheer number of militiamen would root out any potential slave conspiracies, thus pre-empting a repeat of the German Coast rebellion.⁵⁴

The actual deployment of British troops onto Louisiana soil shook the foundation of the burgeoning slave regime in southwestern Louisiana. Writing to Andrew Jackson, Nathaniel Kemper, a prominent member of the state legislature, pleaded with the general to allow more militia to remain in the parishes west of the city. Kemper argued that in the sugar parishes of St. Martin and St. Mary “there is scarcely white men sufficient at any time to form the necessary Patrols & Keep the Blacks in order,” which was a result of “the great number of slaves in said Parishes.” Though the 1811 uprising had energized enough white men in the German Coast District to form patrolling parties, whites in Attakapas did not have the same response; this may be the clearest indication of how Claiborne and other Louisiana officials were projecting unfounded concerns over geopolitical events onto slaves, for whites in Attakapas did not respond as if they felt threatened by the British or their slaves.⁵⁵

Further evidence of this unfounded hysteria was the consternation caused by a rumored slave conspiracy in Attakapas. David Rees’s immediate commander in the Louisiana Militia, Colonel Joshua Baker, reported to General Jackson that a

⁵⁴ Claiborne to Rees, Nov. 3, 1814, *ibid.* Also see Colonel Joshua Baker to Rees, Dec. 27, 1814, *ibid.*

⁵⁵ Kemper’s letter is quoted in Harold D. Moser, David R. Hoth, Sharon MacPherson, and John Reinbold, eds., *The Papers of Andrew Jackson* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), vol. 3, fn 4, p. 266. The 1810 census enumerated 3,132 slaves and 3,959 whites in the Attakapas district. By 1820 people of color constituted a majority in the district: there were 5,707 slaves (46.4 percent of the population); 494 free people of color (4 percent); and 6,097 whites (49.6 percent). See Third Census and Fourth Census.

slave conspiracy had been discovered in the district. Using Jacksonesque spelling and grammar, Baker wrote:

There has been a grate alarm amongst the inhabitance of Opelousas, And St Martain, owing to a rebellion amongst the neagroes of these Parishs. How far It has exstended I don't [know] that I have been correctly informed. There has been 17 [slaves] put in Jale. I belive there tryal has not yet [commenced]..sum of the Negroes has confessed the fact, And that the signal for an attack was to be the [firing] of the British Cannon there [at New Orleans].⁵⁶

Clearly, the plot was unsubstantiated, as there was no further action taken with the seventeen jailed slaves, and whites in Attakapas continued to be unimpressed with the governor's concerns over a British-induced slave conspiracy. As with the German Coast uprising in 1811, but this time with no real plot, Louisiana officialdom was reacting to geopolitical events using slave and masters as puppets.⁵⁷

Even after the battle, whites remained leery of the potential threat. In early February, Louisianans learned of the Treaty of Ghent, but that allayed few of their fears. In the weeks immediately following the battle, the British troops retreated only to the Gulf Coast, where they remained until March. In the interim, whites from areas outside New Orleans reported increased trouble with their slaves. As long as the British were within striking distance of New Orleans, Jackson refused to cease his war operations. As he waited for the final British removal and for the

⁵⁶ Joshua Baker to Jackson, Feb. 2, 1815, *Papers of Andrew Jackson*, 3:264.

⁵⁷ In spite of my spirited searching for further evidence, there appears to be no additional record of this plot. Baker's reference to a trial was either incorrect, or the trial records, if produced, no longer exist.

U. S. Senate to ratify the treaty, Jackson took special care to solidify the defenses of New Orleans.⁵⁸

To do so, Jackson needed slave labor. But the time of year—the end of the harvest and milling season for sugar-cane planters—rendered few slaves available. Jackson pressed on Governor Claiborne to help him round up enough slaves from the area to erect fortifications around New Orleans. Claiborne proposed that slaves be procured by the lure of payment, which would be one dollar per day. Jackson reeled at the expense, but Claiborne replied, explaining that planters were ‘not as ready to meet our requisitions as formerly, attributable I presume to the necessity of preparing their farms for the crop of the present year, & which have for some months been neglected.’ Claiborne also warned Jackson that any forced requisition during this important period for planters’ crops would not only be a ‘serious inconvenience,’ but also would deteriorate relations between the planters and the American government. Finally, seven years into his term as territorial governor, Claiborne had been co-opted by the planter lobby, who, with the immediate threat of the British gone, now had little use for an American general who wanted to drain their enterprises of labor at a most precious time.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Remini, *The Battle of New Orleans*, 194.

⁵⁹ See Jackson to Claiborne, Feb. 3, 1815, and Claiborne to Jackson, Feb. 3, 1815, *Papers of Andrew Jackson*, 3:266-68.

Jackson, who had praised his free black militia units for their soldiery, now turned to them as brute laborers. Regardless of their distinction in battle, Jackson and most Americans saw the men as racial inferiors. In the absence of slave labor, the militia would have to perform the work of fortifying New Orleans. While the white militia units were allowed to return to New Orleans, Jackson ordered one battalion of free men of color to Chef Menteur, an outpost east of the city that he had deemed imperative to fortify. But the officer of the battalion, Louis Daquin, reported that his men preferred to die in battle rather than be relegated to the dehumanizing labor required by Jackson. As a white man, Daquin did not appreciate fully, if at all, that such labor, on the heels of their gallantry in early January, flew in the face of everything the militia had hoped to accomplish. Should they perform the labor, they would be nothing more than glorified slaves. Not surprisingly, only seventeen out of 110 of Daquin's men showed up for the labor, an impressive display of protest that illustrates how important it was for free blacks in New Orleans to portray the image of being non-slaves; to do anything else could be dangerous to their social status.⁶⁰

Jackson's order attended, if not directly accelerated, the rate of desertion in the free black unit, headed by free black Captain Joseph Savary. The lack of

⁶⁰ Daquin to Brig. Gen. Robert McCausland, Feb. 15, 1815, in John Spencer Bassett, ed., *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson* (Washington, D. C.: Carnegie institution of Washington, 1926-35), vol. 2, pp. 171-80.

interest among free blacks in constructing the fortifications, combined with continued desertions, began to gnaw at Jackson. In early March, Jackson wrote, “The mutiny and desertion from Chef Menteur, and the refusal of capt’n Savarys corps to march out of the city agreeably to my orders, all combine to convince me of the necessity of apply[ing] a speedy corrective.” That corrective never came, as Savary intervened on behalf of his men. Savary reminded Jackson that his men had been “always zealous” and “ready to fly to any post” in their defense of the United States. Rather than concluding with reasons why Jackson ought not punish the deserters, Savary prevailed upon the general to take positive action on the free blacks’ behalf. Savary closed his petition with a call to end prejudice against free blacks, “which had always excisted in this country towards them.”⁶¹ Jackson did not respond to this petition, which surely was disappointing to Savary, but that meant the general did not follow through on his threat of a “corrective” to “desertion.”

For some slaves, the presence of the British created an opportunity for freedom. Though the arrival of Britain’s “Ethiopian” regiments —military battalions of African soldiers—did not stir slave rebellion as Louisiana whites had feared, almost 200 slaves from the vicinity of New Orleans decamped with the British. According to the terms of armistice between Jackson and the British

⁶¹ Jackson to Arbuckle, Mar. 5, 1815, in Bassett, *Correspondence*, vol. 2, p. 183; Petition, Captain Joseph Savary to Gen. Andrew Jackson, Mar. 16, 1815, *Papers of Andrew Jackson*, vol. 3, pp. 315-16.

commanders, any slave fleeing to the British had to be returned to their owners. That the slaves did not return became a subject of discord with the British commander, John Lambert. On January 20, 1815, Lambert reported to Jackson “that to my great surprise, I found on returning to my Head Quarters, that a considerable number of Slaves had assembled there under the idea of embarking with the army.” Lambert assured Jackson that “every pains has been taken to persuade them to remain peaceably at home.”⁶² Several weeks later, however, when the British finally retreated from the Gulf Coast, the slaves had still not returned.⁶³

By the early 1820s, Louisiana planters had submitted claims for 163 slaves who fled during the Battle of New Orleans. An examination of the report on these slaves reflects some unsurprising demographic details. An overwhelming majority, 134, were male. Most were in their twenties. Sixty-two had place of origin information listed, and of these, the vast majority—forty-one—were Louisiana-born. That nearly all possessed some noteworthy skill indicates once

⁶² Major General John Lambert to Jackson, Jan. 20, 1815, *Papers of Andrew Jackson*, 3:253.

⁶³ On Britain’s black West Indian troops in the New Orleans campaign, see Frank Lawrence Owsley, Jr., *Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands: The Creek War and the Battle of New Orleans, 1812-1815* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1981), 135-6. As it turned out, many of the slaves who fled southern Louisiana joined several hundred other American slaves in fleeing to Trinidad, which British abolitionists had established as a refuge for free people of color. See Robert Kent Richardson, *Moral Imperium: Afro-Caribbeans and the Transformation of British Rule, 1776-1838* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987); John McNish Weiss, *Free Black American Settlers in Trinidad, 1815-1816* (London: John Weiss, 1995).

again the greater chances that assimilated slaves had to run away, as in this case, or to revolt, as was the case in 1811.⁶⁴

TRANS-ATLANTIC TO DOMESTIC WORRIES

By the end of the decade, though much had changed, the same worries that plagued the Spanish—the importation of “dangerous” slaves —festered in the state legislature. What changed was the place of origin. Though smugglers continued to bring a trickle of Africans into the state, the overwhelming majority of forced migrants to Louisiana were African Americans from the Upper South. In January 1817 the legislature passed a law that signified the body’s acceptance that Governor Claiborne may have been correct in 1811. The act claimed that the ‘several acts which have been passed for the purpose of preventing the importation into this state..slaves or other persons..whom might be dangerous, have been deficient in execution to prevent the dangers.’ Thus, the legislature stated explicitly which actions would prevent such importation. Major violent offenses automatically precluded the possibility of slaves from another state being brought to Louisiana, as did a slave’s ‘having raised, or attempted to raise an insurrection among the slaves in any state of the Union or elsewhere.’ Discovering a bondperson’s guilt of any of these offenses after they had been brought to Louisiana would trigger a cash auction in fifteen days. The inclusion of

⁶⁴ At least twelve, and as many as seventeen, were Africans. Nine slaves were identified with the general term “African” or “Guinea,” while one each was Congolese and Bambara. Those possibly, but not certainly African-born, were five slaves from Saint-Domingue and one slave from Martinique. Information compiled from “Slave Evaluation Report,” May 1821, Historic New Orleans Collection.

two sections in the law that limited the migration of free blacks into the state illustrated the growing fear that the state's free black militia units constituted an anomaly within the free black population. In all, the 1817 law completed—at least in legal terms—the imposition of greater social control that had begun prior to 1811, but that certainly accelerated as a result of the uprising.⁶⁵

Such laws, however, belie the social freedoms that people of African descent continued to enjoy, particularly in New Orleans. Several sources indicate that the city's reputation as a socially free atmosphere for people of color continued to be well-earned, even after the German Coast revolt. One visitor noted that "Sunday is set apart for all kinds of sport that can be thought of." The young man, an heir to a plantation fortune in the Florida parishes, expressed alarm that many slaves participated in the city's sports and recreation by "Gambling fighting Dancing and [attending] Gatherings." Newspaper accounts continued to express angst over such "sports and dances," as well as the ability of slaves in the city to fish at Lake Pontchartrain without supervision by their master. Though the laws passed in response to the German Coast Rebellion signaled a definite departure from Spanish practice and Claiborne's "doctrine" of measured coercion, slaves continued to do what they had always done—maximize their semi-autonomy.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ An act supplementary to an act concerning the introduction of certain slaves from any of the states..., Jan. 29, 1817, *Acts Passed by the Sixth Session of the Louisiana State Legislature*.

⁶⁶ William Bisland to Father and Mother, May 9, 1816, Bisland Cotton Record Book, 1800-1820, Bisland Family Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, La.; Ingersoll, *Mammon to Manon*, 293.

In short, both slaves and whites continued to negotiate the master-slave relationship, both in its individual sense and in its collective sense. What the German Coast Rebellion changed was that masters were no longer hesitant to use their coercive powers, particularly at the collective level. New state laws and new city ordinances, while respecting the tradition of accommodation in Louisiana, symbolized this shift. Perhaps most illustrative was a decision by the mayor of New Orleans in 1817 to limit all “Negro dances” to one spot in the city. The square he chose, Congo Square, held the greatest significance for people of African descent, which the mayor no doubt recognized when he rendered his decision. Nonetheless, the mayor justified the policy on the basis of needing better surveillance of the city’s black population. Semi-autonomy continued, but with more white eyes cast upon it.⁶⁷

For slaves, the mayor’s new Congo Square policy was a microcosm of the changes that had occurred since January 1811. While they were far from passive, as the 1819 *Gomez* decision concluded, their lives had certainly become more constricted during the 1810s. During the next decade, as the domestic slave trade brought thousands of additional slaves to the state, Louisiana’s bondpeople would have to continue their simultaneous navigation of cultural assimilation within their own population and accommodation of the slave regime’s new policies.

⁶⁷ Henry A. Kmen, *Music in New Orleans: The Formative Years, 1791-1841* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), 227.

Chapter Five: Toward Re-Creolization: Sugar Slavery, Cotton Slavery, and the Domestic Slave Trade, 1820-31

James was forced to sail. Sold by his master in Charles County, Maryland, James was forced to board a ship to New Orleans in November 1831. Traveling with 137 other slaves from Maryland, James was but one human component of the massive expansion of sugar and cotton in Louisiana during the 1820s and 1830s. Once in New Orleans, James was purchased by John McDonough, a slaveowner in Orleans Parish who also dabbled in the intra-Louisiana slave trade between the New Orleans market and the hinterlands. Fittingly, given the preponderance of sugar planters whose need for laborers fueled the male-dominated trade to New Orleans, McDonough had made his fortune in sugar cane.¹

In addition to the obvious personal significance to James of his being sold downriver, his plight illustrates much about this era in Louisiana's evolution as a slave society. Just as thousands of Africans poured into the colony from 1791 to 1810, slaves from the Upper South dominated the migrations following that period. Though this migration would continue up to the eve of the American Civil War, the decade of the 1820s marked the a significant expansion of that trade to Louisiana, continuing a trend that started in the late 1810s. Only the slave

¹ Inward Slave Manifests, New Orleans Mayor's Office, 1831, in City Archives, New Orleans Public Library, and Slave Purchase, Nov. 19, 1831, Acts of Notary William Boswell, New Orleans Notarial Archives. On McDonough, see J. Carlyle Sitterson, *Sugar Country: The Cane Sugar Industry in the South, 1753-1950* (Lexington, 1953), 101.

insurrection led by Nat Turner in 1831 would temporarily arrest this trade. As this chapter demonstrates, even that rebellion and its reverberations in Louisiana could not halt Louisiana planters' demands for additional laborers.²

In short, this chapter illustrates that the arguments planters were having in the 1790s—how to meet their need for labor while avoiding the importation of “dangerous” slaves—persisted among politicians in the state, though African American creoles replaced Congolese, Wolofs, Chambas, and Mandingas as the subjects of discussion. Louisiana legislators grappled with the issue by passing piecemeal regulatory legislation, until finally, in 1829, they crafted the first significant milestone in slave-trade regulation since Congress closed the transatlantic trade in 1808. The main challenge facing slaves, of course, was how to build strong communities in the face of yet another period of immense forced migrations.

Some notable changes in how slaves adapted to Louisiana began prior to this period. First, the influence of the Catholic Church, which had played a central role in integrating Africans into kin networks, was on the wane. The flood of Protestant Anglo-Americans and their slaves began to overwhelm practicing Catholics; though this migration slowed after the 1810s, these transplanted Louisianans founded churches and other institutions that planted their mostly non-Catholic traditions deeply in Louisiana's soil.³ This merely accentuated the trend

² Decadal estimates for the domestic slave trade to Louisiana are discussed at length later in this chapter.

³ For a compelling analysis of the ethnic tensions among whites in Louisiana, see Sarah P. Russell, “Cultural Conflicts and Common Interests: The Making of the Sugar Planter Class in Louisiana, 1795-1853,” Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 2000.

noticed by Spanish governors at the turn of the century: the decline in church membership among the white population. Thus, although slaves and free people of color continued to see the Church as their space, the decline of whites in that space also meant that the institution's power to protect people of African descent had decreased as well.

Second, the increasingly balanced sex ratio among slaves increased opportunities to form families and have children. The Gulf Coast climate still produced diseases that plagued all residents of the state, but stable food supplies for whites and slaves alike produced a relatively healthy population when compared to earlier generations. The dramatic decline in the number of Africans slaves also reduced the number of slaves subject to diseases they had not encountered. Louisiana was far from healthy, and the rigors of enslavement, of course, had not changed, but by the 1820s Louisiana slave society was becoming more stable.⁴

There were, however, important differences within the state. The main factor in producing such delineations was the continued emergence of Louisiana's plantation frontier as a settled, developed, and in a handful of cases, enormously prosperous expanse. The more established areas of New Orleans, the agricultural districts near the city, and the older, frontier urban centers of Natchitoches and Opelousas all grew more slowly than the most rapidly expanding areas, which

⁴ Disease in Louisiana, given New Orleans' reputation as the 'yellow fever capital' of the nation, and given the persistent problem of malaria among slaves, is begging for more attention by scholars. For an overview, see Frank C. Innes, "Disease Ecologies of North America," in Kenneth F. Kiple, et al., eds. *The Cambridge World History of Human Disease* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); John Duffy, "The Impact of Malaria on the South," in Todd L. Savitt and James Harvey Young, eds., *Disease and Distinctiveness in the American South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988).

were at opposite ends of the state. The southeastern parishes where sugar predominated and rice was also grown experienced tremendous growth during the decade, mainly on the strength of the tariff-supported sugar prices. Likewise, in northeastern Louisiana, along the rich alluvial soils of Concordia and Ouachita Parishes, cheap cotton lands fed the burgeoning cotton economy of the Old Southwest. Even volatile cotton prices, which drove many cotton planters in southwestern and central Louisiana to sugar production, could not depress the economies of scale that cheap lands and immense capital could produce.

The result was that Louisiana's epicenter of agricultural production shifted away from the New Orleans area to these former hinterlands of the state; it is during the 1820s when that shift can be seen most clearly for the first time. While growth in and around New Orleans was impressive, it was not at the pace of the state average. Steadily, the city was becoming an entrepôt for the agricultural production of the interior, not just in Louisiana but also in the upriver cotton districts of Mississippi, Arkansas, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Missouri. Whether a slaveowner was engaged in cotton or sugar production, New Orleans was the center of his financial dealings.

The city was at least equally important to another trade that is the focus of this chapter. The domestic slave trade, which had supplanted the trans-atlantic traffic in 1808, accelerated in volume during the 1810s, reaching a steady size in the 1820s. Once again, the symbiotic relationship between New Orleans and its interior agricultural regions kept both areas bustling with economic expansion. As the agricultural frontier produced more goods, the demand for slaves in those

areas increased, and slave traders operating in New Orleans were able to meet that demand. Planters sold their crops—in the first part of the year for sugar cane planters, and in the late fall for cotton planters—and invested much of the proceeds in additional human labor.

Thus, most centrally, this chapter demonstrates that the differences in the local regimes of slavery between the cotton-producing north and sugar-producing south became even more pronounced. Like earlier chapters of this study, this one focuses on how macro-level changes “played out on the ground” from the perspective of slaves. In particular, by corroborating conclusions reached through three useful methodologies—historical demography, traditional social history, and legal history—this chapter demonstrates that although many changes were underway in Louisiana, and although the tumultuous period of Africanization was two decades past, slaves continued to navigate the rigors of being enslaved in similar ways. Their communities were in transition from African influence to creole and African American dominance. The four arenas in which African Louisianans had forged coping strategies since 1791—family life, the use of the courts, daily resistance, and appropriation of public space—remained central.

MORE SUGAR, MORE COTTON

In order to understand how slaves operated within those strategic arenas, the macro-level economic factors impacting slaves’ lives must be examined, in particular the dramatic population increase. Driving this explosion in population was the expansion of sugar production in the parishes of lower Louisiana. By the

early 1820s, sugar prices stabilized from their peak in the late 1810s. That spike in prices attracted significant new investment, most frequently in the form of Anglo-Americans migrating to lower Louisiana to partake in the sugar boom. Throughout the 1820s, prices averaged 6.62 cents per pound, plus the three-cent-per-pound tariff levied by the federal government. Though this average price was significantly lower than the \$11.12 cents per pound in 1820, by 1825 the industry stabilized as the rate of new planters slowed and production and prices reached equilibrium. From 1826 to 1834, Louisiana's sugar industry was in its second major growth phase, with the first such period being its original expansion during the 1790s. From a typical year of production in 1825 of 17,055 tons, the state's sugar planters nearly tripled their annual production to 50,028 tons by 1828. During the period 1826-1834, Louisiana sugar planters averaged 40,363 tons of annual production before national economic worries affected that production in the mid- and late-1830s.⁵ This steady growth convinced many cotton planters in southern Louisiana to switch their production to sugar. Such decisions had enormous consequences on slave communities, as I discuss below, for nineteenth-century sugar production in Louisiana relied extensively on young males.⁶

⁵ David O. Whitten, "Ante-bellum Sugar and Rice Plantations, Louisiana and South Carolina: A Profitability Study," (Ph.D. diss., Tulane University, 1970), 55-56; Noel Deerr, *The History of Sugar*, vol. I (London: Chapman and Hall, 1949), 250.

⁶ In 1830, with so many planters in southern Louisiana changing their production to sugar cane, a committee elected by the "inhabitants of St. Martin" set out to estimate what the average startup costs would be for a sugar plantation in the district. The total came to \$87,704.25, obviously a sizable sum in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. More telling, however, were the three most expensive categories. A would-be sugar planter could expect to pay \$25,000 for 1,250 acres of land; the rate of \$20 per acre was among the lowest in Louisiana's long-settled regions, an important factor in the Attakapas district being the only such region experiencing above-average growth in its slave population during the 1820s (87 percent, versus the state average of 64

Cheap lands, rather than steady prices, fueled the cotton boom in northern Louisiana. In the important New Orleans cotton market, the precipitous decline in prices from nearly 30 cents a pound shortly after the War of 1812, to 10 cents per pound between 1825-33, depressed the profit margins of cotton planters everywhere throughout the South. In southern Louisiana—as a rule, south of the 32 degrees latitude—planters could easily shift production from cotton to sugar. But the colder winters in north Louisiana precluded planters there from making such a switch, meaning that planters endured profit margins below 5 percent for much of the 1820s. Yet three factors—a brief spike in prices in 1825, the memory of high prices less than a decade before, and, most importantly, the availability of inexpensive lands in Louisiana’s northern plantation frontier—allowed north Louisiana cotton planters to extract enough profit to expand both the region’s cotton economy and its number of slaves. Thus, as at the turn of the century, when advancements in sugar refining and cotton ginning initiated the first simultaneous boom for south Louisiana sugar and north Louisiana cotton, slavery in 1820s-era Louisiana formed the foundation for the state’s impressive expansion.⁷

percent). One of the major differences in initial investment between a cotton-producing estate and a sugar-producing estate was the sugar works, which the committee estimated to cost approximately \$15,000. But by far, the single greatest expense was the purchase of slaves and the necessity of buying them clothes and food. For fifty slaves in 1830, the group estimated a cost of 30,000, plus \$2,500 to clothe and feed them properly for one year. Thus, aside from the obvious need to obtain good land, a sugar planter needed optimum laborers who could maximize the plantation’s profit margin immediately, the main factor in most sugar planters, whether in Louisiana or across the Atlantic World, desiring male slaves. See *Niles Weekly Register*, Dec. 11, 1830, vol. XXIX, p. 271.

⁷ Figures from Lewis Cecil Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States To 1860* (Gloucester, Mass.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1958), vol. II, 696-700.

Slaves, of course, paid the cost of the planters' good fortune. Like slaves in the Caribbean, those in Louisiana's sugar regions had considerably shorter life spans than those engaged in any other form of agricultural production. The rigors of the work, combined with the pestilence of marshy southern Louisiana, created a regional regime that was the harshest in Louisiana, perhaps even all the United States. As one overseer observed of his boss in the early 1820s, "as soon as all the cane would be up, he would put all the hands in the field..he had many sick negroes." The absolutely unforgiving work on sugar plantations between the early fall and early winter debilitated slaves physically and socially. Such difficult working conditions, especially during the grinding season, upset the delicate master-slave relationship.⁸

As previously noted, some enslaved people in certain situations found suicide their least unacceptable alternative. In 1822, the Louisiana Supreme Court heard a case that involved a group of drunken slaves engaged in *petit marronage* outside New Orleans. Led by the slave Jasmin, a group of male slaves absconded

⁸ *Lazarre v. Peytavin*, Apr. 1821, in Helen Tunnclyff Catterall, ed., *Judicial Cases Concerning American Slavery and the Negro* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968 [1926]), vol. III, *Cases from the Courts of Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana*, 467. The rigors of sugar-cane work have been well-documented by historians. Among the best, see Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), 191-201, 313-25; Manuel Moreno Fraginals, *El Ingenio: el complejo económico social cubano del azúcar* (Havana: Comision Nacional Cubana, 1964). In reference to Louisiana, see Roderick A. McDonald, *The Economy and Material Culture of Slaves: Goods and Chattels on the Sugar Plantations of Jamaica and Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993); V. Alton Moody, *Slavery on Louisiana Sugar Plantations* (n.p.: reprinted from the *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, 1924); Walter Prichard, "Routine on a Louisiana Sugar Plantation under the Slavery Regime," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 14 (1927): 168-78; John C. Rodrigue, *Reconstruction in the Cane Fields: From Slavery to Free Labor in Louisiana's Sugar Parishes, 1862-1880* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), esp. ch. 1; Sitterson, *Sugar Country*.

in a pirogue of Mr. Delery, paddling to the opposite side of the bayou, to steal liquor. After a few hours imbibing the stolen libations, the slaves reentered the pirogue and began to paddle back, but a melee ensued between them in the middle of the bayou, attracting attention from nearby whites who had missed the slaves' drinking session onshore. As the fight intensified, a nearby white, Mr. Lartigue, helped the slaves bring the pirogue to land, and ordered all of them to 'behave themselves.' One witness in the case reported that upon 'hearing this, Jasmin jumped into the river, the witness jumped after him, but was unable to save his life. Another of the negroes..also drunk, immediately endeavored to drown himself, but was prevented.'⁹ Perhaps affected by the liquor, the apparently suicidal slave saw death as better than the certain ensuing punishment.

The rigors of sugar slavery broke the spirit and bodies of many enslaved people, particularly at a time of year when slaves engaged in the production of different crops enjoyed an institutionalized slowdown in their work. Moreover, with the heavy capitalization in land, mill equipment, and humans required of sugar plantation owners, the pressure placed on sugar-region slaves during harvest and grinding was even more intense. The pressure-cooker that sugar slavery was, therefore, only intensified as the enterprise attracted more investors and, necessarily, more slaves.

Louisiana's sugar and cotton economies continued to attract new settlers to the state, though the growth in the numbers of whites between 1820-30 was largely a result of natural increase rather than migration. The 1820s was one of

⁹ *Delery v. Mornet*, Feb. 1822, in Catterall, *Judicial Cases*, 3:470.

tremendous population growth in Louisiana. Both the white and black populations witnessed double-digit percentage gains in the ten-year span, though growth in the latter was considerably larger.¹⁰

THE EXPANDING SLAVE TRADE

Whereas natural increase accounted for most of the population growth among whites, importations accounted for most of the growth among slaves. Following the close of the trans-atlantic slave trade in 1808, the domestic slave trade to the Lower Mississippi Valley increased dramatically. Historian Michael Tadman estimates that 1,159 slaves were imported into Louisiana between 1800-09, and that 20,679 were imported between 1810-19. His figures for 1820-29—a total of 16,415—suggest a tapering off from the previous decade, but in fact the 1820s continued the quickening pace of the late 1810s. Tadman’s figures contain the same inherent error as those of every other study of the domestic slave trade: the inclusion of Spanish West Florida with Louisiana during the statehood process in 1812 meant that the ‘Florida parishes’ of Louisiana were not enumerated in the

¹⁰ The 1820 census enumerated 153,407 people living in Louisiana. The white population stood at 74,987, or 48.5 percent of the population. The state had 69,064 slaves, or 44.7 percent of the total, while free people of color accounted for 10,476, or 6.8 percent of the population. By 1830, Louisiana had 89,231 whites, who constituted 41 percent of the population; 109,588 slaves, who made up 51 percent of the state’s people; and 16,710 free people of color, a number that represented nearly 8 percent of the population. Even though the population growth of whites between 1820-1830 was an impressive 19 percent, or a naturally increasing 1.9 percent per year, growth in the enslaved and free people of color segments constituted 77 percent of the 61,002 net gain in the state’s population between 1820 and 1830. The populations of slaves and of free people of color both increased approximately 60 percent during the period. With that figure resulting in a 6 percent annual increase in population, natural increase alone does not explain such quick growth.
See Third Census of the United States, Fourth Census of the United States, and Fifth Census of the United States.

1810 territorial census, yet are part of the 1820 count. Thus, using flawed census figures, Tadman and others exaggerate the rate of growth in the slave population during the 1810s, causing them to conclude that the late 1810s, rather than the 1820s, was the period of significant growth in slavery and the slave population in Louisiana.¹¹ Moreover, these scholars have also argued that the 1820s was a period of slight retrenchment in the expansion of Louisiana's slave society, when in fact slave imports during the decade continued apace from the 1810s.¹²

In addition, there existed in Louisiana an intrastate system of a slave-exporting region and slave-importing regions, much like the interregional trade from the Upper South, slave-exporting states, to the Deep South, slave-importing

¹¹ No study on Louisiana history in general, or slavery in Louisiana in particular, takes into account the inclusion of the Florida parishes in the 1820 census, and exclusion in the 1810 territorial census. Reliable census figures circa 1810 for the five Florida parishes—East Baton Rouge, Feliciana, St. Helena, St. Tammany, and Washington—do not exist, but can be crudely extrapolated based on the 1820 figures. The slave population of the five parishes in 1820 totaled 11,259, with over 9,000 of this number living in Feliciana and East Baton Rouge Parishes. Using the growth rate in Louisiana's slave population between 1810-20, which was 64 percent, one can work backwards to produce a rough estimate of the slave population in the Florida parishes in 1810; that estimate, based on the growth rate in the Florida parishes being similar to the rest of the state, is 6,740. This figure represents 19.4 percent of Louisiana's slave population in 1810 (34,660). Thus, Tadman's estimate of 20,679 slaves being imported is based on an existing population number that is 19.4 percent lower than it actually was, meaning that if one applies Tadman's methodology to the "correct," estimated figures, his estimate would be 16,667. See Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), p. 12, and Appendix I.

Examples of other slave-trade studies that use the same flawed figures are Frederic Bancroft, *Slave-Trading in the Old South* (Baltimore: J. H. Furst, 1931), ch. 18; Winfield H. Collins, *The Domestic Slave Trade of the Southern States* (New York: Broadway Publishing, 1904), 42-50. This error has been perpetuated in every generation of studies, and likely began with figures from antislavery tracts. See British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, *Slavery and the Internal Slave Trade in the United States* (1841; reprint, Detroit: Negro History Press, n.d.), 3, 9.

¹² Historians have also overstated the impact of declining cotton prices on slave importations to Louisiana during the 1820s, often as an explanation for the faulty assessment that the slave population's growth halted between 1820-30 when compared to 1810-20. For example, see Gray, *History of Agriculture*, vol. II, 696-700.

states. The subsequent demographic changes, both in New Orleans and in the importing regions of the state, throw into question one historian's characterization of the 1820s as a period of "équivoise" for African Louisianans. Obviously, the forced migration of slaves wrecked families and kin networks in one location, and presented slaves in importing regions with a similar challenge to the one faced by creole slaves during Africanization. In that sense, the 1820s was a period of replication on many levels, whether one examines the replication of hastened economic growth, or in the replication of slaves having to forge communities with thousands of new arrivals.¹³

Every parish in Louisiana contained more slaves in 1830 than in 1820, but regional variations in sex ratios and the growth in the slave population indicate which parts of the state led the slave-buying boom of the 1820s. In broad but not universal terms, the areas that had been settled the longest witnessed the smallest rates of growth, but their growth rate was impressive, as the state's slave population grew by 64 percent during the 1820s. Slave populations in parishes that experienced average or slower than average growth tended to develop more balanced sex ratios; unlike rapidly expanding areas, they relied less heavily on the male-dominated domestic slave trade. The sheer price of land, not to mention agricultural considerations such as overuse of certain terrain, made many sections of these long-inhabited regions less attractive for new investment in slave-based

¹³ See Ann Patton Malone's excellent study, *Sweet Chariot: Slave Family and Household Structure in Nineteenth-Century Louisiana* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 26. Though my analysis here throws into question Malone's conclusions that the 1820s was a relatively staid period in terms of slave buying and economic expansion, her overall argument, supported by an impressive array of records, remains convincing.

Table 5.1 *Slave Population by Parish, sorted by Region, in Louisiana, 1830*

<i>Parish</i>	<i>Slave Popul.</i>	<i>% Growth, 1820-30</i>	<i>% of Parish Pop.</i>	
			<i>1820</i>	<i>1830</i>
<i>North La.</i>				
Avoyelles	1,335	71	35	38
Catahoula	920	27	33	36
Concordia	3,619	103	68	78
Natchitoches	3,786	63	31	39
Ouachita	2,145	157	29	42
Rapides	5,329	53	58	70
<i>Southwestern La.</i>				
Attakapas	10,658	87	47	55
Pointe Coupée	5,029	39	74	85
St. Landry	4,970	26	39	39
<i>Florida Parishes</i>				
East Baton Rouge	3,348	61	40	50
Feliciana	11,027	54	56	65
St. Helena	1,359	64	27	34
St. Tammany	1,360	116	37	47
Washington	587	5	22	26
<i>River Parishes</i>				
Ascension	3,777	77	57	70
Assumption	1,881	64	32	33
Iberville	4,508	98	52	64
St. Charles	4,118	38	77	80
St. James	5,029	63	55	66
St. John the Baptist	3,493	58	57	62
West Baton Rouge	1,932	48	56	63
<i>Southeastern La.</i>				
Lafourche	3,189	229	26	39
Orleans, City	9,462	29	27	32
Orleans, Parish	12,049	59	54	45
Plaquemines	3,188	104	67	71
St. Bernard	2,519	31	73	75
<i>State Totals</i>	<i>111,506</i>	<i>64</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>51</i>

agriculture than the frontiers that had been barely touched in slavery's first century of existence in Louisiana.¹⁴

Examples of longer established areas in which the rate of growth was slower than average, and in which the sex ratio among slaves became more balanced can be found in all regions of the state. For example, slaves in Natchitoches Parish had a sex ratio of 0.98 in 1820, which increased slightly to 1.03 in 1830. The number of slaves in the parish grew by 63 percent in the ten-year period (See Table 5.1, page 211, and Table 5.2, page 216). Similarly, slaves in the Feliciana region, who witnessed a 54 percent growth rate in the 1820s, had a sex ratio of 0.96 in 1830, a decrease from 1.02 in 1820. In the southwestern portion of the state, the old County of Opelousas (in the 1830 census, St. Landry Parish), had one of the lowest growth rates at 26 percent, which coincided with its slave population sex ratio declining slightly from 1.08 to 1.07. Finally, in the oldest settled area of the state, Orleans Parish, the slave population grew at 56 percent, while the sex ratio dropped precipitously from 1.56 to 1.22. The demand for male slaves in the sugar districts immediately outside Orleans Parish finally spurred the gender equilibrium that had never existed in the parish. Even with

¹⁴ On land prices being cheaper in frontier areas, see Sarah Russell, "Ethnicity, Commerce, and Community on Lower Louisiana's Plantation Frontier, 1803-1828," *Louisiana History* (1999), 400-1. On the male-dominated trade to New Orleans, see Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 22-25; Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1974), vol. I, *The Economics of American Negro Slavery*, 38-58, and vol. II, *Evidence and Methods*, 37-53; Fogel and Engerman, "The New Orleans Slave Sample, 1804-1862," (Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, Oct. 2000).

owners in all these older parishes importing slaves via the interregional system, the cost of purchasing land limited expansion, and thereby produced a steady progression toward sex ratio equilibrium in their naturally increasing slave population.¹⁵

The explanation for such a stark decline in the number of enslaved males in Orleans Parish was plantation slavery's shifting center of gravity from the New Orleans area to western, northern, and extreme southern portions of the state. The demand for males to work in sugar production drained the parish of many males during the 1810s, many of whom had entered as a wave of African migration between 1795 and 1810. The state's hinterlands became increasingly important to the economy of New Orleans, both as a source of produce and as a market for slaves. John McDonough, a well-known Anglo American who settled in Orleans Parish during the original sugar boom, augmented his agricultural production by selling slaves, mostly males, to the bustling hinterlands. McDonough's business partnership with creole planters of the interior created a multiethnic community

¹⁵ Third and Fourth Censuses of the United States, 1820 and 1830. During the 1820s the former County of Opelousas became St. Landry Parish. In 1828, Claiborne Parish was created out of Natchitoches Parish, so my 1830 figures for Natchitoches include returns from both parishes. Likewise, in 1823 Feliciana Parish was divided into West and East Feliciana Parishes, so my figures for the Feliciana region include both. Finally, the Orleans Parish figures include Jefferson parish, which had been created out of Orleans in 1824. On parish divisions, see The Historical Records Survey, Works Progress Administration, *County-Parish Boundaries in Louisiana* (New Orleans: Louisiana State University, Department of Archives, 1939).

Michael Tadman estimates that the rate of natural increase among American slaves in the 1820s was 31.2 percent. He also concludes that Louisiana's "sugar area experienced at best a 6 percent *natural decrease*" (emphasis his) during the 1840s and 1850s. As Table 3, page 27, shows, Tadman's estimates for the subsequent decades do not hold for the 1820s. Nonetheless, all the parishes cited, with the exception of St. Landry, almost necessarily augmented their existing slave populations with purchases from the domestic slave trade. See Tadman, "The Demographic Cost of Sugar: Debates on Slave Societies and Natural Increase in the Americas," *American Historical Review* 105:5 (2000), 1549.

among whites just as the sale of African-born, or first-generation creole, slaves to the interior did for slave communities.¹⁶

The city of New Orleans, as always, offers a unique picture. The slave population in the city grew at the third-lowest rate in the state, 29 percent, which coincided with a small decline in the number of males per 100 slaves. This is not surprising, as New Orleans was becoming a major urban port with little space for large-scale agricultural operations. The most striking aspect of this metamorphosis, at least in relation to the lives of slaves, was the sex ratio among bondpeople in the city: in 1820, the sex ratio was 0.58, and in 1830 it was 0.55. What had always been an important feature of New Orleans life—the relatively low proportion of male slaves—continued through the second quarter of the nineteenth century. The predominant demand for slaves, domestic work, put a premium on young slave women.¹⁷ In fact, in 1830, the most numerous single demographic category in the city was young enslaved women between the ages of eleven and twenty-three (1,919), and the second most numerous was the category of enslaved women aged twenty-four to thirty-five (1,876). Women in these two groups outnumbered slave men in the same age group by more than a two-to-one

¹⁶ See John McDonough's business records and correspondence from the late 1820s, in Kenneth Stamp, ed., *Records of Ante-bellum Southern Plantations*, microfilm, Series H, Selections from Louisiana State Museum, John McDonough Papers, Reels 1-3. On the contours of this multi-ethnic planter society, see Russell, "Ethnicity, Commerce, and Community," *Louisiana History*.

¹⁷ The 1810 territorial census did not disaggregate according to sex, so sex ratio figures are unavailable for that year. From the 1791 census, though, one can see how the proportion of women in the slave population increased over the next thirty-four years: there were 872 slave men and 1,017 slave women enumerated in the city in 1791. See 1791 Census of New Orleans, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library. On the prevalence of domestics in the city, see Albert E. Fossier, *New Orleans: The Glamour Period, 1800-1840* (New Orleans: Pelican Publishing, 1957), 374-5.

margin, meaning that opportunities for marriage—at least with enslaved men—were limited for slave women in the city.¹⁸

This demographic phenomenon in antebellum New Orleans helped to perpetuate the racial fluidity of the colonial period. In particular, the practice that bedeviled many Spanish officials—relationships between white men and women of color—continued. Both out of demographic necessity, and as a result social institutions such as Mardi Gras balls that flew in the face of biracial conventions, enslaved and free women of color in New Orleans maintained relationships with, sometimes even married, white men. In fact, ranking just below the number of enslaved women in the city were white men between the ages of twenty and thirty-nine (3,009). The dearth of white women of these ages (1,386) helped to justify pushing the increasingly anti-free black legal provisions in the state below the surface. With nearly fifty percent more white men than white women, and nearly fifty percent more black women than black men, the social structure of New Orleans continued to be a tripartite racial society.¹⁹

¹⁸ Fourth Census, 1830. The opportunities for relationships with free men of color were also limited, as there was a similar preponderance of women in the ranks of free people of color. The sex ratio among free people of color was 0.68.

¹⁹ Figures from the Fourth Census, 1830. The overall sex ratio among whites in New Orleans was 1.47. The number of free people of color in the city was 8,018, of which 5,132 were twenty-three or younger. The consternation of whites in New Orleans over the prevalence of interracial relationships was evident in *Labbé v. Abat*, Sep. 1831, in which a white New Orleans divorcee claimed that her ex-husband ‘had more regard for [his] mulatress [girl friend] than for her.’ See Catteral, *Judicial Cases*, 3:491.

Table 5.2 *Sex Ratios among Slaves, by Parish and Region, 1820 and 1830*

<i>Parish</i>	<i>1820 Sex Ratio</i>	<i>1830 Sex Ratio</i>
<i>Northern La.</i>		
Avoyelles	1.17	1.03
Catahoula	1.09	1.00
Concordia	1.13	1.21
Natchitoches	0.98	1.03
Ouachita	1.00	1.03
Rapides	1.09	1.06
<i>Southwestern La.</i>		
Attakapas	1.16	1.20
Pointe Coupée	1.19	1.35
St. Landry	1.08	1.07
<i>Florida Parishes</i>		
East Baton Rouge	1.07	1.12
Feliciana	1.02	0.96
St. Helena	1.01	0.94
St. Tammany	1.14	1.53
Washington	1.19	0.96
<i>River Parishes</i>		
Ascension	1.18	1.19
Assumption	1.08	1.26
Iberville	1.23	1.21
St. Charles	1.61	1.86
St. James	1.34	1.35
St. John the Baptist	1.38	1.54
West Baton Rouge	1.29	1.25
<i>Southeastern La.</i>		
Lafourche	1.27	1.16
Orleans, City	0.58	0.55
Orleans, Parish	1.56	1.22
Plaquemines	1.26	1.41
St. Bernard	1.62	1.78
<i>State Totals</i>	<i>1.13</i>	<i>1.12</i>

Slaves in at least one civil parish in every region of the state experienced this replication phenomenon. Bondpeople in the German Coast, for example, saw dramatic increases not only in the number of slaves but also in the sex ratio of the slave population (see Tables 5.1 and 5.2). Undoubtedly, planters in the German Coast bought many of the male slaves who had been living in Orleans Parish when the 1820 census was taken. In St. Charles Parish, whose slaves experienced a 38 percent rate of growth during the decade, the sex ratio among slaves increased from 1.61 to 1.86. In St. John the Baptist Parish, where slaves navigated a 58 percent jump in their numbers, a similar spike in the sex ratio occurred, from 1.38 in 1820 to 1.54 in 1830. The proximity of the German Coast to the city made purchasing male slaves easy, as seven of every ten net slaves gained in the German Coast during the 1820s were male.²⁰

Statistics from non-sugar areas show a relatively balanced sex ratio among slaves, and therefore corroborate the slave-trade records that indicate the sex-selectivity of the trade to sugar regions. Cotton districts experienced significant growth in their slave populations, in fact, some of them the highest growth rates in the entire state. Unlike sugar estates, however, cotton plantations maintained a relative balance in the number of male and female slaves, which was a result of two factors: a lack of sex-specific demand among most cotton planters, and the success of sugar planters in buying male slaves, which left the domestic slave

²⁰ Calculations from populations figures in Third and Fourth Censuses of the United States, 1820 and 1830.

trade market in New Orleans largely balanced. Slaves in Rapides Parish, a predominantly cotton-producing region with pockets of river-bottom, sugar-producing estates, saw a decline in their sex ratio, from 1.09 in 1820 to 1.06 in 1830. This decrease occurred in spite of a 53 percent jump in the number of bondpeople in the parish.²¹

Likewise, the Attakapas region, with an 87 percent increase in its slave population, saw its sex ratio among slaves remain relatively stable (see Table 5.2). Attakapas remained Louisiana's most diversified agricultural economy, with the major cash crops of sugar and cotton being augmented by significant production in corn and livestock. Like the previously unsettled cotton areas of northern Louisiana, the Attakapas region contained areas of thin settlement, largely a result of the immense Atchafalaya Swamp. With the promise that sugar estates even adjacent to the swamp could produce significant profit, the once-remote corners of Attakapas became flooded with sugar cane planters.²²

Nonetheless, two examples offer competing images of what life was like for slaves in Attakapas. On the Petit Anse Plantation in the southern portion of Attakapas, slaves enjoyed a relatively stable family life. Though the plantation had been founded in 1818, meaning that the slave community was not as densely connected through marriages and affinal relationships as stable upper southern communities, the relative balance of men and women on the plantation created an

²¹ Ibid.

²² Table 2, page 20. Evidence for sugar estates gravitating toward the interior marshes can be found in Glenn R. Conrad, *The Attakapas Domesday Book: Land Grants, Claims, and Confirmations in the Attakapas District, 1764-1826* (Lafayette, La.: Center for Louisiana Studies, 1990).

intricate web of kin relations by the 1840s and 1850s. The apparent production of salt on the plantation, which augmented its main enterprise of sugar cane, created a microcosm of the region's diversified economy. For slaves on Petit Anse, all of the social and cultural advantages that attend such demographic structure, were a result of this diversification, as well as the decisions of their owners to maintain a gender equilibrium on the estate.²³

At the opposite end of Attakapas, slaves at Tiger Island Plantation suffered the much worse fate of slaves of masters who failed to diversify. Located in the heart of Louisiana sugar production on the Atchafalaya River, the plantation produced only sugar. Its slave force was typical of such estates: with 70 percent more men than women, slaves at Tiger Island had far fewer opportunities to establish families than those at Petit Anse. In fact, the owner of Tiger Island never relaxed his demand for male slaves, so the slave community there never underwent the typical period of demographic maturity whereby a sex balance among slaves allowed nuclear families to become the norm and large extended kin networks to develop. The contrast between slaves' prospects at Petit Anse and Tiger Island illustrate the impact of masters' economic decisions on the lives of the enslaved.²⁴

²³ Petit Anse Plantation was established in 1818. In 1826, 17 male slaves and 12 female slaves lived on the plantation; during the 1830s, the sex ratio became more even. In 1839, for example, 35 males and 36 females lived and worked on the estate. See Malone, *Sweet Chariot*, 138-49.

²⁴ Tiger Island Plantation was founded in 1842, which is after the ending date of this chapter and study. Nonetheless, I have decided to include it in contrast to Petit Anse, as its rich slave registers provide that often elusive comparison of slave family life in a single agricultural district. In 1842, 67 male slaves and 39 female slaves lived and worked on the estate. See Malone, *Sweet Chariot*, 150-165.

Newer slave communities developed differently throughout the state, depending on their location in sugar-producing regions or cotton-producing regions. For example, the northeast Louisiana cotton district of Concordia Parish (across the river from Natchez) had 843 whites and 1,787 slaves in 1820 (68 percent slave). But the slave population grew tremendously during the next decade. Even though the white population grew at the robust rate of 22 percent to 1,234 by 1830, the slave population exploded by 102 percent to 3,619, producing a 78 percent slave majority in the parish. The smaller jump in sex ratio in Concordia, as compared to the German Coast, indicates the prevalence of cotton in the district: whereas there were 113 males for every 100 females in 1820, the proportion increased to 116 male slaves per 100 females by 1830.²⁵

Compared to slaves in the sugar enclave of Louisiana, slaves in Concordia had more opportunities to form families and have children. Though the cotton business was booming, many factors that debilitated family life in the sugar region were virtually nonexistent in Concordia and similar upland parishes. In fact, the seven parishes of northern Louisiana, almost all of which relied on cotton, had the highest rates of natural increase among slaves in Louisiana during the 1820s (see Table 5.3, page 221).²⁶ Though the domestic slave trade was essential to meeting the demand for cotton expansion, that trade to the cotton districts of Louisiana was not sex-selective.

²⁵ Compiled from Third and Fourth Census.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Table 5.3 *Rates of Natural Increase among Slaves in selected parishes, 1820-30*

<i>Parish</i>	<i>Net increase in slave pop. 0-9 yrs. (M/F)</i>	<i>Decadal rate of increase</i>
<i>North La.</i>		
Concordia	261/241	13.9%
Ouachita	197/234	20.0%
<i>Southwestern La.</i>		
Pointe Coupée	133/215	6.9%
St. Landry	169/165	6.7%
<i>Florida Parishes</i>		
Feliciana	765/841	14.6%
St. Tammany	57/75	9.7%
<i>River Parishes</i>		
Iberville	272/265	11.9%
St. Charles	89/107	4.8%
<i>Southeastern La.</i>		
Lafourche	102/133	7.4%
Orleans, Parish	279/391	5.6%

Though the sunup-to-sundown gang labor system employed on cotton estates taxed the physical ability of even the strongest slaves, it provided more opportunities for independent time on a regular basis than did the rigorous, literally fatal grinding period in the sugar regions. Having most Sundays off throughout the year meant that slaves in northern Louisiana could maintain relationships with friends and family that benefited from regular visitation and contact. Slaves in these areas could also maintain the internal slave economy in ways that slaves toiling on sugar estates could not do between October and January.²⁷ Most significantly, as the natural increase among slaves in these

²⁷ On this issue, see Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (1974; reprint, Boston: Vintage Books, 1976), 309-24. For a thorough comparison of slave labor patterns in rice and tobacco production, see Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the*

parishes indicates, the labor system and patterns of north Louisiana cotton plantations produced a comparatively older population, more children, and thus a demographically and socially more stable slave community.

LOSING REDRESS

But in the sugar enclave, where forced migration, rather than natural increase, fueled the growth in slaves, little social stability—and certainly no demographic maturity—existed. These structural facets of the African Louisianan population exacerbated the tensions created by the arduous sugar regimen. The result was turmoil. Akin to the era of Africanization, when officialdom, citizens, and slaves all scrambled to navigate the upheaval surrounding them, the 1820s, particularly in the local sugar regimes, was one of social upheaval. Assessing how slaves negotiated that clamor—even with the deafening silence of their voices in the historical record—reveals much about both slaves and slavery in Louisiana. Legal sources provide the clearest surviving record of the tension between slaves and the slave regime. They indicate that slaves relied on the traditions of earlier generations and readily employed the legal system to address their treatment. Of the 237 Louisiana Supreme Court cases involving slaves between 1818-1833, approximately one-third involved questions of emancipation. Almost as numerous were cases involving the issue of warranties covering purchased slaves. The remaining cases centered on a host of issues ranging from debts to theft by slaves,

Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 179-203.

including a substantial proportion that arose from acts of violence, sometimes by slaves but most often by whites. In short, legal records provide periodic glimpses at the upheaval that the domestic slave trade created in all aspects of daily life.²⁸

Manumission suits offer an important insight into how that trade, and how sugar production itself, undermined the daily give-and-take of the master-slave relationship. Slaves brought twelve of the sixteen sampled cases despite the fact that Louisiana law prevented slaves from filing suit or testifying in legal proceedings, because freedom suits were the lone exception to this rule. In one case, a free woman of color filed suit on behalf of her daughter. Dorothee sued on the grounds that her enslaved daughter's mistress was not abiding the conditions set forth in her own will. Not only had Ms. Coquillon decreed in her will that Dorothee's daughter would be set free at age twenty-one, but she also declared "that the child be educated in such a manner as may enable her to earn her livelihood when free." Coquillon's daughter continued, however, to hold Dorothee's daughter in service and denied her an education, so Dorothee asked that she still "be declared free at twenty-one, and in the mean time [be] hired out by the sheriff." Affirming the 1817 Black Code, both the parish and state supreme court dismissed the suit on the grounds that slaves could not use the courts as

²⁸ The total number of cases argued before the state supreme court is from Judith K. Schafer's excellent *Slavery, the Civil Law, and the Supreme Court of Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1994), Table 1, pp. 14-15. Aside from Schafer's important contribution to the literature on Louisiana slavery and the legal history of slavery in the United States, her generous indexing of previously uncited court cases is invaluable (see Schafer, *Slavery and the Civil Law*, Bibliography, pp. 305-353).

I sampled 44 of these 237 cases, all of which can be found in *Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the Supreme Court of Louisiana and the Superior Court of the Territory of Orleans* (St. Paul, Minn.: West Publishers, 1913 [1818-1834]), Books 1-11 [hereafter *Louisiana Reports*].

“relief for ill -treatment.” Given all that was stake for Dorothee and her daughter, the attempt to risk their status as a free woman and a favored slave, respectively, illustrates the perpetuation of the legal resistance tradition among African Louisianans.²⁹

In all these cases, the Court placed an inordinate burden of proof on slaves, ruling in their favor in only three of the sixteen manumission suits. The expansion of slavery and the budding, post-1811 consensus among whites that blackness must be equated with slavery converged to make the court hesitant to enlarge the number of free people of color. In the most important test case on this issue, the Court revealed its predisposed inclinations, concluding that “emancipated slaves, in a free country like ours, are not *exactly what we want to make our agriculture flourish.*”³⁰ As with the slaves who petitioned Governor Carondelet during the 1790s, there was a point at which even the most liberal applications of the law did not offset early-nineteenth-century legal thought toward slaves being property.

Neither state law nor the Court’s decision in the 1829 *Dorothee v. Coquillon* case prevented D. K. Markham, a public prosecutor in the sugar region of southern Louisiana, from suing a planter, John Close, for mistreating one of his slaves. Testimony indicated that the slave, Augustin, was beaten so severely that

²⁹ *Dorothee v. Coquillon et al.*, Jan. 1829, in Catterall, *Judicial Cases*, 3:485. The Black Code of 1817 precluded slaves from suing for redress of mistreatment.

³⁰ Quotation from *Marie, a Slave, v. Avart’s Heirs*, Jan. 1821, *Louisiana Reports*, Book 8 (emphasis in original). The 1829 *Pilie v. Lalande et al.* case established that the Court ought to assume that blacks were slaves, and that mulattoes were free people. See *Louisiana Reports*, Book 5. Also see *Moosa v. Allain*, Dec. 1825, in *Louisiana Reports*, Book 4, 99-102; and *Julien v. Langlish*, Jan. 1821, in *Louisiana Reports*, Book 3, 206-21.

he “was obliged to lie on his belly, being unable to sit or lie in any other position.” Evidently, Augustin had run away to Mississippi for several weeks, probably to his former home. The district court declared that the slave should be sold, and that Close could not repurchase Augustin, given his refusal “to purge himself, on oath, of the charge of cruel treatment.” When the case reached the state supreme court, the justices chafed at Close’s treatment, and declared Markham’s actions to be “actuated by feelings which we cannot but respect.” Still, the Court reversed the lower court’s decision, based on Markham’s case being a civil suit to redress a criminal action. The Court’s ultimate justification, however—that future interventions by petitioners such as Markham might “be the promptings of envy, malice, and all uncharitableness”—indicates its clear desire to protect private property rights, even in cases of exceptional brutality.³¹

These sixteen cases also signify the shift Louisiana slaves had undergone the preceding fifteen years from African and Caribbean migrants to African American migrants. The cases from the early 1820s, most of which involved slaves petitioning for their freedom on the grounds of convoluted migratory patterns between Haiti, Cuba, and Louisiana, gave way to cases by the late 1820s that were more likely to involve similarly convoluted migratory patterns between slave states and free states within the boundaries of the United States. Given the increasingly hostile attitude of the Louisiana Supreme Court to emancipation

³¹ *Markham v. Close*, Sep. 1831, in Catterall, *Judicial Cases*, 3:491-92.

cases, and the increasing volume of the domestic slave trade, the transition from the former type of case to the latter is not surprising.³²

PERFORMING THE SALE

The actions of slaves during and after their sale were key to this transition. As the compelling work of historian Walter Johnson has shown, slave sales brought the public identities of traders, masters, and slaves into play. Slaves, however, in spite of being reduced to human commodities, held a central importance to the market beyond their physical attributes and work skills. In Johnson's terms, slaves "performed their commodification" as the "information brokers" of slave sales. Thus these transient people maintained a subtle yet significant control over one of the most important financial transactions in both their lives and those of their masters.³³

The lawsuits involving warranties illustrate how slaves performed the commodified caricature crafted of them by slave traders. While many of the cases involved provable maladies that were disguised by traders, several involve "defects" that left significant room for dramatic interpretation, whether by the slave or a white person involved in the case. Interestingly, of the "dramatized" cases in my sample group, not a single one involved a female slave, probably

³³ Among Walter Johnson's many contributions to the scholarship on slavery, this notion is one of his most compelling. See Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), introd. (esp. pp. 12-14), 176-87, 207-13. Quoted phrases from p. 13 and p. 176.

because the most common condition—a predilection to running away—has been shown to be a disproportionately male act of resistance.³⁴

Even with stringent warranty laws protecting new owners from habitual runaways, the Louisiana Supreme Court made clear that running away immediately after being sold was merely the slave’s reaction to the transaction. In one case in 1830, the Court concluded that a recently sold male slave’s escape was not evidence “of an anterior habit” of running away. Rather, it was “the consequence of the displeasure of being sold—of his dislike of the new owner.” In several other instances, slaves performed what was almost expected of them by masters and traders alike, including spectacular examples of six recently purchased male slaves running away together, and one case involving a slave who allegedly made his way to New York, Liverpool, and Charleston before being apprehended.³⁵

Such cases were well known to whites in the state. Thus, the state legislature’s passage of a law regulating the importation of slaves is curious. The law, rather than prohibiting the trade, attempted to do what Spanish governors, the Cabildo, Governor Claiborne, and the territorial legislature struggled with: limit the economically necessary trade to slaves who were not tainted by poor character. Whereas the earlier edicts expressly forbade those slaves imbued with principles of egalitarian revolution, the 1829 law required traders and planters to

³⁴ I discuss some of these cases below.

³⁵ *Bocod v. Jacobs*, Dec. 1830, in Catterall, *Judicial Cases*, 3:490-91; *Andry et al. v. Foy*, June 1819, *Louisiana Reports*, Book 2, 689-699; *Andry v. Foy*, July 1819, *Louisiana Reports*, Book 2, 33-43.

provide affidavits attesting to the “good moral character” of imported slaves, including an assurance that the slave was “not in the habit of running away.”³⁶

But slaves were not the only parties to the slave trade who performed their particular role. Many slaveowners augmented their income as agriculturalists with temporary forays into the slave-trading business. For some, this was simply one way to cut out the middleman. For others, it was simply exploiting an opportunity presented them as a result of the cotton, sugar, and slave-buying boom of the 1820s. So doing took planters from their performances as masters and instead made them the puppeteer, the slave trader. For example, Tennessee planter Alfred Flournoy was open about the reasons for his trip to Louisiana in the spring of 1824. In traveling through Attakapas, Opelousas, and the Red River Valley with slaves in tow, Flournoy was attempting to augment his income during a period of depressed cotton prices by engaging in slave-trading.³⁷

But planters-on-the-make, particularly American transplants to Louisiana, could not afford to adopt Flournoy’s bold, almost embarrassing appropriation of the nearly scandalous persona of the slave trader. For Attakapas planter David Rees, who improved his social standing during the Attakapas insurrection scare of 1814, masking a slave-trading jaunt to the Upper South was imperative. Though

³⁶ An act relative to the introduction of Slaves in this State..., Jan. 31, 1829, *Acts Passed by the 18th Session of Louisiana State Legislature*.

³⁷ Alfred Flournoy to Martha Flournoy, Apr. 23, 1824, in Flournoy Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University-Baton Rouge [hereafter LLMVC]. Flournoy’s mistake was that he “arrived in market just two months too late.” The seasonality of the slave trade, especially during times of tight money supply, was prevalent in Louisiana, as in the rest of the South. For the best discussion on the seasonality of the domestic slave trade, see Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 47, 70-1, 83-108.

his letters of introduction indicated that he was going to Maryland “to recruit for his estate in Louisiana,” and that “He is no speculator or trader,” Rees’s actions during his visit illustrate his own ulterior motives and those of planters like him. On May 3, 1820, Rees wrote to his wife from the Eastern Shore of Maryland “that almost any number of Slaves may be purchased in this and the adjoining Counties at what may..be considered very reduced prices...I believe one hundred percent profit may fairly be expected on all the money invested all expenses included.”³⁸ The slaves would, indeed, be for Rees’s own use, but in ledger rather than agricultural form.

By late August, Rees had purchased an unknown number of slaves in Maryland, but was having trouble finding transportation to Louisiana. On August 29, the ship captain whom Rees had hired to transport the slaves wrote Rees of a delay, saying that the planter would have to wait an additional week “for your people” to be shipped. Two months later, back in Attakapas, Rees announced that “16 likely Young Negroes of both sexes, among which are two young Women, one with 4 and the other with 3 fine children, a young creole girl, etc.” were for sale.³⁹ Rees promoted the auction as an estate sale, undoubtedly to mask his moonlighting as a slave trader. Failing to do so would have weakened Rees’ position at the top of south Louisiana’s social hierarchy, in which slaveowners

³⁸ Chandler Price to Preston Smith, July 3, 1820, William Brent to George Brent, May 3, 1820, and David Rees to Anastasia Rees, July 1820, in David Rees Papers, Special Collections, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, La.

³⁹ Rees Memorandum Book, Nov. 4, 1820, David Rees Papers.

were superior beings to slave traders. In all likelihood, however, few of Rees' neighbors were fooled. Masters, like slaves, were guilty of poor performances.

SLAVES' TIME

As the influx of Protestant Anglo-Americans accelerated the decline of the Catholic Church from its once central role in shaping Louisiana society, slaves turned to other institutions to seek the semi-autonomy that Catholic church membership had provided during the colonial and territorial eras. Ironically, even with the decline of the church, the Sabbath, when by law slaves were not supposed to work, remained central to their struggles.

For the most part, with the major exception of sugar plantations during the harvest season, planters and slaves agreed that Sundays were the slaves' time. One overseer in southern Louisiana conveyed this typical arrangement. In late July 1831, Martin Thomas reported to his boss, Farish Carter, that he and Carter's slaves had "violated the holy Sabbath, hired the people ..and floated into the plantation thirty sticks of Cypress" to complete some construction on the estate. That Thomas offered, and Carter paid, the slaves for their work that Sunday was typical of most Louisiana plantations when work need to be done on the Sabbath.⁴⁰

Planters varied on the latitude they were willing to grant slaves on Sundays, both in spatial and economic terms. John McDonough chafed at slaves seeking work on Sundays to augment their spending money; beginning in 1822,

⁴⁰ Martin Thomas to Farish Carter, Aug. 1, 1831, in Farish Carter Papers, LLMVC.

McDonough rejected this practice outright. Other planters went to the opposite extreme, not only looking the other way on the issue of slaves working to earn their own money, but also granting them significant freedom in traveling about their surroundings. Testimony in one lawsuit from the mid-1830s introduced such practices of one owner, who desired “to be indulgent to his slaves, in permitting them to go backwards and forwards to his neighbors’ plantation on Sunday.” Granting such latitude involved not only the owner who allowed his slaves to leave his own estate, but also the owners who permitted slaves they did not own to congregate on their land, in spite of the 1807 law against such slave assemblies. Still, one of the man’s neighbors abided the law, as testimony indicated he was “strict in keeping his negroes at home on Sundays.” In short, more than any other day of the week, Sundays constituted the day of greatest leverage for slaves in the constant negotiation between them and their masters.⁴¹

On sugar plantations throughout southern Louisiana, slaves and masters often joined in an end-of-the-harvest celebration. One observer of such a ceremony noted that the *commandeur* of each plantation chose the tallest cane left uncut, adorned it with a ribbon, and “brandishing the [cane] knife in the air, sang to the cane as if it were a person, and danced around it several times before cutting it.” Once the stalk was cut, the slaves who congregated for the ceremony began a parade from the fields to the master’s house, “waving colored handkerchiefs in the air, and singing as loud as they could.” Waiting for the procession, the master “gave a drink to every Negro, and the day ended with a

⁴¹ Testimony from *Rice v. Cade*, Sep. 1836, *Louisiana Reports*, Book 10, 288-295.

ball, amid general rejoicing.”⁴² Whether owner or slave, domestic or fieldhand, the conclusion of the round-the-clock toil of the grinding season—which exerted tremendous stress on the delicate master-slave relationship—was welcome.

In New Orleans, where the church held onto some vestige of its power, Sundays continued to be the most important periods of autonomy and independent cultural expression for the city’s and region’s people of African descent. As with the earlier period, both enslaved and free women of color marketed their wares in the afternoon, following Mass. A visitor to New Orleans in the early 1830s observed the city’s immense markets, noting that “at this season [late summer] there was a poor display of meat, vegetables, and fruit; mulattoes, free blacks, and slaves, kept the stalls, and French was generally spoken.” Evidently, given Alexander’s gender-neutral description of the peddlers, an unremarkable proportion of women constituted the group; if that were the case, yet another legacy of Louisiana’s late African importations was on the wane. Yet, at the same time, that the group was speaking largely in French also indicates that the pidgin language those Africans, creoles, and whites had forged at the turn of the century continued to be the grammar of African Louisianan culture.⁴³

Just as the state legislature effectively reduced the impact of slaves’ “performances” at the slave market, the New Orleans city council prevailed upon the mayor to regulate musical and dancing “performances” at Congo Square. By

⁴² Quoted in V. Alton Moody, *Slavery on Louisiana Sugar Plantations* (n.p.: reprinted from the *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, 1924), fn 8, p. 88.

⁴³ J. E. Alexander, *Transatlantic Sketches: Comprising Visits to the Most Interesting Scenes in North and South America and the West Indies* (Philadelphia: Key and Biddle, 1833), 224.

the late 1820s, city regulations affirmed the need for Congo Square to exist. Their justification, rather than preserving culture, was supervisory: if the city openly supported and even institutionalized the Congo Square activities on Sunday afternoons and evenings, such potentially dangerous assemblies could be controlled.⁴⁴

Even in the frontier district of Attakapas, vestiges of African traditions continued. Intriguingly, these festivities, as in New Orleans, occurred in front of the church. One report noted, “in 1826 and 1827 multitudes of Congo Negroes used to assemble every Sunday on the green before the church in St. Martin’s [St. Martinville] and dance under the trees.” Unlike Father Antonio Sedella in New Orleans, however, the pastor at St. Martin de Porres Parish did not condone such activity, as the dancing “gave no small annoyance to the pastor.” Nonetheless, as they had earlier in the nineteenth century, African-born slaves in particular saw the Catholic Church as an institution of power. Like the earlier generation of white leaders, the church elders in St. Martinville saw this dancing not as one component of the slaves’ syncretic religious and cultural practices, but as a tradition that was mutually exclusive with Christianity, so that as slaves “gradually..became Christians..the horrible ceremonies entirely disappeared.”⁴⁵

But in terms of religion, much had changed in reference to the Sabbath. Just as the city’s and state’s slave population had gone from being largely African to largely African American—a transition reflecting both the creolizing process in

⁴⁴ “An ordinance in relation to slaves...,” Oct. 15, 1817, Records of the Council, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library; Henry A. Kmen, *Music in New Orleans: The Formative Years, 1791-1841* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1966), 229.

⁴⁵ “The Church in St. Martin,” *American Catholic Quarterly Review*, XIV, 478.

Louisiana's slave communities and the immense human traffic from the Upper South—the importance of a different brand of Christianity blossomed. The 1820s, and especially later periods, witnessed considerable growth in the number of Protestant denominations, both in New Orleans and in the other areas of the state. This was particularly true in the upland cotton districts, where Anglo-American planters dominated numerically and culturally, transferring directly and indirectly their Protestant beliefs to their bondpeople.⁴⁶

The notorious irreligion of planters from the state's French, Acadian, and Spanish dominated southern districts further lessened Catholicism's influence. Proselytizing in the increasingly Protestant environs of north Louisiana, one Catholic priest noted in the early 1820s that

slavery..is disheartening. American [i.e. Protestant] masters permit [slaves] to marry in church and to practice their religion. But in Lower Louisiana, the French for the most part, do not wish you to speak of instructing their slaves or of giving them the sacraments of matrimony; they are often not even permitted to go to church.⁴⁷

Once again, the divisions in daily life according to crop-specific regions of the state impacted what had once been an important institution for slaves in Louisiana. In New Orleans, one observer in the early 1830s noted that Louisianans' "indifference to religion" was evidenced by New Orleans having "only four churches among fifty thousand inhabitants."⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Blake Touchstone, "Planters and Slave Religion in the Deep South," in John B. Boles, *Masters and Slaves in the House of the Lord: Race and Religion in the American South, 1740-1870* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1988), 110-13.

⁴⁷ Father John Mary Odin, Aug. 2, 1823, in *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: American Catholic Historical Society, 1903), XIV, 189.

⁴⁸ Alexander, *Sketches*, 226.

Theologically, Louisiana's generation of slaves in the 1820s found much opportunity in the teachings of evangelical Christianity. As the number of incoming slaves increased, and the slave regime steered the plantation regimen, the teachings of deliverance by evangelical preachers resonated in slave communities across the state. Just as Africans impacted the practice of Catholicism in the early 1800s, and just as their sheer number accentuated the importance of Catholicism as a means of constructing community, the recently arrived African Americans from the Upper South helped to accelerate this shift in the religious practices. Thus, in the same way as the Africans twenty years earlier—both in their cultural influence and in the challenges their very presence created for building community—these African Americans were at the center of yet another important transition in the culture of African Louisianans.⁴⁹

The rise of evangelical Protestantism among African Louisianans became a concern for masters in August 1831 when news of the Nat Turner Rebellion in Southampton County, Virginia spread. Though the reaction to Turner's plot varied across the South, in Louisiana the recent heavy importations of slaves, many of them from Virginia, heightened fears that a similar act could befall them. Rumors of conspiracies, most of them in the sugar enclave between New Orleans and Baton Rouge, prompted both the New Orleans city council and state legislature to enact policies regulating the domestic traffic. By late 1831, the legislature had closed the domestic trade to the state, except for cases in which

⁴⁹ On Protestant Christianity in Louisiana, see Larry M. James, "Biracial Fellowship in Antebellum Baptist Churches," 37-57, and Touchstone, "Planters and Slave Religion" 110-13, both in Boles, *Masters and Slaves*; Fossier, *The Glamour Period*, 336-55.

Louisiana planters proved that slaves accompanying them into the state would be for their own use. Largely ineffective, the law was repealed in 1834.⁵⁰

The longer-lasting impact of Turner's Rebellion was in affirming many planters' attitudes that religiosity among slaves should be outlawed. This attitude, which had been evolving since the 1790s among white Louisianans, was so prevalent by the mid-1830s that John McDonough once again observed a decline in religious practices in the state. Louisiana planters, according to McDonough, had shown "little inclination" since 1831 "to approve religious activities among the Negroes."⁵¹ With the decline of the Catholic Church, and now the decline in opportunities to practice Protestantism openly, the once-public power of religious worship among Africans and African Louisianans would have to be a private matter.

Slave baptisms at the most public, and most Africanized church, in Louisiana—St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans—signify the changes that had occurred during the 1820s and early 1830s. By 1831, though the volume of slave baptisms kept pace with the population growth, the typical baptism was not that of an adult African or imported African American slave, but of enslaved children. The priests recorded no African ethnic information. This was indicative of the waning African influence, and growing African American impact, on Louisiana's varied slave communities. The slave baptisms at St. Louis in 1831 also illustrate another

⁵⁰ On reactions to the Turner Rebellion in Louisiana, Judith K. Schafer, "The Immediate Impact of Nat Turner's Insurrection on New Orleans," *Louisiana History* 16 (1979): 361-76.

⁵¹ John McDonough to Rev. Charles C. Jones, Jan. 26, 1835, in McDonough Papers.

feature of the 1820s, the steady evolution of the plantation frontier: in June 1831, the new priest at St. Louis left the cathedral to visit missions in Plaquemines and Lafourche Parishes, precisely those places where the profitability of sugar cane was replicating eighteenth-century Louisiana society. Though Africans had become community elders, and though the turmoil of the 1820s domestic slave trade could not match the chaos following Saint-Domingue, Louisiana's mature slaves, and maturing slave regime, maintained important connections to their past.⁵²

Africanization was on the wane, and re-creolization was well underway. The colonial experiment that began with so little promise was now flourishing, a transition that impacted the lives of thousands of Africans, African Americans, and African Louisianans. Their lives, their strategies, and their communities would remain inseparable from the economic engine that Atlantic slavery had produced.

⁵² Slave Baptisms, June 1831, St. Louis Cathedral, Book 23, Part 1, 1831, ADNO.

Conclusion: *Evolutions*

By 1831, Louisiana slave society had evolved in many respects. Since 1791, changes in governance and crop cultures, along with the social and cultural results of massive voluntary and involuntary migrations to Louisiana, produced a society that was distinct from its earlier form. Beginning with a largely stagnant economy in 1791, Louisiana society by the early 1830s had become one of the most prosperous in the Deep South; both the cotton regions of north Louisiana and the sugar regions of south Louisiana were important components of the intricate Atlantic economy. The next thirty years, while equally important to the preceding forty in terms of economic growth and political intrigue, would lack the degree of cultural infusion, tension, and upheaval that makes the period 1791-1831 so compelling. It would be a period of gradual social maturation rather than rapid growth and change.

The evolution that underlay most of the other changes in Louisiana society was the shift from a multi-crop agrarian economy to single-crop, plantation agriculture. While cotton and sugar were both major cash crops, north and south Louisiana alike became characterized by their respective crop cultures. The technological innovations that ushered in this transition—the cotton gin in the north, and sugar-refining in the south—transformed the colony's economy. The transition to cotton and sugar produced an attendant demand for additional, unfree laborers, which in turn created the second evolution, the transition from a largely creolized slave culture to one dominated by native Africans.

This evolution constitutes the crux of this study. Aside from the obvious change from creole to African, there was an evolution within an evolution: the creole slave culture that existed in Louisiana prior to the 1790s was dominated by Mande-speaking, Upper Guinea Coast peoples, whose cultural dominance waned because of the high proportion of incoming Africans who were Bantu-speaking, Congolese peoples. Thus, the once-ascendant ‘Bambara’ identity gave way to the equally ascendant ‘Congo’ designation. Just as ‘Bambara’ had once been synonymous with ‘slave’ in the 1720s and 1730s, ‘Congo’ had taken on, by 1810, a similar meaning, at least in New Orleans and in its adjacent sugar districts. Accentuated by the influx of many Congolese slaves from Haiti, the cultural and religious traditions of west-central African peoples formed the foundation of Louisiana’s second generation of creole slaves.

This shift also produced regional slave cultures, whereby the northern cotton districts were dominated by two new groups of African American slaves: on the one hand, descendants of the charter creole generations and, increasingly, slaves from the Upper South who were either brought to Louisiana by their cotton-investing, American owners, or were purchased via the domestic slave trade. By the 1830s, the slave culture of north Louisiana had become distinctly less African than most sections of the sugar-producing southern districts. In those regions, the Congolese who numerically overwhelmed the African importation between 1795 and 1808 dominated.

The process of Congolization, which came to an end with the closing of the trans-atlantic slave trade, had reinforced Louisiana’s characteristics as a

Caribbean slave society. But the central factor in creating that similarity—the continued importation of Africans as the main source of plantation labor—ceased in 1808. Over the next three decades, Louisiana underwent a cultural transition in which its major source of plantation laborers were not African-born, but American-born, slaves. The subsequent development of a healthier society, higher birth rates, and lower mortality—even among enslaved people—produced a society that for the first time differed more than it resembled the sugar colonies of the Caribbean. Though the domestic slave trade, as I argue, had cultural effects on Louisiana’s enslaved people similar to those of the trans-atlantic traffic, the creole cultures of the 1830s and beyond were less African, and more truly African American.

In addition to this change within the slave community, an important evolution that impacted, and was influenced by, slaves occurred. From the early 1790s through the early 1830s, Louisiana completed its evolution from a Spanish to an American slave society. In the 1790s, with Spanish law governing slaves and masters, enslaved people in Louisiana had the recourse, as protected by the slave code to petition the colonial government to ameliorate their conditions. While a small number of slaves actually used, or were able to use, this tactic, the difference between the Spanish and American periods is stark. In legal terms—and in real, everyday practice, at least in some cases—slaves enjoyed greater protection from the hyper-paternalist Iberian governance. While this conclusion is not intended to revive the properly problematized Tannenbaum thesis, this analysis of the late Spanish period in Louisiana ought to convince scholars of

slavery in the New World that some important qualitative differences existed. Louisiana's history permits one to study these differences in a single slave society as it underwent a transition from Spanish to American governance, which effectively illuminates the comparison of Spanish and British North American slavery.¹

One has a difficult time evading the Tannenbaum thesis when considering an evolution in Louisiana slave society that was intertwined with the shift to a society with more American characteristics. The centrality of the Roman Catholic Church, as this study has demonstrated, was enormous in the lives of enslaved African Louisianans. As an institution, the Church offered slaves and free people of color a social space in which truly syncretic social, cultural, and religious traditions were forged. As a quasi-arm of the Spanish colonial government in Louisiana, the Church also served as a space of protection for slaves, particularly in the case of extraordinary priests such as Father Antonio Sedella of New Orleans.

Though Tannenbaum's simplistic caricature of Latin American slavery being more benign than American or British slavery has been correctly criticized, much of that criticism has incorrectly dismissed Tannenbaum's still-applicable arguments. Two legal practices from the late Spanish period of Louisiana illustrate this point. Slaves not only had the right to petition the government for redress of mistreatment but also possessed, and used extensively, *coartación*,

¹ Frank Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen, the Negro in the Americas* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947). Examples of excellent comparative studies on this issue are Carl N. Degler, *Neither Black nor White: Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1971); and Herbert S. Klein, *Slavery in the Americas: A Comparative Study of Virginia and Cuba* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).

which of course led to the numerically large population of free people of color in New Orleans. Together, these two systems illustrate the differences between Latin America and British America that Tannenbaum amplified. One is simply hard-pressed, when considering the evidence from 1791-1831 in Louisiana, to argue with his statement, “If the Latin -American environment was favorable to freedom, the British and American were hostile.” The case of Louisiana ought to resuscitate, to some extent, the much-maligned arguments of Frank Tannenbaum.² Most notably, Louisiana demonstrates that the key to Spanish “moderation” was not the institutional commitment of the Church or of Spanish governance to slaves’ humanity: it was the tools that they created through which slaves could assert their humanity and build their own communities. Nonetheless, the scaling back of those tools by American officials, in coming *after* Congolization, did not prevent African Louisianans from employing those traditions that they forged during the late Spanish period.

In short, what is needed is an evolution in the historiography of slavery. Much of the angst over Tannenbaum’s thesis came from the Marxian criticism that his study did not portray economic factors as underlying the development of slavery. Scholars who made that argument were correct to a degree, as the economic impetuses for cultural change in Louisiana’s slave culture—the sugar and cotton booms—altered the social and cultural context within which Louisianans lived their lives. Nonetheless, simply substituting purely economic factors for the social, cultural, and political factors that Tannenbaum viewed as

² Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen*, 65.

important is equally fallacious as doing the opposite.³ By combining the two approaches, and consciously attempting to focus on the intersections of macro-level and micro-level developments, scholars of enslaved peoples can see more clearly the ways in which their subjects lived those intersections “on the ground.”

For white residents of Louisiana, particularly those interested in plantation agriculture, perhaps the most noticeable change during the period was the evolution of the western and northern frontiers into centers of the Gulf Coast’s rich plantation economies. The plantation revolution, which first gripped New Orleans and the surrounding areas in the 1790s, revolutionized the farthest regions from New Orleans. Whether sugar districts such as Lafourche Parish, which was located on the Gulf of Mexico, or cotton districts such as Claiborne Parish, which was located along the Mississippi River in northeastern Louisiana, the once-frontier regions had become sites of tremendous economic opportunity for plantation owners. Obviously, the necessary influx of slaves meant that the cultural process of amalgamation, which had occurred in the New Orleans area first in the 1720s, then again during Congolization, was replicated in these little-settled areas.

³ For examples, see Eugene D. Genovese, “Materialism and Idealism in the History of Negro Slavery in the Americas,” *Journal of Social History* 1968 (1): 371-84, which called for a more materialist interpretation of slavery’s evolution than Tannebaum’s study allowed; Carl N. Degler, “Slavery in Brazil and the United States: An Essay in Comparative History,” *American Historical Review* 1970 (75): 1004-28, which demonstrated what that materialist interpretation offered in its minimization of differences between the two slave societies; and David C. Rankin, “The Tannenbaum Thesis Reconsidered: Slavery and Race Relations in Antebellum Louisiana,” *Southern Studies* 1979 (18): 5-31, which adopted the wholly untenable conclusion that Louisiana’s “Latin” heritage did not differ in terms of slavery from the American regime.

Even with these important evolutions, many similarities between Louisiana slave society in 1791 and that society in 1831 remained. First, Louisiana remained an integral component of the Atlantic system. Economically, Louisiana cotton and sugar production helped to fuel the increasingly strong economic linkages between the Americas and Europe. In fact, by the 1850s, the success of Louisiana's sugar economy led to serious congressional debates over the annexation of the state's premier, sugar-growing competitor, Cuba. The geopolitical intrigue that marked Louisiana society at the beginning of this study remained for the duration of it, and beyond.

Most of all, Louisiana's enslaved people of African descent in 1831 were, like their counterparts in 1791, a compelling example of how peoples of different African societies, when forcibly placed in the employ of peoples of other continents, coped with that subjugation. Clearly, the resistance traditions that slaves had forged during the previous century, and especially during the preceding forty years, continued. Though the processes of petitioning the governor and purchasing one's freedom no longer existed, enslaved African Louisianans in 1831 continued to tweak, undermine, and challenge both individual masters and the regime of slavery. Their actions were important in their own right, of course. But they came, as this study has aimed to demonstrate, from a complex convergence of economic, cultural, and social factors that the least likely in the population figured out how to navigate.

In closing, the present study demonstrates that African American history is not linear. A simple African-to-African-American-or-creole narrative of slavery

in Louisiana does not work at all.⁴ Moreover, as this study emphasizes, it is possible to see why that non-linear history is the case: until the 1790s, Louisiana was a subsidiary society and economy to the Caribbean. The evolution that was prompted, both directly and indirectly, by the Haitian Revolution, involved a number of fundamental changes in cultural mixes, governance, crops, and legal systems.

In fact, this forty-year period shows that the Haiti-sparked evolution was actually a twinned outcome. On the one hand, the Haitian Revolution prompted an economic evolution, while on the other, it sparked a cultural evolution. By 1831, a distinctively African-North-American slave culture emerged in Louisiana as it broke free from its economic subordination to the sugar islands of the Caribbean. Though the two evolutions are inherently intriguing, exploring them in tandem gets one closer to understanding how people lived their lives. Emphasizing that enslaved people of African descent, just like other peoples of the Atlantic World, responded to those intersections of micro-level and macro-level factors, tells their story while neither romanticizing nor denigrating the lives they led.

⁴ On this issue, see Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 340-50.

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Vita

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